METHOD AND THEORY IN THE STUDY OF ISLAMIC ORIGINS

EDITED BY

HERBERT BERG

BRILL
LEIDEN · BOSTON
2003

PROPHETS AND CALIPHS: THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE UMAYYAD AUTHORITY[1]

Uri Rubin

The Islamic preoccupation with the past is well known, and so is the pivotal place Islam assigned to itself in world history, as well as the Biblical patterns that Islam has appropriated for the documentation of that history.[2] In the present paper a more detailed study of one particular aspect of the Islamic engagement with the past will be attempted, i.e. the past as an origin of legitimacy of authority. This too has already been touched upon, but only within a general discussion of other tools of legitimacy in Islam.[3] Special attention will be paid to the manner in which the Umayyads used the past to legitimize their dynastic authority.[4]

---

[1] A first draft of this paper was read in the workshop: "Genesis and Regeneration", in The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Jerusalem, 2000.

[2] For example, Franz Rosenthal, "The Influence of the Biblical Tradition on Muslim Historiography", in Bernard Lewis *et al.*, eds., *Historians of the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 35–45; and Aziz al-Azmeh, "Chronophagous Discourse: a Study of Clerico-Legal Appropriation of the World in an Islamic tradition," in Frank E. Reynolds and David Tracy, eds., *Religion and Practical Reason: New Essays in the Comparative Philosophy of Religions* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1994), 163–208.

[3] See general observations on the relation between legitimacy and narratives about the past in Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: the Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998), 112–22.

[4] Shortly before the final version of the present article had to be rushed to the publishers, my attention was drawn to Wadād al-Qāḍī's study, "The Religious Foundation of Late Umayyad Ideology," in *Saber religioso y poder político en el Islam: Actas del simposio internacional, Granada, 15–18 octubre 1991*, edited by Manuela Marín and Mercedes García-Arenal (Madrid: Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, 1994), 231–73. I am grateful to my colleague Dr. Camilla Adang for providing me with her copy of this publication. Al-Qāḍī's study is based solely on the letters of ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd, but nevertheless, most of her conclusions seem to be corroborated by the present paper.

I. *Pre-National Origins of Islam*

A study of the Islamic perception of the past must begin with some observations regarding the origins of Islam as perceived by the believers. Islam sees itself as the most authentic representative of a universal, supranational religion that has formed an inborn component of humankind since the first moment of Creation. This idea marks a distinctive feature of the Islamic self-image, which since the great Islamic conquests outside Arabia, became the ultimate justification for the spread of Islam throughout the world. Embracing Islam meant returning to the undistorted religious disposition that ought to have led all people all their lives.

A clear manifestation of Islam as representing a universal and supranational religion is found in traditions about the *fiṭrah*, i.e. the natural or inborn religion.[5] This term occurs in the following utterance attributed to the Prophet: "Every child is born in a state of *fiṭrah*, then his parents make him a Jew or a Christian or a Magian."[6] *Fiṭrah* here stands for the inborn religious status of a child, before external religious education has turned him into a conscious member of a distinctive religious congregation. Most Muslim scholars are of the opinion that this *fiṭrah* is synonymous with Islam,[7] which means that Islam in the eyes of the believers stands indeed for the supranational religious framework of humankind. On the individual level it coincides with a human being's first years of childhood. The fact that only later on he becomes a Jew or a Christian, etc., means that *fiṭrah* as identified with Islam, is not merely supranational but also pre-national.

The pre-national character of the *fiṭrah*/Islam comes out also on the collective level where it is identified with the first era of human history as shaped in the Old Testament and adopted by Muslim historiography. This is the era spanning between Adam and Abraham, and it is pre-national because the forefathers of the people of Israel were born only after Abraham.

Of the Biblical pre-national patriarchs, the one who is especially identified in Islam with the idea of the *fiṭrah*, is Abraham. Before

---

[5] See Camilla Adang, "Islam as the Inborn Religion of Mankind: the Concept of *fiṭra* in the Works of Ibn Ḥazm," *al-Qanṭara* 21 (2000): 391–410.

[6] For example, Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, (Beirut: Dār iḥyā' al-turāth al-'arabī, 1958), 2:125 (23:93); A.J. Wensinck, *A Handbook of Early Muhammadan Tradition* (repr. Leiden, E.J. Brill. 1971), s.v. "Religion".

[7] For example, Aḥmad b. Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fatḥ al-bārī sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Būlāq: 1310/1892; reprinted Beirut: n.d.), 3:197–98.

looking at the material bearing this out, it may be observed that already in the Talmud Abraham appears as a self-made believer, one whose religion came from within his own self:

> R. Simeon b. Yoḥai said: "His [Abraham's] father did not teach him, nor did he have a teacher; whence then did he learn the Torah? The fact is, however, that the Holy One, blessed be He, made his two kidneys serve like two teachers for him, and these welled forth and taught him wisdom."[8]

Abraham's religion was embedded in him since childhood, as is clear in the following Talmudic saying: "Abraham was three years old when he acknowledged the Creator. . . ."[9]

In the Islamic sources as well the image of Abraham was molded on the same pattern of an ideal believer, and as such he was identified with the idea of the *fiṭrah*. The relevant material is contained in the exegesis of Qur'ān 2:124: "And when his Lord tried Abraham with words and he fulfilled them. . . ." A glance at the exegetical traditions recorded in the commentaries on this verse[10] reveals that the *fiṭrah* is explicitly labeled as Abraham's, and is described as a system of laws of purity, including circumcision (*khitān*),[11] shaving of hairy parts of the body, paring the nails,[12] etc.

Not only Abraham, but Noah too is associated in the Talmud with the idea of a supranational religion. This comes out in the idea of (seven) laws usually known as the "Noachian laws,"[13] i.e. the laws enjoined upon the sons of Noah, which preceded the laws given to Moses at Sinai, and are therefore obligatory upon all civilized nations and individuals. Circumcision is also sometimes considered a Noachian law, and Abraham, to whom the command of circumcision was given in Genesis 17:9–14, as well as his descendants until Sinai, are also accounted the sons of Noah.[14] But in other passages circumcision is a command fulfilled by Abraham apart from the Noachian laws.[15]

---

[8] *Genesis Rabbah* 61 no. 1.

[9] *Nedarim* 32a.

[10] For example, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr fī al-tafsīr bi-al-maʿthūr* (Beirut: Dār al-maʿrifah li-al-ṭibāʿah wa-al-nashr, n.d.), 1:111f.

[11] For which see M.J. Kister, "'. . . And He Was Born Circumcised . . .': Some Notes on Circumcision *ḥadīth*," *Oriens* 34 (1994): 10–30.

[12] See Kister, "Pare Your Nails: a Study of an Early Tradition", Near Eastern Studies in Memory of M.M. Bravmann, *The Journal of The Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* 11 (1979): 63–70.

[13] For example, *Sanhedrin* 56a.

[14] *Sanhedrin* 59a–b.

[15] *Yoma* 28b.

Whatever the case may be, Noah and Abraham appear in the Talmud as adhering to a supranational system of laws, in fact, a pre-national one, and pre-Moses in particular.

In the Old Testament and in the Jewish Midrash there is no continuous line yet in which the pre-national religion is forwarded through the generations, and Noah and Abraham appear as isolated instances of righteousness among generations of sin. This comes out clearly in the two following passages from the *Pirke Aboth*:[16]

2. There were ten generations from Adam to Noah to make known how great is His patience: for all those generations continued to anger Him until He brought upon them the waters of the Flood.
3. There were ten generations from Noah to Abraham to make known how great is His patience: for all those generations continued to anger Him until Abraham our father came and received the reward of them all.

