

The Legend of al-Dajjāl (Antichrist): The Personification of Evil in the Islamic Tradition

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There are many figures that represent evil in the Islamic tradition. Among them are Satan, Iblīs, Ṭāghūt, Pharaoh, and al-Dajjāl.¹ However, the only figure with an eschatological significance is al-Dajjāl. Al-Dajjāl occupies an important place in the body of *Ḥadīth* and manuals of Islamic theology. Very few English works, however, have been written on this subject. This article aims to offer the reader an Islamic understanding of al-Dajjāl by referring to two major sources: the Qurʾān and the *Ḥadīth*. Classical as well as contemporary scholars and sources of Islamic theology will be explored. *Ḥadīth* literature has a detailed account of the emergence of al-Dajjāl and his struggle against Jesus and the Mahdi.

His full name al-Masīḥ al-Dajjāl, literally, the pseudo-messiah or the opposite of al-Masīḥ ʿĪsa (Jesus the Messiah or the true Messiah). The term al-Dajjāl originally comes from the Syriac language and is used in Arabic. According to some Arabic lexicons, al-Masīḥ means the one who has no eyebrows and a single eye on one side of his face. This characteristic is found in al-Dajjāl, the pseudo-messiah.² Ibn Manẓūr, author of the famous Arabic lexicon, indicates that al-Masīḥ has two opposite meanings applied to two personalities. Al-Masīḥ is used to describe al-Dajjāl, as well as Jesus. The term al-Masīḥ can mean the beautiful one, Jesus, as well as his opposite, al-Dajjāl, the ugly one.³ Al-Masīḥ can also mean the one who is blind; therefore, this title is given to the blind al-Dajjāl.⁴ Accordingly, al-Masīḥ ʿĪsa is the opposite of al-Masīḥ al-Dajjāl, i.e., Jesus the Christ is the opposite of the Antichrist. Both the words al-Masīḥ and al-Dajjāl are strange (*gharīb*), that is, originally derived from languages other than Arabic. The word al-Masīḥ originally

comes from Hebrew but was adopted by Arabs and subsequently given many meanings.⁵

Al-Dajjāl in the Qurʾān

Whether or not al-Dajjāl is directly referred to in the Qurʾān is a matter of debate among Muslim scholars. Strictly speaking, the word al-Dajjāl does not appear in the Qurʾān. However, some scholars believe that he is mentioned by character traits. The Qurʾānic verses that mention Jesus indirectly make reference to al-Dajjāl, the Antichrist. One verse reads: "Nay, but verily *man* is rebellious" (96.6). Here "man" refers to al-Dajjāl, the Antichrist of the Muslim world who will "attack the people of prayer and attack mosques rebelliously."⁶ Another Islamic scholar refers to a verse in chapter 17, which reads "And we decreed for the children of Israel in the scripture, ye verily will work corruption on the earth twice and will become great tyrants" (17.4). Modern Egyptian scholar Muḥammad Awad believes that the second corruption mentioned in this verse indicates the emergence of the Antichrist at the end of time.⁷ One can argue that verses about Pharaoh and the struggle of Moses against him⁸ and the verses about some false deities, which are named as Ṭāghūt in the Qurʾān and are found in 2.56–57; 4.51, 60.76; 5.36; 16.36; and 39.17, are considered among those containing characteristics of the Antichrist in the Islamic tradition. As Bernard McGinn writes, "some Qurʾānic exegetes refer to Chapter 108 in the Qurʾān, which is called *Kauthar* and claimed that the verse contains the hallmarks of the Antichrist." The chapter reads: "Lo! We have given thee (Muḥammad) the abundance; so pray unto your Lord and sacrifice, surely the one who hates you, *he* is the one who is cut off" (108.1–3). McGinn indicates that Muslim scholars understand the term *abtar* to mean "the one who is cut off,"⁹ and believe it is a reference to the Antichrist.¹⁰

Al-Dajjāl in Ḥadīth Literature

The *Aḥadīth* are considered the second most authoritative source of Islam, and many are dedicated to the emergence of al-Dajjāl. Almost all authoritative *Ḥadīth* collections dedicate a chapter to the trials (*Fitan*) of the end of time, which focus on the Antichrist. My own investigation revealed more than two hundred such *Aḥadīth* of varying lengths.¹¹ The *Ḥadīth* which explore the emergence of the Antichrist almost always examine the struggle between Jesus, the Christ, and the Antichrist, as well.

One of these traditions indicates that the companions of the Prophet were so often warned about the emergence of the Antichrist that they began to think that the Antichrist was in the suburb of Medina, hidden among the date trees, waiting to attack the city. Even a young Jewish man named Ibn Sayyād (d. 683) was believed to be the Antichrist and was nearly killed by Omar, a prominent

companion of the Prophet who would become the second caliph of Islam. The young Jewish man was saved by the Prophet's intervening words: "If he is indeed the Antichrist, then you cannot kill him, because Jesus will kill him. If he is not the Antichrist then again you may not kill him simply because he has the features of the Antichrist."¹² The encounter between the Prophet and his companions and this legendary figure, who is believed to be the son of a Jewish family of Medina, is found in many *Aḥādīth*.¹³

Almost all traditions portray al-Dajjāl as a person. In some, he is even said to resemble a specific person whose name was 'Abd al-'Uzza bin Qaṭan. Al-Dajjāl is known as ugly, dirty and having only one eye (al-A'war). Anas, a companion of the Prophet narrates that the Prophet said, "No prophet was sent but he warned his community against the one-eyed (al-A'war) liar (al-Dajjāl): 'Beware, he is A'war, and your Lord is not A'war. And there will be written between his eyes the word Kāfir (disbeliever).'"¹⁴

A tradition narrated by Nawās b. Sam'ān also mentions his emergence and the period of his reign on earth, which, according to a well-known *Ḥadīth*: will be forty days,

