

QS 30 Q 33:40

33.40 Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the Prophet of God and the Seal of Prophets. God has knowledge of all things.

33.40 Muhammad n'a jamais été le père de l'un de vos hommes, mais le messager d'Allah et le dernier des prophètes. Allah est Omniscient.

سورة الأحزاب
مَا كَانَ مُحَمَّدٌ أَبَا أَحَدٍ مِنْ رِجَالِكُمْ وَلَكِنْ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَخَاتَمَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا (40)

Dye

Si le verset s'arrêtait après *riḡālikum*, on pourrait penser que le propos de cette péricope est de légitimer le mariage de Muḥammad et de Zaynab. La suite du verset montre que l'enjeu de ce passage est totalement différent – et plus profond.

Un détour est ici nécessaire. Il me semble qu'il faut prendre très au sérieux l'idée défendue par Casanova (1911: 8), et reprise par divers collègues récemment, selon laquelle Muḥammad considérait qu'il était le dernier prophète, choisi par Dieu pour présider, conjointement avec le Messie revenu sur terre, à la fin du monde, à la résurrection universelle et au Jugement dernier. Rappelons que cette conception du message de Muḥammad ne dépend pas nécessairement de l'interprétation que l'on fait de la formule *ḥātam al-nabiyyin*.

Or si Muḥammad se considérait comme le prophète de la fin du monde, alors la question de la *continuité de la prophétie* ne se posait pas de son vivant... Une fois le Prophète mort, et les espérances eschatologiques déçues, cette question ne pouvait que resurgir. Les héritiers de la prophétie étaient précisément les descendants mâles de Muḥammad, autrement dit les alides. En d'autres termes, ce verset pourrait être, dans son état actuel, une addition tardive, destinée à contrer les prétentions des alides.

L'expression « sceau des prophètes » se trouve chez Tertullien (*Adv. Judaeos* 8:12), où elle désigne le Christ, appelé *signaculum omnium prophetarum* (Jean Baptiste est qualifié de *clausula prophetarum*). L'idée pourrait venir de Dan 9:24, où l'idée de *clôture*, de *fin*, semble plus importante que celle de *confirmation*. Noter que juste avant (Dan 9:23), Daniel est appelé « [l'homme] des prédilections » (*iš-ḥamudot*), ce qui ressemble beaucoup au surnom *Muḥammad*, (sur Muḥammad comme épithète, surnom, et non comme prénom, cf. Reynolds 2011a et Gilliot (2011)).

Post-scriptum sur les enfants du Prophète : c'est un sujet sur lequel beaucoup de légendes se sont développées (cf. Kister 1993). Il me semble à peu près impossible de retrouver la réalité historique derrière tous ces récits, mais l'idée traditionnelle selon laquelle le Prophète aurait eu sept enfants (un chiffre qui n'est pas anodin dans la culture biblique) ne paraît pas être une information historique. Par ailleurs, quel que soit l'avis que l'on a sur Ibrāhīm, il est clair que Māriya la Copte n'est pas un personnage historique, mais une fiction littéraire (cf. Cannuyer 2008).

Hawting

Usually understood in the present tense, the expression *mā kāna Muḥammadun...* is ambiguous as to its time specification: it could be read in the past tense. Note, however, that vv. 36 and 38 both begin also with *mā kāna*, and v. 36, at least, seems to require understanding as a present tense.

The traditional understanding of v. 40 involves reading it in the light of the events apparently alluded to in Q 33: 36–7, and the traditional understanding of those verses in turn relies heavily on *sīra* material. However, if v. 40 literally means that Muḥammad was not the father of any male (since Zayd, according to the tradition, was not his real son but only one of the *ad'iyā'*: Q 33:4, 37), it is only with some difficulty reconcilable with *sīra* material about the male children of Muḥammad (one has to assume it was known, at the time of the revelation, that none of them would reach maturity). The statement is perhaps also at odds with those frequent passages in the Qur'ān that emphasize that God's messengers are fully human (against the views of the opponents). It is difficult to read the verse without having the *sīra* material regarding Zayd, Zaynab and Muḥammad in mind, but it is not obvious how the mundane events recorded in *sīra* would inspire a statement that Muḥammad was the Messenger of God and the Seal of the prophets.

