Muhammad as an Episcopal Figure[1]

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Abstract

The Medinan stratum of the Qur'an ascribes to Muhammad a noticeably elevated status and a far wider range of functions than the earlier Meccan layer. Although this shift may well have responded to, and been facilitated by, historical circumstances, it is nonetheless appropriate to inquire whether specific aspects of it might draw on pre-Qur'anic precedents. I argue that the Christian episcopate, arguably the most widespread type of urban religious leadership in late antiquity, yields a surprising number of close overlaps with the Medinan presentation of the function and authority of Muhammad. The article also considers important differences between the figure of Muhammad and that of the Christian bishop. The most important such divergence consists in the fact that the Qur'anic Messenger, unlike a Christian bishop, does not owe his authority to ordination by an ecclesiastical hierarchy: Muhammad does not occupy an office that imparts authority independently of the person occupying it.

Introduction

Notwithstanding several attempts to envisage the formative history of Islam differently than traditionally retold, it remains by far the most probable view that the texts collected in the Qur'an were first promulgated by an individual called Muhammad in early seventh-century

[1] This article has emerged from a paper delivered at the symposium *Representations of Muhammad*, held on 24 October 2015 at the University of Edinburgh. The Bible is quoted according to the New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised; my translations of Qur'anic passages are based on Alan Jones (trans.), *The Qurʾān*, [Cambridge:] Gibb Memorial Trust, 2007. Work on this article was supported by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (grant reference AH/M011305/1).

Western Arabia.[2] Yet Muhammad did not merely deliver the Qur'an, he also has a profound literary presence within it. While the Islamic scripture does not contain any narratives about Muhammad in the vein of its accounts of previous divine emissaries such as Abraham or Moses, a host of Qur'anic passages address the Prophet in the second person singular or make third-person statements about him. Despite previous work on this material,[3] it presents significant potential for further analysis. In pursuing this task, it will be necessary to navigate some methodological pitfalls entailed by the literary nature of the material. Especially the Qur'an's second-person addresses of Muhammad create a certain temptation to construe them as a sort of inverse diary. Thus, when Q 9:85 enjoins Muhammad not to be impressed by the wealth and children of those who fail to follow him into battle, one might infer that he must have harboured an "attraction for wealth and children"; and when Q 6:107 and other passages insist that Muhammad is not responsible for those who reject his preaching, one might conclude that "he felt a need to do more than just deliver the message".[4] Applied across the board, such a psychologising reading would yield a somewhat maudlin characterisation of Muhammad according to which the many Qur'anic passages that fortify and console him (e.g., Q 30:60 or 68:2–7) must indicate frequent bouts of prophetic dejection.

[2] For a concise outline of the reasons behind this assertion see Nicolai Sinai, "Der Koran", in *Islam: Einheit und Vielfalt einer Weltreligion*, ed. Rainer Brunner, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 2016, p. 132–166, at p. 133–136. A more detailed treatment can be found in Nicolai Sinai, *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2017, Chapters Two and Three. Note that I would admit the possibility of a certain amount of posthumous editing of Muhammad's revelatory deposit.

[3] The most useful survey remains Alford T. Welch, "Muhammad's Understanding of Himself: The Koranic Data", in *Islam's Understanding of Itself*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian and Speros Vryonis, Jr., Malibu, Undena Publications, 1983, p. 15–52.

[4] Both examples are found in Welch, "Muhammad's Understanding of Himself", p. 24–25 and 37–38.

It is appropriate to be very sceptical about such attempts to derive introspective biographical data from the Qur'an. Instead, it seems far more likely that second-person addresses to Muhammad, just like third-person statements about him, have primarily a prophetological purport: they would have conveyed to Muhammad's audience distinct ideas about his person, function, and authority, ideas that deserve to be analytically deconstructed and historically contextualised. This is well illustrated by the Qur'anic proclamations' marked preoccupation with comforting and solacing Muhammad in the face of miscellaneous aspersions and opposition. Rather than treating the relevant passages as divine pep talks for Muhammad's individual consumption, they are more interestingly read as invocations of the Biblical topos of the suffering prophet. The latter is most vividly embodied by the so-called Confessions of Jeremiah, a sequence of five laments found in Jeremiah 11–20 in which the prophet poignantly bemoans the resistance and enmity he faces and wonders whether God has abandoned him.[5] Admittedly, the Qur'an nowhere mentions the figure of Jeremiah. Yet this does not preclude that the general motif of the rejected and despised man of God could have been well known in the Qur'anic milieu, especially in view of the fact that at least some of the relevant passages from the book of Jeremiah were used as scriptural readings in church services.[6] It is pertinent in this regard that the Confessions of Jeremiah formally conform to the Psalmic genre of the individual lament (e.g., Psalm 13), and that the three brief consolatory surahs 93, 94, and 108 can be analysed as targeted inversions of this genre,

[5] The relevant passages are Jeremiah 11:18–12:6, 15:10–21, 17:12–18, 18:19–23, and 20:7–18; see the brief overview of previous research in Erich Zenger et al., *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, 5th edition, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 2004, p. 461–462.

