Elephants in Islamic history

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Introduction[1]

Islamic attitudes towards elephants have been ambivalent, varying in terms of changing religious thought, pragmatic considerations, and non-Islamic influences. From the dawn of the new faith, Muslims acknowledged the power of elephants, and yet they saw them as dark agents of hostile infidels. Moreover, elephants were quite soon classed among animals whose flesh should not be eaten. More positive attitudes emerged as Persian culture came to dominate both Arabs and Turks, and in the early modern era, the status of the elephant reached its zenith, notably in Islamic South Asia and Southeast Asia, where Hindu and Buddhist ideas remained strong. In modern times, however, shari'a-minded reformers have tended to revert to more negative views.

The enigmatic elephant at the birth of Islam

Elephants were present at the very beginning of Islam, for chapter 105 of the Qur'ân is entitled '*al-fîl*', the elephant. The chapter comes almost at the end of the book, because it contains only five verses. However, scholars agree that it was one of the initial revelations to have been recited by the Prophet Muhammad, during the Meccan phase of his teaching.[2]

Many linguistic aspects of this brief text are obscure and contested, but it broadly retells, in bare outline, a pre-Islamic story. According to one paraphrase, it reads as follows:

> Have you not seen how thy Lord did with the men of the elephant?
> Did he not make their guile to go astray?
> And he loosed upon them birds in flights,
> hurling against them stones of baked clay,
> and he made them like green blades devoured.[3]

The story is fleshed out in the Prophet's biography, the sayings of the Prophet and his companions, and folk tales. The Egyptian author al-Damîrî brought together these various strands in his famous encyclopaedia of animals, dating from the late fourteenth century. In this version, Abraha al-Ashram, King of Ethiopia, came to tear down the *ka'ba* in Mecca, because it was a shrine that competed for pilgrims with the Christian sanctuary in Sana'â', the capital of modern Yemen. Abraha rode on a large and strong elephant, Mahmûd Abû al-'Abbâs, possibly a white animal. Among his forces were perhaps another twelve elephants, or, in other versions, eight. Mecca lay open to the attackers. But then a man whispered something into Mahmûd's ear, and he refused to continue towards Mecca, while being prepared to advance in any other direction. Flocks of birds hurled baked clay, or stones, on the invaders, who died in large numbers. The survivors beat a hasty retreat, and Abraha perished on his way home. Al-Damîrî cites a saying of the Prophet to ram home the moral point: 'God prevented the elephant from entering Makkah, whilst he gave power to his Apostle and the Believers over it.'[4]

Some modern scholars have expressed considerable doubts about this story. Abraha was not Emperor of Ethiopia, but had been appointed viceroy of Himyar (Greater

Yemen) by an Axumite king, while acknowledging a tenuous vassalage to Axum. Procopius of Caesarea's biographical sketch of Abraha makes no mention of an expedition to the north. A Himyarite inscription tells of Abraha defeating an Arab tribal confederation, albeit without mention of Mecca or elephants.[5]

A further complication is that Muslim commentators declared that the invasion by elephant-mounted troops occurred when the Prophet was in the womb of his mother, in the 'Year of the Elephant,' fifty days before his birth.[6] This would have taken place around 570 on traditional calculations, and yet the Himyarite inscription apparently places the expedition against the Arabs in 552. Although the Prophet may have been born earlier than 570, it seems unlikely that he was born as early as 552.[7] Carlo Conti Rossini even suggested that King Afilas of Axum controlled Yemen around 300, and that his name had become conflated with the word *fîl*, elephant, in popular folk tales.[8]

If there were war elephants in southwestern Arabia in the sixth century, historians tend to assume that they came from Ethiopia. However, Cosmas, an Egyptian monk writing at the time, noted that Ethiopians were not good at taming and training elephants, even if they did so occasionally.[9] Moreover, it is known that rulers in India supplied elephants to southern Arabia.[10]

Whatever the facts, Muslims generally believed Abraha's story, with ambiguous cultural and religious consequences. On the one hand, the elephant was portrayed as an animal of considerable power, often described as 'mighty.' Some speculate that the words in chapter 81, verse 5, of the Qur'ân, concerning the end times, also refer to elephants: 'When the savage beasts shall be mustered'.[11] Furthermore, the birth of the Prophet in the 'Year of the Elephant' could be seen as an omen of his later success in life.[12]

