Fluid Boundaries: Christian Sacred Space and Islamic Relics in an Early Ḥadīth

Adam C. Bursi | ORCID 0000-0002-7241-5593
Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands
adambursi@gmail.com

Abstract

This article examines a ḥadīth text that illustrates the complicated interactions between Christian and Islamic sacred spaces in the early period of Islamic rule in the Near East. In this narrative, the Prophet Muḥammad gives a group of Arabs instructions for how to convert a church into a mosque, telling them to use his ablution water for cleansing and repurposing the Christian space for Muslim worship. Contextualizing this narrative in terms of early Muslim-Christian relations, as well as late antique Christian religious texts and practices, my analysis compares this story with Christian traditions regarding the collection and usage of contact relics from holy persons and places. I argue that this story offers an example of early Islamic texts’ engagement with, and adaptation of, Christian literary themes and ritual practices in order to validate early Islamic religious claims.

Keywords

Early Islam – Christian-Muslim relations – churches – mosques – relics – ḥadīth

In his geographical text Aḥsān al-taqāsīm fī maʿrifat al-aqālīm, Shams al-Dīn al-Muqaddasī (d. ca. 380/990) mentions a conversation he had with his uncle about the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. Bemoaning the building’s opulence, al-Muqaddasī complains that its constructor, the caliph al-Walīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 86–96/705–715), had spent “so much of the Muslims’ wealth on the mosque in Damascus,” when that money might have been more responsibly...
spent on “roads, or water troughs, or the restoration of fortresses.” Disagreeing, his uncle responds:

O my little boy, you do not understand! Al-Walid was right and he undertook a worthy project. He saw that Syria was a country of the Christians, and he saw the beautiful churches with their enchanting decorations, renowned far and wide ... So, he built a mosque for the Muslims that would divert their attention from [the churches] and made it one of the wonders of the world.

Al-Muqaddasi’s uncle adds that al-Walid’s father and caliphal predecessor, ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (r. 65–86/685–705), similarly had feared that the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem would “beguile the hearts of the Muslims,” and was thus spurred to build the Dome of the Rock there. Elsewhere, al-Muqaddasi claims that ‘Abd al-Malik also had been motivated to beautify the Aqsā Mosque, “because it was compared with the great Christian church in Jerusalem [i.e., the Church of the Holy Sepulcher], so they made it greater than that.”

The comments of this tenth-century author and his opinionated uncle highlight a reality of the spatial environment within which these Islamic monuments of the Umayyad period were constructed: a Near Eastern landscape dominated by Christian churches and shrines. As this text suggests, authorities in the first centuries of Islamic rule contested this Christian architectural dominance, imposing their presence upon the physical environment in a variety of ways.

However, while praising the Umayyads’ architectural efforts to signal Islamic superiority, al-Muqaddasi betrays the appreciation of – and interactions with – Christian buildings that Muslims exhibited for centuries. Indeed,


2 This included not only the construction of visual symbols of Islamic imperial control – such as the buildings described above – but also the control of the “acoustic environment” in which places of worship participated, exemplified in the forbidding of Christians from sounding the nāqūs and Jews from blowing the shofar, and from raising their voices during services. Milka Levy-Rubin, Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire: From Surrender to Coexistence (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 83, 91, 101–109, 157–161; Mattia Guidetti, In the Shadow of the Church: The Building of Mosques in Early Medieval Syria (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 72; Nancy Khalek, Damascus after the Muslim Conquest: Text and Image in Early Islam (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3–4.
early Muslims not only gazed upon churches and monasteries, but also visited and worshipped within them, engaging tactively with the sacred materials that these buildings contained. Archaeological evidence points to Muslim visitation of the Kathisma Church – located south of Jerusalem and centered upon a stone where the Virgin Mary was believed to have sat – where a miḥrāb has been uncovered, as well as a glass pilgrimage vessel likely used for collecting water hallowed by its contact with the sacred stone. In his Kitāb al-Diyārāt, al-Shābushtī (d. ca. 388/998) describes a similar practice at a monastery near the Sea of Galilee visited by both Christians and Muslims: the monastery contained a stone upon which Jesus sat, and from which “everyone who enters the place breaks off a piece, in order to seek blessing from it.” This and other evidence suggests that early Muslims visited and venerated several such Christian spaces, in many cases collecting material manifestations of these locations’ sacredness.

In this article, I suggest that the kinds of complex interreligious dynamics on view in these early Islamic texts and contexts are reflected also in an unusual ḥadīth in which the Prophet Muḥammad instructs a group of Arabs on how to convert a church into a mosque. This text has most often been read as providing evidence for the presence of Christianity in the Arabian Peninsula in the pre-Islamic period, with its mention of a church (bīʿa) and

5 On this ambiguous term, used in reference to Christian churches and monasteries, and to Jewish synagogues, see: Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, Volume 11, Part 1 (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002), 172; Elizabeth Key Fowden, “The Lamp and the Wine Flask: Early Muslim Interest in Christian Monasticism,” in *Islamic Crosspollinations: Interactions in the Medieval Middle East*, ed. Anna Akasoy, James E. Montgomery, and Peter E. Pormann (Exeter: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2007), 5, 22 n.23, 26 n.85; Guidetti, *In the Shadow of the Church*, 47, 68; E12, s.v. “Kanisāʾ” (G. Troupeau); Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire*, 201 n.59; Campbell, “A Heaven of Wine,” 17. The plural form biʿāʾ occurs at Qurʾān 22:40, and has been variously interpreted as referring there to Christian or Jewish worship spaces. The term biʿāʾ appears to have been adopted into Arabic from Syriac bīṭā (ܒܝܛܬܐ:): Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾān* (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1938), 86–87. I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for bringing this to my attention. The word appears in a Sabaeic inscription dated to 548 CE, where it clearly references a Christian building: Christian Julien Robin, “Ḥimyar, Aksūm, and Arabia Deserta in
a monk (rāhib) residing among the Banû Ḥanīfa tribe in the eastern Arabian region of al-Yamāma. Yet historians of early Islam have remained tight-lipped about (or puzzled by) the largely unprecedented prescription that the Prophet metes out when he tells the Banû Ḥanīfa to destroy their church, to wash it with some water that the Prophet had used to perform ablutions, and then to claim the space as a mosque. The nineteenth-century Orientalist William Muir wrote: "The story appears improbable, because nowhere else is Mahomet represented as exhibiting such antagonism to Christians and their Churches, when they submitted themselves to him." Hesitant to make such a judgement based only on the "sporadic and meagre information" regarding the Prophet’s position on Christian churches, Suliman Bashear wrote that this “isolated” tradition offers “the only 'historical' policy the Prophet is reported to have taken towards churches.” Recently, Mattia Guidetti has laconically commented that the Prophet “reportedly advised the Banu Hanifa to convert (perhaps temporarily) the church of a monk into a mosque” before noting that “practices of conversion in Arabia before and after Muhammad are difficult to ascertain.”

