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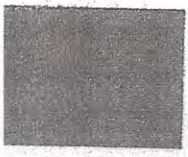

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The Seal of the Prophets and the Finality of Prophecy

On the Interpretation of the Qur'ānic Sūrat al-Aḥzāb (33)[1]

By Uri Rubin, Tel-Aviv

Summary: This article begins by reconsidering Q 33:40 which opens with the declaration that Muḥammad "is not the father of any of your men". It will be argued that this does not mean that Muḥammad is sonless, as is usually assumed by modern scholars, but rather that he is free to marry the divorced wife of Zayd b. Ḥāritha, his adopted son. The assertion that Muḥammad is "the seal of the prophets", which appears in the second half of the same verse, is designed to demonstrate that Muḥammad brings the successive chain of prophetic revelations to its final manifestation. This notion implies that Muḥammad enjoys God's protection like any other prophet before him, especially Moses whose contemporaries criticized him for having married a black woman. They were punished for their criticism, and so will be those who doubted the lawfulness of Muḥammad's own marriage with Zayd's divorcee. As for the specific significance of the qur'ānic seal metaphor, this article goes on to show that it denotes confirmation as well as finality of prophecy. This means that the finality of prophecy is a qur'ānic idea, not a post-qur'ānic one, as maintained by some modern scholars. A reconsideration of the texts on which these scholars rely (including biblical and post-biblical ones) will show that these texts do not bear out their opinion.

A recently published monograph by David Powers[2] has reopened the discussion of a qur'ānic verse which contains the statement that "Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men but the messenger of God and the seal of the prophets" (Q 33:40). Powers' basic idea is that the qur'ānic text as we have it before us underwent a process of secondary omissions and additions which were designed to adapt the Qur'ān to the dogma of the finality of prophecy. In Powers' view, this is a relatively late dogma, which not only affected the qur'ānic textual structure, but was also the origin of various traditions about Zayd b. Ḥāritha, Muḥammad's adopted son. Powers maintains that Zayd's very existence stood in sharp contrast to the post-qur'ānic dogma that Muḥammad was the last prophet, and therefore it was necessary

[1] This article was prepared with the support of the Irene Halmos Chair for Arabic Literature, at Tel Aviv University. My thanks are due to the anonymous readers who commented on previous versions of this study. I should also like to thank David Powers for sharing his ideas with me through an e-mail correspondence, back in 2008.

[2] David S. Powers: *Muḥammad is Not the Father of Any of Your Men: The Making of the Last Prophet*. Philadelphia 2009.

to circulate traditions recounting Zayd's death in battle, thus predeceasing Muḥammad.

POWERS' analysis of Q 33:40 is designed to support a whole set of ideas encompassing several other qur'ānic passages, including the *kalāla* verses (Q 4:12 and 4:176) which pertain to laws of inheritance. These ideas will remain beyond the scope of the present article which is confined to the study of the term *khātam al-nabiyyīn*. Accordingly, I shall begin with a fresh attempt at reading Q 33:40 within the context of the entire *sūra* in which it occurs; I shall reexamine the relationship between its two parts, namely, the statement that "Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men", and the assertion that he is "the messenger of God and the seal of the prophets". I shall try to demonstrate that both clauses share the same goal, namely, to defend the qur'ānic prophet against accusations leveled at him due to his problematic marriage with Zayd's divorced wife. The Qur'ān refers to the latter affair in close juxtaposition with the verse under discussion. I shall argue that the assertion that "Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men" does not mean that he is sonless, as modern scholars usually assume, only that no man among the extended family of believers is his biological son. This implies that Muḥammad is free to marry any of their divorced wives, including Zayd's. As for the assertion that Muḥammad is *khātam al-nabiyyīn*, I shall argue that in the context of the affair of Zayd's ex-wife, it denotes the continuation and final confirmation of the prophetic career of previous messengers, and especially that of Moses who faced similar opposition as regards his own marriage to a certain woman. Moses' name is indeed mentioned explicitly in the same *sūra*. Further on, I shall study some crucial extra-qur'ānic texts which reveal the manner in which early Muslim exegetes, who already knew that Muḥammad had died leaving no son behind, have subjected the interpretation of the two clauses of Q 33:40 to their own new aims, and mainly to the urge to find divine justification for Muḥammad's tragic, and hence dogmatically perplexing, sonlessness. It will become evident that they have read Muḥammad's sonlessness into the interpretation of the first clause of Q 33:40, and turned Muḥammad's status as the Seal of the Prophets into the reason why he had to die sonless. The extra-qur'ānic texts, including some Christian ones, will also be examined in order to find out whether the idea of the finality of prophecy is relatively late, as suggested not only by POWERS, but by several other modern scholars. On the whole, the following study will lead to the conclusion that, at least as far as Sūra 33 is concerned, the consonantal structure of the qur'ānic text as we have it before us has not been tampered with, and that the idea of the finality of prophethood is well represented in this text, as well as in the earliest available extra-qur'ānic materials.

1 The qur'ānic context of *khātam al-nabiyyīn*

The term *khātam al-nabiyyīn* appears only once in the Qur'ān, in Sūrat al-Aḥzāb (33). According to the traditional Islamic chronology of revelation, this *sūra* was revealed in Medina,[3] and apart from passages alluding to the warlike clash between Muḥammad and the *aḥzāb* ("parties")—which is probably the battle of the "Ditch" (5/627)—it contains several verses that pertain to Muḥammad's status within the Medinan family of believers, as well as verses defining his position among the prophets. Verse 40 combines the two aspects of Muḥammad's status:

> Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men, but the messenger of God and the seal of the prophets; and God knows all things.

1.1 "Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men"

The first clause, "Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men", has been one of the main issues of Powers' above-mentioned monograph. Powers bases his analysis of this clause on the assumption that it states that Muḥammad has no adult son.[4] Already before Powers, other scholars read this clause in the same manner.[5] Powers postulates further that Q 33:40 as a whole articulates the connection between Muḥammad's status as the seal of the prophets and his sonlessness.[6] Assuming that this clause declares that Muḥammad is sonless, Powers argues that it could not have been part of the earliest Qur'ān version, because Muḥammad's sonlessness could not have been predicted as long as he was alive and sexually active.[7]

The problem with this reading of the first clause of Q 33:40 is that it is influenced by the testimony of extra-qur'ānic sources which tell us that Muḥammad died sonless (see below). It seems, however, that rather than relying on the evidence of extra-qur'ānic materials, which, as will be seen below, have their own retrospective perception of the Qur'ān, a better approach would be to begin with trying to understand Q 33:40 by reading it

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[3] It appears 4th among the Medinan *sūras* listed by 'Aṭā' al-Khurāsānī (d. 135/753). For his list see Muḥammad b. Ayyūb b. al-Ḍurays: *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*. Ed. Ghazwat Budayr. Damascus 1987, pp. 33–34. The list recurs in later sources. See N. Robinson: *Discovering the Qur'ān: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*. Washington ²2003, pp. 69–70.

[4] Powers 2009, p. 51.

[5] E.g. E. Landau-Tasseron: "Adoption, Acknowledgement of Paternity and False Genealogical Claims in Arabian and Islamic Societies." In: BSOAS 66 (2003), p. 169: "[Q 33:40 states] that the Prophet had no male offspring".

[6] Powers 2009, pp. 68, 149. See also idem: "Adoption." In: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*.

[7] Powers 2009, p. 70.

within its own internal context. Such a reading will lead to the conclusion that the declaration that "Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men" does not mean that he is sonless, and hence there is no reason to suspect its position within the earliest version of the Qur'ān.

The addressees in the verse at hand are the believers, to whom God speaks directly, in the second person ("you"), while referring to Muḥammad indirectly, in the third person ("he").[8] The denial of Muḥammad's fatherhood, which God includes in his address to the believers, seems to pertain to the prophet's status among these believers who are perceived as constituting one extended family to which one belongs by faith, not by birth. This means that Muḥammad's fatherhood that is denied in this verse is not in the biological sense—the one that applies to his nuclear family—but rather in the spiritual or legal one, which applies to the extended family of believers.

Other passages in the same *sūra* seem to bear out this observation. The first clause of Q 33:6 reads:

> The prophet is nearer *(awlā)* to the believers than they are to themselves, and his wives are their mothers ...

POWERS has approached this verse from the perspective of a *qirā'a* ("variant reading") reported in the extra-qur'ānic sources;[9] we shall return to it later on, and for the time being let us try and understand this verse according to the widely-accepted version as we have it before us. As will be seen below, variant readings as reported in the extra-qur'ānic sources should be handled with the utmost caution, because more often than not they are exegesis *(tafsīr)* disguised as *qirā'āt*.[10]

We begin with the declaration that Muḥammad's wives are the "mothers" of the believers. This seems to mean that within the extended family of believers, the prophet's wives must be treated as if they were the believers' own mothers. The legal context of a case in which a woman is declared to be a "mother" becomes clear in view of yet another verse within the very same *sūra*. The first clause of Q 33:4 forbids the practice of *ẓihār* (see also Q 58:2–4), according to which a husband who intends to divorce his wife gives up sexual intercourse with her, swearing that her body is forbidden to him as if she were his "mother".[11]

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[8] POWERS 2009, p. 70, observes that "had this verse been revealed to Muḥammad, it might have begun as follows: 'O, Muḥammad, you are not the father of any of their men.'" However, the Qur'ān contains several other instances in which God addresses a larger audience, with indirect reference to the qur'ānic prophet (e.g. Q 3:144; 24:63; 49:2; 53:2, etc.).

[9] POWERS 2009, pp. 65–66.

[10] See e.g. G.S. REYNOLDS: *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext*. London/New York 2010, pp. 208–214.

[11] Cf. POWERS 2009, p. 63; H. MOTZKI: "Marriage and divorce." In: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*.

It follows that in this verse, "mother" is a legal term pertaining to a relationship between the sexes that cannot include bodily contacts. This takes us back to Muḥammad's wives. They are declared as "mothers" within the extended family of believers, which means that there can be no spousal relationship between them and the believers, so that Muḥammad remains their only husband throughout their lives. In another verse in the same *sūra* (Q 33:53), the believers are indeed warned never to marry Muḥammad's wives after him.[12] This restriction is imposed on Muḥammad's wives alongside other moral duties listed in further verses found in the same *sūra* (Q 33:28–34). The principle on which these instructions are based seems to be that the family of the prophet must be kept pure.[13]

But the most significant point that should be noticed in Q 33:6 is that if Muḥammad's wives are declared to be "mothers" of the believers, he himself, by simple logic, should have been declared their "father." But no! Q 33:6 is careful not to confer on Muḥammad the title "father" within the extended family of believers, asserting instead that he is "nearer *(awlā)* to them than they are to themselves". This clause should be read together with the next clause of the same verse in which the word *awlā* recurs yet again. This time it is declared that blood relatives are "nearer"—*awlā*—to one another than the believers and the *Muhājirūn*. This means that blood relationship may supersede relationship based on common faith shared by all those who have performed *hijra*. This seems to apply to inheritance in particular, which, according to this verse, should go to blood relatives, be they even unbelievers (see also Q 8:75).[14] Therefore the assertion that Muḥammad is "nearer" to the believers than they are to themselves seems to mean that as far as his relationship to the believers is concerned, faith does supersede blood relationship. In other words, on the level of the family of believers, the latter are committed to the prophet more than they are to their own fathers. This articulates Muḥammad's status as a leader whose will overrules that of the believers' blood relatives.