On the other hand, the elephant was an animal fielded in war by infidels, and was a 'dark monster, which can destroy everything.'[13] Even the Arabic word for elephant, *fîl*, was derived from Persian *pîl*, underlining the animal's foreign origins.[14] Muslims were more attached to local horses and camels, which are favourably and frequently depicted in the Qur'ân and other early Islamic texts.[15]

Prejudices against elephants persisted. When Yaq'ûb al-Saffâr, founder of the dynasty that took his name, captured war elephants in 864, he declined to make use of them. He declared that they were 'inauspicious,' as pious Muslims linked them to Abraha's story. Edmund Bosworth suggests that this was an excuse, but, even so, it was telling that Yaq'ûb should have used this particular excuse.[16]

Early Muslim campaigns and negative stereotypes of elephants

The negative lessons of Abraha's story were reinforced by the experiences of Muslim conquerors after the death of the Prophet in 632. Persian war elephants were especially significant in resisting Muslim armies.[17] From 224, the Sassanian dynasty had restored the war elephants that had been shunned by their Parthian predecessors. Sassanian rulers obtained elephants from India, and fielded a number of them against their Muslim foes between 634 and 637. At first, the elephants struck terror into the believers, and held up their progress. However, after deserters had taught Muslims how to target the eyes and trunks of the great beasts, Persia was defeated and incorporated into the Islamic polity. War elephants then temporarily disappeared from the land.[18] Indeed, elephants were not even ridden in early Islamic times.[19]

India's war elephants were particularly numerous, and there was a deep fund of

knowledge on how to preserve wild elephant populations, capture and train them, and deploy them in war.[20] A Muslim host nevertheless managed to defeat the ruler of Sindh and his elephants in 644, and the country became part of the Ummayad Caliphate after 661. However, Muslims proved unable to occupy the whole Indus Basin for several centuries, despite the political disunity that reigned among their Hindu opponents. Nor did Muslims in Sindh at this stage adopt elephants for their own armies.[21]

The Byzantines did not use the great animals in war, but they paraded them for ceremonial purposes. Shortly before the rise of Islam, Emperor Heraklios staged a triumph with a chariot drawn by four elephants, taken from a defeated Persian force.[22] There were several elephant stables in late Byzantine Constantinople, from which the animals were brought to court on special occasions. Several of these stables were converted into mosques, after the Muslims had finally captured the city in 1453.[23]

Unclean meat

The Qur'ân only forbade the consumption of pork, blood and improperly slaughtered meat.[24] However, shari'a law gradually itemized foods that the faithful should avoid. A list was established by the time that the 'gates of interpretation' allegedly clanged shut at the beginning of the tenth century, even if sects and schools of law differed as to what was on the list, and continued to debate the topic.[25]

Although Muslims were allowed to eat most wild herbivores, elephants were either forbidden or discouraged.[26] Probably the oldest reason advanced was that the elephant was 'metamorphic', that is one of the animals into which God had at times metamorphosed human beings.[27] In eighth and ninth century 'Iraq, the elephant was further believed to be related to the accursed pig, and it was noted that the she-elephant could not be milked.[28] More generally, animals with scant hair were prohibited food.[29] Over time, most ulama taught that elephants were fighting beasts, and that tusks were equivalent to the fangs of carnivores, which should not be eaten.[30] Al-Damîrî, writing in Egypt in the second half of the fourteenth-century, recognized that some authorities permitted elephant flesh, but he considered this to be strange. The beast's 'canine' teeth, and the elephant's aggressive behaviour, sufficed to disprove such views. He stated flatly: 'That it is unlawful to eat the elephant is a well known thing.'[31] In recent times, ulama in East Africa argued that elephants were unclean meat because they did not chew the cud.[32]

A popular story around the Islamic world, which was probably of late ninth-century 'Iraqi Sufi origins, assumes that believers should not eat elephants, albeit without providing chapter and verse. A Muslim traveller, caught in a terrible storm on a ship, promised God that he would never eat elephant if saved. The hungry shipwrecked survivors chanced on a young elephant, which they caught and ate, with the exception of the hero. The mother of the young elephant discovered who had eaten her child, by smelling the men's breath, and killed all but the hero.[33]

