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# 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, jinns 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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Just what was so appealing about a she-mule named Duldul? How has the figure of Duldul shaped the medieval Muslim imagination? To address these questions, this article first analyzes three literary genres: *maghāzī* (narratives of the Muslim conquest), hadith (sayings and traditions of Muhammad), and *sira* (biographical information), which detail Duldul and her role in early Islamic history. The second section explores medieval attitudes toward Duldul and she-mules in general, drawing largely from the prolific Abbasid writer al-Jahiz (d. 868) and extending to the Mamluk writer al-Damiri (d. 1405). Shared by the Prophet and the Imam, Duldul took part in important moments of conquest and civil war. I argue that Duldul signified political succession and became a tool of legitimation to navigate an emergent Shi'a-Sunni rift. The she-mule's historical and legendary persona became a literary measure and countermeasure for laying claim to the memory of Muslim conquests, providing a lens into the relationship between hadith construction and Shi'a-Sunni polemics. By taking riding beasts like Duldul seriously as historical actors, we can gain deeper insight into sectarian disputes of Muhammad's legacy in medieval Islamic society.

### Animals as Actors

Renewed interest in studying the “animal turn” has inspired a wave of scholarship uncovering the limits and liminalities of animal-human relationships.<sup>3</sup> Susan Nance, in *The Historical Animal*, captures the difficult questions that historians face when reading accounts of animals, two of which are pertinent to the study of Duldul. First, how we can use sources to properly historicize animal actors; and second, is it possible to recognize animals as “factors of causation” in history?<sup>4</sup> The first question exposes the blind spots that have persisted in historical analysis, for animals undoubtedly played a part in the shaping of early Islamic history and yet have been relegated to an inferior status. To omit animal subjects from the historical narrative is, in and of itself, a methodological and political decision; an act for which Nance rightly takes us to task. By recognizing animals as “factors of causation” we can better explain transitions of political, economic, social, and ecological power in society.<sup>5</sup>

Previous studies of animals in Islam largely have focused on medieval Arabic veterinary treatises, hunting manuals, books of falconry, and animal fables.<sup>6</sup> Scholarship on the study of horses, ants, and postal pigeons reveals a more recent push to investigate medieval historical views toward specific species.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Chris Philo and Chris Wilbert, eds., *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: New Geographies of Human-Animal Relations* (London: Routledge, 2000); Harriet Ritvo, “On the Animal Turn,” *Daedalus* 136, no. 4 (2007): 118–22; Jason C. Hribal, “Animals, Agency, and Class: Writing the History of Animals from Below,” *Human Ecology Review* 14, no. 1 (2007): 101–12; David Gary Shaw, “A Way with Animals,” *History and Theory* 52, no. 4 (2013): 1–12; John Aberth, *An Environmental History of the Middle Ages: The Crucible of Nature* (London: Routledge, 2013); Hilda Kean and Philip Howell, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Animal-Human History* (London: Routledge, 2020).

<sup>4</sup>Susan Nance, ed., *The Historical Animal* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2015), 4.

<sup>5</sup>For instance, see Jilly Cooper, *Animals in War* (London: Heinemann, 1983); Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Michael Cook, “Ibn Qutayba and the Monkeys,” *Studia Islamica* 89 (1999): 43–74; Joanna Swabe, *Animals, Disease, and Human Society: Human-Animal Relations and the Rise of Veterinary Medicine* (London: Routledge, 1999); Diana K. Davis and Denys Frappier, “The Social Context of Working Equines in the Urban Middle East: The Example of Fez Medina,” *Journal of North African Studies* 5, no. 4 (2000): 51–68; Catherine T. Ingraham, *Architecture, Animal, Human: The Asymmetrical Condition* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1–32; Pita Kelekna, *The Horse in Human History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Alan Mikhail, *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt: An Environmental History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and Alan Mikhail, *The Animal in Ottoman Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>6</sup>For a fuller list of medieval veterinary treatises, see Ibn al-Nadim (d. 995), *Fihrist*, ed. Ibrahim Ramadan (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 1997), 382. See also Detlef Möller, *Studien zur mittelalterlichen arabischen Falknerliteratur* (Berlin: Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Jagd, 1965); 'Abd al-Rahman b. Muhammad al-Baladi, *Kitab al-Kafi fi al-Bayzara*, ed. Ihsan 'Abbas and 'Abd al-Hafiz Mansur (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-l-Dirasat wa-l-Nashr, 1983); and Hamzah b. 'Abd Allah b. Muhammad al-Zubaydi al-Nashiri, *Kitab Intihaz al-Furas fi al-Sayd wa-l-Qans*, ed. 'Abd Allah Husayn al-Sada (Damascus: Dar Kinan, 2000). Consider also *Kalila wa-Dimna* and extensive scholarship on animal allegories for Islamic political thought. See Carl Brockelmann, “Kalila wa-Dimna,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman et al (Leiden: Brill, 2012). Animal valor and sentimentality also can be found in the classic Roman tale *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius, told across Western Europe.

<sup>7</sup>For example, Bert Hölldobler and Edward O. Wilson, *The Ants* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1990); Youssef Ragheb, *Les messagers volants en terre d'Islam* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2002); Martin Heide, “Beschreibung und Behandlung einiger Erkrankungen, die Extremitäten der Pferd betreffen aus dem *Kitab al-Furusiya wa-l-Baytara* des Muhammad b. Ya'qub

Such investigations yield remarkable insights into premodern social systems of animal care, health, and administrative use. Richard Bulliet's ambitious study *The Camel and the Wheel* centered the camel as a historical actor and a viable economic competitor with the wheel. Bulliet tasked readers with investigating the social, economic, and military role of the camel and sparked a series of one-humped and double-humped histories.<sup>8</sup> Some scholars have pressed for environmental histories that undertake a cross-species approach. Such work has exposed a rich cultural tapestry of human and animal relationships.<sup>9</sup> Housni Alkhateeb Shehada, in his comprehensive study of medieval Islamic *baytara* (veterinary medicine) titled *Mamluks and Animals*, traces both Mamluk veterinary science and the social, political, and cultural frames that shaped Mamluk veterinary writing.<sup>10</sup> Decidedly not a species-specific approach, his book nevertheless reminds us of the importance of reading animals as historical actors, as premodern historical authors saw them.

More recent anthropological forays into the entangled realities of human and nonhuman beings propose novel ways of rethinking representations of the self. Edwardo Kohn calls for an "anthropology beyond the human" to interrogate the complex relationships between human and animal.<sup>11</sup> To study how humans and animals interrelate requires us to rethink the ways that we, in turn, animate or de-animate the actions of animals.<sup>12</sup> Evaluating how we pattern animal behavior by using human frames of reference raises the troubling idea that our representations might reflect more about ourselves than about animals. Intentionally or not, humans endow animals with agency and identity, generating a sense of connection in personal and meaningful ways. Relatedness denotes an intimacy with animals that, whether loving, indifferent, or hostile, inscribes an affective experience.<sup>13</sup> Interrogating our own animal subjectivities reflects a broader social desire to understand ourselves, a process of self-discovery through human-animal relations that also can be found in medieval Islamic historical writing.

Although the premier Abbasid belletrist, al-Jahiz, devoted an entire treatise to the mule, modern literary studies have overlooked Duldul. On the other hand, previous scholarship has addressed the practice and prevalence of mule breeding in the late antique Near East. As Albert Leighton shows, Jewish prohibitions toward mule breeding practices stemmed from a religious anxiety over hybridity: a cross-species union viewed as contrary to nature that produces a sterile offspring.<sup>14</sup> But the mule was sturdier than a donkey and less prone to disease than a horse, traits that encouraged the spread of mule breeding practices across the Roman Empire. Roman legal debates over property assessments and commercial transactions for animals riddled with defects or sterility resulting from interspecies coupling did not extend

b. Akhi Hizam al-Khuttuli," *Die Welt Des Orient* 34 (2004): 105–52; Elaine Walker, *Horse* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008); and Khalid Sindawi, "The Role of Birds in Shi'ite Thought," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 3 (2008): 165–81.

<sup>8</sup>Richard Bulliet, *The Camel and the Wheel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975); Suraiya Faruqi, "Camels, Wagons, and the Ottoman State in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 14, no. 4 (1982): 523–39; Roger S. Bagnall, "The Camel, the Wagon, and the Donkey in Later Roman Egypt," *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 22, no. 1/4 (1985): 1–6; Ilse Köhler-Rollefson, "Camels and Camel Pastoralism in Arabia," *Biblical Archaeologist* 56, no. 4 (1993): 180–88; Onur İnal, "One-Humped History: The Camel as Historical Actor in the Late Ottoman Empire," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 53, no. 1 (2021): 57–72.

<sup>9</sup>See Brett L. Walker, "Animals and the Intimacy of History," *History and Theory* 52, no. 4 (2013): 45–67.

<sup>10</sup>Housni Alkhateeb Shehada, *Mamluks and Animals: Veterinary Medicine in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Alkhateeb Shehada, "Donkeys and Mules in Arabic Veterinary Sources from the Mamluk Period (7th–10th/13th–16th Century)," *al-Masaq* 20, no. 2 (2008): 207–14. Although he focuses more on veterinary care than Mamluk cultural perspectives of mules and donkeys, Alkhateeb Shehada grounds Mamluk veterinary medicine firmly in its environmental context.

<sup>11</sup>Edwardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Towards an Anthropology Beyond the Human* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013).

