

Princely Companion or Object of Offense? The Dog's Ambiguous Status in Islam

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Abstract

Negative attitudes toward dogs are common in Muslim societies. Thus, in studying both past and present Muslim writings on dogs, a contradictory picture emerges, indicating that Muslim attitudes toward dogs have had their ambiguities. At times the dog has been presented as the lowest, filthiest, and vilest of creatures, and at times the dog appears as a perfect role model, exemplifying qualities like loyalty, devotion, and self-sacrifice. There are signs that attitudes toward dogs are changing in some Muslim societies. One such sign is that an increasing number of people in Muslim countries are now keeping dogs as companion animals. The following research will be used to highlight ambiguities as well as changes in order to not only better understand the position of the dog within Islam, but also to provide a very concrete example of how interpretations of religions are not isolated or single but are dependent on context.

Keywords

dogs – Islam – Sufism – interpretation – Quran – literature – politics

Negative attitudes toward dogs are common in Muslim societies, and many Muslims consider the dog to be an unclean animal. It is said, for example, that the prayers of Muslims will be invalidated if a dog wanders by a praying person; and the Swedish media has occasionally run stories about Muslim taxi drivers who refused to transport dogs in their vehicles. In 2002 Iran imposed a ban on public dog walking (Foltz, 2006, p. 132); and, according to the major Islamic schools of law, when a dog has eaten from a bowl it must be washed at least seven times to be fit for human usage (Bakhtiar, 1996, p. 13).

To explain such unfavorable reactions, it is often said that because dogs were largely responsible for the spread of rabies in the Middle East, they have been long held in low esteem as a species to be abhorred, avoided, and ignored (El Fadl, 2004). This low status not only concerns Islam and Muslims, but it is also reflected in the Biblical Rabbinical tradition. Another explanation that is sometimes given for the dog's low status in Muslim societies concerns the fact that when Islam was established in the 7th century, and then spread to present-day Iran, there was a need for it to distinguish itself from the dominant Zoroastrian tradition, which held a more positive view of this species (Moazami, 2006).

The fact that the dog is considered a basically unclean species has had a major impact on the animal's role as a domestic companion animal, although the same cannot be said of the dog's place in guarding, hunting, and animal husbandry (El Fadl, 2004). In the Arab world, for example, the antelope-hunting Saluki has been long praised in poetry and song for both the creature's skills and beauty. Perhaps the most famous breed in the Middle East, the history of this greyhound-like canine goes back 5,000 years according to some and 8,000 years according to others. In pre-modern Bedouin communities, the Saluki enjoyed a status similar to the treasured Arabian horse. It has been said that in olden times the Saluki could not be purchased for money, but only obtained in exchange for horses and/or camels; indeed, the Saluki was even valued as a princely gift (Duggan, 2009). Moreover, within the mystical Sufi traditions there are various references to dogs that are quite positive, especially when it comes to the dog's ideal exemplification of qualities like faithfulness and fidelity.

Thus, in studying both past and present Muslim writings on dogs, a contradictory picture appears to emerge, indicating that Muslim attitudes toward dogs have had their ambiguities. Often the dog has been presented as the lowest of creatures, but at times the creature has been used as a role model, exemplifying qualities that humans should strive for, which are generally held in high regard within Islam. The purpose of this article is to explore and better understand the nature of this ambiguity.

Dogs in Islamic Texts

To begin with, there is only one place in the Quran where the word "dog" is mentioned: *Surah* 18, the content of which casts the dog not in a negative light, but rather in a somewhat positive light. Known as *Al-Kahf* (The Cave),

this *Surah* contains the tale of a group of young men who were so devoted to God that they fled their city and hid in a cave to avoid the forced worship of idols. After entering the cave, they (along with their dog) are said to have fallen into a 309-year sleep, during which period all of them (including the dog) were sustained and preserved by God's angels. This is described in verse 18; the first passage that directly mentions the presence of a dog:

And thou wouldst have deemed them waking though they were asleep, and We caused them to turn over to the right and the left, and their *dog* [my italics] stretching out his paws on the threshold. If thou hadst observed them closely thou hadst assuredly turned away from them in flight, and hadst been filled with awe of them. (*Al-Kahf*, Verse 18)