Exceptions might be made for parts of the elephant that were considered to have curative properties. The *Manâfi' al-ḥayawân*, composed in Baghdad over many years by a family of Christian doctors, lauded the virtues of fat and skin.[34] A thirteenth-century text, in the same tradition, recommended the elephant's fat, liver, and gall-bladder, as well as the flesh in general.[35] However, al-Damîrî's late fourteenth-century compendium only listed medicinal products that would not involve eating the beast's flesh, perhaps reflecting his Islamic orthodoxy.[36]

The ‘Abbasid Caliphate and the improvement of the status of elephants

The status of elephants improved in the ‘middle years’ of Islam, after the foundation of the ‘Abbasid caliphate in 750. This was a period when Islam was secure, and Arab dominance gave way to a more complex range of cultures.[37] For the common people, elephants became a matter of curiosity and wonder, rather than a threat, as the Caliphate became one of the greatest powers in the world.[38] However, the elephant was not employed in war, so that the return to pre-Islamic notions remained incomplete.

Under the ‘Abbasid dynasty, Persian culture revived and spread throughout the lands of Islam.[39] In Persian traditions, influenced by India, the elephant was highly regarded.[40] It was used as a stately mount in ‘Abbasid times, and Persians were especially fond of these grand riding beasts.[41] In a thirteenth-century text, elephants were depicted as tame and princely animals, following models dating back to the pre-Islamic Sassanian dynasty in Persia.[42] Poetry developed the trope of the dream of the elephant, as a metaphor of longing for home, while miniatures, in breach of the Islamic prohibition on the featuring of living beings, portrayed elephants sympathetically.[43]

Elephants became prestigious gifts, crossing religious boundaries. Hindu rulers occasionally sent some to Baghdad.[44] The legendary Caliph Harûn al-Rashîd famously sent an elephant to the Christian Emperor Charlemagne in 801. The beast arrived the following year, and lived for some six years.[45] Similarly, in 1229, al-Kâmil, the autonomous Ayyubid sultan of Egypt, presented an elephant to the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II. The latter brought it back from the Holy Land to Italy, where he used it in military operations.[46]

The ‘Abbasid Caliphate also marked the development of ivory carving, which Muslims had earlier neglected. Given the lack of a solid tradition of ivory-carving in Persia, Byzantine and Indian models were significant.[47] ‘Alî ibn al-Husayn al-Mas‘ûdî, writing in the first half of the tenth century, not only detailed the uses of ivory in India, but also wrote about how the raw material was obtained from wild elephants in eastern Africa.[48]

A striking aspect of the Caliphate was a deep scientific curiosity, which touched on many matters. ‘Amr ibn Bahr al-Jâhiz was a self-taught polymath, possibly of African origins, who flourished in ‘Iraq in the middle of the ninth century. He wrote the first major Islamic compilation on animals, the seven volume *Kitâb al-Hayawân*. In this work, al-Jâhiz delighted in correcting Aristotle’s remarks on elephants.[49] He personally inspected elephants that had been sent to ‘Iraq, and consulted the works of a writer who had lived in northern India. He attempted to provide information on every aspect of the animal, referring to both India and Africa.[50]

Conquerors from the Eurasian steppe and the restoration of the war elephant

Paradoxically, the revival of the use of elephants in war was due the infiltration of horse-loving Turks into the Caliphate, many of them coming as Mamluks, that is military slaves. The Ghaznavids, who were highly Persianised Turks employing Mamluk soldiers, built up an empire straddling the lands of eastern Persia and northwest India, between the late tenth and the late twelfth century. They were the first Muslims to incorporate war elephants as a major component of their armies.[51]

The Seljuk Turks, who usurped political power from the Caliphs in 1055, learned the lesson from their Ghaznavid predecessors. By 1119, the Seljuk sultan had forty war

elephants. The great beasts were even presented as a barrier against the entry of further waves of horse-riders from Inner Asia.[52]

In the event, the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century, culminating in the seizure of Baghdad in 1258, temporarily reversed the renewed fortunes of war elephants. The western Mongols initially killed the elephants of those that opposed them, and showed no interest in acquiring any. Only the eastern Mongols, in China, accumulated elephants, and that mainly for purposes of display.[53]

However, as the western Mongols converted to Islam and adopted Persian culture, they showed an interest in elephants. In the 1330s, the Persian Ḥamd Allâh Mustawfî Qazvînî summarized what was known about the great beasts in his zoological writings.[54] Even the use of war elephants revived under Timur (Tamerlane), who took Samarkand in 1366, and built up a large empire. Seizing elephants from India in 1398, he deployed them as far west as Syria and Anatolia.[55] However, Timur's empire quickly fell apart after his death in 1405.