The messenger of God mentioned al-Dajjāl one morning spoke at length about al-Dajjāl (so emphasizing him) that we thought that he was among date-trees. 'I am afraid that al-Dajjāl will defeat you' the Prophet said. The Prophet said 'If he emerges (I am with you) I will defend you against him, if he emerges and (I am not with you) every soul should defend himself. God is my successor upon every Muslim. He is a young man with curly hair, his eye is blown up, I almost resemble him to al-'Uzza bin-Qaṭan, those of you who live until the time of his emergence let him read against him the first verses of the chapter al-Kahf (the cave, chapter 18) of the Qur'ān. He is emerging from a place between Damascus and Iraq. He travels towards right and left. O servants of God be steadfast.' We said 'O' messenger of god. How long will be his stay on earth?' He said: 'forty days, one day is like a year, one day is like a month, one day is like a week and his other days are like your days.' We said 'O' messenger of God on the day which is like one year is it enough for us the prayer of one regular day?' The Prophet said: 'No, measure that day according to your days.' We said, 'O messenger of God, how fast is he on the earth?' He said: 'Like rain backed by wind. He comes to a nation and they believe in him and accept (his message). He commands the sky to rain and it rains, and the earth to grow grass, and it grows. He provides them with plenty of wealth. He comes to another nation and they reject his message. He turns away from them and they become poor with nothing in their hands. He passes a remnant of an ancient city and tells her 'take out your treasures.' Its treasures follow him like bees, then he calls a man full of youth and strikes him with his sword, cutting him in two. Then he calls him and he (the youth) comes

laughing with shining face (as if al-Dajjāl was unable to kill him), at that moment God sends Jesus the son of Mary. He descends on the top of the white minaret at the east of Damascus, putting his hands on the wings of two angels. (He is so beautiful that) When he bows his head, water drops when he lifts it shines like pearls. Any non-believer who finds his breath will be killed; his breath reaches as far as his sight. He pursues al-Dajjāl and finds him at the gate of Lydda, then he kills him. Then a nation who was saved in the trial of the Anti-Christ comes to Jesus. He touches them and tells them about the their levels in paradise. At that time God inspires Jesus that he has sent some people (Gog and Magog) that no one can defeat. And God says: "Take my servants to the mountain of Tour."¹⁵

Bernard McGinn compares this to the Jewish *armillus*. As understood from the *Hadīth* cited above, these 'days' are to be understood differently from how we currently perceive them. One day will be like one year, the second will be like one month, the third like a week, and the others like regular days. The rest of the tradition indicates that al-Dajjāl will claim to be a god and will command clouds to bring rain, and it will rain, and he will command the earth to grow grass, and grass will grow. While he is killing a young believer (Mu'min), Jesus will come, the young believer will be resurrected, and Jesus will pursue and kill al-Dajjāl. The Prophet warns Muslims against al-Dajjāl's trial, and asks them to recite chapter 18 of the Qur'ān in order to be protected from al-Dajjāl. The place of his emergence is said to be somewhere between Syria (Damascus) and Iraq.

Said Nursi (d. 1960) makes two interpretations on this but humbly reminds his readers that, "No one knows the realm of the unseen (*ghayb*) but Allah" (27:65). Nursi says, "There are two interpretations of this: the first, a *hadīth* indicates that the Big Dajjāl (the Antichrist of the Christian world) will emerge from the North Pole. Because in the North Pole the whole year is one night and one day . . ." In his second interpretation, Nursi says that both Dajjāls, the Dajjāl of Muslim world and the Dajjāl of the Christian world, will have three periods of rule. During the first of these, which are called "days," the Antichrists will accomplish "endeavors," the like of which a human being could not accomplish in three hundred years.¹⁶ Nursi believed this is what the Prophet of Islam meant by indicating that one day will be like one year. Nursi also suggests that the Antichrist is not a person but a regime, specifically, the communist regime, which promotes irreligion and disbelief in God. Interestingly, Nursi claims that communism began in Siberia, near the North Pole.¹⁷ According to another tradition, al-Dajjāl will first claim to be a prophet, then a god. He will perform miracles, resurrecting parents of the Bedouins. He will be able to enter every place with the exceptions of Mecca and Medina.¹⁸

In another authentic *Ḥadīth* source, al-Dajjāl is mentioned in "The Story of the Beast." The reliability of this *Ḥadīth* is much debated among Muslim scholars, although it is taken from an often accepted *Ḥadīth* source, because it is unclear whether the story of the beast is to be understood as a vision or a reality. Unlike other traditions, in this particular *Ḥadīth*, the Prophet narrates what one of his companions has said, a Christian who converted to Islam. The tradition is narrated by Fāḥima bint Qays, one of the early immigrant women from Medina. In this narration, the Prophet says that Tamīm talked to him about something, which was compatible with what he said about the Antichrist. The Prophet narrates:

He sailed in a boat with thirty people of Lakhm (tribe) and Juzam (tribe). They struggled with waves for one month. Then around sunset time they took refuge in an island, and they entered the island. An extremely hairy beast passed them. They did not know its front and its back because of the extreme hair. They said 'What are you?' It said 'I am the beast.' They said 'What is the beast?' It said 'O people, go to this man in the monastery. He is anxious about your news.' He (Tamīm) said that when it named a man we left it; we thought it might be Satan. We went quickly and entered the monastery. We found the biggest man in His creation we had ever seen. His two hands were tied with iron to his neck together with his knees and we said 'Who are you?' He said 'You learned who I am. Tell me who are you?' (The *Ḥadīth* continues with the Antichrist's question of the date of Baysan, after Tamīm gives him the details of their story:) 'Tell me about the dates of Baysān.' We said 'What of the dates of Baysān are you asking about?' He said, 'I am asking you about its date-trees. Are they still giving dates?' We said 'Yes.' He said 'It is near that they won't give dates anymore.' He said: 'Tell me about the lake of Tabariyyah.' We said 'What of Tabariyyah are you asking?' He said: 'Is there water still in it?' The Prophet says 'They (Tamim and his companions) said 'Yes, there is plenty of water in it.' He (Antichrist) said: 'Its water is about to go.' He said 'Tell me about the fountain of Zugar.' They said: 'What aspect are you asking about?' He said 'Is there water in the fountain? And are its people watering the agriculture with its water?' We said 'Yes, it has plenty of water and its people use it for their agriculture.' He said 'Tell me about the Prophet of illiterates (Arabs). What has he done?' They said: 'He started in Mecca, then came down to Medina.' He said: 'Did Arabs fight him?' We said 'Yes.' We told him that he defeated his opponents, then they all obeyed him. He said 'Is that happened?' We said 'yes.' He said: 'It would be better for them to obey him.' Then he said: 'Let me tell you about myself: I am the Messiah (Antichrist). I am about to receive permission to emerge. I will emerge and travel on the earth. I will never leave any village but enter it in forty (days). Mecca and Medina are prohibited for me. Whenever I want to enter both or each of them an angel with a

sword will prevent me from entering. At every door of it there is an angel who protects it.' She (Fatima, the narrator) said that the Messenger of God said knocking the pulpit with his finger: 'This is Tayba (Medina) This is Tyba,' He meant Medina. The Prophet said 'Did I tell you this.' People said 'Yes.' The Prophet said: 'I am excited about the story of Tamim, because it is similar to what I have told you about the Antichrist and Medina and Mecca. Beware he is in the sea of Damascus (Mediterranean Sea) or the sea of Yemen (Red Sea). No, on the contrary he is coming from the east, he is coming from the east, he is coming from the east. Pointing with his hand towards the east.' She (Fatima) says: 'I have memorized this from the messenger of God.'¹⁹

The reliability of this source is questioned by some scholars, such as A.J. Jenkinson, who states that the story of Tamim is influenced by Greek tales of the god Zeus, who chained Prometheus to an island because of his hatred for the sons of Iapetos.²⁰ Although this tradition is considered reliable according to the methodology of *Ḥadīth* narrations, many scholars of the *Ḥadīth* find weak links in its chain of narration.²¹

What is understood from the body of *Ḥadīth* literature is that the Antichrist has an ontological existence, although some Muslim interpreters claim that he is a sort of devil or demon that is unseen. There are some traditions that place al-Dajjāl and Satan on the same level. The Prophet takes refuge in God from Satan and from al-Dajjāl. 'Ā'isha, wife of the Prophet, narrates: "The Prophet was saying in his prayers (daily prescribed) as follows: 'O my Lord! I take refuge in you from the torment of the grave, and I take refuge in you from the trial (fitna) of al-Dajjāl and I take refuge in you from the trial of life and death.'²² It is very well-known among Muslims that in the final part of each prayer of the five daily prayers, they are asked to take refuge in God from four things: 1) the fire of hell, 2) the torment of the grave, 3) the trial of life and death, and 4) from the evil of the Antichrist.²³ We are told that the Prophet taught this prayer to his companions as he was teaching a chapter from the Qur'ān.

According to the general description of the Antichrist in *Ḥadīth* literature, al-Dajjāl is portrayed as an evil human, not as a devil. He has a human physiognomy and is described in terms of human characteristics; he has eyes, hair, and a body. In some traditions, he is tall; in others, he is short. Medieval scholars like 'Alī al-Qarī (d. 1605) try to reconcile these contradictory descriptions found in the *Ḥadīth*.²⁴ In some traditions, the Antichrist is even thought to resemble a specific person from a specific tribe. Some traditions indicate that there will be many Antichrists, usually thirty or twenty-seven, while others indicate that there will only be one. Two pseudo-prophets who led rebellions against the Prophet, Aswad al-Anasī (d. 632) and Musaylamah al-Khaddāb (d. 633), were considered among the first Antichrists.²⁵

Al-Dajjāl is also characterized in the *Aḥādīth* by a description of his forehead, which is described as bearing the title K-F-R, which means unbeliever. Al-Bukhārī's version is very short, after mentioning al-Dajjāl's one-eye, Anas narrates that the Prophet said: "There will be written between his eyes KAFIR (disbeliever)."²⁶ According to several traditions, these letters will be written between his two eyes. Some traditions add that all believers will be able to read and understand this word, whether or not they are literate. In some versions of the *Ḥadīth*, only those who do not like his endeavors will be able to read it. *Ḥadīth* interpreters differ as to the meaning of these letters. There are those who interpret the description literally and those who interpret it metaphorically. Al-Nawawī narrates that there is a consensus among the "scholars of truth" that the writing in question is real. God will put this writing as a sign to believers to reject the Antichrist. Every believer will be able to read it. However, those who like his endeavors will be unable to read it.²⁷ In the Islamic tradition, God controls man's ability to see or understand. It is therefore possible that a believer, even if illiterate, may read and understand if God so chooses. Likewise, an unbeliever who is literate may be unable to see or read as God wishes. Bernard McGinn argues that the notion that the Antichrist will have three letters written on his forehead parallels a number of Christian physiognomies, especially those of the pseudo-John and the pseudo-Daniel apocalypses.²⁸

The death of the Antichrist is directly connected to the descent of Jesus. According to prophetic sayings as mentioned above, Jesus will descend and kill the Antichrist in a place called Lydda, a small town near Jerusalem. According to the story of Ibn Sayyad, the Prophet indicates that, "only Jesus can kill the Antichrist." Also, the Prophet, when he ascended to heaven, is said to have met with Jesus who told him that he would come at the end of time and kill the Antichrist.²⁹ In such traditions, one can see a strong relationship between Muḥammad and Jesus, who will come to help the community of Muḥammad and protect them from the Antichrist, who will besiege that community. We are told that Jesus will descend onto a Minaret of the Umayyad Mosque, the grand mosque of Damascus. This has been taken literally by many medieval scholars. For this reason, commoners prepared a white horse for Jesus to ride in his battle against the Antichrist.