Nevertheless, an idea about a successive line of a divine hereditary legacy running along those primordial generations begins to emerge in Jewish Hellenistic literature from the Second Temple period. In it, the unity of the human race between Adam and Noah is highlighted, and the patriarchs living in each generation have become links in a dynasty of leaders imposing their global authority on their human contemporaries, and bequeathing it to their offspring.

Most instructive is the manner in which the pre-national age is described in the apocryphal *Book of Jubilees*,[17] which was composed around 130 B.C.E. In Chapter 7:20–35 a list of seven laws enjoined by Noah to his sons is provided, which is obviously an elaboration on the Talmudic Noachian laws. In the present version they pertain to observing righteousness, covering their flesh, blessing their Creator, honoring their parents, loving their neighbor, avoiding fornication and impurity, and not shedding or eating blood. Concluding his address, Noah says to his sons:

> For thus did Enoch, the father of your father, command Methuselah, his son, and Methuselah his son Lamech, and Lamech commanded me all the things which his fathers commanded him. And I also will give you commandment, my sons, as Enoch commanded his son in the first

[16] *Pirke Aboth*, 5: nos. 2–3.

[17] English version in R.H. Charles, ed., *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament Vol. II: Pseudepigrapha* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913).

> jubilees: while still living, the seventh in his generation, he commanded and testified to his son and to his son's sons until the day of his death.[18]

This passage conveys the idea that all humankind in the generations between Adam and Noah was unified under one unchanging system of laws, which were passed on from one ancestor to the other in a ceremonial commandment. Noah's own commandment was formed on the exact model of his ancestors.

The idea of a successive religious legacy recurs in the apocryphal book of Enoch, known as *The Secrets of Enoch*,[19] but here a most significant component is added to the legacy, that is, sacred scriptures, which turn the ancestors from lawgivers to prophets. The scriptures possessed by them are called "the books of their handwriting" which means that they committed to writing what was revealed to them by God. The books that are listed here are of the handwriting of Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared and Enoch himself.[20] The latter is said to have written down 360 scriptures that an angel dictated to him.[21]

These books are of a universal message, as is indicated by the fact that God commanded that they be distributed "children to children, generation to generation, nations to nations."[22] They contained "all the Lord's works, all that has been from the beginning of creation and will be till the end of times."[23] On the other hand, the scriptures are also treated in Enoch as secret ones, and they will only be revealed to faithful people in generations to come.[24] In another apocryphal source, published as *1 Enoch*, the scriptures are written by Enoch as part of his last testament to his son Methuselah, whom he commands to keep the books and hand them over to the coming generations.[25]

The history between Adam and Noah was treated not only in religious apocrypha but also in the historical chronicle of Josephus Flavius, known as *Antiquities of the Jews*. Here the ancestors between

---

[18] Book of Jubilees 7:38–39 in Charles, *The Apocrypha*. See also Uri Rubin, "Prophets and Progenitors in the Early Shī'a Tradition," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 1 (1979): 56.

[19] The Book of the Secrets of Enoch [Version A], in Charles, *The Apocrypha*.

[20] The Secrets of Enoch, 33:10, in Charles, *The Apocrypha*.

[21] The Secrets of Enoch, 23:6, in Charles, *The Apocrypha*.

[22] The Secrets of Enoch, 33:9, in Charles, *The Apocrypha*. Compare, Rubin, "Prophets and Progenitors," 58 n. 103a.

[23] The Secrets of Enoch, 47:2, in Charles, *The Apocrypha*.

[24] The Secrets of Enoch, 35:2, in Charles, *The Apocrypha*.

[25] *1 Enoch*, 82:1.

Adam and Noah are described as a dynasty of political and administrative leaders. Enosh the son of Seth, says Flavius, when he was nine hundred and twelve years old, "delivered the government to Kenan his son". About Jared the son of Mahalalel, Flavius says that "his son Enoch succeeded him." Enoch's son, Methuselah, "delivered the government" to his son Lamech, and Lamech in his turn, "appointed Noah, his son, to be ruler of the people." Noah "retained the government nine hundred and fifty years."[26]

In sum, the antediluvian ancestors between Adam and Noah, as perceived in the above non-Islamic sources, form a successive line of hereditary authority that is prophetic and religious as well as administrative and political.

II. *The Pre-National Prophets in Islamic Historiography*

This universal model became the prototype of the primordial version of Islam. Accordingly, Noah emerges in Islam as the founder of some basic Islamic precepts, which are described as a part of his last will (*waṣīyah*). A tradition enumerating them says that he gave his sons two commands and two prohibitions. The commands were: 1. To say "there is no god but Allāh"; this is the first component of the Islamic testimony of faith (*shahādah*). 2. To say "God be praised" (*al-ḥamdu li-Allāh*). The two prohibitions were: 1. Worshipping idols (*shirk*). 2. Arrogance (*kibr*).[27] The fact that one of Noah's commandments is to say the *shahādah* points clearly to the identity between Islam and the pre-national religion which has become its primordial model.

Moreover, in other traditions the universal pre-national religion is called "Islam". The most explicit of them is perhaps the one recorded in Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845), in which 'Ikrimah, (a Medinan *mawlā* of Ibn 'Abbās, d. 105/723) states: "There were ten generations between Adam and Noah, all of them Muslims" (*kāna bayna Ādam wa-Nūḥ*

[26] Josephus Flavius, *The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus*, translated by William Whiston (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, n.d.), Antiquities of the Jews, 1:3, 4. See Rubin, "Prophets and Progenitors," 56 with n. 95.

[27] Faḍl Allāh al-Jaylānī, *Faḍl Allāh al-ṣamad fī tawḍīḥ al-adab al-mufrad li-al-Bukhārī* (Ḥimṣ: al-Maktabah al-islāmīyah, 1969), 2:4–5. See also Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Tha'labī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-thaqāfīyah, n.d.), 51–52; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-islāmī li-al-ṭibā'ah wa-al-nashr, 1978), 2:170, 225.

ʿashratu qurūnin, kullu-hum ʿalā al-islām).[28] This tradition singles out the antediluvian era as the golden age of the pre-national Islamic religion.

The tradition just mentioned, as well as other similar ones, is also found in commentaries on Qurʾān 2:213: "The people were one nation (*ummah wāḥidah*), then God sent prophets with good tidings and with warnings . . .". Some of the commentaries on this verse take it to mean that the people were all true believers since the days of Adam, till they became divided after Noah.[29] This concentration on the antediluvian era is probably the result of the view, already present in the Old Testament, that after the Deluge, the descendants of Noah's sons were divided into three separate races, which marked the end of the universal predominance of one supranational religion. Nevertheless, in the Semite line of Noah's offspring, the pre-national, or rather, the pre-Israelite, period continues until Abraham, which explains why he too is still a follower of a universal code of religious laws.

Islamic historiography has also turned the patriarchs into no less than prophets sent by God to spread His religion among humankind. In some traditions, the first person ever to be sent by God to warn his people is Noah.[30] Enoch too is described as a prophet in traditions identifying him with Idrīs who is said to have been the first man to whom prophecy was given.[31] Alternately, Enoch/Idrīs is said to have been the first to be sent as a prophet after Adam.[32] In another tradition, Seth is the first prophet after Adam,[33] and Adam himself, so the tradition tells us on the authority of no other than Muḥammad, was the first prophet God sent.[34] Thus, Adam and Muḥammad became the

---

[28] Muḥammaad b. Saʿd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt*, edited by Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār ṣādir li-al-ṭibāʿah wa-al-nashr, 1960), 1:42. The *isnād*: Sufyān ibn Saʿīd al-Thawrī (Kūfan, d. 161/778) ← his father ← ʿIkrimah. See also a tradition of Ibn al-Kalbī (d. 204/819) ← his father ← Abū Ṣāliḥ, ← Ibn ʿAbbās, in Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-al-mulūk*, edited by Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-maʿārif, 1987), 1:189; edited by M.J. De Goeje *et al.* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1879–1901), 1:197.

