

Was the Prophet Muḥammad really Jesus? Responding to the Revisionist Inârah School of Islamic Studies

John M. Hobson

Introduction

In 1977 the modern academic study of Islam's origins took a radical revisionist turn with the publication of two books: John Wansbrough's *Qur'anic Studies*, and most significantly, Patricia Crone & Michael Cook's *Hagarism*. The latter book argued that Islam was invented some six decades after a man called Muḥammad died, while the former claims that Islam was fabricated in the early ninth century. Moreover, Crone & Cook argue that Muḥammad was reimagined as a scriptural prophet when al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf hurriedly fabricated the Qur'ān around 691/2. But *if* the Prophet had existed (as not all revisionists agree that he did), Crone & Cook (1977) insist for various reasons that he would have lived in the Nabatean region—possibly in Avdat (Holland 2012) or Petra (Gibson 2017) or modern-day Jordan or Iraq (Wansbrough 1977), or Merv in far eastern Persia (Popp 2013; Ohlig 2013b). Crone & Cook make this claim through re-reading the Qur'ān. And, they argue, Mecca was fabricated as the Holy Sanctuary only in the 690s.

Most importantly, this radical turn has gathered considerable momentum as a revisionist cottage industry has grown up to advance this critique of Islam's origins. I identify four clear sub-variants:

1. The ‘Crone/Cook variant’, comprising the likes of Tom Holland (2012) and Peter Townsend (2021) (Islam is invented in the 690s).
2. The ‘Donner/Shoemaker’ variant (Islam is invented in the 690s).
3. The ‘Wansbrough variant’, comprising the likes of Andrew Rippin (2001), and Gerald Hawting (2018) (Islam is invented in the early 9th century).
4. The Inârah School comprising the likes of Günter Lüling (2003); Christoph Luxenberg (2007), Karl-Heinz Ohlig (2013a, 2013b, 2013c), Volker Popp (2013), Yehuda Nevo & Judith Koren (2003), and arguably Robert Spencer (2021).¹ (Islam is invented in the early 9th century).

Yet others do not quite fit into these categories, such as Dan Gibson (2017), even if they are drawn upon by other revisionists.

The fourth sub-variant—the revisionist Inârah School—differs fundamentally to the other three given its claim that initially the Arabs embraced orthodox Christianity before turning to heretical Christianity after 685 that finally morphed into Islam by about 830 CE. Inârah scholars insist that the word Muḥammad is an epithet—‘the praised one’—which they take to mean *Jesus*, and that it was only around the turn of the ninth century that Jesus was re-imagined or fabricated as the Prophet Muḥammad.

When faced with such bewildering assertions, Muslim reactions might vary between a simple shrug of the shoulders and just laughing it off; or, should they opt to engage in responding to this critique, they would most probably turn with supreme confidence to the *Sīra* and *Ḥadīth* literatures that would put paid to these revisionist assertions once and for all. Except that there’s a problem here. For one of the key

¹ Spencer is not formally part of the Inârah School, though I include him here because his arguments certainly overlap with several of the key pillars of Inârah belief.

leitmotifs of the revisionist school is that these Islamic sources came 125 to 300 years after the death of the ‘alleged’ prophet and are deemed *impermissible* as evidence. This is because they were written belatedly simply to meet (usually political) needs at the time of writing, before the ‘story’ of the origins of Islam was retrofitted to the 610-632 period. As such, the classical Islamic sources, including the *Sunnah*, are said to have all been fabricated and then dressed up with fake *isnāds* to present the ‘evidence’ with an air of authenticity (Schacht 1950/1979; Goldziher 1967). Such a posture is most effectively summarised by Patricia Crone (2012) in Tom Holland’s TV documentary who laments that ‘we have nothing. We have absence of evidence... We have the Qur’ān and you can’t tell the story [about the origins of Islam] on the basis of the Qur’ān. We have nothing... There’s complete darkness’.

Accordingly, the challenge ahead of anyone who seeks to refute the revisionist school is how to do this *without* resorting to the classical Islamic literature – the *Sīra*, *Sunnah/ḥadīth* and *Tafsīr* literature. The revisionist methodology is to use alternative primary sources—specifically Jewish, though mainly Christian, texts and letters that were composed in the seventh and eighth centuries CE, while also relying on numismatics (coin evidence) and epigraphy (inscriptional evidence)—to provide them with their alternative narratives.

Muslims are, of course, well accustomed to what has been a series of waves in the last 1,400 years that challenge Islam in one way or another. But even the Orientalists of the nineteenth century accepted that Islam existed together with the Qur’ān that had been uttered by Prophet Muḥammad in the 610-632 period. The Christian Crusaders before them did likewise, as did many Christian authorities from the seventh century on. And while they believed that Islam and its final prophet were both false and evil, they at least accepted their existence. This latest (i.e., revisionist) challenge to Islam is arguably the

most damning because it adds up to an exercise in ‘epistemic Islamocide’—that is, the wholesale destruction of the doctrinal foundations of Islam.

So far as this article is concerned, I note that Inârah scholars insist that Prophet Muḥammad never existed and that he was a much later fabrication. While I am currently finishing off a large 3-volume book manuscript—*1001 Myths about Islam*—that counters the many arguments of the revisionist school (Hobson 2026a, 2026b, 2026c), of which this piece is an annotated snippet, here I shall confine my response to what I refer to as one of the ‘five key pillars’ of Inârah revisionist belief, by providing evidence and argumentation to reveal the existence of the Prophet Muḥammad before 632 (in part by using one of the same sources that some of the key revisionists use). This is tied in intimately with my critique of the Inârah claim that Muḥammad was Jesus before he was reimagined as the Islamic prophet in the early ninth century. A secondary aspect of my analysis, as advanced in the first section, is to take on another key pillar of revisionist belief by arguing that the Qur’ân was being composed in the 620s—as opposed to being fabricated sometime between 691 and c.705 according to Crone & Cook (1977), Stephen Shoemaker (2022), and Alphonse Mingana (1917), or in the late eighth/early ninth century according to John Wansbrough (1977) as well as the Inârah scholars such as Ohlig (2013), Popp (2013), Lūling (2003), Luxenberg (2007), and Nevo & Koren (2003).