The killing of the Antichrist is taken by many Muslims in a literal sense, yet, there are some contemporary scholars who focus on the symbolic language of *Aḥādīth*. Jesus represents truth and the Antichrist represents falsehood. Thus, Jesus' killing of the Antichrist is also a killing of falsehood. One very interesting interpretation made by Said Nursi suggests that the killing of the Antichrist is symbolic rather than literal. Therefore, it is not the killing of a person but of a movement of irreligion or materialism. According to Nursi,

"At the end of time, while Christianity is purified, and rid of superstitions and united with Islam against the movement of disbelief and denial of God which stems from Naturalistic philosophy, the collective personality of Christianity will kill the collective personality of irreligiosity with the sword of divine revelation. Jesus, representing the collective personality of Christianity will kill al-Dajjāl, who represents the collective personality of disbelief."³⁰ Although Nursi does not outright deny the literal meaning of the *Ḥadīth*, he is very clear about this spiritual struggle between belief and disbelief. Interpreting the *Ḥadīth* which says "Jesus will kill the Antichrist," Nursi says, "The persona of al-Dajjāl will be killed by the sword of the persona of Jesus, peace be upon him." Nursi continues: "Only Christian spiritualists who will merge the truthfulness of the religion of Jesus with the truthfulness of Islam and by this power (resulted from the merging of Islam and Christianity) will be able to destroy the huge statue of materialism and irreligiosity, and will kill the collective personality of both and their idea of disbelief, which is the denial of the Divine."³¹ According to Nursi, the *Ḥadīth* refers to the community of spiritual Christians who are struggling against worldwide disbelief. These people will merge the real religion of Jesus with Islam, and by this merger the religion of God will have a strong power through which they will be able to 'kill' the collective personality of materialism. Here, Nursi focuses on Muslim-Christian cooperation, which is, according to Nursi, predicted by Prophet Muḥammad in his allegorical sayings. By this, Muslims and Christians will be able to rescue humanity from disbelief in God, and will reestablish 'holy' values. Although some traditions indicate that the Antichrist will be killed by the Mahdi, the messianic figure in Islam, major sources on the subject clearly indicate that this role belongs to Jesus.

Al-Dajjāl in Islamic Theology

With regard to prophetic sayings on the matter of the Antichrist, as briefly indicated above, Muslim scholars are divided into three groups: those who accept the traditions literally, those who interpret the traditions, and those who deny their reliability. To those who claim the traditions must be taken in a literal sense, the traditionalist scholars, the Prophet has said the truth, and logically it is not impossible. Therefore, the traditions must be accepted as literal in meaning. The emergence of al-Dajjāl, it is thought, will occur in the time of miraculous things, and it is said that al-Dajjāl will perform miracles. Such an idea is not viewed as outside the scope of reason. It is an unseen issue (*ghaybī*); therefore, there is no room for personal interpretation of the subject.

The second group, which favors interpretation of the traditions, believes that the traditions of the Antichrist are reliable and authentic, but have

allegorical meanings. Therefore, interpretation is necessary to understand the traditions. Among those who were first to promote this idea was al-Taftazānī (d. 1390), a famous medieval Muslim theologian. He interprets the emergence of the Antichrist as the dominance of evil and corruption on earth. Some other signs of doomsday are the trial of the Mongolian invasion of Muslim land. To such scholars, prophetic sayings should not be taken literally, but require interpretation.

The third group, which questions the authenticity of the *Ḥadīth*, believes that the image of the Antichrist created in the *Ḥadīth* is irreconcilable with Qur'ānic teachings because the Qur'ān states that the coming of the day of judgment will be sudden (6.31–44; 21.40; 22.25; 43.66). The miracles attributed to the Antichrist in *Ḥadīth* literature seem stronger than the miracles given to the prophets to prove their cause or religious claims. God will not, according to such scholars, give the Antichrist such miracles for the purpose of deceiving people. Again, to this group, traditions on the Antichrist contradict the teachings of the Qur'ān, which says there is no change in the laws of nature enacted by God (33:62).

Referring to authoritative sources of the Islamic tradition, classical Muslim theologians have enshrined belief in the emergence of the Antichrist as an integral part of Islamic faith since the eighth century. The first of these theologians, Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767), after declaring the truthfulness of the signs of the Day of Judgment, indicated that the emergence of the Antichrist (*Khurūj al-Dajjāl*) is true and a reality. Theologians after him interpreted prophetic sayings found in the collections of *Aḥadīth* in different ways. The founders of two different schools of thought in Islamic theology, al-Ash'arī (d. 935) and al-Maturīdī (d. 944), did not add anything to the views of Abū Ḥanīfa. All scholars in the Sunni Muslim tradition, with almost no exception, accepted the emergence of the Antichrist as a reality, "*Khurūj al-Dajjāl Ḥaqqun*." Not only Sunnites but Shi'ites, Kharijites, and Mu'tazilites, accepted the emergence of the Antichrist. Therefore, their beliefs support those of the Sunni tradition. Shi'ite sources record that there were questions 'Alī, the cousin of the Prophet, was asked about the Antichrist, which he answered. It is believed that 'Alī's answers stemmed from the teachings of the Prophet, although there are some slight differences such as descriptions of the followers of the Antichrist. According to some Shi'ite sources, the Mahdi, a very significant figure in the Shi'ite tradition, will kill the Antichrist with the help of Jesus,³² while in the Sunni tradition, this role belongs solely to Jesus. Nineteenth century Kharijites sources present a similar scenario.³³ 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1024), a well-known Mu'tazilite scholar of the medieval Islamic world, although not denying the emergence of the Antichrist, used the Mu'tazilite principle of reason, saying that sending such a person with the ability to perform miracles would go

against the principle that God created humans to test. He says the miracles of the Antichrist should not be considered real miracles. He believed that all sayings regarding the miracles of the Antichrist should be interpreted in light of such reasoning.³⁴

