CHAPTER TWO

The Birth of the Prophet of God: *Mawloud* Narratives and the Mappila Tradition

The significance of the Prophet Muhammad for Muslims manifests itself not only in the Quran and other textual sources such as Hadith (the collection of the traditions of the Prophet, including his sayings, deeds and approval); stories, poetry, calligraphy, architecture and other arts have all been utilized to capture imaginatively the religious importance of the Prophet (Ernst 2005). The tradition of venerating the Prophet Muhammad has given birth to a rich body of devotional song-poetry across languages such as *madai‘h nabawiyyah* (praise poetry to the Prophet Muhammad) in the Arab-Islamic tradition, and *na‘t* (praise of the Prophet) and *qawwali* (songs of devotion and supplication) in the Indian subcontinent.\(^\text{30}\) In the eye of the practitioner, the performance of these devotional poems and hymns addressed to the Prophet has transformative powers, enacts a special relationship between Muslims and the Prophet, and is anchored in a belief that the Prophet has a continuing spiritual presence of his own. In this perspective, reciting this literature invests the performer with love and reverence for the Prophet and turns him into a more pious person (Eisenlohr 2009).\(^\text{31}\)

---

\(^{30}\) See, for example, Hudawi 2014a, 2014b.

\(^{31}\) I try to show in ethnographic detail contemporary Mappila Muslim self-fashioning and the *mawloud* tradition in chapter five.
This chapter is concerned with mawlid narratives which find expression in Arabic prose and verse across the Islamic world, with an emphasis on the Keralite Muslim tradition. The Arabic word “mawlid,” which popularly refers to the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (mawlid al-nabi), is used to designate both the observance and celebration of his birthday (also known as milad), and the literary genre appropriate for recitation on such occasion. However, Mappilas more commonly use the term “mawlud” which in local parlance appears to be a slight corruption of mawlid, the classical Arabic word for the observance of the Prophet’s birthday, rather than refers to the related Arabic noun of the same construction (i.e., mawlud) which means “new-born child”—hence my use of mawlud rather than mawlid in this dissertation to emphasize the former’s popular use in Kerala, though people who are conversant with Arabic may find it easy to dub this usage a misnomer. I, however, retain the word mawlid when talking about this tradition of devotional piety in the larger Islamic world. Also, by extension, other revered

---

32 I am aware of the other uses of the word “mawlid” or “mulid” such as the death/birth anniversaries of Sufi saints popular in many parts of the Muslim world. While mawlid/mawlud as a literary form thematizing the life and virtues of martyrs (shuhada) and Sufi saints is also well-known in Kerala, the word is not usually used to refer to the observance and celebration of the death anniversaries of Sufis and other revered Muslim figures. Instead, the Malayalam word “nercha” (literally, “vow”) is the common name for this practice of saint veneration—although the word urus, a corruption of the Arabic ʿurs, (literally “wedding”), which is much popular among the rest of Muslims on the Indian subcontinent as a term to signify celebration of a Sufi’s death anniversary, is also now gaining some traction among Mappilas. Interestingly, it is the birth in the case of the Prophet and the death in the case of revered martyrs and Sufi figures that more usually serve as the occasion for annual devotional festivity for Mappilas as elsewhere in many Muslim societies.

33 It is interesting that even Mappila religious scholars called “musliyars” who are aware of the semantic nuances of both mawlid and mawlud sometimes prefer the latter in their sermons and conversations. Thus, instead of seeing this as a misnomer coming out of Mappilas’ lack of command of Arabic, I want to see it as a means by which Mappilas domesticated and made their own the Arabic mawlid narratives and the larger Muslim practice of the mawlud celebration. Not unlike mawlid, the word “mawlud” indicates both the festive practice of the observance of the Prophet’s birth and the literary form tied to such practice among Mappilas.
Islamic personalities such as the martyrs of the Battle of Badr and Sufi figures all have mawluds written in their honour, although my focus in this chapter will be on mawluds of the Prophet.

*Mawlid: A Checkered History*

The *mawlid* narratives have a history as checkered as that of the *mawlid* (birthday of the Prophet Muhammad) observance. The birthday of the Prophet—the twelfth day of the Islamic lunar month of *Rabi‘-ul-Awwal*—is one of the most important festivals in the Muslim calendar. The legitimacy of its celebration has remained a contentious issue within the Islamic tradition, however. Even the supporters of the celebration admit that it is an innovation (*bid‘a*) that came into being centuries after the life of the Prophet. Thus, the bone of contention is not the origins of the *mawlid* celebration during the Prophet’s lifetime, but the theological legitimacy of the celebration in spite of its belatedness. Most mainstream Sunni Islamic scholars posit that *mawlid* is a good innovation (*bid‘a hasana*) and, therefore, it is licit to observe and celebrate it. This is evident from a number of treatises and *fatwas* (legal opinions) produced on the legitimacy of *mawlid*. Jalaluddin al-Suyuti’s (d. 1505) *Husnul Maqsid fi ‘Amal al-Mawlid* (The Goodness of Purpose in Reference to the Observance of *Mawlid*) is a case in point.34