To advance my skeptical response, I focus on two sources—the *Ṣaḥīfa* (or the ‘Constitution of Medina’) and the Qur’ân. The first section cross references these two sources to make the evidential case for the existence of Prophet Muḥammad and the early origins of the Qur’ân in the 620s, while the second section focuses on four of the five explicit references to Muḥammad in the Qur’ân that establish his prophethood to clinch the correlation with the *Ṣaḥīfa*. However, because Inârah scholars advance an alternative interpretation of these Qur’ânic verses on the basis that they refer to Jesus rather than to

Muḥammad, the third and final section interrogates their interpretation of the five verse-references to Muḥammad.

Cross-referencing the ‘Constitution of Medina’ (*Ṣaḥīfa*) with the early Medinan *sūrahs*

Why the Ṣaḥīfa?

In their nihilistic dismissal of the classical Islamic sources, we encounter one small grain of mercy that some of the revisionists unwittingly bequeath to anyone who seeks to critique their theories of the origins of Islam. Revisionist scholars Crone & Cook (1977), Fred Donner (2010), Stephen Shoemaker (2011), Tom Holland (2012) and, for the most part, Günter Lüling (2003), and Uri Rubin (1985) accept that the ‘Constitution of Medina’ was an authentic document that was written in the 620s—as was first argued by Julius Wellhausen (1927, 11–19). The former five revisionist scholars are (only too) happy to accept its authenticity because they believe that this document confirms their central argument: that in the 620s confessionally mature Islam did *not* exist because at the beginning of the document we are told that the Jews and Believers (Muslims) were all part of one *Umma*.

As I explain elsewhere in detail (Hobson, 2026a), numerous experts on the ‘Constitution’ provide various dates for when it was composed, the upshot of which is my claim that the ‘Constitution’ was probably composed between 622 and 627. More specifically, the specialist secondary literature produces three possible date ranges for the composition of the *Ṣaḥīfa*:

(1) July 622–December 622/July 623.

(2) July 622–February 624.

(3) July 622–627.

For this reason, I seek to correlate the relevant clauses in the *Ṣaḥīfa* with the early Medinan *sūrahs* that cover each of these periods to see if there are plausible correlations between references to Muḥammad that might establish his existence as a man and Prophet who was alive in the 620s.

Most important for my analysis here is the point that the *Ṣaḥīfa* could not have existed in a religious vacuum. For it comprises a mere 47 very short articles that stipulated only very general rules, principles, and injunctions,² while also deploying critically important religious terms that are de-contextualised and undefined. This document is like the Dr Who’s ‘tardis’ (of British TV fame), which is a Police Box that is tiny on the outside but big on the inside. An additional reason for using this source is that it turns out to be a veritable treasure trove that I explore and draw from. Thus, within the *Ṣaḥīfa* we encounter numerous ideas, terms, and religious concepts such as: the (full) *Bismillah*; Muḥammad as the prophet and messenger of God; the *Umma*; Muslims and Jews; the *dīn* (religion) of the Muslims and the *dīn* of the Jews; the issue of ‘Jewish treachery’; the Muslim *Anṣār*; the Muslim Qurashī *muhājirūn*; the non-Muslim (‘polytheistic’) Quraysh as enemies of the Muslims, together with highly critical articles concerning the *mushrikūn* (the ‘polytheistic unbelievers’); Islamic/Qur’ānic law; and finally, the notions of *jihād* and Yathrib as a *Holy City*.

2 As is reproduced in Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 221–5. Note, however, that Michael Lecker’s (2004: 32–9) translation has 64 articles. Curiously, these are both translations of the Ibn Ishāq version.

Given the use of these undefined and de-contextualised terms as they appear in the *Ṣaḥīfa* means that logically there must have been a more extensive document and/or oral set of ideas that existed simultaneously, which could make sense of the ‘Constitution’ and thereby furnish it with religious meaning. Moreover, the content of the *Ṣaḥīfa* must have occurred within a wider religio-legal context given that this politico-legal theocratic document did not specify the many Islamic laws that would have been necessary for the existence and reproduction of the new Medinan Islamic state. Indeed, there was no appendix or glossary attached to the ‘Constitution’ that explained all this. And yet the document was obviously understood at the time.

The only available candidate that could put the necessary flesh on the bones of the ‘Constitution’ is the Qur’ān—specifically the Medinan, and, albeit to a lesser extent, the late Meccan, *sūrahs*. And, as noted, it is not possible for the *Ṣaḥīfa* to have been born *ex nihilo*, given that it could not have been conceived in the absence of these wider Islamic ideas and legal conventions/mores that could only have been found in the Qur’ān. Thus, the ‘Constitution’ did not *will* Islam into existence as the former must have been a symptom or reflection of the latter. As noted in the introduction, although my prime focus is to reveal evidence for Muḥammad as a flesh-and-blood prophet who existed in the time that the Islamic tradition stipulates, a secondary supporting objective of my analysis is that the closer the correlation between the Medinan/late Meccan *sūrahs* and the ‘Constitution’—given that the latter has been accepted as authentic by some key revisionists—the greater the likelihood that the Qur’ān was being composed in the 620s (even if it was not written down into a canonical text and made public until the 650s by ‘Uthmān’s committee). This is a significant point given that the likes of Crone & Cook, Shoemaker, and Mingana, all claim that the Qur’ān was canonised by al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf sometime between 692 and c.705 CE. Finally, note that all following citations to the

‘Constitution’ are from Watt (1956, 221–5) and unless otherwise stated, all references to the Qur’ān are from Asad (1980).

