

Inferno, Canto XXVIII: 30–31. The Prophet Muhammad and the Caliph ‘Alī: (Mis) Representing the Body, Discovering the Soul

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Introduction: Using as a springboard Canto XXVIII: 30-31 of the *Inferno*, I will analyze how Dante portrayed the Prophet Muhammad (ca. 570-632) and علي بن أبي طالب ‘Alī ibn ‘Abī Ṭālib (601-661)—the Prophet’s cousin, son-in-law, and fourth Rightly-Guided Caliph (656-661)—as contrite souls suffering eternal and recurring pain for their “alleged” sins while living on Earth. By physically imagining their suffering bodies and “repented” souls as portrayed in Canto XXVIII: 30-31 of the *Inferno*, I look at how Dante approached, depicted, and condemned the bodies of these “Christian heresiarchs.” Indeed, by doing so, Dante was simply following and perpetuating a common trend in early (476-1000) and late (11th-15th centuries) Medieval Europe, or rather, he misunderstood, hence, (mis)represented, Islam and all Muslims, as in the case of the Prophet Muhammad and the fourth Caliph ‘Alī. Finally, my analysis will look at how Dante’s standpoint on and carefully-chosen verses used to physically describe the Prophet Muhammad and the Caliph ‘Alī opened the doors to centuries of negative visual representations of the Prophet Muhammad and the Caliph ‘Alī even after the West eventually recognized that indeed Islam is a religion by its very nature and not a heterodox sect of Christianity.

Keywords: Dante, Divine Comedy, heresy, heterodox, Inferno, Islam, Muslim, Prophet Muhammad, ‘Alī

I. INTRODUCTION

During the early (476-1000) and late Middle Ages (11th-15th centuries) Islam was regarded as a Christian heresy and the Prophet Muhammad (مُحَمَّدُ ابْنُ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh, 571-632) was deemed as a heterodox, Christian heresiarch. Hence, Dante saw no problem condemning him to suffer eternal suffering in *Inferno*—together with his cousin, son-in-law, and fourth Rightly-Guided Caliph (r. 656-661) ‘Alī ibn ‘Abī Ṭālib (601-661)—because he was regarded as a renegade and schismatic Christian, who spread discord and heresies.¹

‘Alī ibn ‘Abī Ṭālib علي بن أبي طالب (601-661), was Prophet Muhammad’s cousin, son-in-law, and fourth and last Rightly-Guided Caliph (r. 656-661). The *Khulafā al-Rāshidūn* الخُلَفَاءُ الرَّاشِدُونَ (the Rightly Guided Caliphs) were the first four caliphs of Islam following Muhammad’s death in 632. The first three Rightly Guided Caliphs were: Abū Bakr أَبُو بَكْرٍ (r. 632-632), Umar عُمَرُ (r. 634-644) and Uthmām عُثْمَانُ (r. 644-656).²

¹ Dante Alighieri. *A Divina Comédia*. Trans. Vasco Graça Moura. Venda Nova: Bertrand, 1996. Canto XXVIII: 22-31.

² The leadership of the first four Rightly Guided Caliphs (632-661) was followed by the Umayyad Caliphate (661-750), the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258), and the Ottoman Empire (1299-1922); yet, at times there were

Barring Muhammad himself, ‘Alī is by far the most revered and written about Muslim in the entire Islamic world; indeed, he is respected by all Muslims, regardless of their denomination. The *Aḥādīth* of the Prophet Muhammad, the *السيرة النبوية* *Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, or rather, the Biography of the Prophet Muhammad, as well as a myriad of religious and non-religious texts written during the first centuries of Islam, are perhaps the best primary sources containing information on ‘Alī’ the person, the believer, and the religious/political leader.³

The *Ḥadīth* *أحاديث* *Aḥādīth*, of the prophet Muhammad, also known as *الأخبار* *al-Akḥbār* and *الأثر* *al-Aṭhar*, or rather, the traditions. *الأخبار* *Al-Akḥbar* and *الأثر* *al-Aṭhar* are often used as synonyms for the *أحاديث* *Aḥādīth*. The term *الأخبار* *Al-Akḥbar*—singular *الخبر* *al-Khabar*—usually carries the meaning of 'tradition' as it refers to only one person, often with a historical connotation. The *حديث* *ḥadīth*, Arabic for story, is the 'tradition,' i.e., the written record of the saying and doings, *سنة* *Sunnah*, of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions. Together with the Qur’ān, the *ḥadīth* forms the basis for Islamic Jurisprudence (*أصول الفقه* *uṣūl al-fiqh*, principles of Islamic Law). Obviously, this traditional literature was first transmitted orally, through memorization, and then—for fear of permanent loss—it was written down for posterity.⁴

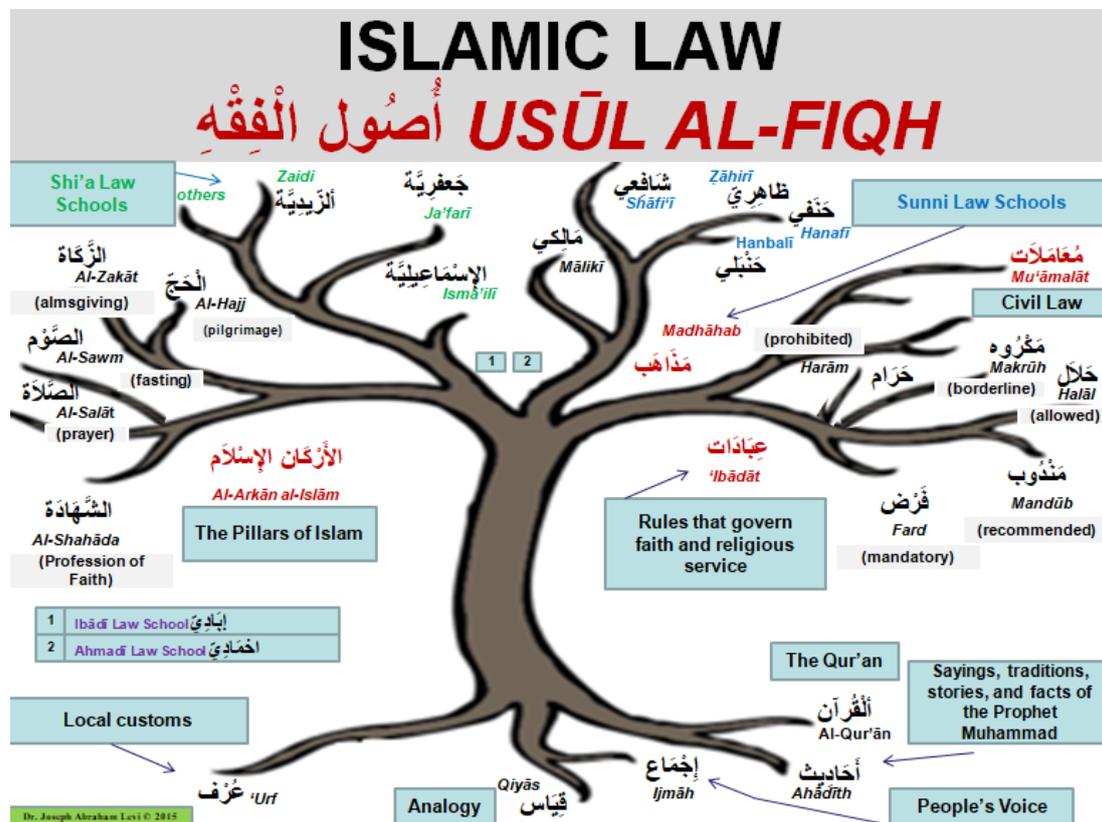


Chart designed by the author

Verses of the Qur’ān and sections from different *Aḥādīth* portray ‘Alī as a devout and knowledgeable Muslim (Qur’ān 3:61), willing to sacrifice his life for the Prophet Muhammad (Qur’ān 2:207), and state, either

innumerable concurrent and adversary kingdoms dispersed throughout the then vast Islamic world arching across three continents (Europe, Africa, and Asia).

³ Nebil Husayn. "The Rehabilitation of ‘Alī in Sunnī Ḥadīth and Historiography." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3.29.4 (2019): 565-583.

⁴ Joseph Abraham Levi 雷祖善博士. "Reconstructing the Abrogated. Exegesis of Qur’ān 53: 21-22." *International Journal of Arts and Social Science* 4 2 (March-April 2021): 6-23. 10.

directly or indirectly, that Allah had chosen ‘Alī to continue Prophet Muhammad’s work on Earth (Qur’ān 5:55; 67; Qur’ān 33:33; Qur’ān 42:23).

For instance, even though he is not mentioned in Qur’ān 3:61, in the year 10 of the Hijrah (October 631), ‘Alī was among the group of Muslim men, women, and children slated to meet with some Nestorian and Miaphysite Christian believers from Najrān⁵. Even though they were very much pleased with how Jesus was portrayed in the Qu’rān (yet always as a prophet and never as the son of God), and even though they paid tribute to the newly formed Islamic State (then celebrating its tenth anniversary of existence, 621-631), these heterodox Christians did not convert to Islam and eventually refused to meet with the Muslim delegation. Apparently, they feared that the steadfastness of these Muslims could be a sign of their sincerity as believers; hence, their religion could have been perceived as not the “true religion.” At the *Mubāhala* (المباهاة) prayer-curse meeting, these Muslims and Najrani Christians were supposed to:

[...] earnestly pray to God and invoke the curse of God on those who should lie. Those who had a pure and sincere faith would not hesitate. The Christians declined and they were dismissed in a spirit of tolerance with a promise of protection from the [Islamic] State in return for tribute.⁶

As for Qur’ān 2:207, this verse is seen by Sunni and Shiite scholars alike as a sign that the stanza alludes to ‘Alī’s selfless act. In this case, ‘Alī volunteered to sleep in the Prophet’s bed so that when the enemies of Islam from the *بنو هاشم* Banū Hāshim clan of the Quraish tribe (Muhammad’s tribe) came in the middle of the night to murder the Prophet of Islam they would not find him. The Prophet Muhammad, instead, was on his way to *يثرب* Yathrib (as of 622 CE/1 AH, Medina). ‘Alī was not killed; yet, he was physically punished for having tricked Prophet Muhammad’s would-be killers:

And there is the type of man	و مِنْ أَنَاسٍ
Who give his life	مَنْ يَشْرِي نَفْسَهُ
To earn the pleasure of God;	أَبْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاتِ اللَّهِ
And God is full of kindness	وَاللَّهُ رَءُوفٌ
To (His) devotees.	بِالْعِبَادِ ⁷

As the late, renowned, Indian-born, British Islamic scholar Abdullah Yūsuf Ali (1872-1953) rightly affirmed, men like the one mentioned in Qur’ān 2:207 were “common in early Islam.” Indeed, they were seen as role models to be emulated by others, especially the first converts to Islam: “Through persecution, obloquy, torture, threat to their own lives or the lives of those dear to them, they stood by their leader and many of them gave their lives. That is what established Islam.”⁸

⁵ G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar. *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012; Richard Barrie Dobson. *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages: A-J*. Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2000; Hugh Goddard. *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020; Philip K. Hitti. *History of the Arabs: From the Earliest Times to the Present*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

⁶ Qur’ān 3:61. A. Yūsuf Ali. *The Holy Qur’ān. Text, Translation, and Commentary*. Brentwood, MD: Amana, 1983. 138; note 400.

⁷ Qur’ān 2:207. A. Yūsuf Ali. *The Holy Qur’ān. Text, Translation, and Commentary*. Brentwood, MD: Amana, 1983. 82.

⁸ Qur’ān 2:207. A. Yūsuf Ali. *The Holy Qur’ān. Text, Translation, and Commentary*. Brentwood, MD: Amana, 1983. 82; note 229.