This verse is, of course, the proof text for the dogma that Muḥammad was the final prophet, and that prophecy had come to an end with him. One problem there is the meaning of “seal” (*ḥātam*, read by some as *ḥātim*). The metaphor has been used in monotheist scriptural and other texts in various languages to convey a variety of ideas: see Colpe, 1984–6; Stroumsa, 1986, and Bobzin, 2010. Using that and other evidence, a number of scholars (including Friedmann 1989, Powers 2009, and Rubin 2014) have put forward conflicting ideas about why and when it became widely, but not unanimously, accepted in Islam that prophecy had come to an end with Muḥammad. Discussion of these issues needs to take into consideration not merely whether and how a single and ambiguous Qur'ānic verse might influence the development of such a fundamental matter of belief, but also what sort of political and religious factors (notably, ideas about authority) would lead a religious community to accept that prophecy was no longer possible.

Pregill

One of only four explicit references to Muḥammad in the Qur'ān.

“Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men...”: cf. the magisterial discussion in Powers 2009.

Ḥātam al-nabiyyīn: in addition to Powers, see also my discussion (Pregill 2011a: 303–304) responding to Stroumsa (1986). The gist is that Stroumsa seeks to refute older scholarship that posited some connection between the Manichaean use of the phrase “seal of the prophets” and the later application of the same phrase to Muḥammad, on the grounds that the Manichaean phrase does not mean that Mani was

the final prophet but rather the one who verifies older prophets. *Pace* Stroumsa, I note that in its original context it is likely that this is exactly what the Qur'ānic phrase means – as I sometimes explain it to students, “sealing” prophecy does not mean tying a bow on it and wrapping it up, but rather giving it the stamp of approval to ratify it. Cf. also Friedmann 1986, who observes that Islamic tradition does preserve evidence of an early, alternative understanding of *ḥatm al-nubuwwa* that was more in keeping with the Manichaean concept and what I would argue is the indigenous concept in the Qur'ān as well.

Stefanidis

Regarding the distinction between *rasūl* and *nabī*, W. A. Bijlefeld (1969) has suggested that *nubuwwa* is the privilege of Adam's and Noah's progeny through Abraham and his descendants and was only belatedly attributed to Muḥammad. The understanding of prophecy as belonging to one's family would explain why it is relevant that the *ḥātam al-nabiyyīna* (and not *ḥātam al-mursalīna*) has no sons (Powers 2009). If the understanding of *ḥātam* as entailing “last” is sound, this expression might have been polemically aimed at a Jewish audience to underscore that God has now put an end to their prophetic pretenses.

Q 3:81 (*wa-id aḥaḍa llāhu mītāqa l-nabiyyīna*) also addresses Muḥammad's relationship to previous prophets. The fact that Q 33:7 might be pointing to that mythical event (*wa-id aḥaḍnā mītāqa l-nabiyyīna*, although here the content of *mītāq* is not specified) makes Q 3:81 even more relevant to the discussion of *ḥātam al-nabiyyīna*.

Winitzer

Against the traditional view, I follow Wansbrough 1977: 64–65 in part on what he described as the “eschatological significance” of Muḥammad's title as “Seal of the Prophets.” An initial parallel for this position avails itself from similar conceptions of Christ in the New Testament, e.g., in John 6:27's depiction of Christ as “sealed by God.” That image, too, should be seen as more than just figurative, a point supported by the understanding of Christ as the second Adam (1 Cor 15). As contended elsewhere (Winitzer 2014: 191–95), the sense of the primordial man in Eden as a seal of a divine blueprint appears in the Old Testament, specifically in the Eden tradition in Ezek 28 (v. 12).

This need not deny the traditional view's understanding of the title figuratively, with the sense that with Muhammad a finality in prophetic election has been reached. It simply supports another, mythological, sense of the image, in which the intermediary between the divine and human realm is envisioned as a constituent of the “heavenly blueprint/writing” motif. This motif, of course, is well attested already in the case of Moses (who was also conceived as a second Adam and thus somehow larger than life); in Late Antiquity it develops considerably, as can be seen in Jewish writings from Jubilees to the rabbinic corpus.