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# Death and Eschatological Beliefs in the Lives of the Prophets according to Islam

*Islamic stories of the prophets include themes and motifs of eschatology and death. The genre dedicated to the stories of the prophets includes many accounts of prophets meeting the Angel of Death. Most of these concern attempts by the prophets to delay their death, or even report that the prophets feared death. Others, however, reflect a different religious attitude, seeking to inspire trust in the fate of good believers by showing that the prophets were not afraid of death and were confident in God's Final Judgment. In ḥadīth literature, prophets are also mentioned in reports dealing with the Day of Judgment, such as in traditions about the prophets being asked to intercede for believers before God. Jesus is also frequently mentioned in eschatological stories, because of his return before the end of time and his killing of the Antichrist. Later literature added further narratives connecting prophets to death and the End Times. All these accounts demonstrate the widespread diffusion of an interest in the themes of death and eschatology, in particular as associated with the prophets.*

## 1 Introduction

According to the Qur'an and Islam, Muḥammad was a prophet who stood at the end of a long line of prophets who had come before him. Most of these prophets were the patriarchs and religious figures occurring in the Bible, both in the Old and in the New Testament, who are also mentioned in the Qur'an. Consequently, stories about the lives of these earlier prophets preceding Muḥammad are included in every genre of Islamic literature. Stories about the lives of the prophets also constitute a specific genre, including narratives of every kind. These narratives attribute Muslim behaviour and Islamic concepts to figures ranging from Adam to Jesus. In fact, the body of stories about the prophets both reflects what was current in Islamic religious discourse at the time and attests to the significance of these figures in Islamic beliefs and traditions. Furthermore, they demonstrate the significance of these specific issues in religious imagery, and particularly the increasing significance of eschatological themes during the Islamic Middle Ages. Their analysis provides us with the impression of an evolving religious sensibility vis-à-vis the themes of death and final destiny.

However, some preliminary considerations regarding the genre and the concerns of the stories of prophets in Islamic literature are needed. Although stories and traditions about the prophets appear in various Muslim literary genres, some

differences in the use of eschatological contents and motifs can be detected between the material used in classical collections of stories of the prophets, on the one hand, and other literature, on the other. If the early normative literature connected with these topics, such as Qur'anic exegesis, follows similar lines, later versions of individual narratives from medieval literary works on the prophets and in *hadith* literature (i.e. the literature collecting the sayings of Muḥammad) introduced a number of new elements that reflected different concerns. The difference is evident and, as we shall see, can be explained, first, by the different concerns of the literary genres, and, second, by a peculiar evolution in style and contents displayed by the traditions on the prophets.

## 2 The Stories of the Prophets and Eschatological Themes

The classical works on the lives of the prophets usually include Qur'anic verses as well as accounts adding various traditions and reports from other sources, mostly early transmitters and authors of Islamic traditions and literature. Given the role of these figures in the Qur'an, Qur'anic exegesis lies directly at the origin of this literary genre, and to a certain extent determines both the tone of the contents and the significance of these stories. In the Qur'an, the Jewish prophets and Jesus, the Christian prophet, are usually depicted as messengers in accordance with the conception of the prophecy of Muḥammad. The themes touched on are therefore strictly connected to their calling. In addition, the prophets are usually depicted as leaders of people and thus as divinely inspired guides involved in the direct administration of their communities, as Muḥammad was in Medina. It is therefore quite natural that eschatological and apocalyptic beliefs do not figure as prominent topics in these Qur'anic descriptions of the prophets' earthly lives. The Islamic literature is in some respects different. The post-Qur'anic narrative elaborations on the prophets are extensive and rich in detail, and alternative versions of many of these stories exist. As a result, numerous accounts of eschatological import can appear in a single work.