A useful English work delineating several stages of the early history of the celebration of *mawlid* was authored by N. J. G. Kaptein in the form of a monograph titled *Muhammad’s*

---

34 For a condemnation of the *mawlid* celebration, see the work of well-known theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1348), for example, *Iqtida al-Sirat al-Mustaqim li-Mukhalafat Ashab al-Jahim* (1998). Recently, polemical books in Malayalam defending the observance of the Prophet’s birthday are not something of a rarity. For example, see Saqafi n.d.
According to Kaptein, the Shiite Fatimid dynasty, which ruled Egypt from 358 AH/969 CE to 567 AH/1171 CE, is known to have celebrated the Prophet’s birthday as a state occasion. The exact chronological limits of Fatimid celebration of the *mawlid* remain unknown, however. As for the Sunni tradition, Katz (2007) notes that some prominent Sunnis observed the Prophet’s birthday around the time of the fall of the Fatimid dynasty. These celebrations included feasting and Sufi audition (*sama’*) with various kinds of literary production. The Syrian ruler Nur al-Din (d. 569 AH/1174 CE) observed the Prophet’s birthday with festivities including night-time feasting and illuminations and the presentation of poetry in honor of the occasion. The next recorded Sunni *mawlid* celebration was the *mawlid* of Muzaffar al-Din Kökbüri, a member of the local Begtegenid dynasty, held in Irbil in the opening years of the seventh century AH/thirteenth century CE. Given that neither of these celebrations is explicitly described by the relevant sources as being innovative or novel, it seems unlikely that their dates are to be regarded as the point at which the celebration was initiated in the religious circles in question. They both probably represent the rather arbitrary point at which a pre-existing practice happened to be mentioned in a surviving source (Katz 2007).

Like the history of *mawlid* observance, the history of *mawlid* texts extends beyond the documented beginning of the *mawlid* celebration under the Fatimid dynasty. While the *mawlid* genre as a literary form appropriate for recitation on the occasion of the Prophet’s birth is a relatively late development, works thematically focused on the Prophet’s birth and life belong to a much older tradition.\(^{37}\)

---

\(^{35}\) In a more recent work, Katz 2007 examines the *mawlid* from its origins down to the present and offers insights into the form of devotional piety entailed by the *mawlid* celebration.

\(^{36}\) See Katz 2007

\(^{37}\) See Katz 2007 for more on this point.
The *Mawlid* Genre: Some Archetypal Themes

A central feature of the celebration of the Prophet’s birthday is the collective reading and singing of devotional literature in prose and verse, also known as *mawlid*. The peculiar literary genre of *mawlid* flourished across the Muslim world in a variety of constellations of texts that shared certain generic conventions and thematic concerns. Among salient themes underpinning the whole complex of *mawlid* literature across time, mention may be made of the following:

a) the pre-existence of the Prophet and the light of Muhammad,

b) the Prophet’s conception and Amina’s pregnancy,

c) the Prophet’s birth, and the miracles accompanying it,

d) omens and prognostications of the Prophet’s advent,

e) and the story of Halima, the Prophet’s wet nurse.

The above themes enjoy a virtually archetypal status in the *mawlid* genre. Almost every known *mawlid* text, past and present, revolves around any/all of these themes popularized in the Islamic tradition.

The pre-existence of the Light of Muhammad, including its origination at the beginning of creation and its migration through the loins of the Prophet’s ancestors, is an integral element of the paradigmatic *mawlid* narrative. Of the scores of authored *mawlid* texts and informally
compiled *mawlid* manuscripts in existence, the vast majority begin with an account of the Light of Muhammad. This fact may seem paradoxical, given that the Prophet’s pre-existence would seem to diminish the significance of his physical birth in the sixth-century CE – the event commemorated by the *mawlid* celebration. However, the overwhelming consensus of the *mawlid* tradition is to treat the Prophet’s birth, not as the beginning of the existence of a historical individual, but as an episode in an ongoing cosmic drama that began with the inception of creation. The Prophet’s physical birth is not the beginning of his existence, but the point at which his manifold blessings become manifest on earth and available to humanity.