How should we interpret this hadīth and its prescription for making a mosque out of a Christian sacred space? As we will see, reconstructing the history of the Prophet Muḥammad’s – and subsequent Muslim generations’ – encounters with churches and monasteries is difficult, due to the limited and sometimes contradictory literary and material evidence available to us. Yet it appears that the conversion of a church into a mosque would have been a quite

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unusual event with few parallels in either the lifetime of the Prophet or in the following years of conquest outside of the Arabian Peninsula. More common was the continued existence of Christian buildings, sometimes directly next to new Muslim ones: a pattern to which al-Muqaddasi attests.

Rather than violent interaction between early Muslims and Christian space, I suggest that the *ḥadīth* instead testifies to early Islamic narrative engagement with a central conceptual component of late antique Christian sacred space: the presence therein of holy relics. While this *ḥadīth* stands oddly against the historical and legal landscape of early Muslims’ treatment of Christian churches, it fits perfectly within the literary and material environment of late antique Christians’ usage of the relics of holy persons and places. Christians frequently deployed relics in their creation and control of sacred spaces, as these objects “turned the churches into ‘holy places’ housing the saint.”¹⁰ This *ḥadīth* depicts a similar usage of a relic: but here, instead of a Christian martyr’s relic sacralizing a Christian church or monastery, an Islamic mosque is created with a relic of the Prophet Muḥammad, his used ablution water.

I suggest we interpret this *ḥadīth* as a late antique hagiographic text that draws upon Christian signifiers in order to attest to the superiority of Islam over Christianity.¹¹ Viewed from the perspective of the late antique Near East, this story about the Banū Ḥanīfa and the Prophet’s ablution water offers an Islamic spin on (if not parody of) Christian stories and practices involving relics, sacred spaces, and holy men. Adapting Christian topos for an Islamic audience, this *ḥadīth* exemplifies early Muslims’ engagement with the late antique *“koinê* of signs, symbols, and narrative forms.”¹² While scholars have taken note of many of these late antique patterns and archetypes present throughout early Islamic texts, comparatively little note has been made of the presence of the specific late antique discourse of relics in stories of the Prophet Muḥammad and the early Muslim community.¹³ This article draws attention to an example

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of the usage of relics in the hadīth literature, and its likely background in the wider late antique hagiographic milieu.

1  “Destroy Your Church”: Situating an Unusual Early Islamic Report

During the ninth year of the Hijra (630–631 CE) – the so-called “Year of Delegations” (ʿām al-wufūd) – groups from throughout the Arabian Peninsula responded to the call to Islam sounded by the Prophet Muhammad and dispatched representatives to Medina in order to pledge their loyalties to his new Muslim community. One such group was the Banū Ḥanīfa, a tribal group residing in the central-eastern region of al-Yamāma. Narrated by a member of the delegation named Ṭalq b. ʿAlī, the story of the Banū Ḥanīfa runs as follows, with some slight variations between the different textual attestations:

We went as a delegation to the Messenger of God, pledged allegiance to him, and prayed with him. We told him that we had a church in our land, and requested that he give us the leftovers of his ablution water. He called for water, performed ablutions, rinsed out his mouth, and placed [the used water] in a vessel. He said, “Take this with you. When you have reached your country, destroy your church, sprinkle its location with the water, and take [the place] as a mosque” ... When we arrived in our land, we destroyed our church, sprinkled its location [with the water], and took [the place] as a mosque. We then called the adhān in it. The

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15 On the debated definitions of the boundaries of al-Yamāma in Arabic sources, see: Al-Askar, Al-Yamama, 7–13.

monk in those days was a man from [the tribe of] Ṭayyiʿ. When the monk heard the adhān, he said, “A call to truth!” Then he left and was never seen again.17

Like other Arab delegations that made their way to the Prophet in Medina, the Banū Ḥanīfa “pledged allegiance to him and prayed with him” (bāyaʾ-nā-hu wa ṣallaynā maʿa-hu), suggesting their tribe’s ritual acceptance of Islam. In the extended narrative of the Banu Ḥanīfa’s visit found in Muḥammad b. Saʿd’s (d. 230/845) al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā, the delegation reportedly “came to the Messenger of God in the mosque, wished peace upon him, and bore witness to the true creed (shahidū shahādat al-ḥaqq)”: an ambiguous phrasing, seemingly suggesting some form of ideological commitment to Islamic belief.18

However, unlike most of the other Arab delegations, who are generally depicted as polytheistic idolaters, the Banū Ḥanīfa appear to have some connection to Christian practice, suggested here by their mention of a church (bīʿa) located in their land.19 Seemingly as part of their conversion to Islam,
the Prophet gives the Banū Ḥanīfa instructions for repurposing this church as a mosque (masjid), which they dutifully follow: they “destroyed” (kasarnā) the church, sprinkled the space with the water provided by the Prophet, and repurposed it as a new mosque.20 The description here is sparse, without specification of which parts of the building were “destroyed” or what exactly the Prophet’s water was sprinkled upon.21 The clearest expression of the building’s new sectarian orientation comes in auditory form, with the performance in the Banū Ḥanīfa’s new mosque of the Islamic call to prayer, the adhān. This sound dislodges a significant avatar of Christianity from the former church: a monk. Identified in different versions of the report as “the monk of the church,” “our [i.e., the Banū Ḥanīfa’s?] monk,” or simply “the monk,” this unnamed figure


21 Finbarr Barry Flood notes that “destruction’ in medieval Islamic texts could meaningfully refer to transformation of buildings and objects that fell far short of physical obliteration... In some cases, desecration and ritual defilement were considered sufficient to ‘destroy’ religious icons by demonstrating their impotence in the face of such an affront.” Such a conception of “destruction” may also be operative here, as Guidetti argues in regard to a later story of a church’s modification by Muslim authorities. Flood, “Between Cult and Culture: Bamiyan, Islamic Iconoclasm, and the Museum,” Art Bulletin 84.4 (2002): 641–59 at 657; Guidetti, In the Shadow of the Church, 46 n.38.
hears the Islamic call to prayer, declares its veracity, and leaves the space, never to be seen again.22

As noted above, scholars have not made much of this story, aside from noting its apparent indication – with mentions of a church and a monk – that the Banū Ḥanīfa practiced some form of Christianity. Yet it is difficult to fit this narrative into a wider pattern of early Islamic interactions with Christian churches and sacred spaces in the seventh and eighth centuries, the study of which is complicated by the heterogeneous and sometimes contradictory information offered by different historical sources. Based upon the available literary and material evidence, it appears that early Muslim interactions with Christian holy spaces did not follow a single pattern, but that the formative seventh and eighth centuries were characterized by different practices and ideas at different times and places.