[29] For details see Uri Rubin, "Pre-Existence and Light—Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muḥammad," *Israel Oriental Studies* 5 (1975): 78.

[30] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:178; 1:183–184.

[31] ʿAbd al-Malik b. Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-nabawīyah*, edited by Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā, Ibrāhīm al-Abyādī, and ʿAbd al-Ḥāfiẓ Shalabī (Beirut: Dār iḥyāʾ al-turāth al-ʿarabī, 1971), 1:3.

[32] Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt*, 1:40, 54 (Ibn al-Kalbī); al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:170; 1:172 (Ibn Isḥāq).

[33] Ibn Qutaybah, *Kitāb al-maʿārif*, edited by Muḥammad Ismāʿīl al-Ṣāwī (Beirut: Dār iḥyāʾ al-turāth al-ʿarabī, 1970), 26.

[34] Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt*, 1:32, 54. The *isnād*: Abū ʿAmr al-Shām (ʿUbādah

two ends of the universal chain of prophets. This correlation between them has been noted in a tradition of Wahb b. Munabbih (Yemeni, d. 110/728) on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās. Wahb declares that Adam was the first of God's messengers and Muḥammad the last.[35]

Islamic historiography has also taken up the idea of an antediluvian legacy being passed on from generation to generation in a hereditary line. The hereditary aspect has become the most crucial feature of the pre-national religion, which has provided Islam with the possibility to connect Muḥammad to the chain of prophets, and to make him their most notable heir. In fact, Islamic historiography turned the Prophet Muḥammad into the final destination of the course in which the divine legacy was forwarded from generation to generation, and thus Muḥammad's Islam became the final link in the sacred history of God's religion.

The linkage between Muḥammad's Islam and the pre-national religion of God determined the literary structure of the earliest available historiographical works composed by Muslims of the first Islamic era. They begin their historical survey not with Muḥammad, the putative founder of Islam, but rather with the creation of the world and the history of its inhabitants, from Adam on. In this manner, they wished to indicate that Muḥammad's Islamic legacy was identical with the divine legacy that was transmitted from generation to generation since Adam.

The best example that bears this out is Ibn Isḥāq, one of the first systematic biographers of Muḥammad (d. 150/768). His work is usually known in the edition of Ibn Hishām, but the latter does not contain the first part of the original work which has only been preserved by al-Ṭabarī in his famous Book of History (*Tāʾrīkh al-umam wa-al-mulūk*).[36] Al-Ṭabarī quotes Ibn Isḥāq through the traditionist Salamah b. al-Faḍl (d. 191/807), whose version of Ibn Isḥāq is considered the most reliable one.[37] Most of the material quoted by Ibn Isḥāq in this part is derived from Jewish sources whom Ibn Isḥāq often calls "people of the first book" (*ahl al-kitāb al-awwal*), i.e. the Torah.[38]

---

b. Nusayy) (Syrian, d. 118/736) ← ʿUbayd ibn al-Khashkhāsh ← Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī (Companion, d. 32/652–3) ← Prophet. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:151; 1:152), where Abū Dharr is quoted by Abū Idrīs al-Khawlānī (ʿĀʾidh Allāh b. ʿAbd Allāh) (Syrian, d. 80/699).

[35] Ibn Qutaybah, *Kitāb al-maʿārif*, 26.

[36] Compare Rubin, "Prophets and Progenitors," 57–58.

[37] Compare Rubin, "Prophets and Progenitors," 57 n. 101 (from *Tārīkh Baghdād*).

[38] For example, Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:139; 1:139–40.

Ibn Isḥāq's account bears a considerable resemblance to the *Book of Jubilees*, especially with respect to the names of the old patriarchs' wives, which he provides. They are identical to those recorded in the *Book of Jubilees*, although they have been distorted in the available Arabic text of al-Ṭabarī.[39]

The idea of hereditary authority is represented most clearly in Ibn Isḥāq's account as quoted by al-Ṭabarī. Ibn Isḥāq tells us that when Adam was about to die, he called his son Seth and appointed him his heir. He informed his son of the approaching Deluge and wrote his testament (*waṣīyah*) for him. Seth acted as Adam's legatee (*waṣīy*) and inherited the government (*al-riʾāsah*) from him. According to a tradition, which Ibn Isḥāq quotes on the authority of Muḥammad, God revealed to Seth fifty scriptures (*ṣaḥīfah*).[40]

Thus the basic features of the hereditary authority as delineated in the Jewish sources has been faithfully reproduced by Ibn Isḥāq. The ancestors in his description, too, are links in a genealogical line of leaders who possess an authority of a clear prophetic, religious, as well as administrative nature. Seth inherits government from his father, and God reveals scriptures to him.

Ibn Isḥāq says also that after writing his testament, Adam died and the angels assembled around him because he was God's chosen person (*ṣafīy al-raḥmān*).[41] This title makes it clear that the persons possessing the hereditary legacy are not merely links in a successive dynasty, but at the same time are also individuals chosen by God for their holy mission. Hereditary succession and divine election are therefore two complementary aspects of their authoritative status.

The hereditary legacy consists of some concrete emblems of authority. Ibn Isḥāq relates that Seth collected the items included in Adam's legacy, among which was the horn (*qarn*) that Adam had brought from Paradise. They were put on lofty stairs (*miʿrāj*) to make sure that no one forgot them.[42]

Seth was succeeded by Enoch, about whom Ibn Isḥāq says that he took over the administration of the realm (*qāma bi-siyāsati al-mulk*), and the guidance of the subjects under his control (*wa-tadbīr man taḥta*

---

[39] See Rubin, "Prophets and Progenitors," 58 n. 109; Franz Rosenthal, trans., *The History of al-Ṭabarī Volume I: General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 317 n. 903.

[40] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:152; 1:153.

[41] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:159; 1:161.

[42] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:159; 1:161.

yaday-hi min raʿīyati-hi). He continued in his father's way, and no one ever noticed that he changed anything in it.[43] Here another crucial feature of the legacy comes out, namely, that it ought to remain unchanged, because change means deviation from the original and ideal state of God's religion. Defending the legacy against change and innovation is the divine duty of each person in the chosen dynasty.

Further on the people of the Torah are quoted concerning the revelation of thirty scriptures to Enoch and about his combat against the rebellious sons of Cain. It is stated that Enoch was his father's legatee (*waṣīy*) in accordance with what his father's forefathers had enjoined (*awṣaw*) upon him and upon each other.[44]

Enoch, so another account from the people of the Torah goes, before he ascended to heaven, appointed (*istakhlafa*) his son Methuselah as his successor, to be in charge of God's government (*ʿalā amr Allāh*).[45] This is perhaps the most explicit manifestation of the two complementary aspects of the authority of the ancestors. They are both heirs to their fathers as well as God's deputies who are in charge of His government. Thus, the hereditary legacy forms the core of God's religion on earth.

From the people of the Torah it is also reported that Lamech was born to Methuselah, and Methuselah maintained his forefathers' obedience to God and their faithfulness to God's commandments (*ʿuhūd*). When Methuselah was about to die, he appointed his son Lamech as his successor (*istakhlafa*) to be in charge of his government (*ʿalā amri-hi*), and enjoined upon him the same unchanging legacy as his ancestors had enjoined upon him.[46]

Historiographers later than Ibn Isḥāq repeated the accounts about the successive legacy of the antediluvian patriarchs. Ibn al-Kalbī (Hishām b. Muḥammad, d. 204/819), for example, provides an account on the authority of his father, which is traced back to Ibn ʿAbbās. It was recorded by Ibn Saʿd as well as al-Ṭabarī. Ibn al-Kalbī delineates the successive transmission of the legacy (*waṣīyah*) from Seth to Enosh, and on to Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah and Lamech the father of Noah.[47]

---

[43] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:163; 1:164–65.
[44] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:170; 1:173.
[45] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:172–73; 1:176–77.
[46] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:173; 1:178.
[47] Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt*, 1:39, 40; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:163, 164, 174; 1:165–66, 179; Rubin, "Prophets and Progenitors," 59.

