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## The Image of the Prophet in the Contemporary Western Scholarship

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**THE IMAGE OF THE PROPHET  
IN THE CONTEMPORARY WESTERN  
SCHOLARSHIP:  
A Study of W. M. Watt's and M. Cook's Thought**

**Fatimah Husein\***

**ملخص**

من أهم المصادر لفهم الإسلام شخصية النبي محمد (ص) نفسه ، ولقد كان موضوعا لمختلف الدراسات الإسلامية حتى عند المستشرقين ، وكالمعتاد فإن البحوث العلمية في موضوع ما لا تنتج دائما نظرات مماثلة فيه ، وهذا يحدث أيضا في دراسات المستشرقين لشخصية محمد (ص) التي تركز عليها هذه المقالة . على وجه التقريب تنقسم الدراسات الاستشراقية إلى كتلتين : الأولى تتمثل في كتابات أمثال و. مونتغميري وات ، والثانية تمثلها أعمال من أمثال ميخائيل كوك . ويمكن القول ، من ناحية ، إن كلا من الكتلتين يستخدم نفس المقاربة التي تستخدمها الأخرى ، وهي المقاربة غير المعيارية أو بعبارة أخرى المقاربة الوصفية ، إلا أنهما من الناحية الأخرى تختلفان في اختبار النماذج المختلفة لهذه المقاربة الوصفية ، فمونتغميري وات يتبنى المقاربة السلمية والظاهرية التي تحترم وتقدر إلى حد كبير المعلومات المكتوبة لتراث الإسلامى ، بينما تستخدم كوك المقاربة النقدية للمصادر التي تعتمد الشك في هذه المعلومات وتفضل تبعاً لذلك معلومات تأتي من مصادر غير إسلامية وأيضاً معطيات أثرية قديمة . وهذا الاختلاف في المقاربات يؤدي لا محالة إلى النتائج المختلفة إن لم نقل المتناقضة . لذلك نرى وات ينشئ صورة إيجابية عن محمد وفي هذا يجارى النظرة

السائدة عند المسلمين، وبعكس ذلك فإن كوك يميل إلى تشكيل صورة سلبية عنه وخصوصا عن علاقته بالجمالية اليهودية في عصره .

وتكون المقالة التالية جذابة لما فيها من محاولة لدراسة مدى تفوق أو نقصان كل من هاتين المقاربتين وفي نفس الوقت تنتقد استخدامهما في دراسة المعلومات عن محمد وعلاقته مع اليهود. وأخيرا تقترح هذه المقالة مزيدا من البحث عند أوساط المستشرقين حتى يتوصل إلى صور أكثر توضيحا وموضوعية عن شخصية محمد.

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### Abstrak

Salah satu sumber penting untuk memahami Islam adalah figur Nabi Muhammad SAW, dan ia telah menjadi obyek kajian dalam studi keislaman, termasuk di kalangan Orientalis. Seperti biasa, kajian ilmiah terhadap satu persoalan tidak selalu melahirkan pandangan yang sama, dan hal ini juga nampak pada kajian Orientalis tentang figur Muhammad yang menjadi fokus telaah makalah berikut. Secara garis besar pandangan mereka terbagi menjadi dua kubu; pertama seperti terlihat pada karya-karya W. Montgomery Watt dan kedua tergambar pada karya-karya Michael Cook. Dari satu sisi, keduanya dapat dikatakan menggunakan pendekatan yang sama, yakni *non-normative* atau *empirical approach*; namun dari sisi lain keduanya dapat dikatakan berbeda karena ternyata keduanya memilih model *empirical* yang berbeda: Watt menganut *irenic* dan *phenomenological approach* yang sangat menghargai data-data tertulis warisan Islam; sedangkan Cook menggunakan *a source-critical approach* yang pada dasarnya amat meragukan data-data tertulis warisan Islam dan lebih memilih data-data yang berasal dari non-muslim dan juga data arkeologi. Perbedaan pendekatan ini membawa pada kesimpulan yang berbeda pula, jika tidak dikatakan bertentangan. Watt cenderung melahirkan kesan (image) positif tentang Muhammad dan hampir sejalan dengan pandangan umum kalangan Muslim. Sebaliknya, Cook cenderung melahirkan image negatif tentang Muhammad terutama tentang hubungannya dengan masyarakat Yahudi pada saat itu. Artikel berikut menjadi sangat menarik karena mengkaji sejauhmana kelebihan dan kekurangan dari masing-masing pendekatan yang digunakan sekaligus mengkritisi penggunaan pendekatan tersebut terhadap data-data tentang Muhammad dan hubungannya dengan Yahudi (non-Muslim). Pada akhirnya makalah berikut menyarankan, bahwa untuk mendapatkan gambaran

yang lebih jelas dan obyektif tentang figur Muhammad di kalangan Orientalis masih diperlukan penelitian lebih lanjut.