Even though he is not mentioned in Qur'ān 2:207, the historical context allows for a positive identification of this type of man with Prophet Muhammad's cousin and future son-in-law 'Alī. Additionally, the next verse, Qur'ān 2:208, exhorts believers to follow this type of man and not tag along the "footsteps of the Evil One," namely:

O ye who believe!	يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا
Enter into Islam	أَدْخُلُوا فِي السِّلْمِ
Whole-heartedly:	كَافَّةً
And follow not	وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا
The footsteps	خُطُوتِ
Of the Evil One;	الشَّيْطَانِ
For he is to you	إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ
An avowed enemy	عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ. ⁹

Indeed, the *الكشْفُ وَالْبَيَانُ عَنِ تَفْسِيرِ الْقُرْآنِ* *Al-Kashf wa al-Bayān 'an Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān* (Commentary of the Qur'ān)¹⁰ and the *عرايس المَجَالِسِ فِي قِصَاصِ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ* *'Arā'is al-Majālis fī Quiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* (The Lives of the Prophets)¹¹ composed by the eleventh-century Shafi'i Persian scholar Abū Ishāk Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Nīsābūrī al-Tha'labī (d. ca. 1035) mention the unique and special nature of 'Alī's character who was appointed by the Prophet Muhammad to be his *وَلِيّ* *walīy* (protector, friend of God) and to follow in his footsteps after his death.¹²

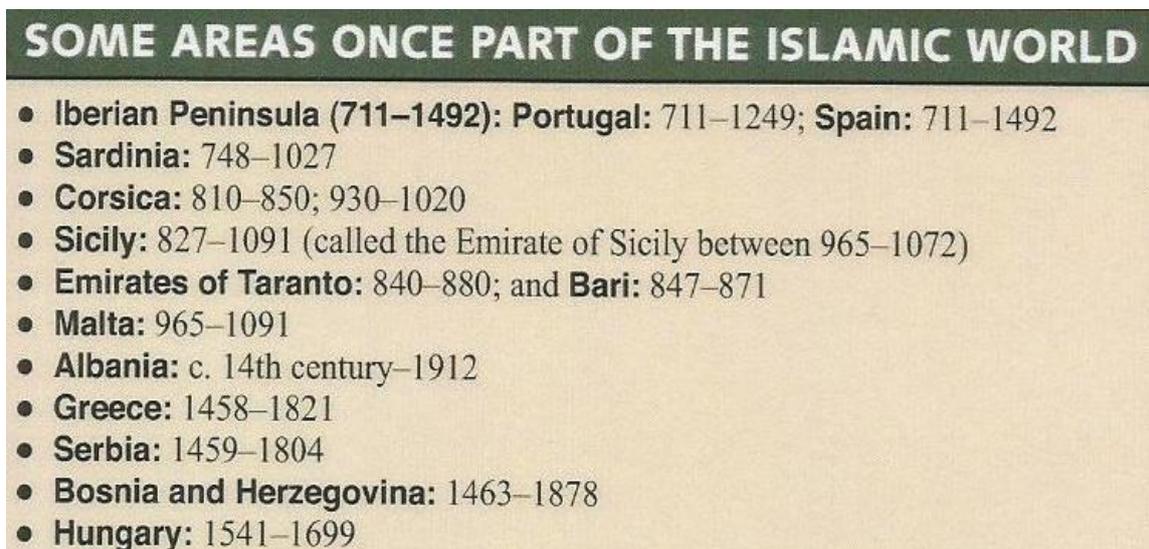
⁹ Qur'ān 2:208. A. Yūsuf Ali. *The Holy Qur'ān. Text, Translation, and Commentary*. Brentwood, MD: Amana, 1983. 82.

¹⁰ Walid A Saleh. *The Formation of the Classical Tafsir Tradition: The Qur'an Commentary of Al-Tha'labi (d.427/1035)*. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

¹¹ Abu Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Mutarrif al-Kinani Tarafi, and Roberto Tottoli. *The Stories of the Prophets by Ibn Mutarrif Al-Tarafi =: Quisas Al-Anbiya Di Tarafi*. Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2003.

¹² R. N. Frye. *The Cambridge History of Iran*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1975; A. Rippin. "Al-Tha'labī," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Eds. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworht, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs; Allama Sayyhid Saeed Akhatar Rizvi. *Imamate. (The Vicegerency of the Holy Prophet)*. Dar-es-Salaam: Bilal Muslim of Tanzania, 2006; Mohammad Ali Shomali. "Imamate and Wilayah. Part IV." *Message of Thaḳalayn* 13 1 (2012): 127-155.

II. ENCOUNTERS



As we can see from the abovementioned chart, between 711-1922, many geographical areas and regions in Europe were, at some point and time, under Muslim domination. Yet, despite its Islamic past—where scientific research, improvements, and discoveries were the norm¹⁴—and regardless of its physical proximity to the Maghreb and the Middle East, Europe always remained with its back to Islam, thus ignoring, not appreciating, or simply blissfully, boldly, and arrogantly being unaware of its vast philosophical, scientific, and technological superiority.

Indeed, Islam, as a religion, and History of Islam, as a full-fledged academic subject matter, have always had a very superficial presence in European/Western high school curricula: one or two pages at the most. In other words, there was and there is no interest in ascertaining that the new generation learns, and correctly, History of Islam and Islam as a world religion. By doing so, Europe/the West follows along the tradition that began during the Crusades (1096-1272) whereby the “other,” i.e., the “Saracen” (sic!), was seen as the enemy; hence, he had to be fought and not understood and/or appreciated for his religious and cultural diversity and, more importantly, for his contributions to human knowledge.

¹³ Joseph Abraham Levi 雷祖善博士. *Middle East History*. Boca Raton, FL: BarCharts, 2011.

¹⁴ Joseph Abraham Levi 雷祖善博士. "Beyond Invasion: the *Bāb* باب in the *Dār* دار, or rather, the Door in the Land. Islam as the Door to the Portuguese Age of Discoveries". *International Journal of Arts and Social Science* 3 4 (August 2020): 403-430. <<https://www.ijassjournal.com/2020/V3I4/4146575877.pdf>>; Joseph Abraham Levi 雷祖善博士. "Muslim Science as the Source of the Portuguese Age of Discoveries". *Comparative Literature and Culture*. Special Issue: *New Work about the Journey and Its Portrayals*. Ed. I-Chun Wang 14.5 (2013). *Purdue University CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2135>>; Joseph Abraham Levi 雷祖善博士. "O Legado Islâmico de *Al-Ândalus* (711-1492)". *Mentalities/Mentalités* 19 1 (2005): 19-31; Joseph Abraham Levi 雷祖善博士. "Religião ao serviço das Ciências: o legado islâmico de *Al-Ândalus* (711-1492)". *Rotas da Natureza. Na Construção Científica e Empírica do Mundo. Colóquios. Lisboa, 23, 27-29 Junho, 2003. Convento dos Cardais, Museu da Água. Peregrinações Muçulmanas*. <http://www.triplov.com/cictsul/levi_islam.html>.

Crusade	Dates of Crusade	Crusades Timeline of Events
First Crusade	1096 - 1099	The People's Crusade - Freeing the Holy Lands. 1st Crusade led by Count Raymond IV of Toulouse and proclaimed by many wandering preachers, notably Peter the Hermit
Second Crusade	1144 - 1155	Crusaders prepared to attack Damascus. 2nd crusade led by Holy Roman Emperor Conrad III and by King Louis VII of France
Third Crusade	1187 - 1192	3rd Crusade led by Richard the Lionheart of England, Philip II of France, and Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I. Richard I made a truce with Saladin
Fourth Crusade	1202 - 1204	4th Crusade led by Fulk of Neuil French/Flemish advanced on Constantinople
The Children's Crusade	1212	The Children's Crusade led by a French peasant boy, Stephen of Cloyes
Fifth Crusade	1217 - 1221	The 5th Crusade led by King Andrew II of Hungary, Duke Leopold VI of Austria, John of Brienne
Sixth Crusade	1228 - 1229	The 6th Crusade led by Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II
Seventh Crusade	1248 - 1254	The 7th Crusade led by Louis IX of France
Eighth Crusade	1270	The 8th Crusade led by Louis IX
Ninth Crusade	1271 - 1272	The 9th Crusade led by Prince Edward (later Edward I of England)

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The Nine Crusades (1096-1272)

The nine Crusades listed above have a tenth companion (proclaimed in 1274) which, due to the fact that there were no takers, never materialized. Interestingly enough, between 1274 -1303, the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea saw a decline in Christian population and a slow, yet steady, increase of Muslim presence, mainly hailing from Central Asia, or rather, Turkic peoples who eventually settled in what soon became the Ottoman Empire (1299-1922).

As Islam became more diverse boasting converts hailing from regions beyond the traditional Middle East and the Maghreb—as in the case of Central Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia—Europe was exposed to Muslims who were not the “usual” Arab or *Maghrébin* to whom Europeans were accustomed. Yet, despite this vast array of Muslims and/or Islamic peoples originating from all over the then-known world having contact with Europe/the Europeans, the representation of Islam—particularly the image of the Prophet Muhammad (seen as a Christian heresiarch) and the Fourth Caliph ‘Alī—remained the same: a religion that was seen as a fraud since it was thought to be a spurious form of Christianity; hence, it, its leader (the Prophet Muhammad) and followers, as in the case of ‘Alī, could, or better yet, should be punished and eradicated from history.

III. KNOWLEDGE

طلب العلم حتى إذا كان لديك للذهاب إلى الصين

Seek Knowledge Even if You Have to Go to China¹⁶

¹⁵ Joseph Abraham Levi 雷祖善博士. *Middle East History*. Boca Raton, FL: BarCharts, 2011.

¹⁶ *Hadīth* attributed to the Prophet Mohammad.

In *al-Andalus* (Iberian Peninsula under Islamic rule, 711-1492) Astronomy reached its peak during the second half of the 10th century:

[...] al-Andalus is where the coming together of Islam, Sephardic Judaism, and Christianity produced a unique body of cultural and scientific works unequaled in human history. Although oftentimes idealized, this peaceful and (almost always) tolerant, cooperation among the Ahl al-Kitāb (People of the Book) (711-11th century), was able to foster the flourishing of the arts and sciences including agriculture, architecture, arithmetic, arts, chemistry, cosmography, geography, mathematics, medicine, music, philosophy, etc., thus opening the doors to the Portuguese Age of Exploration.¹⁷

For instance, Abū al-Qāsim Maslamah ibn Ahmād al-Majriti (d. ca. 1007) was a renowned Andaluzi philosopher and mathematician. Abū al-Qāsim Aṣḡagh ibn Muḥammad al-Samḥ al-Gharnāṭi al-Mahrī (b. Córdoba 979- d. Granada 1035), was a Muslim astronomer and mathematician who, using as a springboard the *زيج السند هند الكبير* *Zij al-Sindhind al-Kabir* (Great Astronomical Tables of the *Sindhind*, ca. 770), composed small treatises on the construction and use of the astrolabe, as the famous treatise where he described an astronomical instrument with seven blades, useful for calculating the movements of the Sun, the Moon, and the five planets.¹⁸ Indeed, in “the eleventh and twelfth centuries Arab [i.e., Islamic] astronomy was in a flourishing condition in [the Iberian Peninsula]: it was for long afterwards studied in the East and continued to retain the interest of scholars of medieval Europe.”¹⁹

Needless to say, the “contributions to the sciences brought by Muslims [...] [to Europe and beyond] were countless.”²⁰ In fact, the Iberian Peninsula under Islamic control (711-1492), known as *الأندلس* *al-Andalus*, was instrumental for introducing Europe to the scientific renaissance triggered by the Islamic interest in seeking and perfecting knowledge (through translations of earlier Indian, Iranian, Greek/Hellenic works added by ameliorations thanks to the latest scientific discoveries of the time):

As Islam was growing in numbers of believers and as Islam was physically and geopolitically progressing leaving the Arabian Peninsula behind itself and expanding from south to north, from east to west including Europe, from east to the south- and northeast Asia and beyond, Islam absorbed and forged new ideas/ideals and new models upon which to construct and reshape its sociopolitical organization, as well as its scientific and philosophical-theological discourse. Needless to say, Greek/Hellenic, Sanskrit, and Hindu, as well as Old and Middle (Pahlavi) Iranian thinking

¹⁷ Joseph Abraham Levi 雷祖善博士. "Muslim Science as the Source of the Portuguese Age of Discoveries." *Comparative Literature and Culture*. Special Issue: *New Work about the Journey and Its Portrayals*. Ed. I-Chun Wang 14.5 (2013). *Purdue University CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2135>>.