<sup>12</sup>See Bruno Latour's remarks in "Foreword: The Scientific Fables of an Empirical La Fontaine," in Vinciane Despret's *What Would Animals Say If We Asked the Right Questions?* trans. Brett Buchanan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016). Consider, on the other hand, Claude Lévi-Strauss, who foregrounds language as the organizing principle on which the study of social life can be structured. Jill Bough writes that the scorn humans express for donkeys arises, in part, from "how we choose to represent donkeys in human terms (or humans in donkey terms)"; see her *Donkey* (London: Reaktion, 2011), 10.

<sup>13</sup>Susan McHugh, *Animal Stories: Narrating across Species Lines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Radhika Govindrajana, *Animal Intimacies: Interspecies Relatedness in India's Central Himalayas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

<sup>14</sup>Albert C. Leighton, "The Mule as a Cultural Invention," *Technology and Culture* 8, no. 1 (1967): 46. Ritual anxieties over interspecies coupling can be found in the Torah (Leviticus 19:19). The Hittites reportedly first bred mules (second millennium BC); see Bough, *Donkey*, 43.

to the mule, since castration, according to Roman jurists, did not impede the mule's stamina or work output, for he was already unable to procreate.<sup>15</sup> Similar to the vulgarity of the donkey in Roman literature, an unrefined character incompatible with the horse (an animal arousing more aristocratic sensibilities), the mule represented a banality mirroring the lower classes.<sup>16</sup> And yet ecclesiastical authorities rode on mules in ceremonial displays, a tradition dating back to when Solomon sat on King David's mule.<sup>17</sup> The paradox of the mule and she-mule, creatures beholden to baser instincts although identified in biblical tradition as the humble mounts of prophets, also appears in the writings of al-Jahiz.<sup>18</sup>

For al-Jahiz, man is a microcosmic reflection of the world and thus can embody multiple animal representations: "in him are the shapes of all kinds of animals."<sup>19</sup> The ability of man to imitate the braying of a donkey, for example, reveals an intersectionality between man and animal where beastly rhetoric can be interpreted, performed, and made human. Al-Jahiz conflates the physical resemblances (and, in some cases, the personality traits) between man and animal.<sup>20</sup> The 10th-century philosopher al-Tawhidi (d. 1023), drawing largely on al-Jahiz's *Kitab al-Hayawan* (The Book of the Animal), writes that the "morals of many types of animals are in accordance with the nature of people."<sup>21</sup> For some medieval Muslim intellectuals and poets, physical likeness with a particular animal could be a manifestation of a similarity in interior state.<sup>22</sup> Medieval Muslim authors such as al-Jahiz and al-Tawhidi sought to capture the kinship between man and animal, a relationship that could be deciphered by man, who despite humans' elevated status exhibits a range of animal resemblances.

Some Muslim scholars view animals as creatures with souls and posit that nonhuman animals will be resurrected on the Day of Judgment.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the most famous and controversial Qur'anic verse regarding nonhuman animals declares that "There is not an animal in the earth, nor a flying creature flying on two wings, but they are peoples like you" (Qur'an 6:38). Nonhuman animals in the Qur'an, referred to largely as *dabba* (pl. *dawābb*), not *hayawān* (pl. *hayawānāt*) which takes on the Qur'anic meaning "true existence," form a community and are afforded a certain respect, purpose, and position in the larger

<sup>15</sup>*Digest of Justinian*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. Alan Watson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), ch. 21, 156–57. The unrefined behavior of certain beasts bothered Roman jurists like Ulpian (d. 228), who took account of the miscellaneous misdeeds of the mule that could unwittingly inflict damage on individuals or property; *Digest of Justinian*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Alan Watson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), ch. 9, 276. Besides manual labor, mules served a military function, transporting Roman (and Sassanid) soldiers and foodstuffs across various terrains. See the Eastern Roman historian Procopius (d. 560s), *History of the Wars*, vol. 4 (6.16–7.35; *Gothic War*) trans. H. B. Dewing (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), section iii, 311–12; and *The Anecdota, or Secret History*, trans. H. B. Dewing (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), ch. 30, 351. Roman military transport across Egypt began to favor camels, donkeys, and mules instead of wagons by the 4th to 6th centuries. See John Haldon, "Pre-Industrial States and the Distribution of Resources: The Nature of the Problem," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East: Papers of the Third Workshop on Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, ed. Averil Cameron and Lawrence I. Conrad (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1995), 1–25.

<sup>16</sup>Justina Gregory, "Donkeys and the Equine Hierarchy in Archaic Greek Literature," *Classical Journal* 102, no. 3 (2007): 194–95; Bough, *Donkey*, 45–76.

<sup>17</sup>Bough, *Donkey*, 61.

<sup>18</sup>Al-Jahiz candidly remarks in *Kitab al-Hayawan*, a book based on Aristotle's writings and al-Jahiz's own experimental findings, that mules and she-mules are sexually promiscuous beasts and yet, ironically, are incapable of reproducing with each other. See *Kitab al-Hayawan*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 2004), 69. He states that this inability is a defect of the sperm that cannot be remedied (vol. 2, 262).

<sup>19</sup>Emily Selove makes this observation in "Who Invited the Microcosm?" in *Abbasid Studies IV*, ed. Monique Bernards (Exeter, UK: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2013), 78. Al-Jahiz, in *al-Hayawan*, details man's resemblance to animals (vol. 1, 213–17).

<sup>20</sup>Anthropomorphizing riding beasts, al-Jahiz notes that "if it is the donkey, you interpret in him longevity, impudence, strength, and endurance." See *al-Hayawan*, vol. 1, 213.

<sup>21</sup>Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi, *Kitab al-Imta' wa-l-Mu'anasa*, vol. 1 (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-'Ansariyya, 2003), 108, 233.

<sup>22</sup>Fakr al-Din al-Razi, *Kitab al-Firasa* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qur'an), 83–84. See also Robert Hoyland, "The Islamic Background to Polemon's Treatise," in *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul: Polemon's Physiognomy from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Islam*, ed. Simon Swain et al. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 253. Renowned for his sharp wit, the poet al-Mutanabbi (d. 965) occasionally mentions man's relations to the mule, horse, and donkey. See 'Abd Allah b. al-Husayn al-Ukbari (d. 1219), *Sharh Diwan al-Mutanabbi*, vol. 2, ed. Mustafa al-Saqqa et al. (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa), 364–65.

<sup>23</sup>Richard C. Foltz, "'This She-Camel of God Is a Sign to You': Dimensions of Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Culture," in *A Communion of Subjects, Animals in Religion, Science, and Ethics*, ed. Paul Waldau and Kimberley Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 151. Consider also Annemarie Schimmel, *Islam and the Wonders of Creation: The Animal Kingdom* (London: al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, 2003).

animal world.<sup>24</sup> Certain animals even carry blessings, and they should be treated with appropriate ethical consideration, especially with regard to charitable endowments, animal rights, and ritual slaughter. Thus, the killing of certain animals—such as bees, ants, frogs (their croaking is considered a form of praise to God), magpies, and hoopoes—is prohibited in Islam.<sup>25</sup>

Animal ethics has been a pressing area of study for scholars Richard C. Foltz and Sarra Tlili, both of whom argue for a much-needed rethinking of humans' relationship to animals.<sup>26</sup> For the Qur'anic exegetes Fakr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1210) and Abu 'Abd Allah al-Qurtubi (d. 1273), the relative degree of mental complexity attributed to nonhuman animals was a matter of theological debate, a discussion that had an impact on the status of particular animals in relation to man and God.<sup>27</sup> For if anthropomorphized animals possess intelligence, rational faculties, and language, what does this tell us about medieval views of the animal world and the importance of man? As Tlili indicates, the lower status given to nonhuman animals has both religious and rational justifications, born out of a practical need to place animals within a proper inferior position.<sup>28</sup> Significant disagreement occurred among intellectuals such as the theologian Ahmad b. Habit (d. ca. 842–47) and the jurist Ibn Hazm (d. 1064) over the position of nonhuman animals as religious and moral subjects.<sup>29</sup> This was a line of theological inquiry unsettled by the perplexing notion that nonhuman animals may have more mental faculties than humans give them credit for, a degree of subjectivity that becomes increasingly apparent in the case of the she-mule.

### Duldul in Early Islamic Tradition

According to the historian al-Tabari (d. 923), Duldul was the white (sometimes gray) she-mule (*baghla*) given to Muhammad by the Egyptian administrator al-Muqawqis in the year 628.<sup>30</sup> Citing the earlier Muslim historian and biographer of Muhammad, al-Waqidi (d. 823), al-Tabari writes that, "Hatib b. Abi Balta'a returned from al-Muqawqis with Mariya, her sister Sirin, his she-mule Duldul, his donkey Ya'fur, and garments."<sup>31</sup> Soon after, the sisters converted to Islam and Duldul became "the mule of the Prophet, the first she-mule seen in Islam, given to the Prophet by al-Muqawqis . . . and the she-mule survived until the time of Mu'awiya."<sup>32</sup> The origin of al-Muqawqis in the Islamic and Coptic traditions has been a matter of debate. The name al-Muqawqis corresponds to the Melkite Patriarch Cyrus who resided in Alexandria in 631, although this interpretation has been challenged in more recent scholarship.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>24</sup>The term *dabba* appears more often in the Qur'an to signify nonhuman animals (beasts, livestock, and other creatures), whereas *hayawān* appears only once. See Richard Foltz, *Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures* (Oxford, UK: OneWorld, 2006), 11–12; and Sarra Tlili, *Animals in the Qur'an* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 71.

<sup>25</sup>Tlili, *Animals in the Qur'an*, 176.

<sup>26</sup>Foltz, *Animals in Islamic Tradition*, 1–8; Tlili, *Animals in the Qur'an*, 6–7, 253. See also Peter Adamson, "Abu Bakr al-Razi on Animals," *De Gruyter* 94, no. 3 (2012): 249–73.

