

Images of David in Several Muslim Rewritings of the Psalms

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Introduction

Among the many extant Arabic manuscripts of “the Psalms of David” are some that start out sounding like translations of the biblical Psalms but that turn out, on further investigation, to contain fresh compositions by Muslim authors. Several different versions of these psalms have come down to us, and each presents a somewhat different image of David, depending on the outlook and objectives of its creator. This paper will explore the range of strategies employed to turn David into what each author considered an appropriately Islamic figure. In keeping with the moderately ascetic and anti-establishment tone of these rewritten psalms, most versions downplay David’s kingly function and emphasize instead his role as a prophet and, above all, as an exemplar of otherworldly piety. The biblical story of David’s sin of adultery and murder poses a special problem, which each editor handles in his¹ own way: some play it up to make him a model of repentance, while others, following mainstream Muslim scholars, ignore or mitigate his sin to make him fit their ideals of piety and prophethood. The paper concludes that the pious Muslim writers who compiled and edited the several versions of these psalms did not see themselves as engaged in an interreligious debate over the true character of David or the true text of his Psalms (the *Zabūr* mentioned in the Qurʾān), but instead used the symbols of David and his Psalms quite freely and creatively to argue against their more worldly fellow Muslims and to promote their own particular visions of Islamic piety.

The many recensions of the Islamic psalms

The principal versions of these Islamic psalms, and the relationships between them, have been presented in detail elsewhere,² so I will only summarize and update that description here. The fifty manuscripts that

¹ Since all these psalms exhibit patriarchal attitudes about women as worldly distractions just as bad as, or worse than, wealth, I think it likely that they were all written by men, and that it would misrepresent them to describe their creators in gender-neutral language.

² Vishanoff, “An Imagined Book Gets a New Text,” identifies the relationships between a number of Islamic psalm manuscripts, including those studied in the early twentieth century by Krarup, Cheikho, Zwemer, and Mukhlis

I have identified so far give evidence of at least a dozen distinct versions, stemming principally from a single collection of one hundred psalms that I call the Core text (C). This text was a compilation of proverbs, parables, and sermonic exhortations, placed in the mouth of God himself and addressed to David and, through him, to the Children of Israel – just as one would expect based on the Qurʾān’s depiction of prior Scriptures like the Torah given to Moses, the *Zabūr* given to David, and the Gospel given to Jesus. Only a fragment of this Core text has been preserved in its original form, but it was frequently edited, reordered, rewritten, expanded, or truncated to produce the many versions or recensions that are extant today. My present understanding of the relationships between those versions is diagrammed in Figure 1.

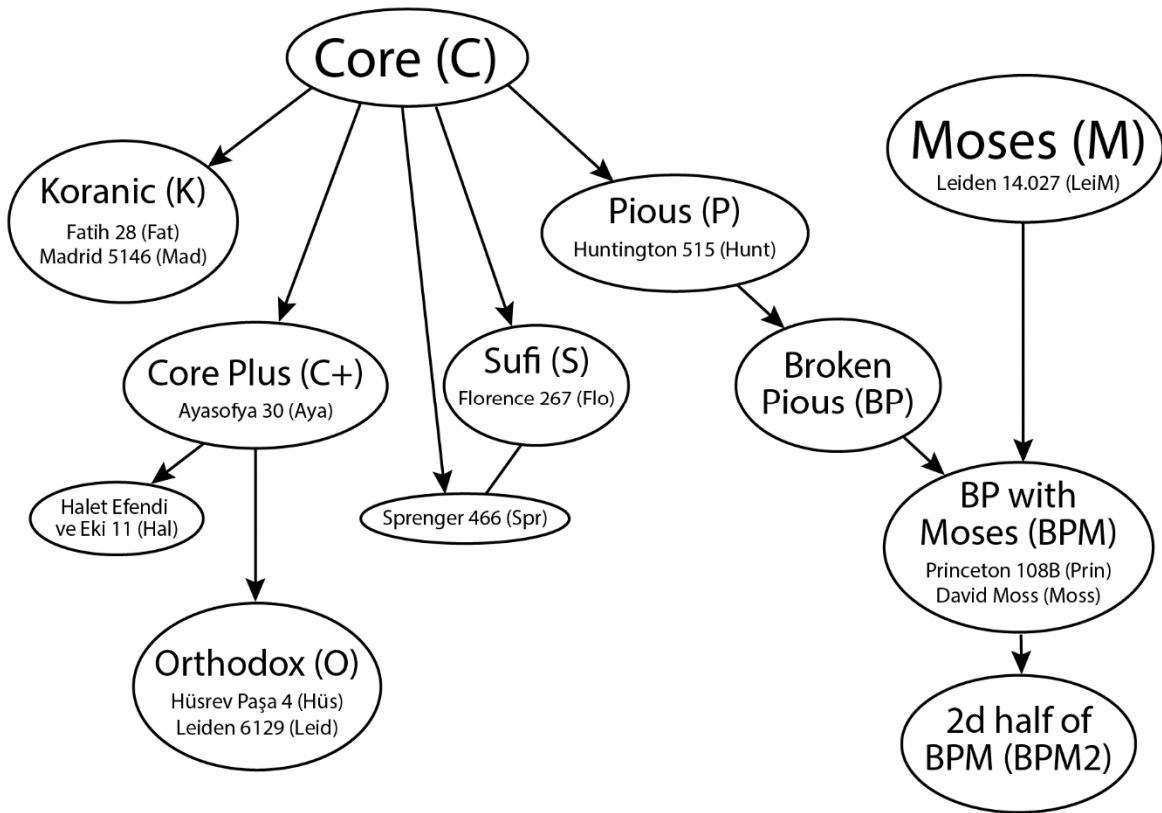


Figure 1. Source texts, recensions, and manuscripts referenced in this study.

(whose works are listed in the bibliography). I intend to give a fuller assessment of a greater number of manuscripts in a planned edition and translation of the Core text.

The known versions, with details of the manuscripts used for this study, are as follows:

- C – Core source. 100 psalms. This collection presents David as a model of repentant, otherworldly, moderately ascetic piety, and makes little mention of his public life. It alludes to standard elements of his story as told in Islamic literature, and takes for granted the biblical account of David’s sin.
 - No complete manuscript of this original compilation is known to me, but its contents can often be reconstructed by comparison of later recensions. Two damaged papyrus leaves from a very early partial copy of the Core text have been discovered by Ursula Brees in the Austrian National Library; they will be the object of a future publication.
- M – Moses source. A set of 30 or 40 psalms originally composed as a “Torah of Moses,” of which 30 were later recopied as “Psalms of David.”³ They do not refer to David; rather, God twice addresses Moses by name, even in the copies attributed to David.⁴
 - LeiM – Ms. Leiden, Leiden University, Or. 14.027, fols. 141r–148v. Dated 1293/1876.
 - Published in 1936 in Egypt by Ya‘qūb al-Muḥṭār, then corrected and reprinted in 1950 in Tunis as *Mawā‘iz baliġa min Zabūr sayyidi-nā Dāwūd*.
 - Also reproduced in BPM and BPM2 (see below).
- K – Koranic recension. Based on C, lightly edited to sound more qur’ānic, followed by 17 unique psalms. This recension presents David as a somewhat more well-rounded character, and as a more distinctly Muslim prophet, while retaining allusions to David’s grave sins.
 - Fat – Ms. Istanbul, Süleymaniye, Fatih 28 (also Arab League microfilm *al-kutub al-samāwiyya* 36). Dated 626/1229. This is the earliest complete manuscript known to me.
 - Mad – Ms. Madrid, National Library, MSS/5146, fols. 207v–237v. Ca. 899/1494.

³ See Sadan, “Some Literary Problems,” 370–398. Copies ascribed to David are mentioned on pp. 379–380 n. 76, and pp. 397–398.

⁴ In M 11 and 22 (LeiM 143r.18–19 and 145v.15), equivalent to BPM 151 and 161 (Prin 99v.5 and 106v.2).