On the personal level, Q 33:6 creates a sharp distinction between Muḥammad and his wives: Since they are the "mothers" of the believers, they will never remarry, but since he is not declared the believers' "father", he may well take new wives for himself from amongst them. This takes us back to Q 33:40. Here, what is implicit in Q 33:6 becomes explicit: "Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men", i. e. the restrictions pertaining to marital bonds with women connected to "your men" do not apply to him.

[12] See further, Powers 2009, p. 64.

[13] W. Madelung: *The Succession to Muḥammad: a Study of the Early Caliphate*. Cambridge 1997, pp. 14–15. For a different perception cf. Powers 2009, p. 65.

[14] Powers 2009, pp. 63–64.

The fact that the verse says "of your men" *(min rijālikum)*, and not merely, "of any man" *(mina l-rijāli)*, deserves special attention. This particular wording indicates that the verse refers to adult persons amongst the addressees, not within Muḥammad's own nuclear family. But the question arises, why is it not enough to point out that Muḥammad is not the "father" of any of the addressed believers, and focus instead on the men amongst them? The answer seems to be found only a few lines earlier in the same *sūra*, in Q 33:37:

> When you said to him to whom God has shown favor and to whom you have shown a favor: Keep your wife to yourself and be fearful of God; and you concealed in your heart what God would bring to light, and you feared people, and God has a greater right that you should fear Him. But when Zayd accomplished his want of her, we gave her to you as a wife, so that there should be no fault in the believers concerning the wives of their adopted sons, when they have accomplished their want of them; and God's command shall be performed.

This verse deals with Muḥammad's marriage to the former wife of a person called Zayd. The verse seems to allude to rumors that were spread concerning the lawfulness of the marriage, therefore God instructs Muḥammad not to be intimidated by what other people say; he should only fear God. The verse concludes with the pronouncement that God has given Zayd's wife to Muḥammad in lawful marriage, "so that there should be no fault *(ḥaraj)* in the believers concerning the wives of their adopted sons". This indicates that Zayd is Muḥammad's adoptee—evidently the one who is known in the extra-qur'ānic sources as Zayd b. Ḥāritha.[15] The latter's status as Muḥammad's adoptee is surely what renders Muḥammad's marriage to Zayd's former wife problematic, because the woman could be regarded as Muḥammad's daughter-in-law. However, God asserts that there is no fault in this marriage. The reason is provided in yet another verse in the same *sūra* (Q 33:4) which declares that "God has not made your adopted sons your sons" *(wa-mā jaʿala adʿiyāʾakum abnāʾakum)*.[16] This means that from the legal point of view, adopted sons belong to their biological fathers. Accordingly, the Qurʾān goes on to say in the following verse (Q 33:5) that adopted sons should from now on be called by the name of their (biological) fathers, and if those fathers are unknown, the adopted sons should be called "your brethren in the religion ..."[17]

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[15] See on him LANDAU-TASSERON 2003, p. 169; M. LECKER: "Zayd b. Ḥāritha." In: EI².

[16] On the significance of Q 33:4, see further LANDAU-TASSERON 2003, pp. 185–186.

[17] On the affair of Zayd's wife, see further H. BOBZIN: "'The Seal of the Prophets': Towards an Understanding of Muḥammad's Prophethood." In: A. NEUWIRTH/N. SINAI/M. MARX (eds.): *The Qurʾān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the qurʾānic Milieu*. Leiden 2010, pp. 576–577.

Coming back to the assertion in Q 33:40 that Muḥammad "is not the father of any of your men", it is now possible to surmise that the wording "your men" alludes to Zayd in particular. It is designed to make it clear that no legal father-son relationship exists between Muḥammad and the believers at large, and in particular with the adult men among them, be they even his adopted sons. Therefore none of their former wives—or even sisters or daughters, for that matter—is forbidden to him. More specifically, Muḥammad's marriage with Zayd's former wife is lawful.

Having said that, it may be observed that there is a verse within the same *sūra* which sets limits to Muḥammad's liberty to take new wives from amongst the believers. It is Q 33:52:

> It is not lawful to you to take women thereafter, nor that you should exchange them for other wives, though their beauty may please you, except what your right hand possesses and God is watchful over all things.

The interdiction to take women "thereafter" seems to mean that Zayd's former wife should be the last to become Muḥammad's wife from amongst the believers, but his slave-girls ("what your right hand possesses") are still allowed to him.

In conclusion, the message of the first clause of Q 33:40 seems to be this:

> [The prophet's marriage with Zayd's former wife is lawful *because*] Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men ...

It follows that nothing is said in the first clause of Q 33:40 (or elsewhere in the Qur'ān, for that matter—see below) about Muḥammad's personal situation as a real father within his own nuclear family; therefore this verse cannot be taken to mean that Muḥammad is sonless. As far as the Qur'ān lets us know, he may or may not have adult sons of his own. Differently put: Just as the declaration that Muḥammad's wives are the mothers of the believers does not necessarily mean that they have children of their own, the pronouncement that "Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men" does not necessarily mean that he has no son and is doomed to die sonless. Consequently, there is no room for doubts as regards the position of this statement within the earliest version of Sūrat al-Aḥzāb.

1.2 God's messenger and the seal of the prophets

Following on the assertion that no legal father-son relationship links Muḥammad to "your men", comes the statement that Muḥammad is "God's messenger and the seal of the prophets". This pronouncement shifts the discourse of Q 33:40 from the level of the believers to the level of the prophets;

thus it seems to be linked directly to the preceding passage which concludes the affair of Zayd (Q 33:38–9):

> [33:38] There is no fault *(ḥaraj)* in the prophet doing that which God has ordained *(faraḍa)* for him; such has been the way *(sunna)* of God with respect to those who have passed away before, and God's commandment is decreed— [33:39] those who were delivering the messages of God and feared him, and did not fear anyone but God; and God is sufficient to take account.

This passage continues the qur'ānic endeavor to exonerate Muḥammad from any fault *(ḥaraj)* regarding "that which God has ordained for him", i.e. his marriage to Zayd's former wife. Now it is asserted that the case of Muḥammad's marriage to Zayd's divorcée agrees with God's *sunna* as was already implemented through the past messengers. They too proceeded in whatever they did, while fearing no one but God.

The *sunna* of God is mentioned in yet another passage in the same *sūra* (Q 33:60–62):

> [33:60] If the hypocrites *(al-munāfiqūn)* and those in whose hearts is a disease and the agitators in the city *(al-madīna)* do not desist, we shall most certainly set you over them, then they shall not be your neighbors in it but for a little while; [33:61] Cursed be they, and wherever they are found they shall be seized and killed, a (horrible) killing. [33:62] (Such has been) the way *(sunna)* of God with respect to those who have gone before; and you shall find no alternation in the way *(sunna)* of God.

Here God's *sunna* stands for the resolute manner in which he used to punish the adversaries of his messengers throughout history. This *sunna* is here invoked as a warning to Muḥammad's opponents—the "hypocrites" and the "agitators" who stand to be expelled from "the city" if they continue harassing Muḥammad. One is tempted to think that the threat is directed mainly at the Jews of Medina.[18] This ominous sense of God's *sunna* recurs in further qur'ānic passages warning Muḥammad's adversaries of the fate of those who persecuted the previous prophets (Q 17:77; 35:43; 40:85; 48:23).[19]

The particular prophet the Qur'ān means when alluding to God's *sunna* in our *sūra* seems to be Moses, whose name is mentioned explicitly in another verse in the same Sūrat al-Aḥzāb (Q 33:69. Cf. Q 61:5):

> O you who believe, be not like those who hurt Moses, but God cleared him of what they said ...

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[18] BOBZIN (2010, pp. 577–578) suggests that the passage about Zayd, as well as Q 33:40, refer to the Jews of Medina in particular.

[19] On the qur'ānic usage of *sunna* cf. U. RUBIN: *Between Bible and Qur'ān: the Children of Israel and the Islamic Self-Image*. Princeton N.J. 1999, pp. 168–169.

Modern scholars have observed long ago that this verse alludes to Numbers 12:1–15 where Miriam and Aaron disparage Moses for having taken a black ("Cushite") woman as a wife. God punished them severely.[20] Therefore, the assertion in Q 33:38 that Muḥammad's marriage to Zayd's former wife represents God's *sunna* with previous messengers seems to mean that as with Moses, God will again protect his messenger—this time Muḥammad—against those who disparage him regarding his own marriage.[21]

Accordingly, the second clause of Q 33:40 seems to elaborate on the same idea: In his capacity as "the messenger of God and the seal of the prophets", Muḥammad's prophecy runs in the same historical course that already ensured protection to God's previous messengers who found themselves in similar situations of disparagement on the part of other people. The concluding clause of Q 33:40 seems to carry through the same hidden warning: "God knows everything", i.e. he is aware of who supports the prophet and who opposes him.

In conclusion, the message conveyed in Q 33:40 seems to be this:

> (The prophet's marriage to Zayd's former wife is lawful because) Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men, but the messenger of God and the seal of the prophets (therefore his conduct corresponds to the precedent of previous messengers whom God has justified and protected in similar situations), and God knows everything.

It may be observed that yet another verse in the same *sūra* (Q 33:7) delineates a further aspect of the correlation between Muḥammad's prophetic mission and that of the previous prophets:

> We made a covenant with the prophets and with you, and with Noah and Abraham and Moses and Jesus son of Mary, and we made with them a solemn covenant.

This verse asserts that Muḥammad acts under the same covenant to which the greatest among the previous prophets were equally committed.[22] This is complementary to the message conveyed in the second clause of Q 33:40, which highlights the exact and most perfect continuity between Muḥammad's prophecy and that of the previous prophets.

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[20] See R. Paret: *Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkordanz*. Stuttgart 1971, p. 401 (with reference to Geiger and Speyer).

[21] Powers (2009, pp. 48–49) observes that according to Muqātil b. Sulaymān, Q 33:38 alludes to the affair of David and Bath-Sheba. But again, it is better to follow the internal context of Sūrat al-Aḥzāb which leads to Moses. On more general aspects of Moses as a paradigm, see Bobzin 2010, pp. 579–581.

[22] Cf. Bobzin 2010, p. 575.