Even within this complicated tapestry, however, the story of the destruction of the Banū Ḥanīfa’s church in al-Yamāma stands out as an unusual example of early interactions between Muslims and Christian sacred spaces. To begin with, the story has no clear parallel in Islamic traditions about the life of the Prophet Muḥammad, which more often depict the Prophet pursuing a non-interventionist approach to the Christians encountered by the Muslim community as they gained control over the Arabian Peninsula. The most salient example is the set of favorable terms reportedly offered by the Prophet to the Christians of Najrān. Unlike pagan Arabian communities who entered the Islamic umma, the Christians of Najrān were not required to adopt Islamic ritual practices or to fight alongside the Prophet’s forces.23 Instead, they were promised that “no bishop will be removed from his office, no priest from his priesthood, no monk from his asceticism,” and that the Najrānī Christians “shall not be called to armed combat.”24 Among the stipulations offered by

22 He is identified as “the monk of the church” in: Ibn Saʿd, Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt, 1:274. He is called “our monk” in: Ibn Shabba, Taʾrīkh al-Madīna, 1:601; Abū Nuʿaym, Dalāʾil al-nabūwawa, 1:91. Otherwise, “the monk” appears in the versions cited in note 17 above.


the Prophet, the Najrānīs were guaranteed that their possessions – including their churches (biyaʿ) – would remain within their own ownership and control, under “the protection of God and the security of the Prophet Muḥammad, the Messenger of God” (jiwār Allāh wa-dhimmat Muḥammad al-nabī rasūl Allāh). Shortly after the Prophet’s death, the first caliph Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (r. 11–13/632–634) reportedly dispatched a document reiterating these terms for the Najrānī Christians, including protections for “their priests, their monks, and their churches.”

Notices of such interactions between early Muslims and Christians are recorded not only in Islamic historical and juristic texts, but also in Christian histories and hagiographies depicting this early period. The *Chronicle of Seert* – a tenth- or eleventh-century Arabic compilation offering a history of the (Nestorian) Church of the East – includes a version of the agreement with the Christians of Najrān in which the Prophet guarantees that “I will defend them, their cathedrals, their churches, their houses of prayer, the places of monks, and the residences of anchorites,” that “no priest will be removed from his priesthood, no monk from his asceticism, no anchorite from his hermitage,” and that “no church building will be destroyed, and none of them shall be entered for the purposes of constructing mosques or houses for the Muslims.”


text, a similar agreement is recorded between the Catholicos of the Church of the East Ishoʿyahb II and the caliph ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 13–23/634–644), in which the rights enumerated for the Christians of Iraq echo those that the Prophet had promised to the Najrānīs. While certainly transmitted (and, in some cases, likely produced) with ulterior motives by later Christian chroniclers, these texts suggest that the period of the Prophet Muḥammad and the first caliphs was imagined (whether accurately or not) as a period when Christian buildings were protected by Muslim authorities.

The subsequent two centuries of conquest and occupation outside of the Arabian Peninsula offer a more negative image than that recorded for the period of the Prophet's life, with both Islamic and Christian literary sources depicting a stunting and control of Christian space and practice. While the treaties between Muslim authorities and conquered Near Eastern cities often established protections for churches and monasteries, legal prohibitions (as components of the so-called “Pact of ʿUmar”) developed over the seventh, eighth, and following centuries against Christians repairing their religious structures or constructing new ones. Fiqh texts indicate that, by the early

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eighth century, some Muslim jurists questioned the legality of the continued existence of churches within Muslim-occupied cities.\textsuperscript{31} Indeed, Christian and Muslim sources describe occasional (sometimes successful) attempts at the physical destruction of churches and monasteries by Umayyad and early ʿAbbāsid authorities.\textsuperscript{32} Muslim worship within such Christian spaces was also a point of contention, with several early traditions discouraging the visitation of prominent Christian holy spaces (including the Church of Mary and the Church of the Ascension, both in Jerusalem), while worship within churches is condemned in some Prophetic aḥādīth and early jurists’ opinions.\textsuperscript{33}

In contrast to these indications of Muslim separation from – if not hostility towards – Christian sacred spaces, it is striking how frequently Muslim respect for (and even worship within) Christian sacred spaces appears in literary and material evidence from the seventh and eighth centuries. Based on both the archaeological record and literary texts, not only was the continued Christian usage of churches allowed by Muslim authorities, but (contrary to Islamic legal prohibitions) major renovations and even the construction of new churches occurred throughout Syria, Palestine, Arabia, Egypt, and Iraq long into the eighth century.\textsuperscript{34} The acknowledgement of a sacrality residing within these

\textsuperscript{31} Levy-Rubin, Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire, 64–67, 75–77; Robinson, Empire and Elites, 13.


buildings by early Muslims is suggested by archaeological remains and literary histories that record the construction in several cities of major mosques “often erected near the extant Christian great churches, establishing contiguity between the two houses of worship.” Indeed, *fiqh* texts indicate that many jurists permitted Muslims to pray within Christian churches and that this “was not an uncommon practice all over the area [of the Near East] and throughout the first and early second centuries.” Rather than enacting a violent break with the Christian Near East, early Muslims mapped their own sacred geography on top of – and often in direct relation to – the still-existing Christian one.