- C+ – Core Plus recension. Based on C, followed by 50 new psalms. This recension retains C’s portrait of David while omitting the clearest references to David’s adultery.
 - Aya: Ms. Istanbul, Süleymaniye, Ayasofya 30. No date.
- Hal – Ms. Istanbul, Süleymaniye, Halet Efendi ve Eki 11. No date. This manuscript represents a distinct recension based on C+, with considerable elaboration and some reordering, omissions, and additions. Its overall portrait of David resembles that of C+.
- O – Orthodox recension. Based on C+, edited to ensure orthodoxy. This recension tempers or omits David’s sin and repentance, and describes him in distinctly Islamic terms, as a caliph and a prophet bringing a book of warnings and guidance.
 - Hüs – Ms. Istanbul, Süleymaniye, Hüsrev Paşa 4, fols. 1v–37v. No date.
 - Leid – Ms. Leiden, Leiden University, Or. 6129. Dated 1335/1917.
- S – Sufi recension. Based on C, reordered and rewritten to emphasize Sufi themes, followed by 102 new psalms. This recension highlights David’s sin, including his adultery, so that he can serve as a model of repentance and Sufi devotional piety.
 - Flo – Ms. Florence, Laurentian Library, Orient. Palat. 267 (Assem. XXVIII). Dated 660/1262.
- Spr – Ms. Berlin, State Library, Sprenger 466. Dated 1179/1766. A poor copy based on C, followed by 49 psalms that correspond roughly to S 102–154.
- P – Pious recension. Based on C, polished and edited to advocate pious obedience, followed by 65 new psalms. This recension minimizes David’s sin and sensuality, and makes him a model of scrupulous obedience to God’s law.
 - Hunt – Ms. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 515. Dated 757/1356.
- BP – Broken Pious recension, copied from P skipping over two folios near the beginning.
- BPM – BP followed by the Moses source (M).
 - Prin – Ms. Princeton, Princeton University Library, Garrett 108B. Dated 1083/1672.
 - Moss – Private collection, David Moss, Jerusalem. No date.
- BPM2 – Second half of BPM, copied separately in some Jerusalem manuscripts.

I will cite these recensions by psalm and verse number, and their representative manuscripts by folio and line number. The numbering of psalms is not consistent, and since verse numbers are not indicated in the manuscripts, I have supplied my own rather arbitrarily. Precise identification of cited passages must depend on the folio and line references.

David's political life downplayed

Like the life of Muhammad in the Qur'ān, David's biography is never narrated in detail in any version of these psalms, but there are frequent references and allusions to his actions and character. In its broad outlines, his story follows that found in the Bible and Jewish and Christian traditions, but as each editor bends the story in a particular direction it takes on a more distinctly Islamic character, downplaying certain biblical elements such as his kingship or his sin, and incorporating selected aspects of the distinctly Islamic portraits that appear in the Qur'ān and the Islamic *Tales of the Prophets* (*Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*).⁵ Psalm 14 verse 6 in the Core text (C 14:6) alludes to several elements of David's story that are shared across Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions: his singing (or recitation) of his Psalms, his wisdom, his sin, his repentance, and God's forgiveness:

O David, once you were endowed with a deeply moving voice, before you rebelled against me; but when you rebelled, I snatched the light of wisdom from your chest – though if you repent I will restore some of it to you.⁶

Wisdom, though associated primarily with Solomon,⁷ also became an important theme in Islamic portraits of David. In other Islamic wisdom literature he is the teacher of the sage Luqmān,⁸ whose proverbial advice to his own son is referenced in the Qur'ān.⁹ This theme is reflected in C 5:2: “O David, sit in the company of scholars, and so add wisdom to your own wisdom.”¹⁰ Most of the C+ tradition changes

⁵ For a comprehensive survey of Muslim traditions about David, see Déclais, *David raconté par les musulmans*.

⁶ C 14:6 reconstructed from K 15:6 (Fat 16r.8–16v.1, Mad 16:6 on 212v.8–10), Aya 13:6 (7v.17–18), Hal 14:6 (5r.13–14), P 15:6 (Hunt 17r.10–17v.1), Spr 13:6 (48r.10–48v.2). The Sufi version of this verse, characteristically, shifts the emphasis from repentance to reliance on God's mercy by changing the ending: “if I relent toward you I will restore it” (S 2:8 in Flo 3v.7–9). O 14:6 drops the closing offer of restoration altogether (Hüs 5v.6–7, which is corrupt; Leid 11v.10–11).

⁷ Indeed, in Islamic narratives David is repeatedly shown up by the superior wisdom of his son. See Déclais, *David raconté par les musulmans*, ch. 13.

⁸ See Al-Mubaššir ibn Fātik, *Muḥtār al-ḥikam*, 261–263.

⁹ Sura 31:12–19.

¹⁰ C 5:2 as reflected in K 6:2 (Fat 6v.8, Mad 209v.7–8).

“scholars” to “the wise” in this verse,¹¹ perhaps because scholars are so often depicted as hypocrites in these psalms. Following the Qurʾān,¹² the S and C+ recensions Islamicize the concept of wisdom by depicting it not just as a personal trait but as a category of revelation sent down by God, either directly to David and his family¹³ or to a larger fellowship of the wise whom David is urged to join:

O David, I sent down Wisdom that people might benefit from it, so be its dispensary.
Wisdom has its exponents, so be one of them. Be like an expert physician who prescribes his medicine for others' benefit.¹⁴

As with Solomon, David's wisdom was traditionally displayed in his judgments, in which he was assisted by a chain linked to heaven that enabled him to detect liars.¹⁵ This judicial function, however, receives scant attention in the Core text. The biblical story in which Solomon judges a dispute between two mothers is echoed in C 4:22, but without the figure of the judge.¹⁶ In C 12:5 David is told to protect people from unspecified forms of slander,¹⁷ and S elaborates this into a string of instructions about how to judge various marital disputes, including accusations of adultery, but this seems to be more an allusion to David's own marital indiscretions than to his judicial function.¹⁸ S 124, one of the Sufi text's unique additions, instructs David to apply the same legal penalties (*ḥudūd*) to women as to men who commit adultery, theft, or slander; but instead of referring to classical legal penalties like lashing or stoning, it recalls the earlier qurʾānic penalty of imprisonment, and specifies that a woman's cell should be pleasant, the goal being only to keep her far from the filth of sin. The point is not David's role as a judge, but his

¹¹ C+ 5:2 as reflected in Aya 4v.3–4, Hal 3r.6–7, and O 5:2 (Leid 5r.12; Hüs 3r.4 has “scholars”). P 7:2 (Hunt 10r.10–11) and Spr 5:2 (39v.7–8) have “scholars.”

¹² In Sura 2:251 and 38:20 God gives David dominion and wisdom, which makes wisdom sound like a personal quality; but in Sura 3:48 and 5:110 God teaches Jesus “the Scripture and the Wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel,” which makes Wisdom sound like a revealed text. See also Sura 17:39, 33:34, 31:12. Wisdom is listed alongside the Scripture in Sura 2:129, 2:151, 2:231, 3:81, 3:164, 4:54, 4:113, and 62:2; much Islamic exegesis has taken this as a reference to the Prophet's Sunna.

¹³ S 54:1–2 (Flo 46r.12–46v.1).

¹⁴ C+ 126b as reflected in O 127:1 (Leid 70r.12–70v.1; Hüs 30v.9–11), corresponding to Hal 102:1 (22v.23–23r.1). Aya omits this segment on wisdom. *Mawḍiʿ* here suggests not just a locus or store of wisdom, but also a source of it, like the doctor who prescribes it (*yaḍaʿu*); the translation “dispensary” is intended to capture this meaning.

¹⁵ See Sura 21:78–79, 38:21–26; Déclais, *David raconté par les musulmans*, 166–167, 172–174, and ch. 13.