The pre-existence of the Light of Muhammad is described or alluded to in many ways in *mawlid* texts, but their accounts are most often based on one or the other of two broadly disseminated narratives associated with the figures of two of the Prophet’s Companions, Ka‘b al-Ahbar and Jabir ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Ansari.

Apart from the ‘primordial light’ theme, narratives about religious importance of conception of the prophet, the wonders accompanying the conception, narratives on Amina’s pregnancy with an aura of the supernatural, narratives about the actual birth of the Prophet, the miracles following/coinciding with the historic birth, the story of the Prophet’s wet-nurse, Halima—have all enriched the thematic fabric of subsequent *mawlid* texts. At the same time, praise poetry to the Prophet Muhammad (*mada‘ih nabawiyya*) that generally extolls the virtues of the Prophet and panegyrizes his exemplary personality is also used in organized *mawlid* recitals along with what is traditionally called the *mawlid* texts in a narrower sense. Examples are the two celebrated mantle odes to the Prophet (*burda*): the famous *qasida Banat Su‘ad* (Su‘ad Has Departed) by the companion of the Prophet Ka‘b Ibn Zuhayr and the more famous *al-
Kawakib al-Durriya fi Madhi Khair al-Bariyya (Pearly Stars in Praise of the Best of Creation) by the 7th/13th century poet of Mamluk Egypt, al-Busiri (d. 1294-97).  

In addition to the narratives celebrating the birth and life of the Prophet (mawlid proper) and praise poetry to the Prophet in general (mada‘ih), other literary genres that enter the mawlid collections include the salawat and salamat verses, tawassul, and du‘a. The salawat and salamat verses pray for and invoke divine blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad and are all variations on the standard blessing formula “Allahumma swalli wa sallim ‘ala Muhammad” (O God, bestow your blessing and peace upon Muhammad!). This Islamic tradition is directly inspired by a Quranic verse and assumes prominence for its religious and liturgical value. For practitioners, inserting this deep-seated tradition into mawlid also helps reinforce the theological legitimacy of the entire idea of the celebration of the birth of the Prophet and of the recitals of mawlid texts on various occasions. Tawassul is the intercessory prayer to God that asks for the intercession of the Prophet (and also of other revered Islamic personalities such as Sufis). Available in both prose and verse, it virtually saturates the text of a mawlid. Du‘a (prayer) is the closing prayer in a mawlid that is also intercessory in nature and mainly seeks divine protection and fulfilment of diverse wishes of the faithful.

All these different, yet related, literary products converged to create among various Muslim communities standardized and popular collections of texts to be read, recited, and sung during the celebrations of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad and other varied occasions punctuating daily life. Also, as mawlid narratives travelled across the Muslim world, they found

---

38 For a detailed study, including original translations and contextualized interpretations, of the famous mantle odes to the Prophet Muhammad, see Stetkevych 2010.
39 “God and His angels shower blessings on the Prophet. O you who believe! Ask blessings on him and salute him with a worthy salutation.” The Quran, 33: 56.
themselves incorporated into collections of texts that were put together by Muslim scholars who lived in specific locales. In the rest of this chapter, I throw light on the narrative world of mawlid texts by analyzing the Manqus Mawlud which remains in wide circulation among the Mappila Muslims of Kerala. This mawlud and other mawlud texts usually circulate in different editions of the Mappila prayer book known as the mawlid kitab or sabeena, a copy of which adorns many Mappila households even today and can still be cheaply purchased from local bookstores across Malabar.\textsuperscript{40}

\textbf{The Manqus Mawlud}

The most popular mawlud work in Malabar is best known under the title \textit{al-Manqus (Manqus Mawlud)}, which Mappilas have traditionally attributed to a renowned Mappila ‘\textit{alim} (religious scholar) of Yemeni Arab descent, Shaikh Zainuddin b. Ali al-Makhdum al-Malabari (d.1521), also called “the senior Makhdum.” It was he who had presided over the heyday of the Shaikh Makhdum institution at Ponnani (a coastal town in Malappuram, northern Kerala). As the tradition goes, Shaikh Zainuddeen composed this mawlud when approached by people from Ponnani and its neighbourhoods who were fearful of deadly diseases breaking out in their midst (Nadwi 2006; Faizy 2008). Accordingly, this work has been credited in Keralite Sunni Islam with curative, talismanic, and spiritual powers.\textsuperscript{41} As the title of the mawlud suggests (which

\textsuperscript{40} I briefly discuss the mawlid kitab/sabeena in chapter four. My references are to text of the \textit{Manqus Mawlud} available in \textit{151 Vaka Mawlud Kitab}, C. H. Ibrahim Kutty and Brothers, n.d., 83-93.