1.3 The root kh-t-m

Although the immediate message of Muḥammad's description as "the messenger of God and the seal of the prophets" seems to be the exact fulfillment of the history of past prophecies, the title *khātam al-nabiyyīn* appears to bear an additional sense that goes beyond "continuity" or "fulfillment". My reason for this consideration is that for the mere idea of fulfillment per se, the Qur'ān has the term *muṣaddiq*. When applied to Muḥammad, this designation means that he confirms, or fulfills, what has been foretold by previous prophets.[23] This corresponds to the qur'ānic tenet that the description of Muḥammad, as well as of his community, is found in the Torah and the Injīl (Q 48:29). Moreover, the Qur'ān also describes other prophets as *muṣaddiq*,[24] whereas only Muḥammad is a *muṣaddiq* as well as the "seal of the prophets". Therefore the title *khātam al-nabiyyīn* must mean something more than just *muṣaddiq*. With this we come to the verb *khatama*.

In all the occurrences of this verb in the Qur'ān, it means to seal something so that it must remain closed.[25] It is used especially in connection with the hearts of the unbelievers on which God "has set a seal" (Q 2:7; 6:46; 45:23; 42:24), as well as concerning their mouths which God has shut up from speaking (Q 36:65).[26] The same idea is conveyed by the verb *ṭabaʿa* (e.g. Q 9:93; 16:108, etc.). Judging by this prevailing sense of *khatama*, the noun *khātam*, of which the verb *khatama* is a derivative,[27] may well stand for a prophet with whom God has sealed—i.e. "closed up" the universal line of prophetic revelation, after it has reached its most perfect fulfillment through the advent of this prophet. In other words, the notion of finality seems to be inherent in the qur'ānic seal metaphor, and inseparable from the ideas of accurate continuity, fulfillment or confirmation.

2 Finality of prophecy: Modern scholarship

The observation that the qur'ānic *khātam al-nabiyyīn* bears the sense of finality alongside that of fulfillment or confirmation stands in contrast to the general trend pursued by modern scholars who have studied the Islamic

[23] See Q 2:101; 3:81. The Qur'ān, too, is *muṣaddiq*, i.e. confirms the monotheistic message delivered in previous scriptures: Q 2:41, 89, 91, 97; 3:3; 4:47; 5:48; 6:92; 35:31; 46:12, 30.

[24] Jesus: Q 3:50; 5:46; 61:6. John: Q 3:39.

[25] A.A. AMBROS: *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic*. Wiesbaden 2004, p. 83.

[26] In Q 83:26 we hear of a "sealed" *(makhtūm)* drink offered to the righteous in paradise, whose seal (here: *khitām* instead of *khātam*) is musk. Perhaps this imagery pertains to the aftertaste of the beverage.

[27] A. JEFFERY: *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*. Baroda 1938, p. 121.

dogma of the finality of prophecy. The first to have studied in detail the history of this dogma is YOHANAN FRIEDMANN, to whom we owe our knowledge of the relevant materials which he has carefully assembled in his studies.[28] It is only thanks to FRIEDMANN's invaluable contribution that we are now able to explore the materials and reconsider them. FRIEDMANN's main conclusion has been that

> While it is true that the phrase *khātam al-nabiyyīn* is generally interpreted as meaning 'the last prophet', the exegetical tradition and other branches of classical Arabic literature preserved material which indicates that this now generally received understanding of the qur'ānic phrase is not the only possible one and had not necessarily been the earliest.[29]

WILFERD MADELUNG has taken into consideration FRIEDMANN's findings in observing that the accepted Islamic view according to which *khātam al-nabiyyīn* means the last prophet is not entirely granted.[30] Similarly, HARTMUT BOBZIN argues:

> Yet the mere fact that "prophetic" movements within Islam have arisen again and again shows that the word "seal" *(khātam)* has also been understood differently, not just as indicating the finality of Muḥammad's prophethood, but also in the sense of confirmation, i. e., as a form of continuity with earlier prophets.[31]

Other modern scholars have been less hesitant. POWERS holds that the idea of finality became the prevailing one—alongside the earlier notion of confirmation—by the end of the first century AH.[32] GERALD HAWTING has gone even farther, in suggesting that the development of the Islamic doctrine of the finality of prophecy was not complete before the 3rd/9th century.[33]

The skepticism of the modern scholars concerning the early provenance of the dogma of the finality of prophethood is based solely on the evidence of extra-qur'ānic materials, not on the Qur'ān itself, especially not on the function of the root *kh.t.m.* which they do not discuss at all, at least not in its qur'ānic context. Moreover, it seems that even in the extra-qur'ānic texts which the scholars have adduced, the idea of finality appears to have been inherent in the seal metaphor from the very outset. Conversely, none of these texts seems to indicate that the notion of finality of prophecy is

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[28] Y. FRIEDMANN: "Finality of Prophethood in Sunnī Islam." In: *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 7 (1986), pp. 177–215. See also IDEM: *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Aḥmadī Religious Thought and its Medieval Background*. Berkeley 1989, pp. 49–93.

[29] FRIEDMANN 1986, p. 183.

[30] MADELUNG 1997, p. 17, with note 34.

[31] BOBZIN 2010, p. 565.

[32] POWERS 2009, pp. 54, 151, 226.

[33] G. HAWTING: Review of POWERS 2009. In: *Islamic Law and Society* 18 (2011), p. 118.

relatively late. But apart from confirming the early origin of the notion that Muḥammad was the last prophet, these texts also reveal the manner in which the exegetes reinterpreted Q 33:40 according to a new dogmatic perception based on the finality of prophecy. Let us now turn to these texts and examine them more closely.

3 Ibrāhīm's prophecy

One of the main pieces of evidence which modern scholars have adduced as though indicating the late provenance of the idea that Muḥammad was the last prophet are traditions revolving around the death in infancy of Muḥammad's son, Ibrāhīm. According to the Islamic sources, this son was born to Muḥammad by Māriya the Copt, who, in 7/629, had been sent to Muḥammad as a gift from the Patriarch of Alexandria (al-Muqawqis).[34] She became Muḥammad's concubine, and as it turned out, her son Ibrāhīm was the only one born to Muḥammad in Medina. All of Muḥammad's other children had been born to him in Mecca, before the *hijra*, by Khadīja.[35] Ibrāhīm died when he was less than two years old, and a few months later Muḥammad himself passed away, leaving no son behind.[36] There is no compelling reason to doubt the factual level of these reports; hence we may safely assume that Muḥammad died sonless. It goes without saying that in the Qur'ān, this fact about Muḥammad could not yet be predicted.

The first tradition about Ibrāhīm which FRIEDMANN has quoted says that when Ibrāhīm was buried, Muḥammad proclaimed: "By God, he is a prophet son of a prophet."[37] FRIEDMANN considers this tradition, as well as others presenting Ibrāhīm as a would-be prophet, as incompatible with the idea that Muḥammad was the last prophet. More specifically, FRIEDMANN asserts with reference to some of these traditions that

> The idea that Ibrāhīm would have become a prophet if he had only lived long enough is important because it does not seem to reflect awareness of the belief in the finality of Muḥammad's prophethood. Alternatively, it chooses to disregard it.[38]

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[34] Ibn Sa'd: *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt*. Beirut 1960, I, p. 134; Muḥammad b. Mukarram b. Manẓūr: *Mukhtaṣar Ta'rīkh Dimashq li-Ibn ʿAsākir*. Damascus 1984–1988, II, p. 290; Ismā'īl b. ʿUmar Ibn Kathīr: *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*. Beirut 1974, V, p. 304. Cf. POWERS 2009, p. 56.

[35] See POWERS 2009, p. 9; M. J. KISTER: "The Sons of Khadīja." In: *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 16 (1993), pp. 70–73.

[36] Cf. POWERS 2009, p. 56.

[37] FRIEDMANN 1986, pp. 187–188; IDEM 1989, pp. 59–60. Cf. POWERS 2009, pp. 56–57.

[38] FRIEDMANN 1986, p. 190.

I beg to differ. In order to elucidate the proper context of Muḥammad's statement that Ibrāhīm is "a prophet son of a prophet", we must begin with looking at the full text of the tradition in which Muḥammad makes this crucial announcement. The tradition is transmitted by Isḥāq b. Muḥammad al-Farawī (Medinan, d. 226/840) with an *isnād* leading back to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, Muḥammad's first cousin. The tradition relates that as soon as Ibrāhīm was dead, Muḥammad sent ʿAlī to Māriya's abode, where she lived with her child;[39] ʿAlī put the tiny body in a basket and brought it to Muḥammad's house where it was washed and wrapped up in a shroud. In the funeral, ʿAlī placed the body in the grave and covered it with soil, then sprinkled water on it, and then Muḥammad put his own hand into a hole that was left above the grave and proclaimed that Ibrāhīm was "a prophet son of a prophet".[40]

Apart from Ibrāhīm's prophecy, to which we shall soon return, a more significant point in Muḥammad's declaration is Ibrāhīm's paternity. His father is a prophet as well. In other words, Muḥammad acknowledges that Ibrāhīm is his son and no one else's.

That Ibrāhīm's paternity is the main issue in Muḥammad's declaration seems to be corroborated by a series of additional traditions to which the present one seems to belong. Several of them provide further aspects of ʿAlī's mission at Māriya's dwellings. One of these traditions has an *isnād* leading back to al-Zuhrī (Medinan d. 124/742) who relates the story on the authority of the Companion Anas b. Mālik (d. *ca.* 91–95/709–713). Anas says that Māriya had a Coptic companion who used to visit her and provide her with water and firewood, till people began to talk, saying: "A non-Arab foreigner *(ʿilj)* has entered the residence of a female-non-Arab foreigner *(ʿilja)*." Muḥammad heard about it and sent ʿAlī to kill the Coptic companion, but as soon as the latter saw ʿAlī waving his sword at him, he was startled, letting his cloth drop off, and thereupon ʿAlī could see that this man was gelded. This seems to imply that he was a eunuch officially employed as Māriya's domestic.[41] Thereupon ʿAlī retreated, told about it to Muḥammad, but the prophet did not stop worrying, till at last, when Māriya gave birth to Ibrāhīm, Gabriel descended and congratulated Muḥammad, saying: "Peace

[39] It is reported that Muḥammad allotted to her an estate he possessed in the formerly Jewish territory of the Banū l-Naḍīr. See Ibn Manẓūr 1984–1988, II, p. 290; Ibn Kathīr 1974, V, p. 303.

[40] Abū l-Qāsim ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasan b. Hibatullāh b. ʿAsākir: *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*. Ed. ʿUmar b. Gharāma l-ʿAmrawī. Beirut 1415/1995–1421/2000, III, pp. 144–145; Ibn Kathīr 1974, V, pp. 310–311 (from Ibn ʿAsākir).