The main eschatological topic emerging in the literature on the prophets is the theme of the prophets facing death, and their fate immediately after death. In the traditional literature, this theme is dealt with, first, in the prophets' discussions with, or reactions to, the Angel of Death who catches their souls – some prophets even contest his authority, given that prophets are superior to angels – and second, in matters regarding the fate of their bodies. The Islamic traditions maintain that the bodies of the prophets are not corrupted by earth, and that they are buried where they died.<sup>1</sup>

The by far most widely attested motif relating to the prophets' deaths lies in their response to the visit of the Angel of Death, particularly either their various

stratagems to delay their fate or, by contrast, their faithful and sober acceptance of their imminent death. The stories representing these differing attitudes touch on sensitive theological points in Islamic thinking, such as the superiority of the prophets over the angels, and the tension between the confidence in God and the fear of the Final Judgment, which, given God's absolute omnipotence, every believer should feel. Although the prophets have a privileged position among human beings, the frequent occurrence of the motif of them trying to avoid or fearing death prove that these topics were of interest to ordinary Muslims. Furthermore, the way the various literary sources treat this question is a clear indication of different attitudes and concerns displayed by them.

One attitude that emerges, as mentioned above, is that some prophets, when confronted with the Angel of Death, are afraid of death and do not want to die, and even try to delay their fate.<sup>2</sup> One story contains a long passage in which God explains to Adam that he would again become mud (*ḥīn*). Adam, however, does not want to die. This account adds that only Muḥammad accepted the visit of the Angel of Death with calm and positivity.<sup>3</sup> According to another text, Adam is disturbed when God announces to him the existence of death, and asks what it is.<sup>4</sup> Yet another story includes a cruel ironic twist: when Adam asks for something from paradise, he receives the unexpected visit of the Angel of Death.<sup>5</sup> Adam's desire to go on living is such that he even wants to come back to earth after his death.<sup>6</sup> His attitude to death as described in these accounts to some extent contradicts the story of Adam giving one thousand years of his life span to David after hearing how short the latter's life would be. This story is well-attested in the literature collecting the sayings of Muḥammad, but is also cited in the literature on the prophets.<sup>7</sup>

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1 See e.g. Tha'labī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 394: earth does not consume the bodies of the prophets. On these matters see also Bayhaqī, *Ḥayāt al-anbiyā' fī qubūrihim*. The question of the tombs of the prophets is connected with popular beliefs identifying various sites, also for the same prophet. There is more literature on this, though the question is also mentioned in early and classical literature which, for instance, provides some relevant information. See e.g. Tha'labī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 66: around the Ka'ba and the spring of Zamzam there are the tombs of ninety-nine prophets; Kisā'ī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, ed. Eisenberg, 178: the tombs of Abraham, Sarah, Ishak and Jacob are close to one another; Ishāq b. Bishr, *Mubtada' al-dunyā*, fol. 136v ff.: tombs of prophets are in Hadramawt, in the sacred territory in Mecca, etc.

2 See on this Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 78–79.

3 Kisā'ī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, ed. Eisenberg, 73–74.

4 Ibn Iyās, *Qiṣaṣ*, 49.

5 Ishāq b. Bishr, *Mubtada' al-dunyā*, fol. 78v–79r.

6 Kisā'ī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, ed. Eisenberg, 42.

7 Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, 1:87–89; Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Shākir et al., 5:233, no. 3076; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 1:252, 299, 371; see also Ps.-Aṣma'ī, "Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'" (= *Tawārikh al-anbiyā'* in the *Kitāb al-Shāmil*), fol. 8r–8v. Cf. also Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, 1:98: when Adam is dying he calls his sons to him. On the death and burial of Adam see Lybarger, "The Demise of Adam in the *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*."

Other traditions concern the prophets coming after Adam. Some accounts state that Idrīs wanted to go to heaven whilst still alive in order to verify how much of his life was left. For this reason, he entered into discussion with the Angel of Death when the latter came to visit him.<sup>8</sup> The tradition describing how Jesus called one of the sons of Noah (usually identified as Shem or Ham) back to life in order to ask him to describe the Ark states that Shem/Ham rose from the grave with whitened hair, because he feared that it was the Day of Resurrection.<sup>9</sup> According to another account, Noah's hair became white and his tongue dry when the Angel of Death came to him.<sup>10</sup>