\textsuperscript{41} My use of the word “Sunni” needs a qualification in keeping with its popular use in Keralite Islam: Sunni here exclusively refers to the majority of Mappila Muslims of Kerala who follow the Shafii school of Islamic law, often dubbed “traditionalists” by the “reformist” Salafi groups
literally means *The Abridged*), in his work Shaikh Zainuddin has offered a cross-section of popular *mawlid* narratives in the Arab-Islamic tradition.

Written in Arabic with a high degree of literary ornamentation, *Manqus* tastefully alternates five passages in flowery rhymed prose (except when Quranic verses or *hadith* reports are intercalated, which are presented as they are) with interludes of devotional poetry—all of them never failing to recreate, with all pomp and show, the wonders, *inter alia*, preceding, accompanying and following the much sought-after birth of the Prophet Muhammad.

---

[1] because of their participation in contentious Islamic practices such as the *mawlid* and saint veneration—the seemingly “polytheistic” practices from the Salafi point of view. Sunnis are the followers of the “traditionalist” ulama organization Samastha Kerala Jam’iyyathul Ulama (“Samastha,” for short) or its splinter groups. The foremost “reformist” Islamic group in Kerala is Kerala Nadwathul Mujahideen (K. N. M.) with its own breakaway factions, and its supporters are known as “Mujahids.” See Miller (1976); Samad (1998); and Osella and Osella 2008. Throughout this dissertation, when I say “Mappilas” I am thinking of “Sunni Mappilas,” unless otherwise stated, as it is to them that Mappila devotional genres such as the *mawlid* and the *mala* carry recitative and performative value geared to the program of ethical formation.

42 It has been argued by some Mappila researchers that the correct title of this popular *mawlid* is not *manqus*, meaning “abridged” or “shortened” but *mankus*, meaning “upside-down”—drawn from a reference in the *mawlid* to the miracle of all the idols on the earth falling upside down (*wa aswbahat aswnamu al-dunya kulluha mankusatan*) at the time of the Prophet’s birth (Abdu Rahman Mangad, personal communication, dated 25 January 2013). I am less persuaded by this argument, not only because it rests on a labored interpretation of the etymology of the *mawlid*’s title with little evidence, internal or otherwise, to that effect but also because the interpretation does not stand the test of Arabic grammar. For if the title referred to “the idols fallen upside-down,” then the appropriate adjective to use would be the feminine “*mankusat(un)*,” not the masculine “*mankus(un)*,” because since *aswnam*, the plural form of the inanimate noun *swanam* (idol), is of the feminine gender, the adjective that qualifies it should also take the feminine form, according to standard Arabic grammar.
The opening passage of rhymed prose begins:

Exalted be the One who made the moon of the Prophet of right guidance rise in the month of Rabi‘ul Awwal, created his light before the creation of the world, named him Muhammad, sent him down in the last age as He had predetermined and revealed, and draped upon him a robe of beauty that He had never draped upon anyone before. Thus was born he, with a face that shamed the moon and the stars. Verily, he is the one whose intercession Adam sought and in being whose father he (Adam) took pride; the one who saved Noah from doom when he sought his help; the one who was in the loins of Abraham when he was thrown into the fire so that its flames got extinguished; the one whose mother Amina saw the angels of the heavens when she was conceiving him and upon whom the prophets entered saying to her “When you give birth to the sun of victory and right guidance, name it Muhammad.”

Then follows the Quranic verse, “Certainly, a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves; it grieves him that you should fall into distress; full of concern is he for you; to the believers is he constantly kind, constantly merciful” (The Quran, 9: 128).

After that, we read a popular hadith report that states the idea of the pre-existence of the Prophet and his primordial light:

It was reported that the Prophet said: “I was a light before God two thousand years before He created Adam. That light glorified God, and the angels glorified God with it. When God created Adam, He cast that light into his clay (of which he was made). Thus, God sent me down to earth in Adam’s loins; placed me in Noah’s loins in the ark; and put me
in the loins of Abraham when he was thrown into the fire. Then my God continued to transfer me from noble and magnificent loins into pure and immaculate wombs until He brought me forth from my parents, without their meeting in illicit congress at all.”

Then, a short poem in seven couplets appears; it is meant to be sung:

Blessings be on the Prophet, peace be on the Messenger

The Abtahi\textsuperscript{43} intercessor, the Arab darling.

This serves as a refrain that is repeated after each couplet of the poem in collective performances of the \textit{mawlid}. The actual poem is:

You rise in our midst like the full moon in stars,

Nay, you are nobler than that, O my lord, the best of the prophets!

You are mother or father? We have never seen in them

Goodness that rivals yours, O my lord, the best of the prophets!

You are our savior on the morrow through your fair intercession

Who is there for us like you, O my lord, the best of the prophets?