Muḥammad as religious leader of Medina after July 622 CE

A significant theme of the *Ṣaḥīfa* concerns Muḥammad’s role as leader of the new Medinan state after 622 CE. To this end §23 states that ‘[w]herever there is anything about which you differ, it is to be referred to God and to Muḥammad’, much as §42 asserts that ‘[w]henver among the people of this document there occurs any incident (disturbance) or quarrel from which disaster for it (the people) is to be feared, it is to be referred to God and Muḥammad, the Messenger of God (God bless and preserve him). God is the most scrupulous and truest (fulfiller) of this document’. All of which resonates with a key verse in early Medinan *Sūrah an-Nisa* (c. 4 AH/625-6 CE):

(4:59) O you who have attained to faith [i.e., the Muslims]! Pay heed unto God, and pay heed unto the Apostle [Muḥammad] and unto those from among you who have been entrusted with authority; and if you are at variance over any matter, refer it unto God and the Apostle [Muḥammad], if you [truly] believe in God and the Last Day. This is the best [for you], and best in the end.

Muḥammad as military leader of Medina in the 620s

It is no less important to note that the issue of warfare and defending both Medina and Islam is a significant theme of the ‘Constitution’ (§§17, 19, 24, 36, 37, 38, 44, 45). Significant for our purposes here is that Muḥammad, as leader of the first Islamic state, plays the key leading role in matters of warfare, specifically for the religious purpose of defending Islam from its enemies. Thus §36 states: ‘No one of them [those party to the

‘Constitution’] may go out (to war) without the permission of Muḥammad (peace be upon him), but he is not restrained from taking vengeance for wounds. Whoever acts rashly (*fataka*), it (involves) only himself and his household, except where a man has been wronged. God is the truest (fulfiller) of this (document)’. These thin statements are fleshed out much further in the Qur’ān.

Sūrah 47 (1 AH/622-3 CE) is particularly significant, given that it includes injunctions on war and what will happen to anyone who seeks to prevent people from converting to Islam (see 47:4-6, 20-21, 27, 30-31, 35). More generally in the Qur’ān, it is Muḥammad who activates (military) *jihād* against his enemies that attack the Islamic believers. Many of the key Qur’ānic verses of relevance here are neatly captured in Abdel Haleem’s (2010, 160) highly insightful summary, such that it is worth quoting in full:

When the Muslims moved from Mecca to Medina, the community effectively became a state which was responsible for its own protection. The Prophet became the head of state. It is made clear in the Qur’an that it is the head of state who initiates *jihād*. The Prophet is asked to urge the believers to fight (Q. 8:65). It is he who gives permission for some not to fight (Q. 9:54–5) and he who excludes some people from going (Q. 9:83). It is he who orders preparations to be made (Q. 9:92–3). He goes out leading the army (Q. 3:121 and Q. 8:5). It is he who decides on peace and the end of hostilities (Q. 8:61). It is he who decides on the distribution of battle gains (Q. 8:1). Believers who are able-bodied (Q. 4:95; Q. 9:91–2; and Q. 48:17) are expected to hear and obey the head of state (Q. 24:51) and to go out to battle with him, unless given permission not to do so (Q. 9:44). It is the head of state (or his appointee) who assigns them where to stand in the battlefield (Q. 3:121). It was the Prophet who decided and declared war and it was he who decided on cessation of hostilities. He is addressed in Q. 8:61–2, if they [the enemy] incline to

peace, you [Prophet] must also incline towards it and put your trust in God. He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing, and if they intend to deceive you, God is enough for you. It is the head of state who decides on taking captives: ... later you can release them by grace or ransom (Q. 47:4). It is not up to any individual Muslim to take up the tasks assigned to the head of state. Nowhere in the Qur'an do we find permission to do so.

It is vital to note that some of these forementioned verses cover the 'very early' and 'relatively early' periods of the *Ṣaḥīfa*'s composition (mid-622/late-622, and mid-622/early-624 respectively), specifically: *sūrah* 47 (1 AH/622-3 CE) and *sūrah* 8 (c. 2 AH/623-4 CE). Some also cover the 'extended late' dating (mid-622/627 CE), specifically: *sūrah* 3 (3AH/624-5 CE), and *sūrah* 4 (4 AH/625-6 CE). Nevertheless, *sūrahs* 24 (c. 5 AH/627-8 CE), 48 (7 AH/628-9 CE), and 9 (c. 9 AH/630-1 CE) post-date the outer temporal boundary of the *Ṣaḥīfa*'s composition.

Muḥammad as Prophet and Messenger of God in the 620s

There is at least one clear problem with the revisionist claim that the first public reference to Muḥammad-as-prophet/messenger is found on the first Islamic coin that was minted by Ibn al-Zubayr in 685/686 CE, and shortly thereafter on the walls of the Dome of the Rock (691/2); or equally that it emerged only in the second half of the eighth century/early ninth century according to the Inārah scholars. For the *Ṣaḥīfa*, which was most likely written up in the 620s, already refers to a man who was alive at the time—namely, Muḥammad who is described as a ruler, a prophet, and a messenger.

In the Watt translation of the 'Constitution', the Preamble tells us that '[t]his is a writing of Muḥammad the prophet between the believers and Muslims of Quraysh and Yathrib [the Anṣār in Medina] and those who follow them and are attached to them and

who crusade (*jāhadū*) along with them’. Moreover, §42 refers to Muḥammad as ‘the Messenger of God’, while §47 closes with the sentence: ‘God is “protecting neighbour” (*jār*) of him who acts honourably and fears God, and Muḥammad is the Messenger of God’. This clause/article veers towards the full *Shahāda*. Curiously, in seeking to downplay Muḥammad’s prophetic status in the early to mid-620s, Muhammad Ibraheem Ahmed (2022, 7) claims that ‘the status of Muḥammad in the Constitution is more strongly linked with his position as arbiter rather than prophet or spiritual leader’. But there are three clear references to Muḥammad as a prophet/messenger and three to his status as leader. Once again, *contra* the revisionist Inārah School, the *Ṣaḥīfa* provides evidence for the existence of a man at that time who was recognised as a Prophet and Messenger. Thus, the question before us now is whether we can find explicit references to Muḥammad-as-Prophet/Messenger in the Qur’ān either on the eve of the *Hijra* (shortly before mid-622) or between mid-622 and 627 CE.

