THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

THE LIFE OF MUHAMMAD AS VIEWED BY THE EARLY MUSLIMS

A Textual Analysis

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The Biblical Annunciation

The emergence of the Prophet of Islam as perceived by the Muslim believers is the focus and culmination of the world’s sacred history (tārikh). This history proceeds through a continuous series of divine revelations delivered by successive prophets of whom Muhammad is the last. Each prophet is elected to his mission in accordance with a predestined divine scheme. Glimpses of this historical outlook, already found in the earliest biographies of Muhammad, are marked by a clear apologetic trend. From the very beginning of their contacts with the ahl al-kitāb, the Muslims had to sustain the dogma that Muhammad did indeed belong to the same exclusive predestined chain of prophets in whom the Jews and the Christians believed. In order to do so, the Muslims had to establish the story of Muhammad’s life on the same literary patterns as were used in the vitae of the other prophets. Since all of those prophets were biblical figures, Muhammad’s biography had to be shaped according to biblical models. This was supposed to convince the People of the Book who refused to recognize Muhammad as a prophet like their own.¹

The shaping of the image of the prophet of Islam along biblical lines is typically exemplified in the theme of annunciation. Being regarded as a prophet whose election is predestined, Muhammad’s actual emergence in Arabia is announced by the previous prophets to whom the aim of God’s historical scheme is revealed in advance, and whose task it is to pave the way for the emergence of Muhammad. In their quest for literary evidence of the annunciation of their prophet, the Muslims used the same device as that used by the Christians for Jesus; they looked for attestation in previous sacred scriptures, and identified their own prophet with the messianic saviour whose emergence was believed to have been foretold in numerous biblical passages. These passages are quoted verbatim in Arabic translation in many polemical treatises by Muslim writers surveyed already by Goldziher and others.² One of the earliest writers of these


² Ignaz Goldziher, “Über muhammadanische Polemik gegen Aḥl al-kitāb”, Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft 52 (1878), 341–87; reprinted in his Gesammelte Schriften, II (Hildesheim, 1968), 1–47. There is also a study in Hebrew by Eliyahu Strauss [Ashtor], in Sefer ha-zikaron le-beit ha-midrash le-rabbanim be-vina
monographs was `Ali ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarî (d. ca. AH 250), who devoted the bulk of his book al-Dīn wa-l-dawla fi ʿithbāt nubuwat al-nabi Muḥammad to the biblical quotations which were believed to refer to the prophet of Islam. Later writers not discussed by Goldziher and the others added similar quotations, and even contemporary Muslims keep repeating them for the same apologetic purposes. In the present investigation, however, our attention will focus not so much on polemical writings of late Muslim theologians as on the early biographical sources and hadith compilations. These sources seem to indicate that Muslim reliance on the Bible began much earlier than is usually assumed by Islamicists.

I.

The Quran already contains some explicit manifestations of the contention that the emergence of the prophet of Islam was prognosticated in the sacred scriptures of the Jews and the Christians. In 61:6 the Quran states that Jesus brought to his people the good tidings about a prophet who would come after him, whose name is “Āhmād”. It has already been noticed by Islamicists that “Āhmād” could be related to the statements in the New Testament about the coming of the Paraclete, the “Comforter” (John 14:16 and 26; 15:26). It has been noted that “Āhmād” reflects the perception of Paraclete in the sense of the Greek ἐπικλήτος, “celebrated”, hence “Āhmād”. Scholars are not convinced, however, whether the Quranic Āhmād itself already draws on the New Testament.

Whatever the case may be, the early biographies of Muḥammad do identify the Prophet with the Paraclete of the New Testament. Ibn Iṣḥāq (d. AH 150)


4 See e.g. editor’s note in Qūwām al-Sunnah, Daulā‘īt, I, 336–39 (relying on Ibn Taymiyya’s al-Jawāh al-ṣaḥīh).

5 E.g. Adang, Muslim Writers, 101.


records in his Sīrat8 a verbatim quotation from the Gospel of John, and renders the Paraclete as al-Muhannān (cf. the Hebrew menahem, “comforter”); he says that al-Muhannān in Syriac is “Muḥammad”, and that in Greek it is al-Baraqiṭis (Paraclete).9

The same identification of the Paraclete with the Prophet recurs in the earliest extant commentaries on Quran 61:6. Already Muqāṭil ibn Sulaymān (d. AH 150) says that “Āhmād” in Syriac is faraqiṭa.10 This indicates that the identification of the Quranic “Āhmād” with the Paraclete of the New Testament is much earlier than is usually assumed by modern scholars. Later commentators like al-Rāzī (d. AH 607) adduced from the New Testament the verbatim quotations of the Paraclete passages in their commentary on the Quranic verse about Āhmād.11

But the Paraclete is not the only instance of biblical annunciation of the Islamic prophet. The Quran itself already utilises further biblical references for the same purpose. In Quran 7:156–58 God says to Moses that He will extend His compassion to those who will follow “the messenger, the prophet, the ummi, whom they find written with them, in the Torah and the Gospel…” This passage implies that Muḥammad is described in the scriptures of the Jews and the Christians as “the prophet, the ummi”.

The significance of ummi has been much discussed in modern scholarship, and cannot be easily translated.12 Some hitherto unnoticed aspects of its significance will, nevertheless, be revealed through the ensuing examination of the literary employment of the ummi idea in the early biographical traditions. This will bring to light other biblical passages which nourished the earliest traditions about the annunciation of Muḥammad.

The title ummi turns up in the early biographical traditions in the context of attestation, and is often produced as an epithet given to the prophet of Islam already in the Bible. Some such traditions were recorded by Ibn Sa’d (d. AH 230). According to one of them, the Prophet was called ummi already in the “book of Abraham” (i.e. Genesis). This tradition, transmitted by the Kūfān

8 Ibn Ishāq, I, 248.


10 Muqāṭil, II, fol. 195a.

11 Rāzī, XXIX, 313. For the identification of the Quranic “Āhmād” with the Paraclete, see also Ibn Kathīr, Bidaya, VI, 181.

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114. But the text is slightly distorted; its correct form has been preserved by al-Suyūṭī, who quotes Ibn Sa'd.17 It relates that when Abraham was ordered to expel Hagar, he set out with her to the wilderness, mounted on al-Burāq, the wonderful riding beast. When they reached Mecca, the angel Gabriel ordered him to dismount, because this was the place where al-nabi al-unmi18 was destined to come out of the seed of his son (i.e. Ishmael).

In yet another tradition of the Medinan Successor Muhammad ibn Ka'b al-Quraishi, who was of Jewish descent (d. AH 117), the prediction about the unmi prophet is delivered directly to Hagar.19 When Hagar set out with her son, Ishmael, an unseen voice said to her:

...your son will be the father of many peoples, and out of his people will come the unmi prophet who will reside in the haram [of Mecca].

This no doubt reflects Genesis 21:18, which, again, is a goy passage. It forms part of the address of the angel to Hagar when she and her son ran out of water in the wilderness of Beer-sheba:

...for I will make him a great nation (...le-goy gadol).

The Hebrew goy in this passage seems to have prompted the allusion to the unmi prophet of the Arabs.

Ibn Sa'd has one more tradition of Muhammad ibn Ka'b al-Quraishi, containing God's revelation to Jacob:

I shall send out of your loins kings and prophets till I send the prophet, the harami, whose nation shall build the Temple, and he will be the seal of the prophets, and his name is Abūmad.20

Here Muhammad is nicknamed not unmi, but rather harami, i.e. of the sacred territory of Mecca. Nevertheless, this passage is also based on a bibilical goy clause, Genesis 35:11, where God addresses Jacob in Beth-el with the following promise:

...a nation (goy) and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins.

12 Ibn Sa'd, I, 163.
13 Noldke, in the original edition of his Geschichte des Qorāns (10 n. 3), already suggested the Hebrew goyiyn as the origin of the Quranic umniyyiyn. However, this has been left out in the Noldke-Schwally edition where 'am ha-areq is preferred (I, 14 n. 1). Most Islamicists since Horovitz have preferred the Hebrew unmiyya-olam.
14 Kharūshi (MS Br. Lib.), fol. 74a. For other variations and interpretations see Khafajī, Nasīm, II, 406; Ibn Kathir, Bidayya, VI, 178–79; Tābarsī, 'A'liam al-wadā, 16, 21 (the entire biblical verse in Hebrew vocalization); Ibn Shahrāshūb, 1, 131, 246. Cf. Wansbrough, Quranic Studies, 64.
15 Ibn Sa'd, I, 163–64.
16 Suyūṭī, Khaṣa'is, I, 24.
17 Ibn Sa'd has al-nabiyy allādhi, instead of the correct reading.
18 Ibn Sa'd, I, 164.
19 Ibid., I, 163. See also Suyūṭī, Khaṣa'is, I, 25.
In another tradition recorded by Ibn Sa’d, the location nabi ummi is mentioned in a prophecy to an unnamed prophet of the Children of Israel. This is a Başran tradition traced back to Ibn ‘Abbás in which God says:  

My anger at you has become great, for you did not keep My word. Therefore I have sworn, the wind of holiness shall not come to you till I send the ummi prophet from the land of the Arabs; the wind of holiness shall come upon him.