When they were finally awakened, the young men, thinking they had been asleep for only a day, chose one among themselves to cautiously reenter the city for the purchase of food. There he found to his astonishment that all the townspeople had become exclusive worshipers of God (i.e., monotheists). In time, these townsfolk came to know of the miracle of the young men, their dog, and the cave, and decided to "build a place of worship over them" (*Al-Kahf*, Verse 21). And, as Verse 22 makes clear, the dog was counted as one among the members of this apparently blessed group:

(Some) will say: They were three, their dog the fourth, and (some) say: Five, their dog the sixth, guessing at random; and (some) say: Seven, and their dog the eighth. Say (O Muhammad): My Lord is Best Aware of their number. None knoweth them save a few. So contend not concerning them except with an outward contending, and ask not any of them to pronounce concerning them. (*Al-Kahf*, Verse 22)

While this story is generally considered proof of God's omnipotence, it is also sometimes employed as an argument for corporeal resurrection. But if this is the only direct reference to the dog in the Quran, and it is a more or less positive depiction, then where do the more derogatory types of references reside? The answer is within the *ahadith*.

The *ahadith* (plural of *hadith*)—that is, the reports concerning what Muhammad (or one of his companions) said or approved of—hold a place of great prominence in Islam because they are thought to represent Muhammad's *sunnah*, his tradition or way of life, viewed as a normative model or standard for all Muslims. It is among these reports that one finds various statements

and depictions suggesting that Muhammad held a basically unflattering view of dogs, although he seems not to have had a problem with dogs who served a practical human purpose, as indicated by the following *hadith* passage:

Whoever acquires a dog other than a sheepdog or hunting dog, will have two *qirats* deducted from the reward of his good actions every day. (Malik's *Muwatta*, Book 54, Number 54.5.13)

In terms of Muhammad's more derogatory remarks, there is a *hadith* in which he is said to have noted that those who maintain dogs within their houses will suffer reduced earnings, and the angels will not enter their homes (Fudge, 2001, p. 545); there are also *ahadith* in which Muhammad is seen calling for the killing of certain dogs.

Apart from containing the statements of Muhammad and his companions, each *hadith* provides the names of those who are said to have successively conveyed this information to new generations from the time of Muhammad to the time that the *hadith* was factually penned. If this succession contains missing links, or if one or more of the individuals in the chain is considered unreliable, then the content of that particular *hadith* may be called into question and declared to be weak or uncertain (Waines, 2003). An example of this can be found in the *hadith* where Muhammad is represented as saying that black dogs are demons in dogs' bodies—a *hadith* that scholars such as Khalid Abou El Fadl, for example, consider to be problematic (El Fadl, 2004).

In addition to the above *ahadith*, there are those that may not be directly positive, but that at least call for the compassionate treatment of these and all such animals. There is a *hadith*, for example, that relates the story of a man who comes to the aid of a thirsty dog by filling a shoe with water from a well and offering that water to the dog. As a reward for this good deed, he is said to have received forgiveness for his sins and eternal life in paradise. This story is commonly interpreted to indicate that human compassion should be extended even to lowly creatures such as dogs. In other words, the reward of paradise was given for the act itself and had little to do with the fact that the specific object of compassion happened to be a dog (Malik's *Muwatta*, Book 49, Number 49.10.23)

Within Islamic jurisprudence, there are various schools of law that address legal customs regarding a variety of themes. Four of the five established schools of law assert that the dog is an unclean species; the exception is the North African Maliki school, which argues that everything originating from nature should be automatically considered pure and good unless the contrary can

be established. In accordance with this principle, the dog, being an aspect of nature, is not considered unclean (Bakhtiar, 1996; Fudge, 2001, p. 546).

On the other hand, the fact that the remaining four schools regard the dog as an unclean creature has had certain practical consequences. It is said, for example, that if a dog's saliva transfers to a person's body and/or clothing, the contaminated skin should be thoroughly cleansed and/or the contaminated cloth should be immediately replaced. While such rules are generally considered to be important and serious, they have also given rise to a number of humorous anecdotes, such as the one paraphrased below:

A man running towards the mosque for fear of being late for Friday prayers comes upon a dog frolicking and splashing in a puddle of water. As he passes the dog, some of the water splashes onto his clothing. Being uncertain as to whether or not the water also contains the dog's saliva, and with no time to run back and change his clothes, he turns his head so as not to exactly see, and exclaims: "God be praised! A goat!" (Foltz, 2006, p. 131)

Desirable Virtues

While living in the vicinity of Baghdad in the 9th century, the Islamic legal scholar Ibn al-Marzuban (1978) compiled various statements and stories about dogs into a curiously titled book called *The Superiority of Dogs over Many of Those Who Wear Clothes*. The work appears to have served two purposes: to defend the status of the dog on the one hand, and to point out the decadence of most human beings on the other. Toward these ends, al-Marzuban (1978) argues against those that proclaim the dog unclean by referring to the rather favorable portrayal of the dog found in *Al-Kahf* (mentioned above) and various *ahadith*. One such *hadith*, for example, indicates that the Prophet's wives brought a dog on pilgrimage to guard their luggage.