[41] There are other reports about a eunuch named Mābūr who came from Egypt together with Māriya as part of the gift from the Patriarch of Alexandria. See Ibn Manẓūr 1984–1988, II, p. 264; Ibn Kathīr 1974, V, p. 303. See also C. Cannuyer: "Māriya, la concubine copte de Muḥammad, réalité ou mythe?" In: *Acta Orientalia Belgica* 21 (2008), p. 253.

be upon you, O, father of Ibrāhīm." In other words, you, Muḥammad, are Ibrāhīm's real father. Only then, Anas tells us, did Muḥammad regain his peace of mind.[42] Other sources provide a shorter—less juicy—version of al-Zuhrī's tradition: When Ibrāhīm was born, Muḥammad's heart was filled with some doubts concerning him *(kāda an yaqaʿa fī l-nabiyyi [ṣ] minhu shayʾun)*. The prophet was put at ease only when Gabriel descended and congratulated him, saying: "Peace be upon you, O, father of Ibrāhīm."[43] Earlier sources already have the tradition about Gabriel's address to Muḥammad as *Abū Ibrāhīm*, but without spelling out the delicate circumstances in which it was made.[44]

As for ʿAlī's part, it is recounted already in a tradition of Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/768) as transmitted by Yūnus b. Bukayr (d. 199/815). This version relates that people used to chatter about Māriya and a Coptic companion of hers; therefore Muḥammad ordered ʿAlī to go and kill him. When ʿAlī approached him, the latter exposed himself, to show that he was gelded. When ʿAlī updated Muḥammad about him, the prophet was relieved and exclaimed: "Praise belongs to God who has removed (this disgrace) from us, the people of the house" *(al-ḥamdu li-llāhi lladhī yaṣrifu ʿannā ahla l-bayti)*.[45]

The atmosphere that all the above versions impart is one of suspicion roused by the presence of a foreign woman *(ʿilja)* among Muḥammad's Arab spouses. The same mood is reflected in a report of al-Wāqidī (d. 207/822) to the effect that Muḥammad's wives were jealous of Māriya the Copt for having given Muḥammad his only son in Medina.[46] More specifically, al-Wāqidī tells us that ʿĀ'isha, Muḥammad's wife and Abū Bakr's daughter, was suspi-

[42] Sulaymān b. Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī: *al-Muʿjam al-awsaṭ*. Ed. MAḤMŪD AL-ṬAḤḤĀN. Riyad 1985–95, IV, p. 415 (no. 3699); Nūr al-Dīn al-Haythamī: *Majmaʿ al-zawāʾid wa-manbaʿ al-fawāʾid*. Repr. Beirut 1987, IX, p. 164.

[43] Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī: *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*. Ed. ʿABD AL-MUʿṬĪ QALʿAJĪ. Beirut 1988, I, pp. 163–64; Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī: *al-Iṣāba fī tamyīz al-ṣaḥāba*. Ed. ʿALĪ MUḤAMMAD AL-BIJĀWĪ. Cairo 1970, I, pp. 172–173; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAbdallāh al-Suhaylī: *al-Rawḍ al-unuf*. Ed. ʿABD AL-RAʾŪF SAʿD. Cairo 1971, I, p. 216; Ibn Kathīr 1974, V, p. 304.

[44] See Ibn Saʿd 1960, I, p. 135; al-Ḥākim Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh al-Naysābūrī: *al-Mustadrak ʿalā l- Ṣaḥīḥayn*. Hyderabad 1342–1923, II, p. 604; Abū Saʿd ʿAbd al-Malik b. Abī ʿUthmān al-Khargūshī: *Sharaf al-muṣṭafā*. Ed. NABĪL AL-GHAMRĪ. Mecca 2003, II, pp. 51–52 (no. 254).

[45] Yūnus b. Bukayr; *Kitāb al-siyar wa-l-maghāzī li-Muḥammad b. Isḥāq*. Ed. SUHAYL ZAKKĀR. Damascus 1978, p. 271. See also Abū Nuʿaym Aḥmad b. ʿAbdallāh al-Iṣbahānī: *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyāʾ*. Cairo 1938, repr. Beirut 1967, III, pp. 177–178; Ibn Kathīr 1974, V, p. 304. See also Ibn Manẓūr 1984–1988, II, p. 291. Another similar version is traced back to Anas b. Mālik. See Yūsuf b. ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbd al-Barr: *al-Istīʿāb fī maʿrifat al-aṣḥāb*. Ed. ʿALĪ MUḤAMMAD AL-BIJĀWĪ. Cairo 1960, IV, p. 1912.

[46] Ibn Kathīr 1974, V, p. 304 (from al-Wāqidī).

cious of Ibrāhīm's real paternity, so much so that she refused to agree with Muḥammad that Ibrāhīm resembled him more than anyone else.[47]

But apart from indicating the loaded atmosphere within Muḥammad's household, most of the accounts seem to share a common object, namely, to restore the dignity and purity of Muḥammad's family as the Muslims of the first Islamic century preferred to remember. This context explains the central role assigned to ʿAlī, which seems to reflect the special Shīʿī interest in protecting the reputation of Muḥammad's close relatives, the *ahl al-bayt*. But this could be a no less urgent purpose of the Sunnīs, as seems to be indicated in versions in which ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb replaces ʿAlī as the one who is eager to execute the Coptic suspect, until he finds out that he is a eunuch.[48]

Above all, it was important to rehabilitate the image of Māriya by making it clear that her son's father was Muḥammad and not anyone else. This is the reason why Gabriel provides divine confirmation that Muḥammad is *Abū Ibrāhīm*, and why Muḥammad himself is said to have thanked God for having saved "the people of the House" from disgrace. The same vindicating message is conveyed in a tradition relating that when Ibrāhīm died, Muḥammad proclaimed: "Ibrāhīm is my son *(Ibrāhīm ibnī)*, and he died while still suckling ..."[49]

Muḥammad's utterance that Ibrāhīm is "a prophet son of a prophet", which appears in the same cluster of traditions, seems to serve the same aim. Like Gabriel's assertion that Muḥammad is *Abū Ibrāhīm*, Muḥammad himself acknowledges that he is Ibrāhīm's father by declaring that the deceased child is "a prophet son of a prophet". This announcement not only confirms the legal paternity of Ibrāhīm but also raises his biological relationship to his real father to the highest degree possible, that of a prophet. This notion is based on the perception that prophecy is hereditary, so that Ibrāhīm emerges as a true son to his father who has inherited from him his most excellent inborn traits.

The notion that Ibrāhīm inherited prophecy from his father does not seem to contradict the idea that Muḥammad is the last prophet. The initial perception on which all the traditions about this son are based is that he died in infancy, therefore, even as heir to Muḥammad's prophecy, he could not possibly have prevented his father from remaining the last prophet.

In conclusion, Muḥammad's declaration that Ibrāhīm is "a prophet son of a prophet" does not mean that prophecy may continue after him. Likewise,

[47] Ibn Saʿd 1960, I, p. 137 (from al-Wāqidī). See also Ibn Kathīr 1974, V, p. 304. For more traditions about Ibrāhīm's resemblance to Muḥammad, see Ibn Ḥajar 1970, I, pp. 174–175.

[48] Haythamī 1987, IX, pp. 164–165. In yet another version, Māriya is the one who brings the dead child to Muḥammad. See Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad al-ʿAjlūnī: *Khashf al-khafāʾ wa-mazīl al-ilbās*. Beirut 1351/1932, II, p. 156.

[49] Ibn Saʿd 1960, I, p. 139; Ibn Manẓūr 1984–1988, II, p. 266.

this announcement does not seem to reflect the political notion that Muḥammad's rule should have been continued in his family.[50] Ibrāhīm's potential prophecy is invoked just to assert that he is a true son to Muḥammad, thus defending the purity and dignity of Muḥammad's family.

4 Muḥammad's sonlessness

Apart from securing the dignified image of Muḥammad's family, Ibrāhīm's potential prophecy could help unravel a grave theological problem connected with Muḥammad's sonlessness. This sad fact about the prophet, which became evident as soon as he was dead, was perplexing, because sonlessness was always considered a grave calamity.[51] Already in the Qur'ān, sons signify one of the clearest signs of divine blessing (Q 16:72; 17:6; 26:133; 71:12), so that the fact that Muḥammad had died sonless compelled the Muslims to bring this tragic condition in line with the evolving Islamic piety, according to which the prophet had always been under God's guidance and protection. This protection ought to have spared him the misfortune of being sonless, so that the fact that Muḥammad left no son behind called for explanation. More specifically, it was essential to explain why Ibrāhīm died in infancy, shortly before Muḥammad's own demise, thus causing his father to die sonless.

The solution that was worked out was based on a combination of Ibrāhīm's status as a potential prophet and on Muḥammad's status as the last prophet. When put together, this pair of features entailed that Ibrāhīm, the potential prophet, had to predecease Muḥammad, the one who was destined to remain the last prophet. This solution is represented in versions which gained access to the most authoritative *ḥadīth* collections, including that of al-Bukhārī (d. 256/869). The version recorded in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* is attributed to a Companion of the prophet, 'Abdallāh b. Abī Awfā (d. 86/705), who declared regarding Ibrāhīm's death in infancy that had it been destined that another prophet followed Muḥammad, this son would have lived, but his death proves that there is no prophet after Muḥammad.[52] Other no-less explicit versions are recorded in further sources.[53]

Poor Ibrāhīm has thus become a martyr whose life has been sacrificed in order to allow his father to remain the last prophet. The sacrifice of the

[50] This seems to be suggested by L. HALEVY: *Muḥammad's Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society*. New York 2007, p. 134.

[51] On sonlessness as a calamity, see HALEVY 2007, p. 134; POWERS 2009, p. 64.

[52] Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī: *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. Beirut n.d., VIII, p. 54 = *Adab* [78], *Bāb man sammā bi-asmā'i l-nabiyy* [108].