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## Introduction

There are some different opinions on what kind of motives which underline Western scholarship research on Muhammad. One might assume that Western scholars realize the importance of Islam as a world phenomenon, and in this sense, the discourse on the Prophet is very central. Their research, therefore, may be aimed at finding the objective data on Muhammad, even though his image might appear negatively from the Muslims perspective. On the other hand, one might conclude that there is a negative motive on Western scholarship, which, by studying the Prophet, aims to depict a negative image on him. The reason for doing so may due to their fear that Islam can be a threat in the future, therefore, it is important to draw a negative image of the central figure of Islam, Muhammad.

The current paper discusses two different approaches applied by contemporary prominent Western scholars, namely William Montgomery Watt and Michael Cook. The reason for choosing them is based on hypothesis that these scholars have different approaches in their study of Muhammad. Consequently, the paper discusses three important accounts to get a clear answer of this hypothesis. Part One analyzes methodological approach applied by Watt and Cook in depicting the images of the Prophet. This leads to Part Two which discusses the kind of images emerge from these two different approaches. Analysis which accounts for these diverging depictions will be provided in Part Three.

## Watt's and Cook's Methodological Approaches to the Study of Muhammad

Contemporary Western scholarship on Islam in general may be divided into two categories: the source-critical method or revisionist approach, and traditional approach. The first category includes the relevant contemporary non-Arabic literature, and the findings of archaeology, epigraphy and numismatics as evidences. This approach is characterized by its denying of historical validity to accounts based purely on facts derived from the Muslim literary sources. The traditional approach, on the other hand, characterized by its dependence to Muslim literary accounts as their sources.<sup>1</sup>

The study on Muhammad can also be divided into two similar categories, namely non-empirical (or normative), and empirical (or descriptive) meth-

ods.<sup>2</sup> The normative approach is characterized by the evaluative application of a norm external to the data under study. This includes two kinds of studies, the ones which depict the image of Muḥammad affirmatively (of which there are few), and the other ones which depict the image of the Prophet negatively (and these are countless). These two approaches to the study of Muḥammad may be termed polemical.<sup>3</sup>

The empirical approach tries to provide a scientific approach to the study of religion. It is focused on the observable aspects of the object under study while excluding the normative aspects.<sup>4</sup> This approach may be divided into three categories, namely historic, reductionism, and phenomenological. The first method aims to rediscover what *really* happened in the past. Although this approach tries to provide the fact of what actually occurred in the past time, the difficulties arise as the primary sources needed to support the research often unavailable in sufficient quantity and quality to provide a comprehensive enough interpretive base of contemporary and relevant data.<sup>4</sup> Royster is right in stating that this might lead to the careless observations, which, in turn, brings the invalid conclusion.<sup>5</sup>

Reductionism aims to explain the person and work of Muḥammad in terms of factors outside the realm of religion *per se*. While this approach might provide a comprehensive understanding of the Prophet's mission and his influence, it fails to take the complexity of religious phenomena with sufficient seriousness.<sup>6</sup>

The last empirically-oriented approach to the study of the Prophet is the phenomenological, which tries to draw as accurate image of Muḥammad as possible, by accepting the presence of the religious traditions as they appear.<sup>7</sup> The essential reason for choosing this approach lies in the fact that short of conversion, no other means enables one to enter so fully into the religious experience of other men. Thus, the two aspects that can be understood of the believers of other religions are their commitment and convictions.<sup>8</sup> It is true that this approach may not completely be satisfactory, since the researchers might involve their personal bias in interpreting the data.

Despite these two approaches, Charles Adams points out some other approaches to the study of Islam, ranging from the normative to the descriptive. One of the important methods related to our discussion is an irenic one, an approach whose aim is to give "the greater appreciation of Islamic religiousness and the fostering of a new attitude towards it."<sup>9</sup> This approach attempts to understand the values of Islam and to overcome the generally prejudiced, antagonistic, and condescending attitudes of Westerners, particularly Western Christians, toward the Islamic tradition.<sup>10</sup>

Watt's works on Muḥammad, at first glance, may be categorized as phenomenological since one finds that he tries to say nothing that would entail

the rejection of any of the fundamental doctrines of Islam.<sup>11</sup> His two books on Muhammad<sup>12</sup> analyze the social and economic background of the Prophet's life, even though he admits that such factors entirely determine the course of events.<sup>13</sup> In examining the reliability of the sources of Muhammad's life, Watt depends more on traditional materials.<sup>14</sup> Royster, however, argues that one cannot categorize Watt's approach as phenomenological since his avoidance to discuss the controversial issues is not the most fundamental characteristic of this approach. He, therefore, terms Watt's over-all approach as multi-methodological.<sup>15</sup> Maximme Rodinson argues that Watt's approach falls into category between the denial of the significance of religious factors and the denial or minimization of the role of sociological factors.<sup>16</sup> Adams argues that among Watt's important contribution to the discourse is his sensitivity to the moral issues that any non-Muslim inquirer who studies Muhammad must face, and his attempt to avoid to over statements and even language that would by implication judge the religious meaning that Muslims see in Muhammad.<sup>17</sup> One finds that Watt applies an irenic approach, since in his works on Muhammad he shows his great appreciation of Islam.<sup>18</sup>