The biblical passage which seems to be echoed here is Jeremiah 5:12–15, where the people of Israel is thus reproached:

12. They have belied the Lord… 13. And the prophets shall become wind, and the word is not in them… 15. Lo, I will bring a nation (goy) upon you from afar, O house of Israel, saith the Lord: it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation…..

This very passage of Jeremiah was interpreted by the theologian Ibn Rabban as foretelling the emergence of the Muslims. The word goy was conceived in his translation in its strict collective biblical sense, and was rendered as umma, “nation”.22 In the tradition of Ibn ‘Abbás, however, goy is perceived as “gentile”, and has accordingly become the ummi prophet. The phrase “from afar” is rephrased in the tradition as “from the land of the Arabs”.

Later sources abound in further traditions in which God foretells the ummi prophet to various biblical prophets. These accounts also seem to draw on biblical goy passages. In one of them, Exodus 32:10–14, Moses hears God’s scheme to destroy the sinful children of Israel, and to make Moses into a great goy instead of the Israelites. Moses, however, prays for mercy on their behalf. In Muslim tradition a similar situation seems to have been duplicated in a prophetic tradition (i.e. one uttered by the Prophet himself) circulated by the Syrian Companion Abū Umāna al-Bāhili (d. ca. AH 81). The children of Israel are slain in the wilderness by an ancient Arab tribe (Ma’add), and Moses prays for God’s help against the Arabs. God tells Moses not to pray, because al-nabi al-ummi is destined to emerge from them.23

Prophecies about the ummi prophet were not only searched for in biblical goy passages, but also read into other apocalyptic visions of the Bible. Daniel’s apocalypse about “a kingdom which shall never be destroyed” (Daniel 2:44)

was interpreted in a tradition of Ka‘b al-Ahbar (d. AH 32), a Jewish convert to Islam, as foretelling the emergence of the ummi prophet.24 Statements about the biblical origin of the epithet ummi are also included in traditions without specific references to the biblical text. A tradition of the Yemeni Successor Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. AH 110) merely mentions the Prophet’s epithet ummi as a part of what is said to be his biblical description.25 In a tradition of Muqāṭil ibn Ḥayyān (d. ca. AH 150), Jesus is said to have been told by God about the need to believe in the ummi prophet.26

That ummi is a biblical epithet of Muhammad is also stated in the realm of Quranic exegesis, relating to 29:48. This verse reads:

You could neither read a book before this one [was revealed], nor write it with your right hand; had you done so, the unbelievers would have doubted [you].

This verse was believed to convey the idea that Muhammad was illiterate, and therefore unaware of previous scriptures, which proved the authenticity of his own revelation. The idea that the sincerity of any prophet is proven through his illiteracy is, indeed, very early, and it emerges already in the earliest Christian sources.27 The verse just quoted indicates that Islam has applied it to its own prophet since the Quran itself. In Quranic exegesis (taṣfīr), the illiteracy of the Prophet was made part of the theme of announcement. Muhammad’s biblical descriptions were said to have included illiteracy; this is already stated in a tradition of Mujaḥid (Meccan d. AH 104),28 and other early exegetes say the same.29

The concept of Muhammad’s illiteracy as part of his biblical description was actually combined with his biblical description as ummi. In this context, ummi means illiterate, again in accordance with the Hebrew goy. Already Muqatil ibn Sulaymān (d. AH 150) states that Quran 29:48 refers to the Jews. If the Prophet could read and write, they would have said: “The one whose description we

24 Abū Nu‘aym, Dalā‘īl, no. 44. For the Islamic interpretation of this passage in Daniel, see also Ibn Rabban, al-Dīn wa-d-dawla, 181; Goldziher, “Polemik”, 379 (no. 46).
25 Abū Nu‘aym, Dalā‘īl, no. 33. See also Šuyūṭī, Ḳhaṣaṣ’is, I, 33–36; Ibn Kathīr, Taṣfīr, III, 496–97. For further prophecies attributed to Wahb about al-nabi al-ummi, see Khurgushi (MS Tübingen), fol 69b–70a; Zaraqāni, VI, 204.
29 Farrā’, II, 317; Zajjāj, IV, 171; Wāḥidī, Wasīl, fol. 141b.
find in the Torah is *ummi*, being able neither to read a book nor to write it with his right hand.¹³⁰ Al-Ṭabarî has recorded similar traditions which are of still earlier authorities: Daḥǧāk ibn Muzāḥim (Khurāsānī d. AH 102) is said to have stated that the prophet of God could neither read nor write, and God described him thus in the Torah and the Gospel, namely, that he is *nabi ummi*, who neither reads nor writes.¹³¹ The same is repeated in other *tafsirs.*³² It follows that the term *ummi* acquired the meaning of illiteracy considerably earlier than some Islamicists have assumed.³³

The annunciation of the *ummi* prophet as treated by Muslim tradition is not always confined to textual reports about the Bible. In other traditions, the anticipation of the emergence of the *ummi* prophet is conveyed through stories about conditions in Arabia on the eve of Islam. The idea of the *ummi* prophet is made part of the messianic hopes of the Jews of Arabia (most of them living in Medina). These are polemical stories aimed at showing that the Jews should have recognized the Prophet, and that their failure to do so contradicted the prescriptions of their own scriptures. This forms part of the accusation against the Jews of concealing (*kitāman*), or deleting the textual evidence of the Bible, or denying the identification of Muḥammad with the prophet of their books.³⁴ The word *ummi*, like Ahmad, became a label denoting the Prophet whom the Jews originally expected, but later denied.

The stories about the Jews utilize some Quranic verses. The early biography of Ibn Ḳūḥāq (d. AH 150), as preserved in the recension of Yūnūs ibn Bukayr (d. AH 199),³⁵ contains a chapter describing conditions in Arabia on the eve of Islam. Ibn Ḳūḥāq says that Jewish and Christian scholars knew better than the

³⁰ Muḥḍir, printed edition, III, 386: *īnna ilāhī nāṣīdā fī l-Tawrāt na’tuḥu huwa ummi lā yaqṣura l-ṯiḥāba wa-lā yakhuṭūba bi-yaddihī. This statement is quoted verbatim from Muḥḍir in Baghawi, *Ma‘alim*, IV, 381. And see also the same formulation in Zākahshārā, III, 208; Qurṭbū, XIII, 351 (without naming Muḥḍirī). But cf. Muḥḍirī, MS II, fol. 73b–74a: *īnna ilāhī nāṣīdā fī l-Tawrāt ba‘aṭhahu lāhu ‘azza wa-jalla lā yaqṣura l-ṯiḥāba wa-lā yakhuṭūba (ummi does not occur).


³³ Goldstei̇n, “The Illiterate Prophet”, 67: “…the noun acquired this sense during the third century of the Hijra.” See also Calder, “The *Umni*”, 116.


³⁵ Ibn Bukayr, 83. See also Bayhaqi, *Dala‘īl*, II, 74–75. The parallel passage in Ibn Ḳūḥāq (I, 217) is abridged.

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Arabs about the imminent emergence of Muḥammad, because they had found his description in their scriptures. They used to pray in his name for victory over the Arab idolaters, and told them that a prophet holding the religion of Abraham, whose name was Ahmad, was about to come. This was the description which they had found in their books. Then Ibn Ḳūḥāq adduces the Quranic *ummi* passage (7:157), which is followed by 61:6 (Aḥmad). He also cites Quran 2:89, where it is stated that the People of the Book used to pray for victory (*yastafīhinā*) over the infidels.

