Historicity of Muhammad

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Muslim religious scholars rely primarily for their understanding of the life of[Muhammad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad) on the [Qur'an](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qur%27an), which gives very little information, and whose[historicity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Qur%27an) has been questioned,[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-EoI-Muhammad-1)[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-FOOTNOTENigosian20046-2) and on the [sīra literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prophetic_biography%22%20%5Co%20%22Prophetic%20biography) and [Hadith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadith) which survive in the historical works of writers of second, third, and fourth centuries of the [Muslim era](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_calendar) (c. 700−1000 AD).[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDonner1998125-3)[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-Watt-Mecca-xi-4) Modern historians have preferred to use as a starting-point a relatively small number of contemporaneous or near-contemporaneous non-Muslim sources and archaeological evidence, but also make use of later Muslim sources in their investigations.

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Islamic sources for the historical Muhammad[[edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Historicity_of_Muhammad&action=edit&section=1" \o "Edit section: Islamic sources for the historical Muhammad)]



11th century Persian Qur'an folio page in [kufic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kufic%22%20%5Co%20%22Kufic) script

The main Islamic source on Muhammad's life are Muslim sources written in [Arabic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabic), which include the [Qur'an](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qur%27an) and accounts of Muhammad's life written down by later Muslims, based on [oral traditions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oral_tradition). These sources are known as [sīra](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C4%ABra%22%20%5Co%20%22S%C4%ABra) and [hadith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadith).

There are also non-Muslim sources written in [Greek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_language), [Syriac](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syriac%22%20%5Co%20%22Syriac), [Armenian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian_language), and [Hebrew](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew%22%20%5Co%20%22Hebrew)by the Jewish and Christian communities.[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-FOOTNOTENigosian20046-2) These non-Muslim written sources go back to about 636 AD and many of the interesting ones date to within some decades later. One, attributed to a 7th-century Armenian scholar [Sebeos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sebeos%22%20%5Co%20%22Sebeos), states that Muhammad was a merchant and that his preaching revolved around the figure of [Abraham](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham).[[5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-SebeosCh30-5) There are also confirmations of Muhammad's [migration](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hijra_%28Islam%29) from Mecca to Medina in them.[[*citation needed*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia%3ACitation_needed)] However, they also contain some essential differences with regard to Muslim sources and in particular about chronology and about Muhammad's attitude towards the Jews and [Palestine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestine).[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-FOOTNOTENigosian20046-2)

The Qur'an itself has some, though very few, incidental allusions to Muhammad's life.[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-FOOTNOTENigosian20046-2) However, the "Qur'an responds constantly and often candidly to Muhammad's changing historical circumstances and contains a wealth of hidden data that are relevant to the task of the quest for the historical Muhammad."[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-EoI-Muhammad-1)

In the [sīra literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prophetic_biography%22%20%5Co%20%22Prophetic%20biography), the most important extant biography are the two recensions of [Ibn Ishaq](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibn_Ishaq%22%20%5Co%20%22Ibn%20Ishaq)'s (d. 768), now known as*Sīrat Rasūl Allah* ("Biography/Life of the Messenger/Apostle of Allah"), which survive in the works of his editors, most notably [Ibn Hisham](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibn_Hisham%22%20%5Co%20%22Ibn%20Hisham) (d. 834) and Yunus b. Bukayr (d.814-815), although not in its original form.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-EoI-Muhammad-1) According to Ibn Hisham, Ibn Ishaq wrote his biography some 120 to 130 years after Muhammad's death. Many, but not all, scholars accept the accuracy of these biographies, though their accuracy is unascertainable.[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-FOOTNOTENigosian20046-2) After Ibn Ishaq, there are a number of shorter accounts (some of which are earlier than Ibn Ishaq) recorded in different forms (see [List of earliest writers of sīra](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prophetic_biography#Early_compilations_of_s.C4.ABra)). Another biography of Muhammad is that of [al-Waqidi's](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Waqidi) (d. 822) and then [Ibn Sa'd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibn_Sa%27d%22%20%5Co%20%22Ibn%20Sa%27d)'s (d.844-5). Al-Waqidi is often criticized by early[Muslim historians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslim_historians) who state that the author is unreliable.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-EoI-Muhammad-1) These biographies are hardly biographies in the modern sense. The writers did not wish to record the life of Muhammad, but rather to describe Muhammad's military expeditions and to preserve stories about Muhammad, his sayings and the [reasons of revelations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asbab_al-nuzul) and interpretations of verses in the Qur'an.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-EoI-Muhammad-1) In addition to sīra, the [biographical dictionaries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biographical_dictionaries) of [Ali ibn al-Athir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ali_ibn_al-Athir) and [Ibn Hajar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibn_Hajar_al-Asqalani%22%20%5Co%20%22Ibn%20Hajar%20al-Asqalani) provide much detail about the[contemporaries of Muhammad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sahaba) but add little to our information about Muhammad himself.[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-Watt-Mecca-xii-6)