¹⁶ C 4:22 as reflected in K 5:26 (Fat 6r.4–6, Mad 209r.22–209v.1), Aya 4:22 (4r.14–16), Hal 4:22 (2v.20–3r.1), O 4:22 (Leid 5r.1–3, Hüs 2v.19–21), P 6:23 (Hunt 9v.9–12). Cf. 1 Kings 3:16–28.

¹⁷ C 12:5 as reflected in O 12:5 (Leid 10v.11–12, Hüs 5r.12–13) and Hal 12:5 (4v.21–22). This psalm was dropped from K, Aya, P, and Spr, probably accidentally due to the identical endings of C 11 and C 12.

¹⁸ S 3:23–28 (Flo 5v.2–6r.3).

own sin: after thus instructing him to be lenient in judgment, S reminds him to consider his own faults rather than lording it over others.¹⁹

There is in fact remarkably little reference in these psalms to David's public life, his adventures as a warrior, his worldly affairs, or even his kingship – all of which were detailed in other Islamic literature.²⁰ His embroilment in political conflict is indicated by his appeals for protection from his enemies, but the main point of these requests is to stress the Sufi virtue of *tawakkul*, reliance on God. For example, the Sufi text paraphrases the opening of the biblical Psalm 3:

The words of David, peace be upon him: O Lord, what evil the people have plotted against me! But they do not realize that I am shielded and surrounded by your protection.²¹

Here the author has to signal that, exceptionally, the speaker is David rather than God. C 96 likewise quotes David's appeal to God for protection – not only from enemies but also from the distracting business of ruling, so that he might focus instead on the devotional life:

David said: O Lord, do not lead me to ruin; do not let my enemies gloat over me; do not cast me from your door; do not make me despair of your mercy. My God, give me a truthful tongue that calls on you, and a heart that listens and obeys. Do not busy me with the affairs of the people, but busy me with remembering you, and occupy my heart with obeying you. My God, grant me to sit with those who have your favor, that I might be one of them. My God, grant me the coolness of your forgiveness, and the sweetness of dialogue with you. If one of my many enemies wills me evil, stand him on his head! O Lord, how could my heart not be stronger than iron, when you are my support and my glory? O God, O ruler of land and sea, grant me to be held in awe by kings, for you are the mighty king.²²

¹⁹ S 124:2–3 (Flo 88r.2–6). O also adds a reference to David's enforcement of the law: in O 120:6 (Leid 65v.8, Hüs 28v.5) he is told to follow the rulings (*aḥkām*) and penalties (*ḥudūd*) of the Torah.

²⁰ See Déclais, *David raconté par les musulmans*, chs. 5–8 and 11.

²¹ S 2:10 (Flo 3v.11–12). This verse was composed by S based on Psalm 3:1–4, and is not found in any other recension.

²² C 96 reconstructed from K 96 (Fat 73v.9–74r.6, Mad 97 on 231v.15–23), O 96 (Hüs 20v.12–19, Leid 48v.11–49r.6), Hal 79 (17v.1–7), S 48 (41v.8–42r.4), Spr 84 (92r.11–92v.11). This psalm is missing from Aya and P. Similar material is to be found at the beginning of S 57 (Flo 48r.10–13) as well as in C 36, which is reflected in K 38 (Fat 36r.5–8, Mad 218v.21–219r.1), Hal 26 (7r.18–20), O 36 (Hüs 10v.4–7, Leid 24v.2–6), S 23 (Flo 22v.9–13), Spr 31 (64v.8–65r.1), and P 18 (Hunt 19r.7–9).

David's appeal against his enemies recalls the biblical Psalm 25:2, "do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me;"²³ but his greater concern is to have a clean heart, that God might not cast him from his presence – concerns that recall the penitence of Psalm 51:10–11.

The particulars of David's political conflicts are not mentioned, nor are his skills as a warrior and military leader ever on display. The Sufi text does allude briefly to the story that David was a skilled ironworker who invented chain mail,²⁴ but then moves on quickly to the more important topics of his devotional life and his struggle against sin:

Yet another of my blessings was to make iron soft for you, so that you worked it as you would, like clay. So, serve me, praise and sanctify me throughout the nighttime and the day; stand before me at dawn and in the middle of the night. Sanctify me with your hearing, your sight, and your limbs; hold back your eyes from that which I have forbidden you, and lower your gaze, for that is the beginning of scrupulous piety (*wara'*).²⁵

In C 2, which echoes the biblical Psalm 2, David is referred to not only as God's prophet but also as his anointed or Messiah (*masīḥ*), but because the Qur'ān applies this title only to Jesus, the Muslim author ignores its royal significance for David and inserts instead a condemnation of the Christian doctrine of Jesus' divine sonship, which was associated with Psalm 2:7, "You are my son; today I have begotten you."²⁶ Only the relatively late Orthodox recension draws attention to David's kingship, in one of its additions to C+:

David, ask my forgiveness with your whole heart; I have singled you out for kingship, and have made you my caliph on the earth.²⁷

²³ All biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

²⁴ This story is reflected in the Qur'ān. See Sura 21:80, 34:10–11; Déclais, *David raconté par les musulmans*, 174–177.

²⁵ S 54:3–4 (Flo 46v.1–5). This psalm is an addition unique to S.

²⁶ C's original "I made you my messiah and my prophet" is supported by P (Hunt 6r.12–6v.1), by the St. Petersburg manuscript studied by Krarup (*Auswahl Pseudo-Davidischer Psalmen*, Arabic p. 12 n. 8), and also perhaps by Aya (2v.19), Hal (2r.2), and Spr (35r.10), though their consonantal pointing is not entirely clear. This sentence is corrupted slightly in Mad (208r.10–11), and more drastically in Fat (2v.1–2) and O (Leid 2r.10, Hüs 1v.15–16), presumably because the editors regard the title messiah as appropriate only for Jesus.

²⁷ O 114:1–2 (Leid 60r.7–8, Hal 26r.1–2). David is also called caliph in P 56:1 (Hunt 37v.2–4).

The Orthodox editor also inserts into the middle of C+ 142 God's promise to David of a kingly descendant who will rule with justice and inherit the ends of the earth.²⁸ This central element of the biblical portrait was largely omitted in Muslim accounts, where David's descendants had no political role to play.²⁹ The Core text does show an awareness of David's royal family, but mentions his son Solomon in C 18 only to have him predict the coming of Muhammad, who will himself inherit the earth:

O David, listen to what I say: tell Solomon to proclaim after you that I will give the earth as an inheritance to Muhammad and his community. They are not like your people; they do not ring bells or worship idols. If you wish to worship me, then weep much! Every hour in which you do not remember me is an hour lost.³⁰

This passage is inspired by Sura 21:105, the only explicit quotation from the Bible in the Qur'ān: "We wrote in the *Zabūr*, after the Remembrance, that my righteous servants will inherit the earth," which refers to Psalm 37:29, "The righteous shall inherit the land, and live in it forever." Since the Qur'ān says this is in the Psalms, the Core text includes it, but with a new twist: David's kingly lineage exists only to predict its own supplanting by Muhammad. Once again the author shows a special interest in rebuking Christians, whose worship involves bells and icons; and once again the topic quickly shifts from politics to the theme of repentant devotional piety: real worship is to weep over one's sins and practice *dīkr*, the remembrance of God that is central to Sufi practice. A similarly gloomy piety is the focus of C 7, where Solomon is mentioned only for David to teach him the solemn demeanor befitting a prophet.³¹

This notable disinterest in David's kingship and public life reflects the context in which these Islamic psalms were originally produced: not in the courtly circles of scholars and poets seeking the favor of caliphs and sultans, but precisely in those otherworldly, renunciant circles that shunned government service and patronage. That the Core text originated in the milieu of early Muslim asceticism has been confirmed by Ursula Bsees' discovery of a fragmentary papyrus, datable to the second/eighth or

²⁸ O 142:2–3 (Leid 80v.8–10, Hal 35r.22–35v.2). The promise of a kingly descendant also appears in S 54:1 (Flo 46r.10–13).