The latter Quranic verse (2:89) is alluded to in other traditions about the Jews' anticipation of a messianic saviour. In these traditions they warn their Arab neighbours in Medina of the coming prophet, telling them that under his leadership they would defeat them (i.e. the Arabs). But when he appears as the Arabian Muḥammad, the frustrated Jews do not believe in him, whereas the Arabs are those who make haste to follow him. Quran 2:89 is said to refer to this, and a tradition to that effect is quoted by Ibn Ḳūḥāq from ‘illusion ibn ‘Umar ibn Qatā‘a (Medinan d. AH 120).³⁶ Ibn Ḳūḥāq has one more tradition (of Ibn ‘Abbās) in which, after the appearance of Muḥammad, the Arab Muslims of Medina urge the Jews to embrace Islam, reminding them that Muḥammad is the very prophet in whose name the Jews used to pray for victory. But a Jew from the tribe of Banū l-Naḍir (Sa‘īd ibn Mishkam) replies that Muḥammad is not the prophet whom they anticipated. Thereupon God reveals Quran 2:89.³⁷

In other traditions of the same setting, the *ummi* notion is added to the presentation. The anticipated prophet is designated as *al-nabi al-ummi*, the gentle messianic saviour awaited by the Jews. For example, a tradition of Sa‘īd ibn Jubayar (Kūfī d. AH 95) from Ibn ‘Abbās relates that the Jews of Khaybar used to fight against the Arabs of Ghantāfān. Whenever the Jews were defeated, they asked God to give them victory in the name of *al-nabi al-ummi*, whom God had promised to send to them at the end of days. When they uttered this prayer, the Arabs of Ghantāfān were defeated. However, when Muḥammad appeared, the Jews did not believe in him.³⁸ This tradition was also recorded in the *tafsir* of 2:89.³⁹ Indeed, many other stories of the same kind may be found in the *tafsir* compilations, on the same Quranic verse.⁴₀ This implies that *sira*
traditions alluding to Quranic verses eventually became appropriate exegetic material which was gladly taken up by the compilers of the books of *tafsir* for the interpretation of the relevant Quranic passages.

II

Apart from the Paraclete and the *goy* passages already employed in the Quran, there are further biblical references which can be traced in Muslim tradition, where they fulfill the requirements of attestation.

In the biography of Ibn Ishāq (in the recension of Yūnus ibn Bukayr) there is a tradition attributed to Ka'b al-Aḥbār alluding to a passage in the Old Testament. It is related that Ka'b was once asked by Umām al-Dardā' in what manner the messenger of God was described in the Bible (Tawrāt). Ka'b said: “We find his description as follows:"

Muḥammad the apostle of God, his name is al-Mutawakkil; he is not rude nor coarse, and he does not raise his voice in the streets (aswāq). He has been entrusted with the keys, that by him God may make blind eyes see, and deaf ears hear, and stammering tongues speak rightly, that they may testify that there is no God but Allāh."

As already observed by Guillaume, Ka'b's description is an elaboration on Isaiah 42:2, which forms part of the description of God's servant:

He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street...

The Muslims were attracted to this passage, due to the fact that in the previous verse (42:1) Isaiah mentions the gentile nations (goyim) among which the servant of God will spread his justice.

Various versions which elaborate on the same passage of Isaiah, identifying the biblical servant of God as Muḥammad, are available in other traditions which are likewise traced back to Ka'b al-Aḥbār. All of them contain the "streets" (aswāq) clause, and were recorded by Ibn Sa'd. In one, which has a Syrian isnād, Ka'b communicates the "biblical" description of the Prophet to the Companion Ibn 'Abbās. It contains not only Muḥammad’s description, but also the name of his birthdayplace (Mecca), and the destination of his hijra

41 The isnād: Ibn Ishāq→Muḥammad ibn Thābit ibn Shurahbil (Hiyāt al빅)←UMM Al-DARDA’ (Syriac)←Ka'b al-Aḥbār.
42 Ibn Bukayr, 141–42. See also Bayhaqī, Dalā'il, I, 376–77; Dahabi, Sirā, 50; Ibn Kathīr, Bidāya, VI, 61.
43 Guillaume, "New Light", 32.
45 See Ibn Sa’d, I, 360. One has the isnād: ‘Āṣim ibn Bahdāla (Kufan d. AH 128)←Abū I-Duḥā (Muslim ibn Subayh, Kufan d. AH 100)←Abū ‘Abbāl al-Jadailī (Kufan)←Ka'b. Another has the isnād: ‘Āṣim ibn Bahdāla←Abū Ṣalīḥ al-Sammān (Dhākkrān, Medinan d. AH 101)←Ka'b. For the later tradition, see also Ibn Shabāb, II, 635.
46 See also Ibn Shabāb, II, 634–35; Abū Nu‘aym, Hilāyā, V, 387; Bayhaqī, Dalā'il, I, 377, 160.
47 Abū Nu‘aym, Dalā'il, no. 33. See also Su‘ūqī, Khayā’īs, I, 34–36.
48 See Ibn Sa’d, I, 362.
49 Ibid., I, 363. The isnād: Yūnus ibn Abī Ishāq (Kufan d. AH 152)←‘Ayyāz ibn Hurayth (Kufan)←‘Ā’ishah. See also Ibn Bukayr, 142; Ibn Shabāb, II, 632–33; Bayhaqī, Dalā'il, I, 377–78; Ibn Kathīr, Bidāya, VI, 61.
51 The isnād: Ibn Sa’d, I, 362.
Attestation

During the third century AH, the most important musannaf compilations came into being. Out of the early biographical material, their authors selected traditions which conformed to their own ideas of what Muslims should know and believe about the life and person of their Prophet. It is most significant that in the authoritative musannaf compilations, such as those of al-Bukhārī (d. AH 256) and Muslim (d. AH 261), not even one of the above traditions may be found. A few of them were only recorded in the more peripheral collections of al-Dārimi (d. AH 255) and al-Hākim (d. AH 404). The former selected one of the above Syrian traditions of Ka‘b al-Ahbar, in which the latter transmits his information to the Companion Ibn ‘Abbās, and included it in the Introduction of his compilation. Al-Hākim recorded the above tradition of ‘A‘isha. This means that the representatives of the mainstream of Islamic thinking were reluctant to acknowledge the merit of the scriptures of the People of the Book as sources of attestation, and were therefore inclined to dismiss traditions in which total reliance on those scriptures was implied, even though some of the isnads could be regarded as “sound” (ṣahīh).

The compilers rather preferred traditions in which the attestation of the Prophet was based on more specifically Islamic documents, namely, the Quran itself. Such traditions were indeed available to them in the pool of early biographical material. To begin with, there is a tradition in Ibn Sa‘d in which the source of information about Muhammad’s biblical description is not Ka‘b al-Ahbar, but rather the Medinan ‘Abdallāh ibn Salām (d. AH 43). Although a Jew by birth, he enjoys a more authoritative position in Islam than that of Ka‘b al-Ahbar; he was a Companion of Muhammad who acknowledged his message from the very outset. Ibn Salām’s own report about Muhammad’s biblical description is similar to the above description of Ka‘b, but it opens with a new element, an extract from the Quran. According to the tradition of Ibn Sa‘d, the Medinan Zayd ibn Aslam (d. AH 136) reported that Ibn Salām used to say: “The description of the apostle of God in the Tawrāt is as follows:”

Yā ayyuhā l-nabiyya innā arsalāhaka shahidan wa-mubashshiran wa-nadhiran wa-nābirzan li-t-anunyisina.... “Oh prophet, We have sent you to bear witness and good tidings, and to warn, and to safeguard the people....”

This is followed by the familiar statement that the apostle is neither crude nor coarse, and does not raise his voice in the streets. The tradition goes on to say

51 Dārimi, I, 17 (Muqaddima, 2). Dārimi (I, 16, 17) also has two additional versions where Ka‘b is quoted by Abu Sāliḥ (Dhakwān, Medinan d. AH 101). See also Abu Nu‘aym, Ḥiyya, V, 387; Qiwām al-Sunnah, Dalā’il, IV, 1332–33 (no. 219).
52 Mustadrak, II, 614.

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that when Ka‘b heard the words of Ibn Salām, he asserted that they were true, thus reducing Ka‘b’s role to a confirmatory one. The description itself opens with a verbatim quotation of Quran 33:45 (cf. 48:8), which was interpolated into the biblical framework, thus becoming supposedly a part of the Bible. Another tradition of this kind, with a Medinan isnād likewise concluding with ‘Abdallāh ibn Salām, was recorded by al-Dārimi.

But for the authors of the more authoritative musannaf compilations this was not still not good enough: the authority of the tradition was still a Jew. The version which they preferred was traced back neither to Ka‘b nor to Ibn Salām, but rather to an indigenous Arab Muslim, ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ (d. AH 63), a Quraishi Companion of the Prophet who is said to have been well versed in the Quran as well as in the Bible. His version too was recorded by Ibn Sa‘d. ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Amr is asked by the Medinan story-teller ‘Aţa’ ibn Yasār (d. AH 103) about Muhammad’s description in the Bible, and the latter responds: “Indeed, he is described in the Tawrāt by some of his descriptions in the Quran.” Then he recites Quran 33:45, followed by the familiar elaboration on Isaiah, in which the Prophet is one who does not raise his voice in the streets, etc. Afterwards ‘Aţa’ asks Ka‘b al-Ahbar about it, and the latter corroborates the words of ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Amr. This is the version which al-Bukhārī selected for his Ṣahīh; but in his version the corroboration of Ka‘b has been omitted, leaving ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ as the sole authority. Al-Bukhārī recorded it in Kitāb al-buya‘ (34:50), under the heading: “The Interdiction to Raise One’s Voice in the Market”. The word aswāq (“streets”), of the biblical description of the Prophet was obviously taken by him in its literary sense (“markets”).