Lastly, there are the [hadith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadith) collections, which include traditional, [hagiographic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hagiography) accounts of the [verbal and physical traditions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunnah)of Muhammad. These date two to three hundred years after the death of Muhammad. The main feature of hadith is that of[Isnad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isnad) (chains of transmission). The majority of Western academics view the [hadith collections](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadith_collection) with caution as accurate historical sources.[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-FOOTNOTELewis1967-7) However, other Western historians have also defended hadith and the general authenticity of Isnad.[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-Humphreys-8)

**Quran**[[edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Historicity_of_Muhammad&action=edit&section=2" \o "Edit section: Quran)]

*See also:*[*History of the Quran*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Quran)*and*[*Criticism of the Quran*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Criticism_of_the_Quran)

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According to traditional Islamic scholarship, all of the Qur'an was written down by Muhammad's [companions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sahabah) while he was alive (during AD 610-632), but it was primarily an orally related document. The written compilation of the whole Qur'an in its finite form as we have it now was not completed until many years after the death of Muhammad.[[9]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-9)

[F.E. Peters](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/F.E._Peters) states, "Few have failed to be convinced that what is in our copy of the Quran is, in fact, what Muhammad taught, and is expressed in his own words... To sum this up: the Quran is convincingly the words of Muhammad, perhaps even dictated by him after their recitation".[[10]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-Peters-10) Peters argues that "The search for variants in the partial versions extant before the Caliph Uthman’s alleged recension in the 640s (what can be called the 'sources' behind our text) has not yielded any differences of great significance." .[[10]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-Peters-10)

[Patricia Crone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patricia_Crone) and [Michael Cook](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Cook_%28historian%29) challenge the traditional account of how the Qur'an was compiled writing that "there is no hard evidence for the existence of the Koran in any form before the last decade of the seventh century." They also question the accuracy of some the Qur'an's historical accounts.[[11]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-Crone-11) It is generally acknowledged that the work of Crone and Cook was a fresh approach in its reconstruction of early [Islamic history](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslim_history), but their alternative account of early Islam has been almost universally rejected.[[12]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-12) Van Ess has dismissed it stating that "a refutation is perhaps unnecessary since the authors make no effort to prove it in detail...Where they are only giving a new interpretation of well-known facts, this is not decisive. But where the accepted facts are consciously put upside down, their approach is disastrous."[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-van_Ess-13) R. B. Serjeant states: "Hagarism [the thesis of Crone and Cook]...is not only bitterly anti-Islamic in tone, but anti-Arabian. Its superficial fancies are so ridiculous that at first one wonders if it is just a ‘leg pull’, pure ’spoof’."[[14]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-14)



The [Uthman Qur'an](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uthman_Qur%27an%22%20%5Co%20%22Uthman%20Qur%27an), dated to the early 9th century. It is an alleged 7th century original of the edition of the third caliph Uthman but this is disputed by some owing to its 9th century kufic script. This Qur'an is located in the small Telyashayakh mosque in[Tashkent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tashkent).