[6] See, for instance, Francis Crawford Burkitt, *The Early Syriac Lectionary System*, London, published for the British Academy by Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1923, p. 30 (according to which the beginning of Jeremiah 12 was read on the evening of Good Friday and parts of Jeremiah 16–17 were read during the week after Easter).

insofar as they substitute human lamentation by divine words of consolation.[7] Qur'anic consolations of Muhammad are therefore sophisticated literary creations speaking to a wider audience rather than just personal words of solace.

It follows that even if we are not inclined to doubt Muhammad's historical existence and his link with the Qur'anic proclamations, we should not expect the Qur'an to provide us with privileged access to his inner life but rather to project certain literary and public images of him. The present article aims to contribute to our understanding of the prophetology inherent in the Medinan surahs of the Qur'an and attempts to explore whether we can pinpoint specific precedents for it. In pursuing this inquiry, I take for granted my argument elsewhere that it is possible to isolate a specifically Medinan stratum of the Qur'an based

[7] According to Gunkel's analysis (Hermann Gunkel, *Einleitung in die Psalmen: Die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels*, completed by Joachim Begrich, 4th edition, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1985, p. 172–265), important components of the genre of the individual lament are the complaint or lament proper (Psalm 13:1–2: "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me for ever? ..."), the petition (Psalm 13:3–4: "Consider and answer me, O Lord my God! ..."), the confession of trust (Psalm 13:5: "But I trusted in your steadfast love ..."), and a concluding vow (Psalm 13:6: "I will sing to the Lord ..."). Allowing for the fact that the three Qur'anic surahs in question feature a divine voice addressing a human individual rather than a human voice invoking God, several of their formal components directly correspond to and invert standard components of Psalmic laments: the complaint or lament corresponds to reminders of past benefactions that God has bestowed upon the addressee (Q 93:6–8, 94:1–4, 108:1); the petition corresponds to promises of divine reward and assistance (93:3–5, 94:5–6, 108:3), and the concluding vow corresponds to moral and liturgical biddings (93:9–11, 94:7–8, 108:2). These correspondences become even more relevant if we bear in mind, firstly, that the Biblical Psalms were widely used in Jewish and Christian worship, and, secondly, that the three surahs in question employ not only Psalmic literary forms but also identifiable Psalmic motifs. For example, as Angelika Neuwirth points out (*Der Koran*, vol. 1: *Frühmekkanische Suren: Poetische Prophetie*, Berlin, Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2011, p. 108–109) the "hater" (*shāniʾ*) who figures to in Q 108:3 corresponds to the Psalmic voice's frequent complaints about the machinations of his enemies (see Gunkel, *Einleitung*, p. 196ff.) and obviously forms the Arabic equivalent of the Hebrew term *śonēʾ* / Syriac *sānē* (e.g., Psalm 9:14). The presence of further Psalmic motifs in Q 93, 94, and 108 is pointed out in Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. 1, p. 77–95 and p. 106–112.

merely on the distinct stylistic, terminological, and thematic profile of the texts in question. I also assume that it can be shown, again without substantial reliance on post-Qur'anic tradition, that the Qur'an's Medinan layer is chronologically posterior to the Meccan one.[8]

The admonitory prophetology of the Meccan Qur'an

Although both the Meccan and the Medinan surahs are united in describing Muhammad as God's "Messenger" (*rasūl*), the Qur'anic understanding of his role undergoes a perceptible reconfiguration in the Medinan part of the corpus.[9] In order to grasp this shift, we must briefly consider Muhammad's presentation in the Meccan Qur'an.[10] There, Muhammad's function is largely confined to the task of relaying divine warnings. Thus, he is commanded to "admonish" (*ḏakkara*, e.g. Q 6:70, 14:5, 50:45, 52:29, 87:9, and 88:21) and to "warn" (*anḏara*, e.g., 6:51, 42:7, 46:12, 71:17, and 74:2) his audience and to "give glad tidings" (*baššara*, e.g., Q 19:97, 36:11, 45:8, and 84:24) both of the paradisiacal reward that awaits the pious and of the "painful punishment" that is merited by those who fail to heed God's

[8] See Nicolai Sinai, "The Unknown Known: Some Groundwork for Interpreting the Medinan Qur'an", *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph*, 66 (2015–2016), p. 47–96. My own delineation of the Medinan corpus largely overlaps with that of Weil and Nöldeke (Theodor Nöldeke et al., *The History of the Qurʾān*, translated by Wolfgang H. Behn, Leiden: Brill, 2013, p. 135–188), even though I am remain unsure about how to allocate Q 61, 64, 98, and 110.

[9] This is not a novel observation: for instance, Alford Welch has remarked that Muhammad's "power and responsibilities" were at first "said to be limited in various ways" but "later are portrayed as being greatly increased" (Welch, "Muhammad's Understanding of Himself", p. 35).