As for the period from Noah to Abraham, neither Ibn Isḥāq nor Ibn al-Kalbī delineate an uninterrupted course of the hereditary legacy during these generations. The reason seems to be that Abraham is regarded as opening a period of his own, being a believer born to pagan ancestors who could not act as bearers of any legacy of righteousness. The same applies to the above-mentioned Jewish sources, where the successive line of the legacy is only described between Adam and Noah.

However, the interest Muslim historiographers took in the successive transmission of the legacy in the antediluvian period is evidence enough that they regarded this period as the first stage of the history of Islam itself, and that they considered Muḥammad as heir to that same unchanging legacy. That this was indeed so is indicated especially in the above traditions that identify the pre-national religion with Islam.

III. *The Israelite Prophets and Muḥammad*

Muslim historiographers have also dedicated much room to the period spanning between the pre-national era and Muḥammad, which consists of the history of the Jews and the Christians. Their prophets provide the essential bridge linking between the pre-national era and Muḥammad himself.

Ibn Isḥāq's account of these prophets begins with Isaac the son of Abraham,[48] and ends with Jesus and his disciples.[49] Al-Ṭabarī himself, who quotes Ibn Isḥāq's traditions about the Israelite prophets, has interpolated among them additional traditions from other sources, and in some of them explicit mention is made of the transmission of the legacy from one Israelite generation to another. Thus, for example, the transition of the *waṣīyah* from Jacob to Joseph,[50] and from Joseph to Judah his brother is mentioned explicitly.[51]

A detailed description of a successive authority running along the generations since Adam, and continued through the Israelites, is provided by the Shī'ī author al-Ya'qūbī (d. 283/897). His *History* abounds

[48] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:317; 1:354–55.
[49] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:602–604; 1:737–39.
[50] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:364; 1:413.
[51] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:363; 1:413.

with quotations from the Bible and other Jewish and Christian sources,[52] and they form the axis around which his account of the pre-Islamic history revolves. His work has been defined as "the earliest universal chronicle in Arabic in the sense of a work going from the Creation down to his own time,"[53] but this can only be true if Ibn Isḥāq is not taken into account.

Thus the Israelite prophets have become the intermediaries between Muḥammad and the pre-national stage of history. This means that Islam has turned them into legitimate representatives of the primordial religion of God.

The Muslims paid special attention to the relationship between the last Israelite prophet, namely Jesus, and Muḥammad. Chronologically speaking, Jesus was the closest Israelite prophet to Muḥammad, and this closeness in time was turned in Islam into a blood relationship. This is the intent of a tradition transmitted by Abū Hurayrah (Companion, d. 57/677), in which Muḥammad declares: "I am the closest person (*awlā al-nās*) to Jesus the son of Mary in this world and in the world to come." When asked how this could be, the Prophet went on explaining: "The prophets are brothers born to fellow-wives (*'allāt*), i.e. their mothers are various and their religion is the same. There is no prophet between me and him."[54]

The prophets are likened here to sons of the same father by various mothers, the father being the one unchanging religion of God that unites them all, and this makes them brothers in the same religion, and among them Jesus and Muḥammad are the closest pair. Their various mothers, so it was explained by some Muslim scholars, represent their various types of *sharī'ah*, i.e. the distinctive religious laws which differ from one monotheistic community to the other.[55]

---

[52] On Ya'qūbī's sources for the Biblical period and especially the Arabic translation of the Syriac *Book of the Cave of Treasures*, see Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Ḥazm* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 117–20, and the bibliography therein.

[53] Stephen R. Humphreys, *Islamic History: a Framework for Inquiry* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1988), 75.

[54] Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad b. Ḥibbān al-Bustī, *al-Iḥsān fī taqrīb Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān, tartīb 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Fārisī*, edited by Shu'ayb al-Arna'ūṭ (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-risālah, 1988), 14: no. 6194. See also Ibn Ḥibbān, *al-Iḥsān fī taqrīb Ṣaḥīḥ*, 14: no. 6195; al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:203 (60:48); Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Muḥammad 'Alī Ṣubayḥ wa-awlādi-hi, 1916), 7:96 (43, *Bāb faḍā'il 'Īsā*); Abū Dāwūd, *al-Sunan* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī, 1952), 2:522 (39:13); Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, 2:319, 406, 437, 463–64, 482, and 541.

[55] For example, Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-bārī*, 6:354.

The need to emphasize the affinity of Jesus and Muḥammad was probably the result of the fact that Jesus was succeeded by several generations of Christian disciples, of whom Islam was well aware, as is indicated by the many reports about them in Islamic sources. They can be traced mainly in the commentaries on various Qur'ānic verses, which were interpreted as dealing with the interval (*fatrah*)[56] between Jesus and Muḥammad.[57] In view of these reports about Jesus' Christian successors, it may be assumed that the tradition highlighting Muḥammad's own relationship to Jesus was designed to imply that Muḥammad, rather than Jesus' Christian followers, is the most authentic representative of the religious message of Jesus. The anti-Christian polemical gist is clear enough here.

Just as Muḥammad was said to have been the closest person to Jesus, he was also presented as the closest one to Moses, and in this case the polemical message is not anti-Christian but rather anti-Jewish. It comes out in traditions recounting the history of the 'Āshūrā' day. In some of them a relationship between this day and the Jewish Day of Atonement is implied. It is related that when Muḥammad came to Medina after his *hijrah* from Mecca, he found out that the Jews of that city used to fast on the day of 'Āshūrā'. He asked them to tell him the reason for that, and they told him that this day was a holiday because on it God delivered the Children of Israel from their enemies, and therefore Moses had fasted on this day. Then Muḥammad said to the Jews: "I am more worthy of Moses than you are" (*anā aḥaqqu bi-Mūsā min-kum*), and thereupon he started to fast on the day of 'Āshūrā' and ordered the Muslims to follow suit.[58] This means that the Islamic *ummah* and not the Jews are the most authentic bearers of the legacy of Moses.

In another version, transmitted on the authority of Muḥammad's companion Abū Hurayrah, the history of 'Āshūrā' shoved even further back, deep into the pre-national stage of history. The Jews explain to Muḥammad that this day was a holiday for them not only because of God's salvation in the time of Moses, but also because on that

---

[56] Compare Qur'ān 5:19.

[57] The verses are mainly these: Qur'ān 36:13f.; 18:9f.; 85:4. And see also Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt*, 1:53.

[58] al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 3:57 30:69); Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, 1:291, 310. The *isnād*: Sa'īd b. Jubayr (Kūfan, d. 95/713–14) ← Ibn 'Abbās. In another version with the same *isnād*, *awlā* is used instead of, or in addition to, *aḥaqqu*. See al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:186 (60:24); Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, 1:336.

day Noah's Ark landed on dry land (on the mountain Jūdī), and therefore Noah fasted in gratitude.[59] Thus the Islamic religious legacy has been rooted in a universal channel encompassing Noah and Moses and ending up with Muḥammad.

Not only Moses but David too is a typical Jewish symbol of salvation and victory, and here again Muḥammad has been turned into his worthiest heir. The traditions establishing the link between David and Muḥammad revolve around Muḥammad's private belongings, which formed an important part of his legacy. Among the effects he left behind was the mail coat (*dirʿ*), which protected him on the battlefield, and according to a tradition, it was a legacy of David. David was clad in it when he confronted Goliath.[60]

All these traditions demonstrate the perception of Muḥammad's Islam as originating in the divine and unchanging legacy that God entrusted with all the prophets since Adam. Therefore Muḥammad's Islam is the only faith to which all humankind should adhere.