The interpolation of a Quranic extract into the above traditions reveals an aspect of the literary role of the Quranic text in Muslim ḥadīth. In this specific case, the Quranic passage was added to the traditions in order to lend the bibli-

53 Ibn Sa‘d, I, 360–61. See also Qiwām al-Sunnah, Dalā’il, III, 835 (no. 128).
54 For more examples of Quranic passages regarded as part of the Torah, see Kister, “Hadditha”, 226.
55 Dārimi, I, 16 (Muqaddima, 2). The isnād: Sa‘id ibn Abī hilāl (Egyptian d. AH 135)→ Hilāl ibn Usāma (Medinan)→ ‘Aţa’ ibn Yasār (Medinan story-teller, d. AH 103)→ ‘Abdallāh ibn Salām, See also Bayhaqi, Dalā’il, I, 376; Qiwām al-Sunnah, Dalā’il, IV, 1337–38 (no. 221); Ibn Kathir, Bida‘ya, VI, 60–61.
56 Ahmad, Musnad, II, 222. See also Kister, “Hadditha”, 231.
57 Ahmad, Musnad, II, 174; Bayhaqi, Dalā’il, I, 374, 375; idem, Shu‘ab, II, 147 (no. 1410); Dhadhab, Sira, 49; Ibn Kathir, Bida‘ya, VI, 60.
58 Bukhārī, Ṣahīh, III, 87.
Attestation

cal description some of the authority of the Islamic scripture. No exegetic consideration was involved in this process. However, as soon as Quranic extracts became part of a tradition, the tradition itself became exegesis, for the simple reason that it contained reference to a Quranic verse. The exegeses of the Quran composed the tafsir of the canon by assembling any available traditions they could lay hands on, provided they contained Quranic excerpts. The above traditions formed no exception: the authors spotted some of them and made them part of the tafsir of the relevant Quranic passages. Thus the tradition of 'Abdallah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ was picked up and recorded by al-Bukhārī in the exegesis of 49:8, in the Kitāb al-tafsir (65) of his Sahih.59 The same tradition was recorded by Ibn Kathir in the tafsir of 33:45.60 But the majority of the commentators recorded this tradition in the tafsir of the Quranic ummūnī passage (7:156–58), to illustrate Muḥammad's biblical description.61

The process of Islamisation of the biblical description of Muḥammad did not cease with the interpolation of a Quranic extract into it. The downgrading of the Bible as a document of attestation is indicated in other versions, where the Prophet's description has been entirely detached from the biblical sphere, being incorporated instead into existing literary portraits displaying Muḥammad's outer appearance and morals. Such "historical" descriptions of Muḥammad's moral conduct, which, of course, the believers are supposed to adopt as their model, are widely current. The most prevailing one is again that of the Companion 'Abdallah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, who is made to state that Muḥammad never behaved indecently (lam yakun fāhishan...). His statement has a Kūfīan isnād62 and is recorded in the biographical sources,63 as well as in several musannaf compilations, including al-Bukhārī and Muslim.64 A similar statement is attributed to the Companion Anas ibn Mālik, who reportedly said that the Prophet was neither in the habit of abusing (sabbāb), nor of offending (fāhāsh), or cursing (laʾʿān). His statement was circulated with a Medinan

59 Ibid., VI, 169–70.
60 Ibn Kathir, Tafsir, III, 496. Ibn Kathir (ibid., III, 496–97) has also recorded another similar tradition on the authority of Wāhir ibn Munabbih (Yemeni d. AH 110).
61 Ṭabarī, Tafsir, IX, 57; Baghawi, Maʿālim, II, 553; Ibn al-ʿArabi, Abākān, II, 794; Ibn ʿAṣīyya, VII, 178–79; Qurtubi, VII, 299; Ibn Kathir, Tafsir, II, 253; Suqūyū, Durr, III, 131. The version of Kaʾb al-Āmmār was recorded in Baghawi, Maʿālim, II, 553–54; Suqūyū, Durr, III, 132.
62 Aʾmah (Kūfīn d. AH 148)–Shaqiq ibn Salama (Abū Wāʿil, Kūfīn d. AH 82)–Masriq ibn al-Ajdār (Kūfīn d. AH 63)–‘Abdallah ibn ‘Anur.
63 Ibn Saʿd, I, 377; Ahmad, Musnad, II, 161, 189, 193; Baghawi, Shamaʿil, I, 204; Ibn Kathir, Bidāya, VI, 36.
64 Ibn Abī Shayba, VIII, no. 5369 (Adab); Bukhārī, Sahih, IV, 230 (61:23); V, 34 (62:27); VIII, 15, 16 (78:38, 39); Muslim, VII, 78 (43:68); Tirmidhi/Taḥṭa, VI, no. 2041 (25:47).

1. The Biblical Announcement

isnād65 and was recorded in biographical sources,66 as well as in al-Bukhārī’s Sahih.67

The statement that the Prophet did not let his voice be heard in the streets (aswāq) was incorporated into this portrait of his, and was thus transformed from a biblical prophecy about him into an historical account of his actual conduct. This appears in its "historical" form in the description attributed to ʿAishah, where she is being made to say that Muḥammad’s morals were the best of all people. He was neither crude, nor did he raise his voice in the streets. He was never vindictive, but always forgiving. Her statement was also circulated with a Kūfīan isnād68 and was recorded in biographical sources,69 as well as in some musannaf compilations, like that of al-Tirmidhi.70 A similar "historical" description, including the "streets" clause, was transmitted on the authority of the Companion Abū Hurayra; it includes a depiction of Muḥammad’s external appearance.71

III

To lend the biblical attestation more genuinely Islamic authority, some quotations were cast in the form of a prophetic hadith.72 In these hadiths the Prophet himself gives in the first person his own biblical description. The utterances represent what we may call the "self-attestation" of the prophet, and they are part of his self-portrait. In these hadiths Muḥammad identifies himself in various biblical prophecies.

One biblical quotation which was to become prophetic hadith appears in its assumed biblical form in Muḥammad’s early biographies, where it is said to have been current among the Jews of Banū ʿNaḍr.73 It runs as follows:

65 Fulayḥ ibn Sulaymān (Medinan d. AH 168)–Hilāl ibn Abī Maymūna (Medinan)–Anas.
66 Ibn Saʿd, I, 379; Ibn Shabha, II, 656; Ahmad, Musnad, III, 126, 144, 158; Baghawi, Shamaʿil, I, no. 206; Ibn Kathir, Bidāya, VI, 36–37.
67 Bukhārī, Sahih, VIII, 15 (78:38).
69 Ibn Saʿd, I, 365; Ibn Shabha, II, 637; Tirmidhi, Shamaʿil, 200; Ahmad, Musnad, VI, 174, 236, 246; Tayālīsī, Musnad, no. 1520; Bayhaqi, Dalāʾīl, I, 315; Baghawi, Shamaʿil, I, no. 205; Ibn Kathir, Bidāya, VI, 36.
70 Ibn Abī Shayba, VIII, no. 5382 (Adab); Tirmidhi/Taḥṭa, VI, no. 2085 (25:69); Ibn Hibban, Sahih, XIV, no. 6443.
71 The isnād: Ibn Abī Dhūlī (Medinan d. AH 159)–Abū Sāliḥ mawliya of al-Tawʿama (Medinan)–Abū Hurayra. See Ibn Shabha, II, 607; Ahmad, Musnad, II, 328, 448; Bayhaqi, Dalāʾīl, I, 316; Ibn Kathir, Bidāya, VI, 36.
72 See also Goldziher, Muslims Studies, II, 148–49.
73 Wāqidi, I, 367. See also Khārgūshī (MS Tūbīngen), fol. 65a.
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The tradition appears in some *tafsirs* on Quran 61:6,79 and recurs in some later sources.80 The form *Ahid* (or *Ahayd*) is probably derived from Hebrew (yahu’d = one and only), and seems to have already been known to Muqattāl ibn Sulaymān (d. AH 150).81

The content of other prophetic utterances of self-attestation is purely Quranic, lacking any biblical allusions. All of them open with the declaration: *anāa...* ..., “I am....” One of them consists of Quran 2:129, where Abraham prays:

Our Lord, send among them a messenger from amongst them, that he may recite to them Your signs, and teach them the book and the wisdom....