²⁹ See Déclais, *David raconté par les musulmans*, 177–180.

³⁰ C 18:1–3, reconstructed by comparing K 20:1–3 (Fat 20r.6–10, Mad 213v.5–10), Aya 17:1–2 (9r.21–9v.2), O 18:1–2 (Hüs 6v.1–3, Leid 14r.8–11), Spr 17:1–3 (52r.3–10), and Hal 65:1–3 (14r.6–8; folios 14 and 15 are out of order and should follow folio 5, so this psalm would have been number 18 if the displacement had not occurred before the numbers were added). "They do not ring bells" (*lā yaṭinnūn bi-ʾl-ṭānīn*) is from Aya; other versions corrupt this phrase in various ways, including "their prayer is (or is not) like that of the Sabaeans," or "let not your prayer to me be with stringed instruments (*ṭanābīr*)."

³¹ C 7:16 as reflected in Hal 7:16 (4r.1–2), O 7:16 (Hüs 3v.23–4r.3, Leid 7v.6–9), S 7:19 (Flo 11v.6–9), and Spr 7:14 (42v.6–11). Aya, K, and P omit Solomon's name.

third/ninth century, that contains several psalms from C alongside other pietistic literature. This Muslim ascetic tradition was inspired in some respects by Christian monks, and flourished until the middle of the third/ninth century before being partly overshadowed by more mystical and legal forms of piety.³² Whereas other essays in this volume illustrate how various Christian and Jewish elites appealed to David's royal stature as a legitimation of their own claims or aspirations to power, the Islamic psalms reflect an anti-establishment renunciatory discourse in which political power is to be shunned, not sought, and the prospect of the afterlife should overshadow the concerns of this world.

This is in marked contrast to some other Islamic portraits of David, in which his penitence and religious devotion are moderated by good taste, temperance, and a balance between spiritual and worldly concerns. The litterateur Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) relates from David the following bits of wisdom:

A discerning person should not omit any of these four: the time he spends confiding in his Lord, the time he spends calling his own soul to account, the time he spends alone with brothers who advise him in his religion and are frank with him about his faults, and the time he spends giving free rein to his legal and praiseworthy pleasures; for truly this last period is a support to the others, a bounty beyond the bare necessities of life, and a relaxation for the heart. A discerning person should never be caught at anything but these three: preparing for the hereafter, tending to this life, or taking pleasure in what is not forbidden. A discerning person should be mindful of his age, careful with his tongue, and focused on his business.³³

In this more gentlemanly and less ascetic ideal, David's worldly affairs are allowed their due, and his infamous sensuality is made into a virtue. The editors of the Islamic psalms, however, all aspire to a more demanding level of scrupulous piety (*wara'*), though they color that piety in different shades. Only in one recension, in just one manuscript of K, have I found any echo of Ibn Qutayba's more well-rounded portrait of David as a gentleman and a scholar, familiar with both literature (or culture more broadly, *al-ādāb*) and the religious sciences:

³² See Melchert, "The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism at the Middle of the Ninth Century C.E.," and more generally the works by Andrae, Livne-Kafri, and Melchert listed in the bibliography. Megan Reid (*Law and Piety in Medieval Islam*, 5–7, 31–33, and *passim*) has shown that Muslim asceticism was still flourishing in the late medieval period and was not incompatible with mystical and legal piety, which helps to explain the enduring popularity of the Islamic psalms.

³³ See Ibn Qutayba, *Uyūn al-aḥbār*, 1:322.

David, I brought together for you culture, sermons, and reports, and made of them signs for all creation.³⁴

That these several branches of knowledge are called signs or verses (*āyāt*), like the verses of the Qurʾān, suggests that the editor of K regarded the psalms he had just penned as a collection of belles-lettres, sermonic exhortations, and reports about the pious figures of past generations. The much later Madrid manuscript, however, made a slight change from *ādāb* to *āyāt*,³⁵ and thus kept David's knowledge and revelations entirely within the domain of the religious sciences. This is much more typical of these Islamic psalms, which almost always reflect the more ascetic, renunciant, or at least otherworldly image of David that is found in the Islamic literature on asceticism (*zuhd*).

David's otherworldly piety and prophetic office emphasized

The Islamic tradition of ascetic piety found much more to celebrate in the widely shared image of David as a devout worshiper. He stands for long periods of prayer, especially at night,³⁶ reciting the Psalms (correctly, O insists),³⁷ either in God's Holy House, where he is warned against raising his voice too much,³⁸ or out in nature, where (as in the Qurʾān³⁹) the mountains, the birds, and even the stars join in his praises.⁴⁰ The Sufi recension in particular regards his long night vigils spent chanting the Psalms as a model of devotional piety: whereas C 13:3 portrays David's long standing as a time of waiting for God to answer his

³⁴ K 112 as reflected in Fat 82v.6–7. This psalm is one of K's unique additions to C.

³⁵ Mad 113:1 on 235r.6–7.

³⁶ See, e.g., C 12:4, reflected in O 12:4 (Hüs 5r.10–12, Leid 10v.9–11), Hal 12:4 (4v.20–21), and S 3:22 (Flo 5r.13–5v.2); this psalm was dropped accidentally from K, Aya, P, and Spr. General exhortations to nighttime devotions are found throughout all the recensions; see, e.g., S 84:2 (Flo 64r.10–11); S 97:1 (Flo 70r.9–11); K 105:2 (Fat 79r.7–8, Mad 106:2 on 233v.21–22); P 111:1 (Hunt 68v.2–5); and C 4:9 as reflected in K 5:12 (Fat 4v.5, Mad 209r.1), Aya 4:8 (3v.11–14), Hal 4:9 (2v.6), O 4:9 (Hüs 2r.23, Leid 4r.3), P 6:10 (Hunt 8v.5–6), and Spr 4:10 (37v.4).

³⁷ O 114:3–4 (Hüs 26r.2–5, Leid 60r.8–11).

³⁸ C 12:3 as reflected in O 12:3 (Hüs 5r.9–10, Leid 10v.7–8), Hal 12:3 (4v.19–20), and S 3:20 (Flo 5r.10–11). This psalm was dropped accidentally from K, Aya, P, and Spr.

³⁹ Sura 34:10, 38:18–19. This became a standard part of Islamic portraits of David; see Déclais, *David raconté par les musulmans*, 167, 171.

⁴⁰ O 114:5–6 (Hüs 26r.5–6, Leid 60r.11–12). The natural world praising God is a recurring image, especially in S; see, e.g., S 58:1–2 (Flo 49r.1–11); S 84:4 (Flo 64r.12–64v.2); S 150:3 (Flo 103v.8–10); and Aya 150:1 (47r.6–7), corresponding to Hal 109:1 (26r.13–14) (this last psalm of C+ is not preserved in O).

prayer, as a punishment for taking pleasure in the speech of slanderers, S turns it into a time of worship, a reward for taking pleasure in the Psalms.⁴¹

Two other recensions, however, the Koranic and the Orthodox, regard the Psalms less as a devotional exercise than as a written scripture analogous to the Qurʾān and other prophetic books. K adds to each psalm a closing phrase very much like those in the Qurʾān: I am the Mighty, the Wise, etc. Such phrases occur at times in other recensions as well, but are almost ubiquitous in K. In both K and O each psalm is labeled a *sūra*,⁴² the same term used for the chapters of the Qurʾān; and O 131, a unique addition by the Orthodox editor, explicitly links the terms chapter (*sūra*) and psalm (*mazmūr*):

O David, listen to what I say, for I speak the truth. I drew Moses son of ʿImrān near to myself, confiding in him and speaking to him, and I wrote out for him the Torah, in which is found guidance, the light of every exhortation, the explanation of every light, and a remembrance for those who believe. And to you I give the *Zabūr*, in which are parables, admonitions and exhortations, reports from the past and announcements of the future. Each of its chapters is a psalm which I cause your tongue to declaim, making clear the *Zabūr* that has been recited to you, that it might be a guide to the Children of Israel, an exhortation to those who come after you, and a healing for the afflictions of the heart.⁴³

The terms used here to describe the Torah and the Psalms are similar to those by which the Qurʾān describes itself: guidance, warning, and remembrance. In another of its unique additions to C+ the Orthodox text employs similar terms and mentions that the Psalms, like the Qurʾān, are intended to be recited in a prescribed manner:

I sent down to you the *Zabūr* as an exhortation and a reminder, so recite it as it should be recited. I am sending down to you therein guidance and light, and a remembrance for those who believe. I am setting loose your tongue to recite what I send down to you, and I am coining parables therein. So recite it as it should be recited; I have commanded the mountains to answer you, echoing your praises morning and evening.