In various stories about Abraham, the latter does not welcome the Angel because he himself wants to be the one calling for it rather than face its unexpected visit.<sup>11</sup> In one account, Abraham is described as surprised and terrified when he sees the Angel's terrible features.<sup>12</sup> Others state that when the Angel of Death appears before Abraham in the shape of an old man, Abraham dies.<sup>13</sup> This tradition is once again meant to underline the superior status of a prophet over that of an angel. And it is because of this that one recurring motif concerns the devious ways the Angel has to devise in order to catch the prophets' souls. When it is time for Jacob to die, the Angel comes and talks to him, making him drink from a cup, after which Jacob dies.<sup>14</sup>

The deaths of Moses and Aaron also attracted particular interest. Moses rejects the first visit of the Angel of Death, and even strikes him and gouges out his eye. The Angel of Death complains to God; in response, God tells Moses to take a handful of hair from a bull and gives his life as many years as the number of hairs. This account is attested in *ḥadīth* literature and subsequently quoted in later narratives on the prophets.<sup>15</sup> Moses' fear of death is also mentioned in another account: when

**8** See Tha'labī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 49–50; Kisā'ī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, ed. Eisenberg, 82–85; Ishāq b. Bishr, *Mubtada' al-dunyā*, fol. 93r; Rabghūzī, *The Stories of the Prophets*, ed. Boeschoten and O'Kane, 2: 43–44.

**9** Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ al-rusul*, ed. Goeje et al., 1:187; Kisā'ī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, ed. Eisenberg, 307; Ibn Iyās, *Qiṣaṣ*, 67; Ps.-Aṣma'ī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, fol. 84r; Rabghūzī, *The Stories of the Prophets*, ed. Boeschoten and O'Kane, 2:428.

**10** Ibn Iyās, *Qiṣaṣ*, 67–68.

**11** Tha'labī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 328–329. See also the *Siyar al-anbiyā'* fol. 54r–54v; Rabghūzī, *The Stories of the Prophets*, ed. Boeschoten and O'Kane, 2:116–117.

**12** Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥabā'ik fi akhbār al-malā'ik*, ed. 'Āshūr, 38–39; on the confrontation between the Angel of Death and Abraham, see also Abū al-Shaykh, *Kitāb al-'aẓama*, 162–63.

**13** Tha'labī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 97; cf. Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ al-rusul*, ed. Goeje et al., 1:328–29; Kisā'ī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, ed. Eisenberg, 152–153; Ps.-Aṣma'ī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, fol. 26r; cf. Ishāq b. Bishr, *Mubtada' al-dunyā*, fol. 214r–215v.

**14** Kisā'ī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, ed. Eisenberg, 177.

**15** Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, 1:316. Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, nos. 1339, 3407; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, no. 2372; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 2:269, 315, 351; 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, ed. al-Raḥmān al-A'zamī, no. 20530; see in general on all these traditions Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt al-zamān fi ta'riḫ al-a'yān*, vol. 1, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās, 441–444; 'Umāra b. Wathīma, *Kitāb bad' al-*

meeting God in the burning bush, Moses states that he has no fear of God because he is only afraid of death.<sup>16</sup> Moses even hated death, leading to God giving Joshua the gift of prophecy in order to alleviate Moses' fear.<sup>17</sup> The death of Aaron is recounted in great detail and given a full narrative setting, including the description of the complex role played by Moses.<sup>18</sup>

The death of Solomon is also an object of attention in narrative accounts regarding the prophets. The Angel of Death visits Solomon and he dies, but the jinn and other creatures remain unaware of the event, at least for some time.<sup>19</sup> Stories about the meeting of Solomon with the Angel of Death describe him asking the Angel directly when the latter is going to take his soul, because, according to other sources, Solomon is a friend of the Angel of Death.<sup>20</sup> But when the Angel of Death appears before him, Solomon blanches with fear.<sup>21</sup> He trembles when he recognizes the Angel of Death.<sup>22</sup> Stories are also told of the visit of the Angel of Death to David.<sup>23</sup>