<sup>27</sup>Tlili, *Animals in the Qur'an*, 142–48.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 14, 143–44.

<sup>29</sup>Foltz, "She-Camel," 151.

<sup>30</sup>Al-Tabari, *Tarikh al-Rusul wa-l-Muluk*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dar al-Turath, 1968), 20; Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 855), *Fada'il al-Sahaba*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risala, 1983), 924, report 1769. Al-Zuhri reports on the white she-mule, whereas Ma'mar reports on the gray she-mule. Hamad ibn Ishaq al-Azdi (d. 880) identifies Duldul as gray. See *Tarikat al-Nabi wa-l-Subul Allati Wajjahaha Fiha*, vol. 1, ed. A. D. al-'Umari (Beirut: Mu'assasat 'Abd al-Hafiz al-Bisat, 1984), 102.

<sup>31</sup>Al-Tabari, *Tarikh*, vol. 3, 20; al-Nawawi, *Tahdhib al-Asma' wa-l-Lughat* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1977), vol. 1, 20, and vol. 2, 354; Ibn Qutayba al-Dinawari, *al-Ma'arif*, vol. 1 (Cairo: al-'Ammal al-Kitab, 1992), 142.

<sup>32</sup>Al-Tabari, *Tarikh*, vol. 3, 173; Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, ed. Muhammad 'Abd al-Qadir 'Ata (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1990), 380; Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1201), *Muntazam fi Tarikh al-Muluk wa-l-Umam*, vol. 3, ed. Muhammad 'Abd al-Qadir 'Ata and Mustafa 'Abd al-Qadir 'Ata (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1992), 274; Ibn al-Athir, *Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1997), 177. Precisely when Duldul died and where she was buried remain a mystery. Charles Pellat and Clément Huart assert that Duldul died of old age in Yanbu' (a port city on the coast of western Saudi Arabia). See "Duldul," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

<sup>33</sup>Al-Muqawqis directed taxation and worked with the Muslim commander 'Amr b. al-'As (d. ca. 663), who led the conquest of Egypt. Sa'id b. al-Bitriq (d. 940), *Tarikh al-Majmu'a 'ala al-Tahqiq wa-l-Tasdiq*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Matba'a al-'Aba' al-Yasu'in, 1909), 22; al-Tabari, *Tarikh*, vol. 3, 21. Scholars affirm that the name Cyrus (the Melkite Patriarch of Egypt in 631) may indicate "Muqawqis" in Arabic, although others consider Greek, Persian, and Coptic derivations. See Kaj Öhrnberg "al-Mukawkis," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

Upon receiving one of Muhammad's earliest delegations, al-Muqawqis replied with various gifts, including Duldul and two Coptic concubines: Mariya and Sirin.

Most medieval Muslim historians, relying on al-Waqidi's report, preserve a similar version of al-Muqawqis either gifting or transporting Duldul to Muhammad in 628; whereas a few indicate that Farwa b. 'Amr al-Judhami, a 7th-century Muslim convert and governor of Ma'n (a city in southern Jordan), presented the she-mule to the Prophet.<sup>34</sup> Al-Waqidi offers two chains of transmission, from Musa b. Muhammad b. Ibrahim (d. ca. 767–77) and Abu Bakr b. 'Abd Allah b. Abi Sabra (d. 779), that identify Duldul as a present gifted by al-Muqawqis and another she-mule named Fidda gifted by Farwa b. 'Amr al-Judhami.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, al-Zuhri (d. 741), an Arab Qurayshi transmitter of hadith who pioneered *sira-maghāzī* literature and historiography of Muhammad, claims that it was Farwa b. 'Amr al-Judhami who gifted Duldul.<sup>36</sup> In spite of the fact that al-Zuhri was renowned for his memorization skills and expert reporting of hadith, most medieval Muslim historians accepted al-Waqidi's version.<sup>37</sup> The main discrepancy in al-Zuhri's report may lie with Ma'mar ibn Rashid (d. 770), a Basran scholar and a favored student of al-Zuhri's, whose reliability has been questioned by modern historians.<sup>38</sup>

The conflicting aspects of Duldul's origin story in al-Waqidi's and al-Zuhri's narratives underscore the (dis)continuities found in *maghāzī* and hadith scholarship, two genres with different epistemological aims. Hadith collections can differ substantially in their *maghāzī* materials—in method, style of reporting, and content—to reflect the historiographical aspirations of their compilers.<sup>39</sup> Acknowledging both al-Waqidi's and al-Zuhri's reports, the Syrian hadith expert al-Dhahabi (d. 1348) provides an explanation

<sup>34</sup>Those who provide both reports yet favor al-Waqidi's: al-Tabari, *Tarikh*, vol. 3, 21, 173; Hammad b. Ishaq al-Azdi, *Tarikat al-Nabi*, vol. 1, 98–99; Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1996), 448, 510; al-Nuwayri (d. 1333), *Nihayat al-'Arab fi Funun al-Adab*, vol. 10 (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub, 2003), 79.

<sup>35</sup>Those only relying on al-Waqidi's report: Ahmad Ibn Muhammad al-Qastallani (d. 1517), *Irshad al-Sari al-Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 3 (Egypt: al-Matba'a al-Kubra al-Amiriyya, 1906), 68, report 1481; Diyarbakri (d. 1559), *Tarikh al-Khamis fi Ahwal Anfas al-Nafis*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1969), 36; al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, vol. 4 (Cairo: Matba'at Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1975), 199, report 1688; al-Dhahabi, *Siyar al-'Alam al-Nubala'*, vol. 2 (Mu'assasat al-Risala, 1985), 64, 98; Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma'arif*, vol. 1, 148; al-Zamakshari (d. 1144), *Rabi' al-Abrrar wa-Nasus al-Akhyar*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lami, 1992), 132, report 60; Ibn 'Asakir (d. 1176), *Tarikh Dimashq*, vol. 3, ed. 'Umar al-'Amrawi and 'Ali Shiri (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1995), 234; al-Nawawi, *Tahdhib al-Asma' wa-l-Lughat*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, n.d.), 354.

<sup>36</sup>Those who favor al-Zuhri's report: 'Abd al-Razzaq al-San'ani (d. 827), *Musannaf 'Abd al-Razzaq al-San'ani*, vol. 5, ed. Habib al-Rahman al-A'zami (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1982), 379, report 9741; Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidaya wa-l-Nihaya*, vol. 5 (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath, 1988), 302; Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 199, 265; Ibn al-Jawzi, *Muntazam*, vol. 3, 299; Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 3, ed. Muhammad Fuad 'Abd al-Baqi (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, n.d.), 1398, report 1775.

<sup>37</sup>Shams al-Din al-Dhahabi, *Kitab Tadhkirat al-Huffaz*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1998), 83. Al-Dhahabi records a report given by al-Zuhri's pupil Ibn Ishaq (d. ca. 768), who said, "I never discredited his hadith nor doubted in a hadith except for one." Although he does not elaborate on the one hadith Ibn Ishaq considered suspicious, the purpose of such a statement was to note al-Zuhri's reliability as a transmitter. Conversely, al-Dhahabi recounts that al-Waqidi was, "one of the most learned scholars, but he is not proficient in hadith" (253). Sean Anthony also accounts for al-Dhahabi's disregard for al-Waqidi; see "Crime and Punishment in Early Medina," in *Analyzing Muslim Traditions: Studies in Legal, Exegetical, and Maghazi Hadith*, ed. Harald Motzki, Nicolet Boekhoff-van Der Voort, and Sean W. Anthony (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 459.

<sup>38</sup>Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 510, reports 1028, 1029. Al-Baladhuri lists four chains of transmitters for al-Zuhri's report (Muhammad b. Sa'd, Muhammad b. 'Umar al-Waqidi, Ma'mar, and al-Zuhri). For al-Waqidi's report (Muhammad b. Sa'd, al-Waqidi, Musa b. Muhammad b. Ibrahim al-Taymi, and his father) and (Muhammad b. Sa'd, al-Waqidi, Ibn Abi Sabra, and Zahir b. 'Amru). Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, in *Sahih Muslim*, mentions that Ishaq b. Ibrahim, Muhammad b. Rafi', 'Abd b. Humayd, and 'Abd al-Razzaq learned of this report from Ma'mar (vol. 3, 1398, report 1775). See 'Abd al-Razzaq, *Musannaf*, vol. 5, 379, report 9741. Al-Tabari, in his *Tarikh*, also mentions that al-Zuhri's report of Farwa b. 'Amr al-Judhami gifting Duldul comes from Ma'mar (vol. 3, 173). For a more balanced analysis of Ma'mar's reliability as a hadith reporter, see Motzki, "Ma'mar as a Source for Zuhri's Teaching," in Motzki et al., *Analyzing Muslim Traditions*, 4–11. See also Michael Lecker, "Biographical Notes on Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 41, no. 1 (1996): 29–31.

<sup>39</sup>See Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "Maghazi and the Muhaddithun: Reconsidering the Treatment of 'Historical' Materials in Early Collections of Hadith," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28, no. 1 (1996): 1–18; Halit Ozkan, "The Common Link and Its Relation to the Madar," *Islamic Law and Society* 11, no. 1 (2004): 42–77; Motzki et al., *Analyzing Muslim Traditions*; and Andreas Görke, "The Relationship between Maghazi and Hadith in Early Islamic Scholarship," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 74, no. 2 (2011): 171–85. For a thorough study of hadith scholarship, see Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1950); and G. H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance, and Authorship of Early Hadith* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

for the confusion over who gifted Duldul. "One of the she-mules was from al-Muqawqis, gray, and he calls her Duldul, with a donkey he calls 'Ufayr, and a she-mule he calls her Fidda, and she was one of the she-mules from Farwa b. 'Amr al-Judhami, with a donkey he calls Ya'fur."<sup>40</sup> Al-Dhahabi reconciles the misunderstanding over who gifted Duldul, for both al-Muqawqis and Farwa b. 'Amr al-Judhami bestowed she-mules to Muhammad, but introduces another issue over who gifted Ya'fur and 'Ufayr, two donkeys with strikingly similar names.