As is expected in the Sufi tradition, we find there a more esoteric interpretation of the emergence of the Antichrist. The prophetic traditions in fact have two meanings, one esoteric and the other exoteric. Sufis favor the esoteric meanings of these traditions. In fact, the emergence of the Antichrist is the emergence of the evil soul of humans. This soul shows truth as falsehood to humanity according to Sufis. The famous Sufi and Muslim spiritual authority, Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240), views al-Dajjāl, Ibn Sayyad, and Musaylamah, the pseudo-prophet, as belonging to the same category. However, the trial of al-Dajjāl will be more severe, because he claims divinity. He will appear to perform some miracles, will change some rules of nature, and will resurrect the dead. The prophetic description of the long day of al-Dajjāl indicates that in the time of his emergence, there will be an intense cloud of ignorance among people. In fact, days will be no longer than usual and nature will not be altered, but will have the appearance of having been altered.³⁵

The famous Sufi poet Rūmī (d. 1273) talks about the metaphorical blindness of the Antichrist. To him, the prophetic traditions on the blindness (al-Aʿwar, one-eyed) of the Antichrist should not be taken literally, but metaphorically. He says, "one can be blind, because of his desire and his anger, although he may have normal eyes." He names an historical personality who is believed to have lived in the time of the Roman Empire and to have caused the persecution of Christian believers as the Antichrist. According to the story that Rūmī narrates in his *Mathnawī*, there was a deceitful and unbelieving Grand Vizier to a King. He told his king to slice his ears and his nose, so that he might claim that he had been punished for his secret faith, and thus gain the trust of Christians. Many Christians followed this hypocrite, believing that he had been punished for his faith and that he was a representative of Jesus. Because he deceived so many, Rūmī declares that "this man was a blind and accursed Antichrist."³⁶

Contemporary Discussion

There has been a severe debate among contemporary Muslim scholars regarding the *Aḥadīth* about al-Dajjāl. The key point of the discussion is whether al-Dajjāl is real or the product of superstition. Most traditional scholars, such as Şiddīq Ḥassan Khān (d. 1889), believed that al-Dajjāl would emerge as a person as described in the prophetic traditions. Those who claim that al-Dajjāl will come in a supernatural way have written sensational books on the subject. One can find these books in the streets of Cairo, Karachi,

Istanbul, and Riyadh. Al-Būṭī, a well-known contemporary Syrian scholar representing the traditionalist view, says, "in this matter the only source of knowledge is the news that is given by the Prophet which indicates certainty. If there were no such traditions we would not be able to imagine the existence of the Antichrist. When he emerges he will be known by the physical senses because he is not in the world of the un-manifested (*'alām al-ghayb*) anymore."³⁷ As indicated above, another group in this discussion believe that prophetic sayings are uttered according to the literature of the Arabic language and have allegorical or metaphorical meanings. In this group, scholars such as Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1905) and his student, Rashīd Riḍa consider the Antichrist a symbol of deceit and evil. The emergence of the Antichrist symbolizes corruption and anarchy as well as materialism.³⁸

Some of these scholars went even further, identifying Western civilization with the Antichrist. Among these is Muḥammad Asad (d. 1992), an Austrian who converted to Islam. He believed that Western civilization was the Antichrist because those living in this civilization do not see the spiritual level of life, and see only the material. In Asad's view, the technology this civilization has created goes far beyond the power of humans and creates miracles. With these technological advances, long distances have been shortened, extraordinary irrigation systems simulate natural rain, complex machinery allows it to mine the earth for hidden treasures, and the dead can be resurrected by means of medical technology. Because of such miraculous things, many perceive Western civilization as possessing god-like power, thus Asad indicates that Western civilization is an Antichrist.³⁹ Asad influenced other scholars such as the syndicated Egyptian columnist and television show host, Muṣṭafa Mahmūd, who endorsed Asad's claims about Western civilization.⁴⁰ Such scholars were severely criticized by those who clung to the literal meanings of the traditions. Those who promoted such literal understandings claimed that it would be impossible to think that the Antichrist is a symbol, because the traditions clearly emphasize that the Antichrist will be a human and even give a physical description. Some even accused those who claimed that the Antichrist was a symbol of corrupting the religion of Islam.⁴¹

Another interpretation connects the Antichrist with Jewish people. Rashīd Riḍa was a champion of this idea; he believed that the trials of the Antichrist described in the prophetic traditions could be describing a Zionist King and his followers. Riḍa thought that Jews may be able to use their knowledge of electricity and chemistry as well as other real sciences to perform the miracles that the Antichrist is predicted to perform.⁴² This connection has been given additional momentum by virtue of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī discusses a Jewish genius who will claim divinity, whom thousands

of other Antichrists will follow. Al-Ghazzālī dramatizes the struggle between Muslims and these Jewish Antichrists. According to al-Ghazzālī, within this period of anarchy, Jesus will descend from heaven, acknowledge Muḥammad as a prophet, kill the Antichrist, fight with Muslims against the “red army,” (the army of Gog and Magog), and defeat them through belief in God. Although in a general scenario of struggle between Christ and the Antichrist found in Islamic literature, Christians and Muslims are considered supporters of Christ; al-Ghazzālī portrays Christians as the supporters of the Antichrist, rather than Christ.⁴³

There is a great deal of literature on the struggle between the Antichrist and believers under the leadership of Christ in the land of Palestine and Jerusalem. Another Egyptian author claims that many Jews will aid the Antichrist, and even gives specific names of Jewish philosophers and scientists, such as Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. These Antichrists will be of Jewish descent but will deny God and embrace materialism. This idea is also supported by Egyptian-Christian author Ibrahim Ṣabrī.⁴⁴ On the other hand, Ben-Azra, a Jew who converted to Christianity, dedicated a whole chapter to the Antichrist, in which he states that Jews will play a significant role in the coming of the Messiah, and they will be his helpers and not the helpers of the Antichrist.⁴⁵