Cook's method on his study of Muhammad, on the other hand, can be classified as source-critical approach.<sup>19</sup> As can be seen on the characteristic of this approach -- its denial to base purely on Muslim sources -- Cook explores the problems of the Islamic traditions, the Qur'an and ḥadīth. On the case of the Qur'an, Cook finds that it contains clear cases of interpolation.<sup>20</sup> He points to an unusual feature of the fifty-third *sūrah*, wherein an inspired style in its short verses is interrupted, in two places, by a prosaic and prolix amplification which is stylistically quite out of place.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, Cook also holds that some parts of the Qur'an show alternative versions of the same passage, and these versions resembles the variations of parallel versions of oral tradition.<sup>21</sup> Cook goes further maintaining that in giving a very limited account on Muhammad's career, the Qur'an solely refers to these events, as opposed to narrates them.<sup>23</sup> In short, Cook believes that the Qur'an carries its problems to be used as a source to reconstruct the Prophet's life.

The case of the ḥadīth as a source of Muhammad's life, in Cook's view, faces the same fate. He argues that the narrative accounts of the life of Muhammad was comprised of works which, by its rules of game, gave freedom to their authors to freely reproduce their sources without an obligation to quote in full or to note their omissions.<sup>24</sup> Cook gives an exception to Ibn Hisham's (d. 833) edition of Ibn Ishāq (d. 767) as a work which clearly indicates its sources. Nonetheless, he argues that Ibn Hisham's *Sīra* omitted a good many things from a variety of motives.<sup>25</sup> Cook, however, undoubtedly refers to Ibn Ishāq's account on Muhammad, since Cook claims that "we still know a great deal about it."<sup>26</sup> Cook goes further notes the most interesting hypothesis that Ibn

Ishāq and his contemporaries drew their sources from the *quṣṣās*, the story-tellers of early Islam. Here Cook highlights his argument that story-telling is an art, not a science; and signs of this art are commonplace in the biography of Muḥammad.<sup>27</sup>

Facing these problems with the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth*, Cook suggests that it would obviously be helpful to have some early sources that have not been transmitted within the Muslim traditions, or at least reflect only the earliest phase of it.<sup>28</sup> He offers two kinds of sources to reconstruct the life of the Prophet: Muslim material preserved archaeologically, and hence unaffected by the later development of tradition, and non-Muslim sources preserved in the literatures of non-Muslim communities.<sup>29</sup>

### The different Images of the Prophet

To look closer at different images that come from these two different approaches applied by Watt and Cook, this paper is going to discuss two important events of the Prophet's life which discussed by Cook and Watt. Since Cook does not discuss the life of the Prophet chronologically, this paper highlights two cases, namely Muḥammad's attitudes towards the Jews and Palestine, which are analyzed by both scholars. As a starting point, Ibn Ishāq's account on these occasions, and a debate on the Constitution of Madinah will be provided. The reason for including Ibn Ishāq's *Sīrah* on these two events is due to the fact that both scholars refer to him, either to a great or small extent. While the inclusion of the Constitution is based on its importance to analyze Muḥammad's attitude towards the Jews.

Ibn Ishāq stated the Constitution was "a document concerning the emigrants and the helpers in which he (the apostle) made a friendly agreement with the Jews and established them in their religion and their property, and stated the reciprocal obligations"<sup>30</sup> To quote part of the Constitution, dealing with the Jews:

This is a document from Muḥammad as prophet (governing the relations) between the believers and Muslim of Quraysh and Yathrib, and those who followed them and joined them and laboured with them. They are one community [*umma*] to the exclusion of all men. Believers are friends one the other to the exclusion of outsiders. To the Jews who follows us belong help and equality. He shall not be wronged nor shall his enemies be aided ... The Jews shall contribute to the cost of war so long as they are fighting alongside the believers. The Jews of B. 'Auf are one community with the believers (the Jews have their religion and the Muslims have theirs), their freedmen and their persons except those who behave unjustly and sinfully, for they hurt but themselves and their families. The same applies to the Jews of the B. al-Najjār, B. al-Hārith, B.

Sā'ida, B. Jusham, B. al-Aus, B. Tha'laba, and the Jafna, a clan of the Tha'laba and the B. al-Shuṭayba. Loyalty is protection against treachery. The freedmen of Tha'laba are as themselves. The close friends of the Jews are as themselves. None of them shall go out to war save with the permission of Muḥammad, but he shall not be prevented from taking revenge for a wound. He who slays a man without warning slays himself and his household, unless it be one who has wronged him, for God will accept that. The Jews must bear their expenses and the Muslims their expenses. Each must help the other against anyone who attacks the people of this document. They must seek mutual advice and consultation, and loyalty is a protection against treachery.<sup>31</sup>

Ibn Ishāq went to argue that when the Prophet began to institute prayer, prescribe the alms tax and fasting, and fix legal punishment, the Jewish Rabbis showed hostility. The reason for their hostility is clearly their "hatred" of the fact that "God has chosen His apostle from the Arabs," not from the Jews. Ibn Ishāq categorized them as "hypocrites" who pretended to accept Islam to save their lives.<sup>32</sup>

On change of the *qiblah* from Jerusalem to the Ka'bah, unfortunately, Ibn Ishāq gave a very short account. He merely stated that "it is said that the Qiblah was changed in Sha'bān at the beginning of the eighteenth months after the apostle's arrival in Medina."<sup>33</sup> This account, of course, does not give an answer, let alone a clear one, concerning the place of Jerusalem in Muḥammad's scheme of things.

