
The Many Deaths of the Last ‘Abbāsīd Caliph

*al-Musta‘šim bi-llāh (d. 1258)*¹



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Abstract

The death of the last ‘Abbāsīd Caliph al-Musta‘šim bi-llāh (d. 1258) has been the object of contradictory historical accounts by medieval historians both in the East and the West. Was he put to death by starvation? Did he have melted gold poured down his throat? Was he executed by Hülegü’s own hands, or even by a Georgian Prince? Was he rolled in a carpet and kicked to death, hanged, or strangled? Writers of the period offer colourful portrayals of this event. Some saw it as martyrdom, others as a humiliating death preceded by moral admonishment and blame by Hülegü. Building upon earlier studies, this article offers a comprehensive view of the extant sources on the topic produced both in the Abode of Islam and Western Europe, as well as in Armenia and Georgia. Rather than seeking the “facts” behind the accounts, this article adopts a literary-critical and socio-political approach, arguing that the accounts are replete with symbolism targeting their specific audiences, and that the choices made by the historians on the manner of the Caliph’s death were meant to offer commentary on—and evaluation of—‘Abbāsīd rule.

Introduction

In his *Mu‘jam al-Buldān*, Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 1229) recalls a story about the foundation of Baghdad as the new capital of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate. Abū Sahl ibn Nawbakht (fl. *circa* 770–809) narrated that when Caliph al-Manšūr (d. 775) wanted to build Baghdad, he ordered him to consult the stars. As he did, Abū Sahl grew enthusiastic; the stars were unequivocal: Baghdad would have a long and prosperous life as a city, and its edifices would be numerous. Abū Sahl decrypted another omen, which he offered to give to the

¹This title is in direct dialogue with E. J. Amster’s *Medicine and the Saints: Science, Islam, and the Colonial Encounter in Morocco, 1877–1956* (Austin, 2013), in particular her first chapter entitled ‘The Many Deaths of Dr Emile Mauchamp: Contested Sovereignties and Body Politics at the Court of the Sultans, 1877–1912’. I thank Professor Paul Heck at Georgetown University for introducing this book to me. I also wish to thank my former colleague at Cardiff University, Dr Maria Fragoulaki, Lecturer in Ancient Greek History, for her conversations and interest in an earlier version of this article when it was presented at Cardiff University’s School of History, Archaeology and Religion in April 2018. Last but not least, I would like to extend my gratitude to several of my colleagues at New College of Florida who have read and discussed this article with me, in particular Carrie Benes, Professor of Medieval History and Renaissance Studies, as well as David Rohrbacher, Professor of Classics.

Caliph, assuring that it would no doubt please him: “The stars indicate that no Caliph would ever die in Baghdad a natural death”.² To this piece of news al-Manşūr smiled and said “al-ḥamdu-lillāh” (thank God). The omen given by Abū Sahl proved true, as most ‘Abbāsīd Caliphs who died a natural death did so outside of Baghdad. Al-Manşūr died in the Ḥijāz on his way to Mecca in 775, al-Mahdī in Māsabadhān on a hunting trip in 785, Harūn al-Rashīd in Ṭūs in 809, al-Ma‘mūn near Ṭarsūs (Cilicia) in 833, al-Mu‘taşim in Samarra in 842, and the list goes on. There are two exceptions to this list: the famous and violent death of al-Amīn (d. 813) in the civil war with his brother al-Ma‘mūn (d. 812–3) in Baghdad, and al-Musta‘şim who was killed by the Mongols in Baghdad in 1258: both were assassinated.

Al-Musta‘şim died multiple deaths at the hands of the Mongols. There is wide disagreement among the historians of the time on the method used by the Mongols to end his life. According to historical chronicles of the period, he was starved to death, had melted gold poured down his throat, was killed by Hülegü’s own hands, rolled in a carpet and kicked, or even hanged or strangled. What to do with such a diversity of accounts?

Modern scholarship (especially surveys of the late ‘Abbāsīd period) has mostly dealt with this variety of explanations in two ways: either by acknowledging the existence of contradictory accounts without a full-fledged analysis of these differences and their root causes, or by adopting a certain view deemed more plausible while dismissing other accounts. Hence, the idea that the Caliph was rolled in a carpet and kicked to death is often interpreted by modern historians as the “most likely story”.³ Another more circumscribed approach was undertaken by scholars Guy Le Strange in 1900 and John Andrew Boyle in 1961, the first being an ‘Abbāsīd specialist and the second a specialist of Iran under the Mongols.⁴ Their articles on this topic sought to reconcile the various accounts and to look for possible explanations for contradictions in the circulation of oral and written sources at the time. This can be seen in the fact that Le Strange interprets the mention of the starvation episode by the late Mamlūk historian of the fourteenth century, Ibn al-Furāt (d. 1405), as confirming the

²The Arabic expression for natural death is “*māta ḥatfa anfihī*”, literally meaning “he died a death of his nose”, i.e. that his soul left his body from his nose. The Arabs used to think that a person who died a natural death, without being hit or killed, would see his soul leaving the body through his nose. To the contrary, a person who was killed would see their soul leave their body through the organ or body part that was hurt.

³The following is a non-exhaustive list of the scholarship taking this approach: D. Morgan, *The Mongols* (Oxford, 1986), p. 133; J. A. Boyle, ‘Dynastic and Political History of the Il-Khāns’, *The Cambridge History of Iran* (Cambridge, 1968), vol. 5, p. 349; H. Gilli-Elewy, *Bagdad nach Dem Sturz des Kalifats* (Berlin, 2000), pp. 30–31; H. Gilli-Elewy, ‘*Al-Ḥawādith al-Gāmi‘a: A Contemporary Account of the Mongol Conquest of Baghdad 656/1258*’, *Arabica* 58 (2011), p. 366; S. Heidemann, *Das Aleppiner Kalifat (A.D. 1261): Vom Ende des Kalifates in Bagdad uber Aleppo zu den Restaurationen im Kairo* (Leiden/New York, 1994), pp. 48–49; H. Kennedy, ‘The Caliphate’, in Y. M. Choueiri (ed.), *A Companion to the History of the Middle East* (Oxford, 2005), p. 66; M. H. Syed (ed.), *A Concise History of Islam* (New Delhi, 2011), p. 56; H. Kennedy, *The Caliphate: The History of an Idea* (New York, 2016), pp. 159–160; P. Jackson, *The Mongols and the Islamic World: From Conquest to Conversion* (New Haven/London, 2017), p. 129; S. John and N. Morton (eds.), *Crusading and Warfare in the Middle Ages* (Surrey, 2014), pp. 208–209; W. W. Fitzhugh, M. Rossabi and W. Honeychurch (eds.), *Genghis Khan and the Mongol Empire* (Santa Barbara, 2009), p. 166; J. Weatherford, *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* (New York, 2004), p. 184.

⁴G. Le Strange, ‘The Story of the Death of the Last Abbasid Caliph, from the Vatican MS. of Ibn al-Furāt’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (April 1900), pp. 293–300; J. A. Boyle, ‘The Death of the last ‘Abbasid Caliph: A Contemporary Muslim Account’, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 6 (Autumn 1961), pp. 145–161. Other studies have been published analysing a single account of the fall of Baghdad: G. M. Wickens, ‘Naşir al-Dīn al-Tūsī on the Fall of Baghdad: A Further Study’, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 7 (Autumn 1962), pp. 23–35; and Gilli-Elewy, ‘*Al-Ḥawādith al-Jāmi‘a*’.

veracity of this story found in the Western accounts. I will return to this point in a later section. Boyle's article criticises certain conclusions drawn by Le Strange, in particular on Ibn al-Furāt's text, and introduces a translation of an account of this death found in 'Aṭā Malik Juwaynī's (d. 1283) *Tārīkh Jahān Gushā*. This important account has been attributed to Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274),⁵ an Imāmī-Shī'ī scholar and astronomer, eyewitness of the invasion, and it too will be examined later on in this article.

Since the publication of Boyle's article, which built upon and addressed the findings of Le Strange, there has been no systematic analysis of this topic. This is the case despite the fact that the field of Islamic historiography has expanded in significant ways since the 1960s. New directions first developed in the 1950s and 1960s, challenging existing traditional approaches to historical narratives. These were led by Franz Rosenthal,⁶ Gustave E. von Grunebaum⁷ and Abdel-Aziz al-Duri⁸ (to name a few of the scholars involved); they emphasised the need to view early and pre-modern texts in a critical manner, not as mere narrations of past events as these occurred, but rather as socially embedded texts with multi-layered meanings and purposes. Their work in turn was followed by other critical studies, including those in Albrecht Noth and Lawrence I. Conrad's *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: a Source-Critical Study* (1973),⁹ as well as more 'Abbāsīd-focused works by Marilyn Robinson Waldman, Julie Scott Meisami, Tayeb El-Hibri, Andrew Peacock, Konrad Hirschler and Matthias Vogt, among others.¹⁰ Their writings looked at meanings and codes in the medieval texts, often relying on a set of *topoi*¹¹ familiar to the targeted audiences of time. In comparison with Islamic historiography, Western historiographical studies on the use of classical rhetoric and *topoi* in medieval texts have been longer established; collectively, they have offered some common ground theory with which to examine and interpret medieval historical writing across traditions.¹²

⁵On this account, see also Wickens, 'Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī on the Fall of Baghdad'.

⁶F. Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden, 1952).

⁷It was in the 1940s that the first idea of literary leitmotifs pervasive in the early Islamic historical narratives was put forth by G. E. von Grunebaum in his *Medieval Islam: A Study in Cultural Orientation* (Chicago, 1946). While he did not use the concept of "leitmotif", von Grunebaum established that certain themes were more common than others in the narratives.

⁸A. A. al-Duri, *The Rise of Historical Writing Among the Arabs* (Princeton, N.J., 1983). His work had a strong impact on several later works, including T. Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge, 1994); C. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge, 2003); and M. Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography* (Cambridge, 2008). In 1997, Chase Robinson published a report summarising some of the main developments in the field: C. F. Robinson, 'The Study of Muslim Historiography: A Progress Report', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 7, 2 (July 1997), pp. 199–227.

⁹A. Noth and L. I. Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study* (Princeton, N.J., 1994). See also A. M. Schimmel, *The Mystery of Numbers* (New York, 1993); and F. M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton, N.J., 1998).

¹⁰M. R. Waldman, *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative* (Columbus, 1980); J. S. Meisami, *Persian Historiography To the End of the Twelfth Century* (Edinburgh, 1999); T. El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography: Harun al-Rashid and the Narrative of the Abbasid Caliphate* (Cambridge, 1999); A. C. S. Peacock, *Medieval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy* (New York, 2007); K. Hirschler, *Medieval Arabic Historiography: Authors as Actors* (New York, 2006); M. Vogt, *Figures de Califes entre Histoire et Fiction* (Paris, 2006), among others.

¹¹A *topos* (pl. *topoi*) is defined as "a narrative motif which has as its primary function the specification of content, and aims to elaborate matters of fact. Its scope is thus very narrow, and it is normally bound to description of a specific situation, definition of a brief moment, or characterization of a person". See Noth and Conrad, *The Arabic Historical Tradition*, p. 109.

¹²One example is the work of Ruth Morse, who highlights that while the modern reader studies history to learn about facts and seek "the truth", in the medieval world history was read as it provided examples of virtue and

The present article, building on these approaches, proposes the importance of re-examining the plethora of accounts produced in the medieval East and West through a literary and socio-political analysis. Rather than an attempt to uncover what happened (which has been the focus of the earlier studies mentioned), it examines *how* and *why* the medieval historians portrayed the Caliph's death in the ways that they did, and what messages they sought to convey to their targeted audiences through their descriptions. This article's argument, therefore, is two-fold: on the one hand, it argues and demonstrates that the accounts of the death of the Caliph are imbued with symbolism and literary *topoi*;¹³ on the other hand, it argues that these literary details were conscious choices made by historians who sought to offer an assessment on the 'Abbāsid Caliphate and its legacy. More than the death of a mere ruler, this event was viewed as marking the end of a long-standing dynasty by these historians, one with which their rulers had often interacted, and about which they had a particular opinion. The description of al-Musta'ṣim's death thus offered them an opportunity to delve into matters of legitimate sovereignty and rulership, and to depict the 'Abbāsid Caliph either as a *fāsid* (corrupt) political leader or as *ṣāliḥ* (competent).