In further traditions the concept of the unchanging divine legacy that transmigrates through the generations from Adam to Muḥammad has been combined with the idea of Muḥammad's pre-existence.[61] The successive legacy has been identified with Muḥammad's own pre-existent entity. Thus this universal legacy was entirely Islamized in the sense that Muḥammad became its first origin. The prophets have become mere vessels carrying the pre-existent Muḥammad. In one of these traditions, recorded by Ibn Saʿd, the following statement has been attributed to Muḥammad:

> I was brought forth from amongst the best generations of the sons of Adam, generation after generation, until I was brought forth from the generation in which I live. *Buʿithtu min khayri qurūni banī Ādam qarnan fa-qarnan ḥattā buʿithtu min al-qarni alladhī kuntu fī-hi*.[62]

As already pointed out by Goldziher,[63] this tradition speaks about the same prophet—i.e. the pre-existent Muḥammad—who has appeared

---

[59] Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, 2:359–60.

[60] Abū Saʿd ʿAbd al-Malik b. Abī ʿUthmān al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī* (MS British Library, Or. 3014), fol. 161b; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib* (Najaf: al-Maṭbaʿah al-ḥaydarīyah, 1956), 1:147.

[61] For which see Rubin, "Pre-Existence and Light," 62–119.

[62] Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt*, 1:25. Compare Rubin, "Pre-Existence and Light," 71–72. The *isnād*: ʿAmr b. Abī ʿAmr [= Maysarah, a *mawlā* of al-Muṭṭalib b. ʿAbd Allāh] (Medinan, d. 144/761) ← Saʿīd al-Maqburī (Medinan, d. 123/741) ← Abū Hurayrah ← Prophet.

[63] Ignaz Goldziher, "Neuplatonische und gnostische Elemente im Ḥadīṯ," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete* 22 (1909): 340.

among humans, generation after generation (*qarnan fa-qarnan*), until at last he arose as Muḥammad.[64] It follows that this tradition, which also appears in Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*,[65] as well as in other sources,[66] identifies the divine legacy that has been transmitted from generation to generation not merely with Islam but also with Muḥammad himself. The course of its transmission is not confined to any specific era but is infinite in the sense that it encompasses all human generations which ever existed until Muḥammad. The basic idea is that the generations along which the legacy passed were the best, i.e. they constituted a chosen pedigree that reached up to Muḥammad.

More traditions of the same intent can easily be pointed out by recourse to the commentaries on a Qur'ānic verse, 26:219. This verse deals with the Prophet's movement (*taqallub*) among those who prostrate themselves (*al-sājidīn*). A tradition of Ibn 'Abbās as recorded by Ibn Sa'd says that the Qur'ān speaks here about the transmigration of Muḥammad "from prophet to prophet and from prophet to prophet, till God brought him forth as a prophet."[67]

In sum, the idea of divine authoritative legacy running along the generations and delivered to the people through the messages of the various prophets has been identified with Muḥammad's pre-existent entity, which brings the concept of the universal origins of Islam to its utmost elaboration.

IV. *The Umayyad Caliphs*

The relationship established between Islam and the universal and supranational religion was designed to ensure legitimacy for the Islamic domination over the older communities, i.e. the Jews and the Christians. The latter observed with astonishment the Islamic conquests that brought to an end their own hegemony in world history. To justify this drastic change of authority caused by its takeover of old empires,

---

[64] I now realize that my criticism of Goldziher concerning the significance of this tradition (Rubin, "Pre-Existence and Light," 72 n. 27) was unjustified.

[65] al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:229 (61:23).

[66] Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwah*, edited by 'Abd al-Mu'ṭī Qal'ajī (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyyah, 1988), 1:175; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Khaṣā'iṣ al-kubrā*, edited by Muḥammad Khalīl Harās (Cairo: Dār al-kutub al-ḥadīthah, 1967), 1:94.

[67] Ibn Sa'd, *Kītāb al-ṭabaqāt*, 1:25. The *isnād*: al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Makhlad al-Shaybānī (Baṣran, d. *ca.* 212/827) ← Shabīb ibn Bishr (Ḥalabī/Kūfan) ← 'Ikrimah ← Ibn 'Abbās. See also Goldziher, "Neuplatonische und gnostische Elemente im Ḥadīṯ," 340. Compare Rubin, "Pre-Existence and Light," 80 with n. 78.

Islam had to anchor its own origins in the universal past. From there it strove to draw legitimacy for its authority and confirm its identity as a community that has replaced Judaism and Christianity and has become the new guardian of God's religious legacy.

But the Islamic link to the universal legacy of divine authority was designed to serve not only external purposes but also internal necessities. There were tensions and struggles within Islamic society itself that were focused on the claim to authority. The various parties tried to link themselves to the divine chain of universal authority, and thus gain the status of the only legitimate guardians of God's eternal religion.

The main parties to this struggle for authority in Islamic society of the first Islamic era were two opposing dynasties, the Umayyad and the Shī'ī ones. Each tried to gain recognition as Muḥammad's exclusive heirs from whom they inherited the universal legacy that he had received from the previous prophets. The Shī'ī side of the matter has already been clarified elsewhere,[68] but the Umayyad one seems to deserve further consideration.

The Umayyads, whose center was in Damascus, Syria, were the first to introduce dynastic government into Islam. Their dynastic rule began in 41/661, after the period of the Righteous Caliphs whose center had been in Medina (Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān). The first rulers of the Umayyad dynasty belonged to the Sufyānī family, i.e. the descendants of Abū Sufyān, father of Mu'āwiyah, who was the first Umayyad caliph (r. 41–58/661–80). The Sufyānīs were succeeded by the Marwānī branch of the Umayyads, the first of whom was 'Abd al-Malik son of Marwān, who ascended in 64/684.

IV.1 *The Evidence of Walīd's Letter*

The manner in which the Umayyads tried to base their own dynastic authority on the hereditary legacy of the prophets is best reflected in a letter sent to the garrison cities on behalf of the Umayyad caliph Walīd II (r. 25–26/743–44) concerning the designation of his successors. The Arabic text was preserved in al-Ṭabarī's *Tā'rīkh*.[69] Various scholars already noted the importance of the letter, and P. Crone

[68] Rubin, "Prophets and Progenitors," 41–65. See also Etan Kohlberg, "Some Shī'ī Views on the Antediluvian World," *Studia Islamica* 52 (1980): 41–66.

[69] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 7:219–220; 2:1757.

and M. Hinds carried out the most recent study of it.[70] I believe, however, that the letter still deserves examination because not all its aspects have been noticed yet, let alone some errors in its English translation as offered by Crone and Hinds.

In this letter the caliph tries to anchor the dynastic principle of hereditary authority in the past. The letter sees in history two major phases, or eras: Universal and Islamic.

The Islamic era in Walīd's letter begins with the Prophet Muḥammad. This is not as obvious as it may seem, because Crone and Hinds claim that in this letter the Islamic era does not begin with Muḥammad but rather with the caliphs who ruled after him. In their own words: "Al-Walīd here sketches out a salvation history divided into two eras, one of prophets and another of caliphs". Muḥammad, in their interpretation of the letter, "represented the culmination of prophethood and on his death the era of the prophets came to an end. The era of the caliphs began when, on the death of Muḥammad, God raised up deputies to administer the legacy of His prophets." Crone and Hinds go on to stress that "What is so striking about this letter is that caliphs are in no way subordinated to prophets (let alone to the Prophet). Prophets and caliphs alike are seen as God's agents, and both dutifully carry out the tasks assigned to them, the former by delivering messages and the latter by putting them into effect. The caliphs are the legatees of prophets in the sense that they administer something established by them, but they do not owe their authority to them (let alone to Muḥammad on his own). Their authority comes directly from God."[71]

But in Walīd's letter Muḥammad does open the Islamic era, and the caliphs, who represent God's religion among humans (which makes them God's deputies), do owe their immediate status to Muḥammad. They are his heirs as guardians of God's legacy, just as he is heir to the previous prophets. This comes out clearly in that passage of the letter in which the emergence of Muḥammad is described. It is stated here that Muḥammad emerged as a prophet at a time when knowledge was obliterated and people were blind, with evil deviations and frictions tearing them apart. Through Muḥammad, so the letter says,

---

[70] Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 26–28. Full translation is provided in 118f.