Based on the Constitution of Medina, contemporary Western scholars, are debating the place of the Jews in Muḥammad's time, especially shortly after the hijra. Wensinck holds that before the Constitution was declared, there had been a break between Muḥammad and the Jews. The Constitution, therefore, was "an alternative" meant as a reconciliation with the Jews.<sup>34</sup> Uri Rubin agrees that Muhammad attempted to establish good relationship with the Jews. In the Constitution itself, however, "there was no cause to deal with them." Rubin goes on to explain that "direct aim of this document was confined to determining the position of the Arab tribes of Medina in relation to those Jewish groups who shared in their territory."<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Moshe Gil holds that the document aimed at practical as opposed to religious matters. Therefore, he believes, it "Was not a covenant with the Jews. On the contrary, it was a formal statement of intent to disengage the Arabs clans of Medina from the Jewish neighbors they had been allied with up to that time."<sup>36</sup>

A clear picture of the Jew's position at that time may be drawn by examining the term "*ummah*" in the Constitution. Rubin argues that it had a political connotation, as opposed to religious intention.<sup>37</sup> Wensinck holds that *ummah* in The Constitution referred to a "political unity"<sup>38</sup> Gil maintains that the term in the document meant as "a group" as opposed to individuals.<sup>39</sup> Watt

shares the similar opinions, arguing that the word "is no longer a purely religious community," since the Jews were allowed to practice their own religion.<sup>40</sup> Humphreys states that the Constitution "cannot be the religiously defined 'nation of Islam' as understood in later centuries, because it included the Jews of Medina."<sup>41</sup> Serjeant asserts that the *ummah* was "entirely political, not religious."<sup>42</sup> He further explains that since the political confederations are generally made under the holy person, "most of confederations are theocratic."<sup>43</sup> Wellhausen holds a slightly different view stating that the *ummah*, at first, "was a rather loose heterogeneous political entity," but this entity "naturally tended to create a unity of the faith and was strengthened on account of this."<sup>44</sup> Denny, I think, rightly points out that the term *ummah* in the Constitution referred to two groups: one, in the first article, signified: (a) believers (*mu'minūn*), (b) Muslim of Quraysh (the Emigrants), and (c) Muslims of Yathrib. The other use of the term *ummah* (in Article 25) referred to the Jews.<sup>45</sup> Serjeant believes that the Jews in the *ummah* constituted a separate *ummah* alongside the Muslims.<sup>46</sup>

The abovementioned opinions on whether the *ummah* was a religious or political entity lead to the examination of the place of the Jews in the Constitution. Humphreys argues that "all modern scholars agree, for example, that by the time of Muḥammad's arrival in Medina the Jewish clans had become subordinate allies of the leading pagan Arab clans in the oasis."<sup>47</sup> He further maintains that in the document "the Jews seem to occupy a clearly subordinate place: that is, the confederation [*umma*] appears to be primarily one between the Meccan emigrants and the various Arab clans heretofore pagan of Medina."<sup>48</sup> Humphreys, as well as Moshe Gil, explains that the document failed to mention three main Jewish tribes, namely B. Qaynuqā', B. Naḍir and Qurayza, even though "these were to groups with whom Muḥammad came into conflict."<sup>49</sup> Thus, there are two major opinions regarding the place of the Jews at the time. While Muslim sources, such as Ibn Ishāq's *Sirah*, stated that Muḥammad made "a friendly agreement with the Jews."<sup>50</sup> Western scholarship in general tends to see the position of the Jews as peripheral based on their reading of the Constitution.

Watt explains the relationship between Muḥammad and the Jews in great detail. He says that Prophet was convinced that revelation that came to him was "identical" with that came to the Jews and the Christians and that, therefore, Muḥammad naturally assumed the Jews would accept him as a prophet. At the time of the *hijra*, while a small number of Jews who accepted Muḥammad as prophet and became Muslims, the majority of them did not simply not accept him, but they became hostile.<sup>51</sup> Despite the Prophet's attempt to render his religion similar to that of the Jews,<sup>52</sup> they did not show their good intention.<sup>53</sup>

Watt notes that Muḥammad remained patient to them until he received a revelation to change the *qiblah* from facing Syria to face the Ka'bah instead, around the date 15th of Sha'bān, 2 A.H. /624. In the same month of Sha'bān, or possibly in the following month of Ramaḍān, Muḥammad regulated the fast of Ramaḍān and declared that the Ashūrā (the Jewish Day of Atonement), practiced before by the Muslims, was no longer obligatory.<sup>54</sup> On this point, Watt argues that these events marked the break with the Jews, and he maintains that there were a number of hostile encounters between them during the years following the change of *qiblah*.<sup>55</sup> Watt concludes that the essential reason for the fight between Muḥammad and the Jews are theological for both parties: "The Jews believed that God had chosen them specially, Muḥammad realized that his prophethood was the only possible basis of Arab unity."<sup>56</sup>