Muḥammad as prophet in the Qur’ān in the 620s

Here I consider the four clear references to the Prophet Muḥammad in the Qur’ān (reserving the fifth for the next section), to wit:

(47:2) those who have attained to faith and do righteous deeds, and have come to believe in what has been bestowed from on high on Muḥammad – for it is the truth from their Sustainer – [shall attain to God’s grace:] He will efface their [past] bad deeds, and will set their hearts at rest (c.1 AH/622-3 CE).

(48:29) ‘Muḥammad is God’s Apostle; and those who are [truly] with him are firm and unyielding towards all deniers of the truth, [yet] full of mercy towards one another’ (c.7 AH/628 CE).

(3:144) And Muḥammad is only an apostle; all the [other] apostles have passed away before him: if, then, he dies or is slain, will you turn about on your heels? (c.3 AH/625 CE).

(33:40) ‘Muḥammad is not the father of any one of your men, but is God’s Apostle and the Seal of all Prophets’ (c.3-5 AH/625-7 CE).

Of note too is that there is a *sūrah* entitled ‘Muḥammad’ (*sūrah* 47). Significantly, this *sūrah* is thought to have been one of the earliest of the Medinan period (1 AH/622-3 CE). Accordingly, *Sūrah* 47 overlaps clearly with the earliest period of the *Ṣaḥīfa*’s composition according to Ahmed and others such as Lecker (2004). And, if we run with the extended ‘five-year’ period of the *Ṣaḥīfa*’s composition that various scholars propose (i.e., 622/7 CE), then verses 47:2 and 3:144 reside comfortably within it (though verse 48:29 stands just outside it).

Moreover, there are hundreds of verses where God addresses Muḥammad via the phrases of *rasūl* (messenger) or *nabī* (prophet) or *an-Nadhīr* (the warner). I argue that such references are to Muḥammad-the-man because of the four verses cited above that explicitly describe him in these terms.³ So, for example, verse 48:13 reads:

³ For a smattering of such indirect references to Muḥammad as the Apostle and Prophet that exist within the 622/4 CE period see, for example Qur’ān verses: 2:101, 2:143, 2:151, 8:1, 8:64, 68:4, 98:2. For Medinan verses that cover the 624/7 CE period see: 3:32, 3:81, 3:132, 144, 153, 64, 4:79–80, 115, 33:1, 28–34, 36, 45, 50, 53, 56–59, 66, 71, 34:28, 46, 59:4, 6–8, 61:9–11, 65:1. For Medinan verses that were composed *after* 627 CE see: 5:15, 41, 24:48–51, 48:8, 29, 49:2, 65:1, 66:1, 9, 9:1, 3, 73.

Now as for those who will not believe in God and His Apostle [which must be to the man named Muḥammad] – verily, We have readied a blazing flame for all [such] deniers of the truth [i.e., the unbelievers]!

Accordingly, when we cross reference these four explicit verses with the hundreds of verses that address ‘you’, we know that it must be to Muḥammad because when written in Arabic it is ‘you’ in the singular rather than the plural form—a point which, of course, does not come across in the English translation.

Ultimately, it is unlikely to be a coincidence that the four (or probably five) verses that explicitly reference Muḥammad’s name are all found in Medinan *sūrahs*. It is also noteworthy that in the Meccan *sūrahs*, Muḥammad is described mainly as a messenger or a warner,⁴ who is ‘entrusted with the delivery of [the message concerning] divine admonishment’ via the ‘punishment legends’ in the Meccan *sūrahs*, whereas his status is elevated into a prophet and a leader in the Medinan *sūrahs* (Sinai 2017, 189), as is congruent with his new position in Medina following 1 AH/622 CE.⁵ In sum, these Medinan verses put flesh on the rudimentary aforementioned statements on Muḥammad as prophet and religio-legal ruler of Medina that are contained within the *Ṣaḥīḥa*. And, moreover, it seems fair to say that the synchronicity of meaning found between these two

4 See, for example: (17:105) ‘And as a guide towards the truth have We bestowed this [Qur’ānic revelation] from on high; with this [very] truth has it come down [unto thee, O Prophet]: for We have sent thee but as a herald of glad tidings and a warner’. See also verses: 6:33–36, 34:28, 74:2, 79:45.

5 Note, however, that even in the Medinan *sūrahs*, Muḥammad is sometimes referred to as a ‘warner’ from God (e.g., 2:119), while occasionally he is referred to as an apostle in the Meccan *sūrahs* (e.g., 7:157–8, 22:78, 46:9).

bodies of work points strongly toward their temporal co-existence for all three possible composition date ranges of the ‘Constitution’, thereby likely confirming my claim that the Medinan sūrahs of the Qur’ān must have been composed after 621/2 CE.

QED? Not according to the numerous revisionists who include Jay Smith (2021), Peter Townsend (2021: 467), Karl-Heinz Ohlig (2013c, 195) and, albeit implicitly in this context, Ignaz Goldziher (1967) and Joseph Schacht (1950/1979) before them, all of whom simply dismiss the *Ṣaḥīfa* as but a later fabrication that was invented between 125 and 200 years after 632 CE (as much as the Inārah scholars believe that the Qur’ān only took on its Islamic form in the ninth century). They do this on the basis that the ‘Constitution’ only appears in later classical Islamic sources (Abu ‘Ubayd, Ibn Ishāq).⁶ And, moreover, none of these scholars accept that the Qur’ān was canonised before the late seventh century (Crone & Cook variant), if not the early ninth century CE (Wansbrough and the Inārah scholars). Accordingly, nothing that I have argued thus far would be accepted by them. Instead, for the most part they argue that the explicit references to Muḥammad in the Qur’ān take the form of a Christological epithet. To rebut this reply, I now turn to revisit all five Qur’ānic verses that explicitly reference Muḥammad by arguing that they cannot take the form of an epithet (for Jesus) but must refer to the man whom Muslims recognise as the final prophet of Islam.