Al-Waqidi preserves several accounts of Muhammad astride a she-mule when God and the Ansar ("helpers" from Medina) crushed the polytheists who controlled the Ka'ba. But it is the Battle of Hunayn (630) that marked Duldul as a riding beast instrumental to early Muslim success in warfare. Al-Waqidi clarifies that at a critical moment in the battle—when the polytheists seemingly gained an upper hand and Muslim forces feared an imminent assault—Muhammad calmly ordered Duldul to sit on the ground. He then grabbed a fistful of dust and cast it toward the faces of the enemy, thereby achieving victory.<sup>41</sup> The stirring account of Muslims triumphing against all odds, a victory achieved through Duldul's battlefield aptitude and calm, attests to the role that the she-mule played in early Muslim warfare. Following this battle, some of Muhammad's companions, such as his paternal uncle al-'Abbas b. 'Abd al-Muttalib (d. 653) and the second caliph 'Umar b. al-Khattab (d. 644), also rode Duldul.<sup>42</sup> Literary attention to the revered companions that rode Muhammad's she-mule adds to the charisma of the riding beast and the respect shown for her service to the Prophet. After Muhammad's death, Duldul served 'Ali and joined him on military campaigns.

The Twelver Shi'i theologian Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 1022), in *Kitab al-Irshad* (Book of Guidance), a text extolling Shi'a elite who conversed with wild animals and were saved by their mounts, records the miraculous acts performed by 'Ali while riding Duldul. Heading toward Siffin to battle Mu'awiya, 'Ali led his beleaguered troops in the direction of Mecca in search of water and uncovered a wellspring underneath some rock.<sup>43</sup> Shaykh al-Mufid's account substantiates 'Ali's rightful succession to Muhammad: only "a prophet or the testamentary trustee of a prophet" could have found the wellspring's exact location.<sup>44</sup> Again, after the Euphrates had overflowed to the point of endangering Kufan residents, 'Ali rode on the she-mule of Muhammad and through God's assistance reduced the floodwaters.<sup>45</sup> The Shi'i scholar Sharif al-Radi (d. 1015) similarly details 'Ali's rescue of Kufan residents while on Muhammad's she-mule.<sup>46</sup> Although Shaykh al-Mufid and Sharif al-Radi do not specify the she-mule's name, according to Shi'i hadith, 'Ali was entrusted with Duldul's care after Muhammad's death and reportedly rode Duldul in the Battle of the Camel (656) and the Battle of Siffin (657).<sup>47</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'*, vol. 2, 305. The Egyptian historian al-Nuwayri writes that al-Muqawqis gifted Duldul and Farwa b. 'Amr al-Judhami gifted Fidda (another she-mule). See *Nihayat al-'Arab fi Funun al-Adab*, vol. 18 (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub wa-l-Watha'iq al-Qawmiyya, 2002), 333.

<sup>41</sup> Al-Waqidi, *Maghazi al-Waqidi*, vol. 3, ed. Marsden Jones (Beirut: Dar al-A'lami, 1989), 896–99. See also al-Qastallani, *Irshad al-Sari*, vol. 3, 68, no. 1481; al-Tabari, *Tarikh*, vol. 3, 77; Diyarbakri, *Tarikh al-Khamis*, vol. 2, 100, 103; al-Nawawi, *Tahdhib al-Isma' wa-l-Lughat*, vol. 1, 35, and vol. 2, 354; al-Tabarani (d. 971), *Mu'jam al-Awsat*, vol. 4, ed. Tariq b. 'Awad Allah al-Husayni (Cairo: Dar al-Haramayn, 1995), 201, report 3978; al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-'Arab*, vol. 10, 82; and Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 3, 1401, report 1777. Shi'a hadith scholars also record the Day of Hunayn and Duldul's involvement. See Ibn Babawayh, *Uyun Akhbar al-Rida*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Matba'at Mu'assasat al-A'lami, 1984), 207; and Shaykh al-Mufid, *Kitab al-Irshad*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Mufid, 1993), 141.

<sup>42</sup> Al-Waqidi, *Maghazi*, vol. 2, 814–15, and vol. 3, 816, 896–98. See a conversation between 'Abbas and Muhammad while the latter was riding Duldul in Ibn al-Athir, *Kamil*, vol. 2, 135.

<sup>43</sup> Shaykh al-Mufid, *Kitab al-Irshad*, vol. 1, 329–30.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 336.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 347. In this account, 'Ali talks with fish (only those that are ritually pure).

<sup>46</sup> Sharif al-Radi, *Khasa'is al-A'imma*, vol. 1, ed. Muhammad Hadi al-Amini (Mashhad: Majmu'at al-Bahuth al-Islamiyya, 1985), 58.

<sup>47</sup> Ahmad b. al-Barqi (d. second half of the 9th century) has a report transmitted from Safwan b. Yahya, Mansur b. Hazim, and Samra b. Sa'id stating that "The commander of the Believers 'Ali left on the she-mule of the Messenger of God." See *Kitab al-Mahasin*, vol. 2 (Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyya, 1909), 477, report 491. He provides a second report on the authority of the sixth imam Ja'far b. Muhammad al-Sadiq (d. 765), who said that "'Ali used to ride the she-mule of the Prophet" (477, report 492). See also Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-Saffar (d. 903), *al-Basa'ir al-Darajat*, vol. 1 (Tehran: Matba'a al-Ahmadiyya, 1983), 169, 206, 239; and Ibn Babawayh, *Man La Yahduruhu al-Faqih*, vol. 1, ed. 'Ali Akbar al-Ghaffari (Qum: Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islami, 1992), 204. Al-Saffar, a companion of Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (d. 873), specifies that the she-mule was

Yet, other medieval Muslim writers present slightly different versions of ‘Ali’s inheritance of Duldul. In *Kitab al-Qawl fi al-Bighal* (Book of Sayings about the Mules), al-Jahiz details the seizure of a gray she-mule at the battle of Nahrawan (658):

‘Ali b. Abi Talib (may God be pleased with him) frequently rode on the gray she-mule of ‘Abd Allah b. Wahhab which he captured [*ghanima*] on the day of Nahrawan. This is the saying of the Shi’a and others [who] deny that ‘Ali oversaw the looting of possessions from the property of Muslims just as he did not seize wealth from the companions [at the Battle of] the Camel.<sup>48</sup>

Al-Jahiz mentions Duldul’s name in the preceding sentence and clarifies that Muhammad rode this same she-mule on the Day of Hunayn (630).<sup>49</sup> Thus, ‘Abd Allah b. Wahhab’s gray she-mule taken by ‘Ali is none other than Duldul. The seizure of the she-mule is a polemical point. A notoriously controversial writer, al-Jahiz paints a disparaging picture of ‘Ali taking Duldul from ‘Abd Allah b. Wahhab by reasoning that ‘Ali would seize anything, even from other Muslims and warriors at the Battle of the Camel. More importantly, al-Jahiz discloses that ‘Ali had captured the she-mule as booty at the Battle of Nahrawan, which occurred roughly a year after the Battle of Siffin. This chronology raises doubts over ‘Ali’s inheritance of Duldul after Muhammad’s death. If ‘Ali had not obtained Duldul until the Battle of Nahrawan, that undermines the Shi’i tradition of ‘Ali riding Duldul at the Battles of the Camel and Siffin.

Al-Jahiz was not the only 9th-century scholar to question ‘Ali’s direct inheritance of Duldul. Al-Tirmidhi (d. 898), Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj (d. 875), al-Bukhari (d. 870), and others recount that Duldul was one of three items Muhammad left to an inheritor after his death—the other two being his armor and the land—however none explicitly names the she-mule’s inheritor.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, other 9th-century Muslim historians infer that ‘Ali inherited Duldul directly from Muhammad. Ibn Sa’d (d. 845) mentions that ‘Ali rode the white she-mule of Muhammad, suggesting that ‘Ali inherited Duldul.<sup>51</sup> The historian al-Baladhuri (d. 892) also observes that ‘Ali rode the gray she-mule of Muhammad but does not specify Duldul’s name; a common practice, as the identification *baghla shahba*’ (gray she-mule) often referred to Duldul.<sup>52</sup> Confusion over the proper identification of Duldul is largely a result of how medieval Muslim writers signified Duldul by just using the descriptor “gray she-mule” or conceived of a second she-mule entirely.<sup>53</sup> Despite this inconsistency, the more widely accepted tradition follows that Duldul and *baghla shahba*’ are one and the same.

Other 9th-century hadith specialists considered Duldul a vehicle representing the transmission of caliphal authority. Ibn Abi Shaybah (d. 849) narrates that ‘Ali “was the owner [*ṣāhib*] of the gray

Duldul (239). Sulayman b. Qays, a highly disputed figure among medieval Shi’a and Sunni scholars, reportedly saw ‘Ali riding on “his gray she-mule that was the she-mule of the Prophet” on the “Day of the Camel, the Day of Siffin, and the Day of Nahrawan.” See *Kitab Sulayman b. Qays al-Hilal al-Amari*, vol. 1 (Iran: Matba’a al-Hadi, 1958), 422, report 59.