I have indulged myself, committing countless sins

To you I submit all my lamentations, O my lord, the best of the prophets!

\textsuperscript{43} The Prophet is called \textit{al-Abtahi} because he hailed from \textit{Bitah} between Mecca and Mina in Arabia.
Truly, we are looking to the cup of your tank to quench our thirst

On the day when my book will be spread out, O my lord, the best of the prophets!

Kindly grant us the intercession on the Day of Judgement

We would be damned without it, O my lord, the best of the prophets!

Blessings be upon the Prophet for all time, forever

So long as stars twinkle in the sky, my lord, the best of the prophets!

[2]

The second rhymed prose passage colourfully describes the Prophet’s conception, his mother Amina’s pregnancy, and the much-sought after, eventful birth of the Prophet:

Ka‘b al-Ahbar (God be pleased with him) reports: When God willed to bring out the treasured light and to reveal the hidden jewel from ‘Abdullah to the belly of Amina, the chastest of young Arab women—and that was on a Friday night in the month of Rajab—on that night God commanded (the keeper of paradise) Rizwan, peace be upon him, to open paradise. Then, the gates of the Gardens were opened; the houris and the children dressed up; glad tidings were sounded; and the morning stars blossomed. A voice called out in the heavens and the earth, “Indeed, the stored and concealed light from which the Leader of Humankind will be made has come to rest in the belly of Amina.”
When the light of our Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, was transferred from Abdullah to Amina’s belly, the Throne (al-‘arsh) shook in ecstasy, rejoicing at the good news; the Chair (al-kursiyy) gained awe and majesty; the heavens became flooded with light; and the angels roared with chants of prayer and supplication. So there was Amina on that night with light shining through her poised forehead. Thanks to him (the Prophet), she became secured against hidden fears and dangers. Signs appeared regarding the transference of his light; and the entire creation rejoiced over him.

When Amina became pregnant with the Prophet in the blissful (month of) Rajab, she was given in Sha’ban the glad news that her wish would be gratified; she was told in Ramadan, “Indeed, you are carrying the one who has been cleansed of all impurity and indecency”; in Shawwal she heard the angels of the heavens delighting her with the news that she had won the utmost fulfilment; she saw Abraham in Dhu al-Qa’da who said to her, “Be delighted with the one who is full of light, awe and splendor”; in Dhu al-Hijja Moses called on her and apprised her of the high status and great stature of Muhammad (peace be upon him); in Muharram Gabriel called out to her that the time of her childbirth had been approaching; the angels surrounded her house in Safar so she knew that the time for joy was getting closer; and at the dawn of Rabi’ul Awwal, the earth and the sky illumined, and the house of God (al-bayt) and the hill Safa brightened. Then, when the time had come for her to give birth, when the news of victory had come out, when the matter of childbirth was weighing on Amina, and when the time had come for the sun of victory to rise, the truth sparkled like light and its delightful flags were spread out in the universe. At that moment, a white bird descended from the air and beating its wings, hurriedly passed along the belly of Amina, whereupon she was seized with labour
pains on the night of Monday, the twelfth of *Rabi‘ul Awwal* and she gave birth that
morning to the Prophet of humans and jinns. God’s blessing and peace be upon him and
upon all his family and companions!

The short poem that accompanies the prose narrative has the refrain:

O my God, send blessings to the Prophet Muhammad,

The savior of creation from hellfire on the morrow!

The nine-couplet poem reads:

The beloved, (who is) the master and God-worshipper, was born

And at that time light was burning in his cheeks.

Called out Gabriel at the occasion of extolling his virtues,

“He is the crowning glory of the universe, he is Ahmad.

He is the one having eyes darkened with kohl, he is the Chosen One

He has tremendous virtues, he is the master.

He is of exquisite character, he is the dear one

He has beaming face, he is matchless.

He is the one who has been adorned with clothes

And gems so his equal will not be found.”
The angels of the heavens said with one accord,

“The beloved was born, and his like will not be born

Delighted be his peoples for seeing his face.

Indeed, this is the greatest of honours”

She gave birth to him, circumcised and with his eyes adorned with kohl,

So goes the correct, authentic hadith report.

God shower blessings upon you, O the flag of right guidance

As long as birds coo, singing on the branches.