We might ask if Muslim reverence for churches led to the buildings’ seizure from Christians, similar to what we find in the story of the Banū Ḥanīfa. The answer seems to be largely negative: while a few examples occurred – most prominently the conversion of the Church of St. John into the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus – literary and archaeological evidence suggests that the purposeful conversion of Christian churches into mosques for Muslim usage was a rare phenomenon during the first several centuries of Islamic rule. A few archaeological sites in the north of modern Jordan have been identified as possible examples of churches being converted into mosques, on the basis

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of architectural changes to the buildings. However, there is little direct evidence to suggest that these developments were tied to early Muslims’ adoption of these churches as mosques, or indicative of wider patterns of Islamic conversion of Christian worship space, in this period.

The story of the Banū Ḥanīfa’s church is thus an outlier with respect to Muslims’ interactions with Christian buildings in the formative seventh and eighth centuries, and especially during the lifetime of the Prophet Muḥammad. The narrative is not consistent with either the literary or historical evidence for Muslims’ treatment of Christian sacred spaces in this early period. What, then, are we to make of this unusual report? As I will argue below, the key to interpreting this story may lie less in the church building itself than in what that the Banū Ḥanīfa carry to it all the way from Medina: the Prophet Muḥammad’s ablution water (ṭahūr). More than just a story about the repurposing of a church, this narrative is about the creation of a mosque through the Prophet Muhammad’s presence there, in the form of fluids from his body.

2 “Sprinkle Its Place with the Water”: Relics and Sacred Space in Late Antiquity

When the Banū Ḥanīfa delegation arrives in Medina, they make an announcement and a request: “We told [the Prophet] that we had a church in our land and requested that he give us the leftovers of his ablution water.” While the delegation’s intentions in seeking the Prophet’s ablution water are nowhere specified, the Banū Ḥanīfa’s pursuit of such water is recognizable within the context of late antique veneration of holy persons and places and the collection from


them of material blessings. Both literary and material evidence provide a wealth of parallels to such activities among late antique communities, who used these materials for a variety of beneficial purposes, including the sanctification of space. Late antique practitioners harnessed these materials’ power, contaminating new places with the blessing of the saintly persons and places from whence they came.

The collection of materials blessed through their contact with holy persons, places, or things is a recurrent trope in saints’ *vitae*, pilgrimage itineraries, and other late antique texts. In these texts, an agent’s (or object’s) touch transmits holy power to materials like water, oil, or dirt, thereby creating sacred matter out of what had been profane material.40 Hagiographies record crowds gathering dust from the footprints and doorposts of living saints, or from their tombs after death;41 tearing off shreds of cloth and other materials that had come


into contact with their (living or dead) bodies; and collecting a variety of other substances from these figures and their associated spaces, even blood and perfumes miraculously exuded by saintly corpses. Pilgrimage itineraries and collections of miracles associated with pilgrimage sites are likewise full of descriptions of visitors collecting stones, soils, liquids, and oils connected with sacred objects and spaces, themselves hallowed by their associations with events and personalities of biblical and post-biblical history.

In addition to such textual descriptions, archeological and material evidence attest to late antique pilgrimage activities that involved the collection of water, oil, or dust that had touched a holy place or relic. Many reliquaries uncovered at churches in northern Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia, and Arabia contain drilled holes, through which water or oil could be poured or dust collected, thus creating a collectable contact relic as these materials touched the relics housed within. Pilgrims to saints’ shrines collected water, oil, and dust...
in special vessels distributed onsite, with the vessels themselves becoming venerated objects in their own right, thanks to their associations with these places and with the cherished materials they carried.46

These materials were widely venerated and used for a variety of purposes. While healing was a common application, such materials were also spread or sprinkled upon spaces in order to provide blessing to locations.47 Pilgrims reportedly installed material blessings over their beds, on the thresholds of their homes, and on their flocks and fields, protecting such places through the sacred material’s presence there.48 The placement of sacred material in a new

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location sometimes endowed that space with a blessedness in its own right, which thereby enabled it to provide new gifts of its own. For example, the seventh-century Coptic Panegyric on Apollo, Archimandrite of the Monastery of Isaac reports that “many healings came to pass” from the water of a cistern in the Monastery of Isaac, after water that Apollo had used to wash himself was poured into it. By coming into contact with Apollo’s used bathwater – a “blessing” through its physical contact with Apollo’s body – the cistern emerged as a site of holy power that provided healings and became a site of pilgrimage in its own right. The blessedness understood to reside within sacred relics, persons, and places could thus be transferred to new spaces and “imbue new locations with … saintly presence.”

By “infecting” their locations with their own holiness, holy persons and objects were able not only to sanctify spaces but – in doing so – also to cleanse these spaces of demonic or unorthodox forces that might be residing within them due to their previous usage by pagans or heretical Christians. For example, the first attested translatio of relics – the movement of the martyr Babylas’ relics to the Antiochene suburb of Daphne in 362 CE – was long remembered for the relics’ banishment of a powerful oracle of the god Apollo from Babylas’ new

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49 Stephen of Heracleopolis Magna, A Panegyric on Apollo, 37 (Coptic), 28 (Eng.).

50 Similar stories about the creation of sources of holy water appear in collections of miracles associated with other saints’ cults: Davis, The Cult of Saint Thecla, 45–46. David Frankfurter writes that such stories “are, to be sure, etiological legends for the reservoirs of holy water and oil kept in monasteries for popular use and to keep present the memories of their heroes”: Frankfurter, “Syncretism and the Holy Man,” 378.


resting space, in what had formerly been an Apolline sanctuary.53 Similarly, the fifth-century translation of the relics of saints Cyrus and John from Alexandria to Menouthis in Egypt was associated with the repulsion of the cult of Isis, as the saints “pushed the demons into flight to Tartarus [i.e., hell]” (ἐπιβάσεως εἰς φυγὴν τὸ δαιμόνιον ἐτρεψαν εἰς τάρταρον).54 When an Arian church in Rome was rededicated to Catholicism in 591 or 592, relics of saints Sebastian and Agatha were installed therein. A series of miracles occurred, including an invisible animal scurrying around the feet of the people in the temple before leaving through the church door, interpreted by the congregants to mean “that the unclean spirit had departed from the building.”55 At a northern Mesopotamian monastery – constructed by the fourth-century saint Mar Yoḥannan the Egyptian in a location that “had formerly been a house of idols and a haven for demons” – demonic squatters continually stoned the monks when they gathered water from the monastery’s spring. Only when Yoḥannan’s coffin was disinterred and deposited beside this spring for several days did the demons cease their abuse, after which the saint’s body was reburied in the monastery’s martyrium so that it might further protect the monastic space.56

53 John Chrysostom, De Sancto Bab.; Socrates, Hist. eccl. 3:18; Sozomen, Hist. eccl. 5:49–50; Gregory of Nazianzus, Contra Jul. 1.25; Theodoret, Hist. eccl. 3:6; Evagrius, Hist. eccl. 1:16. Recalling this story in a hymn in honor of Babylas, Jacob of Edessa (d. 708) notes that “even his dust is formidable to the demons”: E.W. Brooks, James of Edessa: Hymns of Severus of Antioch and Others. Syriac Version Edited and Translated, Po 7,5 (1911): 600 (Hymn 142-11-v1).