<sup>48</sup> Al-Jahiz, *Kitab al-Qawl fi al-Bighal*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar Maktaba al-Hilal, 1997), 23. Following the arbitration at Siffin, disgruntled Khariji rebels led by Ibn Wahhab fought ‘Ali at Nahrawan. Although Ibn Wahhab lost, the Kharijite threat persisted and ‘Ali was eventually killed by a Kharijite.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 23. He writes, “A she-mule named Duldul belonged to the Prophet, a donkey called Ya’fur, a horse called al-Sakb, and two she-camels al-‘Adba’ and al-Qaswa.” Al-Jahiz states that ‘Ali rode the gray she-mule that Muhammad rode on the Day of Hunayn according to al-Zuhri and other *maghāzī* transmitters (24).

<sup>50</sup> Al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan*, vol. 5, 99, report 2775; 424, report 3321; al-Bayhaqi (d. 1066), *Dala’il al-Nubuwwa*, vol. 7 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1985), 277; al-Bukhari, *Sahih Bukhari*, vol. 4, ed. Muhammad Zahir ibn Nasir (Beirut: Dar Tawq al-Najah, 2001), 2, report 2739; 32, report 2873; 40, report 2912; 81, report 3098; Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 4, 1883, report 2423. For more description on succession and inheritance, see Wilfred Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 362.

<sup>51</sup> Ibn Sa’d, *Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 2, 142, 240.

<sup>52</sup> Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 2, 129, report 108.

<sup>53</sup> See ‘Abd al-Razzaq, *Musannaf*, vol. 5, 294, report 9661. The 10th-century Shi’i hadith compiler al-Kulayni first identifies Duldul as *baghla shahba*’, then later indicates that ‘Ali had two she-mules Duldul and Shahba’, two camels, and two horses (although he does not elaborate on the distinction). See *al-Kafi fi ‘Ilm al-Din*, vol. 1 (Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyya, 1985), 237. The Shi’i hadith compiler Ibn Babawayh also provides a report that Duldul and Shahba’ were distinct she-mules. See *Man La Yahduruhu al-Faqih*, vol. 4, 178.



she-mule,” and then adds, “like Mu‘awiya.”<sup>54</sup> In a report originating from Suhayl b. Abi Salih (d. 755), a controversial Medinese transmitter, the description of Mu‘awiya as the final recipient of Duldul is a politicized account that colors Duldul’s Umayyad inheritance.<sup>55</sup> Early Islamic reports of Duldul’s ownership after ‘Ali’s death do not explicitly indicate Mu‘awiya’s possession of the she-mule; rather, they state only that the she-mule survived until the time of Mu‘awiya.<sup>56</sup> Ibn Abi Shaybah, on the other hand, identifies ‘Ali and then Mu‘awiya as the inheritors of Duldul, linking the ownership of this she-mule to the path of political succession. The hadith scholar and Abbasid judge Ibn Qutayba (d. 889) also conveys Duldul’s role as reflecting the transmission of political authority. Ibn Qutayba identifies ‘Ali’s inheritance of Duldul after the Battle of Hunayn, since ‘Ali and ‘Abbas b. ‘Abd al-Muttalib “took ownership of Muhammad’s she-mule.”<sup>57</sup> Ibn Qutayba’s added mention of ‘Abbas b. ‘Abd al-Muttalib, a figure instrumental to the dynastic authority of the Abbasids, is a reference to the Abbasids as the final, symbolic inheritors of Duldul. The connections made between Duldul, ‘Ali, Mu‘awiya, and ‘Abbas b. ‘Abd al-Muttalib demonstrate that 9th-century scholars like Ibn Abi Shaybah and Ibn Qutayba began to view Muhammad’s she-mule as a tool of political legitimation for gaining control over the narrative of early caliphal succession.

Naturally, such an unfavorable presentation of ‘Ali in al-Jahiz’s narrative over Duldul’s disputed inheritance would have outraged Shi‘a scholars. Writing less than a century after al-Jahiz, the prominent Shi‘i hadith compiler Shaykh al-Saffar al-Qummi (d. 903) clarifies that, “The Messenger of God (Peace and Blessings upon him) left behind the properties of a sword, armor, a goat, a male servant and a gray she-mule. . . . so ‘Ali b. Abi Talib inherited all of this.”<sup>58</sup> The Shi‘i hadith compiler al-Kulayni (d. 941) likewise defends ‘Ali’s direct inheritance of Duldul from Muhammad: “the Prophet left behind the goods, a sword, armor. . . and his gray she-mule. So ‘Ali b. Abi Talib inherited all of this.”<sup>59</sup> A distinguished ‘Alid litterateur employed by the Buyid court, al-Sharif al-Radi, also verifies ‘Ali’s direct inheritance of Duldul in a report transmitted on the authority of al-Hasan b. ‘Ali (d. ca. 669–70). ‘Ali reportedly told his son, “The Messenger of God assigned to me his she-camel al-‘Adba’, horse al-Murtajaz, she-mule, donkey, and sword Dhu-l-Faqar.”<sup>60</sup> The Shi‘i tradition of ‘Ali inheriting Duldul and Muhammad’s famed double-edged sword Dhu-l-Faqar had a political aim: both the she-mule and the sword, emblems embodying military might and political legitimacy, signified ‘Ali’s inheritance of Muhammad’s legacy and rule.<sup>61</sup>

The 10th-century Shi‘i hadith compiler Ibn Babawayh (d. 991) also strengthens the association between Duldul and ‘Ali in a report transmitted on the authority of Jabir ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Ansari (d. 697), a companion of the Prophet. On the night of ‘Ali and Fatima’s wedding, Muhammad went to their house and “arrived on his gray she-mule and folded a velvet fabric over her and spoke to

<sup>54</sup>Ibn Abi Shaybah, *Musannaf*, vol. 7 (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 1988), 442, report 37093. The chain of the report is as follows: Waki’ (d. 918), Sulayman al-A‘mash (d. 765), and Suhayl b. Abi Salih. Ibn Abi Shaybah does not specify Duldul’s color but does state that ‘Ali rode the Prophet Muhammad’s she-mule (see also 392, report 15258).

<sup>55</sup>For more on Suhayl b. Abi Salih, see G. H. A. Juynboll, “Suhayl b. Abi Salih,” in *Encyclopedia of Canonical Hadith* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

<sup>56</sup>See al-Tabari, *Ta’rikh*, vol. 3, 173; and Ibn Sa’d, *Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 380.

<sup>57</sup>Ibn Qutayba, *Ma‘arif*, vol. 1 (Cairo: al-Ha‘ya al-Misriyya al-‘amma li-l-Kitab, 1992), 163. The Mamluk historian al-Nuwayri, in *Nihayat al-‘Arab*, also clarifies that ‘Ali inherited Duldul: “For ‘Ali rode Duldul after the Prophet then al-Hasan rode her, then al-Husayn, then Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyya [‘Ali’s son from Khalwa, not Fatima]” (vol. 10, 82). The final mention of Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyya (d. 700) is noteworthy. Following the deaths of al-Hasan and al-Husayn (d. 680), many supporters of the Talibids expected Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyya to take up their cause, although Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyya did not come from the (direct) bloodline of the Prophet Muhammad. See Frantz Buhl, “Muhammad Ibn al-Hanafiyya,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2012). Al-Nuwayri’s final mention of Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyya suggests Duldul’s close connection to the ‘Alid family.

<sup>58</sup>Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-Saffar, *al-Basa’ir al-Darajat*, vol. 1, 169, 206.

<sup>59</sup>Al-Kulayni, *al-Kafi fi ‘Ilm al-Din*, vol. 1, 234. He traces the report from Muhammad b. Yahya al-‘Attar (al-Kulayni’s teacher) to the 9th-century hadith transmitter Ahmad b. Muhammad b. ‘Isa al-Ash‘ari, and finally to Abu Basir al-Asadi (d. 767).

<sup>60</sup>Sharif al-Radi, *Khasa’is al-‘Imma*, vol. 1, 78.

<sup>61</sup>See Brannon Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden: Ritual, Relics, and Territory in Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 34–37. Muhammad obtained Dhu-l-Faqar at the Battle of Badr (624). The true recipient of Dhu-l-Faqar became a matter hotly contested by Sunni and Shi‘a writers, but the sword reportedly passed from the Abbasids to the Fatimids.

Fatima.”<sup>62</sup> The mention of Muhammad’s she-mule is a surprising aspect of the account considering the chronology of Duldul’s arrival. ‘Ali and Fatima (Muhammad’s daughter) married sometime in the year 624, roughly four years before Muhammad received Duldul as a gift. If we are to believe that Duldul was the “first she-mule seen in Islam”—a detail found consistently across numerous reports—then, according to Ibn Babawayh, Duldul was somehow present at this marriage that cemented ‘Ali’s close familial connection to Muhammad.<sup>63</sup> Regardless of the questionable timeline, Ibn Babawayh’s inclusion of the gray she-mule, presumably Duldul, at this pivotal union adds a richness to the Shi‘i tradition of the she-mule’s connection to her inheritor, ‘Ali.

Other 11th-century historians corroborate hadith accounts of Duldul as the main (if not only) she-mule that belonged to ‘Ali. The Sunni hadith scholar Abu Nu‘aym al-Isbahani (d. 1038) clearly identifies Duldul as the she-mule of ‘Ali. Citing an eyewitness account, al-Isbahani records the observations of the Shi‘i hadith transmitter Dawud b. Sulayman (a companion of Imam al-Rida). While at the outskirts of Kufa with his father, Dawud b. Sulayman sees “a bald shaykh on a she-mule. My father was saying, ‘She is Duldul.’ The people had surrounded the shaykh, and I said, ‘Oh father, who is this?’ He said, ‘This is the King of Kings of the Arabs. This is ‘Ali b. Abi Talib.’”<sup>64</sup> Despite using hadith to debate Imami Shi‘i claims that ‘Ali should have been the first caliph instead of Abu Bakr, Abu Nu‘aym’s biographical works greatly influenced 10th- and 11th-century Shi‘i hadith compilers.<sup>65</sup> What is apparent from the compilations of Shaykh al-Saffar al-Qummi, al-Kulayni, al-Sharif al-Radi, and al-Isbahani is a concerted effort to classify ‘Ali as the sole and direct inheritor of Duldul.