⁴¹ C 13:3 as reflected in K 14:7 (Fat 15r.5–7, Mad 212r.4–6), Aya 12:3 (7v.19–21), Hal 13:3 (5r.2–3), O 13:3 (Hüs 5r.17–18, Leid 11r.6–8), Spr 11:3 (47r.7–10), and P 14:3 (Hunt 16v.2–4). This verse appears in altered form in S 3:7 (Flo 4r.12–13).

⁴² This is true in one manuscript of K (Fat; Mad has *ṣaḥīfa*) and both manuscripts of O (Hüs, Leid), as well as other manuscripts based on C+ (Aya, Hal). Most manuscripts in the P and S traditions use other terminology: Flo has *mazmūr*, Spr has *mizmār*, and Hunt and Prin mark psalms only with the *basmala* (though Moss uses *sūra*).

⁴³ O 131:6–8 (Hüs 31v.23–32r.5, Leid 73r.11–73v.5).

O ye mountains, join David in praising me! Let the birds join him in sanctifying me, and every star I have made.⁴⁴

Like Muhammad, David has received from God a text that he is to recite as an act of worship. Like Muhammad, he is to explain that text and make it clear so that his audience can follow its guidance.⁴⁵ And like Muhammad he is to obey its laws, which confirm those of prior revelations, according to several additions by O⁴⁶ and one extra psalm from a different source that was added as an appendix to K:

O David, I sent you a book, so follow it, and do not leave it for anything else. The laws and judgments of the Torah are incumbent upon you.⁴⁷

As we might expect, this conception of the Psalms as a legal text is also developed by the Pious recension, which is less enthusiastic than S about intensive devotional exercises and more concerned with strict obedience to God's law. P reminds its readers that God does not need their worship,⁴⁸ and that he does not impose excessive devotions that the human frame cannot bear.⁴⁹ P 19 describes the Psalms not as a devotional text but as a source of binding law just like the Torah:

O David, I sent down to you my *Zabūr*, just like what I sent down in the Torah. O David, my books, in which I sent down to my prophets revelation and guidance, will be corrupted, and lies will be fabricated against me; but whoever holds fast to what my prophets have brought, and does not diverge from my Shari'a, has succeeded and prospered. I am Mighty and Wise.⁵⁰

This passage originated in C 37:7–9,⁵¹ but the references to revelation (*bayān*), guidance, and Shari'a were added by the Pious editor, emphasizing the legal character of all God's books including the Psalms. The view that Scriptures, including not only the Torah but also the Gospel, are primarily books of moral and

⁴⁴ O 114:3–6 (Hüs 26r.2–6, Leid 60r.8–12).

⁴⁵ O 131:8 (Hüs 32r.4–5, Leid 73v.3–5), quoted above.

⁴⁶ O 120:6 (Hüs 28v.3–5, Leid 65v.7–8) and O 130:2, 7 (Hüs 31v.7–8, 13–14; Leid 72v.4–6, 11–12).

⁴⁷ Fat 88r.2–3, Mad 236v.19–20. This is part of the last of 17 psalms related from the famous Companion, exegete, and transmitter Ibn 'Abbās. A similar verse appears in O 120:6 (Hüs 28v.3–5, Leid 65v.7–8) and Hal 98:2 (21v.22–24), but not in other texts based on C+.

⁴⁸ P 89:1 (Hunt 58r.3–4).

⁴⁹ P 109:2 (Hunt 67v.6–9).

⁵⁰ P 19:6–8 (Hunt 20v.5–9), corresponding to BPM 15:6–8 (Prin 17v.6–9).

⁵¹ The wording of C 37:7–9 is reflected in K 39:7–9 (Fat 37v.2–4, Mad 219r.18–20), Aya 37:7–9 (15r.4–6), Hal 27:7–9 (7v.10–12), O 37:7–9 (Hüs 10v.21–23, Leid 25r.11–25v.1), and S 24:7–9 (Flo 23v.7–9).

legal guidance was articulated already in the Qurʾān,⁵² but its application to the Psalms was not inevitable. Other Islamic traditions reported that the Psalms had no legal content at all, but were purely devotional and liturgical.⁵³ Only the editors of K, O, and P turned David's Psalms into a book of law, while the editors of C, C+, and especially S retained the traditional Jewish, Christian, and Muslim conception of the Psalms as a book of wisdom and worship.

David's sin exploited or minimized

David's assimilation to the qurʾānic model of a prophet who brings revealed guidance, and especially to the Shariʿa-minded version of that model in which prophets are immune from serious or even minor sins, made a theological problem out of the biblical story of David's sin toward Bathsheba and her husband Uriah.⁵⁴ The story was too well-known to be ignored, and was acknowledged in the Qurʾān, albeit obliquely and in a way that allowed wide scope for interpretation.⁵⁵ Consequently, it was the subject of much exegetical activity in Qurʾān commentaries and the Islamic *Tales of the Prophets*. Some early Muslims were aware of, and did not hesitate to retell, the biblical version of the story according to which David first committed adultery with Bathsheba, then tried to cover it up, and finally arranged for her husband Uriah to be killed in battle so that he could marry Bathsheba. Very quickly, however, this version of the story was found to be incompatible with the developing doctrine of the infallibility of prophets (*ʿiṣma*), and was modified through a variety of exegetical strategies. An early tactic was to rearrange the sequence of events so that first Uriah was sent by David to his death in battle, and then David married Bathsheba quite properly. The equivalent of murder, however, was still deemed impossible for a prophet, so the story was modified still further so that David had nothing to do with Uriah's death, and was only to be faulted for finding his death convenient, and for greedily desiring to add another wife to the ninety-nine he already had. Alternatively, David only exerted his royal influence and asked Uriah to divorce his wife, or else preempted Uriah's pending proposal of marriage to Bathsheba and married her before Uriah had a chance to. Some even reduced David's sin to a procedural irregularity in judging a dispute: the prophet Nathan's rebuke recounted in the Bible was retold in the Qurʾān as an actual dispute brought to David by a poor man whose only lamb had been confiscated by a man who already owned ninety-nine, and David was guilty only of judging in favor of the poor man before hearing both sides of the story. Thus the problematic tale of a prophet committing two grave sins was eventually reduced by some exegetes to a case of overzealous concern for the poor. Other exegetes simply refused to discuss what was the sin for

⁵² Sura 5:43–50.

⁵³ See Déclais, *David raconté par les musulmans*, 165.

⁵⁴ 2 Samuel 11:1–12:25.

⁵⁵ Sura 38:21–26.

which David had asked forgiveness in the Qurʾān, or dismissed the vile lies that had been spoken against David without saying what they were.⁵⁶

A similar range of strategies, and a similar historical trend of progressively minimizing David's sins, are evident in the several recensions of the Islamic psalms, each of which deals with David's sin in its own way, highlighting it, altering it, glossing over it, or suppressing it altogether.