[71] Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 27.

God guided the blind and restored light to them, and through him God "revived the religion (*wa-abhaja bi-hi al-dīn*)". The letter goes on to say that many of Muḥammad's nation responded to him and became adherents of the religion with which God had honored them. No one of Muḥammad's adherents was ever heard denying the truth of God's message as revealed to the previous prophets, without being punished by the believers for his disbelief.

Such an exposition of the situation into which Muḥammad emerged as a prophet leaves no doubt as to the role assigned to him here. He is clearly the first religious leader in a new era in which belief in God is renewed and the darkness of disbelief is turned into light of knowledge and faith. This is evidently the idea, well known from many other Islamic texts, according to which Muḥammad's emergence put an end to the ignorance of the *jāhilīyah*.

All this is recounted in the letter only to draw a comparison between Muḥammad and the caliphs who succeeded him. According to the letter, the caliphs, like Muḥammad, are meant to secure the endurance of the revived religion that had been preached by all the prophets, and therefore everyone must obey them, while God Himself will punish anyone who rejects them.

The caliphs, according to the letter, are God's deputies in the sense that they must protect a divine legacy, but their actual authority is explicitly hereditary. This authority is called in the letter *amr*, which term appears in the following passage of the letter:[72]

> When God took away His prophet and sealed His revelation with him, He appointed his caliphs as His deputies in the vein of His prophethood (*ʿalā minhāj nubūwati-hi*). . . . The caliphs of God followed one another (*fa-tatābaʿa*), adhering to the matter (*amr*) of His prophets, which God had caused them to inherit (*awratha-hum*), and He appointed them to be in charge of it on His behalf (*wa-stakhlafa-hum ʿalay-hi min-hu*).[73]

The term *amr*, which here denotes "authority", or "government", recurs in the above texts pertaining to the antediluvian stage of history. For example, we have seen that Enoch is said to have appointed (*istakhlafa*) his son Methuselah as his successor, to be in charge of God's government (*ʿalā amr Allāh*). Here, as in the letter, *amr* appears in juxtaposition with *istakhlafa*, the verb that describes the appointment of

---

[72] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 7:220; 2:1757–58.

[73] Crone and Hinds provide a different, less accurate, translation of the passage. Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 120.

a successor to be in charge of the legacy. Just as the antediluvian ancestors were nominated by their fathers to be in charge of the divine *amr*, so the caliphs, according to the letter, were made by God heirs to the prophets from whom they inherited their actual authority as defenders of the divine hereditary legacy.

In fact, the letter itself refers to those remote stages of the past and sees in them the starting point of the divine authority inherited by the Umayyad caliphs through Muḥammad. These stages are described in the very first passage of the letter. The English translation of this passage in Crone and Hinds' *God's Caliph* is erroneous, and misses the idea of successive authority that is being conveyed here. Due to this error, Crone and Hinds believe to find in the letter support to their supposition that the Umayyads did not see themselves as Muḥammad's heirs, only as God's deputies. The original Arabic text is this:

> *ammā baʿdu, fa-innā Allāha . . . ikhtāra al-islāma dīnan li-nafsi-hi wa-jaʿala-hu dīna khayrati-hi min khalqi-hi, thumma iṣṭafā min al-malāʾikati rusulan wa-min al-nāsi, fa-baʿatha-hum bi-hi wa-amara-hum bi-hi, wa-kāna bayna-hum wa-bayna man maḍā min al-umami wa-khalā min al-qurūnī qarnan fa-qarnan, yadʿūna ilā mā hiya aḥsanu wa-yahdūna ilā ṣirāṭin mustaqīmin, ḥattā intahat karāmatu Allāhi fī nubūwati-hi ilā Muḥammadin (ṣ) . . .* [74]

Crone and Hinds render the passage as follows:

> To continue, God . . . chose Islam as His own religion and made it the religion of the chosen ones of His creation. Then He selected messengers from among angels and men, and He sent them with it and enjoined it upon them. So there was between them and the nations which passed away and the generations which vanished, generation upon generation [events of the type described in the Qurʾān, but they continued to?] call to 'that which is better and guide to a straight path. Ultimately the grace of God [as manifested] in His prophethood reached Muḥammad . . .[75]

The words that Crone and Hinds add in square brackets are only a suggestion by which they try to explain a sentence that they fail to understand correctly. The sentence is this:

> *Wa-kāna bayna-hum wa-bayna man maḍā min al-umami wa-khalā min al-qurūnī qarnan fa-qarnan.*

---

[74] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 7:219; 2:1757.

[75] Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 118–119.

The correct translation seems to be this:

> It [i.e. the religion of Islam] remained among them [i.e. the messengers] and among the past nations and the bygone generations, generation after generation (*qarnan fa-qarnan*).

It is thus clear that this is a complete and coherent Arabic sentence with no lacuna, in contrast to what Crone and Hinds have assumed.[76] The subject of the sentence is the same as the one to which the entire passage is dedicated, namely the religion of Islam that God chose to be His religion and made the religion of His chosen messengers, whom He sent to preach it to their respective peoples.

The key words in the sentence are: *qarnan fa-qarnan* which have the same meaning here as in the above tradition about the transmigration of Muḥammad's pre-existent entity through the generations of the prophets. Here and there the idea is the same: the prophets have belonged to a successive chain of a hereditary divine legacy, which in the letter is identified as the Islamic faith and in the above tradition as the pre-existent Muḥammad. In both instances the legacy is unchanging, and is being forwarded to posterity, generation after generation (*qarnan fa-qarnan*), till the manifestation of Muḥammad's own Islam.

In view of this, the proper translation of the entire passage seems to be as follows:

> To continue, God . . . chose Islam as His own religion and made it the religion of the chosen ones of His creation. Then He selected messengers from among angels and men, and He sent them with it and enjoined it upon them. It [i.e. the religion of Islam] remained among them [i.e. the messengers] and among the past nations and the bygone generations, generation after generation, [during which time] they [i.e. the prophets] were calling to that which is better and guiding to a straight path. [They continued to do this] till at last the grace of God [as manifested] in His prophethood reached Muḥammad . . .

In sum, the universal stage of the course of the hereditary legacy, as described in the letter, reflects the same concept of hereditary authority as witnessed in the above Jewish texts as well as in Ibn Isḥāq. The description of this stage in the letter is designed to furnish the authority of the Umayyad dynasty with the remotest origins in the past. The letter asserts that the caliphs who have inherited the universal legacy

[76] Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 118–119 n. 3.

of the prophets were put in charge of God's religion after Muḥammad's death, and their duty now is to protect it from distortion and pass it on to the coming generations through their own chosen pedigree. This is the reason why people are obliged to obey them, because obeying them means obeying the eternal religion of God.

This is the appropriate context of the status of the Umayyads as God's deputies. They are His deputies in the sense that they are guardians of God's religion, but they only gained this status thanks to the fact that God chose to make them Muḥammad's legatees.

IV.2 *The Evidence of Umayyad Poetry*

Authentic presentation of the Umayyad self-image may be found not only in Walīd's letter but also in Umayyad court poetry. It is authentic in the sense that the poets praising the Umayyads created an image for them that reflected what they liked to hear about themselves (and paid good money for). Here too Muḥammad is placed at the beginning of the Islamic era, and the evidence for this perception is found mainly in the poetry of Farazdaq (d. 112/730).