Why were some medieval historians and hadith compilers so concerned with the inheritance of this she-mule? A chief reason lies with Duldul’s authoritative role in constructing a particular historical narrative of early Islam. When ‘Ali received Duldul from Muhammad, this represented a declaration to his followers that ‘Ali was the rightful successor and a continuation of the legacy of the prophets. A symbol of religious and political legitimacy for Shi‘i writers and apologists, Duldul became a literary foil against the efforts of some 9th-century Sunni writers to question the she-mule’s inheritance and, by extension, the claim of the ‘Alids. Moreover, as a riding beast conferring authority, Duldul is a lens through which we can see the competing political drives of Abbasid and early Buyid writers. The literary project of 10th- and 11th-century hadith specialists to clarify ‘Ali’s direct inheritance of Duldul reflects the patronage of the Buyids who provided financial support and political protection to encourage Shi‘i scholarship. Tied to the political expansion of the Buyids, the network of 10th- to 11th-century scholars like al-Kulayni, Ibn Babawayh, Shaykh al-Mufid, and Shaykh Tusi led to the blossoming of Shi‘i theological doctrine and, in turn, more control over the historical narrative. As a historical subject, Duldul reflects more broadly the literary strategies of Shi‘i apologists to affirm and defend an ‘Alid political history.

Second, Duldul’s battlefield calm on the Day of Hunayn marked the she-mule’s ability in warfare. For each time Duldul rode into war she contributed to some form of military accomplishment. Although the Battle of Siffin was arguably not considered a success since arbitration with Mu‘awiya embittered many of ‘Ali’s followers, the episode nevertheless illustrated ‘Ali’s rightful possession of Duldul at a pivotal crossroad in ‘Alid history. Duldul was not just a riding beast of Muhammad and ‘Ali; the she-mule embodied the transmission of political authority, becoming a prominent pawn for intrareligious competition. Perhaps that explains why the Mamluk historian al-Dhahabi appears to have contested ‘Ali’s direct inheritance of Duldul following Muhammad’s death. Al-Dhahabi states that the first caliph Abu Bakr had been

<sup>62</sup>Ibn Babawayh, *Man La Yahduruhu al-Faqih*, vol. 3, 401, report 4402. According to Laura Veccia Vaglieri, Muhammad gave his daughter Fatima a plush, velvet garment on her wedding night. See “Fatima,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

<sup>63</sup>Ibn Sa‘d identifies Duldul as the *baghla shahbā’* (gray she-mule), and the “first she-mule seen in Islam.” See *Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 380. Al-Tabari, in *Tarikh*, verifies that Duldul was the “first she-mule seen in Islam” (vol. 3, 174). See also al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 510; al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-Arab*, vol. 10, 80.

<sup>64</sup>Abu Nu‘aym al-Isbahani traces the report to ‘Abd Allah b. Muhammad b. Ja‘far (‘Ali’s nephew). See *Akhbar Isbahan*, ed. Sayyid Kasrawi Hasan (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1990), vol. 1, 217, report 323; 366, report 675; and vol. 2, 15, report 957; 89, report 1179.

<sup>65</sup>See Jawid Mojaddedi, “Abu Nu‘aym al-Isfahani,” in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Medieval Islamic Civilization*, vol. 1 (London: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 401–2; and Johnathan A. C. Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhari and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunni Hadith Canon* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 112.

gifted Duldul.<sup>66</sup> He evidently recognized Duldul as a tool substantiating political and religious authority; therefore, Duldul belonged to Abu Bakr who had succeeded Muhammad. The need to clarify Duldul's inheritance continued to bother premodern historians like al-Dhahabi, illustrating the abiding legacy and historical role of Duldul in confirming political succession in the early Islamic historical narrative.

### Medieval Attitudes Toward Duldul and She-mules

Although Duldul was Islam's "first she-mule"—a uniqueness that elevated her status among the riding beasts of Muhammad—she was one of several mules gifted to Muhammad as a recognition of the authority of Islam.<sup>67</sup> As Michael Bonner has shown, the gifting of riding beasts was integral to Muhammad's military campaigns. The example of Tabuk (630) underscores the importance of gift giving, for many members of the Muslim community were able to participate in this expedition only through the generous contribution of riding animals, weapons, and supplies.<sup>68</sup> Outside of this more practical function, gift giving also can bestow religious blessings, social status, and loyalty. Muhammad passed down several gifts that, by nature of their close connection to the Prophet, were commodities imbued with spiritual currency. Prized inanimate gifts establish political and spiritual ties that can last and accrue value over time. As an economic object, the she-mule could not be passed down from generation to generation; for unlike a robe or a shroud, animals die.<sup>69</sup> This made the dispute over Duldul's direct inheritor all the more significant; even though she-mules can live well into their thirties and forties, a finite lifespan demanded an urgency for a deserving recipient of Muhammad's mount.

Despite Duldul becoming a battle-hardened she-mule, her value as a gift might be less than a horse or donkey because the she-mule is a hybrid species unable to reproduce. Property appraisals of nonhuman animals—purpose (military or commercial) and biological well-being (age, health, and gender)—factored into the assessment of gifts and *zakat* (charity).<sup>70</sup> The product of an unnatural coupling of a mare and a donkey, the she-mule did not possess a true ancestry; a detail that adds to Duldul's uniqueness. However, the ability to produce offspring was a trait considered crucial to the assessment and value of

<sup>66</sup>Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'*, vol. 2, 305. Al-Dhahabi states that Abu Bakr received both she-mules, Duldul and Fidda (another she-mule gifted by Farwa b. 'Amr al-Judhami). He relies on the report of the Shafi'i hadith scholar al-Dimyati (d. 1306). See Asma Sayeed, "Abd al-Mu'min al-Dimyati," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd ed., ed. Kate Fleet et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2013). Al-Dhahabi later indicates, relying on al-Bukhari, that Muhammad's she-mule, armor, and land became *sadaqa* (alms) following his death (346).

<sup>67</sup>For detail on the different mules and she-mules that the Prophet Muhammad received, Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj preserves a hadith that describes the gift of a white she-mule from the son of al-'Alma', ruler of Ayla (a city in southern Jordan). See *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 4, 1784, report 1392. See also al-Qastallani, *Irshad al-Sari*, vol. 3, 68, no. 1481; al-Jahiz, *al-Risa'il*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanji, 1964), 30; al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 2, 125, report 1481; vol. 3, 163, report 2614; and vol. 4, 32, report 2872; and al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-'Arab*, vol. 10, 83.

<sup>68</sup>Michael Bonner, "Poverty and Economics in the Qur'an," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 35, no. 3 (2005): 394. See *Kitab al-Hadaya wa-l-Tuhaf* (Book of Gifts and Rarities), a 15th-century compilation on gift giving (animals and other exchanges) in Muslim tradition. See also Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), 41–43. The power of objects of exchange, as Mauss's early work shows, lies in the productive capacity endowed in the object: whether miraculous or mundane, the object establishes a communion between the giver and the gifted.

<sup>69</sup>See Leor Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 106–113. I thank Leor Halevi for pointing this out.

<sup>70</sup>Al-Shafi'i (d. 820), *Kitab al-Umm* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 1990), vol. 1, 330, and vol. 2, 19–210. Al-Bukhari offers a few hadith that evaluate different animal gifts (namely sheep, cows, camels, horses) based on gender, age, procreative ability, number, etc. See *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 2, 118, report 1454; 119, report 1460; 120, report 1463. See also Brannon M. Wheeler, "Identity in the Margins: Unpublished Hanafi Commentaries on the Mukhtasar of Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Quduri," *Islamic Law and Society* 10, no. 2 (2003): 182–209. Wheeler provides a translation on *zakat* for horses versus mules or donkeys that comes from Ibn Qutlubugha's (d. 1474) manual on Hanafi law *Mukhtasar al-Quduri*. According to Abu Yusuf (d. 798) and Muhammad al-Shaybani (d. 805), there is no *zakat* for "horses nor for anything such as mules or donkeys unless they are for commerce" (200). The same applies for suckling camels, lambs, or calves under a year old. The 11th-century Hanafi jurist al-Sarakhsi clarifies that sterility in a wild donkey could have a detrimental impact on gift-giving. See *Kitab al-Mabsut li-l-Sarakhsi*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 1993), 86. As for the financial worth of certain she-mules, Ibn Babawayh records a fascinating report told by the sixth imam Ja'far al-Sadiq about a man killing a she-mule that belonged to the Prophet Muhammad to satisfy a blood debt for 600 dirhams. See *Man La Yahduruhu al-Faqih*, vol. 4, 171, report 5392.

livestock. Regardless of the anxieties over animal sterility and hybridity raised in Islamic legal discourse on ritual purity, gift giving, and food consumption, the she-mule was a preferred mount ridden during the Muslim conquests *because* of the historical precedent and success established by Duldul.