[Gerd R. Puin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerd_R._Puin)'s initial study of ancient Qur'an manuscripts found in Yemen led him to conclude that the Qur'an is a "cocktail of texts", some of which may have been existent a hundred years before Muhammad. He later stated that "these Yemeni Qur'anic fragments do not differ from those found in museums and libraries elsewhere, with the exception of details that do not touch the Qur'an itself, but are rather differences in the way words are spelled." Puin has stated that he believes the Qur'an was an evolving text rather than simply the Word of God as revealed in its entirety to Muhammad in the seventh century A.D[[11]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-Crone-11)[[15]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-15)[[16]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-16) [Karl-Heinz Ohlig](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl-Heinz_Ohlig)comes to the conclusion that the person of Muhammed was not central to early Islam at all, and that at this very early stage Islam was in fact an Arabic Christian sect (likely [Ebionite](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebionite%22%20%5Co%20%22Ebionite), [Arian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arian) and/or [Nestorian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nestorian_Church), based on the recorded Ebionite faith of[Khadija](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khadija), Muhammad's first wife, and the Arianism and/or Nestorianism of her cousin,[[*dubious*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia%3ADisputed_statement)*–*[*discuss*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk%3AHistoricity_of_Muhammad#Dubious)] the monk [Bahira](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bahira%22%20%5Co%20%22Bahira), mentioned by [John of Damascus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_of_Damascus) an early 8th century apologetic text where he hypothesises a fictional story that Bahira might taught Muhammad, such accusations having made by the Quraish themselves in Mecca) which had objections to the concept of the [trinity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity), and that the later hadith and biographies are in large part [legends](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legend), instrumental in severing Islam from its Christian roots and building a full-blown new religion.[[17]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-17)[[*page needed*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia%3ACiting_sources)] [John Wansbrough](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Wansbrough) believes that the Qu’ran is a[redaction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Redaction) in part of other sacred scriptures, in particular the [Judaeo-Christian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judeo-Christian%22%20%5Co%20%22Judeo-Christian) scriptures.[[18]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-18)[[19]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-19) Prof. [Herbert Berg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_Berg_%28religion%29) writes that "Despite [John Wansbrough](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Wansbrough)'s very cautious and careful inclusion of qualifications such as "conjectural," and "tentative and emphatically provisional", his work is condemned by some. Some of negative reaction is undoubtedly due to its radicalness...Wansbrough's work has been embraced wholeheartedly by few and has been employed in a piecemeal fashion by many. Many praise his insights and methods, if not all of his conclusions."[[20]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-20)

There is considerable academic debate over the real chronology of the chapters of the Qur'an.[[21]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-Carole_Hillenbrand-21) [Carole Hillenbrand](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carole_Hillenbrand) holds that there are several remaining tasks for the Orientalist Qur'anic scholars: Few Qur'anic scholars have worked on the epigraphy of the [Dome of the Rock](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dome_of_the_Rock) in [Jerusalem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerusalem) whose foundation inscription dates to 72/692 and the antique Qur'an recently discovered in the Yemen, the [Sana'a manuscripts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sana%27a_manuscripts). The [Carbon-14](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon-14) tests applied to this Qur'an date it's parchment to 645-690 AD with 95 percent accuracy. Their real age may be a good deal younger, since C-14 estimates the year of the death of an organism, and the process from that to the final writing on the parchment involves an unknown amount of time, and parchments were also re-used often.[[21]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-Carole_Hillenbrand-21) [Paleography](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paleography) has dated the San'a manuscripts to 690-750 AD.

**Hadith**[[edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Historicity_of_Muhammad&action=edit&section=3" \o "Edit section: Hadith)]

*Main article:*[*Hadith*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadith)

Early [Muslim scholars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Muslim_scholars) were concerned that some hadiths (and sīra reports) may have been fabricated, and thus they developed a science of hadith criticism (see [Hadith studies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadith_studies)) to distinguish between genuine sayings and those that were forged, recorded using different words, or were wrongly ascribed to Muhammad.