Mamluk Egypt staved off the Mongol threat, and al-Damîrî's great treatise on animals, composed in the late fourteenth century, was ambivalent about elephants. He stressed their dark colour and strength, and enumerated their traits of character. However, there is a sense in his writings that elephants did not really belong in the Islamic heartlands. He noted that Indian and Chinese rulers rode them, and reported of the elephant, with a hint of disapproval, that 'the Hindus magnify it.'[56]

Nevertheless, as part of a last-minute effort to stave off the Ottoman threat, the Mamluk rulers of Egypt obtained four elephants from an unnamed Indian ruler in 1512. Two of them died before arrival, and the two survivors were paraded through the streets of Cairo. One of these was offered to the Ottoman sultan in a gesture of appeasement, though this did not prevent Selim I ('the Grim') from proceeding with his conquest of Egypt in 1517.[57]

Turkish Mamluk dynasties built up the Delhi Sultanate from 1206, which became as dependent on elephants as its Ghaznavid predecessor, and for a long time held off the Mongol threat. The beasts were comprehensively armoured, and functioned like modern tanks, including pushing down the gates of fortresses. Some were pack animals, carrying large single objects. The Delhi Sultans claimed a monopoly of war elephants, and allegedly disposed of 3,000 of the animals by 1340, though probably not more than 1,000 were ever deployed in battle.[58] Sultans pampered their elephants, employed them to execute criminals, and, in the pre-Islamic tradition, considered 'white' specimens to be auspicious.[59] However, the royal stables of Delhi allegedly only contained 120 elephants when Timur of Samarkand defeated the sultan in 1398, in part by lighting fires to cause the beasts to stampede. The Delhi Sultanate soon regained its independence, and persisted for over a century, with renewed elephant forces.[60]

Early modern 'gunpowder empires' and the pinnacle of elephant prestige

There was a subtle change in the role of elephants in early modern times, from around the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. Elephants were increasingly challenged as animals of war by the military revolution engendered by firearms, but they simultaneously reached the acme of their renown in the eastern lands of Islam. This corresponded to the emergence of stable 'gunpowder empires', which warded off further invasions from Inner Asia.[61]

At the centre of these processes lay India's Mughal dynasty, founded by one of the

last waves of Inner Asian invaders in 1526. Over time, the Mughals came to control nearly all the subcontinent, where wild elephants for taming were especially plentiful. Despite their original reliance on steppe horses, the Mughals showed no hesitation in adopting the elephant technology of their new lands, for example for transport purposes.[62] Indeed, they even admired elephants as 'horseman-throwing' beasts.[63]

However, the spread and perfection of gunpowder weapons changed the role of Mughal elephants, which eventually ceased to be deployed in an offensive capacity.[64] As they tended to stampede back into their own ranks when faced with artillery and small arms fire, they were now kept behind the infantry, in a defensive position.[65] Mounting a commander on an elephant also made him an easy target for sharpshooters.[66] Increasingly, docile female elephants hauled the great cannon, and more generally the baggage.[67]

To be sure, Akbar the Great (r. 1556-1605) tried to train his elephants not to panic when faced with firearms, and to accept the firing of muskets and cannons from their backs. He also had improvements made in their armour. In his campaigns of 1567, he is said to have fielded 2,000 elephants.[68] In 1595, the emperor may have disposed of 5,000 elephants, and his nobles of nearly 3,000, out of an estimated total of 17,000 tamed beasts in the subcontinent.[69] However, critics consider that he was clinging to an outdated technique of warfare.[70] Experiments to accustom elephants to artillery fire were shown to fail in the middle of the eighteenth century.[71] As the British gained the upper hand in military terms, they confined their use of elephants to transporting guns and supplies.[72]

At the same time, and to an unprecedented degree, elephants became symbols of the power and majesty of Islamic rulers in Mughal India.[73] Imperial elephants were pampered accordingly.[74] Akbar was the dynasty's greatest lover of elephants, which became favourite items in paintings of the epoch.[75] Abu-l-Fazl Allami wrote dithyrambically about elephants in his *Akbarnama*, the story of his master Akbar.[76]

Historians have tended to see Akbar as standing for the Mughal dynasty as a whole, and it is unclear how the animals fared in the long reign of the much more Islamically 'orthodox' Awrangzib (r. 1658-1707). Although Awrangzib was nearly killed by a stampeding war elephant before coming to the throne, he continued to deploy the animals on campaigns right to the end of his reign.[77] However, it would be important to discover whether there were any differences in emphasis in Awrangzib's reign.