The subject of the next prose passage is the wonders and miracles accompanying the birth of the Prophet, described in fantastic tone:

It was reported that when Amina gave birth to the Prophet, she saw a light that illuminated the castles of Busra in the land of Syria. It was reported again that Amina said: ‘When I gave birth to him I turned my eye and looked at my child but I couldn’t see him. Then I found him in the chamber, circumcised, oiled, with his eyes adorned with kohl, and clothed in a white woolen robe that was softer than silk and was diffusing fragrance all over. And I kept looking at him when a voice called out, “Keep him away from people’s eyes.” She said, “His disappearance and appearance were like nothing but
And when I became anxious about that, I saw three people coming upon me, whose faces looked as though they were moons. In the hand of one of them was a silver ewer, in the hand of the second a basin of green emerald, and in the hand of the third a piece of folded white silk. He unfolded it and took from it a seal that, with its powerful light, dazzled the eyes of its beholders. He took my son and handed him to the person of the basin as I looked on. He washed him with that water in the ewer seven times and said to his companion, “Seal between his shoulders with the seal of Prophethood (khatam al-nubuwwa). He is the last of the prophets and the master of the entire inhabitants of the heavens and the earth.”

It was said that when the Prophet was born, on that night the fire of Persia was extinguished, not having gone out before that for a thousand years; the vault of Chosroes quaked and fourteen of its battlements toppled; the lake of Sawa went dry; all the idols of the world were turned upside down; the devils were pelted with piercing meteors; the dawn of Truth broke; and the work of every disbeliever went in vain.

It was transmitted from Yahya Ibn Urwa that a group of Qurayshi people were with one of their idols. They had made that day one of their festive days, slaughtering camels and feasting. They dedicated themselves to the idol, talking silly and playing around. When they approached the idol, they found it overturned face down. They resented it and put it back to its position but it turned over in a shameful turning-over. They repeated this three times and the idol wouldn’t stand erect. When they saw this, they became overwhelmed with pain and distress and their festival gave way to mourning. Then said Uthman Ibn Huwayrith, “What is up with it? It has increased its
over-turning. Indeed, this is because of something new that happened.” And he sung with a heart raging with fire:

O the idol of festival, standing around whom are Valiant people hailing from far and near.

You turned upside down, tell us why this (happened)

Our sorrow (has left) a flood (of tears) washing away the caravan.

If you’ve (overturned) because of any sins we committed, then, truly

We’re repenting, admitting (our sins), and (are) refraining from the sin.

Or if you’ve been overpowered and turned upside down, humiliated

Then you are not the master-protector among idols.

The idol overturned because of a newborn, with whose light

Illumined all paths of the earth, fearfully.

The fire of Persia was extinguished because of it

And the Persian king sank into the depths of distress.

O the Qusay (tribe), eschew your deviance

And rush to the fold of Islam and the vast home.

The refrain of this song is:

Blessings and peace, and the noblest of greetings be
Upon the Chosen One, the Selected One, the best of creation!

The fourth passage in prose is short and continues the celebration of the prophet’s birth:

Ibn Ishaq said, ‘On the seventh day (of the Prophet’s birth), his grandfather Abdul Muttalib slaughtered (animals) for him and performed all rituals for him, as it should be. He invited the Quraysh (his tribesmen), served them food and honoured them. When they finished eating, they asked, “O Abdul Muttalib! What did you name your son?” He replied, “I named him Muhammad.” Then, they said, “You have turned away from the names of your forefathers.” He said, “I wanted him to be praised by everyone on the face of the earth.”

Then the following couplets interrupt the prose narrative, which are collectively sung in the mawlud performances:

They named the Prophet of right guidance Muhammad (the Praiseworthy)—

He is the most deserving of praise from among the people.

God’s blessings be upon him, so long as

The morning sun shines—(they named him Muhammad) at that auspicious moment.
The prose narrative continues:

When it was time for his secrets to be revealed, and when the universe had brightened with his light. Amina was sitting alone in her house, basking in the blessings of her child in solitude. She had no clue except that the light was burning in her chamber; she was overwhelmed with joy and delight; the angels and houris had all arrived; and a variety of birds had surrounded her chamber. And she heard soft murmurings as they were rushing about and rejoicing over the advent of the beloved. How could it all not have happened when it was the master of the worlds who had arrived in her house!

The corresponding song is typical:

Shower blessings, O the Lord of the worlds

Upon the master of the two universes and of the (guiding) lamps.

[Refrain]

The house where you live

Does not need any lighting.

Your shining face is our proof

On the day when people produce proofs.

The patient receiving your visitation

God offers them relief, indeed.

Whoever desires you has attained success
And risen to the highest of positions.

Sacrificing his heart in the cause of love,

Giving up (his) soul and blood.

O the noble-minded, generous one

You(r generosity is) sufficient for the ocean and the depths!

You are our savior on the morrow from burning

From the flames of hellfire and the blistering heat.

Our sins, O the Eraser of Sins, indeed prevent us

From shedding tears and crying.

Love for you is waning in our heart

Due to the stain of sin and wrongdoing.