While these narratives reflect the ability of relics to sanctify heterodox space in the hagiographic imaginary, one late antique source explicitly prescribes the installation of relics as a component in the transformation of pagan spaces into Christian churches. In a letter recorded in the Venerable Bede's (d. 735 C.E.) *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, Pope Gregory the Great advises a monk named Abbot Mellitus on how to treat pagan temples encountered during his missionary work in England. Rather than destroy them, Pope Gregory instructs Mellitus to turn these pagan temples into Christianity spaces:

> Take holy water and sprinkle it in these shrines, build altars and place relics in them. For if the shrines are well built, it is essential that they should be changed from the worship of devils to the service of the true God.57

Here, holy water, altars, and relics serve to symbolically remove the pagan past and to repurpose these spaces for Christian usage.58 While the “well built” temples are maintained, their religious orientation and purpose is decisively altered by the presence of these Christian objects. As Pope Gregory's prescription for Abbot Mellitus indicates, relics had an important part to play in the ritual creation of Christian space.

Over the course of the fourth through seventh centuries, this sanctifying role of relics became increasingly institutionalized within Christian buildings, as relics came to occupy a central place within Near Eastern Christian sacred spaces, “architecturally and conceptually foundational to the structure of the church.”59 At sixth- and seventh-century churches in Syria, Palestine, Jordan, the Negev, and northern Arabia, reliquaries were frequently installed within the central altar, thus intertwining relics with the most important ritual components of church services (including the gift of the Eucharist); alternatively, secondary altars containing relics within side apses of the church became

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58 The holy water itself may have also been related to relics, as it was common practice to use water poured over bones and other relics as holy water. See: Godefridus J. C. Snoek, *Medieval Piety from Relics to the Eucharist: A Process of Mutual Interaction* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 344–348.

another common architectural feature. The installation of relics in churches and monasteries – often including the relics of a building's deceased monastic founder – appears as a common component in stories about the construction and sacralization of these buildings. Relics were often framed by inscriptions and/or mosaics that “communicated information about the relics in a permanent, place-bound medium,” visually highlighting their presence in these spaces even when the relics themselves were not visible. The widespread evidence for these practices – with the installation of relics named a necessary component of church consecration in several ecclesiastical canons – indicates how the presence of relics had become central to the creation of Christian space in the late antique Near East.

3 “Take It as A Mosque”: Islamic Adaptations of Late Antique Christian Traditions

Keeping this comparative material in mind, we can now reexamine the story of the Banū Ḥanīfa’s church. Though the conversion of a church into a mosque is unusual in the early Islamic landscape, the collection and use of a contact relic

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to sanctify space fits well within the late antique Christian hagiographic and ritual milieu. I suggest that the story of this Christian/Islamic tribe’s utilization of a contact relic from Prophet Muhammad’s body – in this case, water infused with the Prophet’s touch – to transform a church into a mosque offers an early Islamic adaptation of late antique Christian narratives and ritual practices involving relics and sacred spaces.

Much like the believers who treasure the soil from saints’ footsteps or the water that they had used for bathing, the Banū Ḥanīfa request and collect water that had touched the Prophet’s body. While the Banū Ḥanīfa’s intentions for taking the water are unclear – and only the Prophet’s instructions explicitly connect the liquid to the transformation of the church into a mosque – the liquid clearly was understood as a conveyor of some kind of blessing and/or power. Indeed, a distinct emphasis on this water appears in an alternative version of Ṭalq b. ‘Ali’s ḥadīth recorded (to my knowledge) only in the Musnad of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855):

> When the Prophet was bidding us farewell, he ordered me to bring him a waterskin. Three times he sipped from the water and spit it back into the waterskin, then he tied the vessel off. He said, “Take this and sprinkle your people’s mosque, and order them to raise their heads [in prayer], so that God might elevate them.”

Notably, there is no mention here of a church among the Banū Ḥanīfa, but instead the focus is on the water and its role in the sacramentalization of the Banū Ḥanīfa’s mosque. Moreover, rather than the Banū Ḥanīfa requesting the remnants of the Prophet’s ablution water, as in the more commonly attested version of the story, here the Prophet himself takes the initiative in the creation of this powerful liquid: he asks Ṭalq for water, repeatedly sips from and spits back into the waterskin, and hands the container to Ṭalq with specific instructions for sprinkling it in the mosque.

64 Many recent commentators have missed or ignored this corporeal aspect of the report, saying only that the Prophet commands that the church be washed with “water”: EI, s.v. “Masājīd” (J. Pedersen); Bashear, “Qibla Musharriqa,” 274; Guidetti, In the Shadow of the Church, 76. However, it was noted already by Muḥammad Ḥayāt al-Sindī (d. 1163/1750) in his super-commentary on Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī’s (d. 911/1505) commentary on al-Nasāʾī’s Sunan. Al-Sindī’s gloss includes the comment, “This is an example of seeking blessings from the relics of the pious, something which is well-known” (fīhi min al-tabarruk bi-āthār al-ṣāliḥīn mā lā yakhfā): al-Nasāʾī, Sunan, 1:476 (no. 700).

Additional details appear in some versions of the Banū Ḥanīfa report that further illustrate this sacrality of the Prophet’s used ablution water. In several versions, the Banū Ḥanīfa express concern that the ablution water will dry up and evaporate during their long journey homeward, leading the Prophet to assure them that they can add more water to the receptacle on their way, “for it [i.e., the added water] will only increase its goodness” (lā yazīduhu illā tīban).66 The materiality of the holy water – the “goodness” (alternatively, “purity”) of which will “only increase” as ordinary water is added, creating more sacred fluid through contact with the Prophet’s ablution water – brings to mind the inexhaustible essence understood to reside in other late antique relics, which possessed a “[s]acred dynamis [that] was transferable seemingly without limit”67 and was understood to be “miraculously whole despite being constantly broken up into fragments.”68 The indivisible character of the Prophet’s ablution water accords with the sacredness understood to inhabit matter that had touched holy persons in the late antique world.