The Core text unabashedly recalls the biblical account of adultery and murder, albeit only allusively, assuming rather than retelling the story. This is an indication of the early origin of the original Core compilation, because the tendency to mitigate David's sin was evident in qurʾānic commentaries already in the second/eighth century, and a similar tendency might have been expected in these psalms unless David's sin was essential to their purpose – as it was for S but not for C. The Core text's allusions to the story are matter-of-fact, neither minimizing nor belaboring David's sin. For example, C 77 indicates that David has sinned against Uriah in some way that warrants retaliation, but identifies his sins only indirectly, by commenting that his forefather Adam was more righteous than he because Adam did not commit murder or adultery:

David, I swear by my own honor and glory: I will surely give you such a [lowly] station, compared to Uriah, that the earth will shudder and the angels droop their wings [aghast]! No one's wickedness will get past me on that day! Your father Adam was to me the kindest of the kind, the dearest and the nearest. He did not kill anyone, or pollute himself with forbidden women.⁵⁷ I merely forbade him to eat of a certain tree, and he ate of it; yet for that his crown fell from his head, the Garden wept for him, and I consigned him to remorse. So how will it be with you, when you have made yourself subject to retaliation and claims for compensation! If you only realized how that man [Uriah] will demand your punishment, you would bewail yourself still more.⁵⁸

The sins of murder and adultery are here taken for granted, and are not disguised in any way. Sexual sin in particular so colors David's reputation that the Core text has him complain to God:

⁵⁶ See Déclais, *David raconté par les musulmans*, 187–211; Mohammed, *David in the Muslim Tradition*.

⁵⁷ Literally, “or mix with forbidden genitalia.” “Forbidden” is preserved in K, P, and BPM; it is omitted in other recensions, either to improve the rhyming parallelism of the verse or to avoid the implication that David committed adultery – though that inadvertently (and impossibly) makes Adam celibate. One copy of O 77:5 (Hüs 17v.5) drops the reference to murder and adultery entirely.

⁵⁸ C 77:2–8, following K 78:2–8 (Fat 62r.8–62v.7, Mad 227v.12–20). Cf. Aya 77:2–8 (24r.17–24v.3), Hal 53:2–8 (12r.10–15), O 77:2–8 (Hüs 17v.2–8, Leid 41r.5–11), S 39:13–19 (Flo 36r.3–11), Spr 65:2–8 and 112:3–9 (81v.3–11 and 122r.5–122v.4), P 55:2–8 (Hunt 36v.11–37r.12), and BPM 51:2–8 (Prin 38r.8–39r.1).

David said: My God, my sins have worn out my face, weakened my frame, and wounded my heart. My God, does the Devil have no other net than women?⁵⁹

This verse was preserved in K, Hal, and S, but was truncated or omitted from all the other recensions, presumably to avoid suggesting that David had been caught in this particularly devilish snare.⁶⁰

The Sufi text multiplies and amplifies the Core text's allusions to David's sin. For example, in one of its additions to C, the Sufi text again compares David's sin to Adam's and attributes it to the influence of the Devil:

Recite my Book to your own hearts as an act of continual repentance. O David, did not my Book forbid you, when you disobeyed me? But I subjected you to the temptation of Satan. You well know, David, how your father [Adam] sinned, before I exalted him; but his sin was only decreed as a means to populate the world.⁶¹

Into the middle of C 36, in which David asks God to let him speak truth and not let his enemies rejoice over him, S inserts a third plea:

If you decree for me evil and wicked deeds, you put me to shame; and if you let me fall into adultery you cause me to fail and subject me to defeat.⁶²

In C 12:4 God urges upon David the general practice of rising at night after intimacy with his wives to wash himself and stand before God in prayer, promising him wise offspring as a reward; but the corresponding passage in S turns this into a reference to an unspecified but very particular sexual encounter, which God promises will result in a wise son if David spends the night in prayer.⁶³ The very next verse in C effectively downplays the rumors about David by saying that God prefers for accusations of adultery to be covered over, but S turns this into a long list of rules about marriage, divorce, and adultery, some of them very pointedly aimed at David:

⁵⁹ Beginning of C 29:6 reconstructed from K 31:6 (Fat 32r.6–7, Mad 217v.8–10), Hal 19:6 (6r.17–18), and S 18:6–7 (Flo 20r.5–7).

⁶⁰ See Aya 29 (at 13r.4), O 29 (at Hüs 9v.5, Leid 22r.3), and Spr 26 (at 62r.4). This psalm is part of a larger block of material omitted by P.

⁶¹ S 98:2–6 (Flo 71r.13–71v.3).

⁶² S 23:3 (Flo 22v.11–13), reading *awqa'tani* instead of *wāqa'ta bi*. This verse is not in K 38 (at Fat 36r.7 and Mad 218v.23), Hal 26 (at 7r.19), O 36 (at Hüs 10v.6 and Leid 24v.4), or Spr 31 (at 64v.11); this psalm is part of a larger block of material omitted by P.

⁶³ The original wording of C 12:4 must have been similar to Hal 12:4 (4v.20–21) and O 12:4 (Hüs 5r.10–12, Leid 10v.9–11). Cf. S 3:22 (Flo 5r.13–5v.2). This psalm was dropped accidentally from K, Aya, P, and Spr.

Judge between the Children of Israel that if a man leaves a woman and she remarries before the end of the menstrual period that finalizes [the divorce], and it then becomes apparent that she is three months pregnant, then the second [marriage] is void and the child is attributed to the first [husband].⁶⁴

This seems intended to cast doubt on the validity of the marriage that Muslim exegetes claimed had legitimated David's intercourse with Bathsheba. And in C 15, which urges David to weep over his sin and makes several pointed references to sexual licentiousness, S adds a condemnation of "those who say 'if so-and-so were to die, I would marry his wife'," implying that even if David's intercourse with Bathsheba took place in a marriage contracted after Uriah's death, his eagerness was detestable to God.⁶⁵

Uriah appears again in S 72, and is portrayed as singularly upset, as though David's sin had been only against him. Some Muslim exegetes reported that God comforted David by promising to persuade Uriah to give up the right to compensation for his murder,⁶⁶ but here God holds the threat of retaliation over David's head:

O David, next I say to you: let my Book poor forth from you; recite it to the resurrected [in Paradise]! If Uriah hears you [there], he will pursue vengeance upon you with all his might and will start to beat you as you stand in the pulpit of the prophets. When he strikes you, the crown of prophecy will fall from your head, the pulpit will vanish from beneath you, and the wild beasts will come after you for payment [of Uriah's blood money]. I will make the two of you enemies, and so it will be until I dispose him favorably toward you; so be meek in spirit and repent.

I have commanded you to ask forgiveness, and if you ask me for forgiveness I will accept you; but you asked my forgiveness without desisting from sin. Turn to me in repentance and I will receive you! Turning to me in repentance from your sins is like land on which much blood has been poured out: the rain comes and washes away what was on the face of the earth. Such are your sins and your repentance.

⁶⁴ S 3:24 (Flo 5v.4-6). The whole of S 3:23-28 (Flo 5v.2-6r.3) is an expansion of C 12:5, which is reflected in Hal 12:5 (4v.21-22) and O 12:5 (Hüs 5r.12-13, Leid 10v.11-12). This psalm was dropped accidentally from K, Aya, P, and Spr.

⁶⁵ S 4:9 (Flo 6v.8-9). Cf. K 16:10 (Fat 17r.7-8, Mad 212r.20-21), Aya 14:10 (8r.12-13), Hal 15:10 (5r.23-5v.1), O 15:8 (Hüs 5v.15-16, Leid 12r.10-11), Spr 14:10 (49r.9-11), and P 16:7 (Hunt 18r.2-3).

⁶⁶ See Déclais, *David raconté par les musulmans*, 221-232; Mohammed, *David in the Muslim Tradition*, 46-47, 67-68, 73.