Cook's accounts of the relationship between Muḥammad and the Jews, however, are different. He says that the traditional sources note on a series of breaks between Muḥammad and the Jews of Yathrib, and that they were eliminated from the community several years before the conquest began. He, then, provides the early non-Muslim sources, which depict a relationship with the Jews at the time of the first conquest. Cook argues that the Armenian chronicler of the 660s describes Muḥammad as establishing a community which comprised both Ishmaelites (i.e. Arabs) and Jews, with Abrahamic descent as their common platform; these allies then set off to conquer Palestine.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, the oldest Greek source states that the prophet who had appeared among the Saracens (i.e. Arabs) was proclaiming the coming of the (Jewish) messiah, and speaks of the Jews who mix with the Saracens, and of the danger to life and limb of falling into the hands of these Jews and Saracens.<sup>58</sup> It is true that the Armenian chronicler notes the break between Muḥammad and the Jews, but this only happened immediately after the Arab conquest of Jerusalem.<sup>59</sup>

The other major disagreement between the Muslim tradition and the non-Muslim sources is the place of Jerusalem in Muḥammad's scheme of things. Watt holds that in the early Medinan period, Jerusalem was the *qiblah* of the Muslims. He, however, is doubtful whether the Muslims had this *qiblah* or another in Mecca. He further argues that Muḥammad himself may have had no *qiblah* at this time but may have been keen to assimilate his religion to that of the Jews in this respect.<sup>60</sup> Watt underlines his opinion that even if in his Meccan period Muḥammad's *qiblah* was towards Jerusalem, this would not necessarily indicate Jewish influence or a desire to be like the Jews, since the practice was apparently common among Christians.<sup>61</sup>

Cook, on the contrary, argues that Jerusalem is very important in the Islamic tradition. However, after Muḥammad changed the direction of prayer from Jerusalem to Mecca, the latter became the religious focus of his movement, as it was also the main object of his political and military aspirations. In

the non-Muslim sources, by contrast, Palestine played this role, and provided the religious motive for its conquest. The Armenian chronicler states: Muḥammad told the Arabs that, as descendants of Abraham through Ishmael, they too had a claim to the land which God had promised to Abraham and his seed.<sup>62</sup>

### Analysis

Watt clearly states that his book *Muḥammad at Mecca*<sup>63</sup> will be considered by, at least, three types of readers: those who are concerned with the subject as historians, and those who approach it primarily as Muslims or Christians. He testifies that he writes this book as a professing monotheist.<sup>64</sup> In this work, as well as his other book on Muḥammad, Watt indeed tries to remain faithful both to the standards of Western historical scholarship and to Muslims. His motive to write on the life of the Prophet is based on the need for a fresh life of Muḥammad and to answer the questions about the economic, social and political background which have not dealt seriously in the past. The image of the Prophet which arises from Watt's approach, therefore, is very close with the ones we have in the Islamic traditions.

Cook's readers, on the other hand, can be assumed from the format of his book on Muḥammad, which aimed at giving introductory explanation on certain leading intellectual figures to the general readers. Cook discusses two questions on the importance of Muḥammad: historical perspective and sources. The importance on discussing Muḥammad, in his view, lies in the fact that the core of the Islamic community owes its existence to an earlier and more unitary historical context, and the man behind the scene was "a certain Muhammad."<sup>65</sup> As Cook believes in the reliability of external sources on Muḥammad, it would follow that tradition is seriously misleading on important aspects of the life of Muḥammad, and that even the integrity of the Qur'ān as his message is in some doubt.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the image of the Prophet which arises in his opinion is, for the most part, contradicts the ones we have in Muslim traditional sources. Important aspects of the life of Muḥammad,<sup>66</sup> he advances the external evidences, which in his view, can be used as "alternatives" to reconstruct the life of the Prophet. Therefore, the image of the Prophet which arises in his opinion, for the most part, contradicts the ones we have in Muslim traditional sources.

Regarding the two matters discussed above, namely the place of the Jews and Jerusalem in Muḥammad's scheme of things, Watt's arguments are very close to those of Ibn Ishāq. Watt holds that the break with the Jews happened in 624 C.E. (roughly two years after the *hijra*), while the Constitution was written in 627. Thus, there was a break, or breaks, before the Constitution, and the document was a respond intend to reconcile Muḥammad with the Jews. Watt depicts Muḥammad as having a good attitude towards the Jews, and remaining calm despite the Jews' hostility. Consequently, Watt believes that it was the Jews who initiated the break, not Muḥammad or the Muslims.

Muhammad had tried to include the Jews in his *ummah*, but they fought against the Muslims, since they believed they were chosen by God as the best community.