Your lover, by God, will not despair

For your beauty and delight are impeccable!

We look forward to our intercessor

For improving our faith and way of life.

He would save us from hardship

His fragrance permeates the world.

My God, grant us our wish to visit him
Before our soul is taken away and we depart (the world).

Shower blessings on the guide

To the path of truth and solace.

[5]

Finally, the fifth passage of flowery, partially rhymed prose narrates the story of a dhimmi (a free non-Muslim under Muslim rule who is levied special taxes) who first despised the performance of the mawlid and subsequently saw the Prophet in a dream before embracing Islam along with his family:

Ali Ibn Zayd (God’s mercy be upon him) said: ‘There was a dhimmi man living very near to me. I used to invite the poor (for dinner) in the month of Rabi’ul Awwal and observe the birthday of the Prophet (God’s blessing and peace be upon him). So, the dhimmi asked me, “Why are you doing this in this month, not in others?” I replied, “Rejoicing at the birth of the Messenger of God (God’s blessing and peace be upon him) for, verily, he was born in this month.” Then, he started making fun of me. It broke my heart and I became very upset. When I slept that night, I saw the Messenger of God (God’s blessing and peace be upon him) in a dream. He asked me, “What happened to you?” I told him about my matter with the dhimmi, whereupon he said, “Don’t be sad. Truly, he will come back to you tomorrow, being a believer.”’
He (the narrator) said: ‘So I woke up. My anxiety had increased as I was expecting the fulfilment of the promise made to me and a flood of tears rolled down my cheeks. Then, lo and behold, there was a knock on the door and the dhimmi said, “Open the door, the stain of my heart has gone away. If the beloved had been with you, he had also truly been with me last night.”’

He said, ‘Then, I opened the door for him. He entered, saying, “There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.” I asked him, “What is the matter with you?” He said, “Last night, I saw a man with a handsome face, with long, delicate eyebrows, who was pleasant-smelling, awe-inspiring, and soft-cheeked. When he spoke, there was splendor about him. When he was silent, he commanded awe. He was soft-spoken. If he appeared (before you), you would say, “This is the luminous full moon.” When he walked, he exuded musk and ambergris. How handsome his face was and how sweet a smell he had! So I wanted to kiss his hands. Then he asked me, “You kiss my hand when you are on a faith that is not my own?” I asked, “Who are you—the one on account whom God has blessed me?” He said, “I am the one who has been sent down as the mercy of the worlds. I am the master of the predecessors and the successors (sayyid al-awwalin wal-akharin). I am Muhammad, the Final Prophet and the Messenger of the Lord of the worlds.” Then, I said, “There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God,” whereupon he opened his arms and hugged me. After that, he said, “This garden and that palace are for you.” I asked, “What is the proof of this?” (How do I know that it is true?) He said, “(The proof is that) you will die tomorrow.”’

The narrator says, ‘As he was describing his story to me, there was a knock at the door and a voice was singing.
If you have been honoured to have an audience (with the Prophet)

Indeed, disgust and wretchedness have gone away from us.

I asked him, “Who are these people?” He said, “My wife and daughter.” He (the narrator) says, ‘They both entered (my house), pronouncing “There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.” He asked them, “How come you became believers?” They replied, “We saw him (the Prophet) with our own eyes as you had seen him. If he had promised you one palace, he had promised us two.”’

He said, “The man died on the spot; his daughter died the following day; and his wife died the day after. God bless them all and bless us along with them!”

Praise be to God who made us part of the community of Muhammad (ummati Muhammad)—God’s blessing and peace be upon him—so long as the people remembering God remember Him and the people neglecting His remembrance neglect to remember Him!

The refrain of concluding song runs thus:

God, my Lord, God, my Lord—What an excellent Lord!

Shower blessings on this Prophet, Muhammad.
In popular performances of the Manqūs Mawlid, this refrain is seldom used, however. The more common, oft-quoted refrain is:

O my God, send blessings to the Prophet Muhammad,

The savior of creation from hellfire on the morrow!

The poem is as follows:

The month of (the Prophet’s) birth enlivened the spring of heart—

The entire creation—with remembrance of the birth of Ahmad.

Arrived glad tidings for his noble birth

And also miraculous events, on the night of the birth.

His signs and miracles are legion

(Even) jealous minds have attested to their veracity.

The full moon was split at his behest, and the sun

When it set, was brought back for him without hesitation.

Wild beasts and trees prostrated themselves for him

And invoked peace up on him after proclaiming their faith.

From short supplies, he served food and drinks to his soldiers

Until they were satiated, and his short supplies were not still over.

Due to him are special honours (al-wasīlat wal-fażilat) and high ranks.
And his laudable position (*maqamuhu al-mahmud*) on the Promised Day.