Before examining the various accounts on the murder of al-Musta'ṣim, a few words are required regarding the significance of deaths in both the Islamic and Western traditions of historical writing.

Royal death: a mirror into a ruler's life

Deaths in general were a favoured occasion for amplification. The deaths of monarchs were a natural opportunity for historians to expatiate upon common experience, as well as to reflect upon reigns, even characters. [...] Even Homer's *Iliad* sometimes seems too well provided with descriptions of exactly how men died [...].¹⁴

In both the Islamic and the Western traditions of historical writing, death—and specifically the death of a royal figure—was understood as reflecting upon the person's life, their sins or their high morals. People met the end they deserved. In this perspective, medieval historians paid significant attention to the description of death scenes: after all, the last moments of a ruler—whether pitiful or grandiose—informed the reader about the ruler's character, lifestyle and legitimacy.

Turning to the Islamic tradition first—which is itself inspired by Sasanian and Greek traditions—historical narratives of the medieval period demonstrate a salient interest in describing the way in which notorious men died. The medieval narratives are replete with lengthy and vivid death descriptions imbued with commentary and didacticism for the audiences of the time. One of the main historians of the classical period, al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), is the foremost example of this tendency: his milestone production, *Tārīkh al-Rusūl wa al-Mulūk* (*History of*

taught people how to live the good life. See R. Morse, *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages: Rhetoric, Representation and Reality* (Cambridge, 1991).

¹³These *topoi* will be identified and explained for each account in light of the particular tradition of historical writing to which they belonged.

¹⁴Morse, *Truth and Convention*, pp. 118–119. For discussions on death scenes and their meanings in Arabic and Persian historical writing, see, among others, Noth and Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition*; Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*; El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography*; and Meisami, *Persian Historiography*.

Prophets and Kings)¹⁵ abounds with colourful death scenes, often entailing either implicit or explicit commentary. The deaths of Caliphs are a case in point: these events received a great deal of attention by medieval writers. They represented, in the words of Tayeb El-Hibri, “a favourite terrain for the chroniclers to critique the Caliphs”.¹⁶

The murders of Caliph ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān (d. 656)¹⁷ and Caliph ‘Alī are significant examples: both murders have been treated with variations by medieval Muslim writers, serving as the basis for commentary on the nature of their political rule and leadership. In the case of the murder of ‘Uthmān, al-Ṭabarī juxtaposes the account of Sayf b. ‘Umar (d. *circa* 796) and Muḥammad b. ‘Umar al-Wāqidi (d. 823), the first describing the early community as a pious group, while the second emphasised the injustices committed by ‘Uthmān. As Heather Keaney notes, “an author’s interpretive and literary construction is most easily detected through focusing on particularly contentious events”, such as the murder of a Caliph deemed illegitimate.¹⁸

Another example from a later period is the various portrayals of the death of Sultan Baybars in 1277:¹⁹ while some medieval writers described him as having been poisoned (by attempting to poison an enemy and mixing the cups),²⁰ others said that he died from over drinking *qumz* (an alcoholic drink favoured by the Mamlūks), or even that the cause of death was an arrow stuck in his thigh after a battle against the Mongols. The role played by rulers was all the more important since the Islamic tradition emphasised the role of individuals and their behaviours in the state’s prosperity or downfall.²¹

The medieval Western tradition of historical writing, itself based on the ancient Greek and Roman traditions, shares this fascination for death as a topic of writing. At the time of the Roman Republic, there was an impressive range of execution methods, based on the identity and social status of the person as well as the severity of his/her crime. While some offenders were thrown from the Tarpeian Rock, others were eaten by wild animals in an arena in front of cheering crowds. Vivid and lively descriptions of these deaths were common, testifying to the centrality of the concept of punishment. Punishment, as the Roman philosopher and advisor of Emperor Nero, Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4 BCE–65 CE) explained, fulfilled three purposes: retribution, deterrence and prevention.²² Political rulers were often described as having had either a grandiose death or a humiliating one, based on their previous actions. The later work by Lactantius (d. *circa* 325) *De Mortibus Persecutorum* (*On the Deaths of the Persecutors*) is a very significant example of this phenomenon. The

¹⁵Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusūl wa’l-Mulūk*, (ed.) M. J. de Goeje et al. (Leiden, 1879–1901; reprinted Leiden, 1964).

¹⁶El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography*, p. 112.

¹⁷On this particular death and its colourful descriptions, see H. Keaney, ‘Confronting the Caliph: ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān in Three ‘Abbasid Chronicles’, *Studia Islamica* 1 (2011), pp. 25–48, and the book by the same author *Medieval Islamic Historiography: Remembering Rebellion* (Abingdon, 2013); M. Hinds, ‘The Murder of the Caliph Uthmān’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 3, 4 (October 1972), pp. 450–469.

¹⁸Keaney, ‘Confronting the Caliph’, p. 26.

¹⁹See A. A. Elbendary, ‘The Sultan, The Tyrant, and The Hero: Changing Medieval Perceptions of al-Zāhir Baybars’, *Mamluk Studies Review* 5 (2001), pp. 141–157.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 150.

²¹On this, see the early (but still very relevant) analyses in F. Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden, 1952) and G. E. von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam* (Chicago, 1946).

²²Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *De Clementia*, vol. 1, XX–XXII; for a recent English translation, see B. Susanna, *Seneca: De Clementia* (Oxford, 2011).

work describes the deaths of the persecutors of Christians including Nero, Domitian, Decius, Galerius or Maximinus. The deaths are described as punishments from God, with heavy moralising in each anecdote told.

According to the classical Greek writers Thucydides, Herodotus, Isocrates and Polybius (among others),²³ rulers who brought about the fall of their own state often suffered the consequences through the fashion of their death. Greek authors highlighted the presence of a pattern of moral decline in which “hubris” (extreme and foolish overconfidence) brought about “nemesis” (downfall). Once a ruler had been in power for some time, he developed arrogance, impiety and greed, which led to his downfall. He would be replaced by another ruler who initially showed ethical qualities and behaviour, but once comforted in his power, the pattern would ensue all the same, according to the rules of the *metabolē* theory.²⁴

In depicting the death of a royal figure, both Islamic and Western medieval historical narratives relied heavily on symbols, and more precisely *topoi*. Death was a common occasion for deploying *topoi*, which added a layer of meaning to the stories by referring to previous examples in an implicit manner only understandable to the literate reader, be they a member of the court or the learned elite. Since these traditions of writing relied on a similar set of tools, it is all the more important to analyse their productions in dialogue, through multiple descriptions of the same event. The death of Caliph al-Musta‘*ṣim* is a case which, I argue, can only be understood when putting these accounts in dialogue, examining both Eastern accounts produced in the Arab and Persian lands, as well as Armenian, Georgian, and West-European accounts. Political relations between, on the one hand, the Mongols, the Armenians, the Georgians, Western Europe and, on the other hand, the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate, loomed heavily over these compositions. The context of the crusades, as we shall see, was an important factor dictating how medieval authors described the Caliph’s death.

Let us now turn to the analysis of the multiple deaths that al-Musta‘*ṣim* received according to the various extant sources: West-European, Armenian, Georgian, Persian/Mongol and Arabic.

Death by starvation: the ultimate punishment for a corrupt leader

A large number of West-European and Armenian sources state that al-Musta‘*ṣim* died of starvation at the hands of the Mongol ruler Hülegü Khān. Their story seems to find roots in the account attributed to Naṣīr al-Dīn Al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274), the Persian philosopher, astrologer, and Imāmī-Shī‘ī scholar of renown who joined the Mongols when they captured the castle of Alamut in 1256.²⁵ His account can be found in an appendix at the end of ‘Aṭā Malik Juwaynī’s (d. 1283) *Tārīkh Jahān Gushā* (*The History of the World Conqueror*)²⁶ composed in

²³On this topic see J. de Romilly, *The Rise and Fall of States according to Greek Authors* (Michigan, 1991).

²⁴On human agency and its role in the downfall of states according to both Greek and Islamic traditions, see G. W. Trompf, *The Idea of Historical Recurrence in Western Thought: From Antiquity to the Reformation* (Berkeley, 1992), pp. 106–107; Meisami, *Persian Historiography*, p. 285. On the *metabolē* theory, Trompf explains: “the causes of erosion usually lay with the rulers. It was they who turned an order of lawfulness and political responsibility into a regime of injustice, lawlessness, and depravity”. See Trompf, *The Idea of Historical Recurrence in Western Thought*, p. 107.

²⁵For more details on the authorship and attempts to identify the work’s author, see Wickens, ‘Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī on the Fall of Baghdad’, pp. 23–31.

²⁶Juwaynī’s *History* ends abruptly without describing the fall of Baghdad in 1258. There are many possible reasons that could explain why Juwaynī might have wished to avoid writing on the topic, notably the fact that his patrons and commissioners of his work were the murderers.

Persian. The account has been dated between 1258 and 1265 by G. M. Wickens, based on a terminology analysis of the account and the titles attributed to Hülegü. Al-Ṭūsī's account has been considered significant because of his eyewitness status.

Not only did al-Ṭūsī accompany the Mongols to Baghdad when they conquered the city, but he is also said to have advised them about killing the Caliph. As a leading astrologist, the Mongols consulted him to know whether a catastrophe would ensue if they put the Caliph to death. The Mongols' main concern was their superstition that royal blood should not be shed nor touch the ground. The Persian and Arabic sources of the period unequivocally mention al-Ṭūsī as the figure who reassured the Mongols on the idea of killing the Caliph: he confirmed that no catastrophe would ensue, just as was the case when previous Caliphs had been killed. Now turning to al-Ṭūsī's account, it is the first to mention an episode during which the Caliph, after being captured by the Mongols, was locked in his palace and given nothing to eat except gold:

Then he [Hülegü] went to examine the Caliph's residence and walked in every direction. The Caliph was fetched and ordered presents to be offered. Whatever he brought, the King at once distributed amongst his suite and the emirs, military leaders and [all] those present. He set a golden tray before the Caliph and said: "Eat". "It is not edible", said the Caliph. "Then why did you keep it", asked the King, "and not give it to the soldiers? And why did you not make these iron doors into arrow-heads and come to the bank of the river so that I might not have been able to cross it?" "Such was God's will", replied the Caliph. "What will befall thee", said the King, "is also God's will".²⁷

Al-Ṭūsī does not indicate, however, that the Caliph was starved to death: "On the fourteenth of Ṣafar (...) the Caliph met his end in that village together with his middle son".²⁸ No further details are added, leaving to the reader's imagination the fashion in which the Caliph was killed. Among the earliest accounts on the death of the Caliph, the starvation episode is absent. It is not to be found in the work of Minhāj-i Sirāj al-Jūzjānī (b. *circa* 1193),²⁹ Ibn al-Sā'ī (d. 1276),³⁰ Ibn al-Fuwaṭī (d. 1323),³¹ or the late Ayyūbid chroniclers.

The story is present in two categories of later writings: Ilkhānid (Mongol) accounts (Rashīd al-Dīn³² and Waṣṣāf³³ in particular³⁴) on the one hand, and European and

²⁷The original Persian appendix is in Juwaynī, *Tārīkh-i Jahān-Gushā*, (ed.) A.G. Qazvīnī (Tehran, 1963); English translation in Boyle, 'The Death', p. 159.

²⁸Boyle, 'The Death,' p. 160.

²⁹Al-Jūzjānī's account is to be found in his work *Ṭabaqāt-i-Nāṣirī*, (ed. and trans.) Major H. G. Raverty, (Oriental Books Reprint Collection, 1970), vol. II, pp. 1228–1261.

³⁰Ibn al-Sā'ī, *Tārīkh al-Khulafā' al-'Abbāsīyyīn* (Cairo, 1993), pp. 159–160.