[53] See references in FRIEDMANN 1986, pp. 188–189.

child is magnified in traditions elaborating on the fact that he was the namesake of a great qur'ānic prophet. Accordingly, Muḥammad is reported to have stated: "Tonight a child has been born to me, and I have named him after my father Abraham."[54] The elevation of Ibrāhīm to the rank of the qur'ānic Abraham is also implied in the following version, which is again related on the authority of Anas b. Mālik. It says that had Ibrāhīm stayed alive, he would have become "righteous and a prophet" *(ṣiddīq*^{an} *nabiyy*^{an}*)*.[55] The phrase "righteous and a prophet" is derived from Q 19:41, where it describes the qur'ānic Abraham.[56] This means that the tradition actually says that Ibrāhīm was a potential Abraham. The version of the Companion al-Barā' b. ʿĀzib states the same.[57] In a more detailed version, Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68/687) declares that when Ibrāhīm died, Muḥammad stated that the child had a wet-nurse waiting for him in paradise to complete his suckling, and that had he lived, he would have become *ṣiddīq*^{an} *nabiyy*^{an}. Muḥammad goes on to assert that had Ibrāhīm stayed alive, his Coptic maternal uncles would have become freed from slavery, and none of the Copts would have ever been enslaved.[58] This version betrays another aspect of the purpose of the traditions at hand, namely, to protect the reputation of the Coptic community in the Islamic state. The same object is evident in some further versions in which Muḥammad is said to have proclaimed that had Ibrāhīm survived, Muḥammad would have exempted the Copts from paying the *jizya*.[59]

It follows that none of the traditions about the death in infancy of Ibrāhīm contradicts the notion that Muḥammad was the last prophet. The potential prophecy that these traditions attribute to this son of Muḥammad is designed to assert that he was Muḥammad's true son, as well as to explain why he had to die in infancy, thus causing his father to die sonless. In so doing the traditions magnify Ibrāhīm's sacrifice for the sake of his father who had to remain the last prophet. The most explicit articulation of the heroic martyrdom of the child is provided in the version in which Muḥammad declares that Ibrāhīm has a wet-nurse waiting for him in paradise, and that he is *ṣiddīq*^{un} *shahīd*^{un}.[60]

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[54] Ibn Saʿd 1960, I, pp. 135, 136; Ibn Bukayr 1978, p. 271; Ibn Ḥajar 1970, I, p. 175.

[55] Ibn Saʿd 1960, I, p. 140; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal: *al-Musnad*. Beirut 1978, III, 133, pp. 280–281.

[56] The same is stated about Idrīs in Q 19:56.

[57] Ibn Saʿd 1960, I, p. 140.

[58] Ibn Māja, Muḥammad b. Yazīd: *al-Sunan*. Ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Bāqī. Cairo 1952, I, p. 484 (no. 1511) = *Janā'iz* [6], *al-Ṣalāt ʿalā ibn rasūli llāhi* [27]. Quoted in Friedmann 1986, p. 188. See also Ibn Bukayr 1978, p. 270.

[59] Ibn Saʿd 1960, I, p. 144; Abū Nuʿaym Aḥmad b. ʿAbdallāh al-Iṣbahānī: *Maʿrifat al-ṣaḥāba*. Ed. Muḥammad Rāḍī b. Ḥājj ʿUthmān. Medina–Riyad 1988, II, p. 142 (no. 708). See also Cannuyer 2008, p. 254.

[60] Ibn Saʿd 1960, I, p. 140.

4.1 Sonlessness and Q 33:40

A glance at the direct commentaries on Q 33:40 reveals that the Muslims felt the need to find divine justification not only for the premature death of Ibrāhīm, but also for that of Muḥammad's other sons, who, as noted above, had been born to him by Khadīja; they all died in infancy in Mecca before the *hijra*. Their deaths, too, were eventually explained away as the supposed outcome of the fact that Muḥammad had to remain the last prophet. This notion retains the principle that prophecy is potentially inheritable, and the exegetes have read it into their interpretation of the statement that "Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men." For example, al-Samarqandī (d. 375/985) states that according to some scholars, Muḥammad was father to no man because his sons had died young, and if there were adults among his sons they would have become prophets, but there is no prophet after him.[61] Other exegetes repeated the same idea in different words.[62]

However, not all Muslim scholars accepted this explanation, and some of them argued that not every son of a prophet must necessarily be a prophet.[63] In other words, God had his own reasons when he let Muḥammad's sons die in infancy. But as we have just seen, most exegetes thought otherwise and read their outlook into the qur'ānic declaration that "Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men." In this manner, Muḥammad's fatherhood as denied in this statement has been transformed from spiritual to biological, and the scope of the verse was expanded to include Muḥammad's nuclear family. The assertion that he is the seal of the prophets has become the reason of his sonlessness, being thus detached from its primary context, namely, the justification of Muḥammad's marriage to Zayd's former wife.

4.2 The case of Zayd

One of the exegetes, namely, Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767), has extended the principle that prophecy is potentially hereditary to the case of Zayd.[64]

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[61] Abū l-Layth Naṣr b. Muḥammad al-Samarqandī: *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Ed. ʿALĪ MUʿAWWAḌ, ʿĀDIL ʿABD AL-MAWJŪD, and ZAKARIYYĀ AL-NAWTĪ. Beirut 1993, III, p. 53. Cf. FRIEDMANN 1986, p. 189; *idem* 1989, p. 61.

[62] Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Thaʿlabī: *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān ʿan tafsīr āy al-Qur'ān*. Ed. ABŪ MUḤAMMAD B. ʿĀSHŪR, and NAẒĪR AL-SĀʿIDĪ. Beirut 2002, VIII, p. 5; ʿAlī b. Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī: *al-Wasīṭ fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* al-majīd. Ed. ʿĀDIL AḤMAD ʿABD AL-MAWJŪD *et al.* Beirut 1994, III, p. 474; Abū l-Faraj ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī: *Zād al-masīr fī ʿilm al-tafsīr*. Beirut 1984, VI, p. 393.

[63] See FRIEDMANN 1986, pp. 191–192.

[64] Muqātil b. Sulaymān: *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Ed. ʿABDALLĀH MAḤMŪD SHIḤĀTA. Cairo 1979, XIII, pp. 498–499. On Muqātil's comments, cf. POWERS 2009, pp. 54–55.

Commenting on the declaration that "Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men", Muqātil says:

Law kāna Zaydᵘⁿ bna Muḥammadⁱⁿ la-kāna nabiyyᵃⁿ.

"Had Zayd been Muḥammad's son he would have been a prophet."[65]

Here Muqātil seems to mean that Zayd, who did not die in infancy like the rest of Muḥammad's sons, could not have been Muḥammad's biological son, because otherwise he would have become a prophet. To illustrate this fact, Muqātil concludes his comments with a tradition according to which Muḥammad told Zayd: "I am not your father." Zayd retorted dutifully: "O messenger of God, I am Zayd son of Ḥāritha, my pedigree is well known." This tradition appears in early biographies of Muḥammad, where it is formulated as the "occasion of revelation" of Q 33:4–5.[66] Muqātil has imported the tradition into his comments on Q 33:40 in order to assert that Zayd's status as Muḥammad's adoptee did not mean that he was his real son, therefore Muḥammad's marriage to his former wife was lawful.

In conclusion, neither the traditions about the potential prophecy of Ibrāhīm, nor those about the premature death of the rest of Muḥammad's sons, seem to indicate the supposedly late origin of the dogma of the finality of prophethood. These traditions rather use this very dogma to provide Muḥammad's theologically perplexing sonlessness with a divine justification.

4.3 Sonlessness recompensed

At this point, we may observe that the sources reveal some more ways in which the early Muslims tried to cope with the theological problem generated by Muḥammad's sonlessness. Unlike the above traditions in which his sonlessness is accounted for as the inevitable result of his being the last prophet, other traditions deal with it outside of the sphere of the finality of prophecy, maintaining that the tragic effect of Muḥammad's sonlessness was mitigated in various kinds of divine compensation.

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[65] Powers (2009, p. 54) prefers to understand Muqātil's statement in the sense that "had Zayd *continued to be* Muḥammad's son", he would be a prophet [italics mine]. Such reading is designed to sustain Powers' theory concerning the theological background to Muḥammad's sonlessness, but it does not seem to reflect the plain Arabic sense of Muqātil's text. The verb *kāna* seems to be used here in its standard sense ("was"). For the sense of "continued to be", the Arabic would usually require the use of *mā zāla*.

[66] ʿAbd al-Malik b. Hishām: *Al-Sīra l-nabawiyya*. Ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā, Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī, and ʿAbd al-Ḥāfiẓ Shalabī. Beirut 1971, I, p. 265. See also Sulaymān b. Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī: *al-Muʿjam al-kabīr*. Ed. Ḥamdī ʿAbd al-Majīd al-Salafī. Baghdad 1980–1985, V, pp. 83–84 (no. 4651).

One manner of compensation is suggested in the exegesis of a qur'ānic verse that contains the term *abtar*. This is Q 108:3 in which God assures the prophet that his enemy is the one who is *abtar*. The traditions recounting the occasion of revelation *(asbāb al-nuzūl)* of this verse tell us that it was revealed after a certain Qurashī had mocked Muḥammad for being sonless. This means that the traditions have read Muḥammad's sonlessness into the exegesis of the term *abtar* (originally denoting "mutilated"[67]), and thus the assertion that the real *abtar* is Muḥammad's enemy has been loaded with a sense of divine comfort to the sonless prophet.[68]

Another way in which God is said to have compensated his sonless prophet is suggested in traditions maintaining that God gave Muḥammad daughters of the highest quality, to the degree that Muḥammad was proud to be called *Abū l-banāt*, "the father of daughters". On account of it he also proudly compared himself to some previous prophets who were fathers of daughters, namely, Moses, Shu'ayb and Loth.[69] The mother of the daughters, namely, Khadīja, is also said to have been compensated. When her son al-Qāsim died while still suckling, Muḥammad promised her that a wet-nurse was waiting for him in paradise to complete his suckling.[70]

Yet another way of divine recompense is proposed in a significant variant reading *(qirā'a)* of Q 33:6. As seen above, the standard version of this verse asserts that Muḥammad "is closer to the believers than they are to themselves", but the variant reading that was eventually circulated contained the additional words: *wa-huwa abun lahum*—"and he is a father to them".[71] This *qirā'a* seems to imply that God compensated the sonless prophet by declaring him to be the spiritual father of the entire community of believers. Muslim scholars have indeed discussed this reading in the context of the term *abtar*, with reference to traditions about Muḥammad's grief as a result of his sonlessness.[72] It follows that we have here a case of exegesis disguised as a *qirā'a*. Nevertheless, the reading *wa-huwa abun lahum* did not gain much popularity among the Muslims, as indicated by a tradition relating that the caliph 'Umar requested its removal from those qur'ānic copies in which it had been included.[73] Apparently, the seemingly contrast between this reading and the qur'ānic assertion that "Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men" was too sharp to allow for its unreserved acceptance.

[67] See AMBROS 2004, p. 33.

[68] For the traditions revolving around the term *abtar* see KISTER 1993, pp. 85–92.

[69] KISTER 1993, p. 91.

[70] KISTER 1993, p. 79.

[71] E.g. al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad b. Jarīr: *Jāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Cairo 1323/1905, repr. Beirut 1972, XXI, p. 77 (on Q 33:6).

[72] E.g. al-Suhaylī 1971, II, p. 145.

[73] POWERS 2009, pp. 66–67.