[10] On the following see also the summary characterisation of Muhammad's image in the early Qur'an put forward in Hartmut Bobzin, "The 'Seal of the Prophets': Towards an Understanding of Muhammad's Prophethood", in *The Qurʾān in Context: Literary and Historical Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth et al., Leiden: Brill 2010, p. 565–583, at p. 569.

moral and religious imperatives.[11] In line with such diction, Muhammad himself is defined as a "warner" (*naḏīr* or *munḏir*, e.g., Q 17:105, 25:56, 38:4.65, 46:9, 50:2, 51:50–51, 67:26),[12] as a "bearer of eschatological tidings" (*bašīr* or *mubaššir*, see Q 11:2, 17:105, 25:56), and in one place also as an "admonisher" (*muḏakkir*, Q 88:21). The understanding of Muhammad's messengership that can be discerned here is best labelled as "admonitory": Muhammad's task consists in the "transmission" (*balāġ*) of God's message (e.g., 42:48, 72:23); he is explicitly dispensed from any further function, such as attempting to coerce his audience into heeding his message (Q 50:45, 88:21–22). As Q 42:48 puts it, "If they turn away – We have not sent you as a guardian over them. Your sole duty is to transmit."[13]

The Meccan surahs' admonitory prophetology is not limited to Muhammad: many earlier messengers are presented as performing the same role. These include the non-Biblical prophet Ṣāliḥ, who according to Q 46:21 "warned his people", like other warners "before him

[11] Although the literal meaning of *baššara* is "to give glad tidings" (cf. the noun *bušrā* as used e.g. at Q 2:97, 3:126, and 8:10), the Qur'an stereotypically joins the verb *baššara* to the object "a painful punishment" (*ʿadhāb alīm*, e.g., Q 3:21, 4:137, 9:34, 45:8, 84:24). This concatenation would originally have had a sardonic resonance ("Give them the glad tidings of a painful punishment!"), although the verb's formulaic employment together with a reference to damnation may gradually have weakened this. See also Devin Stewart, "Poetic Licence and the Qur'anic Names of Hell: The Treatment of Cognate Substitution in al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī's Qur'anic Lexicon", in *The Meaning of the Word: Lexicology and Qur'anic Exegesis*, ed. Stephen R. Burge, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 195–253, at pp. 196–8.

[12] Cf. Welch, "Muhammad's Understanding of Himself", p. 41.

[13] The Meccan surahs also contain a number of liturgical and ethical biddings addressed to the Qur'anic Messenger (see Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*, second edition, London, SCM Press, 2003, p. 100, 109–110, 121–122); cases in point are, for instance, Q 87:1, 93:9–11, or 94:7–8. Unlike commands to engage in prophetic warnings and admonishment, it seems likely that such liturgical and ethical imperatives are not meant to apply exclusively to the Messenger, but also to extend to his followers. Their purport is consequently not prophetological but rather what one might call "pistological": they serve to convey general ideas about the nature of faith and the human-divine relationship.

and after him". Noah, too, was instructed, "Warn your people before a painful punishment comes upon them" (Q 71:1). And at Q 29:18 Abraham underscores that "the messenger's sole duty is to transmit clearly." The fact that the Qur'an has the messengers prior to Muhammad express themselves in the same diction as he has not gone unnoticed.[14] It is important, however, not to conceptualise this exclusively in terms of the retrospective imposition of certain given traits of Muhammad onto earlier figures. Instead, it would be just as true to say that Muhammad's image is cast in the mould of existing prophetological paradigms.[15] After all, the Meccan Qur'an's admonitory prophetology has strong roots in the Biblical tradition prior to the Qur'an. Thus, already pre-Qur'anic Jewish and Christian texts portray Noah as calling his contemporaries to repent.[16] (One may observe that this amounts to a significant transformation of the Biblical Noah, for Genesis 6 does not report him to have made any attempt to convince others to mend their ways.) Earlier literature likewise depicts Abraham

[14] E.g., Josef Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1926, p. 8–9, 11, 18, and
Karl Prenner, *Muhammad und Musa: Strukturanalytische und theologiegeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu den mekkanischen Musa-Perikopen des Qurʾān*, Altenberge, Christlich-islamisches Schrifttum, 1986, p. 26 ("daß sich nämlich in der Person des Musa Muhammad selbst abbildhaft darstellt").

[15] See the remarks in Devin J. Stewart, "Wansbrough, Bultmann, and the Theory of Variant Traditions in the Qurʾān", in *Qurʾānic Studies Today*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth and Michael A. Sells, Abingdon, Routledge, 2016, p. 17–51, at p. 30–31.