³¹See, in particular, the analysis and translation of Ibn al-Fuwaṭī's description of the capture of Baghdad by Hülegü's troops and the murder of the Caliph in Gilli-Elewy, 'Al-Ḥawādīth al-Gāmi'a'.

³²Rashīd al-Dīn (d. 1318) mentions the starvation story but later explains that on the 14th of the month of Ṣafar, the Caliph was put to death in the village of Waqf, along with his eldest son and a few eunuchs. See Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh (Compendium of Histories)*, (ed.) Etienne Quatremère (Paris, 1836), p. 304.

³³Waṣṣāf (d. 1329) does explicitly mention that the Caliph was rolled in a carpet and trampled to death. See *Geschichte Wassafs*, (ed. in Persian and trans. from German) Josef von Hammer-Purgstall (Vienna, 1856), vol. 1, pp. 68–75.

³⁴The account of Ibn al-'Ibrī (or Barhebraeus, d. 1286) also mentions the episode; this account is very close to al-Ṭūsī's account in terms of structure and content. See the translation of this account by Wickens in the appendix of his article 'Naṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī on the Fall of Baghdad', pp. 32–35. Ibn al-'Ibrī mentions that the Caliph was eventually put to death along with his middle son and six eunuchs, while the eldest son was put to death at the

Armenian accounts on the other. In the European and Armenian accounts, the story shows an interesting trajectory: not only is it amplified, with the addition of details not found in al-Ṭūsī's work, but the Caliph is made to die by starvation in many of these sources, as a punishment for his greed. This trajectory of the accounts is critical and calls for our attention: why did these European and Armenian sources decide on this death type? What value did it bring to the stories they were crafting?

The first account is one that amplifies the starvation episode, while still explaining that the Caliph died by being kicked. It is to be found in the *History of the Nation of the Archers*,³⁵ by the Armenian Christian cleric Gregory of Akner (d. 1335), also known as Grigor of Akanc.³⁶ Gregory of Akner relied on the Armenian cleric Johannes Vanakan, who worked for the Mongols along with Kirakos, his student. His account differs from al-Ṭūsī's on three levels: the addition of details pertaining to the Georgian and Armenian contingent in Hülegü's army, elements added to the starvation story, and changes to the conversation between Hülegü and the Caliph.

We are told by Akner that the Caliph was thrown into captivity for "three days", with neither "bread nor water", before the conversation with Hülegü took place. This reference to a three-day fast, absent from previous accounts, is a Christian *topos* meant for his Christian audience. It is only after these three days of captivity without food that the Caliph is ordered to be "given to the feet of [Hülegü's] troops, and thus [they] slay the Caliph of the Arabs".³⁷ As a Christian cleric, Akner relied on themes and symbols that were meaningful to him and his targeted audiences. Another example of such a symbol is the fact that the Caliph is described as begging for "bread, meat and wine" when exchanging his first words with Hülegü after the three-day captivity. These details—absent from al-Ṭūsī's account—are highly symbolical for his Christian audience. Another critical element in Akner's account is the emphasis that he placed on gold. The account is built around the importance of this metal, found everywhere in the city: "countless gold and silver" was taken by the Mongols, while red gold is what is given to the Caliph as food:

Hulawu said: "this is gold, eat so thy hunger and thirst shall pass and thou shalt be assuaged". The Caliph retorted: "Man is not saved by gold, but by bread, meat, and wine". Hulawu said to the Caliph: "Since thou knowest that man is not saved by gold, but by bread, meat and wine, why didst thou not send so much gold to me? Then I would not have come to plunder the city and seize thee. But thou, without care for thyself, satest eating and drinking". Then Hulawu ordered him given to the feet of his troops, and thus to slay the Caliph of the Arabs. The Tatars returned with much treasure and plunder to the eastern country.³⁸

An important element in Akner's account is the focus on gold. The Mongol (Persian) and Western accounts share this focus. The modern reader might ask: why did it matter and why

Kalwādh Gate. The story is also absent from the Mamlūk accounts, with the notable exception of the work of Ibn al-Furāt, which will be dealt with in a later section of this article.

³⁵R. P. Blake and R. N. Frye, 'History of the Nation of the Archers (The Mongols) by Grigor of Akanc, Hitherto Ascribed to Marak'ia The Monk: The Armenian Text Edited with an English Translation and Notes', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 12, No. 3/4 (Dec., 1949), pp. 269–399. The translated passage is on p. 335.

³⁶See also the translation and analyses in George Lane, *Genghis Khan and Mongol Rule* (London, 2004), p. 178.

³⁷Blake and Frye, 'History of the Nation of the Archers', p. 335.

³⁸*Ibid.*

is gold emphasised so strongly in these accounts? In ancient Greek traditions of historical writing, gold was associated with the portrayal of—or rather stereotypes around—Asian rulers. In the *Histories* of Herodotus for instance, Croesus the King of Lydia (corresponding to Asia Minor, i.e. modern Turkey) was described as possessing enormous amounts of gold. A story recalls that Croesus once showed his treasure to the Athenian statesman Solon who was paying him a visit. After displaying all his gold and artworks, Croesus asked Solon who the happiest man in the world was, expecting Solon to reply that it was surely him. Solon replied however that it was Tellus, an Athenian who had raised a family and fought and died for his country. When asking who the second happiest man was, Croesus was rebuked again with a negative answer. The style and moralising content of the story bears a high resemblance to the accounts on al-Mustaʿsim's humiliation before his execution. Just like al-Mustaʿsim, Croesus demonstrated misplaced confidence in his wealth, thinking it would allow him to defeat Persia. Eventually, he was defeated by the King of Persia and died humiliated and having lost his empire. His wealth was proverbial: “as rich as Croesus” one says. While these ancient Greek stories may seem far away to our modern critical eye, it is important to note that medieval writers relied on a repertoire of these symbolic stories and *topoi* in their writings. The ending line referring to the Caliph of the Arabs does confirm the idea that this text would have been written to cater to a Christian audience, one that viewed the ‘Abbāsid Caliphate negatively.

In later European accounts, the starvation episode becomes the *actual cause* of death of the Caliph who is made to die from hunger, surrounded by gold and treasures. This development, I would argue, is not linked to a lack of information around the event, or a confusion about the source material. It was a deliberate choice on the part of the writers to highlight a certain view of al-Mustaʿsim and the ‘Abbāsid Caliphate. The Venetian explorer Marco Polo (d. 1324) was the first writer to mention the Caliph's death by starvation; he certainly influenced other European historians who relied on his account. In many cases, their reliance on his work is clearly attested. In others however, it is not. Before examining two accounts by Marco Polo and the Armenian baron Hayton, both selected for their original additions and legacy, let us look more closely at death by starvation and its meaning in late medieval Europe.

Though it was rare, starvation as an execution method for royals and nobles was considered one of the most humiliating types of death. It was a slow death, meant to inflict physical pain and torture the mind of the victim. More importantly, it was often inflicted on the basis of treason. In medieval Europe, well-known cases of execution by starvation and dehydration include Henry Tyrel in Ireland,³⁹ and Maud de Braose and her son William in a dungeon in England.⁴⁰ Starvation and immurement were also used as execution techniques in the Greek and Roman world: Livilla was condemned to death by starvation for treason in 31CE; the Roman Emperor Flavius Basiliscus died of starvation with his family while locked in a tower, after being deposed; and the Spartan commander Pausanias during the Greco-Persian wars was accused of treason and contacts with the Persian enemy (he was walled in a sanctuary and starved to death on those grounds). Because of its status as a humiliating

³⁹J. Bothwell and G. Dodd (eds.), *Fourteenth Century England IX* (Woodbridge, 2016), p. 133.

⁴⁰F. Michel, *Histoire des Ducs de Normandie et des Rois d'Angleterre* (Paris, 1840), pp. 112–115.

death for royals, it is very likely that starvation was consciously chosen by our European writers. We can certainly assume this was the case for Marco Polo, who had travelled extensively in the Mongol Empire and had access to various local sources, all of which present a different story. We know from the extant sources that he had very close relations with the Mongol court. He and his family had particularly close links with Kubilai Khān (d. 1294),⁴¹ and the family enjoyed being well received by the Mongol court.

Marco Polo's account can be found in his *Travels*, completed around 1300. His description of the death of the Caliph goes as follows:

Once he had taken the town, Alau [Hülegü] found that the Calif possessed a tower full of gold, silver, and other treasures, such as had never before been seen collected in a single place. When he saw this great treasure, he marvelled greatly, and, sending for the Calif, summoned him to his presence. Then he said: "Calif, why hast thou gathered together such a great treasure? What didst thou intend to do with it? [...] Why didst thou not take thy treasure, and give it to thy knights and soldiers to defend thee and thy city?" The Calif answered nothing, for he knew not what to say. [...] Then he [Hülegü] said: "Calif, eat now of thy treasure, as much as thou wilt, for never shalt thou have anything else to eat but it". After this, he left him in the tower, where he died four days later. And certainly it would have been better for the Calif to have given his treasure to his soldiers that they might defend his dominion and his folk, than to be put to death with all his people, and dispossessed. And since the days of that Calif, there has never been another.⁴²

If we compare this account with that of al-Ṭūsī, we notice that Marco Polo made several additions. Polo portrays a Caliph who remains silent during the rebuking of Hülegü, because "he does not know what to say". His account, just like Akner's, is built around the idea of gold and treasures being of extraordinary quantity, with a tower full of gold, an element which has remained in the collective memory of Europe. Last, the Caliph dies four days⁴³ after being left without food or drink, secluded in his gold tower. These details are not to be found in the Arabic sources of the period. In order to understand his account however, it is important to look at the entire work. Polo's account is imbued with commentary on the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate, which, in the context of his overall work, was seen as an enemy empire, one that caused grief to Christians. The *Travels* includes several stories describing what he saw as the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate's anti-Christian actions. One example is a story that Polo includes under a section entitled "Of the great miracle of the mountain that occurred at Baudac [Baghdad]" in 1225, during which, we are told, many Christians were threatened with death by the Caliph for not converting to Islam. Polo explains that the Caliph delivered an ultimatum to the Christians of Baghdad using the Gospel of Matthew 17:20 in which Jesus highlights the possibility of moving mountains through prayer.⁴⁴

⁴¹For details, see the introduction of Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, (ed.) L. F. Benedetto, (trans.) Aldo Ricci (London, 1931), pp. vii-xvii.

⁴²Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, p. 27.

⁴³The number four is associated with the idea of plenty in ancient and medieval historical writings. See, for instance, the study on numbers in the Islamic historical tradition: Lawrence I. Conrad, 'Abraha and Muḥammad: Some Observations a propos of Chronology and Literary "Topoi" in the Early Arabic Historical Tradition', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 50, 2 (1987), pp. 225-240.

⁴⁴Gospel of Matthew 17:20: "Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there', and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you".

You must know that in the year 1225 after Christ's Incarnation, there was a Caliph in Baudac, who detested the Christians, and ever thought, day and night, how he might make all the Christians in his land turn Saracens, or, failing that, how he might have them all killed. And every day he took counsel on this matter with his priests and wise men; for they all greatly detested the Christians.⁴⁵

Two important points need to be raised about this episode as it appears in Polo's work. The first is its placement: Polo breaks with chronology, putting this episode, which he argues took place in 1225, right after the fall of Baghdad in 1258. The second point is that not only is this event absent from all the sources of the period, but it is an event that took place in Fatimid Cairo three centuries earlier and known as the "miracle of Muqattam".⁴⁶ Polo used the main skeleton of this story while modifying a variety of details: for instance, while in the Muqattam story it is a Jewish figure, Ya'qūb ibn Killis, who challenges the patriarch Abraham (also known as pope Abraam) to perform the miracle, in Polo's version it is the Caliph. It would be very difficult to defend the idea that Polo mistakenly attributed this event to have taken place under the 'Abbāsids. Rather, he used a known and symbolical story in order to emphasise the 'Abbāsids' anti-Christian stand. What Polo suggests through his account is that death and destruction at the hands of the Mongols (and the Christians who participated in the army of Hülegü) came as a punishment from God for previous injustices against Christianity. In that context, the Mongols were seen as an ally against Islam.⁴⁷ This idea of punishment is central in Polo's account: the fact that the Caliphate received what it had deserved is highlighted in other parts of his work. The literary tools used in the account of the murder of al-Musta'şim are all meant to fulfil this purpose: they are didactic, all the while entertaining the audience with vivid and colourful happenings.⁴⁸

The second account is by Hayton of Corycos (d. 1310), who might have used the work of Marco Polo, along with other Mongol sources. Hayton was an Armenian baron who left Armenia in 1305 to become a monk in Cyprus. During a trip to Avignon, he was received by Pope Clement V who asked him to compose his *Oriental History* with the title *Flos Historianum Terre Orientis*, originally dictated in Old French, with one Latin translation surviving.⁴⁹ In *Les Fleurs des Histoires de la Terre d'Orient*, the death of the Caliph is described as follows:

Once Hülegü had done what he willed with the city of Baghdad, he commanded that the Caliph be brought before him and had all his treasures put in front of him. [...] Then Hülegü said to him: "You were called Caliph, head of all those holding the religion of Mahmet, yet you choked

⁴⁵Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, p. 28.