In general, the majority of western academics view the [hadith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadith) collections with caution. [Bernard Lewis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernard_Lewis) states that "The collection and recording of Hadith did not take place until several generations after the death of the Prophet. During that period the opportunities and motives for falsification were almost unlimited."[[22]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-FOOTNOTELewis196737-22) However, some Western historians have defended hadith and the general authenticity of [Isnad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isnad%22%20%5Co%20%22Isnad) (chain of transmission).[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-Humphreys-8)

**Prophetic biography (sīra)**[[edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Historicity_of_Muhammad&action=edit&section=4" \o "Edit section: Prophetic biography (sīra))]

*Main article:*[*Prophetic biography § Authenticity and usefulness*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prophetic_biography#Authenticity_and_usefulness)

According to Wim Raven, it is often noted that a coherent image of Muhammad cannot be formed from the literature of sīra, whose authenticity and factual value have been questioned on a number of different grounds.[[23]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-EI2-23) He lists the following arguments against the authenticity of sīra, followed here by counter arguments:

1. Hardly any sīra work was compiled during the first century of Islam. However, [Fred Donner](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fred_Donner) points out that the earliest historical writings about the origins of Islam first emerged in 60-70 AH, well within the first century of Hijra (see also [List of biographies of Muhammad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_biographies_of_Muhammad)). Furthermore, the sources now extant, dating from the second, third, and fourth centuries AH, are mostly compilations of material derived from earlier sources.[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDonner1998125-3)
2. The many discrepancies exhibited in different narrations found in sīra works. Yet, despite the lack of a single orthodoxy in Islam, there is still a marked agreement on the most general features of the traditional origins story.[[24]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDonner199826-27-24)
3. Later sources claiming to know more about the time of Muhammad than earlier ones (to add embellishments and exaggeration common to an oral storytelling tradition).[[25]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-25)
4. Discrepancies compared to non-Muslim sources. But there are also similarities and agreements both in information specific to Muhammad,[[26]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-Cook_73.E2.80.9374-26) and concerning Muslim tradition at large.[[27]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-27)
5. Some parts or genres of sīra, namely those dealing with miracles, are not fit as sources for scientific historiographical information about Muhammad, except for showing the beliefs and doctrines of his community.

Nevertheless, other content of sīra, like the [Constitution of Medina](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_Medina), are generally considered to be authentic by both Muslim and non-Muslim historians.[[23]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-EI2-23)

Non-Muslim sources[[edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Historicity_of_Muhammad&action=edit&section=5" \o "Edit section: Non-Muslim sources)]

*See also:*[*Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seeing_Islam_as_Others_Saw_It)

There is a reference recording the Arab conquest of Syria, that mentions Muhammed. This much faded note is preserved on folio 1 of BL Add. 14,461, a codex containing the Gospel accord to Matthew and the Gospel according to Mark. This note appears to have been penned soon after the [battle of Gabitha](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Yarmouk) (636 CE) at which the Arabs inflicted crushing defeat of the Byzantines. Wright was first to draw the attention to the fragment and suggested that "it seems to be a nearly contemporary notice",[[28]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-28) a view which was also endorsed by Nöldeke.[[29]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-29) The purpose of jotting this note in the book of Gospels appears to be commemorative as the author appears to have realized how momentous the events of his time were. The words "we saw" are positive evidence that the author was a contemporary. The author also talks about olive oil, cattle, ruined villages, suggesting that he belonged to peasant stock, i.e., parish priest or a monk who could read and write. It is worthwhile cautioning that the condition of the text is fragmentary and many of the readings unclear or disputable. The lacunae are supplied in square brackets:

... and in January, they took the word for their lives (did) [the sons of] Emesa [i.e., ̣Hiṃs)], and many villages were ruined with killing by [the Arabs of] Mụhammad and a great number of people were killed and captives [were taken] from Galilee as far as Bēth [...] and those Arabs pitched camp beside [Damascus?] [...] and we saw everywhe[re...] and o[l]ive oil which they brought and them. And on the t[wenty six]th of May went S[ac[ella]rius]... cattle [...] [...] from the vicinity of Emesa and the Romans chased them [...] and on the tenth [of August] the Romans fled from the vicinity of Damascus [...] many [people] some 10,000. And at the turn [of the ye]ar the Romans came; and on the twentieth of August in the year n[ine hundred and forty-]seven there gathered in Gabitha [...] the Romans and great many people were ki[lled of] [the R]omans, [s]ome fifty thousand [...][[30]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-30)

The 8th century BL Add. 14,643 was published by Wright who first brought to attention the mention of an early date of 947[AG](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seleucid_era) (635-6 CE).[[31]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-31) The contents of this manuscript has puzzled many scholars for their apparent lack of coherence as it contains an assembly of texts with diverse nature.[[32]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-32) In relation to Arabs of Mohamed, there are two important dates mentioned in this manuscript.