Now you see him (Muḥammad), now you don’t: Conjuring Muḥammad out of the Qur’ān?

1. *Qur’ān 48:29*

⁶ Abu ‘Ubayd *Kitāb al-amwāl* (*Book of State Finance*); Ibn Ishāq’s (lost) text, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (*Biography of the Prophet*).

Inârah scholar Karl-Heinz Ohlig (2013b, 278–80) performs some high wire intellectual acrobatics when dismissing the relevance of these five verses that explicitly reference the Prophet, one result of which is that the first part of 48:29 should *not* be read as ‘Muḥammad is God’s Apostle’ but rather ‘Blessed is the messenger of God’. Here, he claims that the *epithet* applies so that this messenger is in fact Jesus. He also argues this on the basis that most of this long verse chimes with Christian meaning. While there is a chronological problem with this claim that I return to below, here I turn to consider the position of another Inârah-inspired revisionist.

Paradoxically, support for my rebuttal comes from the revisionist populariser, Robert Spencer, given that he draws on many of the arguments of the Inârah School throughout his book. He concedes that verse 48:29 ‘probably refers only to the [final] prophet of Islam’ (i.e., Muḥammad). And he rationalises this on the basis that ‘while “the praised one” here could conceivably refer to some other prophet, the language “Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah”... within the Islamic confession of faith makes it more likely that 48:29 refers specifically to the prophet of Islam’ (Spencer 2021, 51–52).

2. *Qur’ān 47:2*

Once again, Ohlig argues that the reference to Muḥammad in this verse is a Christological epithet. But the logic that he uses to ‘prove’ this is spurious. He cites verses 19:30 and 3:46, where the former has Jesus speaking of his prophethood from the cradle while the latter asserts that Jesus would ‘speak unto man [while yet] in his cradle’ (Ohlig 2013b, 281). From there he argues that ‘[b]ecause of these Qur’ānic parallels, verse 47:2 should be translated as “those who believe in what has been sent down to the Blessed One [i.e., Jesus]”’ (Ohlig 2013b, 281). He also claims that the final clause of this verse—‘*He*

riddeth them of their ill deeds and improveth their state’—is indicative of Christian rather than Islamic soteriological meaning. Indeed, he claims that

[t]he ‘redemption from sins’ through faith is a ‘soteriological’ concept, i.e., it refers to salvation as effected by Jesus Christ, not to a Prophet of the Arabs. The first three verses [of *sūrah* 47] can obviously be considered Christian and *muḥammad* should be understood as a Christian title (Ohlig 2013b, 281).

Robert Spencer (2021, 51) casts a degree of ambiguity here when he concludes of verse 47:2 that “‘Muhammad’ is someone to whom Allah has given revelations, but this could apply to any of the Qur’an’s designated prophets as well as to Muhammad in particular’. But there are four points of note that in aggregate refute Ohlig’s argument.

First, it is unequivocal, even in the translation used by Ohlig, that it is God and not his Prophet who is said to redeem those who have attained to faith. And if we run with Muhammad Asad’s translation, or indeed any of the major translations of verse 47:2,⁷ the critical part at stake reads; ‘whereas those who have attained to faith and do righteous deeds, and have come to believe in what has been bestowed from on high on Muhammad – for it is the truth from their Sustainer – [shall attain to God’s grace:] *He* [i.e., Allah] will efface their [past] bad deeds, and will set their hearts at rest’ (my emphasis).

Moreover, this redemptive property is as pertinent to Islam as it is to Christianity given that it is a fundamental theme of the Qur’ān. Notable here are the following verses from early Medinan *Sūrah al-‘Imran*:

⁷ See the translation of verse 47:2 in the following eight translations: Sahih International, Yusuf Ali, Abul Ala Maududi, Mushin Khan, Marmaduke Pickthall, Dr Ghali, Abdel Haleem, and Muhammad Junagarhi. At: <https://myislam.org/surah-muhammad/ayat-2/>

(3:31) Say [O Prophet Muḥammad]: ‘If you love God, follow me [Muḥammad], [and] God will love you and forgive you your sins; for God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace’.

(3:32) Say: ‘Pay heed unto God and the Apostle [Muḥammad]’.

And there is, of course, a whole chapter devoted to the forgiveness of sins and redemption —*Sūrah at-Tawbah* (*sūrah* 9).

My second rejoinder is that *sūrah* 47 (*Sūrah Muḥammad*) could *not* have Christian roots. Thus, while Ohlig claims that the ‘first three verses [of *sūrah* 47] can obviously be considered Christian and *muḥammad* should be understood as a Christian title’, he neglects to point out that much of this *sūrah* is about (defensive) Holy War. And while the first three verses could be read as either Christian or Islamic, the following three verses are undeniably Islamic:

(47:4) Now when you meet [in war] those who are bent on denying the truth, smite their necks until you overcome them fully, and then tighten their bonds; but thereafter [set them free,] either by an act of grace or against ransom, so that the burden of war may be lifted: thus [shall it be].

And [know that] had God so willed, He could indeed punish them [Himself]; but [He wills you to struggle] so as to test you [all] by means of one another.

And as for those who are slain in God’s cause, never will He let their deeds go to waste:

(47:5) He will guide them [in the hereafter as well], and will set their hearts at rest,

(47:6) and will admit them to the paradise which He has promised them.