¹⁸ Monica Rius. "Ibn al-Samḥ: al-Qāsim Aṣḡagh ibn Muḥammad al-Samḥ al-Gharnāṭi al-Mahrī," in *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers*. Ed. Thomas Hockey, editor-in-chief. New York: Springer, 2007. 568.

¹⁹ Bernard Carra de Vaux. "Astronomy and Mathematics," in *The Legacy of Islam*. Eds. Arnold, Thomas, and Alfred Guillaum. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931. 376-397. 394.

²⁰ Joseph Abraham Levi 雷祖善博士. "Muslim Science as the Source of the Portuguese Age of Discoveries." *Comparative Literature and Culture*. Special Issue: *New Work about the Journey and Its Portrayals*. Ed. I-Chun Wang 14.5 (2013). *Purdue University CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2135>>.

had a profound impact on the formative years of Islamic philosophy and science.²¹

It should also be remembered that:

[...] Muslims did not only introduce a civilization or a culture; they also were the means by which a Europe living in the darkness of ignorance experienced a renewal of intellectual activity, based on knowledge brought by the Muslims. [...] Scholars and scientists explained the Orient to the Occident, in this way sowing those seeds which later gave rise to the Renaissance. [...] Education was available to almost everyone. A great majority of Muslims living in [the Iberian Peninsula] knew how to read and write. Teachers were highly respected within the society. All the principal cities had universities [...]; the areas studied included theology, philosophy, grammar, Arabic, poetry, and lexicography, history, geography, law, astronomy, mathematics, botany, and medicine.²²

As shown in the chart above, besides *al-Andalus*, also Muslim Sicily had a considerable Islamic presence, one that lasted for more than two hundred and sixty years (827-1091). It is within this heavily Islamized context that courtly poetry—with an emphasis on idealized and (almost always) impossible love—was born at the court of the Norman kings of Sicily (1091-1194), a place where Islamic traditions mingled with local mores:

[...] elements of Islamic culture remained after the Muslims were expelled. Clothing, music, poetry, and harems were all appropriated by the Normans and incorporated into the new, hybridized Sicilian court culture. Sicily provided another conduit for transmission of texts to mainland Italy that was much closer than Islamic [Iberia] [...].²³

In fact, it was from Sicily that European poetry flourished at the end of the 11th century. From Sicily, the trend moved to Provence and from there to Portugal at the court of the newly formed second County of Portugal (*Condado Portucalense*), established in 1095 by Count Henry of Burgundy (ca. 1066-1112; r. 1096-1112). As the late Maria Rosa Menocal (1953-2012) keenly pointed out: “Arabic poems of courtly love would influence the Provençal courtly traditions that would later have a significant impact on the styles of Dante (especially *Vita Nuova*) and Petrarch (*Canzoniere*)”²⁴ as well as on the troubadour tradition in Portugal.

²¹ Joseph Abraham Levi 雷祖善博士. "Muslim Science as the Source of the Portuguese Age of Discoveries." *Comparative Literature and Culture*. Special Issue: *New Work about the Journey and Its Portrayals*. Ed. I-Chun Wang 14.5 (2013). *Purdue University CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2135>>.

²² Sheikh David Minr. "The Presence of Arabs and Jews on the Peninsula," in Jorge Casimiro, ed. *Judeus e árabes da Península Ibérica. Encontro de Religiões, Dialogo de Culturas*. Lisbon: Centro Nacional de Cultura, 1994. 134-142. 140.

²³ Jeffrey B. McCambridge. "Dante and Islam: A Study of the Eastern Influences in the Divine Comedy." M.A. Dissertation. Indiana University, 2016. 19.

²⁴ Maria Rosa Menocal. *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010. 118. Also cited in: Jeffrey B. McCambridge. "Dante and Islam: A Study of the Eastern Influences in the Divine Comedy." M.A. Dissertation. Indiana University, 2016. 20.

**Origins of
Italian, Provençal, and Portuguese Poetry**

Arabic/Islamic

[Arab-Islamic Poetry from
Sicily سفليّ (827-1091) and
Andalusia الأندلس (9th century)]



Origins of Italian, Provençal, and Portuguese Poetry

Hence, the Renaissance of 12th Century Europe, with its scientific, socioeconomic, and political renovations/revolutions that paved the way for the intellectual fervor known as the Italian Renaissance (14th-16th centuries), saw the gradual, yet still very slow, understanding of Islam and the Muslims as not being renegade Christians that had nothing to contribute to Humanity, but rather, as being simply the “other” who—even though they were different and not-to-be trusted because of the religious beliefs—had much to offer when it came to scientific knowledge. Indeed, as “a whole, the millennium that goes from the fall of the Western Roman Empire (476) to the Renaissance (beginning of the 14th century–end of the 17th century) was a revival of classical art, architecture, literature, science, and learning which eventually marked the transition from medieval to modern times.”²⁶

IV. DANTE AND THE ISLAMIC WORLD

“In medieval Europe the Orient was chiefly represented by the Muslim world.”²⁷

²⁵ Text written by Joseph Abraham Levi 雷祖善博士. Images: “The Rise and Fall of Islamic Spain.” November 11, 2013. <<https://pt.slideshare.net/fridaycircle7/the-rise-and-fall-of-islamic-spain>>; “Mapa de la llengua occitana a finals del segle XII.” <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ancien_occitan.png>; “Gli arabi in Sicilia 827-1091.”

²⁶ Joseph Abraham Levi 雷祖善博士. “Muslim Science as the Source of the Portuguese Age of Discoveries.” *Comparative Literature and Culture*. Special Issue: *New Work about the Journey and Its Portrayals*. Ed. I-Chun Wang 14.5 (2013). *Purdue University CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2135>>.

²⁷ Paul A. Cantor. “The Unconventional Dante : the Divine Comedy and Islamic Philosophy.” *Philosophy and*

The eminent, late scholar Paul A. Cantor (1945-2022) stated, and rightly so, that “the portrait of Mohammad [and of his cousin, son-in-law **علي بن أبي طالب** ‘Alī ibn ‘Abī Ṭālib] in the *Divine Comedy* is an isolated moment” since, always according to Cantor, a “wider reading in Dante reveals a surprisingly positive treatment of figures from the Islamic world.”²⁸

Most of Paul Cantor’s research concentrated on “Dante’s debt to Islamic thought in general and to one Islamic philosopher in particular,”²⁹ namely: **أبو الوليد مُحَمَّدُ ابْنُ أَحْمَدَ ابْنُ رُشْدٍ** Abū al-Walīd Muḥammad ibn ‘Aḥmad ibn Rušd, also known as **ابن رُشْدٍ** ibn Rušd or Averroes (1126-1198). Averroes is in good company, since **ابن سِينَا** ibn Sina (Avicenna, 980-1037) and **النَّاصِرُ صَلَاحُ الدِّينِ يُونُسُ بْنُ أَيُّوبَ** al-Nāṣir Ṣalāh al-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Ayyūb, also known as Saladin (1137-1193), are also included in Dante’s *Inferno*, Canto IV:129; 143-144:

Earlier in the *Inferno*, a small group of Muslims turns up. Avicenna, Averroes, and Saladin are among those virtuous heathens who, along with Hector, Aeneas, Abraham, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, are confined to the first circle of the *Inferno*, there to suffer a minimal (and even honorable) punishment for not having had the benefit of Christian revelation. Dante, of course, admires their great virtues and accomplishments, but because they were not Christians he must condemn them, however lightly, to Hell.³⁰

Indeed, Avicenna, Saladin, and Averroes, despite their non-Christian status, are placed by Dante in the first circle of the *Inferno*, Limbo, (Canto IV), because of their virtuous character:

129: e solo, in parte, vidi 'l Saladino	and, all alone, I saw Saladin
143: Ippocrate, Avicenna e Galieno	Hippocrates, Avicenna, Galen,
144: Averrois, che 'l gran comento feo. ³¹	Averrhoès, who made the famous comment. ³²

Dante’s Limbo is reserved for virtuous men and women who were born before Christ; hence, they did not have the opportunity to convert to Christianity by their own volition. Additionally, Dante’s Limbo is for those who, even though they were born after Christ, thus they had a chance to convert to Christianity, nevertheless when they were alive they led an honorable life. Finally, Dante’s Limbo is also reserved for the unbaptized souls, or rather, those who were not given the choice to freely accept Christ in their lives.

Literature. 20.1 (April 1996): 138-153. 139.

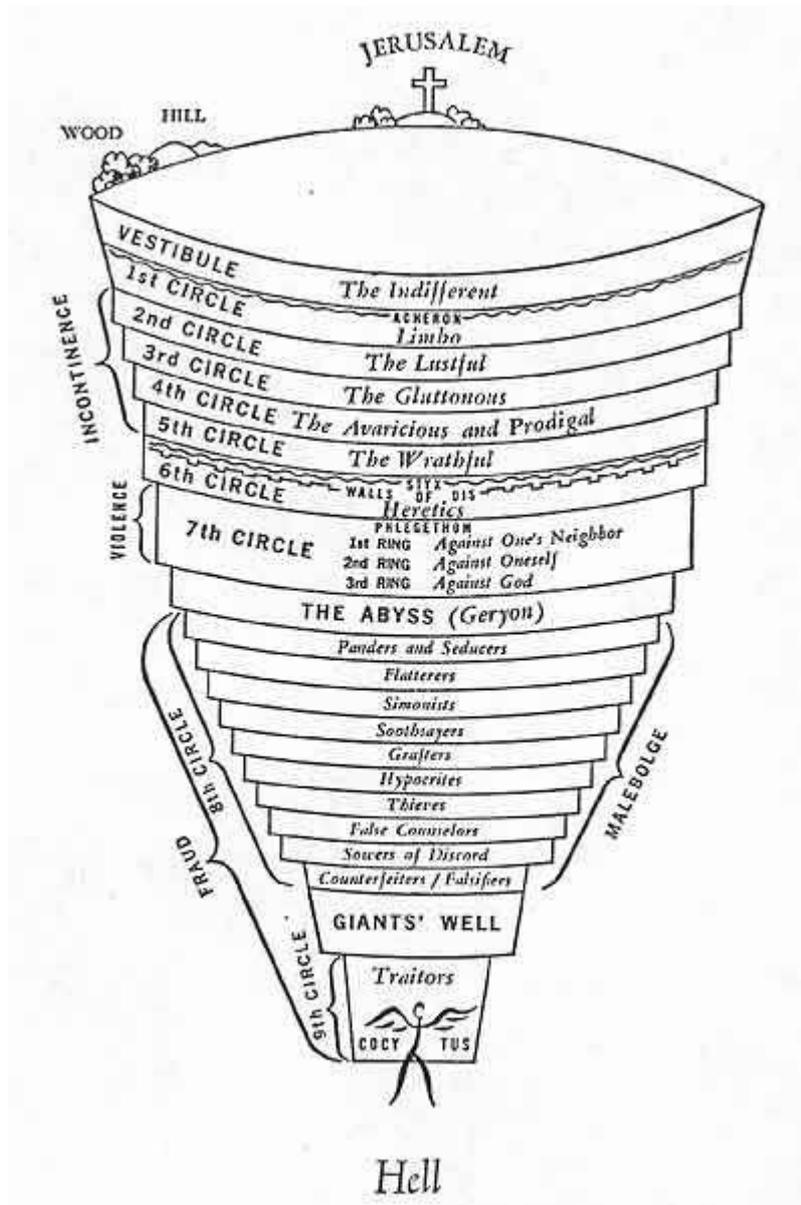
²⁸ Paul A. Cantor. “The Uncanonical Dante : the *Divine Comedy* and Islamic Philosophy.” *Philosophy and Literature*. 20.1 (April 1996): 138-153. 140.