That Farazdaq indeed placed Muḥammad at the beginning of the Islamic era is clear from those verses in which he praises the caliph Sulaymān (r. 96–99/715–717). The poet describes him as a source of mercy to humankind, whom God sent to heal all sore wounds, like Muḥammad whom God sent at a time of recess (*ʿalā fatrah*), when people were like beasts (*bahā'im*).[77] Here again it is clear that Muḥammad marks the revival of God's religion at a time of beastliness (that is, *Jāhilīyah*) caused by the interval in the line of prophets. Sulaymān's mission is to maintain the survival of God's religion that was revived through Muḥammad, and eliminate all the "wounds" of deviation from it. In short, his mission is to protect Muḥammad's legacy that has reached him through his own Umayyad ancestors.

Furthermore, Muḥammad appears in Farazdaq's verses as the ultimate origin of the Umayyad authority. Crone and Hinds would not agree with this observation, because in their analysis of the Umayyad poetry they contend that "though Muḥammad is now clearly invoked to legitimate the caliphate, it is to God on the one hand and ʿUthmān

[77] Hammām ibn Ghālib al-Farazdaq, *Dīwān* (Beirut, Dār ṣādir li-al-ṭibā'ah wa-l-nashr, 1960), 2:309, 4–5.

on the other that the caliphs are directly indebted for their authority."[78]

However, although ʿUthmān features in Farazdaq as a model of authority, he is not the ultimate one, because he in turn owes his authority to Muḥammad, who again appears as the first in the era of the renewed religion of God. ʿUthmān is mentioned here mainly thanks to being an Umayyad ancestor of the Marwānīs on the one hand and the third of the Righteous Caliphs on the other. But the first two Righteous Caliphs, Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, are mentioned too, and all three are considered as links in a hereditary chain of chosen persons appointed by God to protect and look after Muḥammad's legacy.

That this is indeed the case is indicated, to begin with, in another verse praising the Umayyad caliph Sulaymān. Farazdaq states here that no shepherd equaling this caliph has risen upon earth since the death of the Prophet Muḥammad and ʿUthmān.[79] Thus ʿUthmān emerges as a link in a line of model leaders that begins with Muḥammad. Moreover, in another verse conveying the same idea, ʿUthmān's name is not mentioned explicitly, only that of Muḥammad. This time the poet addresses the caliph Yazīd II (r. 101–105/720–24), saying: "After Muḥammad and his Companions, Islam has not found a shepherd like you for the religion."[80] Clearly the Umayyad caliph is imagined here as a link belonging to a successive chain beginning with Muḥammad and continued through his Companions, i.e. the Righteous Caliphs.

The Umayyads placed the Righteous Caliphs, namely, Abū Bakr, ʿUmar and ʿUthmān (ʿAlī was not recognized by them as a legitimate caliph) as intermediaries between themselves and the Prophet. They saw in them spiritual models and considered themselves heirs to their religious legacy.

As for the first caliph, Abū Bakr, Farazdaq associates him with Muḥammad's legacy. The poet describes him as an *imām* and a scholar (*ʿālim*) who is authorized more than anyone else to interpret (*ta'wīl*) what Muḥammad has enjoined (*waṣṣā*) upon the people.[81] The Umayyads themselves, says Farazdaq, are heirs to the *waṣīyah* of the "Second of the Two after Muḥammad" (*thānī ithnayn baʿda Muḥam-*

[78] Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 31.
[79] al-Farazdaq, *Dīwān*, 2:89, 6.
[80] al-Farazdaq, *Dīwān*, 2:352, 9.
[81] al-Farazdaq, *Dīwān*, 2:62, 7.

madīn).[82] This is Abū Bakr's well-known Qur'ānic epithet;[83] it was applied to him to assert that he was the first legitimate caliph after Muḥammad. The allusion to Abū Bakr's *waṣīyah* is an explicit indication of the fact that the Umayyads saw themselves heirs to his religious legacy. Farazdaq sees in Abū Bakr, together with 'Uthmān, the origin of the Marwānī power, and confers further honorific titles on them. Abū Bakr is the Prophet's *khalīl* ("friend"), and 'Uthmān is his Muhājir [for his *hijrah* to Abyssinia].[84]

As for 'Umar, he is presented as the founder of the *sunnah* which was continued by the Umayyad caliph Sulaymān, who in turn also acted on the model of 'Uthmān. The verse conveying this idea refers to 'Umar as Fārūq.[85] Farazdaq also praises the caliph Hishām (r. 105–125/724–43) as one who has adhered to the *sunnah* of Abū Bakr and 'Umar. Their *Sunnah* cures sick souls.[86]

Just like the antediluvian patriarchs, the Umayyads too possessed emblems of authority which came down to them from previous generations, and more specifically, from Muḥammad. To begin with, the Umayyads claimed possession of the symbolic sword of Muḥammad. In a poem addressed to the caliph Walīd II (r. 125–126/743–44), Farazdaq states that this caliph has fought the infidels with the sword with which Muḥammad had fought his enemies in Badr.[87] Badr is the place where the Muslims won their greatest victory over Quraysh in 2/624. The recurrence of this name in Farazdaq's poetry indicates that Muḥammad's conquests in Arabia became the ultimate model of the most crucial aspect of the spread of Islam under the Umayyads, namely, holy war. Muḥammad's sword that was raised in Badr became the symbol of the warlike mission that the Umayyads continued to fulfill in the wake of Muḥammad's victories.

Farazdaq mentions the same symbolic sword of Muḥammad in other verses praising the military achievements of the caliphs Yazīd II,[88] and Hishām.[89] Elsewhere[90] Farazdaq describes the same sword as the "sword of prophethood", which means that Muḥammad's

---

[82] al-Farazdaq, *Dīwān*, 1:78, 13 (Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik).
[83] Compare Qur'ān 9:40.
[84] al-Farazdaq, *Dīwān*, 1:250, 6 (Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik).
[85] al-Farazdaq, *Dīwān*, 2:101, 7 (Sulaymān).
[86] al-Farazdaq, *Dīwān*, 2:294, 11 (Hishām).
[87] al-Farazdaq, *Dīwān*, 2:92, 4.
[88] al-Farazdaq, *Dīwān*, 2:353, 11.
[89] al-Farazdaq, *Dīwān*, 2:189, 15.
[90] al-Farazdaq, *Dīwān*, 2:124, 3.

prophetic powers continue to work through the Umayyad military thrust. What is so significant about this sword is that Farazdaq describes it not only as the sword of Muḥammad but also as the sword of God by which He defeated the infidels in Badr.[91] This means that God's and Muḥammad's names are interchangeable, so that the caliphs, who gained possession of this sword with its two interchanging names, are, technically speaking, God's deputies as well as Muḥammad's heirs.

Thus it becomes clear yet again that God and Muḥammad are complementary components of the idea behind the title "God's caliph." A caliph of this kind is one who has inherited from the Prophet Muḥammad the mission of protecting God's religion.