Acknowledgement of the water’s sacrality is seen also in the Banū Ḥanīfa’s treatment of the water vessel on their journey back to al-Yamāma, as well as after they arrive home. According to several versions, the Banū Ḥanīfa delegates quarreled among themselves over the honor of carrying the water receptacle back to al-Yamāma from Medina, leading the Prophet to appoint turns for them: one day and night for each person. This zeal for contact with the Prophet’s water recalls the trope of Christians clamoring for access to such materials from their own saintly figures. This desire for contact likewise continued after their arrival in al-Yamāma: in a version transmitted by Ibn Saʿd, it is noted that after the water had been sprinkled in the former church space, the water vessel was kept in the possession of one of the delegation members, al-Aqʿas b. Maslama.69 Not unlike the pilgrims who kept their ampullae from
saints’ shrines as cherished objects, al-Aqʿas keeps this vessel that had touched the Prophet as a special memento, and perhaps as an object of power.

The deployment of the Prophet’s ablution water in transforming the Banū Ḥanīfa’s church into a mosque offers some noticeable parallels to the similar usage of Christian relics in the consecration of churches. Just as Pope Gregory advises Mellitus to install relics and sprinkle holy water to turn British pagan shrines into Christian churches, so too the Prophet Muhammad instructs the Banū Ḥanīfa to sprinkle his ablution water upon the location of their church in order to transform it into a mosque. Just as the installations of the relics of Babylas and other saints enabled spaces to be used for orthodox Christian worship, so too the Prophet Muḥammad’s ablution water is sprinkled to create a new worship space for the Banū Ḥanīfa. Like Christian martyrs’ relics, divided and translated to new spaces for the sanctification of new spaces, Muhammad’s ablution water offers a transportable “extension of his authority” (or blessing) to a distant location for the establishment of a new Islamic religious space.70

This narrative about the Prophet Muḥammad’s ablution water sanctifying the church in al-Yamāma likely stands in dialogue with late antique narratives involving similar usages of holy persons’ relics: it offers an “Islamized” account of a relic’s role in the transformation and consecration of a new religious space, a sort of Islamic relic *translatio*.71 While the story draws on late antique literary topoi, it adapts these motifs using Islamic signifiers. For example, it is noteworthy that the sacred material used is water with which the Prophet had performed ablution. The usage of a saint’s bathwater as a source of blessing appears in Christian sources, as we saw above in the story of Archimandrite Apollo. However, the use of the remains of the Prophet’s ṭahūr – water used to perform *wuḍūʿ*, the minor ablution performed before the performance of *ṣalāt* – adds a distinctly Islamic valence to this form of contact relic. Given


the close connection between conceptions and practices of purity, the performance of ritual prayer, and conceptions of community among early Muslims, it seems especially meaningful that water used by the Prophet in creating his own ritual purity is deployed in the creation of a mosque.72

The story also adapts the functions ascribed to relics in another Islamic way: by transforming a space away from Christian usage. In the Christian narratives examined above, relics enabled pagan shrines or heretical churches to be transformed for usage by orthodox Christian denominations. In this story, however, rather than the remains of a Christian saint or holy man turning a formerly pagan space into a Christian church, a relic of the Prophet turns a formerly Christian space into an Islamic mosque. In this narrative, Islam usurps the place of Christianity, in terms of both a religious space and the relic used to create it.

This shifting of late antique topoi in an Islamic direction is clearest in the story’s dénouement. The transformation of the space from Christian to Islamic usage is marked by another distinctly Islamic emblem: the adhān. After the Banū Ḥanīfa inaugurate their new mosque by announcing this Islamic call to prayer within it, a monk who had been affiliated with the church emerges and declares the adhān to be “A call to truth!” (daʿwat ḥaqq).73 A slightly expanded version appears in Ibn Saʿd’s al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā, in which the monk declares the adhān to be “A word of truth and a call to truth!” (kalimat ḥaqq wa-daʿwat ḥaqq).74 Like many other attestation narratives about the Prophet Muhammad found in sīra and ḥadīth texts, the authoritative late antique figure of the monk is deployed to confirm the truth of Islam, here in the form of the “call to truth” of the Islamic call to prayer.75 Notably, the monk here uses language echoing the pronouncement at Qurʾān 13:14 that “The true call is to Him [God]” (la-hu daʿwatu al-ḥaqiqi), further linking the monk’s statement with Islamic religious vocabulary.

After declaring the veracity of the Islamic call to prayer, the monk then flees into the mountains, from whence he was “never seen again.” Rather than converting to Islam as the Banū Ḥanīfa had done – and which monks not infrequently do in other Islamic stories of encounters between monks and early Muslims – this Christian figure leaves the space that he and his faith had

73 See the sources cited in note 17 above.
74 Ibn Saʿd, Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt, 1274.
75 Sizgorich, Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity, 156–161; Rubin, The Eye of the Beholder, 48–52; Garth Fowden and Elizabeth Key Fowden, Studies on Hellenism, Christianity and the Umayyads (Athens: Diffusion de Boccard, 2004), 157, 172.
previously occupied. The monk is seemingly repelled by the presence of the new religious dispensation present in the church.

As discussed above, Christian hagiographies depict saints and their relics casting out pagan gods (understood by Christian authors as demons) from their residences in pagan shrines and temples as part of the repurposing of these spaces for Christian usage. Here, however, instead of removing demonic forces from a formerly pagan shrine in order to repurpose it for Christian usage, a Christian holy man is himself dislodged from a formerly Christian space by the call of Islam. The monk here appears to take the place of the demons repulsed by the power of saints or saintly relics: when he encounters a new religious power that he cannot overcome, he flees. Like the demons who yell in anger or sorrow at the saints that exorcise them, the monk verbally acknowledges his defeat before leaving, never to be seen again.

4 “Never Seen Again”: A Textual Embodiment of Hardening Muslim-Christian Relations?