His virtues—their number knows no bounds

So praise falls short of reaching the end point.

O the master of masters! I have come to you, wanting you

I expect your protection so please don’t let me down.

I have met with what you know are hardship,

Injustice and trying weakness so please help.

I do not have any means but my love for you

So bless me in your sublime generosity—then I shall succeed.

I am your guest—and your guest,

O the best of creation, is fed on all virtues!

So be upon you from us for all time without cease

(Invocations of) God’s sacred blessing and everlasting peace

And upon all of your noble companions

And upon their successors in truth—so strive (to be one of them).

**The Closing Prayer**
The *Manqus Mawlud* ends with a short prayer as follows, although in collective performances of the *mawlud* this prayer is supplemented with other extended, and often improvised, verses of prayers:

O God! Shower blessings on our master, Muhammad, and upon the family of our master, Muhammad. Such blessings because of which You save us from all threats and trials; protect us against all diseases and dangers; cleanse us of all vices; forgive us all our sins; carry out for us all our needs; raise us to the highest of positions at your command; and bring us the utmost in all virtues in this life and after death.

O God! We beseech You by means of Your great name, the high standing of Your noble Prophet, and Your revered saint. Forgive us our sins; conceal our defects; better our conduct; expand our provisions; cure our diseases; and relieve our pains. Protect us, the people of our land, and this house of ours against deadly poison, debilitating disease, and rending epidemic (*al-waba al-qati‘*). You are the One who listens and answers!

Protect us against plague and affliction (*al-ta‘un wal-bala‘*); and save us from the befalling of Your retribution and from pestilence (*waba*). Shield us with Your light from the evils of our enemy, the evils of the damned devil, and from the scourge of pestilence and plague. O God! Do not punish us on account of our vicious deeds, and do not destroy us because of our sins. O God! We ask You that You save us from the retribution of the grave; relieve us of the Great Fear (of Doomsday); save us from the abode of ruin; and give us residence in Paradise, the eternal home—in deference to our master, Muhammad, and his righteous family.
May God shower blessings upon the best of His creation, our master, Muhammad, and upon his entire family and companions. O the Most Merciful of the merciful!

Note that affliction and pestilence are a recurrent motif in the closing prayer of the mawlud. Highly dangerous infectious diseases like plague receive special mention more times than one. Perhaps, the Arabic word *waba*, literally meaning “pestilence,” may well refer to the fatal epidemic, cholera (Faizy 2008). This pathological motif lends credence to the popular tradition that the sixteenth-century Islamic scholar and Sufi, Shaikh Zainuddin Makhdum Senior, put together the *Manqus Mawlu* when people of Ponnani and its neighbourhood were struck by deadly diseases such as cholera and asked him for help. He recommended that the mawlud should be recited in the entire pestilence-stricken area. People did so; within a few days the epidemic ceased to exist miraculously; and life returned to normalcy. Since then, many Mappilas have regarded the *Manqus Mawlu* as a cure for epidemics and chronic illnesses.\(^4\)

**Conclusion**

My main intention in offering in this chapter original translation and brief interpretation of the *Manqus Mawlu* has been to illustrate a microcosm of important *mawlid* narratives with an example from Kerala, a *mawlu* text popular with Mappilas. Narratives and songs found in the *Manqus*, or versions thereof, can be seen in any popular constellations of *mawlid* texts across the

\(^4\) See Faizy 2008, 10.
Islamic world. A typical Mappila prayer book known as *mawlid kitab* or *sabeena* in which *mawluds* and other devotional narratives circulate contains several *mawluds*, including the popular *Sharaf al-Anam*, which share narratives about the preexistence of the Prophet and the Light of Muhammad, the Prophet’s conception and Amina’s pregnancy, the miracles and wonders accompanying the Prophet’s birth, and so on. Therefore, it does not mean much to talk of *mawlid* narratives in reference to popular *mawlid* texts in different parts of the Muslim world. All *mawlid* texts are intertexts; they are quite new and, yet, quite identical. Peter Burk’s comment on the oral literary tradition is suggestive here: “…the same text is different, and different texts are the same.”\(^45\) In other words, the “same” narrative may take on different forms in different renditions and performances, whereas “different” narratives may still share common schemas, themes and motifs.\(^46\)

\(^{45}\) Quoted in Katz 2007, 28.

\(^{46}\) The importance of a philological study of the *Manqus Mawlud* can hardly be overstated, although I am not prepared for that task in this dissertation. For a list of translations and interpretations of the *Manqus Mawlud* in Arabic, Arabi Malayalam, and Malayalam, see Faizy 2008, 108-124.