Cook's account on the break between Muhammad and the Jews remains unique. His view differs from that of Watt and those of Muslim traditional sources pointing the breaks between Muhammad and the Jews shortly after Muhammad's arrival to Medina, after his attempts to cooperate with the Jews were rejected by them. At the same time, Cook does not share the opinions of the abovementioned Western scholars that, based on their analysis of the Constitution, Muhammad did not give an appropriate place for the Jews in his *ummah* since the very beginning of his coming to Medina. Cook believes that the relationship between the Prophet and the Jews, as depicted in the Armenian chroniclers, was harmonious. It was not until the Arab conquest of Jerusalem (in 634 C.E).<sup>67</sup> that the breaks between the Muslims and the Jews occurred. One might assume, though Cook does not state clearly, that it was the Muslims who initiated the breaks, since it was they who conquered Jerusalem, the Jews' holy land.

On the importance of Jerusalem, it is hard to analyze similarity between Watt's and Ibn Ishāq's attitudes, since Ibn Ishāq said nothing on the relationship between the change of the *qiblah* with the place of Jerusalem in Muhammad's mind. Watt holds the Jerusalem was not important in Muhammad's time. He is even doubtful whether Muhammad had a *qiblah* before he received the revelation to face the Ka'bah. And even if Jerusalem was the *qiblah* at that time, Watt rejects the idea that it indicated Jewish influence in Muhammad's scheme of things. It is hard to discern the reason for Watt's rejection. One possibility is that Watt believes that it is important to reject the idea that Muhammad, or Islamic teaching in general, are indebted to Jewish tenets, since Muslim tradition depicts the source of Muhammad's teaching as the Qur'an, not Jewish thought.

Cook, on the other hand, insists on the importance of Jerusalem in Muhammad's mind. He argues that Muhammad, realizing his position as the descendant of Abraham through Ishmael, claimed Jerusalem as a land given by God to him and to Abraham's seeds. It is not easy to understand why he does so. One possibility, however, is Cook's suggestion to use the external evidence which placed Jerusalem as very important site in Muhammad's time as alternatives to get a better understanding of the place of Jerusalem in Muhammad's scheme of things. In other words, his conclusion of the importance of Jerusalem is a logical consequence of the source-critical approach which he applies.

It is important to note that many works written on the Constitution of Medina accept the expense of this document without questioning its sources. Wellhausen states that he is not doubtful of the authenticity of the Constitution

"as transmitted by Ibn Ishāq." He argues that the Constitution originated from the early Medinan period as supported by both Ibn Ishāq and al-Wāqidī. He further states that "the authenticity of the document has been taken for granted: on one challenged this and there is no reason to do so."<sup>68</sup> Akira Goto simply accept the existence of the document saving "there exist a written contract known as 'the Constitution of Medina,' which the Prophet Muḥammad exchanged with the people of Medina after the *hijra*."<sup>69</sup> Even Cook, who has questioned by early Muslim sources, especially the Qur'ān and the *Ḥadīth*, also accepts the existence of the document showing little of this great "curiosity" and doubtfulness.<sup>70</sup> It is Faizer who maintains that the document was not authentic. She holds that "Ibn Ishāq would quite consciously and deliberately provided no *isnād*, as in the case of Constitution of Medina."<sup>71</sup> She further argues that the lack of the *isnād* shows that it was Ibn Ishāq himself who was "the source of the information."<sup>72</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

Watt's approach to his study of Muḥammad may be categorized as irenic and, to some extent, phenomenological. There are some positive aspects to these approaches, such as the attempt to depict Muḥammad by avoiding an image which may contradict Islamic fundamental doctrines. Consequently, the image of the Prophet emerging from Watt's study is very close to that of Muslim traditional sources. This approach, however, as one finds in Watt's study on Muḥammad, lacks critical assessment. It is true that Watt acknowledges the attacks on the credibility of traditional Muslim sources, on which he relies.<sup>73</sup> Yet he argues that he finds no reasons to completely reject these sources.

Cook, on the other hand, applies a source-critical approach, whereby he concludes that there are some problems with the Muslim traditional sources. He, therefore, advances the external sources as "alternative." Consequently, Cook's depiction of Muḥammad is different from the image given by Muslim traditions as the "necessary image". It should be noted, however, that Cook does not say that these external sources, such as the Armenian chroniclers, are "more correct" (*sahīh*) compared to the Muslim materials. Rather, he simply points to their existence. He is trying to argue that all sources must be read with care: that one should doubt everything, since certainty is dangerous to the pursuit of knowledge.

There is no doubt at Cook's approach gives a positive attitude towards getting a "true" image of Muḥammad. One, however, may ask why Cook proposes the Armenian chroniclers, for example, as alternative sources for reconstructing the life of the Prophet, while in Islamic history approximately 12,000 Armenians, under a certain Jaraja (George), fought against the Muslims in year

of 635 C.E (prior to the date of Armenian chroniclers given by Cook).<sup>74</sup>In view of this initial hostility, why should one consider these external evidences as alternative sources. A similar question may be advanced on account of Cook's somewhat "easy" acceptance of the existence of the Constitution of Medina, on the one hand, and his deeply critical view of other Muslim traditional sources, on the other. Further research needs to be undertaken to clarify these questions.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup>J. Koren and Y.D. Nevo, Methodological Approaches to Islamic Studies, *Der Islam* 68 (1991), 87-8. In this article, they discuss the basic premises, both of the traditional and of the revisionist approach, in detail.