⁴⁶See, in particular, J. Pruitt, 'The Miracle of Muqattam: Moving a Mountain to Build a Church in Fatimid Egypt', in *Sacred Precincts: The Religious Architecture of Non-Muslim Communities Across the Islamic World*, (ed.) M. Gharipour (Leiden, 2015), pp. 277–290.

⁴⁷For a thorough discussion on Latin Christendom-Mongol relations against the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate, see the excellent work by P. Jackson, *The Mongols and the West 1221–1410* (New York, 2005), pp. 165–195.

⁴⁸A fairly similar account has been attributed to Jean de Joinville (d. 1317), the famous chronicler of medieval France, in the *Life of Saint Louis*, a chronicle recounting the life of Louis IX of France and the Seventh Crusade. The episode is as follows: 'To cover his breach of faith and to throw upon the caliph the blame of the capture of the city, he took the caliph and put him in an iron cage, and made him fast as long as a man can fast without dying, and then asked him if he were hungry [...]'. The translation is available in J. Hutton, *Saint Louis: King of France* (London, 1892), p. 173. The narrative around the death of the caliph is told in a similar fashion by the Italian Dominican travel writer and missionary Ricold of Monte Croce (d. 1320), and the Byzantine Greek historian and philosopher Georgius Pachymeres (d. 1310).

⁴⁹D. D. Bundy, 'Het'um's La Flor Des Estoires De La Terre D'Orient: a Study in Medieval Armenian Historiography and Propaganda', *Revue Des Études Arméniennes*, 20 (1986–7), pp. 223–235.

on your wealth. Now such a great leader should be fed on no other food. This huge amount of wealth is the food which you so loved and kept with insatiable greed". Having said this, Hülegü ordered that the Caliph be placed in a room and that pearls and gold be set before him, so that he eat of them as much as he pleased. He decreed that no other food or drink be given to him. Thus did that wretched, greedy, covetous man dismally end his life. Thereafter no Caliph resided in Baghdad.⁵⁰

Just like Polo's account, Hayton's story comprises embellishments as compared to earlier accounts; these additions were conscientious and deliberate narrative choices, in line with Hayton's political ideas. What we know of Hayton's own biography is helpful for understanding his account. Hayton spent most of his adult life fighting Muslim powers both on the battlefield and diplomatically. His work reflects a Christian point of view on Islam common at the time in Armenia and Western Europe. In other passages of this same work, Hayton explicitly criticises the Caliphate for the blood it had shed, and he rejoices at its destruction by the Mongols. One critical novelty in his work, however, is the fact that the Armenian King is said to have advised Mongke Khān, the Mongol Emperor, to destroy the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate and kill the Caliph. This information is mentioned before the description of the sack of Baghdad: upon their meeting, the King of Armenia presented seven requests to Mongke Khān, one of which was a request to put the Caliph to death. By emphasising this request, Hayton highlights the role played by the Armenian King in the end of the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate. In a sense, credit for the downfall of the Caliph is attributed to the Armenians and their King. The last chapter of Hayton's book ends with proposing a new crusade through an alliance with the Ilkhān.⁵¹

Both Marco Polo and Hayton's accounts enjoyed wide circulation from the time that they were produced. Both remained very popular works in Europe for centuries, as attested by the number of extant manuscripts and translations. Marco Polo's book was translated into several vernacular languages, the Latin rendering alone amounting to over fifty extant manuscripts. Hayton's treatise was written in old French in 1307 and translated into Latin the same year by Nicolas Faucon. Over fifty manuscripts have survived, produced in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁵² This explains why the story of al-Musta'şim dying of starvation became so popular and widely circulated in Europe.

Moreover, the legacy of these works has continued into the modern period. Inspired by *The Travels of Marco Polo*, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (d. 1882) wrote a poem entitled *Kambalu*, first published in 1864 under the title "The Kalif of Baldacca".⁵³ The poem further

⁵⁰Het'um the Historian's *History of the Tartars* [The Flower of Histories of the East] compiled by Het'um the Armenian of the Praemonstratensian Order, (trans.) Robert Bedrosian, Chapter 26, p. 48.

⁵¹Hayton's account of the death of the Caliph was copied by John Mandeville (d. 1371), a Frenchman. See the translation by C. W. R. D. Moseley, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (London, 1983), p. 149. The work is mentioned in Boyle, 'The Death', p. 294. There are doubts about the historicity of this figure, including the authorship of the work and whether he travelled. Nevertheless, the work had a critical impact on later writers and reached a very broad audience. See R. Tzanaki, *Mandeville's Medieval Audiences: A Study on the Reception of the Book of Sir John Mandeville 1371–1550* (New York, 2003).

⁵²See Jackson, *The Mongols and the West: 1221–1410*, pp. 334–335.

⁵³Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 'The Kalif of Baldacca', *Macmillan's Magazine* 10, 56 (Cambridge, 1864), pp. 115–116. The poem can also be accessed online via the archives of *The Atlantic*: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1864/06/the-kalif-of-baldacca/540309/> (accessed 4 March 2020).

popularised the myth of a Caliph starving to death in a tower symbolically named “the Tower of Gold”, his body looking like a crucified “statue of gold”:

Never a prayer, nor a cry, nor a groan
 Was heard from those massive walls of stone,
 Nor again was the Kalif seen alive!
 “When at last we unlocked the door,
 We found him dead upon the floor;
 The rings had dropped from his withered hands,
 His teeth were like bones in the desert sands:
 Still clutching his treasure he had died;
 And as he lay there, he appeared
 A statue of gold with a silver beard,
 His arms outstretched as if crucified”.⁵⁴

Several conclusions can be drawn from the treatment of the Caliph's death in the accounts examined above. First, we note a degree of proximity between Mongol sources on the one hand, and European and Armenian accounts on the other. The starvation anecdote found in al-Ṭūsī's account was used and expanded in European and Armenian sources of the period. The diplomatic relations between Latin Christendom, Armenia post Mongol invasion, and the Mongols allowed for travel and intellectual exchange. Strengthening these political entities was the fact that they shared a common enemy: Islam and the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate. The Mongol armies of Hülegü included many Armenians⁵⁵ and Georgians, while the Mongols held close contacts with the Christian West. In addition, the Ilkhāns conducted a considerable intellectual propaganda effort following their conquest of Persia. This is visible in the mass copying of manuscripts including Juwaynī's *World History*⁵⁶ and Rashīd al-Dīn's *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh*, which also mentions the starvation episode at length, though not as the cause of death.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Several medieval historians of Cilician Armenia portrayed the Mongols positively for political reasons: on this topic see A. Osipian, ‘Armenian Involvement in the Latin-Mongol Crusade: Uses of the Magi and Prester John in Constable Smbat's Letter and Hayton of Corycus's “*Flos historiarum terre orientis*” 1248–1307’, *Medieval Encounters* 20, 1 (February 2014), pp. 66–100.

⁵⁶ Charles Melville, ‘Jahāngosā-ye Jovaynī’, *Encyclopædia Iranica*, XIV, 4, pp. 378–382, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/jahangosa-ye-jovayni> (accessed 30 December 2012). It is important to note that Rashīd al-Dīn's *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* might have been composed only after Marco Polo's *Travels*, since the *Jāmi'* is dated 1306–7. The work, or at least portions of it, might have been available prior to these dates.

⁵⁷ On this, see Robert Hillenbrand, ‘Propaganda in the Mongol “World History”’, *British Academy Review* 17 (March 2011), pp. 29–38. It is important to note that the two most significant Persian scholars who worked as ministers for the Mongols, ‘Aṭā Malik Juwaynī (d. 1283) and Rashīd al-Dīn (d. 1318), are both silent about the method used to kill the Caliph. Rashīd al-Dīn however, included in his narrative anecdotes emphasising the humiliation the Caliph suffered and his regrets: “I have been trapped like a little bird”, says the Caliph before being executed. Commentary on ‘Abbāsīd rule is also highly present in Rashīd al-Dīn's work, where the account of the invasion starts with the following statement about unrest in Baghdad: “There was much unrest in Baghdad, and the inhabitants, sick and tired of the ‘Abbāsīds, considered this a sign of the end of their reign as varying allegiances appeared among them” (Rashīd al-Dīn, p. 346). These anecdotes express views on the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate and the illegitimate character of their rule. Although death by starvation disappears from several Mongol accounts, other narrative strategies are used to fulfil the same purpose on a larger scale: the Caliph is continuously blamed as a weak ruler, and is contrasted with the power, wisdom, and legitimate sovereignty of Hülegü.

Second, the trajectory of the narrative indicates that Marco Polo⁵⁸ was most probably the first writer outside the region to describe the cause of death as starvation. His account demonstrates an acquaintance with the history of the ‘Abbāsid Caliphate, but also a deliberate “manipulation” of dates and events, including the “miracle of Baudac”, examined earlier. This takes us to our next point, which is the fact that for Mongol, European and Armenian historians, al-Musta‘sim’s death offered an opportunity to reflect on his rule as a sovereign. A low, humiliating death preceded with the admonishment of the Mongol ruler and expression of his own regrets and contrition was a means to delegitimise him as a ruler, and his dynasty; it was also a means to contrast his persona with that of a powerful and dignified Hülegü. For Marco Polo, the starvation episode was a means of expressing and conveying this message to his audiences. His account was written for a Christian audience in Latin Christendom: it focused on the stories and plight of Christian groups in Baghdad and was crafted around the main theme of unjust rule. It is important to note that at this time, conveying a viewpoint and a memory of the Caliphate in this case mattered more for the historian than portraying events exactly as they took place. Symbolism played a large role in these writings. Both Marco Polo and Hayton were certainly exposed to sources describing the death of the Caliph in a different fashion; starvation, however, was a choice they made deliberately because this death type would resonate with their audiences and made for an entertaining, humiliating and moralising story.

Supporting the argument that symbolism and conveying a message to the audience were more important to the historian than accuracy, the work of the Venetian historian Marino Sanudo offers another exuberant description of the death style of the ‘Abbāsid Caliph.

Melted gold poured down the Caliph’s throat: punishing thirst for wealth

Marino Sanudo (d. circa 1334)⁵⁹ composed *The Book of the Secrets of the Faithful of the Cross* (*Secreta Fidelium Crucis*) between 1306 and 1321. The following passage describes melted gold being poured down the Caliph’s throat and causing his death:

He ordered the throat of the captured Caliph to be filled with melted gold, condemning him for his avarice. Because, since he had immense wealth, he was delayed by cupidity and compromised his own safety to weigh it out. [...] [Dotousaton, Hulagu’s Christian wife] requested her husband that the temples of the Saracens should be pulled down everywhere and that everyone should be forbidden to worship the filthy Mahumeth.⁶⁰

Sanudo, however, is the only historian who mentioned this story. No other source, whether contemporaneous or later, contains a similar description of the last moments of the Caliph. Where did this story come from? How to explain its presence in Sanudo’s

⁵⁸Doubts have been raised by several modern scholars about Marco Polo’s travels to China, some suggesting that he never went past the Black Sea, and others arguing that evidence proves his travels to China. For instance Frances Wood argued in 1995 that Marco Polo never reached China in her book *Did Marco Polo go to China?* (New York, 1995/2018). See also Hans Ulrich Vogel, *Marco Polo Was in China: New Evidence from Currencies, Salts, and Revenues* (Leiden, 2012).