AG 945, indiction VII: On Friday, 4 February, [i.e., 634 CE / Dhul Qa‘dah 12 AH] at the ninth hour, there was a battle between the Romans and the Arabs of Mụhammad [Syr. tayyāyē d-Ṃhmt] in Palestine twelve miles east of Gaza. The Romans fled, leaving behind the patrician YRDN (Syr. BRYRDN), whom the Arabs killed. Some 4000 poor villagers of Palestine were killed there, Christians, Jews and Samaritans. The Arabs ravaged the whole region.

AG 947, indiction IX: The Arabs invaded the whole of Syria and went down to Persia and conquered it; the Arabs climbed mountain of Mardin and killed many monks there in [the monasteries of] Kedar and Benōthō. There died the blessed man Simon, doorkeeper of Qedar, brother of Thomas the priest.[[33]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-33)

It is the first date above which is of great importance as it provides the first explicit reference to Muhammad in a non-Muslim source. The account is usually identified with the [battle of Dathin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Dathin).[[34]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-34) According to Hoyland, "its precise dating inspires confidence that it ultimately derives from first-hand knowledge".[[35]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-35)

Another account of the early seventh century comes from Sebeos who was a bishop of the House of Bagratunis. From this chronicle, there are indications that he lived through many of the events he relates. He maintains that the account of Arab conquests derives from the fugitives who had been eyewitnesses thereof. He concludes with Mu‘awiya's ascendancy in the Arab civil war (656-61 CE), which suggests that he was writing soon after this date. Sebeos is the first non-Muslim author to present us with a theory for the rise of Islam that pays attention to what the Muslims themselves thought they were doing.[[36]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-36) As for Muhammad, he has the following to say:

At that time a certain man from along those same sons of Ismael, whose name was Mahmet [i.e., Mụhammad], a merchant, as if by God's command appeared to them as a preacher [and] the path of truth. He taught them to recognize the God of Abraham, especially because he was learnt and informed in the history of Moses. Now because the command was from on high, at a single order they all came together in unity of religion. Abandoning their vain cults, they turned to the living God who had appeared to their father Abraham. So, Mahmet legislated for them: not to eat carrion, not to drink wine, not to speak falsely, and not to engage in fornication. He said: 'With an oath God promised this land to Abraham and his seed after him for ever. And he brought about as he promised during that time while he loved Ismael. But now you are the sons of Abraham and God is accomplishing his promise to Abraham and his seed for you. Love sincerely only the God of Abraham, and go and seize the land which God gave to your father Abraham. No one will be able to resist you in battle, because God is with you.[[37]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-37)

Sebeos was writing the chronicle at a time when memories of sudden eruption of the Arabs was fresh. He knows Muhammad's name and that he was a merchant by profession. He hints that his life was suddenly changed by a divinely inspired revelation.[[38]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-38)

Views of historians[[edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Historicity_of_Muhammad&action=edit&section=6" \o "Edit section: Views of historians)]

Attempts to distinguish between the historical elements and the unhistorical elements of many of the reports of Muhammad have not been very successful.[[39]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-39) A major source of difficulty in the quest for the historical Muhammad is the modern lack of knowledge about pre-Islamic Arabia.[[10]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-Peters-10) According to [Harald Motzki](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harald_Motzki%22%20%5Co%20%22Harald%20Motzki), "On the one hand, it is not possible to write a historical biography of the Prophet without being accused of using the sources uncritically, while on the other hand, when using the sources critically, it is simply not possible to write such a biography."[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-FOOTNOTENigosian20046-2)