Some contemporary popular authors in the Muslim world who participate in the debate concerning the Antichrist believe that he is not a human being but a devil who will emerge as a personification of evil. Others say that even if he is not a devil he will use a genie (genies are invisible creatures who exist parallel to humans) to exercise his power and present a tremendous trial to believers. Some authors go further, claiming that this genie is chained on an island and that God will show him to the people when he wishes. There are some contradictions in opinions. On one hand, some authors say the Antichrist is a genie who can live without eating or drinking. Yet, they also write of the genie as necessitating a mode of transportation, such as a large airplane with a wingspan of 60 yards.⁴⁶

There are several factors in the development of the idea of the Antichrist in the Islamic tradition. As indicated above, the influence of the people of the book, Christians and Jews, is obvious. Arab folklore also influenced the development of the concept. In folklore, the Antichrist symbolizes evil and those who are bad are considered the Antichrist's soldiers. An early *adab* writer, al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 868 c.e.), records that the poet Maʿdan al-Aʿma al-Shumayṭī describes his opponents in war as “the soldiers of the Antichrist.”⁴⁷ As Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (d. 936), a well-known tenth century storyteller, records, the term al-Dajjāl used to be given to a blind person in Kufa in order to humiliate that person.⁴⁸ Folklore sources, such as the writings historian Ibn Iyās (d. after

1522), after a long description of the Antichrist's height and emergence in Isfahan (central Iran), describe one of the Antichrist's eyes as absent and then, interestingly, prays that God will blind his other eyes as well.⁴⁹ Contemporary Egyptian modernist philosopher Ḥasan Ḥanafī holds that the concept of the Antichrist is folkloric.⁵⁰

In folklore, eyes are very significant. One eye is almost always indicative of evil or tyranny. For example, early Egyptian gods were identified by their eyes. The number of eyes increased and decreased, depending upon the sentiments of the people towards the particular god. A popular nineteenth century Egyptian author, in his book on the signs of the Last Hour, gives a long description of the Antichrist, and claims that al-Dajjāl's eyes are similar to those of the Egyptian gods, increasing and decreasing in size.⁵¹

As previously indicated, there are both religious and political aspects of the portrayal of the Antichrist in Arabic folklore. The Muslim understanding of the Antichrist has been informed by the Arab–Israeli conflict, and is also fueled by other associations between Jews and the Antichrist. The emigration of Russian Jews to Israel was said by some authors to be a sign of his emergence, because emigrating Jews were thought to be forces of the Antichrist assembling in the place of his emergence.⁵² The mention of specific places in which the Antichrist will emerge and be killed, such as Jerusalem and the Gate of Lydda (formerly Lod), have added to tension between Arabs and Jews by attributing religious significance to the lands over which these people dispute and by giving the dispute itself a special religious significance as part of the final battle between Christ and his forces and the Antichrist and his forces.

Thus, each description or portrayal of the Antichrist also has political implications, which are not limited to the Arab–Israeli conflict. For example, Muḥammad Asad associates Western civilization with the Antichrist, portraying political tension between Muslims and the West. British military forces colonizing the Sudan were associated with al-Dajjāl during the war between the Sudanis and the British. A Sudani sect, whose leader was known as the Mahdi of Sudan (one who claimed to be the Muslim messiah), specifically advocated casting British forces as Antichrists.⁵³ Thus, a political struggle or territorial dispute became a battle between good and evil. Likewise, identification of the Antichrist with some military forces or specific political personalities, such as Stalin, Lenin, and Hitler, are found in the literature of both contemporary Muslim and Christian popular authors.⁵⁴ Communism, irreligion, and materialism have been associated with the Antichrist. These political ideologies and those who support them are equated with evil and are to be opposed. Some authors have indicated that such Antichrists can only be defeated by a united Muslim and Christian force.

As is obvious from the sources and traditions mentioned above, al-Dajjāl does not appear in the Qurʾān, despite the fact that the holy text deals extensively with eschatology and end times. However, there are some references in the Qurʾān which some contemporary and even medieval scholars believe refer to the Antichrist. In the body of the *Ḥadīth*, there is no doubt that al-Dajjāl is extensively mentioned and has an ontological existence. What is to be argued here is not the existence of al-Dajjāl but the connection of these *Aḥādīth* to the Prophet of Islam. There is no doubt that there are some common aspects in the body of the *Ḥadīth* as far as the characteristics of al-Dajjāl are concerned. Still, there are many contradictory traditions. One can arguably say that the narrators have transmitted their interpretations of the Prophet's sayings rather than the sayings themselves, and this is the reason for many of the contradictions. To accept all traditions would be impossible.

Historically speaking, almost all traditions on the subject were understood literally. The possibility of the Prophet speaking in an allegorical way was underestimated or ignored despite the fact that Muslim history shows that the Prophet taught in a parabolic or allegoric manner. Some medieval scholars such as al-Taftazānī (d. 1390) opened the door to symbolic interpretations of prophetic sayings. However, most continued to only interpret the texts literally.

Although belief in the emergence of the Antichrist is listed as a part of the Muslim creed, especially in the early sources of Islamic theology, it has not become a significant part of the Muslim faith. This is because the traditions that mention al-Dajjāl are not clear enough to form a principle. Most of these traditions are interpreted by different scholars in different ways. The Antichrist is a devil to some, a human with supernatural power to others, and to still others, he is a movement or regime of disbelief.