⁵⁹See M. Sanudo Torsello, *The Book of the Secrets of the Faithful of the Cross* (*Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis*), (trans.) Peter Lock (London, 2011), p. 3

⁶⁰Sanudo, *The Book of the Secrets of the Faithful of the Cross*, p. 379.

account? It is no doubt a transfer from the old and popular story of the Roman general and political figure Marcus Licinius Crassus in 53 BC. Marcus Crassus had amassed a very large fortune composed of assets seized from those whom he declared enemies of the state. He was considered one of the wealthiest men in Roman history. Historians recall that Crassus, driven by his grudge, embarked on a military campaign to Parthia, where he was defeated by the Parthian King Orodes II. According to several accounts that have remained popular, Crassus was taken alive and executed by having melted gold poured down his throat, while being rebuked: "You thirst for gold, gold you must drink".⁶¹ The Parthians were said to have used this method in derision for their victim: it was symbolically meant to satisfy the victim's unquenchable thirst for wealth. This method of execution was also used by the Spanish during the Inquisition, and outside Europe in sixteenth-century Ecuador for instance. Such death was a method of torture, meant to inflict atrocious pain. It ruptured the victim's organs, burnt his lungs and eventually choked him.

Sanudo's book is one of the major literary works of the Middle Ages. It belongs to the genre of "recovery literature", the purpose of which was to support attempts by the Christian West to reconquer the holy land. The book was written with the purpose of reviving the spirit of the Crusades; the first volume of the three composed was offered upon completion in 1307 to Pope Clement V as a manual to guide crusaders on their struggle to reconquer the holy land. The other two volumes completed between 1312 and 1321 were offered to Pope John XXII in 1321, as well as to the King of France.

The *Secreta* lays down a plan to reconquer crusading territory in two parts: first, the Muslim territories close to Europe (including Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor, North Africa and Andalusia) through trade restrictions, and second the further parts of the Muslim world including Palestine, up to the Indian Ocean. The double plan relies on help that would be provided by the Mongol allies, in particular the Ilkhāns. Hence, the description of the Mongols and of Hülegü is positive throughout the work, and in the episode of the Caliph's execution, the emphasis is placed on the punishment deserved by al-Musta'şim with no mention of any atrocity or cruelty performed by Hülegü and his men.

To the contrary, the depiction of the death of the Caliph is humiliating, emphasising his greed, but it also entertains this audience by using literary *topoi* drawn from the Roman tradition. Throughout the work, pejorative references are made to Islam, such as the "filthy Mahumeth" in the passage above. It is no coincidence that Sanudo portrayed the Caliph's death in the manner he did; writing in the early fourteenth century, he must have been aware of previous European accounts of the sack of Baghdad and the death of the Caliph, in particular the work of Marco Polo, fellow Venetian and his predecessor. Among the other sources of his work was the Venetian nobleman Guglielmo Bernardi de Furvo, who had travelled extensively in the Middle East and visited both Baghdad and Tabriz.⁶² The choices made when rendering the story of the death of the Caliph emphasise the fact that these accounts were full of symbolism and offered commentary on 'Abbāsīd rule. Let us turn now to another fashion of death: killing by the sword or by Hülegü's own hands.

⁶¹C. F. Fraker, *The Scope of History: Studies in the Historiography of Alfonso el Sabio* (Ann Arbor, 1996), p. 142.

⁶²H. Chisholm (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Cambridge, 1911), vol. 24, pp. 196–197.

Death by the sword or by Hülegü's own hands

Georgian sources tell us a different story of the execution of the Caliph. Most Georgian accounts as well as a few Armenian ones mention that the Caliph was killed by Hülegü himself, execution being undertaken by the sword.⁶³ An examination of these accounts indicates that they are based on either oral or written sources emerging from the Kingdom of Georgia (which included Georgia proper, Armenia and large parts of the Caucasus),⁶⁴ in particular Georgian/Armenian princes or military personnel in Hülegü's armies.

Most of these sources display two significant tendencies: first, they deny the Caliph an "honourable" death based on his status since he is killed violently and with no consideration for his royal descent; second, their portrayal of Hülegü is less lauding than in the Armenian accounts previously examined, since he appears rather cruel and unsophisticated. Slaying the Caliph would have been a most ignominious type of death, since it meant shedding his blood. The accounts, however, are not always precise about how he was slain, and whether he was beheaded for instance.⁶⁵

Among these sources are accounts by Kirakos Gandzaketsi (d. 1271) and Vardan Areweltsi (d. 1271), both of which are critical in terms of posterity and showcase differences worth examining. Kirakos provides a detailed description of the fall of Baghdad in his *History of the Armenians*,⁶⁶ started in 1241 and completed in 1265. Chapter eleven along with the subsequent ones are devoted to describing the events of his own day; they are considered the most important part of his work due to the details that they contain. His source was the Armenian Prince Pfosh Khaghbakian, a participant and eyewitness of the conquest.⁶⁷ Kirakos notes in his *History* that this Armenian lord told him directly about the events surrounding the invasion of Baghdad.⁶⁸

Then Hülegü asked the Caliph: "What are you, God or man?" And the Caliph responded: "I am a man, and the servant of God". Hülegü asked, "Well, did God tell you to insult me and to call me a dog and not to give food and drink to God's dog? Now in hunger the dog of God shall devour you". And he killed him with his own hands. "That", he said, "is an honour for you, because I killed you myself and did not give you to another for killing". He ordered his son to slay one of the Caliph's sons while he gave the other son as a sacrifice to the Tigris river, saying: "It did not harm us but was our collaborator in killing the senseless ones". And he said: "this

⁶³See Boyle, 'The Death', p. 149.

⁶⁴Some of these accounts are based on Armenian sources from the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, in particular Armenian princes and the Armenian contingent in the Mongol army. The Kingdom was a protectorate of the Mongol Empire and later the Ilkhānate from 1245 to 1335.

⁶⁵On this point, I would challenge the argument of Florence Hodous who wrote in her very good analysis of execution methods under the Ilkhānids that "not a single source implies that his [al-Musta'sim's] blood was shed". See F. Hodous, 'Faith and the Law: Religious Beliefs and the Death Penalty in the Ilkhanate', in *The Mongols' Middle East: Continuity and Transformation in Ilkhanid Iran*, (eds.) B. de Nicola and C. Melville (Leiden, 2016), pp. 106–129.

⁶⁶K. Gandzakets'i, *History of the Armenians*, (trans.) R. Bedrosian (New York, 1986), pp. 314–318.

⁶⁷Kirakos mentions at the end of his account of the fall of Baghdad that "all of this was narrated to us by prince Hasan called Prosh, son of the pious Vasak son of Baghbak, brother of Papak' and Mkdem, Papak', Hasan and Vasak who was an eyewitness to the events and also heard about events with his own ears, [a man] enjoying great honour in the Khan's eyes". Gandzakets'i, *History of the Armenians*, p. 320. Kirakos also interacted with other Greater Armenian nobles, including Pros Xalbakean, who participated in the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 1258, and Prince Grigor Mamikoriean, who told him what he had heard about Chinggis Khān. See R. G. Bedrosian, *Turco-Mongol Invasions and the Lords of Armenia in the 13th and 14th Centuries* (Ann Arbor, 1979), p. 25.

⁶⁸Gandzakets'i, *History of the Armenians*, p. 320.

man caused much blood to flow through pride. Let him go and answer to God and may we be innocent".⁶⁹

This is one of the rare accounts to mention that the Caliph called Hülegü a dog: "You are a dog, a Turk. Why should I pay taxes to you or obey you?" was a reply that he sent to Hülegü who was asking him to submit.⁷⁰ The portrayal of Hülegü is of a violent leader acting out of revenge: "now the dog of God shall devour you", says Hülegü to the Caliph before killing him. These references, I would argue, are indirect criticism of the Mongols. Kirakos and his mentor Vanakan, along with others, were captured by Mongol forces in 1236 following the invasion of Tavush in Armenia. Kirakos and his fellow captives had to serve as secretaries for the Mongols during their imprisonment, and it is doubtful that they did so willingly, but rather had to comply for the sake of their own lives.⁷¹ After several months of captivity, Kirakos managed to flee. Kirakos does mention in his work the need to write a history of the Mongols because "the evils caused by the Tatars (Mongols), conquerors of the Universe, surpasses all accounts".⁷² This comment certainly explains the tone of Kirakos' account, whose work tends not to praise the Mongols. Moreover, the account of the Caliph's death belongs to a section composed after he escaped Mongol captivity, which allowed more leeway to express his opinion on his former tormentor. In his account, both Hülegü and the Caliph are symbolically criticised.

As for the death of al-Musta'şim's sons, Kirakos tells us that one is slain like his father and the other offered as a sacrifice to the Tigris. This last execution method was quite common in the Mongol world and in the Ilkhānate later on: death by drowning was particularly applied for women, as was the case for the wife of the Georgian King David named Gontsa, executed on order of Hülegü.⁷³ Kirakos has other sections in his work where he explains that Baghdad ought to be punished for the blood it had shed throughout its history. The 'Abbāsīd dynasty, in his view, was one of perversion, violence, and illegitimate rule:

[...] five hundred fifteen years had elapsed since that city [Baghdad] was built [...] and it had taken everything into its kingdom like an insatiable blood-sucker, swallowing up the entire world. It was destroyed in 707 [1258] paying the blood price for the blood it caused to flow and for the evil it wrought.⁷⁴

A contemporary of Kirakos was Vardan Areweltsi (d. 1271), an Armenian cleric and author, who used Kirakos as a source for his own account. Vartan wrote an account in

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 318.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 316.

⁷¹Kirakos managed to escape to the town of Getik on the night that his teacher Vanakan was freed after payment of his ransom. On Kirakos' experience as a captive and his relationship to his Mongol captors, see D. Bayarsaikhan, 'Kirakos Gandzakets'i, as a Mongol Prisoner', *Ming Qing Yanjiu* XXII (2018), pp. 155–163. In particular, Bayarsaikhan notes that "Kirakos is very explicit about the extent of the destruction wrought by the Mongols in Greater Armenia and Georgia, and also shows great concern about the Armenian lords' actions under Mongol pressure" (p. 161).

⁷²John Victor Tolan (ed.), *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam*, (London, 2000), p. 37.

⁷³S. Orbélian, *Histoire de la Siounie*, (trans.) M. Brosset (Saint Petersburg, 1864), vol. 1, p. 234. Hodous mentions other famous cases including Toghachaq Khatun and Baghdad Khatun. See Hodous, 'Faith and the Law', p. 112.

⁷⁴Gandzakets'i, *History of the Armenians*, p. 319.

his *Hawakumn Patmutedan* (*Historical Compilation*), composed soon after 1267.⁷⁵ In this account, Vartan explains that Hülegü executed the Caliph with his own hands:

In 707 the valiant Hulawu captured Baghdad-517 years after its construction by Jap'r the Ismaelite, in 194 of the Armenian era-on the river Tigris, a seven-days' journey from old Babylon, as they say. Hulawu slew with his own hands the Caliph, whose name was Mustcasr; and the Christians who lived there were saved by the good-will and intercession of the great Queen Toluz.⁷⁶

Vardan's account contains a number of errors, in particular dates and the spelling of names. Though he knew of Kirakos' account,⁷⁷ Vardan's narrative is different on several levels: it is shorter, with a different focus, but also less critical of Hülegü. The account contains information on Hülegü's wife and her role as protector of the Christian community of Baghdad during the invasion. The information we have from Vardan's biography is helpful as far as shedding light on the narrative choices that he made in his account. We know that Vardan was a priest and had a close relationship to Hülegü, who even confided to him that he had been a Christian since birth.⁷⁸ In addition, Vardan was the confidant and religious adviser of Doquz Khatun, Hülegü's Christian wife, who acted as a patron of East Syria Christianity in the region after the Mongol capture of Baghdad. He was commissioned by Hülegü⁷⁹ and had the reputation of being a remarkable and very knowledgeable writer.⁸⁰ In 1264, he played a significant role as negotiator in Tabriz when brokering an agreement that granted special privileges to Armenians living under the authority of the Mongol Empire, in particular in the field of taxes and levies. Unsurprisingly, the account is focused on the plight of Christians during the fall of Baghdad, drawing attention to their fate, and the fact that they were saved thanks to the intercession of Hülegü's Nestorian wife.