Historian [Michael Cook](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Cook_%28historian%29) takes the view that evidence independent of Islamic tradition "precludes any doubts as to whether Muhammad was a real person" and clearly shows that he became the central figure of a new religion in the decades following his death. He reports, though, that this evidence conflicts with the Islamic view in some aspects, associating Muhammad with Palestine rather than Inner Arabia, complicating the question of his sole authorship or transmission of the Qur'an, and suggesting that there were Jews as well as Arabs among his followers.[[40]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-40) For [Patricia Crone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patricia_Crone), a single Greek text written at around the time of Muhammad's death provides "irrefutable proof" that he was a historical figure. There is also, she says, "exceptionally good" evidence that Muhammad was an Arab political leader and prophet. She says we can be "reasonably sure" in attributing all or most of the Qur'an to him. She takes a view that Muhammad's traditional association with the Arabian Peninsula may be "doctrinally inspired", and is put in doubt by the Qur'an itself, which describes agricultural activity that could not have taken place there, as well as making a reference to the site of [Sodom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sodom_and_Gomorrah%22%20%5Co%20%22Sodom%20and%20Gomorrah)which appears to place Muhammad's community close to the [Dead Sea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dead_Sea).[[41]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-41)

In their 2003 book [*Crossroads to Islam*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crossroads_to_Islam), [Yehuda D. Nevo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yehuda_D._Nevo) and Judith Koren advanced a thesis, based on an extensive examination of archaeological evidence from the early Islamic period, that Muhammad may never have existed, with monotheistic Islam only coming into existence some time after he is supposed to have lived. This has been described as "plausible or at least arguable" and employing a "very rigorous historical methodology" by David Cook of [Rice University](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rice_University), but has also been compared to Holocaust denial by historian [Colin Wells](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colin_Wells_%28historian%29), who suggests that the authors deal with some of the evidence illogically.[[42]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-42)[[43]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_note-43)

See also[[edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Historicity_of_Muhammad&action=edit&section=7" \o "Edit section: See also)]

* [Achtiname of Muhammad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achtiname_of_Muhammad)
* [Reliability of the Quran](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Criticism_of_Islam#Reliability_of_the_Quran)
* [Historiography of early Islam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historiography_of_early_Islam)
* [Islam: The Untold Story](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam%3A_The_Untold_Story)
* [Muhammad's letters to the Heads-of-State](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad%27s_letters_to_the_Heads-of-State)
* [Relics of Muhammad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Relics_of_Muhammad)
* [Soviet Orientalist studies in Islam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Orientalist_studies_in_Islam)

Notes[[edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Historicity_of_Muhammad&action=edit&section=8" \o "Edit section: Notes)]