²⁹ Paul A. Cantor. “The Uncanonical Dante : the *Divine Comedy* and Islamic Philosophy.” *Philosophy and Literature*. 20.1 (April 1996): 138-153. 140.

³⁰ Edward Said. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979. 69.

³¹ Natalino Sapegno. *La Divina Commedia. Inferno*. Milan: La Nuova Italia, 2004. 47-48.

³² “The *Divine Comedy*. Vol. 1 (*Inferno*). (English trans.)” *The Divine Comedy, in 3 vols.* (Langdon trans.). Liberty Fund. Online Library of Liberty. <<https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/langdon-the-divine-comedy-vol-1-inferno-english-trans>>.



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Indeed, Saladin was admired by Dante and other Europeans that preceded and followed him, because of his leadership and warfare tactics. In fact, even though he fought against the Crusaders, Saladin shined as an excellent and impeccable leader always guided by mercy, loyalty, and munificence. In Canto IV: 129 of the *Inferno* Saladin is referred to as “solo” (all alone) because, he was the only Muslim among the other non-Christians mentioned in verses 121-129, namely: Electra (mother of Dardanus, the founder of Troy), Hector, Aeneas, Caesar, Camilla, Penthesilea (Queen of the Amazons), King Latinus, Lavinia, Junius Brutus, Tarquin, Lucretia, Julia, Marcia, and Cornelia Africana. Additionally, Saladin is “solo” (all alone) because, it appears that, according to Dante, inner soul and virtue (where politics and power are inseparable) are qualities that transcend time, places, and religions. Elsewhere in his works, as in the *Convivio* (the Banquet, composed between 1304 and 1307), Dante praised Saladin for being a generous man and kind sovereign:

³³ “Hell.” *Traviztt*. Wordpress. <<https://traviztt.wordpress.com/2010/02/14/a-video-game-rant-dantes-inferno/>>.

E cui non è ancora nel cuore Alessandro per li suoi reali benefici? Cui non è ancora lo buono re di Castella, o il Saladino, o il buono Marchese di Monferrato, o il buono Conte di Tolosa, o Beltramo dal Bornio, o Galasso di Montefeltro? Quando de le loro messioni si fa menzione, certo non solamente quelli che ciò farebbero volentieri, ma quelli prima morire vorrebbero che ciò fare, amore hanno a la memoria di costoro.³⁴

Aelius or Claudius Galen of Pergamon (129-ca. 216) was a famous Greek philosopher and physician whose legacy in logic, philosophy, anatomy, pathology, pharmacology, and physiology was felt in Late Antiquity (284-700) and Medieval Islam (900-1300). Indeed, it was through the latter that Galen was rediscovered during the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance.³⁵ Averroes, on the other hand, was admired by Dante because of his Long, Middle, and Short commentaries on Aristotle's peripatetic texts.³⁶

Hence, the presence of three Muslims in Limbo—Averroes, Avicenna, and Saladin—is a sign that, as Paul Cantor also suggested, Dante admired and respected Islamic contributions to human knowledge. In other words, the “presence of these monumental figures makes sense for the reader: while not Christians, they were foundational to Western (Christian) civilization.”³⁷

The influence of Islam on Dante's *Divine Comedy* is undeniable. Indeed, many scholars have contributed with groundbreaking research underscoring the ties with Islamic cosmology, cosmogony, eschatology, and philosophy (understandably all influenced by centuries-old Indo-Iranian and Greek/Hellenic sources, yet ameliorated to accommodate to the Islamic tenets as well as to adjust to the latest scientific discoveries of the time). Needless to say, numerous controversies surrounded and still surround today these scholarly publications.³⁸

³⁴ *Convivio* (Italian). IV, XI: 14. *Digital Dante Columbia*. <<https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/text/library/convivio-italian/#anchor61>>; “Who does not still keep a place in his heart for Alexander because of his royal acts of benevolence? Who does not keep a place for the good King of Castile, or Saladin, or the good Marquis of Monferrato, or the good Count of Toulouse, or Bertran de Born, or Galeazzo of Montefeltro? When mention is made of their gifts, certainly not only those who would willingly do the same, but those as well who would sooner die than do the same, retain in their memory a love for these men.” “The Convivio, Book 4.” *Digital Dante Columbia*. <<https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/text/library/the-convivio/book-04/#11>>.

³⁵ Raymond F. Jones. *Stories of Great Physicians*. Florence, AL: Whitman, 1963. 46-47.

³⁶ Nuri Adigüzel. “The Concept of ‘Nature’ in Peripatetic Islamic Philosophers.” *Dini Tetkikler Dergisi Journal of Religious Inquiries ULUM* 1.1 (July 2018): 5-21. <<https://philarchive.org/archive/ADGTCO>>; “Ibn Rushd's Natural Philosophy.” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* August 17 2018. <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ibn-rushd-natural/>>; Traci Ann Phillipson. “Aquinas, Averroes, and the Human Will.” PhD. Diss. Marquette University, 2009.

³⁷ Jeffrey B. McCambridge. “Dante and Islam: A Study of the Eastern Influences in the Divine Comedy.” M.A. Dissertation. Indiana University, 2016. 29.

³⁸ Paul A. Cantor. “The Uncanonical Dante: the Divine Comedy and Islamic Philosophy.” *Philosophy and Literature*. 20 (1996): 130-137; Pierluigi Casolino. “Persian Ascension Miniatures of the Fourteenth Century and Dante and Islam.” *Futuro e Geopolitica Future-Geopolitics*. 20/04/2012. <<http://pierluigicasolino.altervista.org/persian-ascension-miniatures-of-the-fourteenth-century-and-dante-and-islam/>>; Enrico Cerulli. *Il libro della scala e la questione delle fonti arabo-spagnole della «Dinia Commedia»*. 1949. Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Romana, 1970; Enrico Cerulli. *Nuove ricerche sul «Liro della scala» e la conoscenza dell'Islam in Occidente*. 1949. Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Romana, 1972; Alberto Coffey. “Encountering the Body of Muhammad: Intersections between *Mir'aj* Narratives, the *Shaaq al-Sadr*, and the *Divina Commedia* in the Age before Print,” in *Constructing the Image of Muhammad in Europe*. Ed. Avinoam Shalem. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013. 33-86; Paolo De Ventura. “Dante and Islam,” in Thomas, David, Alexander Mallett et Sala J. P. Monferrer. *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*. Leiden: Brill, 2012. 779-87; Gregory B. Stone. *Dante's Pluralism and the Islamic Philosophy of Religion*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006; Miguel Asín Palacios. 1926. *Islam and the Divine Comedy*. Oxfordshire, UK:

Yet, the night journey (*al-Isrā'* الإسراء) and the subsequent ascension (*al-Mi'rāj* المعراج) of Prophet Muhammad to Heaven and Hell, as well as the idea of Purgatory being a mountain, are undeniable examples of being, if not Islamic, at least of Eastern influence since they precede Dante's *Divine Comedy* by many centuries. For instance, in Islamic eschatology, Hell is composed of Seven Hells, it can only be reached through Paradise, and it is located within the confines of the Third Heaven, before the gates to the Fourth Heaven.

Indeed, Qur'an 17, *al-Isrā'* (Night Journey), or *Banī Isrā'īl* (Sons of Israel), starts with a mystic vision of Prophet Muhammad's Ascension to the Celestial Spheres and Hell being transported by the winged *al-Burāq* (the bright one) from Mecca's Sacred Mosque (*al-Masjid al-Harām*) to the Farthest Mosque (*al-Masjid al-Aqṣā*) in Jerusalem.



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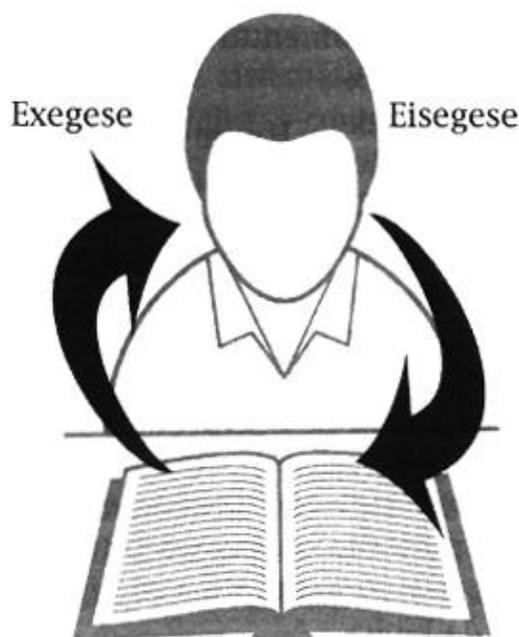
Routledge, 1926; Jeffrey B. McCambridge. "Dante and Islam: A Study of the Eastern Influences in the Divine Comedy." M.A. Dissertation, Indiana University, 2016.

³⁹ "Muhammad's Paradise." <<http://sandakanmagic.blogspot.dk/2011/03/islamic-depictions-of-mohammed-with.htm>>.

V. EXEGESIS VS. EISEGESIS

Exegesis ≠ Eisegesis of Religious and Juridical Texts

- **Exegesis:** ἐξήγησις; critical and impartial interpretation of a religious or juridical text performed by an exegete (he/she who interprets the text); the exegete extracts from the text the truth as it was written by the original author(s) of the text.
- **Eisegesis:** interpretation of a text, usually a religious or juridical text, whereby the points of view of the person who is interpreting the text (the exegete) are weaved into the interpretation of the text; the exegete applies his/her own religious/political view(s). It is a deductive method/dogmatic approach.



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Exegesis vs. Eisegesis

As the text of the chart above postulates, the heuristic approach to performing exegesis can be contaminated by one's biased interpretations, views, and agenda(s). When this happens, exegesis turns into eisegesis, or rather, it becomes a subjective exegesis. Alas, this occurs when the exegete interprets a sacred text by deliberately extrapolating facts and placing them into a narrative that fits the needs of the exegete and his or her community. Now, when it comes to Islam and the Prophet Muhammad, the West has a history of performing eisegesis; hence, the heuristic approach is froth with misunderstandings and misinterpretations due to prejudice, biases, and, most of the times, sheer ignorance, i.e., unfamiliarity with the topic(s).

As stated above, Dante was exposed to, was aware of, and borrowed from Islamic cosmology, cosmogony, eschatology, and philosophy, even though he keenly adjusted them to the needs of his Christian message for Humanity. Most likely, Dante was also familiar with some Islamic mores and lore. This would justify the many similarities, either overt or covert, between the *Divine Comedy* and Islamic cosmology, cosmogony, eschatology, and philosophy when it comes to the Afterlife.

Also as mentioned earlier in my research, Dante—along with most Europeans to him contemporary as well as those who preceded and followed him—considered Islam a heterodox, Christian sect and thought of Muhammad as a renegade Christian heresiarch. Hence, as *bona-fide* Christians (sic!), Muhammad and his cousin, son-in-law, and fourth Caliph 'Alī could be, or better yet, had to be punished. Nevertheless, since Muslims were the heterodox Christian “other” living outside Europe, constantly threatening to take over, dominate, and eventually convert the Europeans, they were also seen as an external threat and, as such, they had to be annihilated:

⁴⁰ Text: Joseph Abraham Levi 雷祖善博士 © 2022. Image: “Exegese X Eisegese”. *Expositivo.com. Estudos Teológicos*. <<https://sites.google.com/site/teologiatextos/exegese-x-eisegese>>.

In Inferno Canto XXVIII the Islamic Prophet Muhammad is punished as a representative of Christian schism. Because he was not a Christian but treated as one, his punishment represents unique problem for Dante scholars because it means that Islam is a threat from outside as well as within Christianity.⁴¹

Following Dante's logic then, it comes to no surprise then that Muhammad and his cousin, son-in-law, and fourth Caliph 'Alī were placed at the bottom of the Eighth Circle, the *Malebolge*, the Circle of Fraud, with the Sowers of Scandal and Schism. Below them, the very bottom of the Eighth Circle, lie the Falsifiers. The Eighth Circle is home to "panders and seducers, flatterers, sorcerers and false prophets, liars,"⁴² and thieves. Ulysses and Diomedes are also in this circle.