In general, however, Marzuban's book is considered to be more about the character of man than it is about the status of dog, as is confirmed by the following passage: "Hold on to your dog if you can get one, because most people have become swine" (al-Marzuban, 1978, p. 12). Here al-Marzuban means to indicate that rather than living according to the commandments of God and the ideals of Islam, most people are driven by self-love. This undesirable characteristic is then contrasted with the dog's instinctive sense of loyalty and duty, which he depicts as ideals to be striven for by man. And since these virtues

are naturally occurring features of the dog's personality, but not of man's, al-Marzuban (1978) concludes that dogs are superior to people.

Islam has a rich tradition of religious storytelling, with tales that contain a gallery of characters and plots, many of which are common to those found in Judaism and Christianity (e.g., Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and Jesus). There is also a plethora of stories about Muhammad as well as other important figures within the tradition. Several such narratives have their origins in the Quran, but have been supplemented, and in some cases augmented, by materials from the *hadith* literature and other sources. Among these, there are a few indicating that despite the consideration that the dog is an unclean species, dogs nonetheless embody virtues that humans often aspire to have.

In a narrative about King Solomon (*The Anvar-I Suhali*, cited in Eastwick, 2010), for instance, the king is said to have once summoned all the animals to his court in order to obtain their counsel on whether he should consume an elixir of life. When all the animals responded to his call save the heron (in some version, the porcupine), Solomon is said to have dispatched a noble horse to convince the heron to attend, but unfortunately to no avail. Undaunted, the king is said to have next sent a dog, who somehow managed to convince the heron to come along. Astonished at the dog's success, Solomon asked the heron why the heron had agreed to come with a simple dog when the creature would not agree to come with a beautiful and elegant horse. In reply, the heron noted that:

Although the beauty of nobility is outwardly apparent in the horse, and the most perfect gifts are luminously and evidently displayed in him, yet he has not fed in the mead of faithfulness, nor drunk one drop from the fountain of gratitude. . . . And notwithstanding that the dog is notorious for his baseness, and well-known for his impurity, still he has eaten the morsel of constancy, and habituated himself to the custom of gratitude. (*The Anvar-I Suhali*, cited in Eastwick, 2010, p. 564)

In other words, while the horse is certainly beautiful, the horse has superficial character and the dog's character is faithful.

God's Faithful Servant

Sufism is often described as Islam's mystical tradition—the branch that emphasizes its spiritual values. Many Muslims also claim that Sufism constitutes

Islam's "traditional" form. Within Sufism, there are a diversity of traditions and numerous brotherhoods that have formed around different Sufi masters (Waines, 2003, p. 137 ff.), yet all commonly stress the importance of Islam's inner dimensions, which are described as being centered upon the soul and the heart. For every Sufi master there appears to be at least one narrative in which the dog is used as an exemplar (Foltz, 2006, pp. 140-141). For example, work by one of the most celebrated Sufi masters of all time, the Persian poet Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273), whose writings have reached far beyond the Muslim world and also given rise to several Sufi orders, which have attempted to follow his example in various ways.

It is said that Rumi was once offered a large quantity of wonderfully prepared foodstuffs by one of his disciples. To everyone's astonishment, however, rather than eating it himself, he fed it to a female dog (with puppies), who was thin and worn in appearance—a deed that could have been easily regarded as an act of ingratitude by some. Justifying his conduct, Rumi explained that God had called upon him to provide the starving dog with food. Here the lesson to be learned is presumably that Rumi's compassion was so great that it extended even to the lowly dog (Can, 2004, p. 109).

