

Why Do So Many Muslims Hate Dogs?

by Hugh Fitzgerald



A Muslim taxi-driver in England, one Abandi Kassim, was recently fined [for refusing to take on a blind passenger's seeing-eye dog](#) because, as Kassim claimed: "For me, it's about my religion."

There have been many such cases in the U.S., the UK, and Canada of Muslims refusing to pick up fares with seeing-eye dogs. Many of the Somali taxi drivers who made up three-quarters of the 900 taxi drivers at the Minneapolis airport refused to pick up blind passengers because of their dogs. When forced to do so, some of them simply quit.

In Toronto, [a guide dog's owner was refused taxi service by a Muslim driver](#). In Saskatchewan, [the same problem](#). In Montreal, in Ottawa, and all across Canada, Muslim drivers have refused

service to seeing-eye dogs. In London, in Nottingham, in Reading, and in Tunbridge Wells, taxi drivers have refused service to fares with dogs.

Blind or poorly sighted people with guide dogs have [been forced by Muslim bus drivers to get off](#) – often to calm the hysterical reaction of other Muslim passengers. Much worse, [killings of dogs, chiefly by poison, in areas populated mainly by Muslims has been reported in Spain, Sweden, France, and Great Britain.](#)

This Muslim hatred for dogs, as even many non-Muslims now know, has its origin in a celebrated hadith from the most authoritative collection, that by Bukhari:

*Once Gabriel promised the Prophet (that he would visit him, but Gabriel did not come) and later on he said, " **We, angels, do not enter a house which contains a picture or a dog.**" (Sahih Bukhari 4.54.50)*

Two hadith from Sahih Muslim vividly convey Muhammad's murderous hatred of dogs:

*Abdullah (b. Umar) (Allah be pleased with them) reported: **Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) ordered the killing of dogs** and we would send (men) in Medina and its corners and we did not spare any dog that we did not kill, so much so that we killed the dog that accompanied the wet she-camel belonging to the people of the desert. (Sahih Muslim 3811)*

*Ibn Mughaffal reported: The Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) **ordered killing of the dogs**, and then said: "What about them, i. e. about other dogs?" and then granted concession (to keep) the dog for hunting and the dog for (the security) of the herd, and said: "When the dog licks the utensil, wash it seven times, and rub it with earth the eighth time." (Sahih Muslim 551)*

Dogs are to be killed, according to Muhammad, with the only exception made for those that are used for hunting or to guard a herd of cattle. But *why*? And why the mysterious coupling of two disparate items deemed *haram*: “pictures and dogs”?

A little history may help us solve this mystery.

The earliest conquests of the Muslims were to the north and northwest of Arabia, Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia: places populated by Christians. To the northeast, Muslims conquered the Sasanian Empire, which was peopled by Zoroastrians.

It was easy to distinguish the Christians, and to prevent fraternizing between Muslims and Christians. Christians had paintings, icons, and statues in their homes – the very things which, according to the hadith of Bukhari, the angel Gabriel said would prevent him from entering a house. That led to Muhammad to command the same for his followers.

If Muslims were told that Muhammad, the Perfect Man (*al-insan al-kamil*) and Model of Conduct (*uswa hasana*), would not enter a house that had “pictures” (paintings, icons, statues) in it, then no Muslim would do so. And if Christians, precisely in order that members of the ruling Muslim class might enter their houses – which for those Christians could be a desirable thing, for surely they would want to curry favor with the Muslims who now ruled over them – they might find themselves more willing to do away with statues, paintings, and icons.

But dogs? Well, [dogs are revered in Zoroastrianism](#).

The conquest by the Muslim Arabs of the Sasanian Empire (Persia) by 651 made the Muslims masters of the Persian Zoroastrians. And just as the Muslims could use Muhammad’s ban on “pictures” to distinguish themselves from the Christians they conquered, a similar ban on dogs would help Muslims to distinguish themselves from the Zoroastrians they conquered:

*“Ehtirám-i sag,” or “Great respect for the dog,” is a command among Zoroastrians. **The dog is regarded as an especially benevolent and virtuous creature, which must be fed and lovingly taken care of.** The dog is praised for loyalty, intelligence and having special spiritual virtues.*

It is precisely because dogs were prized by Zoroastrians, and treated with great affection and reverence, that Muslims would want to clearly distinguish themselves from the inferior Zoroastrian infidels by treating dogs with contempt and even hatred.

Muslim attitudes toward dogs, and the fiendish cruelty with which, in Muslim Iran, both Zoroastrians and their dogs are treated by Muslims, [have been described by the celebrated scholar of Zoroastrianism, Mary Boyce](#), who lived with Zoroastrians in 1963-64:

“In Sharifabad the dogs distinguished clearly between Moslem and Zoroastrian, and were prepared to go ... full of hope into a crowded Zoroastrian assembly, or to fall asleep trustfully in a Zoroastrian lane, but would flee as before Satan from a group of Moslem boys ...

*The evidence points ... to Moslem hostility to these animals having been deliberately fostered in the first place in Iran, as a point of opposition to the old (pre-Islamic jihad conquest) faith (i.e., Zoroastrianism) there. Certainly in the Yazdi area ... Moslems found a double satisfaction in tormenting dogs, since **they were thereby both afflicting an unclean creature and causing distress to the infidel who cherished him.** There are grim ... stories from the time (i.e., into the latter half of the 19th Century) when the annual poll-tax (jizya) was exacted, of the tax gatherer tying a Zoroastrian and a dog together, and flogging both alternately until the money was somehow forthcoming, or death released them.*

I myself was spared any worse sight than that of a young Moslem girl ... standing over a litter of two-week old puppies, and suddenly kicking one as hard as she could with her shod foot. The puppy screamed with pain, but at my angry intervention she merely said blankly: "But it's unclean."

In Sharifabad I was told by distressed Zoroastrian children of worse things: a litter of puppies cut to pieces with a spade-edge, and a dog's head laid open with the same implement; and occasionally the air was made hideous with the cries of some tormented animal. Such wanton cruelties on the Moslems' part added not a little to the tension between the communities."

The extreme cruelty of the Muslims – even Muslim children – to dogs should not surprise us. Nothing in the behavior of Muslims toward the most helpless of non-Muslims, the Zoroastrian remnant in Yazd, should surprise us, as it did not surprise the learned Mary Boyce.

So the next time you read about Muslim taxi-drivers refusing to pick up passengers with dogs, or about Muslims in the Middle East fiendishly torturing dogs to death, look for the explanation in the conquest by Muslims of the Sasanian Empire, and the desire to distinguish themselves, 1400 years ago, from the "infidels" whom they conquered.

First published in