At this point it may be observed that according to POWERS, the reading *wa-huwa ab*^{un} *lahum* was rather part of the original consonantal structure of the Qur'ān, which was eventually expunged, because it became too offensive to the idea of the finality of prophecy. But while POWERS' observation regarding the problems involved in this *qirā'a* is correct, his argument for its early date is not entirely convincing.[74]

5 The political sphere

From Muḥammad's personal domain we move on to the sphere of the political tensions among the Muslims of the first Islamic century. Here, too, there are texts which modern scholars interpreted as though dating back to a period in which Muḥammad was not yet considered the last prophet. A re-examination of these texts will reveal, yet again, that they do not contradict the notion of the finality of prophecy.

5.1 ʿAlī and Aaron

Some of these texts deal with the virtues of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. According to one of them, Muḥammad left ʿAlī as his deputy in Medina, while he and the rest of the Muslims set out for a certain warlike campaign (Tabūk, 9/630).

[74] POWERS (2009, pp. 65–66) argues that according to a tradition recorded in Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*, the reading with the words *wa-huwa ab*^{un} *lahum* was "the first reading". But the term *al-qirā'atu l-ūlā* does not refer to the status of the written Qur'ān. It alludes to one of two oral "proof-readings" of the Qur'ān which Gabriel is said to have carried out with Muḥammad during the last year of the prophet's life. In each of the previous years, there was only one proof-reading. The traditions about these proof-readings are designed to indicate that Muḥammad was involved in person in establishing the final textual structure of the Qur'ān. For these final two oral proof-readings and the discussion of their supposed relationship to the written pre-ʿUthmānic and ʿUthmānic Qur'ān codices, see Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī: *Fatḥ al-bārī sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Cairo 1310/1892, repr. Beirut n. d., IX, pp. 40–41 (on Bukhārī: *Ṣaḥīḥ, Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān* [66], *Bāb kāna Jibrīl yaʿriḍu l-Qur'ān* [7]). More importantly, the statement that a given reading is the "first reading" is a common device designed to lend some authority to an un-canonical variant, usually with additional words. A typical example of this device is provided in the case of Q 49:4: "Those who call out to you from behind the private chambers, most of them do not understand." According to a tradition related by Yazīd b. Rūmān (Medinan d. 130/747), this verse was originally revealed with the additional words: "of the people of Tamīm". These words appeared after the clause: "those who call out to you from behind the private chambers". Yazīd states that "this is the first reading" *(wa-hiya l-qirā'atu l-ūlā)*. See Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī: *Ta'rīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*. Ed. MUḤAMMAD ABŪ L-FAḌL IBRĀHĪM. Repr. Cairo 1987, III, p. 120 [ed. Brill: I, p. 1717]. Of course, no one will take this anti-Tamīmī "first reading" as indicating that the name of Tamīm appeared in the supposedly first version of the written Qur'ān.

ʿAlī expressed his reluctance to stay behind with the women and children, thereupon Muḥammad said to him comfortingly: "Aren't you satisfied with being unto me what Aaron was unto Moses?" FRIEDMANN suggests that this account may date back to a period in which the dogma of the finality of prophethood did not yet develop, or else was not yet prevailing.[75]

However, the equation ʿAlī-Aaron does not seem to contradict the notion that Muḥammad was the last prophet. The equation seems to originate in a qur'ānic scene (Q 7:142) in which Moses says to Aaron: "Be my successor among my people" *(ukhlufnī fī qawmī)*. Moses asks this of his brother before he goes away to his appointment with God. The key word in this qur'ānic passage is *ukhlufnī*, "Be my successor." This implies that Aaron acted as Moses' *khalīfa*, and this very notion seems to have been the point behind the equation ʿAlī-Aaron: Like Aaron, the *khalīfa* of Moses, Muḥammad nominates ʿAlī to be his own *khalīfa* in Medina.[76] The relevance of this equation to the well-known Shīʿī claims concerning the succession to Muḥammad is evident enough, yet it should be observed that the equation only hints at ʿAlī's right to succeed Muḥammad as a *khalīfa*, not as a prophet. Therefore there seems to be no clash here with the tenet that Muḥammad was the last prophet.

To be sure, in spite of the Shīʿī spirit of the equation ʿAlī-Aaron, it did not worry the Sunnīs too much. They even included the tradition with this equation in their canonical compilations, for example, in that of al-Bukhārī.[77] The reason for their indifference seems to be that Aaron filled in for Moses only during the latter's lifetime, not to mention the fact that he had died before Moses. In the Sunnī canonical compilations, we also have an expanded version in which, after comparing ʿAlī to Aaron, Muḥammad adds: "But there is no prophet after me."[78] This formula, which appears already in the *Sīra* of Ibn Isḥāq,[79] seems to have been designed to make it clear that the equation ʿAlī-Aaron does not mean that the former is a prophet like Aaron.

5.2 ʿAlī as a *waṣiyy*

Not only the traditions comparing ʿAlī to Aaron acknowledge the notion that Muḥammad was the last prophet, but even the explicit traditions which claim for ʿAlī the right to succeed Muḥammad do not contradict the dogma

[75] FRIEDMANN 1986, pp. 186–187.

[76] These deductions are stated explicitly in Ibn Ḥajar n.d., VII, p. 60 (on Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Faḍā'il aṣḥāb al-nabiyy* [62], *Bāb manāqib ʿAlī* [9]).

[77] Bukhārī n.d., V, p. 24 = *Faḍā'il aṣḥāb al-nabiyy* [62], *Bāb manāqib ʿAlī* [9].

[78] E.g. *Ibid.*: VI, p. 3 = *Maghāzī* [64], *Ghazwat Tabūk* [78].

[79] Ibn Hishām 1971, IV, p. 163. See also ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣanʿānī: *Al-Muṣannaf*. Ed. ḤABĪB AL-RAḤMĀN AL-AʿẒAMĪ. Beirut 1970, V, pp. 405–406 (no. 9745).

of the finality of prophethood. The Shīʿī term describing ʿAlī as heir to Muḥammad's authority is *waṣiyy*, i. e. "legatee". One of the earliest texts in which ʿAlī is praised as Muḥammad's *waṣiyy* contains a report about one of the first of ʿAlī's partisans, ʿAbdallāh b. Sabaʾ, a Yemenite Jew who converted to Islam during the caliphate of ʿUthmān (r. 23/644–35/656). The early Muslim historian Sayf b. ʿUmar (d. 180/796) reports that Ibn Sabaʾ once addressed his closest entourage saying that there were a thousand prophets before Muḥammad, each having his own *waṣiyy*, and ʿAlī was Muḥammad's *waṣiyy*. Ibn Sabaʾ went on to pronounce that Muḥammad was the "seal" of the prophets and ʿAlī was the "seal" of the *awṣiyāʾ*. He then denounced ʿUthmān for having stolen the caliphate from Muḥammad's lawful *waṣiyy*.[80]

Whether or not Ibn Sabaʾ ever said such things[81] is not as important as the very ideas that are conveyed in the words attributed to him. The seal metaphor is invoked in his words to show that prophecy was sealed up, i. e. terminated, with Muḥammad's advent. This seems to be combined with the notion that being the seal of the prophets, Muḥammad not only brought the universal prophecy to an end but marked its most magnificent fulfillment after a long history during which it had been running through no less than a thousand prophets. As for ʿAlī, Ibn Sabaʾ seems to mean that just as Muḥammad marked the final and most magnificent manifestation of prophecy, ʿAlī represented the final and most glorious link in the line of a thousand legatees. Therefore Ibn Sabaʾ praises them both as "seals". The most important point to be noticed is that the elevation of ʿAlī to the rank of Muḥammad's *waṣiyy* does not deprive Muḥammad of his status as the seal of the prophets, i. e. the last of them.

The same statement about Muḥammad and ʿAlī is available as a tradition of the prophet. The Companion Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī (d. 32/652–653) reports that Muḥammad said: "I am *khātam al-nabiyyīn* and ʿAlī is *khātam al-awṣiyāʾ*."[82] Similarly, ʿAlī was reportedly described by his son al-Ḥasan as "the *khātam* of the *awṣiyāʾ* and as the *waṣiyy* of the prophets."[83]

In this context it may be observed that the seal metaphor conveys the same sense of finality in yet another tradition of the same structure, which deals, this time, with al-ʿAbbās, Muḥammad's uncle and ancestor of the ʿAbbāsid caliphs. In this tradition, Muḥammad tells al-ʿAbbās: "Rest assured, O uncle, you are the seal of the Muhājirūn just as I am the seal of the prophets."[84]

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[80] Ṭabarī 1987, IV, p. 340 (ed. Brill: I, p. 2942); Ibn Manẓūr 1984–1988, XII, p. 219.

[81] On the problematic historicity of the reports about Ibn Sabaʾ, especially those of Sayf b. ʿUmar, cf. Madelung 1997, pp. 1–2.

[82] Ibn Ḥajar n. d., VIII, p. 114 (from Ibn al-Jawzī).

[83] Haythamī 1987, IX, p. 149.

[84] Ibn Manẓūr 1984–1988, XI, p. 332.

Muḥammad says this to cheer up his uncle who expresses uneasiness at being among the last Qurashīs to have made the *hijra* to Medina (on the eve of the conquest of Mecca, 8/630). Here, too, the sense of finality is intertwined with that of excellence. The sense of finality is even clearer in another version in which Muḥammad tells his uncle: "Your *hijra* is the last *hijra (ākhiru hijrat[in])*, just as my prophecy is the last prophecy" *(ākhiru nubuwwat[in])*.[85]

Even later Shīʿīs—those who were already aware of the line of subsequent Imāms who succeeded ʿAlī as legatees (*awṣiyāʾ*) in their own right—never denied the finality of prophecy. This is indicated in several Shīʿī commentaries on Q 33:40, in which the qurʾānic title *khātam al-nabiyyīn* is always interpreted in the sense of "the last prophet."[86] The manner in which the Shīʿīs ensured for the Imāms their legitimate status within the dogma of the finality of prophecy is demonstrated in a tradition in which Muḥammad proclaims that he is *khātam al-nabiyyīn* and ʿAlī is the best (*khayr*) of the *awṣiyāʾ*. The prophet allegedly said this to his daughter Fāṭima, moments before he died, which makes it his last testament.[87] The shift from *khātam* to *khayr*, "best", in the case of ʿAlī is designed to eliminate the sense of finality, so as to make it possible for him to be succeeded by more *awṣiyāʾ*, namely, the Imāms. But Muḥammad still retains his position as the "seal" of the prophets, i. e. the last and most magnificent of them all.

5.3 The Umayyads: Walīd's letter

The same model that has just been seen concerning ʿAlī as Muḥammad's *waṣiyy* recurs in other texts describing the Umayyad caliphs as Muḥammad's successors. These texts present the caliphs as carrying on Muḥammad's authority, but, again, without ever denying the finality of his prophecy.