The immense prestige of elephants spread out from Mughal India to the other two major Islamic 'gunpowder empires', the Safavids and the Ottomans. The Mughals not only dispatched elephants to fellow rulers as gifts, but they also spread the 'symbolic capital' associated with the great beasts. The imperial menagerie became part of the pomp of rule, and elephants played a major role within these institutions. Western visitors to the Ottoman and Safavid courts were duly impressed.[78]

That said, neither Safavids nor Ottomans copied the Mughals' extensive deployment of elephants of war. Only Sultan Osman II, of the Ottoman empire, is known to have taken elephants on a campaign, in 1621, and only four at that.[79] This may have been because the animals were rare and expensive, although that had not stopped earlier dynasties.

The Mughal model was more exactly copied in newly Islamized Southeast Asia, where wild elephants abounded in Sumatra and Malaya.[80] The Muslim ruler of Pasai, in North Sumatra already rode an elephant by the time of Ibn Battuta's visit in the mid-fourteenth century.[81] The seventeenth-century kings and queens of the successor

state of Aceh, fascinated by the Mughals, expanded the use of elephants more than anywhere else in Southeast Asia.[82] Grandly attired, the animals were central to ritual manifestations of the sultan's power.[83] On Mughal lines, Iskandar Muda (r. 1607-1636) enjoyed pitting elephants against each other as a spectator sport, or against other animals, even though such fights were prohibited in Islamic law.[84] His successor, Iskandar Thani boasted in 1640 of possessing a white elephant, and beasts with four tusks, betraying pre-Islamic influences.[85]

Moreover, the rulers of Aceh used war elephants extensively, even transporting them by sea. Iskandar Muda was said to possess 900 of the beasts, allegedly trained not to fear firearms. They were known as the 'city walls' of his unfortified capital.[86] In 1620, for a campaign in the Malay Peninsula, he deployed a fleet of some 600 ships, carrying 90 elephants, 100,000 soldiers, and 200 artillery pieces.[87]

While Aceh went furthest in copying Mughal models, elephants were deployed widely across Islamic Southeast Asia. In the Malay Peninsula, they were both royal symbols and machines of war.[88] However, where elephants were not present in the wild, and thus needed to be imported at great cost, they were apparently not used for fighting, for example in Java, Brunei, and Makassar.[89]

Modern Islamic reform and the questioning of the elephant's status

From the middle of the seventeenth century, a gathering tide of Islamic reform began to unfurl from West Africa, flowering fully in the nineteenth century. While reformists were split between 'fundamentalists', 'traditionalists', and 'modernists', all groups worried about the accretion of banned innovations in the faith, and took a renewed interest in the origins of their religion.[90] Elephants are not known to have figured specifically in any reformist programme, and yet shifting religious interpretations appear to have affected attitudes towards the great beasts.

In the case of Aceh, sultans gradually ceased to employ elephants for ceremonial purposes from the eighteenth century.[91] The last trained elephant left the Acehnese court for the interior in the 1830s, and it was Dutch army officers who revived the employment of these animals from 1880.[92] Wild elephants had not disappeared from the island, and the related Malayan elephant continued in use across the Straits.[93]

Islamic factors have been little considered to explain this story of elephant decline in Aceh. And yet, strong Middle Eastern cultural influences entered Aceh with a dynasty of three Hadhrami Arab sultans, from 1699 to 1726, following a fatwa from Mecca that a woman could not be sultan in Islamic law.[94] Muslim notables in late nineteenth-century Aceh, led by another Hadhrami Arab, specifically prohibited animal fights and associated gambling.[95] Elephants then ceased to be involved in animal combats.[96]

In contrast to the situation in Aceh, the sultan of Yogyakarta, Java, continued to keep elephants at court, even though he had to import them.[97] There was a marked contrast between Java's syncretic Islam, with a significant Hindu-Buddhist substratum, and Aceh's fierce claims of Islamic orthodoxy, as the 'verandah of Mecca.'[98] This religious difference may have played a role in the differing trajectories of these two states.