* 1. ^ [Jump up to:***a***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-EoI-Muhammad_1-0) [***b***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-EoI-Muhammad_1-1) [***c***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-EoI-Muhammad_1-2) [***d***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-EoI-Muhammad_1-3) [***e***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-EoI-Muhammad_1-4) *[Encyclopaedia of Islam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Encyclopaedia_of_Islam%22%20%5Co%20%22Encyclopaedia%20of%20Islam)*, *Muhammad*
	2. ^ [Jump up to:***a***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-FOOTNOTENigosian20046_2-0) [***b***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-FOOTNOTENigosian20046_2-1) [***c***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-FOOTNOTENigosian20046_2-2) [***d***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-FOOTNOTENigosian20046_2-3) [***e***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-FOOTNOTENigosian20046_2-4) [***f***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-FOOTNOTENigosian20046_2-5) [Nigosian 2004](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad%22%20%5Cl%20%22CITEREFNigosian2004), p. 6.
	3. ^ [Jump up to:***a***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-FOOTNOTEDonner1998125_3-0) [***b***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-FOOTNOTEDonner1998125_3-1) [Donner 1998](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#CITEREFDonner1998), p. 125.
	4. [**Jump up^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-Watt-Mecca-xi_4-0) [William Montgomery Watt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Montgomery_Watt), [*Muhammad in Mecca*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_at_Mecca_%28book%29), 1953, Oxford University Press, p.xi
	5. [**Jump up^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-SebeosCh30_5-0) Sebeos' History [Chapter 30](http://rbedrosian.com/seb9.htm#30)
	6. [**Jump up^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-Watt-Mecca-xii_6-0) William Montgomery Watt, [*Muhammad at Mecca*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_at_Mecca_%28book%29), Oxford University Press, p.xii
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	8. ^ [Jump up to:***a***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-Humphreys_8-0) [***b***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-Humphreys_8-1) Humphreys, R. Stephen (1991). *Islamic History: A framework for Inquiry* (Revised ed.). Princeton University Press. p. 82. [ISBN](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Standard_Book_Number) [0-691-00856-6](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special%3ABookSources/0-691-00856-6).
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	10. ^ [Jump up to:***a***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-Peters_10-0) [***b***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-Peters_10-1) [***c***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-Peters_10-2) F. E. Peters (1991)
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	13. [**Jump up^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-van_Ess_13-0) van Ess, "The Making Of Islam", [Times Literary Supplement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Times_Literary_Supplement), September 8, 1978, p. 998
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	20. [**Jump up^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-20) Herbert Berg(2000), p.83
	21. ^ [Jump up to:***a***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-Carole_Hillenbrand_21-0) [***b***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-Carole_Hillenbrand_21-1) Carole Hillenbrand in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, p.329
	22. [**Jump up^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-FOOTNOTELewis196737_22-0) [Lewis 1967](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#CITEREFLewis1967), p. 37.
	23. ^ [Jump up to:***a***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-EI2_23-0) [***b***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-EI2_23-1) Raven, W. (1997). "SĪRA". *Encyclopaedia of Islam* **9**(2nd ed.). Brill Academic Publishers. pp. 660–3. [ISBN](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Standard_Book_Number) [90-04-10422-4](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special%3ABookSources/90-04-10422-4).
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	31. [**Jump up^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-31) W. Wright, Catalogue Of Syriac Manuscripts In The British Museum Acquired Since The Year 1838, 1872, Part III, Printed by order of the Trustees: London, No. DCCCCXIII, pp. 1040-1041
	32. [**Jump up^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-32) A. Palmer (with contributions from S. P. Brock and R. G. Hoyland), The Seventh Century In The West-Syrian Chronicles Including Two Seventh-Century Syriac Apocalyptic Texts, 1993, op. cit., pp. 5-6; R. G. Hoyland, Seeing Islam As Others Saw It: A Survey And Evaluation Of Christian, Jewish And Zoroastrian Writings On Early Islam, 1997, op. cit., pp. 118-119
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	34. [**Jump up^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-34) A. Palmer (with contributions from S. P. Brock and R. G. Hoyland), The Seventh Century In The West-Syrian Chronicles Including Two Seventh-Century Syriac Apocalyptic Texts, 1993, op. cit., p. 19, note 119; Also see R. G. Hoyland, Seeing Islam As Others Saw It: A Survey And Evaluation Of Christian, Jewish And Zoroastrian Writings On Early Islam, 1997, op. cit., p. 120, note 14
	35. [**Jump up^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-35) R. G. Hoyland, Seeing Islam As Others Saw It: A Survey And Evaluation Of Christian, Jewish And Zoroastrian Writings On Early Islam, 1997, op. cit., p. 120
	36. [**Jump up^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-36) R. G. Hoyland, Seeing Islam As Others Saw It: A Survey And Evaluation Of Christian, Jewish And Zoroastrian Writings On Early Islam, 1997, op. cit., p. 128
	37. [**Jump up^**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Muhammad#cite_ref-37) R. W. Thomson (with contributions from J. Howard-Johnson & T. Greenwood), The Armenian History Attributed To Sebeos Part - I: Translation and Notes, 1999, Translated Texts For Historians - Volume 31, Liverpool University Press, pp. 95-96. Other translations can also be seen in P. Crone & M. Cook, Hagarism: The Making Of The Islamic World, 1977, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, pp. 6-7; R. G. Hoyland, Seeing Islam As Others Saw It: A Survey And Evaluation Of Christian, Jewish And Zoroastrian Writings On Early Islam, 1997, op. cit., p. 129; idem., "Sebeos, The Jews And The Rise Of Islam" in R. L. Nettler (Ed.), Medieval And Modern Perspectives On Muslim-Jewish Relations, 1995, Harwood Academic Publishers GmbH in cooperation with the Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, p. 89
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