Our primary text is a letter sent to the garrison cities on behalf of the Umayyad caliph Walīd II (ruled between 125–126/743–744) concerning the designation of his successors. The Arabic text was preserved in al-Ṭabarī's *Taʾrīkh*.[88] The letter opens with a detailed description of the transmigration

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[85] Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā al-Balādhurī: *Jumal min ansāb al-ashrāf*. Ed. SUHAYL ZAKKĀR and RIYĀḌ ZIRIKLĪ. Beirut 1996, I, p. 451.

[86] See ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī: *al-Tafsīr*. Beirut 1991, II, p. 169; Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī: *al-Tabyān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*. Ed. AḤMAD AL-ʿĀMILĪ. Beirut n.d., VIII, p. 346; al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī: *Majmaʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*. Beirut 1957, XXI, pp. 148–149.

[87] Ṭabarānī 1980–1985, III, pp. 57–58 (no. 2675); Ibn Manẓūr 1984–1988, XVII, p. 340.

[88] Ṭabarī 1987, VII, pp. 219–220 (ed. Brill: II, p. 1757). For previous studies of the letter see P. CRONE/M. HINDS: *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*. Cambridge 1986, pp. 26–28, 118–119; U. RUBIN: "Prophets and Caliphs: the Biblical

of prophecy through the prophets, "generation after generation", *(qarnan fa-qarnan)* till Muḥammad. When it reached him,

> (God) sealed up through him his prophetic revelation *(wa-khatama bihi waḥyahu)*, gathered in him all the grace which he had bestowed upon the prophets before him *(wa-jamaʿa lahu mā akrama bihi l-anbiyāʾa qablahu)*, and brought him forth in their footsteps, confirming *(muṣaddiqᵃⁿ)* what has been revealed through them, safeguarding it, summoning unto it, and enjoining it ...[89]

The words *wa-khatama bihi waḥyahu* clearly indicate that Muḥammad's qurʾānic function as *khātam al-nabiyyīn* is perceived in this letter as marking the cessation of prophetic revelation. This is followed by the assertion that all aspects of previous prophetic revelations were gathered in Muḥammad, which means that his role as the "seal" of the prophets is not just to mark the end of prophecy but to reenact the prophecy of previous prophets in its fullest and most magnificent fashion. This is complementary to his function as a *muṣaddiq*, the qurʾānic term which the writer of the letter has used in this context to complete the scope of Muḥammad's position among the prophets.

Most significantly, the finality of prophecy does not rule out the possibility that Muḥammad's prophetic authority be continued after his death in a non-prophetic manner. Therefore the author of the letter states a few lines below:

> Then (God) appointed his caliphs in the manner of his prophethood *(ʿalā minhāji nubuwwatihi)*, when he took away his prophet and sealed up with him his prophetic revelation *(ḥīna qabaḍa nabiyyahu [ṣ] wa-khatama bihi waḥyahu)*.[90]

This indicates that although Muḥammad's role as *khātam al-nabiyyīn* means to the author of the letter that he was the last prophet, this author can very well argue that God allowed for the emergence of chosen successors—the Umayyad caliphs—who continued Muḥammad's prophetic authority in a new non-prophetic semblance, *ʿalā minhāji l-nubuwwa*, "in the manner of prophethood".

It should be added that the idea that God has appointed the caliphs "in the manner of prophethood" recurs in several traditions. For example, the Companion Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān (d. 36/656) says that God sent his prophet to guide the people, and then, "when prophecy was gone" *(dhahabat*

Foundations of the Umayyad Authority." In: H. Berg (ed.): *Method and Theology in the Study of Islamic origins*. Leiden 2003, pp. 88–90.

[89] Ṭabarī 1987, VII, p. 219 (Brill: II, p. 1757).

[90] *Ibid.*: VII, p. 220 (Brill: II, pp. 1757–1758).

al-nubuwwa), there was caliphate in the semblance of prophecy *(fa-kānat al-khilāfa ʿalā minhāji l-nubuwwa)*.[91]

In sum, the idea of *khātam al-nabiyyīn*, as it emerges in Walīd's letter, comprises the two inseparable notions: confirmation and finality. Muḥammad confirms the previous prophecies in this that all the aspects of the prophetic revelations in past generations have been gathered in his person, being brought to their final and most imposing manifestation through his advent. Nothing in this letter seems to indicate that the seal metaphor ever conveyed to the Muslims of the first Islamic century the idea of fulfillment or confirmation without the idea of finality.

On a more general level it can now be observed that the fact that various groups within early Islamic society aspired to continue Muḥammad's prophetic authority—either Umayyads as caliphs, or Shīʿī Imāms as *awṣiyāʾ*—does not indicate that the qurʾānic *khātam al-nabiyyīn* did not originally convey to all parties the initial sense of finality.

6 The Christian Jesus

Modern scholars based their view about the relatively late origins of the Islamic dogma of the finality of prophethood not only on Islamic texts, but on non-Islamic ones as well. More specifically, GUY STROUMSA[92] pointed out several instances in Jewish, Christian and Gnostic texts in which the seal metaphor refers to the idea of confirmation or attestation, not of finality.[93] POWERS as well has expressed his confidence that in pre-Islamic Jewish texts as well as in Christian and Manichaean ones,

> the seal metaphor is invoked to signify the *confirmation* or *fulfillment* of prophecy; conversely, in none of these texts is the metaphor used to signify the *end* of prophecy.[94]

From the methodological point of view, the reliance on the evidence of the pre-Islamic texts is absolutely justified, because the term *khātam* was originally loaned from Semitic languages in which we have the Hebrew *ḥŏtām*

[91] Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal 1978, V, p. 404. See also Abū Nuʿaym 1967, I, p. 275. See more versions in Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal 1978, IV, p. 273; Bayhaqī 1988, VI, p. 491. Cf. Ṭabarānī 1980–1985, I, p. 157, no. 368.

[92] G. G. STROUMSA: "Seal of the Prophets: the Nature of a Manichaean Metaphor." In: *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 7 (1986), pp. 61–74.

[93] STROUMSA 1986, pp. 69–70. On the Manichaean context of the seal metaphor see also C. COLPE: *Das Siegel der Propheten*. Berlin 1990, pp. 227–243.

[94] POWERS 2009, p. 52.

and the Syriac *ḥātmā*.[95] However, it seems that already in these texts the ideas of confirmation and finality are closely intertwined. This was already observed decades ago by ARTHUR JEFFERY who said that in Aramaic we find "seal" used in the sense of "confirmation", "end", "conclusion". He observes further that "the claim to be the final member of the prophetic chain, the bearer of the final revelation" was made by others before Muḥammad. "It is implicit in the Christian claim that God who in earlier days had spoken through the prophets had spoken a final word in the message of Jesus."[96]

What JEFFERY considers implicit among Christians is actually explicit. This brings us to several Christian texts about Jesus which revolve around a passage in Daniel 9:24 in which the seal metaphor is linked directly to prophecy.

Daniel 9:24 reads:

> Seventy weeks are decreed upon your people and upon your holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sin, and to forgive iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal vision and prophet *(ve-laḥtŏm ḥazŏn ve-nabĭ)*, and to anoint the holy of holies.

STROUMSA holds that the Hebrew *laḥtŏm* ("to seal") in Daniel's expression *ve-laḥtŏm ḥazŏn ve-nabĭ* means "to accomplish".[97] POWERS seems to have shared this view.[98] But beyond the question of what Daniel's *laḥtŏm* originally means, it is more important to explore the manner in which scholars of late antiquity understood it. For this purpose we have at our disposal the comments of the Christian author Tertullian (d. *ca.* AD 220). Modern scholars have already mentioned him in connection with the qur'ānic seal metaphor,[99] but without pointing out the sense of finality that emerges in his comments.

In the relevant part of Tertullian's comments, he explains that when speaking of the sealing of vision and prophecy, Daniel refers to Jesus whose advent fulfilled

> everything that the prophets had announced previously about him. In fact, after his coming and his suffering, *there is now neither vision nor prophet* announcing the Christ as going to come. Further, if this is not so, *let the Jews produce some volumes of the prophets after the Christ*, or visible miracles of some angels like those the patriarchs saw in former times up until the coming of this Christ, who is now come.[100] [italics mine]

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[95] JEFFERY 1938, pp. 120–121; AMBROS 2004, p. 84.

[96] A. JEFFERY: *The Qur'ān as Scripture*. New York 1952, p. 78.

[97] STROUMSA 1986, p. 64.

[98] POWERS 2009, p. 272, note 58.

[99] COLPE 1990, pp. 28–34, 235–37; POWERS 2009, p. 272, note 59.

[100] G.D. DUNN: *Tertullian*. London 2004, p. 83 [*Adversus Judaeos*, VIII, pp. 12–14]. Tertullian is quoted in E.E. URBACH: "*Matay pasqah ha-nebu'ah*? [When did prophethood cease?]." In: *Tarbiz* 17 (1946), p. 10.

And a few lines below:

> In fact when the Christ was baptized—that is, when he sanctified the waters in his own baptism—*all the abundance of past spiritual gifts ended in the Christ* who has sealed all visions and prophecies, which he has fulfilled by his coming.

For Tertullian, then, Daniel's "to seal vision and prophet" means to fulfill as well as to terminate, that is, the fulfillment of the prophecies was achieved through the advent of Jesus, which resulted in the cessation of prophecy in Israel.

Very similar views apropos of Daniel's "to seal vision and prophet" can be found in the writings of Athanasius of Alexandria (d. AD 373),[101] as well as in those of some other Church leaders.[102] Special attention should be paid to the Syrian theologian Aphraates (d. shortly after 345), who, as observed by BOBZIN, held views similar to those of Tertullian. BOBZIN points out that Aphraates represents the Syrian monastic teaching, and hence he is particularly relevant to the Qur'ān where the same general perception of the relationship between Jesus and the previous prophets is applied to Muḥammad.[103] However, BOBZIN does not dwell on the notion of finality that is inherent in Aphraates' comments on Daniel 9:24. Aphraates expresses this idea—as well as the idea of confirmation—very clearly, when he writes:[104]

> Now understand that after these weeks, the Messiah came and was killed in fulfillment of the vision and the prophets.

And a few lines below:

> Understand, my beloved, and perceive, that the weeks were fulfilled; *the visions and the prophets have ceased.* Sovereignty has been cut off from Judah. [italics mine]

It follows that the Christian writers of late antiquity, in the west as well as in the east, were all united in perceiving Daniel's seal metaphor in the sense of cessation of prophecy generated by ultimate fulfillment of previous revelations. Therefore these texts cannot be adduced as proving the late origins of the Islamic dogma of the finality of prophecy. They rather advance the possibility that already the qur'ānic *khātam al-nabiyyīn* bears the intertwined meanings of confirmation and finality.