Circles of Hell in Dante's Inferno

1 st Circle: Limbo	The unbaptized and virtuous pagans including Virgil, Homer, Horace, Ovid, Socrates, Plato, and Saladin
2 nd Circle: Lust	Souls are blown about in a violent storm, without hope of rest. Francesca da Rimini and her lover Paolo are here.
3 rd Circle: Gluttony	The gluttons are forced to lie in vile, freezing slush, guarded by Cerberus. Ciaccio of Florence is here.
4 th Circle: Avarice & Prodigality	The Miserly and spendthrift push great heavy weights together, crashing them time and time again. Plutus guards them.
5 th Circle: Wrath & Sullenness	The wrathful fight each other on the surface of the Styx while the sullen gurgle beneath it. Filippo Argenti is here.
6 th Circle: Heresy	Heretics are trapped in flaming tombs. Florentines Farinata degli Uberti and Cavalcante de' Cavalcanti are here.
7 th Circle: Violence	The violent against people and property, the suicides, the blasphemers, the sodomites and the usurers.
8 th Circle: Fraud	Panders and seducers, flatterers, sorcerers and false prophets, liars, thieves, and Ulysses and Diomedes.
9 th Circle: Treachery	Betrayers of special relationships are frozen in a lake of ice. Satan, Judas, Brutus, and Cassius are here.

VI. INFERNO, CANTO XXVIII: 30-31: IMAGES OF MUHAMMAD AND 'ALĪ

"Maometto"-Mohammed-turns up in canto 28 of the Inferno, He is located in the eighth of the nine circles of Hell, in the ninth of the ten *Bolgias* of *Malebolge*, a circle of gloomy ditches surrounding Satan's stronghold in Hell. Thus before Dante reaches Mohammed, he passes through circles

⁴¹ Jeffrey B. McCambridge. "Dante and Islam: A Study of the Eastern Influences in the Divine Comedy." M.A. Dissertation. Indiana University, 2016. 3.

⁴² "Dante_Inferno_Levels.png" (550 x 546 pixels, file size: 155KB, MIME type: image/png). <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Dante_Inferno_Levels.png>.

⁴³ "Dante_Inferno_Levels.png" (550 x 546 pixels, file size: 155KB, MIME type: image/png). <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Dante_Inferno_Levels.png>.

containing people whose sins are of a lesser order: the lustful, the avaricious, the gluttonous, the heretics, the wrathful, the suicidal, the blasphemous. After Mohammed there are only the falsifiers and the treacherous (who include Judas, Brutus, and Cassius) before one arrives at the very bottom of Hell, which is where Satan himself is to be found. Mohammed thus belongs to a rigid hierarchy of evils, in the category of what Dante calls *seminator di scandalo e di scisma*. Mohammed's punishment, which is also his eternal fate, is a peculiarly disgusting one: he is endlessly being cleft in two from his chin to his anus like, Dante says, a cask whose staves are ripped apart. Dante's verse at this point spares the reader none of the eschatological detail that so vivid a punishment entails: Mohammed's entrails and his excrement are described with unflinching accuracy. Mohammed explains his punishment to Dante, pointing as well to Ali, who precedes him in the line of sinners whom the attendant devil is splitting in two; he also asks Dante to warn one Fra Dolcino, a renegade priest whose sect advocated community of women and goods and who was accused of having a mistress, of what will be in store for him. It will not have been lost on the reader that Dante saw a parallel between Dolcino's and Mohammed's revolting sensuality, and also between their pretensions to theological eminence.⁴⁴

As the late, distinguished Arabist Francesco Gabrieli (1904-1996) keenly observed, Dante placed Muhammad among the sowers of scandals and schisms, not among heresiarchs⁴⁵ because he really wanted to convey the idea that Muhammad belonged in Hell.

According to early (476-1000) and late (11th-15th centuries) Medieval lore, the Prophet Muhammad was an ambitious Christian bishop who, because he was not chosen to be pope, or because of mundane reasons, decided to create a schism within the Church. This would explain why Dante chose to place the Prophet Muhammad with the sowers of scandals and schisms.

An Early Renaissance (1400-1495) fresco illustration of Dante's *Inferno* portrays Muhammad as he is being hauled away to Hell.

⁴⁴ Edward W. Said. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979. 68-69.

⁴⁵ Francesco Gabrieli. "Maometto," in *Enciclopedia Dantesca*. Treccani, 1970. <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/maometto_%28Enciclopedia-Dantesca%29/>.



“Fresco from Bologna. The Devil and Mahomet.”⁴⁶

Indeed, the “punishment visited upon Muhammad and Ali by the sword-wielding demon fits their crimes; as they proceed in a single-file line, their bodies are sliced open.”⁴⁷

Interestingly, upon considering the five Muslims represented in the *Divine Comedy*—namely, Averroes, Avicenna, Saladin, Muhammad, and ‘Alī—only Muhammad is given the opportunity to put into words his predicament. Forty-one verses are dedicated to the Prophet Muhammad and his cousin, son-in-law, and Fourth Caliph ‘Alī (28:22-63), of which twenty-two are direct speech from the Prophet Muhammad (28:33-45; 55-60):

Mentre che tutto in lui veder m’attacco,
guardommi, e con le mani s’aperse il petto,
dicendo: «Or vedi com’io mi dilaccio!
Vedi come storpiato è Maometto!
Dinanzi a me sen va piangendo Ali,m
Fesso nel volto dal mento al ciuffetto.
E tutti li altri che tu vedi qui,
seminator di scandalo e di scisma
fuor vivi, e però son fessi cosí.
Un diavolo è qua dietro che n’accisma
sí crudelmente, al taglio de la spada
rimettendo ciascun di questa risma,
quand’avem votla la dolente strada;
però che le ferite son richiuse
prima ch’altri dinanzi li rivada.
Ma tu chi se’ che ’n su lo scoglio muse,
forse per indugiar in su le tue accuse?»
«Né morte ’l giunse ancora, né colpa ’l mena»

⁴⁶ “Mohamet and Devil Bologna.jpg.” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Mohamet_and_Devil_Bologna.jpg>.

⁴⁷ John Woods, and Alexander Barna. “William Blake’s Watercolor of Canto XXVIII (Lines 30 and 31 of *Inferno*, the First Part of Dante Alighieri’s Epic Poem the *Divine Comedy*.” *Teaching the Middle East. A Resource for Educators*. <<http://teachmiddleeast.lib.uchicago.edu/historical-perspectives/middle-east-seen-through-foreign-eyes/islamic-period/image-resource-bank/image-03.html>>.

rispuose 'l mio maestro «a tormentarlo;
ma per dar lui esperienza piena,
a me, che morto son, convien menarlo
per lo 'nferno qua giù di giro in giro:
e quest'è ver così com'io ti parlo».
Più fuor di centro che, quando l'udiro,
s'arrestaron nel fosso a riguardarmi
per meraviglia, obliando il martirio.
«Or di' a fra Dolcin dunque che s'armi,
tu che forse vedra' il sole in breve,
s'ello non vuol qui tosto seguirarmi,
sí di vivanda, che stretta di neve
non rechi la vittoria al Noarese,
ch'altrimenti acquistar non sarà leve».
Poi che l'un piè per girsene sospese,
Maometto mi disse esta parola;
indi a partirsi in terra lo distese.⁴⁸

No cask, indeed, by loss of middle-board
or stave, is opened as was one I saw,
split from the chin to where one breaketh wind;
while down between his legs his entrails hung,
his pluck appeared, and that disgusting sack,
which maketh excrement of what is swallowed.
While I on seeing him was all intent,
he looked at me, and opening with his hands
his breast, he said: "See now how I am cloven!
Behold how torn apart Mahomet is!
Ali in tears moves on ahead of me,
cloven in his face from forelock down to chin;
and all the others whom thou seest here
disseminators were, when still alive,
of strife and schism, and hence are cloven thus.
There is a devil here behind, who thus
fiercely adorns, and to the sword's edge puts
each member of this company anew,
when we have gone around the woeful road;
because, ere one return in front of him,
the wounds thus made have all been closed again.
But who art thou, that musest on the crag,
perhaps to put off going to the torture
adjudged thine accusation of thyself?"
"Death hath not reached him yet," replied my Teacher,
"nor to a torment is he led by guilt,
but that complete experience may be giv'n him,
I, who am dead, must needs conduct him here
from circle unto circle down through Hell;

⁴⁸ Natalino Sapegno. *La Divina Commedia. Inferno*. Milan: La Nuova Italia, 2004. 300-302.

and this is true, as that I speak to thee.”
On hearing him, more were there than a hundred
who stopped there in the ditch to look at me,
and who through their surprise forgot their pain.
“To Fra Dolcino do thou therefore say,
thou that, perhaps, wilt shortly see the sun,
if soon he would not hither follow me,
to arm him so with food, lest stress of snow
should give the Novarese a victory,
which else would not be easily obtained.”
When one foot he had raised to go away,
Mahomet said these words to me; which done,
upon the ground he stretched it to depart.⁴⁹

These forty-one verses offer a very sad image of the Prophet Muhammad and his cousin, son-in-law, and Fourth Caliph ‘Alī. The images that they convey are very graphic. Indeed, they function as a warning against disseminating scandals and schisms. The punishment for doing so is being bodily mutilated. Prophet Muhammad has his upper body dilacerated from his chest down to his womb. ‘Alī, on the other hand, has his face open from his forehead down to his chin:

Muhammad and Ali are nearly cut in half, only to be restored and forced to endure this bodily torment over and over again. By portraying two of Islam’s most important figures as schismatics, Dante demotes Islam to the status of a particularly virulent brand of Christian heresy. In terms of negatively stereotyping Islam and Muslims, Dante Alighieri’s description of Muhammad’s torments in the Eighth Circle of Hell is one of the most noteworthy passages found in medieval Western European poetry, not only because of its graphic imagery, but also because of the impression it has left on the imagination of later European scholars and authors.⁵⁰

Prophet Muhammad talks to Dante, the only living soul in Hell, and tells him: “See how my body parts are opening up! Can you see the state Muhammad is in? In front of me there is ‘Alī, walking and crying, all opened up from his forehead to his chin. All the other condemned souls that you can see were, during their lifetime, disseminators of religious scandals e schisms; hence, they are lacerated here in Hell.”⁵¹

The Law of Retaliation (*La Pena del Contrappasso*) is Dante’s way of seeing how human beings should compensate, in the Afterlife, for the sins committed during their lifetime. In this case, if the disseminators spent their lives dividing people with their lies and heterodox, Christian ideas, then in the Afterlife their punishment should be to be eternally dilacerated, every day, continuously, *ad infinitum*:

⁴⁹ “The Divine Comedy. Vol. 1 (Inferno). (English trans.)” *The Divine Comedy, in 3 vols.* (Langdon trans.). Liberty Fund. Online Library of Liberty. <<https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/langdon-the-divine-comedy-vol-1-inferno-english-trans>>.

⁵⁰ John Woods, and Alexander Barna. “William Blake’s Watercolor of Canto XXVIII (Lines 30 and 31 of Inferno, the First Part of Dante Alighieri’s Epic Poem the Divine Comedy.” *Teaching the Middle East. A Resource for Educators*. <<http://teachmiddleeast.lib.uchicago.edu/historical-perspectives/middle-east-seen-through-foreign-eyes/islamic-period/image-resource-bank/image-03.html>>.

⁵¹ This paraphrase of Prophet Muhammad’s speech is mine.

Mohammed explains how punishment works around here. He and his fellow mangled sinners eventually find that their injuries have healed—but once they're all closed up, they're mangled yet again by a demon. The punishment is not simply about pain and suffering, to say nothing of the inconvenience of having to carry your colon in your hands; the indignity of being mangled is equally important.⁵²

Additionally, 'Alī's wound complements Prophet Muhammad's wound since, "as it moves from the chin it precedes in the opposite direction."⁵³ The reason for including 'Alī in this Circle lies in the fact that, always according to Dante, he was the founder of yet another faction within Sunni Islam, namely: Shiism. Hence, for Dante, both Muslims are to be condemned: Muhammad for having caused a religious rift within Christianity and 'Alī for having created yet another denomination (Shiism) within this heterodox, Christian sect (Sunni Islam). Again, Dante, as most of Westerners of the time, considered Muhammad a renegade Christian bishop who caused a very deep divide within the Church, one from which there was no return. Hence, according to Dante, the physical dilacerations of Muhammad and 'Alī in the Afterlife are justifiable.