The key point is that there is simply no precedent for the notion of ‘Holy War’ in the New Testament; in fact, quite the opposite! Thus, Matthew 5:38-39 has Jesus proclaim that:

(5:38) You have heard that it was said [in the Old Testament—Leviticus 24:19-21], ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’

(5:39) But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

And moreover, Matthew 5:43-45 reports Jesus as proclaiming:⁸

(5:43) You have heard that it was said [most likely in the Dead Sea Scrolls], ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy’.

(5:44) But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

(5:45) so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

It is, of course, true that mainstream Christianity later developed a theory of Just/Holy War, which was formulated by the likes of St Augustine (354-430 CE) and, even later, by Thomas of Aquinas (1225-1274 CE). Clearly this theory informed Pope Urban II’s rallying speech in November 1095, which spurred the ‘Knights of Christ’ (*milites Christi*) to launch the Crusades to recapture and ‘liberate’ the Holy Land from the ‘Islamic infidel’, galvanised by the knowledge that if they fell, they would become Christian

⁸ All verse citations from the English Standard Version of *The New Testament*. At:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%205%3A38-45&version=ESV>

martyrs whose reward would be a passport into heaven. But the point here is that Pope Urban had to play fast and loose with Christian doctrine to re-present Christianity as being endowed with a militaristic propensity given that Jesus had unequivocally rejected such a conception.

My third rebuttal has added impetus in the light of my second criticism: that linking 47:2 with verses 19:30 and 3:46 is spurious and I can see no reason for making such a link other than to try and spin the word ‘Muḥammad’ into an epithet for Jesus. Thus, as I have established in my first rebuttal, *sūrah* 47 is exclusively Islamic such that *Sūrah Muḥammad* could in no way be understood as *Surah ʿĪsā ibn Maryam*. And my fourth and final rebuttal concerns the more general point that one of the core themes of the Medinan *sūrahs* is the confessional differentiation of Islam from Judaism and Christianity. This is driven home as much in the earlier Medinan period via *sūrahs* 47, 2 and 3 as well as at its close via *sūrahs* 5 and 9 (9-10 AH/630-2 CE).

3. Verse 33:40

In this famous verse, which tells us that ‘Muḥammad is not the father of any one of your men, but is God’s Apostle and the Seal of all Prophets’, Ohlig initially concedes that it refers to the Arabic Prophet rather than to Jesus. Coupling verses 33:37-50 with 33:50-59 (Ohlig 2013, 281–3) he argues that all talk of Muḥammad taking many wives leads him to conclude that these verses express ‘religious and ethical ideas which bear no relation to Jesus as a person, nor to his message, as he would have considered the described behavior of the Prophet as an especially abominable case of adultery’ (Ohlig 2013, 28). Though no doubt designed to besmirch the prophet Muḥammad, this argument presents Ohlig with a conundrum: i.e., that he is now conceding that Muḥammad is not an epithet. Not surprisingly, we then find the goalposts shifting as Ohlig plays his favoured Inârah School

‘get-out-of-epistemic-jail-free card’ when he concludes that these forementioned verses are ‘clearly no longer Christian, so [that] both groups of verses *must have come into existence very late*’ (Ohlig 2013, 283, my emphases). By this he means that this *sūrah* was one of the latest in chronological terms at a time when the Christian sect had morphed into becoming Muslim.

But this claim opens up a Pandora’s Box for the Inârah thesis more generally. Thus, if *sūrah* 33 appeared *after* the Christian sect had become Muslim then, at least according to the Nöldeke (2013) chronology, verses 47:2 and 48:29 together with 33:40 and very possibly 61:2 all come within the Islamic period that Ohlig identifies (see Syukron and Khairiyah 2022: 16650–16651). In which case, four out of the five references to Muḥammad in the Qur’ān cannot, by Ohlig’s criterion, be to Jesus but must be to Muḥammad as the final prophet of Islam.

Finally, Inârah scholar Thomas Alexander advances a slight twist on Ohlig’s argument. Drawing on David Powers’ (2009) argument, in two of his fascinating podcasts on the origins of Islam, Alexander (2022a, 2:35–3:24, 2022b, 1:22–1:35) claims that this verse was a much later interpolation that was made by a particular scribe. And, he concludes by saying that there is no mention of Muḥammad in the Qur’ān. Thus, once again: now you see Muḥammad-the-man, now you don’t. Still, Spencer, at least, concedes that this verse ‘is almost certainly a specific reference to the prophet of Islam, and not simply to a prophetic figure being accorded the [Christological] epithet “the praised one”’ (Spencer 2021, 51).

4. Verse 3:144

This verse, as noted above, tells us that ‘Muḥammad is only an apostle; all the [other] apostles have passed away before him: if, then, he dies or is slain, will you turn about on

your heels?’ [dated roughly to 3 AH/625 CE]. Ohlig (2013, 284) then cites the following verse: (3:145) ‘Nobody can die, except with God’s permission and after a limited(-term) providence (lit.: scripture)’. And from there he claims that there is an interesting parallel with verse 5:75: ‘The Messiah, son of Mary, was no other than a messenger, messengers (the like of whom) had passed away before him’ (cited in Ohlig 2013, 284). Given his claim that the Arabic wording is ‘exactly the same’, he then jumps to the spurious conclusion that the inclusion of Muḥammad in verse 3:144 is an epithet and therefore refers to Jesus. Note that Spencer (2021, 51) follows Ohlig in making this argument.

The paradox here is that verses 3:144 and 5:75 are indeed inter-related but for precisely the opposite reason to that deduced by Ohlig and Spencer. The Islamic principle of *tawḥīd* (absolute or indivisible oneness) precludes outright the possibility that God begets children who are deities (or adopts human Messengers). In this light, verse 5:75 constitutes a *critique* of the Christian trinitarian belief that Jesus was part-deity (as in duophysitism), or God incarnate (as in monophysitism). Here it is also helpful to note that the Council of Nicaea (325 CE) pronounced the ‘pre-existence’ of Christ. Francis Lankester (????, 9) rightly notes that Spencer (and Ohlig) fails to appreciate the Qur’ānic principle of what David Marshall (2014) calls the ‘uniformity of the messenger’, or what Mark Durie (2022, 945) calls ‘messenger uniformitarianism’. This refers to the point that *all* messengers are human beings that live for only a very short time. In short, verses 3:144 and 5:75 deny that apostles of Allah, such as Jesus and Muḥammad, are part-God. Thus verse 5:75 explicitly denies that Jesus is the Son of God, while 3:144 renders this implicitly.