In India too, there were hints of changing mentalities. Muslim rebels in Awadh (Oudh) in 1857 compared the British to the 'men of the elephant' in the Qur'ân, breathing new life into Abraha's story.[99] As religion became a stronger marker of identity under British rule, attitudes towards animals may have acquired novel

meanings. John Lockwood Kipling declared in 1891, ‘At the present moment, the most carefully-kept studs of Elephants are in the hands of Hindu Rajas, and the Muhammadan Nawâb prefers the horse.’[100] Kipling saw this as a timeless historical divide, whereas it was probably of recent vintage.

More generally, a return to the founding texts of Islam, as opposed to the commentaries of the schools of law, renewed interest in the obscure and difficult five verses of the elephant chapter in the Qur’ân. For example, in Ahmed Ali’s English version of the text, there are about seven times as many words in the notes as in the text itself, seemingly the highest proportion of notes to text for any chapter in the whole book. That said, there is no change to the traditional explanation that this chapter refers to Abraha’s attack on Mecca with war elephants around 570.[101]

Other modern commentators are more radical. The physical improbability of elephants being able to march across desert lands from southwestern Arabia to Mecca has led some to speculate that the ‘men of the elephant’ in the Qur’ân were actually the inhabitants of Petra, in modern Jordan, where spectacular elephant-headed columns were unearthed in 1921. Moreover, it is suggested that the incident, whatever it was, took place at a different date.[102]

Diet and Islamization in modern times

Another consequence of ‘shari‘a-minded reform’ was a greater emphasis on the question of forbidden foods. For all the earlier uncertainties about elephant meat, by the 1880s, the elephant was widely perceived as being unclean for Muslims.[103] On the internet, after the story of Abraha and Chapter 105 of the Qur’ân, the greatest numbers of posts for ‘elephants and Islam’ concern the meat of the animal.[104]

Dietary restrictions potentially hinder the spread of the faith among unbelievers, as Islam has been expanding mainly at the expense of Animism in modern times. Some Animist peoples eat elephant meat, whereas Hindus, Theravada Buddhists, and Christians would not usually have eaten such flesh.

For example, in the early 1820s, Batak Animists, in the interior of North Sumatra, were attached to eating elephant meat, and it was suggested that this made it difficult for them to adopt Islam.[105] The Batak still ate the flesh of elephants in the early 1930s, and remained mainly Animist by religion.[106] That said, the neighbouring Alas people declared themselves to be Muslims, and yet partook of elephant meat, even though they knew that Islamic law forbad the practice.[107]

Moreover, not all Animists in Islamic frontier zones in Maritime Southeast Asia consumed the flesh of elephants. In southeastern Sumatra, Kubu deities were associated with elephants, perhaps in a totemic manner, and these people abstained from their meat.[108] Similarly, at least one of the Orang Asli Animist peoples, in the interior of the Malay Peninsula, refrained from eating elephants, although they hunted them for their ivory.[109]

Hui Muslims of Zomia, where the four Asian sub-regions meet, may have found the ban on elephant meat a hurdle to converting their neighbours, as some highland Animist peoples in this zone ate the animal.[110] Han Chinese of the area were also likely to eat elephant. Although they adhered to Mahayana Buddhism, alongside Confucianism and Daoism, the dietary teachings of the Buddha were seen as applying only to monks. Han Chinese were especially keen on elephant trunk, considered to be akin to suckling pig.[111]

Consumption of elephant meat was probably greatest in Africa, however, where one gigantic pachyderm could feed a large number of people for a long time.[112] The meat could be dried as *biltong*, to be consumed at a later date.[113] However, a correlation between eating elephant flesh and reluctance to convert to Islam remains to be discovered and documented.

Complicating this issue is the nature of conversion in Islam, as it suffices to recite the *shahada* with pure intent to be considered a Muslim. A slow process of ever greater adherence to Islamic law then follows this initial acceptance of the faith.[114] From this perspective, not eating elephant meat can become a marker of increasing Islamic 'orthodoxy,' for example in East Africa.[115]

Conclusion

The history of human-elephant interactions has rarely been approached from the angle of shifting and conflicting Islamic beliefs. This kind of history has usually been written with a strong focus on areas where elephants abounded in the wild, especially South Asia, where Muslims have been portrayed as adapting flexibly to ancient Indian norms. The same story has been extended to Southeast Asia.