Endnotes

1. The terms al-Dajjāl and Antichrist will be used interchangeably.
2. Khalil bin Ahmad Al-Faraidi, *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*, eds. Mahdi al-Makhzumi and Ibrahim al-Samarai. (Baghdad, 1967), vol. 3, 156–7.
3. Tabir al-Ruʿya Bukhārī, no. 33. (Traditions indicate that the Prophet sees both Christ and the anti-Christ. The figure of Christ is beautiful, in contrast, the anti-Christ is hideous.)
4. Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab* (Beirut, 1970), vol. 4, 4196–9.
5. Raphael Nakhlah, *Gharaib al-Lughat al-ʿArabiyyah (The Strange Words of Arabic Language)* (Beirut, n.d.), 206.
6. Bedizzaman Said Nursi, *Şualar (Rays)* (Istanbul: Sozler, 1958), 500. Nursi believes that there are two Antichrists: the first is the one who emerges in the Muslim world and tries to destroy the teachings of Muḥammad; the second, which is more powerful, is the one who emerges in the world of Christendom and tries to destroy the teachings of Jesus. The

Prophet of Islam in various traditions in fact refers to both. Therefore, the Antichrist is also the anti-Muhammad.

7. Muhammad 'Awad, *Masiḥ al-Dalalah Ua' al-Fitnah fi Ākhir al-Zamān: al-Masiḥ al-Dajjāl (The Messiah of Misguidance and trial at the end of Time: Antichrist)* (Cairo, 1989), 53.

8. See M. Fuād 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam al-Mufabras* (Cairo, 1987), 515–16.

9. Al-Asqalani (d. 852 c.e.), Ahmad bin Ali bin Hajar tells a story in which Muhammad, on the occasion of the death of his son al-Qasim, is referred to as *abtar* (one who is cut off) by al-As bin wail, a forceful opponent, meaning that Muhammad is without heirs. Allah comforts Muhammad with the above revelation through the angel Gabriel (108, 1–3). Muhammad is promised that he has "abundance" while his enemy is actually the one who is cut off. See *al-Asqalani's al-Iṣābah*, vol. 5. (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1992), 515.

10. Bernard McGinn, *Anti-Christ: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 111.

11. *Ḥadīth* references are given according to the index of A.J. Wensinck's Concordance *Et Indices De La Tradition Muslamane*.

12. Al-Bukhārī, *Adab*, 97; Muslim, *Fitan*, 85–88, 95; Abū Dawūd, *Malāḥim*, 16. See also, David J. Halperin. "The Ibn Sayad Traditions and the Legend of Al-Dajjāl," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 96 (1976), 213–25. For specific reference to these *Ḥadīth*, see 220.

13. On the traditions on Ibn Sayad, see David J. Halperin, *ibid.*, 214.

14. Al-Bukhārī, *Fitan*, no. 26.

15. This long tradition is found in Muslim, *Fitan*, no. 110.

16. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Kulliyati I–II* (The Collection of the Treatises of Light) (Istanbul: Nesil Yayinlari, 1996), vol. I, 887.

17. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Sozler* (Istanbul: Sozler Publications, 1986), 319.

18. Ibn Mājah, *Fitan*, no. 33.

19. Muslim, *Fitan*, no. 119, 120, 121; see also Malāḥim Abū Dāwūd, no. 15; Tirmidhī, *Fitan*, no. 66.

20. A.J. Jenkinson, "The Moslim Anti-Christ Legend," *Muslim World* (New York, 1930), vol. 20, 50–55; Abel, A. "al-Dajjāl." *Encyclopedia of Islam Second Edition*. (London, 1976), vol. 2, 77; Triton, A.S. "al-Dajjāl-Anti-Christ," Proc, 5th All India Oriental Conference 1930. Triton focuses on the Christian influence in the Muslim understanding of the Anti-Christ. Sweetman explores similarities between the Islamic concept of the Anti-Christ and the Christian concept of the Anti-Christ, without attributing these similarities to the influence of one faith over another. Sweetman J. Windrow, *Islam and Christianity* (London, 1947), 213–14.

21. For details of the criticism of this tradition and its narrators see: Zeki Saritoprak, *Islama ve digger dinlere gore Deccal (The Anti-Christ According to Islam and other Religions)* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Yayinlari, 1992), 65–66.

22. Muslim, al *Ṣalāt*, no. 128; the *Ḥadīth* also briefly mentioned in al-Bukhari, *Fitan*, no. 26.

23. Muslim, *Ṣalāt*, no. 128.

24. Ali bin Sultan al-Haravi al-Qari, *Mirqat al-Mafatih*. (Cairo, n.d.), vol. 5, 210.

25. Muhammad Anwar Al-Kashmiri, *Atasribh bima Tawatere fi Nuzul al-Masiḥ*, edited by Abd al-Fatah Abu Ghuddah (Aleppo, 1965), 60. In editor's footnote.

26. Al-Bukhārī, *Fitan*, no. 26. See also Muslim *Fitan* no. 95, 101, 102; Abu Dawud. *Malahim*, no. 14; al-Tirmidhi, *Fitan*, no. 656–62.

27. Al-Nawawi, Muhyi al-Din Abu Zakariyya Yahya Bin Sharaf. *Sbarḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Cairo, 1929), vol. 18, 60; See also for more details: Ibn Kathir, Ismael Bin Omar. *Nabiyit*

al-Bidayab Wa al-Nabiyab fi al-Fitan Wa al-Malahim, edited by Muḥammad Fahim (Riyadh, 1968), vol. 1, 148.