[16] Heinrich Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, Hildesheim, Georg Olms Verlag, 1988 (originally published Breslau, Marcus, between 1937 and 1939, but misattributed Gräfenhainichen, C. Schulze, 1931, in order to circumvent the Nazi ban on Jewish publications), p. 94–95; James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible As It Was at the Start of the Common Era*, Cambridge (Massachusetts), Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 185–186.

and Moses, two of the earliest Biblical figures mentioned in the Qur'an,[17] as preaching to an obstinate and unbelieving audience.[18]

Muhammad's status and function in the the Constitution of Medina

Turning to the Medinan surahs, we find that expressions of the admonitory understanding of Muhammad's messengership just outlined persist to some degree. Especially the verb *baššara* has a significant number of Medinan occurrences (see among others Q 2:25.155.223, 3:21, and 4:138). Similarly, Medinan verses continue to designate Muhammad as a "bearer of eschatological tidings" and a "warner" (e.g., Q 2:119, 5:19), and it is reiterated that his sole responsibility lies in faithfully transmitting God's message (e.g., Q 3:20, 5:92.99). Furthermore, Q 42:48, cited above,[19] has more than one close Medinan parallel (Q 3:20, 4:80, 5:92; see also 5:99, 24:54, 64:12?).[20] At the same time, such admonitory statements coexist with others that bespeak a tangible elevation of Muhammad's status and a significant broadening of his functions and responsibilities. The development can be summarised by saying that Muhammad is now explicitly credited with a novel role of political and religious communal leadership.

[17] See Q 53:36–37, 79:15–26 and 87:18–19. Other early verses mention only Pharaoh: Q 85:18 and 89:10.

[18] Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, p. 134–138 (Abraham arguing against the idolatry of his compatriots) and p. 270–272 (Moses preaching to Pharaoh); on Abraham see also Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, p. 245–249. Especially with regard to Moses, the Qur'an admittedly goes much further in its emphasis on the latter's role as a preacher as opposed to the liberator of the Israelites. See Prenner, *Muhammad und Musa*, p. 271 (citing Johan Bouman on the Moses pericope in Q 28).

[19] "If they turn away – We have not sent you as a guardian over them. Your sole duty is to transmit."

[20] But note that Q 4:80 additionally insists on the duty to obey the Messenger, on which see below.

Before reviewing the different aspects of this Medinan reconfiguration of the figure of Muhammad, it is appropriate to review the so-called Constitution of Medina, a covenant reportedly concluded by Muhammad upon his arrival at Medina that many scholars have accepted as authentic.[21] The Constitution describes itself as "a document by Muhammad the Prophet between the Believers and Submitters of Quraysh and Yathrib and those who follow them, attach themselves to them, and engage in military struggle with them" (§ 1).[22] Like the Medinan layer of the Qur'an, the Constitution of Medina presents us with a community (*umma*) (§ 2) that is composed of the Meccan "Emigrants" (§ 3) and various other tribal groups, is defined in religious terms,[23] and is engaged in "fighting in the path of God" (§§ 19, 21). Given such broad similarities between the Constitution and the Medinan Qur'an, we might expect Muhammad, too, to play a comparable role in both texts. Is this the case?

The answer to this question can hardly be unreservedly affirmative. Apart from the superscript just cited, the Constitution mentions Muhammad only four more times, thereby according him far from the towering presence that he has in many Medinan parts of the Qur'an. The most significant references to him are two provisos to the effect that "whatever you differ about should be referred to God and Muhammad (*fa-inna maraddahu ilā llāhi wa-ilā Muḥammadin*)" and that "every major crime (*ḥadaṯ*) or dispute (*ištiğār*) between the

[21] Michael Lecker, *The "Constitution of Medina": Muḥammad's First Legal Document*, Princeton, Darwin Press, 2004. The document and the arguments for its authenticity are concisely introduced in Harry Munt, *The Holy City of Medina: Sacred Space in Early Islamic Arabia,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 54–56. The unity of the document, which some earlier scholars have doubted, is defended in Lecker, *Constitution*, p. 183–190.

[22] Lecker, *Constitution*, p. 7 (slightly modifying Lecker's translation as given on p. 32).

[23] Cf. the treaty's numerous references to "Believers" as well as the use of the terms "Unbeliever" (*kāfir*) in § 15 and "Associator" (*mušrik*) in § 23. Note that § 25 specifies the doctrinal commitments of the Believers by speaking of belief "in God and the Last Day", a common Qur'anic phrase (e.g., Q 2:126, 3:114).

people of this treaty from which evil is to be feared should be referred to God and Muhammad." (§§ 26 and 52)[24] One may note the conspicuous omission of a prophetic honorific for Muhammad in these two provisos according to at least some witnesses of the Ibn Isḥāq recension of the text.[25] The Constitution furthermore stipulates that the nomadic allies of the Jewish tribes listed in the document, or perhaps these Jewish tribes themselves, may not leave Medina, or perhaps go on a military campaign, "without Muhammad's permission" (§ 40).[26] The document's final reference to Muhammad comes in its conclusion, which states that "God is the protector of him who is righteous and God-fearing, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God" (§ 63).[27]

The "community" (*umma*) created by the Constitution of Medina is a confederation of internally autonomous tribal units. Watt defensibly characterises the fairly limited role that Muhammad plays in the political structure set out in the document by saying that "Muhammad as chief of the Emigrants" was "on a level" with the other Medinan clan chiefs, although he may have possessed a "primacy of honour".[28] According to the Constitution, Muhammad functions largely as a subsidiary arbitrator of last resort for disputes that have proved, or are likely to prove, impossible to settle by means of existing tribal mechanisms for

[24] Lecker, *Constitution*, p. 35 and 38 (translation slightly modified). On the meaning of the term *ḥadaṯ* see ibid., p. 132 and 173–174. An alternative recension of the first proviso states that disputes "should be *judged* by God and by the Messenger" (*fa-inna ḥukmahu ilā llāhi wa-ilā l-rasūli*); see Lecker, *Constitution*, p. 24.