Duldul played a small yet unequivocal role in the knowledge production surrounding Muhammad's life, and medieval Muslims declared enduring respect for her. As a tool in the production of cultural memory, Duldul expressed a historical personality that medieval readers could engage with, recognize, and perhaps even covet. Admiration for Duldul compelled some Muslims to purchase a similar looking she-mule of their own. The Hanafi scholar Ibn al-Jassas (d. 981) confessed, "I seek a she-mule like the she-mule of the Prophet and I will even call her Duldul."<sup>71</sup> Reminiscing over the glory of the Muslim conquests drove Abu Sa'id (d. 1049), a poet and mystic living in Nishapur, to lament the current state of affairs and exclaim, "Where is his she-mule Duldul, where is his sword al-Samsama, where is Muhammad's outer garment [*burda*] and dress [*hulla*], where has his people's [desire to] give support and nourishment gone?"<sup>72</sup> Abu Sa'id admonishes Muslim greed and abandonment of charitable virtues, and lists Duldul first among Muhammad's prized possessions. His criticism of the 11th-century Muslim community rests on Duldul's role as a yardstick measuring moral decline. Ibn al-Jassas's desire to own a noble steed like Duldul and Abu Sa'id's condemnation of his contemporary Muslim community both demonstrate that Duldul continued to shape the medieval Muslim social imagination well after her death.

Al-Jahiz, in his treatise on mules, best captures Duldul's good fortune and renown for her involvement in Muslim intrareligious warfare. He preserves a comment made by Ibn Abi 'Atiq (grandson of first caliph Abu Bakr) to 'A'isha (wife of Muhammad): "By God, we did not wash our heads on the day of the camel, so how is it not 'the day of the mule!'"<sup>73</sup> The Day or Battle of the Camel occurred between 'A'isha and 'Ali over caliphal succession in the year 656. "We did not wash our heads" signifies the loss of the battle to 'Ali, but the more intriguing end of the statement humorously challenges the name of the battle, for 'Ali won while astride a she-mule whereas his vanquished antagonist rode a camel. Al-Jahiz presents Ibn Abi 'Atiq's comedic assertion to underscore the she-mule's vital role in early Muslim campaigns (Fig. 1).

Drawing from *maghāzī* materials and *sīra*, al-Jahiz provides a social history and biography of the she-mule: a compilation of historic deeds and sayings associated with the esteemed mount of Muhammad and his companions. He pairs endorsements of the she-mule's subtleties of power with witty aphorisms and poems addressing the nature of her relationship with man. His treatise begins with a description of the she-mule's commendable aspects:

The best is her conduct, well-tempered character, and bold commands in which secrecy is her essence. Her outer appearance has humility, her behavior has advantages, and her nimble gait of movement is firmly fixed and destined. Since the distinguished nobles' [*ashraf*] affection remains in connection with her, simultaneously greater still are those who allege her defects. When they reported in her a lasting purity of character, how is there an apparent surplus of shortcoming in her? How do they forgive what is odious about her, while finding peculiarities concealed in her? Until man outgrows them, the moralist searches her for as al-Sa'di said, "Brother of mine, as the days of life end . . . species are colored by happenstance; If a characteristic became insignificant, then it would leave the species . . . while a characteristic is driven away from me, there remains no defect in her."<sup>74</sup>

An entirely misunderstood creature, the she-mule remains an enigma for man who, paradoxically, has valued her many esteemed traits yet continues to find cause to malign her. Al-Jahiz remains confounded by the many who appear to underestimate the she-mule, as she is a riding beast well respected by the elite

<sup>71</sup> Al-Tawhidi, *al-Basā'ir wa-l-Dhakha'ir*, vol. 1, ed. Wadad al-Qadi (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1988), 126.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 205. Al-Samsama was the sword of 'Amr b. al-Ma'di Karib al-Zubaydi, used to carve out disbelief in Jahili times. For more on al-Samsama, see Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden*, 42.

<sup>73</sup> Al-Jahiz, *al-Risā'il*, vol. 2, 222; and *al-Bighal*, 25. See al-Baladhuri's version in *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 420, report 884. See also Abu Mansur al-Tha'labi (d. 1038), *Thimar al-Qulub fi al-Mudaf wa-l-Mansub*, vol. 1, ed. Muhammad Abu al-Fadl Ibrahim (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1956), 349–50, report 531.

<sup>74</sup> Al-Jahiz, *al-Bighal*, 20.



**Figure 1.** 'Ali b. Abi Talib riding Duldul (upper right) at the Battle of the Camel. Inayatullah al-katib al-Shirazi / Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Purchase — Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds, Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, and Dr. Arthur M. Sackler, S1986.238.

nobles of early Islam. In addition, the poetic reflection of al-Sa'di points to the perfection found in the she-mule, a riding beast that has retained her best qualities as man struggles to remove his defects.<sup>75</sup> For al-Jahiz, the she-mule has a reservoir of morally superior attributes for man to learn from.

Providing a source of entertainment for the 9th-century audience, al-Jahiz weaves myth and history to valorize the she-mule who similarly attained mythic proportions. Reminiscent of the allegorical and didactic appeal found in al-Jahiz's treatise on mules, the epistle *Tada'i al-Hayawanat 'ala al-Insan 'inda Malik al-Jinn* (The Case of the Animals versus Man before the King of the Jinn) composed by the Ikhwan al-Safa' (Brethren of Purity), an esoteric group of anonymous 10th-century litterateurs, illustrates the intelligence and subjectivity of the mule. Articulating a call for animal justice against their

<sup>75</sup>Al-Jahiz makes no other reference to al-Sa'di in *al-Bighal* that might identify this poet. However, in *al-Hayawan*, he offers two potential candidates: 'Ubada b. Muḥabbar al-Sa'di (vol. 2, 292) and the Mukhadram poet al-Mukhabbal al-Sa'di (vol. 3, 236). See more on the *diwan* (collection of poetry) of al-Mukhabbal al-Sa'di in Michael A. Sells, "Along the Edge of Mirage': The Mufaddaliyah of al-Mukhabbal al-Sa'di, An Interpretation," in *Literary Heritage of Classical Islam*, ed. Mustansir Mir (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1993), 119–36.

maltreatment by human oppressors, the mule serves as the representative for the beasts and avers the mistaken belief that animals are the unwitting slaves of man.<sup>76</sup> Even though the mule lost the case to the human representative—who argued that the virtuosity of saintly people (*awliya'*) redeemed men—the sophisticated and satirical posturing of the mule illustrates the dynamic skills of mules beyond a mere utilitarian purpose.<sup>77</sup> A comparable argument can be found in *Risalat al-Sahil wa-l-Shahij* (Letter of a Horse and a Mule) by the Syrian poet al-Ma'arri (d. 1058). Voicing complaints to 'Aziz al-Dawla (governor of Aleppo, d.1022), a mule draws on his noble lineage to Duldul to justify his claims: "Perhaps you don't know of al-Murtajaz or Khali or Duldul, from my family, or Yafur, my father or uncle?"<sup>78</sup> Tracing ancestry to Duldul, an infertile she-mule that attained recognition through her service to Muhammad, substantiated the mule's right to speak and challenge a human in al-Ma'arri's narrative.

Tales of talking mules have more than just entertainment value. For the Ikhwan al-Safa', the mule's eloquent speech offered a measure of anonymity for the authors when critiquing humanity's shortcomings. The Qur'anic exegete Ibn Kathir (d. 1373) notes the speech of certain animals (birds and ants), affirming that such language is not perceptible to man except in remarkable cases.<sup>79</sup> Evidence of human-like abilities in riding animals can be found in numerous stories, from Muhammad's talking donkey Ya'fur to Ka'b b. al-Ashraf's (d. 624) donkey reprimanding his owner.<sup>80</sup> Medieval Muslim literary fascination with the speech and experiences of riding beasts conveys a reimagining of animal-human relations that looks beyond a rigid anthropocentric approach, conceiving of mules and she-mules as personable, opinionated creatures who are just as involved in choosing their riders as their riders are in choosing them. Both al-Jahiz and the Ikhwan al-Safa' present she-mules and mules as historical counterparts to man, and agents with their own moral and rational faculties. From an anecdote provided by al-Jahiz, the Arab general and insurrectionist 'Abd al-Rahman b. Muhammad b. al-Ashath (d. 704) explains that a she-mule has a keen nose for the many sins of men and women. Had the wife of Ibn al-Ashath's friend committed adultery, his friend's perceptive she-mule would surely have been aware of the indiscretion and escaped.<sup>81</sup> Al-Jahiz presents a she-mule as an intelligent creature with an ethical impulse that allows her to assess the morality of men and women.

For al-Jahiz, the uniqueness of Duldul lies both with her miraculous appearance in early Islam and her feminine nature. Conveying her extraordinary status, al-Jahiz writes that God "did not bring her for

<sup>76</sup>*The Case of the Animals versus Man Before the King of the Jinn: A Translation from the Epistles on the Brethren of Purity*, ed. and trans. Lenn E. Goodman and Richard McGregor (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), 104–9. The Ikhwan al-Safa' were anonymous 10th-century authors who wrote various treatises that alleged Shi'i theological views.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 108. Citing Qur'anic injunctions and rational appeals for a reckoning of man's abuse and overwork of animals, the mule refutes the arguments of the delegate chosen to defend the humans, a descendant of 'Abbas ibn al-Muttalib (the half-brother of Muhammad's father and eponymous progenitor of the Abbasid dynasty).

<sup>78</sup>Al-Ma'arri, *Risalat al-Sahil wa-l-Shahij* (Egypt: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1975), 19. For an analysis of al-Ma'arri, see Pieter Smoor, "Enigmatic Allusion and Double Meaning in Ma'arri's Newly-Discovered 'Letter of a Horse and a Mule'" Part I, *Journal of Arabic Literature* 12 (1981): 49–73; and Part II, *Journal of Arabic Literature* 13 (1982): 23–52.

