

Strip, Palestinians living in Gaza had lacked widespread social media literacy, Internet connectivity, and access to mobile technologies—lacked, that is, the means to produce a visual archive to counter the military message. But by 2014 digital technologies were proliferating in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. During that year's bloody Israeli aerial bombardment of the Gaza Strip, Palestinians under attack were filming the Israeli military assault and sharing their footage in something close to real time. There was now a greater volume of videographic evidence of excessive military force against Palestinians, shot with greater clarity and precision. In the intervening years, between 2008 and 2014, Israeli audiences had been forced to contend with the rise and normalization of Palestinian smartphone witnessing, and with the growing visual archive of state violence that it generated.

I propose that the repudiation script matured alongside these changes in the Palestinian media ecosystem and was an attempt to manage their threats. The accusation was deemed particularly urgent during the emerging years of Palestinian bystander videography, when the Jewish Israeli public was first contending with the social effects of these threatening visuals. This essay concludes at a time when the Palestinian-produced archive of state violence no longer surprised Israeli audiences. By the time of the Azaria shooting in 2016, both cameras and social media usage had become widespread within the occupied territories. Where once network-enabled cameras were a rarity and the ensuing visual archives a threatening surprise, they were now commonplace and widespread Palestinian political tools of anti-occupation protest and documentation. After smartphone normalization, repudiation was no longer urgent, at least not to the same degree. Its urgency and prominence as an explanatory narrative would subside. Other explanatory narratives could step into the breach. After Azaria, there were other political means of contending with this visual field: the stance of total embrace.

It can be argued that there was nothing new at work in these years. Namely, that the growth and normalization of the repudiation script was merely reanimating the colonial ideology of denial and dehumanization at the heart of the Zionist project.<sup>86</sup> And yet I want to propose that the tethering of this ideology to the shifting global media ecology of the moment marked a distinctive shift. In the first two decades of the 21st century, commensurate with shifts in both the political and media landscapes, repudiation was seizing on new objects, employing new analytic techniques and technologies for ferreting out fraud, and inaugurating new modes of expertise. In the process, Israeli colonial ideologies of denial and disavowal (of Palestinian land, history, and personhood) were being updated, brought into line with the digital media ecology of the moment. Colonial denial was given a new digital dressing.

**Acknowledgments.** An earlier version of this essay appeared in *Screen Shots: State Violence on Camera in Israel and Palestine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021). My thanks to Stanford University Press for providing permissions. Additional thanks to Rachel Ariel, three anonymous readers for IJMES for insightful feedback, and Joel Gordon for his astute engagement.

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01 Haziran 2022

<sup>86</sup>Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism," 387–409.

## ARTICLE

## More than Beast: Muhammad's She-Mule Duldul and Her Role in Early Islamic History

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### Abstract

Duldul, a beloved she-mule of the Prophet Muhammad and 'Ali b. Abi Talib (d. 661), fourth caliph and Muhammad's son-in-law, was a venerated riding beast in early Islamic tradition. The article argues that Duldul reflected the transmission of political authority and became a tool of legitimation for hadith compilers and medieval Muslim writers to use, contest, and navigate an emergent Shi'a-Sunni rift. Exploring the responsive relationship between hadith construction and the Shi'a-Sunni polemic, the article first analyzes three literary genres—*maghāzī*, hadith, and *sīra*—to describe Duldul and her role in early Islamic history. Second, the article examines the writings of al-Jahiz (d. 868) and al-Damiri (d. 1405) to understand medieval Muslim attitudes toward Duldul and she-mules in general. By taking Duldul more seriously as a historical actor, we can gain deeper insight into the disputes over Muhammad's legacy in medieval Islam.

**Keywords:** animal-human relations; Duldul; Islamic history; Islamic literature; riding beasts; Prophet Muhammad

As emblems deployed by medieval authors for comic relief, to substantiate miracles, and to correct moral failings, certain riding beasts have been instrumental to the construction of early Islamic history and have even attained celebrity status. These venerated mounts—from Muhammad's talking donkey, Ya'fur, to his five mares that spawned the legend of the Arabian horse—expose the literary threads weaving together history and myth and the steps taken to glorify the time of the Prophet.<sup>1</sup> But riding beasts serving prophets and early Islamic heroes were more than passive objects; they were historical actors integral to the narrative of Muslim conquest.

A beloved she-mule, the hybrid offspring of a mare and a donkey, Duldul emerges in the pages of the literature of Arab conquests and accounts of Muhammad's life and sayings. Duldul, meaning "porcupine" in Arabic, was the Prophet's mount. She then served 'Ali b. Abi Talib (d. 661), fourth caliph and Muhammad's son-in-law. After decades of faithful service, Duldul died in a grove of trees sometime during the reign of the first Umayyad ruler Mu'awiya (r. 661–80). Beginning in early Islamic accounts, Duldul's status is illustrious. Tales of the she-mule are even found in the celebrated *Arabian Nights*. "Tell me of five that are in Paradise and are neither humans, jinn nor angels," said a court philosopher. The slave-girl Tawaddud replied, 'Jacob's wolf and the Seven Sleepers' dog and Esdras's ass and Salih's camel and Duldul the mule of the Prophet (upon whom be blessings and peace!).'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>I choose to use the term "myth" to capture the generative appeal that Duldul has in medieval Islamic narratives. See "What is Cultural Memory?" in Jan Assmann's *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 7–9.

<sup>2</sup>Abu al-Husn and His Slave-girl Tawaddud," in *Arabian Nights, the Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night*, vol. 5, trans. Sir Richard F. Burton, ed. Romesh C. Dutt (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2018), 235. Indeed, Duldul's hoofprints in southern Kyrgyzstan continue to draw admiration and hope from those seeking their healing and cosmic properties. See Kenneth Lymer, "Rags and Rock Art: The Landscapes of Holy Site Pilgrimage in the Republic of Kazakhstan," *World Archaeology* 36, no. 1 (2004): 158–72; Lymer, "Rock Art and Local Religious Practices in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan," *Expression* (2017): 32–36. David Tyson also has explored local legends of Duldul and her service to 'Ali in Turkmenistan. See his "Shrine Pilgrimage in Turkmenistan as a Means to Understand Islam among the Turkmen," *Central Asia Monitor* 1 (1997): 15–32.

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