28. See Bernard McGinn, *Anti-Christ*, 112, ft. 165.
29. The *Ḥadīth* is recorded in Ibn Majah, *Fitan*, no. 33.
30. Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Kulliyat*, vol. I, 347.
31. Nursi, *ibid.*, vol. 887.
32. Muḥammad bin al-Murtaza al-Kasany, *Iʿlm al-Yaqīn fi Uṣūl al-Din*. (Qum, 1979), vol. 2, 805.
33. Ismail bin Mūsa al-Jaytali, *Qanātir al-Khaynat* (Cairo, 1889), vol. III, 318.
34. Abd al-Jabbar Abu al-Hasan al-Hamadani, *al-Mughni fi Abwab al-Tawbid wa al-Adl*, edited by Amin al-Khuli (Cairo, 1960), vol. 16, 432.
35. Ibn al-Arabi, Muhyi al-Din Muḥammad Ibn Ali, *al-Futubat al-Makkiyyab*, edited by Usman Yahya and Ibrahim Madhkur. (Cairo, 1972), vol. 4, 337–8.
36. Rumi Jalal al-Din Mawlana, *al-Mathnawī*, trans. into Arabic by Muḥammad Abd al-Salam al-Kefafi (Beirut, 1966), vol. 1, 104.
37. Said Ramadan al-Buti, *Kubra al-Yaqīniyyat. al-Kawniyyab* (Damascus, 1974), 342. For traditionist views of some contemporary scholars see the following sources: al-Jisr, Husain, *Al-Fusun al-Hamidiyyab* (Cairo, n.d.), 86–87; Khan, Siddiq Hasan, *Qatf al-Thimar fi Beyan Aqa'id Abl al-Athar (Picking the Fruits of Traditional Beliefs)*, edited by Asim bin Abd Allah al-Qaryuni (Cairo, 1984), 118; al-Jazairi, Abu Bakr, *Aqidab al-Mumin (The Creed of the Believer)* (Cairo, 1985), 262. For more sources on the subject see Zeki Saritoprak's *Deccal*, 116–117.
38. Rada, Rashid, *Tafsir al-Manar* (Cairo, 1954), vol. 3, 317–8. For symbolic meaning of the Anti-Christ, see also: Muḥammad Al-Bahi, *Ra'y al-Din Bayn al-Sail Wa al-Mujib* (Cairo, 1980), vol. 3, 70.
39. Muḥammad Asad, *The Road To Mecca (Arabic Version)* (Beirut, 1956), 309–312.
40. Mustafa Mahmud, *al-Masib al-Dajjal (The Anti-Christ)* (Cairo, 1980), 18–25.
41. See Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani, *Silsilah al-Abadis al-Sabibab (The Chain of the Authentic Traditions)* (Kuwait, 1979), vol. 3, 190–191; vol. 4, 477; Muhammad al-Hamid, *Rudud Ala Abatil (Answers to the Absurd)* (Aleppo, n.d.), 107.
42. Rida, *ibid.*, vol. 9, 444, 459.
43. Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī, *Aqīdat al-Muslim* (Beirut, 1987), 124–5, 221.
44. Ayyoub Said, *al-Masib al-Dajjal Wa Qital Akbir al-Zaman Min Dairat al-Zihni Ila alam al-Tasawwur (The Anti-Christ and His War at the End of Time From the World of Memory the World of Imagination)* (Cairo, 1985), 53, 146; Ibrahim Sabri, *Al-Madhi Wa al-Mustaqbal fi Nubuat Daniel (The Past and the Future in the Prophecy of Daniel)* (Cairo, n.d.), 39.
45. Ben-Azra, Juan Josafat, *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty*, translated from Spanish by Rev. Edward Irving, a.m. (London, L. B. Seeley and Son, 1827), 297–300.
46. For the debate of this subject see: Muḥammad Salamah Jibr, *Asbrat al-Saa' Wa Asra ruba (The Signs of the Hour and its Secrets)* (Kuwait, 1982), 34; Laila Mabruk, *Alamat al-Saa' al-Sughra wa al-Kubra (The Small and Large Signs of the Hour)* (1986), 58; Ibrahim al-Gamal, *al-ʿItida wa al-Mahdi al-Muntazar (Animosity and the Expected Mahdi)* (Medina, n.d.), 34, 51–53.
47. Abu Usman Amr Bin Bahr al-Jahiz, *Al-Bayan Wa al-Tabyin*, edited by Abd al-Salam Muḥammad Harun (Cairo, 1985), vol. 1, 397; vol. 3, 356.
48. Abu Omar Ahmad Ibn Abd Rabbih, *al-Iqd al-Farid* (Cairo, 1962), vol. 4, 39–44. For similar examples in Arab folklore, see Hamza Bin al-Hasan al-Isbahani, *Al-Durrat al-Fakbirah Fi al-Amthal al-Tharib*, edited by Abd al-Magid Qatamash (Cairo, 1972),

185; al-Thaalibi, Abu Mansur Abd al-Malik, *Lataif al-Lutf*, edited by Omar al-Asad (Beirut, 1980), 117.

49. Muḥammad Bin Ahmed Ibn Iyas, *Badai' al-Zubur Fi Waqai' al-Dubur* (Cairo, n.d.), 191.

50. For Ḥanafī's opinion on the subject see his book *Min al-Aqida Ila al-Thawra (From Faith to Revolution)* (Cairo, 1988), vol. 4, 471f. For details of folkloric representations see Said al-Hadim, *Ma'lam Min Funun al-Sha'biyyah* (Cairo, 1961), 109. The author thanks Dr. Ḥasan Ḥanafī, professor of philosophy at Cairo University, for this source.

51. Muḥammad bin Muḥammad al-Waiz al-Hijazi, *Sawa' al-Sirat fi Zikr al-Saa' Wa al-Asbrat*, unpublished manuscript, Egypt National Library under Ghaybiat Taymur no. 26, folio, 271.

52. Atiyah Izzat, "Hijrat al-Yahud Min al-Ittihad al-Soviati (The Immigration of Jews from the Soviet Union)," *Al-Nur Gazette* (Cairo: Issue 44, Feb. 7. 1990).

53. Christopher Hill, *Anti-Christ in Seventh Century England* (London, 1970), 158.

54. For details of the Anti-Christ in the contemporary Christianity, see: McGinn. *Anti-Christ: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 250–80.