Contrasting attitudes, if not beliefs, are revealed in other accounts, which stress that the prophet, and with him the good believer, has nothing to fear from death. This attitude, as already mentioned above, reflects the view that – notwithstanding the absolute omnipotence of God, who therefore decides the destiny of all – the good believer and Muslim should have confidence in his final destiny because of his true faith and obedience to religious rules of behaviour. This is also reflected in the vicissitudes ascribed to the prophets. In al-Tha'labi's collection of stories of the prophets, Joseph talks calmly to his people just before his death, showing no fear.<sup>24</sup> In the same source, God eventually leads Moses to love death.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, when a man finds David speaking to the Angel of Death, he sees the two calmly talking with each other.<sup>26</sup> This narrative detail is reminiscent of the account in a tradition cited by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 855), which states: "David came back home to find a man there who was in fact the Angel of Death; he accepted the end of his days and

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*khalq wa-qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, ed. Khoury, 42–51. On the death of Moses and Aaron in a comparative analysis of motifs and stories, see Schwarzbaum, "Death of Moses in Jewish, Arab, Falasha and Slav Folklore;" Schwarzbaum, "Jewish, Christian, Moslem and Falasha Legends" (reprint in Schwarzbaum, *Jewish Folklore Between East and West*, 31–73); Sadan, "Le tombeau de Moïse à Jéricho et à Damas."

16 Kisā'i, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, ed. Eisenberg, 210.

17 Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ al-rusul*, ed. Goeje et al., 1:503.

18 Cf. Tha'labī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 246–247; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, 1:318; cf. Ps.-Aṣma'i, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, fol. 42v; 118v–119r; see also Kisā'i, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, ed. Eisenberg, 189.

19 *Siyar al-anbiyā'*, fol. 144v–145r; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, 2:30–31.

20 Ibn Iyās, *Qiṣaṣ*, 153; Abū al-Shaykh, *Kitāb al-'aẓama*, 164.

21 Kisā'i, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, ed. Eisenberg, 295.

22 Tha'labī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 326.

23 Kisā'i, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, ed. Eisenberg, 277. On David, see also *Siyar al-anbiyā'* fol. 131v.

24 Tha'labī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 141.

25 Tha'labī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 237.

26 Tha'labī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 292.

did not oppose God's will."<sup>27</sup> But other sources, too, mention of similar attitudes of acceptance and obedience to God's plan to have been shown by other prophetic figures: no-one wishes for death more than Joseph, but God reveals to him that he still has sixty years of life remaining.<sup>28</sup> Abraham meets the Angel of Death, but it is his wife who weeps after recognizing the Angel. Abraham then sees the form in which the Angel of Death catches the souls of the prophets and it is beautiful. In the end, the Angel, in the usual form of an old man, takes Abraham's soul. The account ends by stating that Abraham was the first one to wish for death.<sup>29</sup> Elsewhere, more neutral attitudes are attested: Noah laments his fate before his death and the Angel of Death simply offers him a cup: he drinks and dies.<sup>30</sup> Mary also accepts her fate with no complaint when she receives the visit of the Angel of Death.<sup>31</sup>

Some further points can be made about the general outlook of the works citing these traditions. The stories can reflect, and even combine, contrasting attitudes, but some authors tend to favour one motif over another. The two major works on the lives of the prophets by Tha'labī (d. 1027) and Kisā'ī (fl. twelfth century?), for instance, include contrasting traditions regarding the visits of the Angel of Death to the prophets. Whereas Kisā'ī included many accounts that show that the prophets, too, were afraid of death and tried to delay it, Tha'labī paid attention particularly to accounts that emphasised the prophets' confidence in the face of death. These differing emphases accord with the two works' characteristics more generally: Kisā'ī frequently included tales of popular origin, whereas Tha'labī derived his stories from more traditional exegetical environments, but with a special interest in mystical attitudes and behaviours.<sup>32</sup>

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27 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 2:419. On David's death, see also Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, 2:16–17.