Accordingly, the key point is that *contra* Ohlig, verse 3:144 proves that the reference to Muḥammad cannot be an epithet that implies Jesus Christ. For if this reference is to the epithet, then it fundamentally contradicts the trinitarian Christian belief

that Jesus is the Son of God. However, for those Inârah scholars who claim that Islam originated as a Jewish-Christian sect, then my rebuttal drops out because some, though not all, of these sects revere Jesus as the apostle but reject his divinity. However, this does not get them off the hook because in chronological terms, *sūrah* 5 is the penultimate one. And given that for Ohlig this is the part of the Qur'ān that supposedly reflects Islamic rather than Christian doctrine, then this point renders his argument self-contradictory.

A final point returns us to the wording of verse 3:144, which tells us that 'Muḥammad is only an apostle; all the [other] apostles have passed away before him: if, then, he dies or is slain, will you turn about on your heels?' The tradition insists that the Qur'ān was first completed in a *mushaf* in the early 650s that was, in turn, based on Muḥammad's utterances between 610 and 632. Thus, verse 3:144 is clearly talking about someone who was supposed to be alive in the 610-632 period and that it was articulated at that time by the final prophet – else it would read: 'Muḥammad was only an apostle; all the [other] apostles have passed away before him: after he had died in 632, did you turn about on your heels?' How, then, could this refer to Jesus who died six centuries earlier? And the same conclusion, of course, applies when allowing for the Inârah claim that the Qur'ān was completed in the ninth century according to the Inârah scholars. True, their claim is that the Qur'ān was invented, this fabricated narrative refers to Muḥammad as having uttered the Holy Book before 632.

5. Verse 61:6

While Robert Spencer (2021, 88) advances the claim that verse 61:6 provides evidence that the word Muḥammad means Jesus, I view this verse as the clincher for the claim that here the word Muḥammad refers to the Islamic prophet:

And [this happened, too,] when Jesus, the son of Mary, said: ‘O children of Israel! Behold, I am an apostle of God unto you, [sent] to confirm the truth of whatever there still remains of the Torah, and to give [you] the glad tiding of an apostle who shall come *after me*, whose name shall be Ahmad’ (my emphasis). But when he [i.e., Ahmad, whose coming Jesus had foretold] came unto them with all evidence of the truth, they said: ‘This [alleged message of his] is [nothing but] spellbinding eloquence!’

Clearly, Ahmad could not have been an epithet as this would mean that Jesus would be predicting the future apostle Jesus! Thus, were Ahmad an epithet the verse would read:

And [this happened, too,] when Jesus, the son of Mary, said: ‘O children of Israel! Behold, I am an apostle of God unto you, [sent] to confirm the truth of whatever there still remains of the Torah, and to give [you] the glad tiding of an apostle who shall come after me, whose name shall be Jesus’. But when he [Jesus, whose coming Jesus had foretold] came unto them with all evidence of the truth, they said: ‘This [alleged message of his] is [nothing but] spellbinding eloquence!’

Of course, the revisionists are likely to insist that Ahmad does not necessarily refer to Muḥammad and it is simply an Islamic interpretive over-reach (or wishful thinking) to assume that it does. In which case, these revisionists will need to explain those verses that clearly differentiate the two prophets. For example, verse 42:13 reads: ‘In matters of faith, He has ordained for you [Muḥammad] the same as He had enjoined on Noah – that which We have revealed to you [Muḥammad] – and as We enjoined on Abraham, Moses and Jesus: ‘Steadfastly uphold the faith and do not divide into factions’. Or again, verse 33:7

tells us: ‘And remember when We took a covenant from the prophets, as well as from you O Prophet [Muḥammad], and from Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, son of Mary’.

Finally, I note that the Qur’ān has over 375 references to the ‘messenger/prophet’, which must be to Muḥammad, while there are also many hundreds of implicit references where God is speaking directly to the Prophet (via ‘You’ in the singular), which must also be to Muḥammad. If nothing else, this dispels the frequent revisionist claim that the Qur’ān is bereft of focus on Muḥammad, even if such focus does not (nor should it) contain biographical content. For the ultimate upshot of my analysis is that the Qur’ān is replete with references to Prophet Muḥammad. And, to sum up this section, I note that Spencer concedes two of the four references are to Muḥammad-the-man (i.e., that they are a proper name rather than a Christological epithet). Nevertheless, given that this is a massive concession, not surprisingly Spencer still tries to downplay the significance of these two references by arguing that we learn very little biographically about Muḥammad in the Qur’ān. But, as implied above, this is merely a diversionary tactic because it is irrelevant to the issue at stake.

Conclusion

Much of the Inârah School’s *modus operandi* boils down to performing all manner of intellectual gymnastics to keep their revisionist spinning plates from allowing gravity to get the better of them. But it seems to me that a far more plausible way to proceed when trying to narrate the of the origins of Islam is to apply Occam’s Razor. Here I refer my reader to a poem called Al-Ha’iyyah—a 33-line poem on Sunni creed (*Aqeedah*) composed by the Sunni scholar Ibn Abī Dāwūd (2024). In one of its lines, he writes:

And keep yourself from the opinions of people and their stances,
 Since the stance of the Messenger of Allah is more befitting and comforting to the
 chest.⁹

In other words, it is easier to follow than to invent. And in this light, I want to close by stating that the Muslim tradition's account appears far more straightforward than the highly strained complexities that the revisionists necessarily bring to bear such that the former's simplicity is far more likely to reflect the truth.