Just as Kirakos and Vardan's accounts differ on certain details, slight differences can be noted among the Georgian accounts of the period. In the *Georgian Chronicles* (*Kartlis Tskhovreba*), a collective work written between the ninth and fourteenth centuries, the fall of Baghdad is described in one of the last sections of the work. In this work, Hülegü deals the final blow to the Caliph, although he gave one of his commanders, Ilge Noyan, the order to do so previously.⁸¹ The account includes a story of the Caliph attempting to flee by boat, one that is solely found in a Chinese miniature, and has its origins in the work of the Chinese historian and politician Song Lian (d. 1381).⁸² More importantly, the account contains

⁷⁵V. Arawelc'i, 'The Historical Compilation of Vardan Arawelc'i', (trans.) R. W. Thomson, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 43 (1989). The work is a chronicle telling the history of the world from the genesis to 1267, date of completion of the work. On this work, also see E. Dulaurier, 'Les Mongols d'après les Historiens Arméniens, Fragments Traduits sur les Textes Originiaux. Extrait de l'Histoire Universelle de Vartan', *Journal Asiatique* 5, 16 (1860), pp. 273-322.

⁷⁶Vardan Arawelc'i, 'The Historical Compilation', p. 217.

⁷⁷Despite their differences, these two works reinforce each other for the main part.

⁷⁸Jackson, *The Mongols and the West: 1221-1410*, p. 176. Vardan provided a unique Armenian perspective in that he discussed clerical attitudes toward the Mongol invasion.

⁷⁹Dulaurier, 'Les Mongols d'après les Historiens Arméniens', pp. 3-4.

⁸⁰J. R. S. Phillips, *The Medieval Expansion of Europe* (Oxford, 1998), p. 79.

⁸¹This might explain the confusion around the author of the final blow to the Caliph in Boyle's article. Boyle mentions: "According to the official Georgian Chronicle, it was one of Hülegü's commanders, Ilge Noyan, who dealt the blow". See Boyle, 'The Death', p. 149.

⁸²The story appears in Song Lian, *History of Yuan* (commonly known as *Yuanshi*), vol. 149. The work was commissioned by the court of the Ming dynasty. It was criticised for its numerous errors, leading to a complete recompilation of the work under the Qing dynasty (1636-1911) in the form of the *New History of Yuan*. In a number

several details about the role played by the Georgian contingent in the conquest of the city: they are the ones who “opened the city gates and the Tatars entered”:

The Georgians opened the city gates and the Tatars entered. Learning that the Tatars entered the city, the Caliph embarked a ship and fled by the river, which flows through the city. [...] When the Caliph appeared before the Khan they told him to bow before him, but he did not concede, saying: “I am an autocratic King, and have never been submissive to anybody. If you let me go, I will resign to it, if not – I will die submissive to nobody”. But they urged him to bow and knocked him down, and he fell on his back, but still did not bow. And [Khulagu] ordered them to take him out, escorted by noin Elga in order to put him and his son to death. Then he told the Caliph that the Khan had spared him, and they rejoiced. The Caliph said: “If he is going to spare me, let him release me and give me Babylon”. But noin Elga told him: “No, the Khan will kill you himself with his own sword, and the son of the Khan, Abagi, will kill your son”. And (the Caliph) said in amazement: “If I must be executed, it is of no difference whether the executioner is a dog or a man”. So the Caliph was executed, along with his entire household. But the Khan showed mercy to the remaining Baghdadians, and ordered reconstruction, and they scattered coins from the icons. And so enriched by the captives and with spoil, they returned to their camp.⁸³

Another Georgian account by Gullielmus Adae (Guillaume Adam) explains that it was a Georgian Prince who dealt the blow to al-Musta‘sim.⁸⁴ A certain status was associated with the person who dealt the final blow, and the fact that it was a Georgian Prince will have enhanced his position in the eyes of the readers. This particular description fits within the patterns of Gullielmus’ work, which has the tendency to highlight the role played by the Georgian troops who fought alongside them. Indeed, the historian often attributes Mongol victories to these Georgian troops.⁸⁵

Death by the sword or by Hülegü’s own hands—whatever that might involve—had implications in the context of our writers. Indeed, slaying the Caliph, and potentially shedding his blood, was a way of inflicting a highly ignominious death. We can suppose that these historians borrowed from one another and chose to tell a story that reflected an internal perspective on the last moments of the Caliph. Since the Georgian accounts mention eye-witnesses as their source, it is possible that this story was circulated among the Georgian contingent in Hülegü’s army, down to our historians. That being said, reliance on a source seems to have been less important than didacticism if we consider the choices made by each of our historians examined here, in particular when it came to the details pertaining to how they described the Caliph, his very last moments, Hülegü, or even the Georgian contingent.

of accounts, it is said that the *davat-dar* (first secretary) of the Caliph attempted to flee by boat upon realising that the situation was very serious. See Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi’ al-Tawārīkh*, p. 291; *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. V, p. 348. See also B. Brentjes, ‘The Fall of Baghdad and the Caliph Al-Musta‘sim in a Tabriz Miniature’, *East and West* 28, 1/4 (December 1978), pp. 151–154. Illustrations of the death of the Caliph can be found in the work of Rashīd al-Dīn, but also in European works, such as that of Maitre de la Mazarine (d. circa 1425) in *Le Livre des Merveilles du Monde* (ed.) Marie-Thérèse Gousset (Paris, 2003).

⁸³Kartlis Tskhovreba -A History of Georgia (Tbilisi, 2014), pp. 348–349.

⁸⁴*Recueil des Historiens des Croisades, Documents Arméniens* (Paris, 1960), II, pp. 534–535; Boyle, ‘The Death’, p. 149.

⁸⁵Jackson, *The Mongols and the West: 1221–1410*, Chapter 8.

Rolled in a carpet and kicked/trampled to death⁸⁶

Most accounts on 1258 written close to the time of the invasion recall a different kind of execution for the Caliph: in these he was rolled in a sack or a carpet and trampled/kicked to death, either by the feet of soldiers or horses. This type of execution is to be found in most non-Western accounts: almost all Arabic sources of the period (late-‘Abbāsīd and Mamlūk accounts in particular), but also several Persian accounts (mostly written by Persian administrators of the Mongols). While these differ in some of the details given by the writers (whether a carpet or a sack was used, horses or men’s feet), the main narrative remains the same.

The earliest extant account to mention this execution style is al-Jūzjānī (1193-?), the Persian historian who fled the Mongol invasions and migrated to the Delhi Sultanate, then the abode of Islam. Al-Jūzjānī’s account is narrated in his *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, a Persian chronicle composed in 1259–60 and commissioned by the Sultan of Delhi, Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd (r. 1227–29). On the death of the Caliph he writes:

The Malik of Mosul Badr al-Dīn Lu’lu’ – God’s curse upon him! – and other infidels, represented to Hülegü, saying: “If the Khalīfā continues alive, the whole of the Musalmans which are among the troops, and other [Musalman] peoples who are in other countries, will rise, and will bring about his liberation, and will not leave thee, Hülegü, alive”. The accursed Hülegü was frightened at this, saying: “If the Khalīfā continues to live, an outbreak of the Musalmans may take place; and, if he is slain, with the sword, when his blood falls upon the ground, an earthquake will

⁸⁶Death by trampling has been considered by modern historians of the Mongol period as the “most likely death”, and it probably was in this case. This is linked to the fact that the medieval sources are replete with indications that trampling was a common practice by the Mongols when killing a royal figure. In the *Secret History of the Mongols*, for instance, the Mongol aristocrat Jamukha (a Mongol military leader and later rival to Genghis Khān) is killed using this method in 1206. Jamukha is said to have asked to die a “noble death”, i.e. his blood not being spilled. Indeed, the Mongol religious law, the *Yasa*, strictly prohibited the spilling of royal blood onto the ground. Several sources mention that Hülegü was concerned about shedding the blood of the Caliph; they explain that he was at first reluctant to kill the Caliph because he feared a catastrophe would ensue. On this matter, Hülegü consulted with two astrologers: Ḥussām al-Dīn and Naṣir al-Dīn Al-Ṭūsī, the first having advised him not to put the Caliph to death. Al-Ṭūsī however recommended the Caliph should die, and comforted Hülegü by saying that nothing bad would happen, just as no natural catastrophe took place in the past when previous Caliphs were killed. This story is mentioned across sources, including most of the Mongol (Persian) and Arabic accounts. Another common method of killing among the Mongols was to break their victims’ back, again to avoid the shedding of royal blood. In his work *La Mort*, Jean Paul Roux explains the meaning of blood in Mongol culture. According to him, the Mongols considered any type of blood to be sacred as it was the “seat of the soul” (Hodous, ‘Faith and the Law’, p. 108). The Mongols were particularly concerned with afterlife: they feared that the soul of a person who had died violently might come back and harm them (Hodous, ‘Faith and the Law’; R. Hamayon, *La Chasse à l’Âme. Esquisse d’Une Théorie du Chamanisme Ibérien* (Paris, 1990), p. 400). They also believed that breaking the bones of a person would ensure that his lineage would die with him. Many sources of the period emphasise that the Mongols were adamant about erasing any ‘Abbāsīd lineage and wanted to ensure that no one was left from the family, particularly among the men (the anonymous *De Statu Saracenorum* mentions that all the Caliph’s relatives were put to death, though we know that several were in fact able to flee to Egypt). The fact that the bones were broken would send the message that the Caliph’s ancestry was broken. Qazvīnī (d. 1349) specifically mentions that the head of the Caliph was broken, which suggests that the execution method chosen had less to do with honouring him because of his royal blood, and more to do with Mongol religious beliefs and superstitions. After placing the Caliph in a sack, Qazvīnī writes, the Mongols “broke his head as though it were a stone and he died quickly. Fate dealt him a grievous blow, and brought destruction on that beautiful king. When the renowned Musta’sim was killed, a great name tumbled to the dust”. See H. Mustawfī Qazvīnī, *Zafāmāneh*, (trans.) Ward (unpublished PhD dissertation, Manchester University, 1983), p. 128. Trampling to death was not used commonly after 1258 by the Ilkhāns; we only have one recorded instance, that of Prince Nayan, ordered killed by the Mongol ruler Kubilai in 1287.

take place, and people will be destroyed"; so he proposed to put the Khalifa to death after a different fashion. He gave orders therefore so that they enfolded him in a [leather] sack for holding clothes, and kicked his sacred person until he died—May the Almighty reward him and bless him!⁸⁷

Not only does Jūzjānī not include the starvation story, but his account includes details not to be found in the previously mentioned accounts. In his narrative, it is Hülegü who is rebuked by the son of the Caliph named Abū Bakr. Abū Bakr reproaches Hülegü for having tricked the 'Abbāsīd court by pretending that he had come to meet the Caliph and convert in person:

It was supposed by us that you had high birth, that you might be an honourable man, and that you would be a high-minded monarch; and we placed reliance on your word. Now it is obvious that you are neither a monarch nor a man since you have acted this perfidiously, for kings commit no perfidy.⁸⁸

All elements in al-Jūzjānī's narrative serve an ultimate purpose: to emphasise that al-Musta'ṣim died as a "martyr", while upholding political and religious integrity until his very last moments. This gives him the upper hand on a moral and ethical level, despite his military defeat. The Caliph's portrayal contrasts with the description made of Hülegü and the Mongols: the latter used treachery to take over Baghdad and they never kept their word. The final words of the Caliph's son resonate as a lesson for the readers: though the Caliph and his descendants were killed, they died in dignity, having saved their honour by holding on to the core values of integrity and good leadership, these being absent in the Mongols' behaviour.