28 Kisā'ī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, ed. Eisenberg, 178.

29 Ibn Iyās, *Qiṣaṣ*, 88.

30 Kisā'ī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, ed. Eisenberg, 100.

31 Rabghūzī, *The Stories of the Prophets*, ed. Boeschoten and O'Kane, 2:426–427.

32 The role of the Angel of Death when visiting and taking the souls of the prophets is underlined in the accounts saying that he weeps when he knows he is taking the souls of angels and the poor (Ps.-Aṣma'ī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* fol. 6r). As a matter of fact, he even wept when he first came to know of his power to take the souls of human beings (Iṣḥāq b. Bishr, *Mubtada' al-dunyā*, fol. 41r). Other stories attest that, in any case, other figures also had a kind of confidence in treating with the Angel of Death. Some kings, for instance, asked him to come later, delaying their fate, but this he would refuse (Chauvin, *Bibliographie des ouvrages arabes ou relatifs aux arabes publiés dans l'Europe Chrétienne de 1810 à 1885*, 183–185; see also Weil, *The Bible, the Koran, and the Talmud*, 98).

### 3 The End Times and *ḥadīth*

As we have seen, the question of the fear of death and the encounters of the prophets with the Angel of Death were major eschatological motifs in the stories of the prophets. But they were not the only motifs associating the prophets with the theme of death and related matters. Other significant accounts include details about the role of prophets on the day of Resurrection and in other events that will take place at the end of time. Apocalyptic beliefs with some eschatological details are also evoked by the traditions mentioning the presence of prophets in heaven in the well-known narratives on Muḥammad's ascension to heaven (*mi'rāj*) and the many accounts associating prophetic figures with the eternal abodes. The most significant of these accounts are not about the prophets whom Muḥammad met in the seven skies when he ascended to heaven, but a few mention the presence of certain figures by the throne of God. One saying also quoted in the major *ḥadīth* collections refers to Moses standing at one pillar (*qā'ima*) of the throne.<sup>33</sup> He is not the only prophet to be granted this privilege. It is, for instance, stated that David, too, is or will be in the vicinity of the throne in eschatological times.<sup>34</sup>

In addition, there are also a number of traditions that associate certain prophets with the Day of Resurrection more directly by giving them a role in the definition of beliefs and religious concepts. One significant saying ascribed to Muḥammad contains the Prophet's answer to his Companions' question as to who will help them and humankind on the Day of Resurrection. Muḥammad explains that men will go first to Adam, and then to Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus to ask for intercession. All these prophets will refuse their request or will tell them that they cannot intercede before God for men because of some faults or sins they themselves committed during their lives. Then the men will ask Muḥammad, and he will intercede for them before God. This tradition, attested in all the major *ḥadīth* collections, affirms that Muḥammad will be the sole intercessor before God and that no other figure will be able to play that role on the Day of Resurrection. It reflects a tendency in this literature that emphasises Muḥammad's superiority over all other prophets.<sup>35</sup>

However, both *ḥadīth* literature and Qur'anic exegesis also include reports and traditions regarding the End Times that link some of what will take place to Jesus,

<sup>33</sup> 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr*, 2:484: Muḥammad adds that he does not know if he will be raised before him; see also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fi tawīl āy al-Qur'an*, 20:258, 259: various versions; Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 2412; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, nos. 1843–4.

<sup>34</sup> David will be standing by the leg (*sāq*) of the throne on the Day of Resurrection: al-Wāḥidī, *al-Tafsīr al-wasīf*, 3:549; Ismā'il b. Ja'far, *Ḥadīth 'Alī b. Ḥajar al-Sa'dī*, 227, no. 134; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 13:29, no. 7586, *passim*. This tradition regarding David recalls the use of entertainments for the blessed every Friday before the throne of God and awaiting the Final Judgment; on these beliefs and in relation to the mention of David standing next to the throne, see Lange, *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions*, 152.