O Children of Adam, when you consider your sins, laugh little and weep much! Weep for shame before me, and I will cover over your evil deeds. I am fully aware of what you do.⁶⁷

This psalm, which is unique to S, shows why the Sufi editor so frequently drew attention to David's sin, and why he had no desire to minimize it: it made David a perfect model of tearful repentance. The image of David the penitent is also evident in C+ 104, where David begs God for protection from both sin and punishment:

David (God's prayers be upon him) said: My God, do not abandon me; do not leave me humiliated in the dust! My God, do not test me with sins and so degrade me! When you invite a man into the house of rebelliousness, and offer him the cup of sin to drink, he is humiliated, despised, of no repute. My God, I ask you for clemency on the day all creatures are brought before you and called to account for their deeds. My God, I beg of you not to punish me, for my works are few and my body is weak, and I cannot endure your punishment. O God, you are my Lord and the Lord of my fathers, the Lord of all angels and humans. If you wish, you will punish me, and if you wish, you will have mercy on me. I cannot escape your dominion or contest your sovereignty. My God, if you abandon me, then how weak is my frame, and how little my strength! My God, do not set me on the path of sin; do not set me on a course of destruction!⁶⁸

Another relatively early recension, K, likewise puts on David's lips a psalm reminiscent of the penitential psalms of the Bible:

Praise to you, my God! Forgive me my sin, for truly my sin upsets me and saps my strength. My God, if you do not forgive me, I will be left penniless among the destitute. But what is my sin to one as great as you, O my God, and what is my punishment to one who rules over everything? My God, make me one of the righteous, who do not keep going back to their sins, and give me a tongue of truth and holiness. If I utter praises, let my tongue declare your holiness; when I declare your praises, let my cares take wing, and let my bones exalt you. For you are Wealthy and Worthy of praise.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ S 72:5–15 (Flo 59r.6–59v.3). Uriah's demand for compensation is also mentioned in C 77, quoted above.

⁶⁸ C+ 104:2–11 from Aya 32v.7–17. This psalm was probably on a folio that is missing from Hal, between fols. 18 and 19. O preserves only the first verse of C+ 104 (Hüs 23v.13–14, Leid 55r.7–8). None of the C+ material appears in the other recensions.

⁶⁹ K 108, following Fat 80r.5–80v.1; cf. Mad 109 (234r.12–16).

The image of David weeping and begging for forgiveness is to be expected in the Islamic psalms, for it was also an important part of his image in the literature of asceticism and *Tales of the Prophets*, where he is portrayed as so overcome by remorse for his sin, and by fear of the Day of Judgment, that he weeps in continual prostration until his tears cause grass to grow beneath him. He spends every fourth day wandering and weeping (still echoed by the birds and the mountains), and another day bemoaning his sin in the company of monks.⁷⁰

The Orthodox and Pious recensions, however, do not contain the lengthy examples of David's repentance that were just cited from S, C+, and K. Usually O preserves and edits the material added by C+, but in reproducing C+ 104, it preserves only the first verse, and omits entirely the penitential prayer of David cited above.⁷¹ Instead, O and P preserve much briefer calls to repentance that sound more like generic exhortations to every reader than like pointed references to David's sin:

David, weep over your sin with the tears of the penitent. Consider how you fare with the fire of this world – and it is but a thousandth part of the smoke of Gehenna!⁷²

David, I should not see you so tranquil and secure, neither wailing with those who wail, nor weeping with those who weep. If only you could see Hell and its Guardians, and what I have prepared there for adulterers [...].⁷³

Indeed, O and P repeatedly downplay David's sin. Their principal strategy for dealing with the problematic story of Bathsheba is to ignore or minimize it. As other papers in this volume illustrate, in all three Abrahamic traditions David's sin became a focal point of exegesis and was addressed through multiple strategies: some ignored it, others modified it, and others rationalized it or counterbalanced it by emphasizing David's piety. So it was with the several recensions of the Islamic psalms. The Core text, as it can be reconstructed from later recensions, shows no sign of the progressive elimination of David's sin that was undertaken by qur'ānic exegetes; the compiler simply assumed that the biblical tale of adultery and murder was a well-known part of David's story, and neither avoided nor belabored it. The

⁷⁰ See Déclais, *David raconté par les musulmans*, 220–237; Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Zuhd*, 101–105.

⁷¹ O 104 (Hüs 23v.13–14, Leid 55r.7–8).

⁷² C 82:1 reconstructed from K 83:1 (Fat 64v.6–8, Mad 228v.4–6), Aya 82:1 (25r.11–12), Hal 57:1 (12v.12–14), O 82:1 (Hüs 18r.5–7, Leid 42v.6–7), P 60:1 (Hunt 39r.2–4), S 39:28 (Flo 36v.8–9), and Spr 71:1 (84v.3–5).

⁷³ C 95:2–3 reconstructed from K 95:2–3 (Fat 73r.3–5, Mad 96:2–3 on 231v.1–3), Aya 95:2–3 (28v.4–6), Hal 78:2–3 (17r.17–18), O 95:2–3 (Hüs 20v.1–2, Leid 48r.9–11), S 47:2–3 (Flo 41r.2–3), and Spr 83:2–3 (91v.4–7). This psalm is missing from P. A similar rebuke is added by S in S 122:2–3 (Flo 87r.1–2): “David, what is wrong with you that you are too lazy to wail and weep, as if you were one of those who do good! If only you could hear the boiling sound from all the tears shed by the inhabitants of hell!” Cf. Spr 107:1–2 (118r.1–4), which corrupts tears to brains.

Sufi recension amplified David's sin in order to make him a model of repentance and dependence on God's mercy, and the Core Plus and Koranic recensions used it to similar effect, albeit without the same emphasis. But for the Orthodox and Pious editors, the biblical story ran counter to the orthodox doctrine of the infallibility of prophets and undermined the piety of legal obedience that P in particular wanted to promote, so they elided or modified most references to David's sin. In this they reflected the long evolution of David's story in qur'ānic exegesis and *Tales of the Prophets* literature, in which adultery was quickly ruled out and even Uriah's murder was eventually replaced by a case of hasty judgment.

We have already seen several examples of this trend. O modifies the reference to adultery in C 77 and omits the penitential prayer in C+ 104, and both O and P omit David's complaint "My God, does the Devil have no other net than women?"⁷⁴ A more systematic cleaning up is evident in O and P's revisions to C 78, which originally referred quite frankly to the story that David had Uriah killed so that he might enjoy his wife:

O David, you have passed judgement on yourself; you have caused men to be stricken that you might take pleasure in what they used to enjoy. I knew already that I would build palaces for you, but when you did what you did, I knew already that I would diminish that station of yours – and what calamity is greater than a calamity that diminishes your station before God?⁷⁵

The corresponding psalm in O, while acknowledging that David did something wrong, turns the description of what he did into a generic, if rather puzzling, aphorism:

O David, you have passed judgment on yourself. Being patient with men makes them lose their pleasure in what they once enjoyed.⁷⁶

The editor of P, working independently of O, found a different way to mitigate the reference to David's sin: he turned the whole verse into an allusion to the story of David's hasty judgment between two litigants:

⁷⁴ See notes 57, 68, and 60 above.

⁷⁵ C 78:1–2 as reflected in K 79:1–2 (Fat 63r.1–4, Mad 227v.22–228r.3), S 39:20–21 (Flo 36r.11–36v.1) and Hal 54:1–2 (12r.16–18) show that K indeed reflects the gist of C. Aya 78:1–2 (24v.6–8) corrupts the passage severely, and Spr 67:1 (83r.10–83v.2) omits the first sentence describing David's sin.

⁷⁶ O 78:1 (Hüs 17v.9–10, Leid 41v.2–3).

O David, I made you my vice-regent on earth that you might judge rightly between people, but you followed your fancy rather than obey your Lord, and preferred your desire over the truth.⁷⁷

Another common strategy for dealing with David's sin was to explain that God ordained it for some higher purpose. The Core text does this in C 76. It does not play down David's sin; indeed it seems to assume that David not only had Uriah murdered but even committed adultery with Bathsheba beforehand. But it explains how God brought good out of that sin: Uriah's son was not a God-fearing man, so God rewarded him with another – through David!