A prophetic statement using this verse for self-attestation was recorded by Ibn Sa’d. It has a Kūfī *iṣnad*, lacking a Companion (mursal).82 The Prophet states: “I am the [subject of] the prayer of my father Abraham.” This is followed by a verbatim quotation of Quran 2:129. This tradition implies, of course, that the Quranic prayer of Abraham is a prophecy about Muhammad. An extended statement of the Prophet, referring also to the good tidings of Jesus about Aḥmad (Quran 61:6), is included in a Medinan tradition quoted by Ibn Sa’d from al-Wāqīḍi. This is related on the authority of some Medinan Successors, and in it the Prophet says: “I am the prayer of my father Abraham, and Jesus Son of Mary announced the good tidings about me.”83

There are more versions, all of Syrian provenance, of the same statement of Muhammad. In all of them an additional prediction is included which is derived not from the Quran, but rather from an episode of the Prophet’s infancy legends. The episode takes place during the pregnancy of his mother, Āmina. Ibn Iṣḥāq relates that while pregnant with Muhammad, she had a vision in which she saw light spreading out of her, reaching as far as the forts of Buṣrā in Syria.84 Light (*nūr*) is a prevalent symbol of Muḥammad’s prophethood,85 and the glorious role of Syria as the future abode of Islam is forecast here by mak-

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74 Goldzimer, “Polemik”, 377 (no. 25).
75 Lees e.g., Ibn Rabbab, 149–50; Khāfijī, *Nasīm*, II, 404. And cf. the epithet Rider of the Camel also in Khargūsh (MS Br. Lib.), fol. 75a; Kulini, VIII, 43, 139; Ibn Shahrashub, I, 134; Ibn Kathir, *Bidāya*, VI, 62.
77 See also Goldzimer, “Polemik”, 378 (no. 35).
79 Māwardi, *Nakat*, V, 529; Qurrubi, XVIII, 84.
82 Ibn Sa’d, I, 149. The *iṣnad*: Juwayhir ibn Sa’d al-Balḥīqi (Kūfān d. AH 140–50)–Dhahīk ibn Muzāhīm (Kharāṣīb, d. AH 102)–Muḥammad.
84 Ibn Hishām, I, 166; Ibn Bukayr, 45.
Attestation

In other prophetic statements opening with anā, “I am”, no historical reference is made. Self-attestation is achieved by simply recounting lists of the various Arab names of the Prophet. Most of them do not occur in the Quran in their actual form, but they nevertheless rest on Quranic vocabulary and imagery, each of the names attesting to a different aspect of his prophetic role. One of these traditions is Syrian, and is circulated on the authority of the Companion ‘Awf ibn Mālik al-Ashja’ī (d. AH 73). Muḥammad’s statement is as follows: “I am al-Ḥashir, and I am al-‘Aqīb, and I am al-Muqaffī (var. al-Muṣṭafā).” These names signify his position as the ultimate prophet before the day of resurrection (Ḥashir), being the last of all prophets, who was sent in their footsteps (‘Aqīb, Muqaffī). This specific list is recorded as part of a story about the refusal of the Jews of Medina to recognize Muḥammad as their messianic deliverer. The Prophet makes this statement in their synagogue, where he is said to have come on a Jewish holiday and asked the Jews to produce twelve people who would testify that he is God’s messenger, so that He would forgive them their sins. When they refuse, Muḥammad announces his four names. As he is about to leave the synagogue, one of the Jews calls him back. This Jew, who proves to be ‘AbdAllāh ibn Salām, swears by God that Muḥammad is indeed the prophet whose description the Jews have found in the Torah. His fellow Jews call him a liar, so he joins Muḥammad, and they both leave the synagogue together. Thereupon God reveals Quran 46:10 (“... and a witness from among the children of Israel bears witness to its like, and believes...”). The tradition was recorded by Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal and al-Ṭabarānī, and it recurs in some musannaf compilations in the chapter about the virtues of ‘AbdAllāh ibn Salām.

More such anā statements of Muḥammad were recorded by Ibn Sa’d in his chapter about the names of the Prophet. All of them open with the two best-known Quranic names, Muḥammad (e.g. 48:29) and Ahmad, followed by other names which signify his eschatological role. One of the traditions is of the Mecan Muḥājir (d. AH 104), who does not mention a Companion as his source. Apart from Ahmād and Muḥammad, the Prophet is here named Messenger of Mercy, Messenger of War, Muqaffī, and Ḥashir. A similar prophetic statement recorded by Ibn Sa’d was circulated on the authority of the Companion

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86 Ahmad, Musnad, V, 262. The isnaḍ: Faraj ibn Fuḍāla (Ḥimṣī d. AH 177)→ Luqman ibn ʿAmr (Ḥimṣī)→ Abū Umāma. Cf. Ibn Sa’d, I, 102, 149. And see Ṭaylīṣī, Musnad, no. 1140; Bayhaqi, Dalā’il, I, 84; Ṭabarānī, Kabir, VIII, no. 7729; Qiwām al-Sunnah, Dalā’il, I, 239 (no. 1).
87 For which see Rūhān, “Pre-Existence,” 67–71.
88 Ibn Sa’d, I, 149. The isnaḍ: Sa’d ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Muḥājir (Syrian)→ ‘Abd al-ʿAzīz ibn Hilāl al-Sulamī→ Ibrahīm ibn Sīrāy. See also Ibn Shabba, II, 636; Bukhārī, Tārkīk kabīr, VI, 68–69; idem, Tārkīk saḥīḥ, I, 39; Ahmad, Musnad, IV, 127, 128; Bayhaqi, Dalā’il, I, 80, 83; II, 130; Abū Naʿaym, Hilya, VI, 89–90; Ṭabarānī, Kabir, XVIII, nos. 629–631; Bayhaqi, Shamsātī, I, 6 (no. 4).
89 Ibn Ḥibbān, Sahih, XIV, no. 6404; Mustadhrāk, II, 600.
90 Ṭabarānī, Taṣfīr, I, 435.
91 Taṣfīr, XXVIII, 57. See also Suyūṭī, Durr, VI, 213–14; Ibn Kathir, Taṣfīr, IV, 360 (including the tradition of Abū Umāma).
92 Mustadhrāk, II, 418 (Taṣfīr); Suyūṭī, Durr, V, 207.
I. The Biblical Anunciation

Sa’d, and are traced back to the Companions Jābir ibn ‘Abdallāh (Medinan d. AH 77), Ibn ‘Umar, and Ibn ‘Abbās.

Such wide circulation of prophetic self-attestation points to the extent of interest the Muslims took in the subject. In fact, their preoccupation with the names and epithets of their Prophet was as compelling as their preoccupation with the names and epithets of God. In both cases they circulated traditions containing lists of those names, discussed the significance of each of them, and tried to systematize this field of knowledge by fixing the exact number of names. In one more version, a number is appended to the list. This is a tradition of the Meccan Companion Abū l-Tufayl ‘Amir ibn Wāthila (d. AH 110) in which Muhammad states: “I have with God ten names: Muhammad, Ahmad, Abū l-Qasīm, al-Fātīh, al-Khātim, al-‘Āqib, al-Ḥashir, al-Māhī. Abū l-Tufayl could only remember eight out of the ten. Another version of Abū l-Tufayl contains the total ten, including Yūsīn and Tāhā.

The idea of awarding prophets a fixed number of names is very early, and is already known in Jewish midrash, where it is stated that a prophet is called by ten names. The variety of names adduced (Emissary, Trustee, Servant, Messenger, Seer, Scout, Beholder, Angel, Prophet, Man of God), reflects the various aspects of the prophet's person and mission.

But the number which the early Muslims seem to have preferred for their own prophet was five. This number appears in the Sīra of Ibn Ishaq in one more version of the above tradition of Zuhri—Muhammad ibn Jubayr—Jubayr ibn Mu‘tim. In the present version Muhammed states: “I have five names: I am Muḥammad, Ahmad, al-Māhī—by whom God wipes off disbelief, al-‘Āqib, al-Ḥashir—in whose footsteps people will be resurrected.” In one of the versions with the same isnād, the Prophet is said to have uttered this statement as a kind of battle cry against the polytheists of Quraysh. The tradition recurs in

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97 Ibn Sa’d has another tradition of the Companion Jubayr ibn Mu’tim (Medinan d. AH 58), quoted by his son Naf’i ibn Jubayr (Medinan d. AH 99); it was also recorded by al-Hākim. The tradition of the same Companion was circulated by another son of his as well, namely, Muhammed ibn Jubayr. This Muhammad was quoted by al-Zuhri (Medinan d. AH 124), and the tradition recurs in many sources other than Ibn Sa’d, as well as in the muṣannaf compilations, where it was recorded in special chapters dedicated to lists of Muhammad’s names and appellations. It was also included in the tafsir of 61:6, to illustrate the function of the name Aḥmad.