<sup>35</sup> Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, nos. 3361, 4712; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, nos. 194, 195; Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Shākir et al., nos. 2434, 3148; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 1:4–5, 281–282; 2:435–436.

and to some extent also to other prophets. Adam, for instance, plays a role in an account of the physical appearance of people destined to paradise: they will enter it as tall in stature as Adam, whose original height was sixty cubits when he left paradise.<sup>36</sup> The words of Muḥammad are in any case more concerned with theological matters than narrative details. When he says that God already determined the men destined to hell and paradise at the time of Adam, the issue is predestination and not the eternal abodes.<sup>37</sup> Another theme emerging in many *ḥadīth* accounts connecting the prophets with eschatology is their role and rank. Muḥammad describes what will happen to him and his Companions on the Day of Resurrection, and states that Abraham will be the first to be re-clothed on that day.<sup>38</sup> However, the contrasting approach, underlining that the prophets have no knowledge of the unseen and do not know more than Muḥammad, is also attested. During his night journey, Muḥammad asks the prophets he meets if they know the time of the Hour (that is, the Day of Resurrection), but Abraham, Moses and Jesus answer that they know nothing of it.<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, the main prophet connected with the End Times is clearly Jesus. According to Muslim Sunni traditions, Jesus is the Messiah and the redeemer who comes before the end of time – although, it must be pointed out, he is a Muslim Jesus. In fact, the traditions have it that he will come down from heaven, where he now dwells, and will burn crosses, kill swine, and be a just judge.<sup>40</sup> Other *ḥadīths* mention the ten signs which will accompany the events leading to the End Times, one of these being the Second Coming of Jesus.<sup>41</sup> But the main eschatological event involving Jesus will be his confrontation with the Deceiver, i.e. the Antichrist (the Muslim *al-Masiḥ al-Dajjāl*), who will come to earth and tempt men throughout the events that will bring the world to its end. Many (sometimes contrasting) traditions describe this Dajjāl, and consequently many others explain how Jesus came back to earth from heaven to fight against him, to redeem men and to restore the pure Islamic faith. The accounts are numerous and give a great many details regarding these occurrences, explaining where they will take place, the prodigious events accompanying and following them, and the strictly Islamic nature of this Jesus coming

<sup>36</sup> Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 2:295, 535.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 6:441.

<sup>38</sup> Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, no. 2860; Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Shākir et al., no. 3167; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 1:229, 235, 253, 398.

<sup>39</sup> Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, ed. Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, no. 4081; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 1:375.

<sup>40</sup> Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, nos. 2222, 2476, 3448; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, nos. 155–156; Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Shākir et al., no. 2234, Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 2:272, 290, 394, 411, 482, 538; 6:76.

<sup>41</sup> Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, no. 2901; Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, ed. Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, no. 4055; Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Shākir et al., no. 2183; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 4: 6–7; 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, nos. 20791–20792.

back to earth.<sup>42</sup> Islamic traditions usually interpret the short and simple phrase in the Qur'an stating literally "He will be a sign of the Hour" (Q 43:61) as referring to these events, including the major role to be played in them by Jesus, and consequently all this is mentioned and described in later reports. Jesus also features as the Messiah, or the Messiah son of Mary, in the sayings of Muḥammad. The term *al-masīḥ* appears eleven times in the Qur'an as a by-name of Jesus and is also used to refer to him in the later traditions. Some accounts give further details: the Messiah will not enter the city of Medina, just as the pestilence spreading before the End Times will not enter it, since it is the city of the prophet Muḥammad.<sup>43</sup> The relevance of the eschatological Jesus is further attested by the chapters on this theme included in the major collections of stories of the prophets.<sup>44</sup> Finally, the names of the prophets also appear in some accounts describing the *dābba*, the Beast of the End Times mentioned in the Qur'an (Q 27:82). The Beast will come bearing the seal ring of Solomon and the staff of Moses, cleansing the face of the believer with the staff and stamping the unbeliever's nose with the seal ring.<sup>45</sup>

As a matter of fact, although some collections of stories of the prophets include chapters about Jesus at the end of time, the main authoritative accounts regarding this are also included in the major collections of sayings of Muḥammad. Muslim (d. 875), the author of the collection second only to the one by Bukhārī (d. 870) in Muslim consideration, includes many accounts which became canonical with regard to Muḥammad's references to these events. This is of great significance also in relation to the major topic of the fear of death discussed above.