Another example in which the desirable characteristics of the dog are featured comes from the following statement, attributed to Muhammad's son-in-law Ali (the fourth Caliph), who holds a particularly important place in Shiite Islam:

Happy is the one who leads the life of a dog! For the dog has ten characteristics which everyone should possess. First, the dog has no status among creatures; second, the dog is a pauper having no worldly goods; third, the entire earth is his resting place; fourth, the dog goes hungry most of the time; fifth, the dog will not leave his master's door even after receiving a hundred lashes; sixth, he protects his master and his friend, and when someone approaches he will attack the foe and let the friend pass; seventh, he guards his master by night, never sleeping; eighth, he performs most of his duties silently; ninth, he is content with whatever his master gives him; and tenth, when he dies, he leaves no inheritance. (Foltz, 2006, p. 133)

According to Javad Nurbakhsh (1989), a contemporary Sufi master from Iran, this statement can be understood to indicate that knowledge and discipline are so important that even a domesticated dog can be considered a role model (p. xii). Another possibility is that Ali intends to highlight the need for

spiritual guidance, without which a person's good qualities may not become manifest—a fairly standard point of view in Sufism. Although it can be said that Ali's statement is more about people than it is about dogs, and that the dog plays a more or less symbolic role in his statement, his point would have little analogical weight if the ten mentioned characteristics could not be factually discerned in the conduct, personality, and habits of the dog. Thus, even though the dog may play only a pedagogical and rhetorical role in Ali's statement, the characteristics spoken of must be noticeably present in order for the dog to have symbolic value. Ultimately, as is often the case in Sufism, the aim is to highlight virtues such as humility, simplicity, loyalty, self-sacrifice, and gratitude—virtues that leave room for the positive use of the dog in numerous Sufi accounts and tales (see, for example, Can, 2004).

In Love Poetry

The dog is also praised in Muslim literature that is not explicitly religious in intention, content, and design. For example, the tale of the young Qay (or Majnun, meaning madman; Guinhut, 1998) and his unrequited love for the beautiful Layla. One of the most renowned love stories in the history of Muslim literature, it is believed to date back to the 7th century and to have been the inspiration for both Gottfried Straßburg's *Tristan and Isolde* and William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. In the tale, Majnun is driven by his unhappiness into the desert, where he spends his time in the company of wild animals. Alone, depressed, and almost mad with longing, he appears to develop some sort of identification with the dog, and extols the dog's virtues in a manner that is uncommon in comparison to most of the accounts and stories coming from Muslim cultures. The dog is treated not as a mere symbol, but rather as a species to be valued and admired for the animal's genuine intrinsic worth. Upon encountering a dog wandering alone like himself, Majnun exclaims:

O you, with the collar of faithfulness, before whom the lion has bowed down. You are better than a man in terms of fidelity and more intimate with the Path than most. If you eat once from someone's hand then one hundred stones cannot cause you to turn your back at that person. Your work is to guard at night and herd the sheep at day. You make the thief lose interest in his profession and captivate the wolf with your lion-like claws. Your bite/bark scares off nightwalkers while guardians are paralyzed by fear. On the battlefield of righteousness, one of your hairs is worth as much as those of a thousand armed men.

In terms of the discussion at hand, however, which specifically concerns the ambiguity of Muslim attitudes toward the dog, the probative value of this glorification is mitigated by the fact that Muslim cultures typically regard Majnun as someone who has lost his mind—that is, a madman. This implies that his admiration for the dog is nothing more than another symptom of his insanity.

Signs of Change

As has been indicated several times above, when the dog serves particular purposes (basically guarding and/or hunting), the creature has been generally accorded a high value in Muslim societies, or at least has been considered acceptable. This view has been confirmed by a recent *fatwa* regarding the use of guide dogs that was issued by the Muslim Council of Britain. In general, the *fatwa* declares that it is permissible for guide dogs to accompany their blind owners to the mosque so long as they are kept fastened outside the prayer hall during prayers. The reasoning is that the guide dog, like the hunting dog, serves a vital practical function, and thus the dog's more intimate involvement in human affairs is permissible (*The Guardian*, 2008).

On the other hand, the idea of maintaining a dog as a mere household companion animal has long been considered an oddity in many Muslim-majority countries. Nevertheless, there are signs that attitudes toward dogs are beginning to change in some Muslim societies. One such sign concerns the fact that an increasing number of people in Muslim countries are beginning to keep dogs as companions—a trend that is often viewed as a symptom of Western influence. In a recent study from Kuwait, for example, the increased tendency of Kuwaitians to accept dogs as companions has been attributed to the powerful international reach of such Western-dominated media as film, satellite television, and the Internet, all of which tend to present the dog in a favored light (Al-Fayez, Awadalla, Templer, & Arikawa, 2003).