There is considerable value to this approach, but it is argued here that there was also an autonomous Islamic history of attitudes towards elephants. This turned around two main poles. On the one hand, believers might or might not be allowed to partake of the flesh of elephants. On the other hand, elephants might be shunned as symbolizing the hostility of infidels to the faith, but they might also be embraced as one of the wonders of God's creation.

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NOTES

[1] An oral version of this paper was first presented at the Royal Asiatic Society, London, 8 March 2006. All dates are in Common Era (CE) form.
[2] Beeston 1965, 895.
[3] Arberry 1969, II, p. 350.
[4] al-Damîrî 1906-08, II, pp. 575-8.
[5] Beeston 1960 and 1965; Bowersock 2013, pp. 111-17.
[6] al-Damîrî 1906-08, II, p. 575.
[7] Bowersock 2013, pp. 111-17; Conrad 1987, pp. 225-8.
[8] Beeston 1965, p. 895.
[9] Cosmas 1897, p. 372.
[10] Bidwell 1983, pp. 14.
[11] Schimmel 2003, p. 36; Arberry 1969, II, p. 326.
[12] al-Damîrî 1906-08, II, p. 575.
[13] Schimmel 2003, p. 54.
[14] Ruska and Pellat 1965, p. 892.
[15] Kipling, 1921, pp. 200, 244-5, 359.
[16] Bosworth 1968, p. 548.
[17] Schimmel 2003, pp. 53-4.
[18] Trautmann 2015, pp. 255-6; Bosworth 1965, p. 893; Kistler 2007, pp. 178-80.
[19] Tlili 2012, p. 158 (n. 10).
[20] Trautmann 2015, pp. 139-207; Sukumar 2003, pp. 59-63; Heathcote 1988, pp. 55-6; Quaritch Wales 1952, pp. 36-8.
[21] Kistler 2007, pp. 184-5.
[22] Kistler 2007, p. 177.
[23] Mikhail 2014, p. 241 (n. 59).
[24] Arberry 1969, I, p. 127.
[25] Foltz 2006; Cook 2004; Andelshauser 1996, Gelder 2003, p. 420.
[26] Cook 2004: pp. 222-5; Andelshauser 1996, pp. 44-5.
[27] Cook 2004: pp. 223-4.
[28] Tlili 2012, p. 158; Ruska and Pellat 1965, p. 892. See also Cook 2004: p. 225 (n. 63).
[29] Tannahil 1988, p. 111.
[30] Foltz 2006, p. 32; Benkheira et al. 2005, pp. 29, 33, 79; Hughes 1885, p. 58; Berg 1882-84, II, p. 313.
[31] Al-Damîrî 1906-08, II, pp. 582-3.
[32] Felicitas Becker, personal communication, 27 March 2016.
[33] Gelder 2003. For different versions, see Al-Damîrî 1906-08, II, pp. 569-70; Gröning and Saller 1999, pp. 230-1; Walters and Portmess 2001, pp. 173-4; Sillar and Meyler 1968, pp. 135-6.
[34] Gröning and Saller 1999, pp. 241.
[35] Contadini 2012, p. 86.
[36] Al-Damîrî 1906-08, II, pp. 585-6.
[37] Hodgson 1974.
[38] Ruska and Pellat 1965, p. 892; Schimmel 2003, pp. 54-5.
[39] Yücesoy 2007.
[40] Trautmann 2015, pp. 220-3; Gröning and Saller 1999, pp. 226-7.
[41] Bosworth 1965, p. 893; Ruska and Pellat 1965, pp. 892-3.
[42] Contadini 2012, p. 88,
[43] Schimmel 2003, p. 55.
[44] Ruska and Pellat 1965, p. 893.
[45] Schimmel 2003, p. 54; Gröning and Saller 1999, p. 246; Kistler 2007, pp. 187-8.
[46] Gröning and Saller 1999, p. 246; Kistler 2007, pp. 189-90.
[47] Pinder-Wilson 1960, pp. 200-3.
[48] al-Mas‘ûdî 2007, p. 78; Ruska and Pellat 1965, p. 893.