References:

- Abdel Haleem, M.A.S. 2010. "Qur'anic 'jihād': A Linguistic and Contextual Analysis". *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 12: 147–166. <https://doi-org.sheffield.idm.oclc.org/10.3366/jqs.2010.0108>
- Ahmed, Mohammed Ibraheem. 2022. "Islam and Judaism: Religious Attitudes and Identity in the Medinan Era." *Al-Masāq: Journal of the Mediterranean*, 1–23. At <https://doi.org/10.1080/09503110.2022.2154564>
- Alexander, Thomas. (2022a). "The Origins of Islam 1.3—The Koran—the Proto-Koran." Youtube podcast. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vaD0gFNGwnY&list=PL1zJ2LUq92EkBQpJIVHK2vb7YigCcmzP7&index=3>;
- Alexander, Thomas. 2022b. "The Origins of Islam 4.3—A New Religion: Muhammad I and Muhammad II." Youtube podcast. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tgYi59UxulY>
- Al-Sijistānī, Ibn Abī Dāwūd. 2024. *The Ḥā'iyya of Ibn Abī Dāwūd: A Poem on the Beliefs of the Salaf*. ???????: Origem Publishing.

⁹ I am grateful to Abdul Hai for supplying me with this poem.

Asad, Muhafmmad. 1980. *The Message of the Qur'an*. Sharjah: Dar Al-Andalus

Crone, Patricia, and Michael Cook. 1977. *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

I DON'T KNOW HOW TO PRESENT THIS: Crone, Patricia. 2012. "Islam: The Untold Story." (Interview), Channel 4 Documentary, at 15.35–15.57. (It's Tom Holland who does the documentary)

Donner, Fred. 2010. *Muhammad and the Believers*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Durie, Mark 2022. "Semantic Decomposition of Four Quranic Words." *Russian Journal of Linguistics* 26 (4): 937–969.

Gibson, Dan. 2017. *Early Islamic Qiblas*. Saskatoon, Vancouver: Independent Scholars Press.

Goldziher, Ignaz. 1967. *Muslim Studies*. New York: SUNY Press.

Hawting, Gerald. 2018. "The House and the Book: Sanctuary and Scripture in Islam (2017 IQSA Presidential Address)." *Journal of the International Quranic Studies Association* 3: 3–23.

Hobson, John M. 2026a. *1001 Myths about Islam, I: A Skeptical Response to the Revisionist Critique of Islam and its Origins*. University of Sheffield, unpublished mss.

Hobson, John M. 2026b. *1001 Myths about Islam, II: The Revisionist 'Petra Myth' and the Return to Mecca*. University of Sheffield, unpublished mss.

Hobson, John M. 2026c. *1001 Myths about Islam, III: A Skeptical Response to the Inârah School's Revisionist Critique of Islam and its Origins*. University of Sheffield, unpublished mss.

Holland, Tom. 2012. *In the Shadow of the Sword*. New York: Doubleday.

Lankester, Francis. ????. *Did Muhammad Exist? A Counterblast to the Revisionists.*

?????.

Marshall, David. 2014. *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers*. London: Routledge.

Lecker, Michael. 2004. *The Constitution of Medina*. Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press.

Lüling, Günter. 2003. *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.

Luxenberg, Christoph. 2007. *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*. Berlin: Hans Schiler Verlag.

Mingana, Alphonse. 1917. "Transmission of the Kur'ān according to Christian Writers." *The Muslim World* 7 (4) 402–414. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.1917.tb01574.x>

Nevo, Yehuda, and Judith Koren. 2003. *Crossroads to Islam*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus.

Nöldeke, Theodor. 2013. *The History of the Qur'ān*. Leiden: Brill.

Ohlig, Karl-Heinz. (ed.). 2013a. *Early Islam*. New York: Prometheus.

Ohlig, Karl-Heinz. 2013b. "From *muḥammad* Jesus to Prophet of the Arabs – the Personalization of a Christological Epithet." In Ohlig (ed.), *Early Islam*, 251–307.

Ohlig, Karl-Heinz. 2013c. "Evidence of a New Religion in Christian Literature 'under Islamic Rule'?" In Ohlig (ed.), *Early Islam*, 176–250.

Popp, Volker. 2013. "From Ugarit to Sāmarrā' – An Archeological Journey on the Trail of Ernst Herzfeld." In Ohlig (ed.), *Early Islam*, 14–175.

Powers, David. S. 2009. *Muhammad is Not the Father of Any of Your Men*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Rippin, Andrew. 2001. *The Qur'an and its Interpretative Tradition*. Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate/Variorum.

Rubin, Uri. 1985. "The 'Constitution of Medina': Some Notes." *Studia Islamica* 62: 5–23.

- Schacht, Joseph. 1950/1979. *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Shoemaker, Stephen. 2011. *The Death of a Prophet*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Shoemaker, Stephen. 2022. *Creating the Qur'an*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Sinai, Nicolai. 2017. *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Smith, Jay. 2021. "Muhammad's 'Constitution' is likewise a 'Sham'! (#13)". At <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=env2MKOOc0E>.
- Spencer, Robert. 2021. *Did Muhammad Exist?* New York: Bombardier Books.
- Syukron, Ahmad, and Nikmatul Khairiyah. 2022. "Chronology of the Qur'an According to Theodor Nöldeke and Sir William Muir (Analysis of the *History of the Qur'an* and *Life of Mahomet*)."
Budapest International Research and Critics Institute-Journal (BIRCI-Journal) 5 (2) 16644–16656.
- Townsend, Peter. 2021. *The Mecca Mystery*. (Self-published).
- Wansbrough, John. 1977. *Qur'anic Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Watt, W. Montgomery. 1956. *Muhammad at Medina*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Wellhausen, Julius. 1927. *The Arab Kingdom and Its Fall*. Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press.