102 As for Ibn Sa’d, he recorded a similar prophetic statement on the authority of the Companion Abū Mūsā al-As‘arī (d. ca. AH 42–53). This was accepted into several muṣannaf compilations and tafsir books. More prophetic statements containing similar lists of names are found in sources other than Ibn

98 The isnād: ‘Āṣim ibn Bahdala (Kufan d. AH 128)− Zayr ibn Hubaysh (Kufan d. AH 83)− Ḥudayfa. See Ibn Sa’d, I, 104; Tirmidhi, Shama‘il, 212; Bukhari, Tariqāt sahīh, I, 36; Ahmad, Musnad, V, 405; Duhaihi, Sira, 10–11. See also Kashi al-aslār, Ill, no. 2379. Another isnād: Abū Bakr ibn ‘Ayyāsh− Aṣir− Abū Wālī’-I Ḥudayfa. See Tirmidhi, Shama‘il, 211; Baghwali, Shama‘il, I, no. 151. See also Kashi al-aslār, III, no. 2378. And see also Abu Abai Shayba, XI, no. 11738.


100 Mustadrak, II, 604.

101 See Ibn Shabba, I, 631; Tirmidhi, Shama‘il, 210–11; Ṣabrānī, Tariqāt, I, 1788 (III, 178–79); Humaydi, I, no. 555; Bukhari, Tariqāt sahīh, I, 35; Ahmad, Musnad, IV, 80, 84; Abū Ya‘la, XIII, no. 7395; Bayhaqi, Dalā’l, I, 152; 152–54; Abū Nu‘aym, Dalā’l, no. 19; Ṣabrānī, Kabir, II, nos. 1520, 1522–28; Baghwali, Shama‘il, I, no. 150; Duhaihi, Sira, 8.

102 See ‘Abd al-Razzag, Muṣannaf, X, no. 19637; Muslim, VII, 89 (43:124–25); Tirmidhi, Tuhfa, VIII, no. 2996; Ibn Abi Shayba, XI, no. 11737; Dārimi, II, no. 2775; Ibn Hibban, Sahih, XIV, no. 613.

103 Bukhari, Sahih, VI, 188 (65, Sūra 61); Wāhīdat, Wasiṭ, fol. 278b; Ibn Kathir, Tafsir, IV, 359–60; Ṣabrānī, Majma‘, XXVIII, 61.

104 The isnād: ‘Amr ibn Murra ibn ‘Abdallāh (Kufan d. AH 118)− Abū ‘Ubayda ibn ‘Abdallāh ibn Mas‘ud (Kufan)− Abū Mūsā. See Ibn Sa’d, I, 104–105. See also Ibn Bukayr, 142; Tariqāt, I, 1788 (III, 178); Ahmad, Musnad, IV, 404; Ibn Shabba, II, 632; Bukhari, Tariqāt sahīh, I, 36; Bayhaqi, Dalā’l, I, 156–57; Ta‘ālīs, Mushkil, II, 51; Daylam, Firdaws, I, no. 96; Ṣabrānī, Sahīh, I, 80; Duhaihi, Sira, 9.

105 Ibn Abi Shayba, XI, no. 11739; Muslim, VII, 90 (43, Bāb fi asmā’thā); Mustadrak, II, 604; Bayhaqi, Shu‘ab, II, no. 1400.

some *miṣannaf* compilations, as well as in *tafsir* books. It was reportedly discussed in the court of the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik, who asked Juba'ir’s son, Nafi’, what was the number of names included in his father’s tradition. Nafi’ claimed that they were six (including Khattam).\(^\text{117}\)

However, the above versions of Juba'ir’s tradition where the list of names is unnumbered gained much wider circulation, which indicates that the Muslims chose not to limit the names of Muhammad to any specific small number. In fact, they preferred to point to the largest number possible. Some of them stated that Muhammad’s names were 99, like those of God, while others maintained that they amounted to 300.\(^\text{118}\) Some Ṣūfis stated that God and Muhammad had 1000 names each.\(^\text{119}\)

Later sources reveal an increased interest in glean information from the Quran names and epithets of the Prophet for the purpose of attestation. Forms which were extracted verbatim from the scripture were systematically arranged in long lists.\(^\text{120}\) Scholarly discussions were devoted to the significance of Muhammad’s Quranic names, and it was observed that some of them were derived from the names of God (Muhammad and Aḥmad from Ḥamid, etc.).\(^\text{121}\) The idea of such divine derivation (Muhammad from Maḥmūd) already appears in a poetic verse attributed to Muhammad’s poet, Ḥassān ibn Thābit.\(^\text{122}\) The same verse is ascribed to Abū Ṭālib as well.\(^\text{123}\)

The issue of the number of Muhammad’s Quranic names was also tackled, and even assumed the form of a prophetic statement. The prophet is said to have declared: ‘I have seven names in the Quran: Muhammad, Aḥmad, Yāsin, Ṭāhā, Muddaththir, Muzzammil, ‘Abdallāh.’\(^\text{124}\) Some writers maintained that the Quranic names were only five (Muhammad, Aḥmad, ‘Abdallāh, Ṭāhā, Yāsin),\(^\text{125}\) while others were able to transmit no less than 400 such names.\(^\text{126}\)

With Muhammad’s own self-attestation, which draws heavily on the Quran, the process of the Islamisation of his originally biblical attestation was completed.

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\(^\text{114}\) See Ibn Saʻd, I, 105; Buhārī, Ṭarīkh ṣaghīr, I, 36; Bayhaqī, *Dalā’il*, I, 156; Ṭahāwī, *Musḥif*, II, 50; Dhabāḥ, *Ṣira*, 9. See also Mustadrak, IV, 273–74; Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab*, II, no. 1398. This report was circulated with the *ṭanād*: Sa‘id ibn Abī Hīlāl (Egyptian d. AH 1355).–‘Uthā ibn Muslih (Medinan)–Nafi’ ibn Juba’ir.

\(^\text{115}\) *Fath al-bārī*, VI, 406.


\(^\text{117}\) E.g. Khargūši (MS Br. Lib.), fol. 73a–b; Bayhaqī, *Dalā’il*, I, 159; Ṭabarsti, *A‘lâm al-awārād*, 15. And see on the role of these names in everyday Muslim life and in mystical thought, Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger: the Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill, 1985), 105–22, 257–59.


\(^\text{120}\) Buhārī, Ṭarīkh ṣaghīr, I, 38; Bayhaqī, *Dalā’il*, I, 161; *Fath al-bārī*, VI, 404; Maḥīk/Zurqānī, V, 512.


\(^\text{122}\) Abū Zakariyyā, in Bayhaqī, *Dalā’il*, I, 159. See also Dhabāḥ, *Ṣira*, 9–10.

The Khadija–Waraqa Story

THE GOAL OF INITIATION and guidance is revelation. Already in the previous chapters reference has been made to traditions describing the actual beginning of Muhammad’s prophetic revelations. We have seen that in some versions the event is linked to the opening of Muhammad’s breast (Chapter 3). Some models of the same scene recur in the story of guidance (Chapter 4). The present chapter is dedicated to a more concentrated study of additional versions of the beginning of Muhammad’s prophetic revelations. This moment has drawn the attention of numerous Islamicists, but all have tried to unveil the factual background of the story, not the textual history of the story itself.¹

1 The moment of first revelation, which is so crucial in stories about many prophets, is attached with no less importance when retold about Muhammad. It contains the usual components, such as visions of voices and light, startling appearance of a supernatural figure (mostly an angel), the inexperienced prophet’s fear, address of the angel, etc. These elements were built into the private case of Muhammad, the prophet that emerged in Mecca. His story is set, of course, in a Meccan scene, and the plot revolves round two figures of his closest family—his first wife Khadija, and her cousin Waraqa ibn Nawfal, an Arabian Christian scholar. The latter is mentioned in the sources alongside Zayd ibn ‘Amr and other hanifs who abandoned Meccan polytheism and searched for the true religion of Abraham.² His role links the story to the theme of biblical attestation (Chapter 1); his knowledge of the sacred scriptures enables him to assert that the first vision experienced by Muhammad is indeed a genuine prophetic one.


5. The Khadija–Warqa Story

your safekeeping, and you do good unto the kindred." Khadija disclosed the Prophet's secret to Abū Bakr, who was Muhammad's drinking companion (nadim) in the Jāhiliyya. Abū Bakr brought Muhammad to Warqa ibn Nawfal, who advised Muhammad to go out again and not to run away, should he hear the voice call him. Muhammad followed his advice, and when he went out, he was indeed addressed once more. He answered the call, and the voice commanded him to recite the entire text of the Fātiha. Afterwards Muhammad returned to Warqa and told him what had befallen him. Warqa said: "Rejoice, rejoice, I hereby declare that you are the messenger about whom Jesus said he would succeed him, and whose name is Ahmad. I confess that you are Ahmad and that you are Muhammad. In a short while you will be summoned to wage war, and if I am still alive, I will join in with you ...."