As I have argued, the hadith about the Banū Ḥanīfa delegation displays a clear engagement with important late antique Christian signifiers, including a church, bodily relic, and monk. In the deployment of these topoi, a seeming rejection of the continuing validity of Christianity appears in the destruction of a Christian space and a Christian holy man by the call of Islam. This trope of pagan gods as demons likewise appears in early Islamic literature: Ibn al-Kalbi, Kitāb al-Aṣnām, 25–26; al-Wāqidī, Kitāb al-Maghāzī, 2:841, 3:873; Ibn Saʿd, Kitāb al-Tabaqāt, 2:135–136; Ibn Abī Shayba, al-Muṣānnaf, 13:403–404 (no. 37935); Johns, “The House of the Prophet,” 94.
of the church and the monk’s flight from the new mosque. In what context might we place the attitude towards Christian spaces and symbols displayed in this ḥadīth?

Situating this ḥadīth’s appearance in space and time, the recorded asānīd suggest that the narrative of the Banū Ḥanīfa delegation began to circulate in Iraq in the second/eighth century. In all versions that include an isnād, the narrative is attributed to Ṭalq b. ‘Ali through a series of Ṭalq’s family members, almost always extending up to Mulāzim b. ‘Amr b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Badr al-Ḥanāfī (d. ca. 190/805–806), a distant relative of Ṭalq b. ‘Ali’s and a ḥadīth transmitter of Yamāmī background resident in Baṣra.78 As illustrated in Figure 1, Mulāzim

78 On Mulāzim b. ‘Amr, see: al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Taʾrīkh, 4/ii:73 (no. 2215); Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Kitāb al-Jarḥ wa-l-taʿdīl, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Yaḥyā al-Muʿallīmī, 9 vols. (Hyderabad:
b. ‘Amr is the “common link” who related this story to several Iraqi hadith transmitters active in the late second/eighth and early third/ninth centuries, including Abū Bakr b. Abī Shayba (d. 235/849), Musaddad b. Musarhad (d. 228/843), and Hannād b. al-Sarī (d. 243/857), among several others.79

Putting aside the difficult question of the authenticity of this “family isnād,” the multiple lines of transmission stemming from Mulāzim b. ‘Amr indicate that this story’s oral and/or written circulation among hadith collectors – and thus its eventual incorporation into the literary corpus – likely occurred in Iraq in the mid to late second/eighth century.80

As Milka Levy-Rubin has argued, “the eighth and ninth centuries appear to have been a period in which the regulations concerning the dhimmīs were the subject of a lively debate.”81 One of the significant issues faced by Muslim jurists as they sought to formalize the rights and privileges of the non-Muslim populations was the status of churches in Muslim-governed territories: while conquest treaties guaranteed the rights of Christians over their buildings, the terms of these agreements were reexamined as the Muslim populations of Near Eastern cities grew over the eighth and ninth centuries, bringing them into closer daily contact with non-Muslims. On the one hand, some jurists argued for the continuing validity of the old agreements. For example, Abū Yūsuf (d. 182/798) proclaimed that “the treaty [ṣulḥ] is as valid as it was in the days of ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, until the Day of Resurrection,” thus forbidding the destruction of churches.82 However, other jurists argued that the newly Muslim


81 Levy-Rubin, Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire, 60–61.

82 Levy-Rubin, Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire, 64, 74; Abū Yūsuf, Kitāb al-Kharāj, 147.
population of a city altered its status from whatever had been agreed upon in the conquest era, and thereby allowed the potential takeover or destruction of its non-Muslim prayer spaces.83

The story of the Banū Ḥanīfa’s church offers a condensed version of these interreligious issues in the form of a Prophetic narrative. Much like the Muslims who were increasingly populating what had previously been Christian-majority cities, the Banū Ḥanīfa’s conversion to Islam calls into question the continued existence of a church in al-Yamāma. Here an explicit answer to what is to be done in such a situation is offered by the Prophet Muḥammad himself: destroy the church and create a mosque in its place. With the quick departure of the remaining Christian inhabitant of the previous church space – the unnamed monk, who was “never seen again” – a clean conversion of previously Christian space is facilitated, enabled by the Prophet’s instructions and (seemingly) by the sanctifying relic he provided.

Despite its potential convenience for Muslim jurists, the Prophet’s prescription for converting the Banū Ḥanīfa’s church into a mosque appears not to have been a commonly used source to handle these issues. The story is infrequently attested in Islamic legal sources: though a rare piece of textual evidence for the Prophet Muḥammad’s interaction with Christian churches, the story largely occurs within biographical and historical texts, rather than in compilations of legal ḥadīth or commentaries thereupon.84 The ḥadīth does, however, appear in a few significant legal compilations of the ninth and tenth centuries. The Muṣannaf of Ibn Abī Shayba includes an abbreviated version of the ḥadīth in a chapter on prayer in churches, alongside several Companions’ and jurists’ sanguine opinions and anecdotes on the acceptability of Islamic prayer in unaltered Christian spaces.85 By contrast, Aḥmad b. Shu‘ayb al-Nasāʾī (d. ca.

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83 Levy-Rubin, Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire, 64–68.
85 Ibn Abī Shayba, al-Muṣannaf, 2:501 (no. 4903). Ibn Abī Shayba’s version is seemingly condensed from the longer narrative to focus on its “legally relevant parts”: Görke, “The Relationship between Maghāzī and Ḥadīth,” 177. See also: Bashear, “Qibla Musharriqa,” 274. On the infrequent citation of the Prophet’s example in comparison to that of Companions and Followers within Ibn Abī Shayba’s text, see: Scott C. Lucas,
303/915) includes the report in a self-contained chapter on “taking churches as mosques” in his al-Sunan al-kubrā and in his canonical Sunnī ḥadīth compilation al-Muṭṭabā (often referred to as his Sunan). Muḥammad b. Ḥibbān (d. 354/965) similarly includes it as the only text in his chapter on “the permissibility of taking a Muslim mosque in the location of churches” in his al-Taqāṣīm wa-l-anwā‘ (also known as Ibn Ḥibbān’s Ṣaḥīh). Though these scholars did include the tradition in their compilations of legal ḥadīth, there is little context or commentary to indicate that it was commonly drawn upon as an important precedent or model for Islamic practice. Notably, Ibn Abī Shayba’s Muṣannaf cites the Ṭalq ḥadīth in a chapter on prayer in churches, but not in a chapter discussing whether or not non-Islamic religious spaces can be destroyed. While al-Nasāʾī’s and Ibn Ḥibbān’s chapter titles suggest the permissibility of seizing churches for Muslim usage, jurists do not appear to have actively utilized the report in making such rulings. Instead of drawing out the ḥadīth’s implications for Muslim commandeering of churches, commentators on al-Nasāʾī’s Sunan largely restrict themselves to explaining the linguistic obscurities in the report. Rather than commenting on the politics of sacred spaces evoked by Ṭalq b. Ṭalq’s story, Ibn Ḥibbān uses the story of the Banū Ḥanīfa’s visit to the Prophet in order to situate


chronologically a different hadith – in which Ṭalq asks the Prophet about an issue relating to ritual purity – and thereby to argue that the Prophet’s position on this issue changed after Ṭalq left Medina to return to al-Yamāma.91 The story of the Prophet’s prescription for converting a church into a mosque, thus, does not appear to have been commonly deployed by early or medieval Muslims to rule on the seizure of churches for the construction of mosques.