David, fear of me once vanished from your heart. But I made what you did to be an occasion for that man to merit the station of the righteous: Uriah was a man who feared me, but his son did not have that same fear, and I wished to gladden him with a child of his own offspring.⁷⁸

The only way that the child born to David and Bathsheba could be considered Uriah's son would be if he were conceived while Bathsheba was still married to Uriah, which, under Islamic law, would make Uriah the legal father even if the child was born of adultery. Thus C's version of the story acknowledges the grave biblical version of David's sin, and explains it as a reward for Uriah. The Koranic recension, however, tries to avoid the implication that David committed adultery by turning the story on its head: Uriah's father was a godless man, so God punished him by having Uriah killed, while Uriah himself gained "the station of the righteous" through martyrdom:

O David, fear once vanished from your heart. But you did what you did so that that man might merit the station of the righteous; he used to fear me greatly, but his father did not have that same fear, and I wished not to gladden him with a child of his own offspring.⁷⁹

Clearly the Koranic editor found the presumption of adultery too problematic and eliminated it, leaving only an explanation of Uriah's murder. The Orthodox editor, who did not know K's version of the story, made his own attempt to avoid the implication of adultery, but ended up making things even more convoluted: Uriah's grandfather is god-fearing, but his son (Uriah's father) is not, so God compensates the grandfather by having his grandson Uriah killed and brought to his side in Paradise:

⁷⁷ P 56:1 (Hunt 37v.2-4).

⁷⁸ C 76:1 as reflected in Aya 76:1 (24r.8-11). The passage is corrupted to the point of nonsense in Hal 52:1 (12r.4-7).

⁷⁹ K 77:6, following Fat 61v.7-62r.2; cf. Mad 227v.3-6, which names Uriah but makes less sense.

David, I once made fear of me to vanish from your heart. But you brought about an occasion for that man to merit the station of the righteous: Uriah's grandfather was a man who feared me, but his son did not have that same fear, and I wished to gladden him in Paradise with a child of his own offspring.⁸⁰

All this to explain the higher purpose behind a murder while avoiding the implication of adultery! The Pious text likewise avoids mentioning Uriah's progeny, the child of adultery mentioned in C, and refers instead to Uriah's grandfather's progeny, meaning Uriah himself, the enemy of David who surpasses him and gains the station of the righteous by suffering martyrdom at his command:

O David, fear of me once vanished from your heart to the point that your enemy despised you, and I made what I did an occasion by which he might merit the station of the righteous: Uriah's grandfather was a man who feared me, and I wished to make one of his offspring a descendent who would gladden him.⁸¹

Thus in P, as in K and O, the old story of adultery is passed over, and Uriah's death is all but justified as part of God's righteous plan.

Indeed the Pious text, with its emphasis on following the law, is particularly sensitive to any suggestion of sexual immorality or even sensuality. In the original text of C 7, God reminds David not to lust after married women, but suggests that if he is particularly attracted to one, God might arrange for him marry her – precisely as happened with Bathsheba:

David, lower your gaze away from the believers' wives, that the world might present itself to you bashfully. David, if a comely and beautiful woman passes by, remember that you will stand before me on the day of resurrection. Ask me, and I will marry her to you in this world and the next.⁸²

But the Pious editor finds this suggestion overly accommodating of David's purported lusts, so he omits "this world," so that David can only ask for a future marriage in Paradise, and he does not promise that

⁸⁰ O 76:2 (Hüs 17r.18–22, Leid 40v.9–41r.1). In this case the equivalent verse in S (S 39:8–10 in Flo 35v.10–13) is closest to O, which suggests that the original Core text might have been similar; but this version seems to me too convoluted to be anything but an awkward attempt to avoid the implications of the original. Spr omits this verse entirely.

⁸¹ P 54:6 (Hunt 36v.2–6).

⁸² C 7:2–3 reconstructed from K 9:4–5 (Fat 8v.3–6, Mad 210r.10–13), Aya 7:2–3 (5r.5–8), Hal 7:2–3 (3v.3–6), O 7:2–3 (Hüs 3v.1–3, Leid 6v.4–7), S 7:2–3 (Flo 10v.3–6), and Spr 7:2–3 (41r.6–10).

God will grant his request.⁸³ This discomfort with sensuality is characteristic of the Pious editor; he again defers a reward of spouses to the afterlife in P 8:3,⁸⁴ and when describing Paradise he specifies that its perfumes are not like those of this world.⁸⁵

Conclusion

The different editorial strategies adopted by the compiler of the Core text and the editors of the Koranic, Sufi, Orthodox, and Pious recensions reflect an array of conceptions of what it means for David to be a Muslim prophet. As in the other traditions documented in this volume, David is portrayed in various ways to support a range of religious ideologies. In the Core text David appears as a wisdom figure in the biblical mold, whose grave sins form an integral part of his life story of repentant ascetic piety. The Sufi recension presents a portrait influenced by Muslim ascetic literature, highlighting David's sin to make him a model of repentant devotional piety who weeps over his sins, prays and chants the Psalms late into the night, and pays little attention to the affairs of his kingdom. The Koranic editor pays no special attention to David's sin, but presents him as a more well-rounded and distinctly prophetic figure. The Orthodox editor highlights his prophetic office and therefore downplays his sin and repentance. And the Pious editor, the most gifted writer of them all, insists that David must have been nearly impeccable in thought and deed, a model of scrupulous obedience to God's law.

It is striking how free these editors felt to modify, reword, add to, or delete from the Core material to achieve their different portraits of David. Evidently, they did not see themselves as engaged in the preservation and transmission of a sacred text. They were compiling and transmitting wisdom, which only gains with increased rigor and literary polish. Naturally, each one shaped David to his own form of Islamic piety.

Yet, I do not want to overstate the differences: all these texts present David as a model of otherworldly piety rather than a king, a judge, or a messianic forebear. All of them employ David to critique the worldly sins and preoccupations of the Muslim community, and to call Muslims to turn from their sins and lead a life of pious devotion to God. They are not really all that interested in David himself, and they never recount his story in detail; what interests them is the heavenly-minded piety that David symbolizes, as well as the imagined idea of his Psalms, which provides the perfect literary vehicle for spreading that piety. Their psalms are written as a form of exhortation, to be quoted, perhaps, in sermons, or for

⁸³ P 9:2–3 (Hunt 11v.6–9).

⁸⁴ P 8:3 (Hunt 11r.3–5). All other recensions simply promise “many spouses;” see K 7:3 (Fat 7v.4–6, Mad 209v.19–21), Aya 6:2 (4v.13–15), Hal 6:3 (3r.14–15), O 6:3 (Hüs 3r.15–16, Leid 6r.2–4), S 6:3 (Flo 10r.3–6), and Spr 6:3 (40v.1–3).

⁸⁵ P 10:9 (Hunt 13v.11–14r.8). Cf. K 10:9 (Fat 11r.9–11v.7, Mad 211r.5–10), Aya 8:8 (6r.6–12), Hal 8:8 (4r.9–13), O 8:9 (Hüs 4r.15–20, Leid 8v.1–7), S 8:10 (Flo 12v.1–7), and Spr 8:9 (43v.9–44r.6).

meditation in nighttime vigils. The differences between the several recensions stem not from any major disagreement about David, but from the specific coloring of each editor's devotional piety, from mystical and ascetic to scrupulously legalistic.

Nor were the Muslim compilers and editors of these rewritten psalms arguing against Jewish or Christian views of David. They were not writing to debunk or replace the biblical Psalms. They were writing for their fellow Muslims, confidently and naturally reimagining David in line with their own notions of prophethood, and reimagining his Psalms after the style of the Qur'ān. They employed a Jewish and Christian symbol, but they used it for their own internal purposes, and thus revealed how profoundly David and his Psalms – as ideas rather than historical realities – had become the common property of all three traditions. David was for them just one of many imagined heroes in the firmament of Near Eastern piety, a shared cultural resource and a convenient symbol that they could refashion to convey their own religious ideologies.

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