[25] For textual variants see Lecker, *Constitution*, p. 14 and 17 as well as p. 24–25.

[26] Lecker, *Constitution*, p. 37 and 153–157.

[27] Lecker, *Constitution*, p. 39 opts for an alternative translation: "Allāh is the protector of him who is righteous and God-fearing and so is Muḥammad, the Messenger of God." My rendering follows W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1956, p. 225.

[28] Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, p. 228.

resolving conflicts. This is so despite the prophetic titulature applied to him at the beginning and end of the document (but not, at least according to some witnesses, in the body of it).

Even though we can perhaps not be certain that we may safely follow the *sīra* literature in dating the Constitution of Medina to the first year after the *hiğra*, the treaty is not unreasonably considered to document an initial status quo that crystallised relatively soon after the arrival of Muhammad and his followers at Medina, i.e., as a point of departure for subsequent developments that are reflected in the Qur'an. This is certainly the case as far as relations with Medina's Jewish tribes are concerned. While the Constitution envisages them as religiously independent clients, and perhaps even fully-fledged members, of the *umma*,[29] Q 5:51 unequivocally demands that the Believers must not "take Jews and Christians as allies (*awliyāʾ*). They are allies of each other. Whoever of you takes them as his allies is one of them." The Qur'an is here clearly engaged in a substantial reshaping of the political and religious situation stipulated by the Constitution. It appears that the Medinan surahs are similarly engaged in transforming the role of Muhammad, the general direction of this transformation being a considerable boosting of his authority.

We may not of course assume that the various prerogatives and responsibilities with which the Medinan Qur'an invests Muhammad were immediately and fully observed by all of its addressees. It is well possible that at least for a certain time the elevated image of Muhammad put forward in the passages to be reviewed below remained a programmatic

[29] The Jewish tribes named in the document are expressly granted the right to retain their own religion (*dīn*); see Lecker, *Constitution*, p. 35. There is disagreement as to whether the text calls the Jewish tribes an *umma maʿa* or an *umma min* the Believers, or whether this should not be emended to something else entirely; for a discussion of text-critical problems surrounding the relevant part of the text see Lecker, *Constitution*, p. 137–147. I am unconvinced by Lecker's plea in favour of emending *umma* to *amana* and would be inclined to retain the customary understanding of the paragraph in question as stating that the Jews "form one community with the Believers".

postulate. This conjecture is in fact corroborated by the Medinan Qur'an's frequent polemics against the so-called "Hypocrites" (*al-munāfiqūn*, see e.g. Q 9:38–129): the significant amount of text devoted to them is only comprehensible if a considerable part of Medina's population remained hesitant to recognise Muhammad as more than the arbitrator of last resort who is attested by the Constitution of Medina. Evidently, a historically critical reader must resist the Qur'an's marked tendency to depict such reluctance as deviant, anomalous, and imbued by base motifs. Very likely, it simply emanated from circles that clung to the status quo enshrined in the Constitution of Medina. It is conceivable that an unreserved willingness to recognise the role that the Medinan surahs claim for Muhammad was at least initially a minority position and only gradually prevailed among a significant number of Medina's inhabitants.

Muhammad's status and functions in the Medinan Qur'an

What, then, does the Medinan Qur'an have to say about Muhammad's role and functions?[30] What is most noticeable from a purely quantitative perspective are formulaic calls to "obey God and His Messenger / the Messenger" (e.g., Q 3:32.132, 8:1.20.46).[31] This close association of God and Muhammad implies that obedience to the latter is identical with obedience to the former, an equation that is indeed explicitly asserted in Q 4:80: "Who obeys the Messenger has obeyed God." Incidentally, while the formulaic concatenation of the words *aṭāʿa + allāh + al-rasūl / rasūluhū* is characteristically Medinan, the general theme of people's duty of obedience to messengers other than Muhammad already appears in some

[30] Some of the material in this section is also covered, albeit more summarily, in Sinai, "The Unknown Known".

[31] See David Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers: A Qurʾanic Study*, Curzon, Richmond, 1999, p. 165–170.

Meccan surahs. Thus, the narrative part of Q 26 has Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lot, and Shuʿayb address their respective audiences with the command, "Be fearful of God and obey me!" (vv. 108, 110, 126, 131, 144, 150, 163, and 179). The same command recurs, likewise outside the Medinan corpus, at Q 43:63 (Jesus) and 71:3 (Noah), and has a further parallel in 20:90 (Aaron).[32] Probably against the background of such earlier passages, the Medinan verse Q 4:64 duly generalises: "We did not send any messenger except in order to be obeyed, with God's permission", the divine voice states.