Apart from Khadija and Warqa, who belong to the basic narrative framework, the event is also attended in this version by Abū Bakr. As is the case in so many traditions about the attestation in its Arabian sphere (Chapter 2), here again a Companion has been interpolated into the story for the purpose of promoting his own virtues (fīdā‘ī). Abū Bakr's name was added to the story of Muhammad's meeting with Warqa, just as his name was linked to the meeting of the Prophet with Bahrām.

Another element which does not form part of the basic narrative is the Quranic passage. The Fātiha was only secondarily built into the basic tale, and in fact, there are other versions of the same Khadija–Warqa narrative framework in which the angel brings to Muhammad an altogether different Quranic passage, the first verses of Sūrat al-‘Alaq (96).

The opening passage of this sūra reads:

iqra' bi-sni rabbika....: “recite in the name of your Lord....”

This extract was chosen to represent the first Quranic revelation, because it is the only passage in the Quran where the imperative iqra‘, “recite”, opens an entire sūra. Therefore, the passage seemed applicable to the story of the first address of the angel, in which he commands the Prophet to start declaring the glory of his Lord.

The traditions in which the Khadija–Warqa narrative contains the iqra‘ passage gained wider circulation than those with the Fātiha. In the section assigned to the beginning of Muhammad's prophethood in the Sahih of al-

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3 Ibid., I, 203–204. See also Mustadrak, II, 609–10.
4 There were other Quranic passages which were made part of Muhammad's first prophetic vision, but no detailed narratives are available: al-Tin (95): Halabi, I, 261 (from “one of the exegetes”); al-Qalam (68): Fath al-bi‘rī, VIII, 521 (Mujāhid); Zurqānī, I, 222; Halabi, I, 244.
6 Ibn Bukayr, 152–33. See also Balādhurī, Anṣāb, I, 105–106; Balādhurī, Dalā‘īl, II, 158.

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Bukhārī (no. 1). There are traditions dealing with the ways in which revelations generally used to come to Muhammad, as well as traditions about the very first Quranic revelation. The latter all bear the ḥiqā' passage. The story with the same passage was recorded in the relevant section about Muhammad's prophetic revelation in the rearranged compilation of Ibn Hibbān, and was included in the Miskṣṣad of Abū 'Awāna in the section devoted to the first stages of the Prophet's career. Even compilers who did not devote separate sections to the subject of the first revelation did not fail to record the story. It occurs in the section named Ṣahih in ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s compilation, in the section named Ḥimān in Muslim’s Ṣahih, in the section named Siyar in al-Bayhaqī’s Sunan, etc.

The tradition with the ḥiqā’ passage which al-Bukhārī and Muslim selected is the one with the notable Medinan ḥimān of al-Zuhri (d. AH 124)–‘Urwa ibn al-Zubayr (d. AH 94)–‘A’isha. The assumption is, of course, that ‘A’isha only heard the story when she came of age, i.e. long after the actual event. The specific version recorded by al-Bukhārī and Muslim was circulated by Zuhri’s disciple ‘Uqayl ibn Khālid (d. AH 141), as well as by the Egyptian Yūnus ibn Yazīd (d. AH 159). Rich in Quranic imagery, the tradition runs as follows:

The first prophetic experience of the messenger of God was “a true dream in sleep” (al-ḥā’ay al-ṣādiqā ‘alā al-sāḥib fi l-nawm; cf. Quran 37:105, 48:27). Each time he dreamt, it would seem to him like the “light of dawn” (fa‘ala al-sāḥib; cf. Quran 6:96). Then he began to find pleasure in solitude. He used to retire to a cave in the mountain Hira’, where he practiced tahlīlah... When he was thus engaged in the cave of Hira’, the angel came to him, saying: “Recite!” (ḥiqā’). Muhammad said: “I am not reciting” (mā a‘ān bi-qarī’). The (Prophet) said: “The angel seized me and gripped my body till I could bear it no longer. Then he released me and said: ‘Recite’. I said: ‘I am not reciting.’ The angel seized me and gripped my body till I could bear it no longer. Then he released me and said: ‘Recite’. I said: ‘I am not reciting.’ The angel seized me for the third time and gripped my body till I could bear it no longer. Then he released me and said: ‘Recite’. I said: ‘I am not reciting.’ The angel released me and said: ‘Recite’. I said: ‘I am not reciting.’ The angel released me and said: ‘Recite’. I said: ‘I am not reciting.’ ”

In this tradition the ḥiqā’ passage has been fitted into the basic narrative by means of what we may call a “linking word”. This is contained in Muhammad’s utterance: mā ṣa‘ān, which has been derived from the Quranic ḥiqā’. This repetitive line of Muhammad has converted the repetitive Quranic ḥiqā’ into a divine response to Muhammad’s indisposition to recite. An additional linking word is the request zamālīn uttered by Muhammad. This links the events to the opening passage of Sūrat al-Muzzammil (73), where the title al-muzammīl signifies the Quranic prophet. However, the actual revelation of this Quranic passage is not stated in the story, the ḥiqā’ passage remaining the only Quranic revelation.

A parallel version of the Zuhri–‘Urwa–‘A’isha tradition appears in the biographical sources. This version, transmitted from al-Zuhri by the Jazīran al-Nu‘mān ibn Ṭashīd, contains some additional details not included in the version of the musannaf compilations. Gabriel visits Muhammad twice, the first interview ending with Muhammad’s flight to Khadija. Only during the second encounter is the ḥiqā’ passage revealed. But before this takes place, Muhammad is so frightened that he tries to take his own life by throwing himself off a cliff. The angel stops him, saying: “Oh Muhammad, I am Gabriel and you are the messenger of God.” The absence of the attempted suicide in the former version of the Zuhri–‘Urwa–‘A’isha tradition seems to have made it more acceptable to the musannaf compilers.

Another tradition with an attempted suicide, which likewise remained outside the musannaf compilations, is that of the Meccan story-teller ‘Ubayd ibn ‘Umayr (d. AH 68), who relates his tale to ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Zubayr (Meccan d. AH 72). The first part of the story is related in the third person. At the point...
where the *iqra* passage is revealed, the narration shifts to Muḥammad himself, who carries on the story in the first person and mentions the attempted suicide. The tradition abounds in Quranic material. Apart from the *iqra* passage, it contains the idea that revelation of the Quran began in the month of Ramadān (Quran 2:185), as implied in the statement that our episode took place during the same month. Moreover, the appearance of Gabriel is said to have taken place at night (*laylān*), which echoes the Quranic verses about *laylat al-Qadr* (97:1) and “the blessed night” (44:2), both indicating the time when the scripture was first sent down to the Quranic prophet. The tradition was preserved by Ibn Ishaq (d. AH 150), and is quoted from him in al-Tabari’s *Tārikh*. In the version of Ibn Hishām, Muḥammad’s attempted suicide is expunged. The traditions with the *iqra* passage were also picked up by the Quran exegetes in their quest for the “occasions of revelation” (*ashbāb al-nuṣūl*). Thus, in the *Taṣfir* of ‘Abd al-Razzāq (d. AH 211) and al-Tabari (d. AH 310), some of the above traditions are recorded in the exegesis of the *iqra* passage. But already before them, exegetes like Muqāṭil ibn Sulaymān (d. AH 150) were aware of the same traditions, stating that the *iqra* passage was Muḥammad’s first revelation.

II

There are other traditions with the Khadija–Waraqa narrative framework which only survived in the biographical sources. All of them occur in Ibn Sa’d, and their *isnād* indicate that they were first put into circulation in the Hijāz (Mecca and Medina). All of them delineate the chain of events which led to Muḥammad’s interview with Waraqa ibn Nawfal, but none of them refer to any specific Quranic revelation. All the traditions mention only non-verbal visions of voices and light. The fact that these traditions lack the essential Quranic allusions seems to have made them of no interest to the compilers of the musannaf collections. In themselves these versions preserve the sheer universal elements of revelation adapted to Arabian surroundings, but not yet to Quranic models.

One of these traditions is of the Meccan ‘Ammār ibn Abī ‘Ammār (d. ca. AH 105), who quotes Ibn ‘Abbās:

5. The Khadija–Waraqa Story

The Prophet said: “Oh Khadija, I hear a voice and see light, and I am afraid the demon has taken possession of me.” She said: “God will not do such a thing to you, oh son of ‘Abdallāh.” Then she came to Waraqa ibn Nawfal and told him about this, and he said: “If he is telling the truth, then this is an angel (nāmās) like the one of Moses. If I am still alive when he is sent as a prophet, I shall support him and help him and believe in him.”