According to Dante, Prophet Muhammad and 'Alī's sins were having caused unnatural division within Christianity, particularly in the field of religious ideology. This, always according to Dante, led to unnecessary physical and spiritual death of many people who were deceived by these two heterodox, Christian heresiarchs:

Una la colpa di questi sciagurati, come una la pena; e la colpa è, per Maometto [...] l'aver comunque cagionato scissure innaturali tra coscienza e coscienza, disordine insomma, che portaron con sé dannazione di anime e spargimento di sangue.⁵⁴

The devil is the one who, with his sword, dilacerates the Prophet Muhammad and 'Alī every time they complete a round of the *bolgia* (circle). Hence, their wounds have time to heal only to be reopened by the devil's new dilacerating blow to their bodies. As everywhere in the Divine Comedy, torture is repeated *ad infinitum*.

During his speech, the Prophet Muhammad mentions a heterodox, Christian heretic, Gherardo Segarelli (ca. 1240-1300)—from Alzano, in the Italian province of Parma—who was burned at the stake along with his partner, Margherita di Trento, and other followers. Segarelli was the founder of the Order of the Apostles of Social Change (also known as the Apostolic Brethren) whose ideologies were continued by the Dulcinians (Dolciniani),⁵⁵ a contemporary religious movement loosely based on Franciscan principles and Joachimite ideology.⁵⁶

⁵² Alexander Aciman. "Recapping Dante: Canto 28, or *Unseamly Punishments*." *The Paris Review* May 5 (2014). <<https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2014/05/05/recapping-dante-canto-28-or-unseamly-punishments/>>.

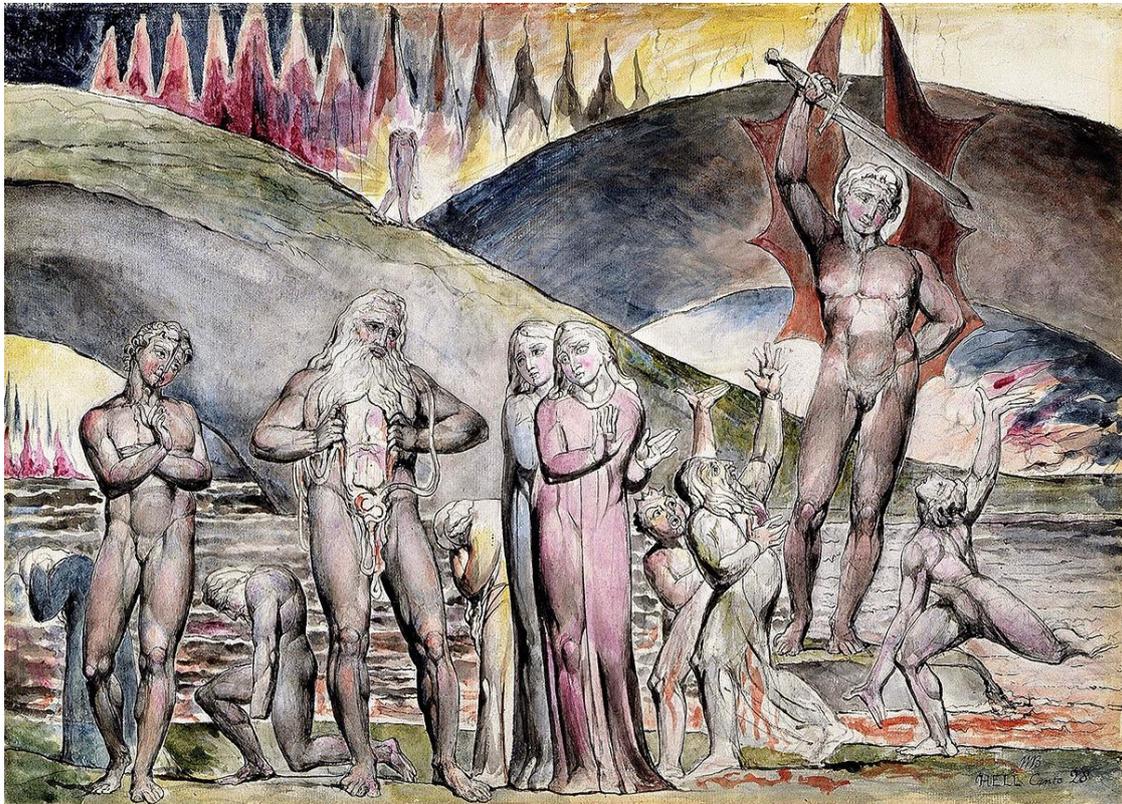
⁵³ Natalino Sapegno. *La Divina Commedia. Inferno*. Milan: La Nuova Italia, 2004. 300.

⁵⁴ Lodovico Ferretti, in Natalino Sapegno. *La Divina Commedia. Inferno*. Milan: La Nuova Italia, 2004. 301. [One was the sin of these unfortunate souls, one was the punishment; and the sin is, for Muhammad [...] having triggered unnatural schisms between consciousness and consciousness, in other words, disorder, that led to the perdition of souls and bloodshed.]. [translated by the author].

⁵⁵ Founded by Fra Dolcino di Novara (c. 1250-1307) who was burnt on the stake by order of Pope Clement V (r. 1305-1314).

⁵⁶ Based on the religious ideology of Gioacchino da Fiore (ca. 1135-1202), the Joachimetes were excommunicated by Pope Innocent III (r. 1198-1216) for criticizing the Church as well as for their eschatological interpretations.

Indeed, placing Fra Dolcino in the same *bolgia* (circle) of the Prophet Muhammad and the fourth Caliph 'Alī was Dante's way of saying that these two Arabs, as their fellow renegade Christian heresiarch Fra Dolcino, sowed ideological and religious discord with the Church, thus leading those who followed them to eternal condemnation; hence, the just and perpetual punishment imposed by Dante in the Inferno. The Prophet Muhammad and the fourth Caliph 'Alī are forever dilacerated as they dilacerated, forever, the unity of the Church.



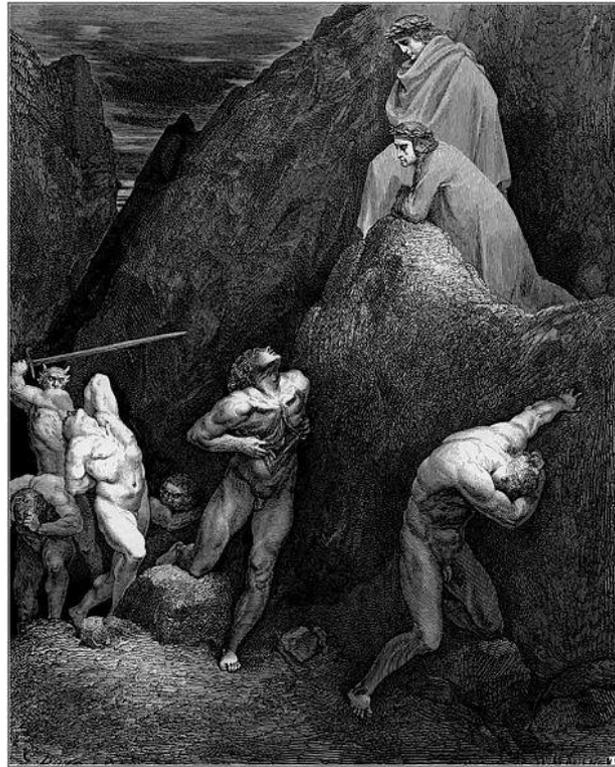
William Blake. "Dante and Virgil Meet Muhammad and His Son-in-Law, Ali, in Hell."
1824-1827. Watercolor. 14.6 in x 20.7 in.⁵⁷

In William Blake's watercolor herewith reproduced, the Prophet Muhammad is pulling his chest open while 'Alī is behind him sad and pensive, with his left knee on the ground. The Prophet Muhammad had, yet again, his chest rent asunder by a demon that is portrayed by Blake as being double the size of all the dead souls and Dante, the only living soul in the Afterlife.

William Blake (1757-1827) the engraver, painter, poet, and visionary was fascinated by John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667); indeed, Blake is reputed as being the artist who has illustrated this masterpiece more than any other writer. In fact, his infatuation with the message contained in Milton's epic poem (the fall of humankind) led Blake to turn his attention to Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

⁵⁷ John Woods, and Alexander Barna. "William Blake's Watercolor of Canto XXVIII (Lines 30 and 31 of Inferno, the First Part of Dante Alighieri's Epic Poem the Divine Comedy)." *Teaching the Middle East. A Resource for Educators*. <<http://teachmiddleeast.lib.uchicago.edu/historical-perspectives/middle-east-seen-through-foreign-eyes/islamic-period/image-resource-bank/image-03.html>>.

Even though Blake did not complete “the full set of engravings commissioned [...] only because death itself cut the project short [...] he managed to complete several watercolors and a handful of engraving proofs [...]” that “cast a sometimes critical eye on the theological and moral sensibilities of Dante’s original work.”⁵⁸



Gustave Doré. “Mohammed”. *La Divina Commedia*. 1861.⁵⁹

French artist Gustave Doré (1832-1883), best known for his wood-engravings used to illustrate classic books, produced the engraving “Mohammed” which was included in the 1861 edition of the *Divine Comedy*. In this engraving, the Prophet Muhammad is seen talking to Dante above him while tearing apart his chest in pain. ‘Alī is behind the Prophet Muhammad with his body slightly reclining so that a demon behind him can dilacerate, yet again, parts of his face (as stated above, from his forehead to his chin):

The majority of Doré’s paintings of the Canto remain true to Dante’s written description; however, Doré’s style and goal is to make hell ‘look’ like hell. Meaning, all his paintings are dark and gloomy regardless of the setting that is actually present in *Inferno*. [...] Doré ignores the flickering lights because it would not cohere with the ‘darker’ feeling of hell he generally portrays, his goal is to create a representational image. [...] Doré’s interpretations of hell are more hallow and solely superficial. [...] Doré’s goal [...] was simply to craft a representational image of the Canto. [...] Doré’s strictly romanticized and gloomy depictions. [...] Doré does stick

⁵⁸ Colin Marshall. “William Blake Illustrates Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (1827).” *Art, Literature*. January 19, 2015. <<https://www.openculture.com/2015/01/william-blakes-last-work-illustrations-for-dantes-divine-comedy-1827.html>>.

⁵⁹ “Mohammed by gustave dore.jpg.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Mohammed_by_gustave_dore.jpg.

with the more traditional look of Hell [...] Doré's painting may have much more substance than I give credit to it [...].⁶⁰



Lucas van Leyden. "Muhammad and the Monk Sergius (Bahira)." 1508. Engraving⁶¹

A 1508 engraving by Dutch painter and printmaker Lucan van Leyden, also known as Lucas Hugensz or Jacobsz (1494-1533), perhaps best captures the negative stereotypes that were circulating in Medieval, Early Renaissance, and Renaissance Europe on Islam, Muslims, Muhammad, and the fourth caliph 'Alī. In this case, it was the hypothetical encounter of Bahīra بحيرى, known in the West as Monk Sergius, and his friend, the Prophet Muhammad.