Going beyond a call for mere obedience to the Messenger, Q 33:21 describes him as "a good exemplar (*uswatun ḥasanatun*) for those who place their hope on God and the Last Day and invoke God often". The Believers, it appears, are not just meant to submit to explicit commands by Muhammad but also to imitate and emulate him. The phrase *uswatun ḥasanatun* recurs at Q 60:4.6, where "Abraham and those with him" are similarly described as "a good exemplar for those who place their hope on God and the Last Day". In the context of surah 60, Abraham's worthiness to be emulated is tied to a specific act, namely, his dissociation from his idolatrous contemporaries. No such restriction is stated in the case of Q 33:21, although Q 2:124 calls Abraham an *imām* – here probably meaning an exemplar as well – "for mankind" due to his willingness to carry out God's command of sacrificing his son.[33] Like Abraham, then, the Qur'anic Messenger is cast as an ethical role model, not just as a source of authoritative instruction.

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[32] But note that non-Medinan surahs generally appear to equate obedience to God's messengers with heeding their eschatological message, whereas the Medinan surahs express a much more comprehensive understanding of the duty of obedience to Muhammad. A fascinating verse in this regard is Q 72:23, pointed out to me by Andrew O'Connor, who may work on this topic in the future.

[33] I assume that Q 2:124 refers back to the episode recounted in Q 37:99–111. – Cf. the statement that God has made Abraham an *imām* with Q 16:120, where Abraham is described as an *umma*, most

One aspect of the duty of obedience towards Muhammad that is specifically highlighted is his entitlement to settle disputes between the Believers, a demand that calls to mind §§ 26 and 52 of the Constitution of Medina. This expectation is programmatically voiced at Q 4:59: "O you who believe! Obey God and obey the Messenger and those of you who have authority. If you quarrel with one another about anything, then refer it (*ruddūhu*) to God and the Messenger, if you believe in God and the Last Day."[34] The passage then proceeds to criticise those who profess to believe in "what was sent down to you [i.e., Muhammad] and sent down before you" yet "seek out the judgement of the idols (*yurīdūna an yataḥākamū ilā l-ṭāġūt*)" (Q 4:60).[35] The rationale behind this stark accusation is most likely that submitting to judgements that do not originate from God via Muhammad is as such an act of idolatry, insofar as it is tantamount to substituting God by a rival source of authority – indeed, is equivalent to yielding to temptation by the devil, as maintained at the end of v. 60. Failing to abide by the command to "come to what God has sent down and to the Messenger" will therefore mark one as belonging to the "Hypocrites" (v. 61). The root *ḥ-k-m* recurs a few verses later, in Q 4:65, which states that "they do not believe until they establish you [i.e., Muhammad] as an adjudicator (*yuḥakkimūnaka*) concerning what is in dispute between them (*fī-mā šaǧara baynahum*)". To fail to seek Muhammad's judgement is thus equivalent to unbelief.

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likely in the same sense. Although Q 16 mostly fits the stylistic, terminological, and thematic profile of the Meccan Qur'an, the surah would appear to include a number of Medinan additions towards the end, among them the verse cluster on Abraham (see Angelika Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1981, p. 301), meaning that Q 16:120–123 are best allocated to the Medinan Qur'an.

[34] A link between Muhammad's adjudicatory role and the theme of obedience is also made in Q 24:51.

[35] On the meaning and etymology of the term *ṭāġūt* see concisely Arne Ambros with the collaboration of Stephan Procházka, *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic*, Wiesbaden, Reichert, 2004, p. 173.

The overlap between this passage and the Constitution of Medina is not just limited to the general demand that Muhammad be recognised as an authoritative arbiter of communal disputes; there are also palpable parallels in diction.[36] Yet in other regards the Qur'an goes significantly beyond the Constitution of Medina – not only by its massive deployment of religiously charged rhetorics (idolatry, Satan, the question of belief vs. unbelief) but also by positing an intimate nexus between Muhammad's ability to act as an arbiter and his receipt of divine revelations, which is underscored both in Q 4:60 ("what was sent down to you and what was sent down before you") and 4:61 ("what God has sent down"). It seems obvious that the primary reference of the phrase "what God has sent down" must be to the sizable corpus of Qur'anic law that came to accumulate over the course of Muhammad's Medinan period and much of which is now concentrated in surahs 2 (vv. 142–283) and 4 (vv. 1–43, 92–93, 101–103, 127–130, 135, 176). Some of these passages even style themselves as answering questions posed by Muhammad's addressees (e.g., Q 2:189.215.217.219.220.222, 5:4, 8:1), thus embodying what it would mean to follow the Qur'anic injunction to seek judgement by Muhammad.

The link between Muhammad's adjudicatory role and his access to revelatory knowledge is also stressed in Q 5:48–50, which twice commands Muhammad to "adjudicate between them according to that which God has sent down" (vv. 48 and 49).[37] V. 50 then contrasts adjudication by Muhammad with seeking "the judgement of ignorance" (*ḥukm al-ğāhiliyya*), which presumably means adjudication that is uninformed by revealed

[36] Cf. the Constitution of Medina's demand *fa-inna maraddahu* (alt. *ḥukmahu*) *ilā llāhi wa-ilā muḥammadin* (Lecker, *Constitution*, p. 35 and 24) and the Qur'anic command *fa-ruddūhu ilā llāhi wa-l-rasūli* (4:59) as well as the Constitution's use of the word *ištiğār* (Lecker, *Constitution*, p. 38) and the Qur'anic *mā šağara baynahum* (4:65).