Death by trampling is also described in the works of late Ayyūbid historians, and it is the most common execution in the Mamlūk chronicles. Aside these sources, which were clearly anti-Mongol, it is also to be found in a number of accounts by historians who worked for the Ilkhānid Mongols, including the works of the Christian historian Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286),⁸⁹ the Arab historian (pseudonym) Ibn al-Fuwaṭī (d. 1323),⁹⁰ the Persian writers Waṣṣāf (d. 1329)⁹¹ and Qazvīnī (d. 1349),⁹² and Ibn al-Kāzarūnī (d. 1298).⁹³ Bar Hebraeus presents a very interesting case because this Syriac historian has two different accounts of the death of the Caliph in two of his works: while his *Chronography* composed in Syriac mentions that the Caliph was put in a sack and kicked ("they put him in a piece of sackcloth and then sewed it up round about him, and with kicks of their feet they killed him"),⁹⁴ his *Tārīkh*

⁸⁷Al-Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, (ed. and trans.) H. G. Raverty (Hyderabad, 1873), pp. 1252–1253.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, p. 1251.

⁸⁹Bar Hebraeus (known alternatively as Ibn al-'Ibrī in Arabic) relied heavily on al-Ṭūṣī's account for his Arabic account of the fall of Baghdad. Ibn al-'Ibrī, *Tārīkh Mukhtaṣar al-Duwal*, (ed.) A. Ṣāliḥānī, S. J. (Beirut, 1890), pp. 471–475.

⁹⁰See Gilli-Elewy, 'Al-Ḥawādith al-Jāmi'a'. The following is her translation of the execution: "his blood was not shed; instead he was put in a sack and trampled to death. He was then buried, and traces of his tomb effaced" (p. 366).

⁹¹See *Geschichte Wassafs*, pp. 68–75.

⁹²Qazvīnī, *Zafarnāme*, p. 128; much of his work is based on Rashīd al-Dīn.

⁹³Ibn al-Kāzarūnī, *Mukhtaṣar al-Tārīkh min auwal al-Zamān ilā muntahā dawlat Banī l-'Abbās*, (ed.) Muṣṭafā Ğawād (Baghdad, 1970), pp. 273–274.

⁹⁴Bar Hebraeus, *The Chronography of Gregory Abū'l Faraj*, (trans. from Syriac) E. A. Wallis Budge (London, 1932), p. 431.

Muktaṣar al-Duwal, addressed to an Arabic-speaking audience, is silent on the method of execution (“on the 14th of Ṣafar Hulagu moved off from Baghdad; at the first halting-place, at night, he killed the Caliph al-Musta‘ṣim and his middle-son, together with six eunuchs”⁹⁵).

Later Mamlūk accounts on the death of al-Musta‘ṣim and the work of Ibn al-Furāt (d. 1405)

Mamlūk historiography is characterised by common features, and there is an overall consensus on the death of the Caliph. He is described as having died trampled, usually as a martyr; the starvation episode is not mentioned. The later Mamlūk historians do not always afford detailed descriptions of the death of the Caliph: for instance, it is mentioned in a rather laconic manner in the works of Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328) and Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373). This does not mean that commentary is absent regarding either the event or the person of the Caliph: Ibn Kathīr mentions that the Caliph dies “*mazlūm*” (treated unjustly).⁹⁶ However, in these later works, commentary on the Mongols and the ‘Abbāsids is included in other sections of them, and so does not specifically have to take place in the account of the Caliph’s death.

Among later Mamlūk accounts, the work of the Egyptian historian Ibn al-Furāt (d. 1405) deserves attention. While it does include the trampling execution of the Caliph, Ibn al-Furāt’s *Tārīkh al-Duwal wa al-Mulūk*⁹⁷ is the only Mamlūk account that mentions the starvation episode, as well as a conversation between Hülegü and the Caliph’s son. Guy Le Strange, in his article ‘The Story of the Death of the Last ‘Abbāsīd Caliph, from the Vatican MS of Ibn al-Furāt’,⁹⁸ argued that Ibn al-Furāt might have met at the court of the ‘Abbāsids in Cairo people whose grandfathers had fled Baghdad in 1258. Le Strange, hence, proposed that the mention of the starvation episode by Ibn al-Furāt gave more validity to this story, since it had been mentioned in an Arabic chronicle for the first time. However, he also noticed that the account was “full of anecdotes”.⁹⁹ Several points need to be made on this argument as this pertains directly to our analysis and the tendency of modern historians to look for facts rather than meaning in the medieval sources.

First, Ibn al-Furāt’s mention of the starvation episode should not be interpreted as giving it greater historical validity. Rather, Ibn al-Furāt’s work was characterised by its ambition to be comprehensive in scope and in the sources he used and cited. This means that the episodes and events mentioned often include various versions, allowing the audience to get a taste of the plurality of existing views. Ibn al-Furāt’s work commonly cites Shī‘ī writers (such as Ibn Abī Ṭayyī’, d. 1228), as well as Christian sources (the Coptic historian Ibn al-‘Amīd, d. 1273, for instance), cited alongside Muslim ones considered more orthodox. Accordingly, I would argue, rather than lending more credibility to the story, the mention of the starvation episode by Ibn al-Furāt was made to demonstrate his own awareness of the story from

⁹⁵ Wickens, ‘Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī on the Fall of Baghdad’, p. 35.

⁹⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya* (Cairo, 1982), vol. 13, pp. 200–206.

⁹⁷ Ibn al-Furāt, MS. Vatican, fol. 196a and 196b; Le Strange provides a translation of a section of the account on the death of the Caliph, see Le Strange, ‘The Story’, pp. 297–298.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

other foreign sources. Moreover, in his account, the Caliph does not die of starvation: Ibn al-Furāt explains that the Caliph and his son Abū Bakr were put in sacks and trampled to death.

A second significant point is that Ibn al-Furāt mentions a second anecdote, which is the immediate cause for the execution of the Caliph and his son. This anecdote, absent from most other sources but inspired by elements to be found in al-Jūzjānī's work, describes an encounter between Hülegü, the Caliph, and the latter's son. When Hülegü started rebuking the Caliph, his son Abū Bakr interceded by screaming: "How do you address the Commander of the Faithful, oh Enemy of Allah? And he spat in the face of Hülegü".¹⁰⁰ This act immediately led Hülegü to execute both men. Abū Bakr's action is highly symbolical in this context: it redeems the honour of the 'Abbāsids. Both men die as martyrs and heroes.

Other anecdotes are given by Ibn al-Furāt, all of them stressing martyrdom: a group of men from the Khanqahs, dressed in white, proceeded to the bridge and threw themselves off it, refusing to live after the martyrdom of their Commander. In Ibn al-Furāt's account, the Caliph does not express any regrets, which contrasts with Western and Mongol accounts attributing his death to starvation.

A last anecdote deserves attention: Ibn al-Furāt includes a rather lengthy mention of a white bird that came to roost on the tent where the Caliph was kept captive. This story is not accidental: it is a direct reference to the *ḥadīth* literature. When the Companion of the Prophet Muḥammad Ibn 'Abbās (d. 687) died, a white bird is said to have alighted on his shroud and to have disappeared inside it. When the people looked for it, they could not find it. As they stood to pray over Ibn 'Abbās' body, they heard a voice saying: "Oh you soul in complete rest and satisfaction! Come back to your Lord well pleased and well pleasing (unto Him)! Enter then among My honoured and enter My Paradise!" These are verses from the Holy Qur'an, chapter *al-Fajr*, 89:27–30. The presence of the white bird anecdote in Ibn al-Furāt's work is a direct reminder for the reader of the death of Ibn 'Abbās; since the death of al-Musta'ṣim symbolised the end of the 'Abbāsids, it is no surprise that a link was made with the dynasty's ancestor.

The women of the Caliph: rape, suicide, and martyrdom

Supporting our argument that medieval historians made conscious decisions with regard to how they described the Caliph's death and imbued their narratives with symbolism for their audiences, it is important to consider the fate of 'Abbāsīd women in these historical accounts. Upon their conquest of Baghdad, the Mongols not only put the Caliph to death, but they also dealt with his family members including the women of his harem. The sources do not always offer details on the fate of family members, but in some cases they provide information on his sons, daughters, wives, as well as the few who managed to flee to Cairo.

The description of the fate of the Caliph's female entourage is particularly interesting. A sharp contrast can be noted in the sources between accounts that emphasise the dishonour that these women suffered at the hands of the Mongols, and others that present sophisticated stories about how they managed to escape Mongol captivity and rape. For the purpose of the

¹⁰⁰Ibn al-Furāt, MS. Vatican, fol. 196a and 196b.

discussion here, I would argue, three groups of sources can be distinguished in relation to the topic.

The first group—composed of pro-Mongol sources written in Persian and more rarely in Arabic (in the case of Ibn al-Ṭiqtaqā)—includes accounts that mention the captivity of ‘Abbāsīd women without demonstrating any obvious emotion. An example is the work of Ibn al-Ṭiqtaqā in *Kitāb al-Fakhrī*: when describing the end of the Caliphate, Ibn al-Ṭiqtaqā underlines that the Caliph’s daughters were all “taken as captives”.¹⁰¹ In this pro-Mongol work, Ibn al-Ṭiqtaqā is overtly critical of the ‘Abbāsīds and considers the end of their dynasty as fortuitous.¹⁰² An Iraqi historian of Shī‘ī lineage, he held the title of “*naqīb* of the ‘Alīds”, just as his father had done before him. He wrote *al-Fakhrī*, a historical compendium of Islamic history, in which he narrated the events taking place in Baghdad in 1258, under a section entitled “The Caliphate of al-Musta‘šim bi-llāh”. *Al-Fakhrī* was composed in 1302 during his stay in Mosul for its ruler Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Isā b. Ibrāhīm. From his perspective, ‘Abbāsīd rule was unjust, and the last Caliph deserved his end; countless examples in his work demonstrate his anti-‘Abbāsīd stand, in particular due to the massacre of the Shī‘a by the Caliph’s troops in the Karkh quarter of Baghdad in 1256.¹⁰³ Highlighting the captivity of ‘Abbāsīd women was a way to disgrace the family.

The second group—largely Muslim sources composed in Arabic—mentions that the three daughters of the Caliph—Fāṭimah, Khadījah and Maryam—became captives of the Mongols,¹⁰⁴ and expresses various degrees of discontent at their fate. These accounts were composed by Muslim writers who were very critical of Mongol rule. Among these sources many poems by Muslim poets lament the end of the Caliphate and the ignominious tragedy that befell the women of the house of ‘Abbās, most notably their sexual humiliation. The famous elegy of Taqī al-Dīn Ismā‘īl ibn abī al-Yusr¹⁰⁵ (d. 1273)—mentioned in Dhahabī’s *Tārīkh al-Islām*—asked:

How many inviolate women [*ḥarīm*] have the Mongols captured by force!
and before that veil [*sitr*] there were [so many] layers of protection [*astār*];
[...] I called out while the exposed captives [*sabiyy mahtūk*] were dragged
to ravishment by licentious enemies,

¹⁰¹ Ibn al-Ṭiqtaqā in *Al-Fakhrī fī al-Ādāb al-Sultāniyya wa al-Duwal al-Islāmiyya* (Greifswald, 1858), p. 388.

¹⁰² See his description of the end of the Caliphate, *ibid.*, pp. 382–390.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 383.