This apparent change in attitudes can also be understood in terms of the 20th century rise of Islamic reform movements that have, to various degrees, challenged the dominant interpretations of traditional Islamic scholars as well as the authority of Islamic schools of law. An example from Malaysia in the 1930s (Roff, 1983) is representative of this sort of challenge, and also demonstrates that the question of whether the dog should be treated as a domestic companion animal is not specific to the 21st century. The case involved a Dalmatian—kept as a companion by heir to the throne Tengku Ibrahim¹—who

1 Also the younger brother of the Sultan of Kelantan, a Malaysian state.

appears to have been the cause of a protracted political dispute. The reasons that Ibrahim initially acquired the dog are not known, although it may be that companion dogs had been associated with European culture, wealth, and power, and thus were symbolic of the modern society that had begun to emerge in Malaysia at that time.

One person who evidently did not appreciate the Dalmatian was the heir's sister Tengku Maharani, who objected on the grounds of the dog's uncleanness. In response, Ibrahim consulted a religious scholar (*alim*), asking him whether dogs could be held as companions. The answer was positive as far as Ibrahim and the Dalmatian were concerned. Unsatisfied, Ibrahim's sister turned to other religious scholars, and they came to the opposite conclusion, while also protesting against the answer that had been given by the *alim* that Ibrahim had consulted. The disagreement led to a public debate between the defenders and the opponents of companion dogs. With over 2,000 people in attendance, each side presented its point of view, backed by arguments and texts from the Quran, the *hadith*, and previous religious scholars. When neither side evinced a willingness to yield to the other, the debate ended in a stalemate and the question was referred to the Al-Azhar University in Cairo. The result was that in 1937 a *fatwa* was issued favoring keeping dogs as companions (Roff, 1983).

The example is interesting given that it points to the dog's contentious place in Muslim societies. However, there is an additional dimension to the conflict that is also worth stressing; it concerns the matter of how the religious sources should be interpreted and who has the authority to interpret them. In the above mentioned debate, the proponents of keeping companion dogs argued that in an emerging modern society, the individual must choose which of the schools of law to follow—that is, those that are relevant for his or her times. In terms of the religious scholars that Ibrahim had consulted, they chose to follow the Malikian School, which does not regard the dog as an unclean animal. On the other hand, those scholars that regarded the dog as unclean, and thus opposed the keeping of dogs as companions, argued in terms of the Shafi School, which for centuries had been Malaysia's traditional school of Islamic jurisprudence (Roff, 1983).

More recently, Khaled Abou El Fadl (2004), professor of Islamic Law at the University of California, made use of the Malikian School to argue on behalf of the companion dog. He further asserted that the *ahadith* used to support antipathy toward dogs are highly questionable, insisting that many Muslim scholars throughout history have declared that only rabies-infected dogs are unclean, and not dogs in general (El Fadl, 2004). These conclusions have elicited a strong reaction from militant Islamic groups that disapprove of his scholarship, and that have even gone so far as to threaten El Fadl with

some sort of harm or retribution (Tolson, 2008). This is an indication of how impassioned and inflamed the controversy over the dog's place in Islam can become—a tendency that can also be seen by studying the manner in which the dog has been a provocative element in certain political situations.

The Dog in World Politics

In the mid-1970s, when it became internationally known that the Swedish king kept a Labrador named Ali (the name of the Prophet's cousin/son-in-law), there was a strong reaction from Pakistan, among other countries. In response, the king, who had not intended to offend anyone, simply changed the dog's name from Ali to Charlie, thus bringing the protests to an end (Mårtensson, 2000). And when the Swedish artist Lars Vilks depicted Muhammad as a roundabout dog, the reactions were similarly heated. However, the difference is that this was a deliberate provocation (see Lööf, 2009, for a discussion about Wilks). These political provocations point not only to the dog's ambivalent place, but also to some of the tensions and changes that exist in Muslim majority societies concerning how to relate to the Western world.