<sup>79</sup>See Tlili, *Animals in the Qur'an*, 180–81.

<sup>80</sup>According to the Shi'i hadith scholar Qutb al-Din al-Rawandi (d. 1177), Muhammad took a donkey on the Khaybar campaign (628), and after hearing the donkey speak the Prophet asked the animal his name. "Yazid b. Shihab," replied the donkey. "God gave my ancestor sixty descendants, of which none but prophets rode, and none of my ancestors remain but myself, and there are no other prophets but you. I have been waiting for you to ride me." Following the donkey's declaration of loyalty, Muhammad renamed the donkey Ya'fur. See *al-Khara'ij wa-l-Jara' ih*, vol. 1 (Qum: Mu'assasat al-Imam al-Mahdi, 1989), 42. See also al-Tabari, *Tarikh*, vol. 3, 21. The eleventh imam al-Hasan al-'Askari preserves the story of Ka'b b. al-Ashraf's donkey. "Oh Ka'b b. al-Ashraf your donkey is well-mannered," Muhammad said, "yet he has refused you riding him (indeed you will never ride him)." The donkey scolded his master Ka'b b. al-Ashraf saying, "Oh enemy of God, cease your attack on Muhammad the messenger of God. For if not for fear of violating the messenger of God, then I would kill you, trample you beneath my hooves, and cut off your head with my teeth." See *Tafsir al-Imam al-'Askari* (Qum: Madrasat al-Imam al-Mahdi, 1988), 97. Consider also the hadith about a talking cow and wolf (al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 4, 174, report 3471). For an analysis of these riding animals, see Eliot Weinberger, "Muhammad," *Conjunctions* 46 (2006): 235; Khalid Sindawi, "The Donkey of the Prophet in Shi'ite Tradition," *al-Masaq* 18, no. 1 (2006): 90–99; and Brannon Wheeler, "Gift of the Body in Islam: The Prophet Muhammad's Camel Sacrifice and Distribution of Hair and Nails at His Farewell Pilgrimage," *Numen* 57, no. 3/4 (Jan 2010): 361.

<sup>81</sup>Al-Jahiz, *al-Bighal*, 30. "Oh Abu al-Fadl, indeed your brother's son alleged that your she-mule is majestic.' He said, 'Because if his she-mule had escaped, then it left the home of the adulterer and not the home of a respected woman, for only it could be aware of this!'"

purchase nor inheritance nor a gift of surrender.”<sup>82</sup> Essentially, Duldul’s arrival was a fortuitous event that did not happen under quotidian circumstances. In addition, al-Jahiz underscores her gender: “none of the mounts was a mule, rather it was a she-mule of the Prophet, a gift from al-Muqawqis, and Muhammad accepted her with affection [*al-ta’aluf*].”<sup>83</sup> Al-Jahiz’s attention to Duldul’s gender raises a question that he does not answer: why did Muhammad prefer a she-mule for battle rather than a mule? Duldul’s feminine nature is an intrinsic aspect of her historical identity as a companion serving Muhammad. Although al-Jahiz does not fully explain why a she-mule remained a preferred mount, later premodern zoological writers provide a reason for the valorization of she-mules in early Muslim warfare.

In the comprehensive animal lexicon *Hayat al-Hayawan al-Kubra* (The Great Book on Animal Life), the Mamluk scholar al-Damiri explains why she-mules were more adept for war. Citing the jurist al-Nawawi (d. 1277), al-Damiri affirms that Muhammad “rode the she-mule into battle, the answer for this [decision] was to fulfill his prophethood and his courage.”<sup>84</sup> Unlike the she-mule, the mule’s attitude (*ha’i’a*) was not suited to military conflict: male mules “were riding mounts of peace and security not of war and fear [*fi salam wa-amm la fi harb wa-khawf*].”<sup>85</sup> Based on al-Damiri’s view, Duldul’s feminine gender conferred an instinctive aptitude for battle, a characteristic absent in male mules, that made her the ideal mount for Muhammad.

In addition to the symbolism of early Islamic success that accompanies riding a she-mule, there is mystery surrounding her origins and natural ability. Al-Damiri’s fascination with unusual events, such as the birth of a she-mule from a black breeding mare and a white mule (generally a sterile animal), denotes a literary appreciation for the she-mule that appears throughout his text.<sup>86</sup> Describing early ‘Alids, hadith scholars, *maghāzī* writers, and notable jurists who rode she-mules while accomplishing historic deeds, al-Damiri demonstrates how the she-mule became entwined in the destinies of prominent Muslims living in the early Islamic period.<sup>87</sup> Al-Damiri shares an unmistakable appreciation for Duldul, describing her role carrying Muhammad in the Battle of Hunayn, the special care she received once her fighting days had ended, and her death in a grove of trees during Mu’awiya’s reign.<sup>88</sup> He also directly compares Duldul’s color to the brilliant whiteness of Buraq, a mythologized composite creature who assisted Muhammad on the night journey (*isrā’*).<sup>89</sup> Both Duldul and Buraq possessed a hybridity that endowed each of them with extraordinary abilities. Just as riding Buraq served to signify Muhammad’s prophetic power, possessing Duldul reflected the transmission of political authority and control over the narrative of the Muslim conquest.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 92.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 92.

<sup>84</sup>Al-Damiri, *Hayat al-Hayawan al-Kubra*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2004), 169. Al-Nawawi is reportedly drawing from Abu Bakr al-Zubaydi’s (d. 989) *Mukhtasar al-‘Ayn* (although I have been unable to find any such information in this text).

<sup>85</sup>Al-Damiri, *Hayat al-Hayawan*, vol. 1, 169.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 199. The noteworthy event occurred in the year 1052. Al-Damiri cites Melkite Patriarch of Alexandria Sa’id b. al-Bitriq’s (d. 940) *Kitab al-Tarikh* (Book of History), a text written in the 10th century and continued by the 11th-century Christian historian Yahya of Antioch. Even al-Jahiz wonders how mules can, in special cases, propagate (*al-Bighal*, 82). The historian ‘Arib b. Sa’d (d. 980) also records that sometime in the year 912–913, the postmaster in Dinawar (a province in western Iran) made note of a she-mule giving birth to a colt. See *Silat Tarikh Tabari* (Leiden: Brill, 1898), 39. Adam Silverstein also notes this in *Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 106.

<sup>87</sup>Al-Damiri, *Hayat al-Hayawan*, vol. 1, 199–205.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 206–207. Although Duldul’s life and exploits have been described by hadith specialists, *maghāzī* writers, and medieval Muslim historians, less is known about her death and burial. Al-Damiri goes on to cite the hadith scholar al-Tabarani, noting a second she-mule that Muhammad rode during the invasion of Hunayn, as opposed to during the battle (206). To reconcile the reports about al-Muqawqis and Farwa, he uses a different term (*ghazwa*, or invasion) to distinguish two historical moments in the Battle of Hunayn—Muhammad rode a white she-mule gifted from Farwa for the invasion but rode the gray she-mule Duldul when battle ensued.

<sup>89</sup>Al-Damiri notes that, “Buraq was white while Muhammad’s she-mule was gray” (*Hayat al-Hayawan*, vol. 1, 169). Although not a real animal, Buraq nevertheless played a significant historical role in the narrative of Muhammad’s night journey. For more on Buraq, see Ibn Hisham (d. ca. 833), *Sirat Ibn Hisham*, vol. 1 (Egypt: Shirkat Maktaba, 1995), 396. See also Christane J. Gruber, “al-Buraq,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd ed., ed. Kate Fleet et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

<sup>90</sup>Suliman Bashear, “Riding Beasts on Divine Missions: An Examination of the Ass and Camel Traditions,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 37, no. 1 (1992): 40. Al-Waqidi and Ibn Ishaq drew on particular riding beasts like Buraq, a steed afforded a special position in the hierarchy of animals, to signify Muhammad’s prophetic power.

## Conclusion

Duldul was given a name, an identity, and a memory, cultural and literary vestiges that attest to her enduring hold over the medieval Muslim imagination. Part of Duldul's distinctive appeal as a mount for Muhammad lay in her aptitude and calm in warfare. Simultaneously a gendered female and a powerful war-steed, Duldul bravely carried both Muhammad and 'Ali into battle. Duldul's uniqueness as the first she-mule overshadows her inability to produce offspring; perhaps being unable to reproduce provided Duldul with a martial advantage. For as al-Damiri indicates, she-mules rather than mules were better equipped for the strains and toils of war. Both al-Jahiz and al-Damiri underscore the singular characteristics of the she-mule; whether it is an air of mystery endowed by a hybrid union or battlefield calm. Medieval admiration for Duldul illustrates how certain riding beasts had individuality and intelligence that shaped memories of early Muslim conquest and civil war.

Examining Duldul's role in reflecting the transmission of political authority enriches our understanding of the literary strategies that 9th- to 11th-century Muslim writers used to control the historical narrative of the Muslim conquests, contest and navigate an emergent Shi'a-Sunni rift, and claim ownership over the memory of Muhammad and 'Ali. By viewing Duldul as a historical actor, we gain deeper insight into the legacy of the Prophet and Shi'a-Sunni polemic, for both existed in a responsive and generative relationship. Showing how the inheritance of Duldul signified the transfer of political authority after Muhammad's death, this article has touched upon a broader literary appreciation for the admirable qualities of she-mules, creatures that matched or outmatched the integrity of man in early Muslim tradition. Furthermore, I have revealed the role that Duldul played in the construction of early Islamic political succession—a literary and historical agency that calls for a reinvestigation of named and beloved riding animals in early Islamic history.

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