While the Banū Ḥanīfa hadith is not often cited within the legal literature, its inclusion in the collections of Ibn Abī Shayba, al-Nasāʾī, and Ibn Ḥibbān suggests that it was perceived to have some utility and/or authenticity. Notably, legal discussions about the continued existence of Christian worship spaces within Muslim territories occurred against the backdrop, especially in the late-eighth and ninth centuries, of both attempted and actual destruction of churches by several caliphs and other authorities.92 This hadith – in which the Prophet Muḥammad seemingly provides sanction for the seizure and conversion of a Christian space – was likely understood as an advantageous citation in these debates about the rules for how to treat Christian inhabitants and buildings within Muslim-controlled lands. That it did not attract more attention, however, may reflect the fact that its prescription for the treatment of non-Islamic religious space was deemed less useful as a consensus emerged among jurists and rulers that such buildings would be allowed to stand.

5 Conclusion: Fluid Boundaries/Bounded by Fluids

The story of the Banū Ḥanīfa’s church offers an Islamic adaptation of late antique Christian topoi regarding holy persons, relics, and the transfer of their sacred touch to new materials and places. Many early Muslims were familiar with such ideas and practices, and both material and literary evidence suggests that early Muslims collected blessed materials from several Christian places and persons. Beyond the Kathisma Church discussed above, a reliquary at Ruṣāfa – where Christian and Muslim worship spaces stood in close proximity in the early eighth century – enabled oil or water to be poured over the bones of Saint Sergius and then collected.93 Based on the iconography on some glass souvenir bottles used for collecting fluids from holy sites in seventh-century

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92 See note 32 above.

Jerusalem, Julian Raby has suggested that these objects were produced for and used by Muslims to collect perfumed fluids at the Dome of the Rock.94 Finbarr Barry Flood has written, “There is no evidence for the manner in which the matter contained in such flasks was consumed by early Muslims, but in light of well-documented Christian practices and the viscosity of many of the materials used to mediate sacrality, it is likely that they were applied both externally and internally.”95

References in literary sources further point to Muslim familiarity with, and likely participation in, rituals involving such sacred materials. In the responsa of the Syrian Orthodox bishop Jacob of Edessa (ordained in 684), Jacob is asked, “Is it right for a priest to give the eucharist or ḥnānā [oil and water mixed with dust from the relics of saints] to Hagarenes [i.e., Muslims] or to pagans possessed by evil spirits ... so that they might be healed?” Jacob replies, “By all means. None should at all hinder anything like this.”96 Likewise in Christian hagiographies of the eighth and ninth centuries, Muslims visit Christian saints to receive blessings and collect blessed materials from them.97 We find here direct engagements – though certainly literary constructs, to lesser or greater degrees – between Muslims and Christians in the usage of holy dust and fluids.

The proximity of these boundaries would widen over time. Something of this expanding gap between Muslim and Christian may be reflected in the ambiguity of the story of the Banū Ḥanīfa’s church/mosque, with its simultaneous acceptance and rejection of Christian space and symbol. The story’s engagement with late antique Christian discourse and ritual practice is illustrative of the continuity with, but difference from, Christian identity that Muslims pursued in the early centuries of Islamic rule in the Near East. Several

Christian signifiers – church, monk, and relic – are drawn upon, illustrating the continuing valence of these Christian symbols in the late antique symbolic koine inherited by early Islam. Yet the story subverts these symbols and redirects them in order to illustrate the supersession of Christianity by Islam. As Guidetti describes early Muslims drawing upon the “aura and sacredness” of Christian architecture in constructing their mosques alongside pre-existing churches, in this story Christian symbols are “not devoured but slowly emptied in order to be transferred into a new Muslim context.” Like the gradual, material transfer of the sanctity of Christian spaces, Muslim storytellers here demonstrate the Islamic narrative and ideological inheritance of Christian symbols, while stripping those symbols of their previous, specifically Christian explanatory power. In this Islamic hagiographic story, a relic can make a church into a mosque, and a monk can deem Islam to be true.

Acknowledgements

The research for this article was partially funded and carried out through the ERC Consolidator Grant project “The Senses of Islam: A Cultural History of Perception in the Muslim World” (project no. 724951). Versions were presented to audiences at the 2015 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Atlanta and the 2016 Annual Meeting of the American Oriental Society in Boston. I am especially grateful to Eyad Abuali, Ross Brann, Arash Ghajarjazi, Kim Haines-Eitzen, Christian Lange, Simon Leese, David Powers, and the anonymous reviewers for reading and commenting upon previous drafts. All errors are my own.

98 Sizgorich, Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity, 13, 144–149.
99 Supersession of Christianity is an even stronger theme in an Ottoman-period myth with interesting parallels to the story examined here. According this myth, Byzantines in the seventh century used mortar that contained the Prophet’s saliva, sand from Mecca, and Zamzam water in order to repair the dome of the Hagia Sophia. Patrick Franke notes that the story “demonstrate[s] that Aya Sofya was not a pure Christian building, but one which was already Islamized at the time of Muhammad by his saliva, which here functions as a symbolic carrier of sacred energy.” On this story, see: Gülru Necipoğlu, “The Life of an Imperial Monument: Hagia Sophia after Byzantium,” in Hagia Sophia from the Age of Justinian to the Present, ed. Robert Mark and Ahmet Ş. Çakmak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 203; Patrick Franke, “Khidr in Istanbul: Observations on the Symbolic Construction of Sacred Spaces in Traditional Islam,” in On Archaeology of Sainthood and Local Spirituality in Islam: Past and Present Crossroads of Events and Ideas, ed. Georg Stauth (Bielefeld: Transcript; Piscataway, NJ: Transaction, 2004), 42–44.