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[101] R.W. THOMSON: *Athanasius*. Oxford 1971, pp. 231–233 [*De Incarnatione*, 40]. Athanasius is quoted already in URBACH 1946, p. 10.

[102] E.g. Clement of Alexandria (d. *ca.* AD 215). See URBACH 1946, p. 10.

[103] BOBZIN 2010, p. 566.

[104] J. NEUSNER: *Aphrahat and Judaism: The Christian-Jewish Argument in Fourth-Century Iran*. Leiden 1971, p. 95 [19:11].

7 The Muslim Jesus

Finally, not only the Christian Jesus, but the Muslim one as well seems to have some relevance to the history of the Islamic dogma of the finality of prophecy. In this sphere, there are some further texts which modern scholars interpreted as though signaling the supposedly late provenance of the dogma. The most significant ones are those in which the Muslim believers are instructed to avoid saying that there is no prophet after Muḥammad. One such tradition is related on the authority of Muḥammad's wife, ʿĀ'isha, and according to Friedmann, it seems irreconcilable with the dogma of the finality of prophethood.[105] Let us look at it more closely.

This tradition, which Friedmann quotes from a relatively late source, appears already in the *Muṣannaf* of Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 235/849). Jarīr b. Ḥāzim (Baṣran, d. 175/791) relates that ʿĀ'isha, when referring to Muḥammad, declared: "Say *khātam al-nabiyyīn*, and do not say: There is no prophet after him."[106] According to Friedmann,[107] whose view has been embraced by Powers,[108] the term *khātam al-nabiyyīn* in ʿĀ'isha's statement does not denote "last", but "best". However, in order to read the tradition in its proper context, one has to look at the tradition that Ibn Abī Shayba has recorded immediately after the one of ʿĀ'isha. This one is related on the authority of Muḥammad's Companion, al-Mughīra b. Shuʿba (d. 50/670). He is said to have once heard a Muslim saying, "God's blessing be upon Muḥammad *khātam al-nabiyyīn*; there is no prophet after him." Al-Mughīra said to the Muslim: "Suffice it to say that Muḥammad is *khātam al-nabiyyīn*, because we have been taught that Jesus is about to appear; and when he does, he will be [a prophet] before as well as after him [i.e. after Muḥammad]."[109]

Al-Mughīra's version indicates that the instruction not to say that there is no prophet after Muḥammad is designed to harmonize the dogma that Muḥammad is the last prophet with the equally widely-accepted tenet of the second coming of Jesus. The Islamic awareness of the idea of the return of Jesus is indicated in traditions about his "descent" *(nuzūl)* at the end of days.[110]

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[105] Friedmann 1986, p. 192; *idem* 1989, p. 63.

[106] ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad b. Abī Shayba,: *al-Muṣannaf fī l-aḥādīth wa-l-āthār*. Ed. ʿAbd al-Khāliq al-Afghānī. Bombay 1979–1983, IX, pp. 109–110 (no. 6704).

[107] Friedmann 1986, p. 192; *idem* 1989, p. 63.

[108] Powers 2009, p. 53. This perception of the tradition of ʿĀ'isha is shared by Bobzin 2010, p. 565.

[109] Ibn Abī Shayba 1979–1983, IX, p. 110 (no. 6705). The tradition is quoted from Ibn Abī Shayba in Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī: *al-Durr al-manthūr fī l-tafsīr bi-l-maʾthūr*. Cairo 1869, repr. Beirut n.d., V, p. 204. Cf. Bobzin 2010, pp. 565–566.

[110] See e.g. the traditions assembled in Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī: *Nuzūl ʿIsā b. Maryam ākhira l-zamān*. Ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā'. Beirut 1985.

These traditions describe the justice that will prevail as a result of his coming and of his victory over the Antichrist *(al-dajjāl)*.[111]

In the harmonized version of the two dogmas, as it seems to be presented in al-Mughīra's utterance, Muḥammad retains his position as the last prophet, while allowing for the coming of Jesus after him. Jesus will not be a new prophet, because he has already come before Muḥammad, therefore his emergence after him is just the second phase of his mission. Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/890) has already observed that this is the meaning of the instruction not to say that there is no prophet after Muḥammad. He states that ʿĀ'isha's words allude to Jesus who, when he returns, will not abrogate *(yansakhu)* Muḥammad's religion through a new *sharīʿa*.[112] This idea means that Jesus will be after Muḥammad only in the chronological sense, but spiritually, Muḥammad will remain the last prophet.

Another, less orthodox, way that was designed to adapt the dogma of the finality of prophecy to the second coming of Jesus is reflected in words attributed to ʿAbdallāh b. Saba', whom we have already met above. Apart from asserting that Muḥammad was the seal of the prophets, Ibn Saba' is said to have claimed that not only Jesus, but Muḥammad as well, was about to return at the end of days. He read this idea into Q 28:85 in which Muḥammad is thus addressed: "He who has imposed the Qur'ān on you will surely cause you to come back *(la-rādduka ilā maʿād)*."[113] Ibn Saba"s unconventional interpretation of this verse retains for Muḥammad the finality of prophethood not only in the spiritual sense, but in the strict chronological one as well.

This solution has never been accepted by the mainstream Muslims, and the exegetes are content with explaining the qur'ānic *khātam al-nabiyyīn* in the spiritual sense, while leaving Jesus as chronologically the last. Thus al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058) states in his *tafsīr* of Q 33:40 that Muḥammad is *khātam al-nabiyyīn*, i.e. the last prophet *(yaʿnī ākhirahum)*, and Jesus will descend and act as a just judge and Imām and will kill the Dajjāl and smash the cross.[114] Al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1143), too, says that Muḥammad will always remain the last prophet, because Jesus became a prophet before Muḥammad; when he descends he will act according to Muḥammad's

[111] E.g. Bukhārī n.d., IV, pp. 204–205 = *Aḥādīth al-anbiyāʾ* [60], *Bāb nuzūl ʿĪsā* [49].

[112] ʿAbdallāh b. Muslim b. Qutayba: *Taʾwīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth*. Ed. MUḤAMMAD ZUHRĪ AL-NAJJĀR. Beirut 1972, pp. 187–189. On Ibn Qutayba's explanation, cf. FRIEDMANN 1986, pp. 192–193. FRIEDMANN seems to assume that the reconciliation between ʿĀ'isha's statement and the second coming of Jesus is Ibn Qutayba's own idea. But al-Mughīra's version indicates that this is not the case.

[113] Ṭabarī 1987, IV, p. 340 (ed. Brill: I, p. 2942); Ibn Manẓūr 1984–1988, XII, p. 219.

[114] ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Māwardī: *al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*. Ed. ʿABD AL-MAQṢŪD B. ʿABD AL-RAḤĪM. Beirut 1992, IV, p. 409.

sharīʿa and pray towards his *qibla* ("direction of prayer").[115] Al-Ālūsī (d. 1270/1853) repeats the same argument when he states that Jesus will be no more than Muḥammad's *khalīfa*.[116]

7.1 Umayya b. Abī l-Ṣalt

The second coming of Jesus seems to be referred to in yet another text which modern scholars have adduced as though proving the supposedly late origins of the dogma of the finality of prophecy. This is a poetic verse attributed to the poet Umayya b. Abī l-Ṣalt, a contemporary of Muḥammad. The verse runs as follows:[117]

Bihi khatama llāhu man qablahu
Wa-man baʿdahu min nabiyyⁱⁿ khatam

With him God has sealed up any prophet that was before him,
As well as any prophet after him.

Friedmann argues that the verb *khatama* in this verse cannot mean that Muḥammad is the last prophet, because the verse takes into account the possibility that prophets may appear after Muḥammad as well.[118] It seems, however, that this verse only repeats the harmonized idea of the second coming of Jesus and Muḥammad's finality of prophethood. It implies that Jesus will only be after Muḥammad in the chronological sense, so that Muḥammad remains the one with whom God has sealed up prophecy, i. e. brought it to its final end.

7.2 "False prophets"

However, the conviction that Muḥammad would always remain the last prophet, even when Jesus returned, did not prevent the emergence of persons who claimed to be prophets after Muḥammad. Such persons emerged as early as the first Islamic century,[119] which indicates the deep popular need to fill up the empty space which Muḥammad left behind. In the long run, the need to fill in for Muḥammad has led to the emergence of the Aḥamadīs whose founder (Mīrzā Ghulām Aḥmad, d. 1908) aspired to represent the

[115] Jārullāh Maḥmūd b. ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī: *Al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq al-tanzīl*. Cairo 1977, III, pp. 264–265. Cf. Colpe 1990, pp. 242–243.

[116] Abū l-Faḍl Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī: *Rūḥ al-maʿānī*. Repr. Beirut n. d., XXII, p. 34.

[117] Umayya b. Abī l-Ṣalt: *Dīwān*. Ed. Sajīʿ Jamīl al-Jubaylī. Beirut 1998, p. 112, line 20.

[118] Friedmann 1986, p. 184.

[119] On the "false prophets" after Muḥammad see Friedmann 1986, pp. 193–199; Powers 2009, pp. 53–54.

second coming of Jesus. This device did not prevent orthodox Muslims from rejecting him as a false prophet. But these later developments do not belong in the present study.

8 Conclusion

In none of the above early texts, Islamic or Christian, is the seal metaphor —when linked to prophets or prophecy—used to signify fulfillment without implying finality as well. Therefore, there is no compelling reason to assume that the Muslims of the first Islamic century originally understood the qur'ānic *khātam al-nabiyyīn* in the sense of confirmation alone, without that of finality. Moreover, judging by the function of the verb *khatama* in the Qur'ān, it may be assumed that already in this scripture the seal metaphor bears the intertwined sense of confirmation and finality.

Nevertheless, the idea that Muḥammad is *khātam al-nabiyyīn* is invoked only once in the Qur'ān, and not necessarily to state that he is the last prophet. We have seen that within the immediate context of Q 33:40, the primary purpose of the declaration that Muḥammad is the seal of the prophets is to bring out the perfect correlation between the prophetic career of the previous prophets and that of Muḥammad, whose advent marks the final and most magnificent manifestation of their prophecy. The Qur'ān points out this correlation in order to anchor Muḥammad's problematic marriage with Zayd's former wife in God's precedent *(sunna)* that has been implemented with the previous prophets, Moses in particular. The same purpose lies behind the first clause of Q 33:40, which says that "Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men." We have seen that it is designed to provide the legal basis for Muḥammad's liberty to marry any available woman among the extended family of believers, including Zayd's former wife. We have also seen that the declaration that "Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men"—when read independently of the evidence of the extra-qur'ānic sources—does not seem to indicate any link to his sonlessness. This unfortunate situation of Muḥammad was only known to later Muslims who read it back into the interpretation of this clause. They did so mainly in order to turn this tragedy of Muḥammad into the inevitable result of a divinely predestined scheme designed to retain for him his position as the last prophet.