## 4 Later Stories of the Prophets

The central role played by these accounts and these topics is clearly shown in the later evolution of Islamic literature. A brief preamble is called for here. Islamic

<sup>42</sup> See e.g. Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 3449; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 2:166, 272, 336; 3:345, 368, 384; 4:182, 217, 429; see also Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, no. 2940; Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, ed. Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, no. 4075; Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Shākir et al., no. 2240; 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, nos. 20835–20836, 20838–20839. A *ḥadīth* explains that Muḥammad saw Jesus and the Dajjāl in a dream, cf. Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, nos. 3440–41 etc., and stating that Jesus will kill the Dajjāl, see Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Shākir et al., no. 2244; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 3:420, 4:226, 5:13, 6:10; 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al nos. 18709–18710*. On this topic see Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, index under the headword Jesus, and the literature cited there.

<sup>43</sup> Bukhari, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 5731; cf. other accounts citing the Messiah, e.g. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 5:41, 46, 47; 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, nos. 10181, 10185.

<sup>44</sup> Tha'labī, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 403–404; Kisā'ī, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, ed. Eisenberg, 307–309.

<sup>45</sup> Nu'aym b. Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-ḥitan*, 403; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī ta'wil āy al-Qur'an*, 20:15, 16; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, no. 7942; Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Shākir et al., no. 3187; Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, ed. Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, no. 4066; cf. on this Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 120–122.

literature saw internal developments after the fourth century AH (tenth century CE), the period usually considered as that of the final canonization of classical Islam's main features. As already noted by other scholars, it was in fact from then on that religious literature and traditions became more and more interested in themes regarding devotion to the Prophet Muḥammad, eschatology, the motifs of death and lament over it. Along with reworkings of earlier literature, which was extensively commented on and glossed, certain genres of Islamic literature show the evolution of a new sensibility in relation to these themes.

The major motifs associating the prophets with eschatology became the subject of literary re-workings in the context of the emergence of new topics and traditions. This appears clearly in the collections preserving manuscripts that include various short accounts, mostly in miscellaneous collections, dealing with the lives of single prophets or even with only one event in their lives. Some of these *qiṣaṣ* (tales) concern the Second Coming of Jesus before the Day of Resurrection or the deaths of Aaron and Moses, elaborating upon the old classical accounts in new, more extensive narrative settings. One of the most interesting narratives in this respect is a story in which Jesus calls a skull back to life. The man thus revived tells Jesus of his visit to hell and the punishments and torments he saw there. Because of this experience, the man decides to act properly as a believer and finally converts to Islam. This story, though not mentioned in the major collections of the stories of the prophets, is included in almost fifty manuscripts. Many of its extant versions are not textually related, attesting to its widespread circulation, and thus also to the role of Jesus in the vivid description of hell presented as a *memento mori* to believers.<sup>46</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

The prophets played various roles in the Islamic traditions. The figures from Adam to Jesus are first of all earthly figures, and their lives are described in order to explain the role of a prophet leading a community and communicating the message of belief in God. No specific or special significance is given to them in relation to death and eschatology in the stories describing their lives in historical sequence. The main eschatological topic in the stories of the prophets is their interaction with the Angel of Death, their different reactions to him reflecting contrasting attitudes toward death.

Nevertheless, other early literary genres include different traditions, describing the impossibility for the prophets to be intercessors for humankind on the Day of Resurrection and the apocalyptic role of Jesus. This narrative tradition, attested in

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<sup>46</sup> See on this Tottoli, "The Story of Jesus and the Skull in Arabic Literature."

the major *ḥadīth* collections, demonstrates the need to underline the superior status of Muḥammad and thus of Islam. It also shows the significance of eschatological and apocalyptic beliefs in early Islam, and of Jesus's role in the general Islamic scenario of those events.

These topics and narratives were further developed by later Islamic literature, mainly in adaptations to suit popular tastes, which also prove the widespread diffusion of an interest in the themes of death and eschatology, in particular as associated with the prophets. New traditions and narratives added further stories, with the prophets also playing a role in describing the eternal abodes and the events of the End Times.

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