The Umayyads had in their possession not merely the symbolic relics of God and Muḥammad but also some concrete emblems of authority that were believed to have come down to them in a successive hereditary line originating in Muḥammad. These emblems are the *minbar* ("pulpit"), the staff and the signet ring (*khātam*). These objects are mentioned, to begin with, in a verse praising the Marwānids as those who have inherited the "two pieces of wood" and the signet ring (*wa-man waritha al-ʿūdayni wa-al-khātam*).[92] This verse is quoted in *Lisān al-ʿarab*,[93] and the term "the two pieces of wood" (*ʿūdāni*) is explained there as "the pulpit (*minbar*) and the staff (*ʿaṣā*) of the Prophet."[94] Elsewhere Farazdaq mentions the *minbar* by name, and describes it as part of the legacy of kings which upon their death they forward to their heirs.[95]

The direct origin of the "two pieces of wood" and the signet ring is Marwān, as Farazdaq indicates elsewhere,[96] but they are being forwarded in a hereditary line beginning with Muḥammad. This is indicated in another poetic piece in which Farazdaq alludes to the *minbar*. He first describes the caliph Walīd II as Muḥammad's legatee (*walīy ʿahd Muḥammad*), then goes on to say that seven caliphs (beginning with Marwān) inherited the caliphate before it reached Walīd, and that they in turn had inherited it from ʿUthmān whose legacy in

---

[91] al-Farazdaq, *Dīwān*, 2:312, 11–12.
[92] al-Farazdaq, *Dīwān*, 1:59, 6.
[93] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab* (Beirut: Dār ṣādir, 1955–1956), s.v. *ʿūd*.
[94] See also E.W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, edited by Stanley Lane-Poole (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863–93), s.v. *ʿūd*.
[95] al-Farazdaq, *Dīwān*, 1:348, 5.
[96] al-Farazdaq, *Dīwān*, 2:302, 3–4.

turn was the legacy "of our chosen prophet." All these caliphs are described as having in their possession the *minbar* from which they used to deliver their sermons and exercise their authority over their subjects.[97] The *minbar* is no doubt considered here part of the legacy that the caliphs inherited from Muḥammad through ʿUthmān.

That the *minbar* held by the Umayyads was indeed considered part of Muḥammad's legacy is corroborated in traditions. In one of them, Muḥammad himself foresees their possession of it, but the manner in which they use his *minbar* is despicable. The Prophet sees the Umayyads (the Marwānīs) in his dream as they jump up and down his *minbar* like monkeys.[98] While asserting the fact that the Umayyads possessed what was considered Muḥammad's *minbar*, this tradition reflects anti-Umayyad criticism directed against the manner in which these arrogant caliphs desecrated Muḥammad's legacy.

As for the staff inherited by the Umayyads, Farazdaq explicitly describes it as belonging to Muḥammad (*ʿaṣā al-nabīyi*), and as—together with the signet ring—providing the basis for the authority of Yazīd II. Farazdaq goes on to say that when the people see what is on the signet ring, the memory of Muḥammad is not forgotten (*idhā raʾaw mā fī-hi dhikru Muḥammadin lam yunḥali*).[99]

What could be seen on the signet ring is revealed in a tradition traced back to Ibn ʿUmar (d. 73/692) in which it is related that the ring was made of silver, and was passed on from the Prophet to Abū Bakr, then to ʿUmar, then to ʿUthmān. ʿUthmān dropped it by accident into a well in Medina (Bīr Arīs). The text that was engraved on the ring read: *Muḥammad rasūl Allāh*: "Muḥammad Messenger of God."[100] In a tradition of Anas b. Mālik (Baṣran Companion, d. ca. 91–95/709–13) relating the same story, it is added that each of the three words was placed in a separate line.[101] In some versions it is added that after the loss of the original ring, ʿUthmān made a new one with the same inscription.[102]

The fact that ʿUthmān lost Muḥammad's ring probably symbolizes the loss of authority in the eyes of ʿUthmān's subjects, as indicated

---

[97] al-Farazdaq, *Dīwān*, 1:336, 4–9.

[98] Uri Rubin, *Between Bible and Qurʾān: the Children of Israel and the Islamic Self-Image* (Princeton, The Darwin Press, 1999), 224.

[99] al-Farazdaq, *Dīwān*, 2:125, 3–4.

[100] al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 7:201 (77:46), and 202 (77:50).

[101] al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 7:203 (77:55).

[102] Abū Dāwūd, *al-Sunan*, 2:406 (33:1).

in a remark made by Abū Dāwūd (d. 275/888) on this story. He says that people did not dispute 'Uthmān until the ring fell off his finger.[103] The story could also imply that the ring possessed by the Umayyads was not the original Muḥammadan one, but merely the copy made by 'Uthmān. In that case, the traces of anti-Umayyad bias are clearly noticed here as well.

Beyond the political tendency, these traditions reveal what Farazdaq had in mind when saying that when people saw the ring held by the Umayyad caliphs, they did not forget Muḥammad. They saw the three words: *Muḥammad Rasūl Allāh*, and this means that the Umayyads, even as God's caliphs, did not forget that the origin of their authority was Muḥammad, the messenger of God.

Of course, critics of the Umayyads could claim otherwise, namely, that the Umayyads did forget the Prophet, and only saw themselves as God's deputies, not Muḥammad's. That this was indeed imputed to them, is indicated in some letters attributed to the notorious al-Ḥajjāj,[104] in which the Umayyads come out as extremely arrogant and corrupt. But these "letters" only reflect the views of anti-Umayyad groups who have put these letters into circulation.

In sum, Muḥammad's symbols of authority, of which the Umayyads boasted, indicate that they considered themselves links in a successive chain of leaders stemming from Muḥammad.

The Umayyad claim to Muḥammad's legacy was essential to maintain their link to the universal chain of the prophets, the bearers of the authority, which was now in their own hands. This aspect too comes out not only in Walīd's letter but also in Farazdaq's poetry. In his verses reference is made mainly to David and Solomon. The reason why they are given predominance over other prophets is that David was the first to introduce dynastic government among the people of Israel. He bequeathed his kingdom to his son Solomon and this is why this pair of Israelite kings became essential models for the Umayyads. Moreover, David's house became the focus of Jewish messianic hopes, so that the Umayyads too gained a messianic glamour by comparing themselves to David.

The dynastic aspect of the allusion to David and Solomon is clear in a verse in which Farazdaq states that the caliph Walīd I inher-

---

[103] Abū Dāwūd, *al-Sunan*, 2:406.

[104] Discussed in Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 28–29, where these letters seem to be taken as authentic.

ited government (*mulk*) from his father like Solomon from David, and this was a bequest from God (*niḥlan min Allāhi*).[105] This indicates that Solomon's authority is based on inheritance as well as on God's will, which means yet again that the Umayyad caliph too is at once God's deputy as well as his father's heir. Elsewhere Farazdaq defines the manner in which David's son succeeded his father as an ideal *sunnah*, which provides the right guidance to anyone who follows it.[106]

Outside the realm of poetry, the hereditary model of David and Solomon recurs in a tradition recorded in the *Mustadrak* by al-Ḥākim al-Nīsābūrī (d. 404/1013–14). It relates that God chose David to be His prophet and messenger, and He gathered for him light and wisdom, and revealed to him the Zabūr (that is, the Psalms), adding it to the scriptures already revealed to previous prophets. When David was about to die, God commanded him to bequeath the light of God (*nūr Allāh*) as well as the hidden and the revealed knowledge to his son Solomon, and so he did.[107]

In this tradition David and Solomon have become links in a universal chain of a religious legacy that is being passed on from generation to generation. It contains emblems of prophecy and religious knowledge, such as light and revealed scriptures, which were already in the possession of previous messengers of God. Thus the concept of hereditary authority that is forwarded from generation to generation has been clearly demonstrated for the Umayyads.

---

[105] al-Farazdaq, *Dīwān*, 2:145, 7–8. Compare Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 31 n. 38.

[106] al-Farazdaq, *Dīwān*, 1:247, 10. Compare Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 54. The ʿAbbāsids, too, saw themselves as heirs to the prophets, and the caliph al-Manṣūr (reigned between 136–58/754–75), for example, was described as holding the legacy (*irth*) of Solomon, Job and Joseph. See Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 81 with n. 146.

[107] Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥākim al-Nīsābūrī, *al-Mustadrak ʿalā al-ṣaḥīḥayn fī al-ḥadīth* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-naṣr al-ḥadīthah, n.d.), 2:587. The *isnād*: Muḥammad b. Ḥassān ← Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad ← his father. See also Rubin, "Prophets and Progenitors," 50.