<sup>2</sup>James E. Royster discusses these two approach in great detail in his dissertation "The Meaning of Muhammad for Muslims: A Phenomenological Studi of Recur-rent Images if the Prophet," Ph.D. dissertation, Connecticut, 1970, 1-28.

<sup>3</sup>James E. Royster, The Study of Muḥammad: A Survey of Approaches from the Perspective of the History and Phenomenology of Religion, *The Muslim World* 62 (1972), 49-53. See Also Royster "The Meaning of Muhammad," 8-10.

<sup>4</sup>Royster, The Study of Muḥammad, 54.

<sup>5</sup>Royster, The Study of Muḥammad, 52-3.

<sup>6</sup>Royster, The Study of Muḥammad, 57-8.

<sup>7</sup>Royster, The Study of Muḥammad, 62.

<sup>8</sup>Royster, The Study of Muḥammad, 64.

<sup>9</sup>Charles J. Adams, Islamic Religious Tradition, *The Study of the Middle East: Research and Scholarship in the Humanities and the Social Sciences*, ed. L. Binder (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1976), 38.

<sup>10</sup>Adams, Islamic Religious Tradition, 38.

<sup>11</sup>W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), x.

<sup>12</sup>His volumes, *Muhammad at Mecca* and *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Cal-arendon Press, 1956) later abridged as *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesment* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

<sup>13</sup>Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, xi.

<sup>14</sup>Watt testifies that the main sources he uses for the life of Muḥammad are firstly the Qur'ān, and secondly historical works written in the third and fourth centuries of hijra, such as the *Sīrah*, which was edited by Ibn Hishām (d. 218/833), the section of the *Annals* of aṭ-Ṭabarī (d. 310/922), which deals with the life of the Prophet, and the *Ṭabaqāt* of Ibn Sad (d. 230/845) (*Muhammad at Mecca*, xi).

<sup>15</sup>Royster, The Study of Muḥammad, 64.

<sup>16</sup>Maxime Rodinson, The Life of Muhammad and the Sociological Problem of the Beginning of Islam, *Diogenes* 20 (1957), 32-6.

<sup>17</sup>Adams, *Islamic Religious Tradition*, 58.

<sup>18</sup>On this point, Adams does not really refer to Watt's works on Muhammad. He refers to Watt's books, namely *Truth in Religion* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 1963) and *Islamic Revelation in the Modern World* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 1969) as "animated by the irenic spirit" ("Islamic Religious Tradition," 41)

<sup>19</sup>Cook's other work, in collaborations with Patricia Crone, *Hagarism: The Making of The Islamic World* (Canbridge : Canbridge University Press, 1977), applies the same method: 'it [*Hagarism*] is based on the intensive use of a small number of contemporary non-Muslim sources the testimony of which has hitherto been disregarded" (*Hagarism*, vii). Cook's *Early Muslim Dogma: A Source-Critical Study World* (Canbridge: Canbridge University Press, 1981), applies the same method. Cook, in this book, argues that to analyze the Islamic traditions, two strategies could be applied: one is by examining the early non-Muslims sources which survive archeologically, and two by isolating the oldest element preserved within Islamic tradition. He states that his book *Hagarism* applies the first strategy, while his *Early Muslim Dogma* applies the second strategy (*Early Muslim Dogma*, vii)

<sup>20</sup>Michael Cook, *Muhammad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 69.

<sup>21</sup>Cook, *Muhammad*, 69. Cook does not specifically mention these two verses. However, it seems that he refers to verses 23 and 32 of the fifty-third *sūrah*, since these two verses contain prosaic styles.

<sup>22</sup>Cook, *Muhammad*, 69.

<sup>23</sup>Cook, *Muhammad*, 69.

<sup>24</sup>Cook, *Muhammad*, 61. Cook notes that the materials were usually transmitted orally not through book (*Muhammad*, 62).

<sup>25</sup>Cook Muhammad, 62. Guillaume in his : "Introduction" to *The Life of Muhammad; A Translation of Ibn Ishāq's Sirat Rasūl Allāh* (Oxford University Press, 1955), discusses some omissions by Ibn Hishām's recension if the *Sīrah* and analyzes possible reasons behind these omissions. See pp. xxii, xli.

<sup>26</sup>Cook, *Muhammad*, 62.

<sup>27</sup>Cook, *Muhammad*, 66.

<sup>28</sup>Cook, *Muhammad*, 73.

<sup>29</sup>Cook, *Muhammad*, 73. Cook gives examples of Muslim materials, such as administrative papyri, coins and inscriptions. On the non-Muslim side, Cook points to Greek and Syriac materials (*Muhammad*, 73)

<sup>30</sup>Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 231.

<sup>31</sup>Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 231-3.

<sup>32</sup>Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 239.

<sup>33</sup>Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 289.

<sup>34</sup>A.J. Wensinck, *Muhammad and the Jews of Medina*, ed. And trans. By W. Behn (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1975). 71.

<sup>35</sup>Uri Rubin, "The Constitution of Medina: Some Notes," *Studia Islamica* 43 (1985), 10.