49 Foltz 2006: 56.
50 Ruska and Pellat 1965, pp. 892-3.
51 Bosworth 1965, p. 893; Kistler 2007, pp. 191-6; Heathcote 1988, p. 59.
52 Bosworth 1965, pp. 893-4.
53 Kistler 2007, pp. 197-201.
54 Mikhail 2014, pp. 239-40 (n. 46).
55 Kistler 2007, pp. 202-5.
56 Al-Damîrî 1906-08, I, pp. 64-5, and II, pp. 567-75.
57 Mikhail 2014, pp. 120-1.
58 Digby 1971, pp. 24-5, 50-3, 58-9; Sukumar 2013, p. 76.
59 Kistler 2007: 200-1.
60 Sukumar 2013, p. 76; Gröning and Saller 1999, p. 141.
61 Hodgson 1974.
62 Gröning and Saller 1999, pp. 140-2; Deloche 1980, pp. 237-40, 276
63 Kistler 2007, p. xiii.
64 Deloche 1980, p. 238.
65 Lattimore 1968, pp. 122-3.
66 Trautmann 2015, p. 296.
67 Kistler 2007, pp. 211, 217; Heathcote 1988, p. 61.
68 Kistler 2007, pp. 211-15; Gröning and Saller 1999, pp. 142-5.
69 Sukumar 2003: pp. 76, 80.
70 Digby 1971, p. 50.
71 Deloche 1980, p. 239; Kipling 1921, p. 222.
72 Heathcote 1988, p. 57; Gröning and Saller 1999, pp. 322-4.
73 Deloche 1980, pp. 238-9.
74 Schimmel 2003, pp. 4-5.
75 Gröning and Saller 1999, pp. 142, 152.
76 Sillar and Meyler 1968, pp. 111-20.
77 Schimmel and Waghmar 2004, p. 54 and *passim*.
78 Mikhail 2014, pp. 112-22.
79 Kistler 2007, p. 220.
80 Clarence-Smith 2004.
81 Ibn Battuta 1983, pp. 275-6.
82 Andaya 2001, pp. 61-3.
83 Lombard 1967, pp. 140-51, 168-9; Mundy 1919, pp. 121-6.
84 Andaya 2001, pp. 62-3; Lombard 1967, p. 144.
85 Ito 1984, pp. 369.
86 Lombard 1967, pp. 88-9; Ito 1984, pp. 51-2.
87 Pinto 1997, p. 304.
88 Crawfurd 1971, p. 136; Pires 1944, II, p. 265.
89 Reid 1998, p. 120; Remmelink 1994, pp. 89, 121.
90 Hodgson 1974.
91 Crawfurd 1971, p. 136; Lombard 1967, p. 88.
92 Kreemer 1922-23, I, p. 193, and II, pp. 81,118.
93 Crawfurd 1971, pp. 3, 135-6, 192, 239, 362; Kathirithamby-Wells 1997, pp. 223, 228-9; Kaur 1985, p. 153.
94 Ricklefs 1993, p. 36; Jacobs 1894, I, pp. 14-15.
95 Snouck Hurgronje 1906, I, p. 161.
96 Jacobs 1894, II, pp. 163-7.
97 Scidmore 1984, p. 274; Knaap 1999, p. 3.
98 Clarence-Smith 2010.
99 Bates 2007, p. 72.
100 Kipling 1921, p. 208.
101 Ali 1993, p. 552.

102 Q 2000.
103 Manzoni 1884, p. 159.
104 For example, Muhammad ibn Adam 2016.
105 Anderson 1971, p. 35.
106 Loeb 1972, p. 25.
107 Iwabuchi 1994, p. 34.
108 Andaya 1993, p. 20; Loeb 1972, p. 283.
109 Skeate and Blagden 1906, I, pp. 126, 202-3, 206-7, and II, p. 260.
110 West and Little 1884, pp. 23, 47.
111 Trauffer 1997, pp. 101, 107, 181, 251; Elvin 2004, p. 15; Schafer 1985, p. 79.
112 Anon. 1998, pp. 68-9; Latour and Stiles 2011.
113 Beinart 2003, p. 34.
114 Levtzion 1979.
115 Felicitas Becker, personal communication, 27 March 2016.