There is a similar tradition of Hishām ibn ‘Urwa (d. AH 146) on the authority of his father ‘Urwa ibn al-Zubayr (d. AH 94). It too knows only of a non-verbal vision, and runs as follows:

The Prophet said: “Oh Khadija, I hear a voice and see light, and I am afraid I have become a kāhin.” She said: “God will not do such a thing to you, oh son of ‘Abdallāh. You tell the truth, deliver whatever is entrusted with you, and support your needy kindred.”

These versions, in which no verbatim extract from the Quran is used to describe Muḥammad’s first revelation, seem to contain only the basic Khadija–Waraqa narrative framework, with the universal elements of revelation; it is essentially independent of the Quranic concept of revelation, for the very notion that the Prophet saw light and heard voices is alien to the Quran. Nowhere in the scripture is there any reference to visions of light (*dawr*), or to the hearing of a voice (*jawr*). Neither is there in the Quran any reference to a terrifying encounter with the angel which causes the Prophet a critical state of anxiety. The fear with which Muḥammad reacts to his first prophetic experience in the story seems to have its origin in biblical conventions of the terror and fright with which prophets and other human beings react to the appearance of God (e.g. Judges 6:22–23; 13:22; Isaiah 6:5). Only the actual words with which the Prophet expresses to his wife Khadija his fear for himself reflect Quranic themes, and this indirectly. He fears for his mental integrity, or that he has become a kāhin, etc. The Quran itself (52:29, 68:2, 69:42, 81:22) states that the prophet is neither a sorcerer (kāhin) nor a madman (majnūn).

The basic tale of Muḥammad’s first revelations therefore accords with biblical rather than Quranic conventions, and the story was initially designed to meet apologetic needs. The scene of the beginning of prophetic revelations was of vital importance to the *vita* with which Muḥammad had to be endowed in order to match the prophets of the “People of the Book”. But Quranic elements had soon to be fitted into the basic narrative in order to provide it with a more au-

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20 Ibn Hishām, I, 253.
22 Muqāṭil, II, fol. 244b.
23 Ibn Sa’d, I, 195. See also Ahmad, *Musnad*, I, 312; *Tabarānī*, *Kabīr*, XII, no. 12839.

24 See Ibn Sa’d, I, 195.
5. The Khadija-Waraqa Story

The motif of non-Quranic visions of voices and light is present not only in some versions of the Khadija-Waraqa tale, but also in traditions designed to fix the chronology of Muhammad's first years of prophethood. These are harmonising traditions which try to squeeze the non-Quranic visions and the proper Quranic revelations into one progressive sequence of events. One of the traditions of this kind is recorded in the Sahīh of Muslim.\(^\text{22}\) Here it is said that the Prophet remained in Mecca fifteen years, during seven of which he used to hear voices and see light, and in the course of the other eight years he was receiving the wahy, i.e. the proper revelation of the Quran. In Medina he spent ten years. This tradition was circulated with the ḫiṣād of the Meccan 'Amr ibn Abī 'Amr (d. AH 105) from Ibn 'Abbās.\(^\text{28}\) Another tradition recorded by al-Baladhuri says that Gabriel appeared to Muhammad on Monday, 17 Ramadan, on the mountain Ḥirā', when the Prophet was 40 years old. The tradition adds that earlier on, the prophet already heard [voices] and saw [light].\(^\text{29}\)

It is noteworthy that in yet another group of traditions, the visions which precede the revelations administered by Gabriel are also said to have been prompted by an angel, thus being elevated from simple voices and light to the rank of prophetic revelations. In one tradition the name of the angel is Michael, which is known from the Quran (2:98). The tradition has the Iraqi ḫiṣād of Dāwūd ibn Abī Hind (Bāṣran d. AH 139)\(^\text{26}\) the ḥāliṣ of the Prophet was 43, Gabriel took over the role of Michael: he brought him the Quranic revelations for ten years in Mecca, and for ten years in Medina. The Prophet died at the age of 63. This tradition was recorded by 'Abd al-Razzāq in his Musannaf in the section Janā’iz, i.e. funeral rites.\(^\text{30}\) This somewhat bizarre classification arises from the fact that Muhammad's age at death is provided here. A similar tradition is found in Ibn Sa'd.\(^\text{31}\) Its ḫiṣād is identical to the Iraqi ḫiṣād of the tradition of al-Sha'bi about Michael, and the only difference is in the name of the angel who precedes Gabriel. This time he is Isrā'īl, not

\(^{22}\) Muslim, VII, 89 (43, Būb kam uqāma l-nabiyya (s) bi-Makka wa-l-Madīna).\(^\text{23}\)

\(^{26}\) See the same tradition also in Ibn Sa'd, I, 224; Ahmad, Musnad, I, 266, 279, 294, 312; Tabašrīnī, Kabir, XII, no. 12640; Bayhaqī, Dalā'il, VII, 240.

\(^{28}\) Baladhuri, Ansāb, I, 104 (no. 188). The ḫiṣād: Abū Bakr ibn 'Abdallāh ibn Abī Sabra (d. AH 162)\(^\text{26}\) Ishāq ibn 'Abdallāh ibn Abī Farwa (d. AH 144)\(^\text{26}\) Abū Ja'far (the Imam Muhammad ibn 'Alī al-Baqir, d. AH 114).

\(^{30}\) 'Abd al-Razzāq, Musannaf, III, no. 6785.

\(^{31}\) Ibn Sa'd, I, 191. See also Tabari, Fiṣḥ, I, 1249 (II, 387); Bayhaqī, Dalā'il, II, 132; Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, Istī'āb, I, 36; Ibn Kathīr, Bidāyā, III, 4. See also Ya'qūbī, II, 23.
Michael. Isrāfīl is not mentioned in the Quran, for which reason the version with his name seems to have been left outside the musannaf compilations. The compilers (in this case, ‘Abd al-Razzāq) preferred the version with the name of the Quranic Michael to that with the non-Quranic Isrāfīl.

In fact, the version with Isrāfīl provoked the objection of several scholars. Ibn Sa’d relates that he mentioned the tradition about Isrāfīl to his master al-Wāqidi, and the latter responded: “The scholars of our town (i.e. Medina) do not know that Isrāfīl attended the Prophet. The scholars and the sīra experts say that once the revelation had been sent down to Muḥammad, no angel associated with him till he died except Gabriel.”32 In al-Ṭabarī’s Tārīkh,33 where another version of the same Iraqi tradition about Isrāfīl is recorded, al-Wāqidi himself inquires of his own Medinan masters about this, and they reject it. Thus, for a tradition about the prophetic inspiration of Muḥammad to be accepted by all scholars, it had to fit Quranic modes of revelation. Since Michael is the only angel mentioned in the Quran besides Gabriel, only traditions with him were recognised as sound.

6

The Lapse of Revelation

(Fatr al-wahy)

I

THE LINK BETWEEN GOD AND MAN through prophetic revelation may sometimes be interrupted, which causes the recipient of revelation a serious crisis. The Bible has some examples of such crisis caused by the departure of the spirit of God (e.g. 1 Samuel 16:14). This traumatic aspect of revelation also emerges in the life of Muḥammad. In his case it was turned into the anti-climax of his meeting with Wāraqa. But the lapse of revelation takes place only to end with the resumption of revelation, which reaffirms the God–prophet link. This event provides another angle of the trial which the Prophet had to endure before being fully initiated into the prophetic office.

The traditions refer to the lapse of revelation as fatr al-wahy, “the interval in the prophetic inspiration” (lit. “the cooling down of the prophetic inspiration”). The story of the interval deserves examination, because here the process of adaptation was again not entirely successful, due to some doctrinal problems that it caused.

Let us again begin with the musannaf compilations. Here another version of the Zuhri–Urwa–‘A’isha tradition of the Khadija–Wāraqa story is recorded, and relates an extended chain of events. This version was circulated by the Başran sīra expert Ma’mar ibn Rashid (d. AH 154). The interview with Wāraqa is followed by the fatr al-wahy, during which Muḥammad does not meet the angel. The absence of the angel gives Muḥammad a fresh cause for agony: this time he is not in a state of fear of the angel, but of yearning to meet him again. In the version of Ma’mar, when the fatra takes place Muḥammad is distressed and tries to end his life by throwing himself from a cliff. This is only prevented by the angel, who resumes his visits at the last moment, saying to the desperate Prophet: “Oh Muḥammad, you are truly the messenger of God.” But the angel disappears again into another fatra, so Muḥammad repeats his attempt to take his own life, only to be saved once more by the reappearance of the angel with more encouraging words.

32 Ibn Sa’d, I, 191.
33 Ṭabarī, Tārīkh, I, 1249 (II, 386–87).

3 There are various opinions concerning how long this fatra lasted. See Suhaylī, Rawd, I, 281; Shāmi, II, 363–64; Mughuljāy, fol. 115b–116a.