¹⁰⁴ These include Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, *al-Hawāḍith al-Jāmi‘a*, (eds.) Bashshār ‘Awwād Ma‘rūf and ‘Imād ‘Abd al-Salām Ra‘ūf (Beirut, 1997), pp. 357–359; Ibn al-Kāzarūnī, *Mukhtaṣar al-Tārīkh*, (ed.) Muṣṭafā Jawād (Baghdad, 1970), pp. 274–277; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab*, (eds.) Aḥmad Kamāl Zakī and Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Ziyādah (Cairo, 1980), vol. 23, p. 324; Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdat al-Fikrah fī Tārīkh al-Hijrah*, (ed.) Donald Richards (Beirut, 1998), p. 37; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām wa-Wafayāt al-Mashāhūr wa-l-‘Ālām*, (ed.) ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Salām Tadmūrī (Beirut, 1999), vol. 66, p. 262; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, (eds.) Aḥmad Abū Mullīḥim, ‘Alī Najīb ‘Aṭawī, Fu‘ād al-Sayyid, Mahdī Nāṣir al-Dīn and ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Sattār (Beirut, 1987), vol. 13, p. 169–171. These are also mentioned by Mona Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate: A Transregional History* (Princeton, 2016), pp. 38.

¹⁰⁵ This is an extract from ‘A *Qaṣīda* on the Destruction of Baghdad’ by Taqī al-Dīn Ismā‘īl ibn Abī al-Yusr (the author’s name is not to be found in the major biographical dictionaries of that time period with the exception of al-Dhahabī’s work *Tārīkh al-Islām*, which contains the whole *qaṣīda* lamenting the fall). The translation of the poem is available in Joseph de Somogyi, ‘A *Qaṣīda* on the Destruction of Baghdad by the Mongols’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 7, 1 (1993), pp. 41–48, republished more recently as J. de Somogyi, ‘A *Qaṣīda* on the Destruction of Baghdad by the Mongols’, in *Muslims, Mongols and Crusaders* (ed.) G. R. Hawting (London, 2005), pp. 1–10.

while they were being driven to [their] death[s], which they beheld,
 “The Fire, O my Lord, rather than this, and not this shame!”¹⁰⁶

The Persian poet Sa’dī (d. 1292) expresses similar feelings in his poem on the fall of Baghdad, describing the “tearing apart of the women’s veils during captivity”.¹⁰⁷

In the face of these atrocities, a third group of writers made the deliberate choice of saving the honour of the ‘Abbāsīd women. These are largely pro-‘Abbāsīd sources distinguishable from others by the fact that they crafted extraordinary stories of ‘Abbāsīd women escaping being harmed by the Mongols. Al-Jūzjānī is a first example of this trend. He expanded his account of the Caliph’s martyrdom with a mention of the daughter of the Caliph who escaped rape¹⁰⁸ at the hands of the Mongols. As she was sent to Samarqand with a group of Mongol soldiers, al-Jūzjānī writes that:

[...] she requested permission [...] saying: “The mausoleum of one of my ancestors is situated in the city of Samarqand, namely that of Kusam, son of Abbas; permit me to go and visit his tomb”. The intendant in charge acceded to her request [...] In the mausoleum, bowing her face to the ground, she prayed: “Oh God, take This servant to You, and deliver her out of the hands of these strange men”. The door of compliance was opened; and then and there, in that act of adoration, she transmitted her pure soul to the Most High God.¹⁰⁹

This story recalls several Muslim traditions popular in the sub-continent and among both Sufi and Shī‘ī communities that describe the death of pious women who evaded danger and humiliation through martyrdom. The earth would open up and take them into its fold.¹¹⁰ The tomb of Ruqaiya, the daughter of ‘Alī (the first *imām* in Shī‘ī Islam), was allegedly a place where six ladies from the household of the Prophet prayed for divine rescue when they were harassed and threatened by disgraceful treatment. Their collective prayer led the ground to split and they disappeared underground. A piece of cloth (or scarf) is believed to have remained visible for a time.¹¹¹ Up to this day, the tomb of Bibi Pak Daman is venerated by Muslims in Pakistan. Another version of the legend relates that it was during the Mongol invasion of Lahore that six chaste and pious sisters (the daughters of Wali Allah Sayyad Ahmed Shah Tokhta) gathered outside the city to pray to Allah to bring about their demise as they feared captivity. An earthquake struck, and the women were buried alive.¹¹² The fact that al-Jūzjānī was himself based in the Sultanate of Delhi is probably

¹⁰⁶The translation used is by Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate*, pp. 39, 42. On the topic of sexual humiliation and the rhetoric tools used by the Muslim poets, see *ibid.*, pp. 39–42.

¹⁰⁷Sa’dī, *Kolliyat-i Sa’dī*, (ed.) Muhammad ‘Alī Forughī (Tehran, n.d.), pp. 503–504.

¹⁰⁸In ancient Rome, rape leading to suicide was a significant *topos*: the story of Lucretia, a noblewoman who committed suicide after her rape by Sexus Traquinius, has led to considerable storytelling and embellishment in the Roman and post-Roman tradition. See the Roman historian Livy (Titus Livius), *Ab Urbe Condita Libri (History of Rome)*, (trans.) Rev. Canon Roberts (1905), 1. 58. Art works illustrating her rape or suicide are very common. Similarly, in Greek mythology, the rape of Cassandra, daughter of Priam (the last king of Troy), has been an important symbol and a source of inspiration for writers and painters up to the modern period.

¹⁰⁹Al-Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt-i Naṣiri*, p. 1258.

¹¹⁰J. W. Frembgen, *The Friends of God: Sufi Saints in Islam: Popular Poster from Pakistan* (Oxford, 2012), p. 16.

¹¹¹M. Iqbal Chawla, R. Shoeb and A. Iftikhar, ‘Female Sufism in Pakistan: A Case Study of Bibi Pak Daman’, *Pakistan Vision* 17, 1 (June 2016), pp. 224–247. See p. 228.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, p. 229.

not a coincidence; he might well have been aware of these popular legends, their symbolic appeal and their likely impact on the reader's imagination.

Ibn al-Kāzarūnī and his student Ibn al-Fuwaṭī (d. 1323) provided further details of how Khadījah, who had been sent to Möngke by Hülegü, was honourably saved from Mongol captivity by her future father-in-law and Ibn al-Fuwaṭī's teacher.¹¹³

Several Mamlūk historians included similar stories about women from the house of 'Abbās being saved from dishonour. Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 1370) provides one such story—not to be found in earlier accounts—of the wife of the Caliph being taken captive by Hülegü, who lusted after her. After trying to distract Hülegü with a series of precious objects in the Caliph's palace, she had to devise a trick with her servant in order to save herself from rape. The plot was as follows. The Caliph's wife pulled out a sword belonging to the Caliph and claimed that it was magical and would only inflict harm if used by the Caliph himself. She offered to demonstrate the sword's harmlessness upon her servant, who, as previously instructed, screamed their refusal. The Caliph's wife then asked the servant to try the sword on herself instead; the servant did so and split the Caliph's wife into two. Thus, she died and avoided dishonour. Several elements in the account recall popular stories, such as Scheherazade's trick to avoid being killed by King Shahriar in *The Thousand and One Nights*, but also ancient Greek narratives such as the fate of Penelope, the wife of Odysseus, who managed to postpone marrying one of her 108 suitors during her husband's absence. One of Penelope's ploys involved weaving a cloth:¹¹⁴ "Young men, my wooers, since goodly Odysseus is dead, be patient, though eager for my marriage, until I finish this robe [...]"¹¹⁵

Al-Malik al-Ashraf (d. *circa* 1390), the ruler of Yemen, has a story in which a sister of the Caliph named Sitt al-Sharaf (literally meaning "the lady of honour") avoided ignominy at the hands of the Mongols. When she heard that the Mongols had set out for Baghdad in 1257, she began fasting and pleading with God that He take her soul so that she would not witness terror under Mongol captivity. Al-Malik al-Ashraf explains that she fell ill and died a few days later, God having answered her supplications.¹¹⁶ This account not only redeems the honour of a female member of the 'Abbāsīd family, but also suggests that religiosity can save a person.

What these various accounts make clear is that the fate of 'Abbāsīd women was a significant topic of commentary and concern for historians of the time; it crystallised their historical consciousness. While some medieval historians made it a point to emphasise the debasement of 'Abbāsīd women by the Mongols, others lamented the humiliation generated, while a last group redeemed these women's honour through supernatural stories of female heroes escaping captivity. Such stories are important in so far as they build a memory of these women for audiences of the time as well as subsequent ones. Avoiding rape through supernatural

¹¹³Ibn al-Kāzarūnī, *Mukhtaṣar al-Tārīkh*, pp. 274–277; Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, *Majma' al-Ādāb fī Mu'jam al-Alqāb*, (ed.) Muḥammad al-Kāzīm (Tehran, 1995), vol. V, pp. 112–114. For an analysis of these two sources and other related accounts, see Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate*, pp. 43–44.

¹¹⁴Homer, *The Odyssey with an English Translation by A.T. Murray*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA/ London, 1919), vol. 1, pp. 43–45. For the classical citation for the shroud discussed three times, see 2.93–110; 19.137–156; and 24.129–148.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 43.

¹¹⁶Al-Malik al-Ashraf, *Al-'Asjad al-Masbūk wa al-Jawhar al-Maḥkūk fī Ṭabaqāt al-Khulafā' wa al-Mulūk*, (ed.) Shākir 'Abd al-Mun'im (Beirut, 1975), p. 627.

stratagems was a *topos* in ancient Greek chronicles, and the parallels observed between them and medieval stories by Muslim historians underline the significance of symbolism in these accounts.¹¹⁷

Conclusion

The many deaths of al-Musta‘*šim* bi-*llāh* offer a good case study through which to explore and illustrate the importance of narrative strategies in medieval accounts. Our medieval historians used the death of the last ‘Abbāsīd Caliph as an opportunity to offer broader commentary on ‘Abbāsīd rule, sovereignty and legitimacy; they did so through a large use of literary tools, in particular *topoi*. More than simply telling us how he died, these accounts can inform us of the ways in which medieval historians of various religious and political backgrounds wanted the Caliph to be remembered and what his death meant for various social groups at the time. Put simply, they urge us to read these texts differently: rather than looking for facts and resolving their differences regarding the method of death applied, the modern historian ought to focus on the greater knowledge that can be derived from these texts, such as the commentary on the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate, Mongol rule, legitimate leadership, and religion in a wider sense. This does not mean, however, that these sources are all fictional, as some scholars have suggested;¹¹⁸ rather, significant episodes such as the death of a monarch or the end of a dynasty were occasions for reflection on larger issues of political and social significance.

Looking at sources produced both in the East and the West brings out the similarities of methods and *topoi* used in them. Also highlighted is the extent of the dialogue and competition taking place between these sources, each of which sought to establish a certain perception of the ‘Abbāsīd empire after its fall. The time period is of particular importance here: the fall of the ‘Abbāsīds and the rise of the Mongol empire led to an urge to establish Mongol sovereignty and legitimacy over the newly conquered territories. In the Mongol realm, this was done through a large propaganda apparatus, made noticeable by the rise of historical chronicles composed largely by bureaucrats and viziers. In the West, the post-Crusade context loomed large in many European accounts. Viewed from this perspective, the portrayal of the death of the last ‘Abbāsīd Caliph informs us of East/West relations at that particular time. Hence, it is critical to read each of these accounts not as an individual or isolated narrative, but one that is linked to broader questions and worldviews.

Finally, and perhaps more importantly, this case study highlights minutia in the details offered by writers of the time, who crafted highly sophisticated accounts that should be viewed as socio-political projects. In order to continue to examine and interpret these accounts, today’s historian needs to adopt a multi-dimensional approach. Not only should they examine the historical context and biographies of the writers, but they would benefit from working closely with classicists to uncover the various symbolisms and ancient *topoi*

¹¹⁷In ancient Rome, during the war between Rome and Clusium, a young woman named Cloelia was taken hostage but managed to flee the Clusian camp by swimming across the Tiber river. She is said to also have led away a group of Roman virgins, who thus avoided rape. She has been considered a female hero.

¹¹⁸Of relevance to this discussion, see the new study by Najam Haider on the early Islamic period, emphasising the role of rhetoric in the early medieval works: N. Haider, *The Rebel and the Imam in Early Islam* (Cambridge, 2019), in particular the first chapter on methodology entitled ‘Modeling Islamic Historical Writing’, pp. 1–25.

contained in these accounts. Only a very careful and detail-oriented analysis of these texts, I would argue, can allow modern readers to grasp their political and social meaning, as well as their long-term intent.

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