Dogs have been used, for example, as provocation against extreme Islamist groups in Pakistan. Islamism, in a somewhat simplified sense, is an umbrella-term used for interpretations of Islam that want to see Islam as an all-encompassing system that controls not only the individual's relationship to God, but also social functions and political life. The goal of many Islamists is the establishment of a state controlled in accordance with Islamic law, *Sharia*. In Pakistan, for example, the extreme Islamist groups have made themselves famous for using violence to achieve their ends.

Parvez Musharraf, the former president of Pakistan, became famous as one of America's allies in the hunt for violence-prone Islamist groups. He allowed himself to be photographed holding his Pekingese dogs in his arms (Figure 1). The image was published in several newspapers and was, at the time, considered to be a sublime way to demonstrate influences of Western values and breaking Muslim taboos; it became a figurative example of U.S. influence when he allowed himself be photographed with companion dogs, as many Americans are inclined to do. The image was seen as a direct provocation against the Islamists in the country. By being photographed with dogs, considered by many to be one of the most unclean animals, he demonstrated that he would not submit to the Islamists' demands for Islamization.

One complication, however, was the reaction of Saudi Arabia, which, although also in alliance with the United States, nonetheless emphasized that it was unacceptable for the president of a country like Pakistan, with a majority



FIGURE 1 *Parvez Musharraf with his Pekingese dogs*

of Muslims, to allow himself to be photographed with dogs who cannot be regarded as anything else but companions. Since the number of pictures of Musharraf with dogs was greatly reduced in the course of his time in power (1999-2008), it is possible that the critique had its desired effect.

The next example is the Islamist organization Hamas, which commonly uses images of animals to promote its message of struggle for a Palestinian state and the need for the Islamization of society. Several of the organization's Internet sites and posters display pictures of animals such as lions, horses, and falcons. These are animals associated with strength, courage and beauty, and are therefore used to highlight what the organization believes is a noble fight. Dogs, however, are not found in the organization's images. On the contrary, images of dogs have been used to reproach Hamas. The image in Figure 2 was produced by the secular Fatah movement. Hamas leaders appear along with dog heads and slippers and are being affronted in two senses, since it is considered grossly offensive in Muslim societies to throw a slipper or shoe at someone as well as to associate a man with a dog.

Here it is noteworthy to recall the incident that occurred at the retiring George W. Bush's last Baghdad press conference in December of 2008, when an Iraqi journalist threw his shoes at the American president while calling him a dog. The question is to what extent did the former president perceive the dog epithet as an insult, given the fact that during the very same year, Bush's White House Family Christmas movie was all about his dog Barney's excellence as an American patriot? Another possibility, though unlikely, would be to regard the Bush family Christmas movie not just as an expression of patriotism, but also as a provocation against Islamist groups, and therefore a contribution to the "war on terror." It is almost impossible to argue that the dog is not present in the midst of world politics.



FIGURE 2 *Offensive picture of Hamaz leaders*

Various Levels of Ambiguity

The ambiguity that emerges concerning dogs can be understood on several levels relative to the teachings of Islam. First, it can be understood in terms of the difference between maintaining a dog for a utilitarian purpose and keeping a dog as a companion. The dog's accepted functional role in Muslim societies—where dogs have long acted as hunting companions, livestock guardians, and general protectors—may be regarded as a historically self-evident fact.

The picture is not as clear, however, when it comes to the dog's role as a household companion animal—something that has been called into question by dog's capacity to spread rabies, general uncleanliness, and somewhat negative treatment in certain *ahadith*. The varied, non-uniform opinions about whether it is permissible to maintain dogs as domestic companions demonstrate that there are tensions in the Muslim world relative to the West. The fact that more families in certain Muslim countries are beginning to embrace the dog as “man's best friend” and allow dogs to live under their roofs indicates that a gradual change of attitude is taking place.

This detectable shift appears to be significantly related to the reach of such modern media as the Internet, television, and film, which largely tend to promote a more positive image of the dog, but also provide interpretations that legitimize the notion of the dog as a companion. In today's world, interpretations of religions are no longer isolated, local, and more or less single; rather, many angles of interpretation exist side by side and are accessible to all. As such, individuals are afforded greater opportunities to choose from the plethora of religious interpretations, including those that highlight the more

positive aspects of the species known as dog. These options may be the result of the increased influence of the West or the natural progression of the ongoing discussion about how the religious sources should be interpreted. When deciding how to interpret texts and who has the authority to interpret them, we may find that the dog's place in Islam does not lend itself to a simple explanation, but it is surrounded by ambiguity.

Acknowledgments

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