[37] Muhammad is furthermore warned not to "follow their inclinations away from the truth that has come to you" (v. 48, similarly v. 49).

knowledge.[38] The term must perform the same rhetorical role as the phrase "seeking the judgement of idols" in Q 4:60: both passages are concerned to construct the choice between submitting to Muhammad's adjudication and failing to do so as a choice between belief and unbelief, or between knowledge and ignorance. By contrast with the Meccan surah's admonitory understanding of Muhammad's messengership, Muhammad here appears not merely as the divinely appointed transmitter of a certain number of theological and ethical doctrines whose content is specifiable without reference to him. Rather, Muhammad and the need to submit to his authority become a core part of the kerygma he is charged with proclaiming.[39]

It may be pointed out that, unlike surah 4 and the Constitution of Medina, Q 5:48–50 do not suggest that Muhammad's adjudicatory interventions are to be limited to pre-existing disputes. The same is true of a third passage that stresses the need to submit to prophetic adjudication, Q 24:48.51. It is possible to view this omission of any reference to communal disputes constituting the precondition for prophetic intervention as extending Muhammad's adjudicatory role beyond the domain of arbitration. On the other hand, the fact that as late a surah as Q 5 reiterates Muhammad's authority to adjudicate between the Believers might also lead one to conclude that the two pertinent provisos of the Constitution of Medina were not routinely respected even at a fairly late stage in the Qur'an's genesis.[40]

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[38] On the root *ğ-h-l*, which within the Qur'an certainly expresses the notion of ignorance, see Ambros, *Dictionary*, p. 64.

[39] That the person of Muhammad becomes part of the message proclaimed by him can also be seen in calls to believe in God *and His Messenger* (e.g., Q 49:15 and 57:7.19.28).

[40] That Q 5 is one of the latest surahs of the Qur'an is supported by its very high mean verse length (even though the present shape of the text is likely to have a significant redactional pre-history); on mean verse length as a dating criterion and the exact value it takes for Q 5 see Nicolai Sinai, "Inner-Qur'anic Chronology", forthcoming in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*, edited by Muhammad Abdel Haleem and Mustafa Shah, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Another context in which the request for obedience towards Muhammad recurs is in connection with the issue of dividing the Believers' spoils of war. Q 8:1 claims these for "God and the Messenger", a demand followed by a string of hortatory commands that once more features the formulaic command to "obey God and His Messenger". Later on in the same surah, at Q 8:41, we encounter either a further specification or a climb-down according to which only a fifth of the Believers' spoils belongs to God "and to the Messenger and to relatives and orphans and the poor and the traveller". Muhammad's entitlement to dispose of part of the Believers' booty is also maintained in Q 59:6–8, which deal specifically with spoils obtained in one particular situation. V. 7 lists the same catalogue of intended beneficiaries as 8:41 and enjoins the addressees to be content with "what the Messenger gives to you". Evidently, Muhammad's portfolio of tasks has here come to encompass the distribution of material goods. As Q 9:58–60 as well as 9:103 demonstrate, this distributive role was not limited to spoils of war but also included the Believers' alms (*al-ṣadaqāt*). Q 9:60 again comprises a list of intended beneficiaries worthy of charitable support. A final passage that is relevant in this regard is Q 58:12–13, which urge payment of a charitable donation prior to private audiences with the Messenger.

The quasi-fiscal role of Muhammad that is on display in the above passages, and the economic power that was undoubtedly consequent upon it, constitute an unmistakable novelty both compared to the admonitory prophetology of the Meccan Qur'an and to the Constitution of Medina. The reason why three of the passages asserting Muhammad's distributory function include lists of needy recipients may well be to dispel the suspicion that Muhammad might be deriving personal profit from his religious role, given that earlier verses

like Q 6:90 and 12:104 had vigorously maintained that he did not demand any wage (*aǧr*) in return for proclaiming God's word.[41]

Medinan passages also attest to formal pledges of allegiance (verb: *bāyaʿa*) to Muhammad: membership in the community of Believers involved a relationship of personal loyalty to him rather than just the espousal of a certain set of religious doctrines. Q 48:10, employing a now familiar equation, maintains that pledging allegiance to Muhammad is equivalent to pledging allegiance to God (see also 48:18). The context in surah 48 is military: pledging allegiance to Muhammad apparently implied being prepared to fight on his side. In line with this, the Medinan Qur'an frequently calls the Believers to engage in militant "struggling" (*ǧāhada*) or "fighting" (*qātala*) "on the path of God" (e.g., 9:36, 9:38–57, 9:81–96, 9:111, 9:119–123), diction that we have also encountered in the Constitution of Medina. An explicit stipulation of the obligations entailed by pledging allegiance to Muhammad is found in Q 60:12, dealing specifically with pledges by "believing women". The duties catalogued here include the doctrinal commitment of not associating anything with God as well as moral prohibitions (e.g., not stealing, not fornicating, not killing one's children) and, once more, obedience to Muhammad ("that they will not disobey you in something that is right and proper").