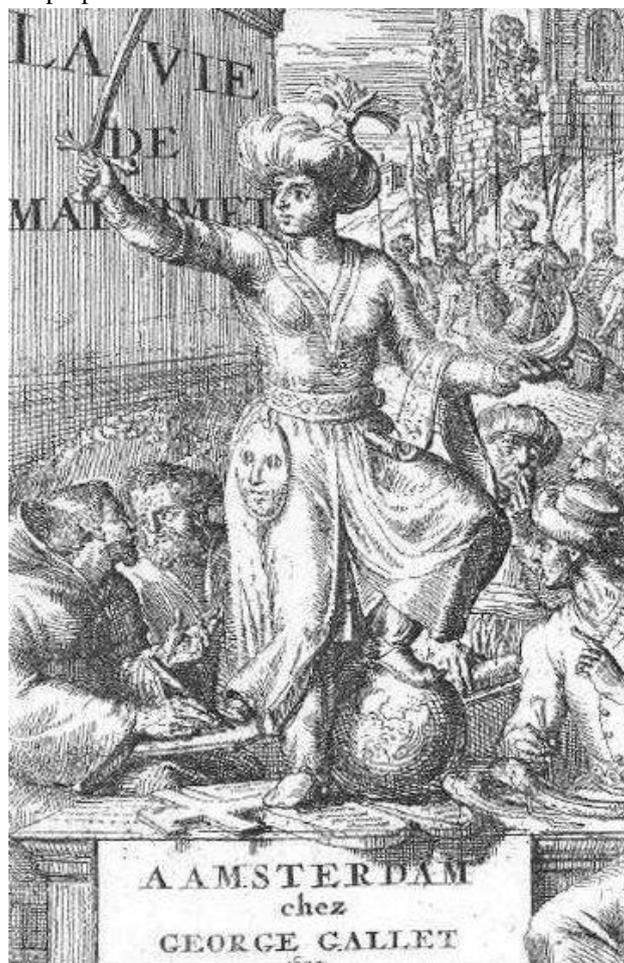
Allegedly, the Prophet Muhammad had been drinking (sic!) and fell asleep drunk (sic!). Upon waking up the Prophet Muhammad found his friend, the Monk Sergius, slain to death. Unbeknownst to the Prophet Muhammad, a soldier had killed the Monk and put the sword that he used to slay the monk in Prophet Muhammad's hands. According to this made-up legend, the Prophet Muhammad then forbade the use of alcohol beverages.

Bahīra was a Nestorian or Gnostic Nasorean monk who lived in the Arabian Peninsula when Prophet Muhammad was a young lad. According to early Islamic traditions, during one of his many business excursions with his uncle Abū Tālib ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭālib to other parts of the Arabian Peninsula, this time in present-day

⁶⁰ Melissa Yee. "Dante and Virgil Contemplate the Inferno.' The Flaming Spirits of Ulysses and Diomedes. Sandow Birk. Gustave Doré" *Mel Dante*. Boston University." <https://bu.digication.com/meldante/Paper_3>.

⁶¹ "Mohammed2.jpg." <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Mohammed2.jpg>>.

Bahrain, the nine- or twelve-year-old Muhammad met Bahīra who, based on the New Testament, saw in the young boy the signs of a great prophet.⁶²



*La vie de Mahomet*⁶³

In 1697, renowned Cornish Orientalist Humphrey Prideaux (1648-1724), Dean of Norwich (1702-1724), authored the *Life of Mahomet* which a year later was published in Amsterdam, yet translated in French, as *La vie de l'Imposteur Mahomet; Recueillie des Auteurs Arabes, Persans, Hebreux, Caldaiques, Grecs & Latins: avec un Abregé Chronologique qui marque le tems où ils out vécu, l'origine & le caractere de leurs Ecrits* (The Life of the Impostor Muhammad; a Collection from Arab, Persian, Jewish, Chaldean, Greek & Latin Authors: with a Chronological Compendium that Marks the time in which They Lived, the Origin & Character of their Writings). The French edition of Prideaux's work contains an illustration of Prophet Muhammad brandishing a sword and a crescent while his feet are stepping on a cross, the globe, and the Ten Commandments. Aside from having a disdain for Islam, Prideaux rejected all forms of Deism, or rather, he was skeptical of divine revelation to human beings (in this case, prophets) and proposed, in its stead, empirical reasoning and the simple observation of Nature since, always according to Prideaux, both will give human

⁶² Abjar Bahkou. *The Story of the Encounter between Monk Bahira and Muhammad as it is Recorded in the Syriac Manuscript of Mardin 259/2: The Monk Encounters the Prophet*. Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 2016; Barbara Rogemma. *Legend of Sergius Bahira: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*. Boston: Brill, 2008.

⁶³ "La.Vie.de.Mahomet.jpg (362 x 559 pixels, file size: 99 KB, MIME type: image/jpeg). <<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:La.Vie.de.Mahomet.jpg>>.

beings reasons to believe in a Supreme Being, the only One who could have created the Universe.⁶⁴ Hence, Prideaux's disregard for the Prophet Muhammad came from his disdain for all prophets rather than pure hatred for all-that-is-Islamic. Nevertheless, the *Life of Mahomet* is froth with misconceptions, misunderstandings, and stereotypes of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad.



Observing from right to left, the North Wall Frieze of the Supreme Court of the United States in Washington, DC, portrays the images of Justinian (ca. 483-565), Muhammad (ca. 570-632), Charlemagne (ca. 742-814), King John of England (1166-1216), Louis IX (ca. 1214-1270), Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), Sir William Blackstone (1723-1780), John Marshall (1755-1835), and Napoleon (1769-1821). The sculpture of Muhammad is the second one from the right, holding a sword in his right hand and a copy of the Qur'an in his left hand:

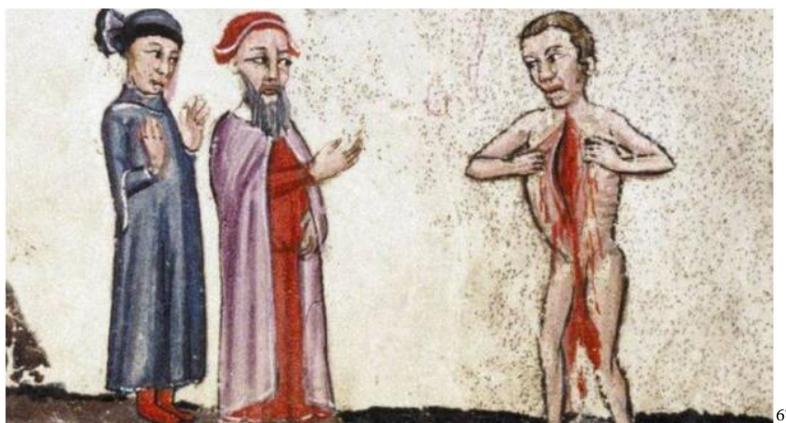
Muhammad (c. 570 - 632) The Prophet of Islam. He is depicted holding the Qur'an. The Qur'an provides the primary source of Islamic Law. Prophet Muhammad's teachings explain and implement Qur'anic principles. The figure above is a well intentioned attempt by the sculptor, Adolph Weinman, to honor Muhammad and it bears no resemblance to Muhammad. Muslims generally have a strong aversion to sculptured or pictured representations of their Prophet.⁶⁶

VII. CONCLUSIONS

⁶⁴ Leland Royce Harper. *Multiverse Deism*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020. 47-68.

⁶⁵ "Courtroom Friezes: South and North Walls." *Supreme Court*. <<https://www.supremecourt.gov/about/northandsouthwalls.pdf>>.

⁶⁶ "Courtroom Friezes: South and North Walls." *Supreme Court*. <<https://www.supremecourt.gov/about/northandsouthwalls.pdf>>.



The Prophet Muhammad, “seminator di scandalo e di scisma” (sower of scandal and schism), and ‘Alī, are both condemned by Dante: the former, for supposedly having started discord within (sic!) the Church, thus creating an irreparable religious division (Sunni Islam) within Christianity, the latter for having created, within Islam (seen as a heterodox, Christian heresy) a division (Shiism). This is the reason why ‘Alī’s punishment in hell is “lighter” because the alleged schism was within Islam and not within the Christian dogma per se, as in the case of the Prophet Muhammad.

As stated earlier in this work, Dante was not the only European who thought of Islam as being a heterodox sect of Christianity; hence, the Prophet Muhammad, according to this view, was a heterodox, Christian heresiarch.

The Dominican friar Jacobus de Voragine (ca. 1230-1298), in his *The Golden Legend* (1260), describes how the Prophet Muhammad (Magumeth, sic!) rose to power. Indeed, he is depicted, in detail, as being a false prophet, a sorcerer, and an epileptic who had been influenced by Sergius, a Nestorian heterodox.⁶⁷ Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), instead, mentions the Prophet Muhammad in his theological treatises, as in the case of the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (1260-126):

Aquinas addresses aspects of Islam that make the faith irreconcilable with Christianity, making Muslims especially difficult to convert, and also draws his own characterization of the Prophet Muhammad. The Muslims, Aquinas claims, are difficult to relate to and debate in matters of faith because they do not hold Christian scriptures to be divine truths that can then be used to convince them of their religious errors.⁶⁹

Indeed, according to Islam, the أهل الكتاب *Ahl al-Kitābi* are those who belong to the "family of the book," i.e., Jews (الهُود *al-Hūd*), Christians (أهل الإنجيل *ahl al-Injīl*), Sabians (الصَّابِئَة *al-Ṣābi'ah*), Zoroastrians (الزُّرَادَشْتِيُون *al-Zurādštiūna*), Hindus (الهِندُوسِيُون *al-Hindūsīūna*), Sikhs (السِّيخ *al-Sīkh*), Samaritans (السَّامِرِيُّون *al-Sāmīriyyūna*), and

⁶⁷ Image source: “Ravennanotizie per il Settimo Centenario di Dante Alighieri: La Divina Commedia. Inferno, Canto XXVIII”. *Ravennanotizie*. October 2, 2020. <<https://www.ravennanotizie.it/cultura-spettacolo/2020/10/02/ravennanotizie-per-il-settimo-centenario-di-dante-alighieri-la-divina-commedia-inferno-canto-xxviii/>>.

⁶⁸ Carl Ernst. *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World*. Chappell Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004; William Granger Ryan. *The Golden Legend*. Trans. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.

⁶⁹ Jeffrey B. McCambridge. “Dante and Islam: A Study of the Eastern Influences in the Divine Comedy.” M.A. Dissertation. Indiana University, 2016. 47.

Mandeans (الصَّابِئَةُ المَندَانِيُونَ *al-Ṣābi'ah al'Mandā'iyūna*). Due to their monotheistic faith and, moreover, given that their religions are based upon a book, they are to be considered, while living in دار الحرب *dār al-ḥarb* (non-Muslim soil) as ذِمِّي *dhimmi*, i.e., protected.⁷⁰ Here is what Aquinas says about Muslims when comparing Muslims to Jews:

Thus, against the Jews we are able to argue by means of the Old Testament, while against heretics we are able to argue by means of the New Testament. But the Mohammedans and the pagans accept neither the one nor the other.⁷¹

In order to understand Thomas Aquinas's thought herewith reproduced, we must take into consideration the concept of abrogation and "perfected message" at it applies to the sacred books that came before the Qur'ān. The Torah (تَوْرَة *Tawrah*), the Psalms (زُبُور *Zabūr*), the New Testament (اِنْجِيل *Injīl*), the גִּינְזָא רַבָּא *Ginzā Rbā*, and the Zend-Avesta,⁷² are all examples of Allāh's revelation to Humankind. Originally, these sacred books contained the divine truth; yet, as time went by, due to the corruption and greed of Humankind, they no longer contained the original, divine message. Indeed, they still contain some divine truth because they were sent to Humankind by Allāh; however, much of what it is contained in each revealed book is interwoven with human and not divine ordinances. Hence, there was the need for a last, divine revelation. The Qur'ān is therefore the "perfected" version, the uncorrupted word of Allāh. Indeed, the Qur'ān abrogates the other sacred books because it was not forged by humans. According to Islamic theology and jurisprudence then, the Qur'ān came from Heaven and it was revealed piecemeal to the Prophet Muhammad, either directly or semi-directly through the intermediary presence of the Archangel Gabriel. The Qur'ān is Humanity's last chance. After the Qur'ān, Allāh did not send and will not send any other sacred book.⁷³ Yet, Aquinas, either willingly or unwillingly, is oblivious to Islamic theology and says:

[...] Mohammed. He seduced the people by promises of carnal pleasure to which the concupiscence of the flesh goads us. His teaching also contained precepts that were in conformity with his promises, and he gave free rein to carnal pleasure. In all this, as is not unexpected, he was obeyed by carnal men. As for proofs of the truth of his doctrine, he brought forward only such as could be grasped by the natural ability of anyone with a very modest wisdom. Indeed, the truths that he taught he mingled with many fables and with doctrines of the greatest falsity. He did not bring forth any signs produced in a supernatural way, which alone fittingly gives witness to

⁷⁰ Joseph Abraham Levi 雷祖善博士. Reconstructing the Abrogated. Exegesis of Qur'ān 53: 21-22." *International Journal of Arts and Social Science* 4 2 (March-April 2021): 6-23. 13.