<sup>36</sup>Moshe Gil, "The Constitution of Medina: A Reconsideration," *Israel Oriental Studies* 4 (1974), 65.

<sup>37</sup>Rubin, "The Constitution of Medina," 12.

<sup>38</sup>Wensinck, *Muhammad and the Jews of Medina*, 52.

<sup>39</sup>Gil, "The Constitution of Medina," 50.

<sup>40</sup>Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 241.

<sup>41</sup>R. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 95.

<sup>42</sup>R.B. Serjeant, "The Constitution of Medina," *Islamic Quarterly* 8 (1964), 12.

<sup>43</sup>R.B. Serjeant, "The Sunnah Jami'ah Pacts with the Yathrib Jews, and the Tahrir of Yathrib: Analysis and Translation of the Documents Comprised in the So-Called Constitution of Medina," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 41 (1978), 4.

<sup>44</sup>J. Wellhausen, "Muhammad's Constitution on Medina," in Wensinck, *Muhammad and the Jews of Medina*, 131.

<sup>45</sup>F.M. Denny, "Ummah and the Constitution of Medina," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 36 (1977), 42-3.

<sup>46</sup>Serjeant, "The Constitution of Medina," 13.

<sup>47</sup>Humphreys, *Islamic History*, 97.

<sup>48</sup>Humphreys, *Islamic History*, 97.

<sup>49</sup>Humphreys, *Islamic History*, 97. See also Gil, "The Constitution of Medina," 60-1.

<sup>50</sup>See n. 30 above.

<sup>51</sup>Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 195-7

<sup>52</sup>Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 201. Watt notes some Muhammad attempts adopted shortly before and after the hijra such as fasting on the Jewish Day of Atonement (the fast of 'Ashūrā), and midday worship (*ṣalāt*) Other examples of reconciliation with the Jews is the verse which allows Muslims to eat the People of the Book's food and to marry women of their group (*Muhammad at Medina*, 199-201)

<sup>53</sup>Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 201. Watt thinks that the Jews' reasons for criticizing Muhammad's claim to be a prophet "may have been partly religious contradictions between what Muhammad claimed or asserted and some of their fundamental dogmatic attitudes. " However, Watt argues that the political reason was more important, since if Muhammad succeeded with his plan, "the Jews would have no chance of supreme power; they may have realized already that the Emigrants would generally have more influence on Muhammad than the Anṣār (*Muhammad at Medina*, 201-2). See also Watt. "Muhammad," *The Cambridge History of Islam* 1A, eds. P. M. Holt, et. Al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 44.

<sup>54</sup>Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 202-3.

<sup>55</sup>Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 204, 208. Watt notes some intellectual attacks on the Jews by the Qur'ān, and physical attacks by the Medinan state. The intellectual attacks were based on a conception of the religion of Abraham which is stated in the Qur'ān. Since Judaism and Christianity "come to be looked at as imperfect manifestations of this religion of God [the religion of Abraham]," the Qur'ān therefore "instruct Muhammad and the believers to regard themselves as neither Jews

nor Christians, but a community distinct from both, followers of the 'creed of Abraham' [*millat Ibrāhīm*]; and Abraham is described as a *ḥaniḥ*, a *muslim* [that is, one surrendered to God], not one of the idolaters" (*Muhammad at Medina*, 205) See also pp. 204-19.

<sup>56</sup>Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 220.

<sup>57</sup>Michael Cook, *Muhammad*, 75.

<sup>58</sup>Michael Cook, *Muhammad*, 75-6.

<sup>59</sup>Cook does not clarify the year of this conquest. However from other sources, it can be concluded that first Arab conquest to Jerusalem happened at 634 C. E. shortly after the battle of Adjnadyan (C. E. Bosworth, et.al, eds., *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986], s.v. "al Kuds," by O. Grabar, 323.

<sup>60</sup>Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 198.

<sup>61</sup>Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 199.

<sup>62</sup>Michael Cook, *Muhammad*, 76.

<sup>63</sup>It is true that Watt writes this standpoint in his book *Muhammad at Mecca*. His other works on Muḥammad, such as *Muhammad at Medina* aimed to the same readers.

<sup>64</sup>Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, x.

<sup>65</sup>Cook, *Muhammad*, 1-2.

<sup>66</sup>Cook, *Muhammad*, 75-6.

<sup>67</sup>See n. 59 above.

<sup>68</sup>Wellhausen, "The Constitution of Medina," 134-5.

<sup>69</sup>Akira Goto, "The Constitution of Medina," *Orient* 18 (1982), 1.

<sup>70</sup>Cook, *Muhammad*, 73.

<sup>71</sup>Rizwi Shuhadha Faizer, "Ibn Ishāq and al-Wāqidī Revisited: A Case of Muhammad and the Jews in Biographical Literature," Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 1995, 75.

<sup>72</sup>Faizer, "Ibn Ishāq and al-Wāqidī Revisited," 88.

<sup>73</sup>Watt, "The Reliability of Ibn-Ishāq's Sources," 31.

<sup>74</sup>F.M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquest* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1981), 132. See also J. Jandora, *March from Medina: A Revisionist Study of the Arab Conquest* (Clifton, NJ: Kingston Press, 1990).