⁷¹ Anton C. Pegis, F.R.S.C. *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Trans. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991. 1, 2, 3; and quoted in: Jeffrey B. McCambridge. "Dante and Islam: A Study of the Eastern Influences in the Divine Comedy." M.A. Dissertation. Indiana University, 2016. 47.

⁷² The *Ginzā Rbā* (Great Treasury, ca. 1st-3rd century of the Common Era) is by far the most famous and the longest (21 books) of many sacred texts of the Sabians, also known as Nasoraeans, Mandaean, or Christians of Saint John. Yet, they are not to be confused with the Sabeans of Southern Arabia. The Zend-Avesta is the book of the sacred writings of the مَجُوس *Majūs*, i.e., the Zoroastrians who practice المَجُوسِي *al-Majūsiyya* (دِينِ زَرْدُشْت *Dīn Zardusht*, Zoroastrianism). The sacred texts of Zoroastrianism are: *Yasna Haptanghaiti* (Worship, 7 Chapters), namely: a set of 7 hymns within the *Yasna*; the *Yasna*: liturgical collection of the *Avesta* texts; the *Avesta*: a collection of 72 sacred texts; and the *Gathas*: 17 hymns in verse (religious poetry).

⁷³ Joseph Abraham Levi 雷祖善博士. Reconstructing the Abrogated. Exegesis of Qur'ān 53: 21-22." *International Journal of Arts and Social Science* 4 2 (March-April 2021): 6-23. 20.

divine inspiration; for a visible action that can be only divine reveals an invisibly inspired teacher of truth. On the contrary, Mohammed said that he was sent in the power of his arms—which are signs not lacking even to robbers and tyrants. What is more, no wise men, men trained in things divine and human, believed in him from the beginning. Those who believed in him were brutal men and desert wanderers, utterly ignorant of all divine teaching, through whose numbers Mohammed forced others to become his followers by the violence of his arms. Nor do divine pronouncements on the part of preceding prophets offer him any witnesses. On the contrary, he perverts almost all the testimonies of the Old and New Testaments by making them into fabrications of his own, as can be seen by anyone who examines his law. It was, therefore, a shrewd decision on his part to forbid his followers to read the Old and New Testaments, lest these books convict him of falsity. It is thus clear that those who place any faith in his words believe foolishly.⁷⁴

Paradise X: 136-138 is an interesting window to Dante's appreciation for Averroism. As mentioned earlier in this essay, Dante respected and valued the contribution of the Andalusian philosopher Averroes to European (i.e., Christian) philosophy and theology. In these three verses of Paradise X, Dante introduces Sigieri of Brabant (1226-1284), professor of philosophy at the University of Paris, known for being a staunch supporter of Averroism.⁷⁵



⁷⁴ Anton C. Pegis, F.R.S.C. *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Trans. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991. 1, 6, 4; and quoted in: Jeffrey B. McCambridge. "Dante and Islam: A Study of the Eastern Influences in the Divine Comedy." M.A. Dissertation. Indiana University, 2016. 48.

⁷⁵ Tony Dodd. *The Life and Thought of Siger of Brabant, Thirteenth-Century Parisian Philosopher: An Examination of His Views on the Relationship of Philosophy and Theology*. Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1998.

⁷⁶ William R. Cook. "Dante's Paradise: The Sphere of Wisdom." *Ancient Literature, Literature, World Literature Wondrium Daily* December 14, 2016. <<https://www.wondriumdaily.com/dantes-paradise-sphere-wisdom/>>.

“Dante and Beatrice speak to the teachers of wisdom Thomas Aquinas, Albertus Magnus, Peter Lombard, and Sigier of Brabant in the Sphere of the Sun.”

Indeed, because of his enthusiasm for Averroism, Brabant was often at odds with the Church, local as well as Rome (including being investigated by the Inquisition). For example, in 1270, the Bishop of Paris, Étienne Tempier (d. 1279), condemned most of Brabant’s philosophical views since they were heavily inspired by Averroism. Tempier’s 219 *Condemnations* (1270-1279) censured Aristotelianism as well as certain Christian doctrines and all philosophical approaches to religion (e.g., syllogism) that could cast a shadow on God’s omnipotence.⁷⁷ This included the approaches of Thomas Aquinas⁷⁸ and Averroes to philosophy, theology, and religion/religious reasoning. Eventually, Brabant was slain in Orvieto by an enraged cleric, though most likely his murder was part of a larger conspiracy to silence his “heretical” views. Yet, this did not stop Dante to place Brabant in Paradise and place him side by side with Saint Thomas of Aquinas (verses 82-148): the *IV Cielo del Sole, Spiriti Sapienti* (Fourth Sphere, The Sun: The Wise Souls). The fact that Brabant (a “moderate” Averroist) and Saint Thomas of Aquinas (a staunch, anti all-that-is-Islam) were on the opposite side when it came to Averroes and his philosophy does not preclude the fact, in Heaven, they are friends thanks to the divine light that, in a sense, highlights their intellectual lights (alliteration intended). For this reason, Brabant was not a heretic; hence, he could be placed in Heaven: “By saving and celebrating Sigier of Brabant, an ardent follower of the Muslim philosopher Averroes, Dante also reminds us that he does not deem Averroes a heretic.”⁷⁹



“The 12 wise souls that Dante and Beatrice encounter in the fourth sphere are Thomas Aquinas, Albertus Magnus, Gratian, Peter Lombard, King Solomon, Dionysius the Areopagite, Orosius, Boethius, Isidore of Seville, Bede, Richard of Saint Victor, and Sigier of Brabant.”

It is no surprise, then, that in Paradise X, Fourth Sphere (The Sun: The Wise Souls), Saint Thomas of Aquinas, and Sigier of Brabant are among the twelve souls who, during their lifetime, showed to possess

⁷⁷ Richard E. Rubenstein. *Aristotle’s Children: How Christians, Muslims, and Jews Rediscovered Ancient Wisdom and Illuminated the Middle Ages*. Orlando: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004.

⁷⁸ John Marenbon. *Medieval Philosophy*. London: Routledge, 1998.

⁷⁹ “Paradise 10.” *Digital Dante*. <<https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/paradiso/paradiso-10/>>.

⁸⁰ William R. Cook. “Dante’s Paradise: The Sphere of Wisdom.” *Ancient Literature, Literature, World Literature Wondrium Daily* December 14, 2016. <<https://www.wondriumdaily.com/dantes-paradise-sphere-wisdom/>>.

Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude. With their works, these twelve individuals—Thomas Aquinas, Albertus Magnus, Gratian, Peter Lombard, King Solomon, Dionysius the Areopagite, Orosius, Boethius, Isidore of Seville, Bede, Richard of Saint Victor, and Siger of Brabant—brought light to humanity:

- | | | |
|------|--|---|
| 136. | essa è luce eterna di Sigieri, | it is the everlasting light of Siger, |
| 137. | che, leggendo nel vico di li strami, | who when he lectured in the Street of Straw |
| 138. | sillogizzò invidiosi very. ⁸¹ | Demonstrated truths that earned him envy. ⁸² |

Siger is introduced to Dante by Saint Thomas of Aquinas. By doing so, Dante is proving that, despite their differences in approach, Siger and Aquinas had much in common, especially their thirst for truth and wisdom:

The most interesting character that Thomas Aquinas introduces us to is a fellow named Siger of Brabant, who turns out in the circle to be right next to Thomas, and Siger is a contemporary of Thomas, and Siger was also in Paris with Thomas Aquinas, and they were, if you will, theologically at odds. Siger not only was condemned as a heretic, but he and Thomas Aquinas disagreed fundamentally on certain issues. We might expect not to find them next to each other in this circle. But, in fact, of course, Dante's making a very important claim here about the value of scholarship and also the limits of the kind of theological haggling that take place back on Earth, that many of these disagreements are not between bad guys and good guys, but rather people who sometimes erroneously are nevertheless true seekers of wisdom.⁸³

A fake and superficial positive attitude towards Islam and the Prophet Muhammad can be found in *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, a travel memoir most likely composed before 1357 and very popular in Europe. Indeed, also in this work there are many inaccuracies about Islam and Muhammad. Muhammad is still seen as an epileptic, an impostor, and a criminal.

On the other hand, this work does not condemn Islam and Muhammad (called Machomet); however, it also states that Christianity is the true religion and that Muslims (called Saracens) one day will accept Christianity since Christianity is the only religion that is set to endure through the end of time. Conversely, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* emphasizes the moral superiority of Muslims versus, much to the chagrin of the West, the debauchery of some Christians.⁸⁴

In conclusion, for those who came before Dante, his contemporaries, and those who came after him, the images of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad, and of the fourth Rightly-Guided Caliph 'Alī represented a fabricated, yet very convenient, tool to portray and explain the "other."

In other words, Islam and Muslims were Orientalized, or rather, there was the need to deconstruct the very nature of a religion and its people through a distorted lens, one that refused to consider what the "other" had to offer in terms of contributions to world religions and Humanity.

⁸¹ Aldo Vallone, and Luigi Scoranno, eds. *La Divina Commedia*. Naples: Editrice Ferraro, 1993. 186.

⁸² "Paradise 10." *Digital Dante*. <<https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/paradiso/paradiso-10/>>.

⁸³ William R. Cook. "Dante's Paradise: The Sphere of Wisdom." *Ancient Literature, Literature, World Literature Wondrium Daily* December 14, 2016. <<https://www.wondriumdaily.com/dantes-paradise-sphere-wisdom/>>.

⁸⁴ C.W.R.D. Moseley. *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*. Trans. Westminster, UK: Penguin, 2005.

Undoubtedly, Dante had knowledge of and drew upon Islamic science, technology, philosophy, and eschatology. His respect for Muslim/Islamic scholars and thinkers was based on what they offered to Humanity. Interestingly enough, it is not a coincidence that Avicenna, Averroes, and Saladin hailed from areas with a strong tradition of intellectual research and investigation (Central Asia of Indo-Iranian tradition, al-Andalus, and Hellenic Egypt, respectively).

The Prophet Muhammad and the fourth Rightly-Guided “Alī, on the other hand, were heirs to Bedouin tribes that inhabited the Arabian Peninsula. As most pre-Islamic societies of the Arabian Peninsula and the Maghreb, sedentary and nomadic Bedouins tribes and clans had a rich oral history; yet, it was unknown to most, if all, Europeans.

Furthermore, even though there were societies that possessed a writing system, there were no corpora of studies that explored and discussed works of science, technology, philosophy, and religion. Hence, the image of the “ignorant” (sic!) Arab/Bedouin Muslims (Saracens) vs. the Andalusian, Egyptian, and Iranian/Central Asian Muslims who have centuries-old traditions of research and investigation in the sciences as well as the humanities predominated in Europe before, during, and after Dante’s time.⁸⁵ Alas, barring the undeniable contributions to astronomy, philosophy, and science, Islam and Muslims are believed to have nothing to offer to the West; hence, the need to atone for their sins in Hell:

The Orient and Islam have a kind of extrareal, phenomenologically reduced status that puts them out of reach of everyone except the Western expert. From the beginning of Western speculation about the Orient, the one thing the Orient could not do was to represent itself. Evidence of the Orient was credible only after it had passed through and been made firm by the refining fire of the Orientalist’s work.⁸⁶

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