Q 60:12 also exemplifies a further dimension of Muhammad's role by instructing him to "seek God's forgiveness for" the women in question (*wa-staġfir lahunna llāha*). Other passages, too, attribute to the Messenger the role of seeking God's forgiveness for sins committed by members of the Qur'anic community (Q 4:64, 24:62, 47:19, 63:5–6). God's

[41] Another reason is probably to insist that Muhammad is not guilty of the charge levelled against Jewish and Christian leaders to "wrongfully consume people's possessions" (Q 9:34). See Holger M. Zellentin, "*Aḥbār* and *Ruhbān:* Religious Leaders in the Qurʾān in Dialogue with Christian and Rabbinic Literature", in *Qurʾānic Studies Today*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth and Michael A. Sells, Abingdon, Routledge, p. 262–293, as well as below.

forgiveness, it seems, must be mediated by Muhammad rather than being directly accessible to ordinary Believers. Presumably, this is also the reason why Muhammad is tasked with "purifying" (*zakkā*) his followers (Q 2:129.151, 3:164, 62:2). According to Q 9:103, it is specifically by taking "alms (*ṣadaqāt*) from their possessions" that he "purifies and cleanses" the Believers (*tuṭahhiruhum wa-tuzakkīhim bihā*). Muhammad is then commanded to offer up prayers for the Believers. That he would pray specifically for dead community members is attested by Q 9:84. The undeniable upshot of all these verses is to endow Muhammad with a role bordering on that of a priestly intermediary. It should be noted, though, that Muhammad's role as a mediator of divine mercy does not, according to the Qur'an, entail his sinlessness: Medinan texts explicitly acknowledge that Muhammad, too, is capable of sinning (see Q 40:55, 47:19, and 48:2).

One expression of the general boost in Muhammad's status that is discernible in the Medinan Qur'an is the terminological characteristic that he is now called a "prophet" (*nabiyy*), a title that Meccan texts generally limit to figures of Biblical history.[42] Application of this title to Muhammad may have implied some claim of genealogical relationship to the protagonists of Israelite sacred history; after all, the most important prophetic figures in the Qur'an – Adam, Noah, "the family of Abraham" and "the family of ʿImrān" (namely, Jesus and Mary) – are described as "the seed of one another (*ḏurriyyatun baʿḍuhā min baʿḍin*)" (Q 3:33–34).[43] Given that surah 14 explicitly styles the Meccans as belonging to the "seed" (*ḏurriyya*) of Abraham (Q 14:37), it would appear that designating the Qur'anic Messenger as a "prophet" also implied his belonging to the lineage of Abraham. That the Qur'anic community and their prophet are physically descended from Abraham also emerges very

[42] Welch, "Muhammad's Understanding of Himself", p. 43–45; Bobzin, "Seal", especially p. 567–569 and 571–574. A Meccan verse that might at least be taken to imply that Muhammad is a prophet is Q 25:31 ("We have appointed an enemy for every prophet").

[43] Bobzin, "Seal", p. 572.

clearly from Q 2:128–129. In any case, the title certainly had a connotation of special divine election: as Hartmut Bobzin has shown, it is primarily Biblical figures like Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Jesus whom the Qur'an describes as having been divinely chosen (by means of the verbs *iṣṭafā*, *iǧtabā*, and *iḫtāra*).[44]

A surah that is particularly replete with assertions of Muhammad's augmented status is Q 33, which contains the description of Muhammad as a "good exemplar" for the Believers discussed above. Not only does surah 33 contain "almost half" of all cases in which the title "prophet" is applied to him,[45] but it also presents him as a quasi-paternal figure to the Believers (33:6): "The Prophet is closer to the Believers than they themselves [are to one another], and his wives are their mothers."[46] The following verse, v. 7, places Muhammad at

[44] Bobzin, "Seal", p. 572–573.

[45] Welch, "Muhammad's Understanding of Himself", p. 43.

[46] A reading variant inserts the additional clause: "and he is their father" (Nöldeke et al., *History*, p. 202; Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qurʾān: The Old Codices*, Leiden, Brill, 1937, p. 75 and 156). Nöldeke and Schwally think that this contradicts v. 40 ("Muhammad is not the father of any of your men"), yet this is actually not the case: to be the father of the Believers in their entirety is not the same as being the father of "one of their men" in particular. Uri Rubin points out that the canonical text "is careful not to confer on Muḥammad the title 'father' within the extended family of believers, asserting instead that he is 'nearer (*awlā*) to them than they are to themselves'"; see Uri Rubin, "The Seal of the Prophets and the Finality of Prophecy: On the Interpretation of the Qurʾānic Sūrat al-Aḥzāb (33)", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 164 (2014), p. 65–96, at p. 69. Rubin is certainly right in maintaining that the verse conspicuously fails to say something that one would naturally expect to follow from the designation of Muhammad's wives as "mothers" of the Believers. This is why the variant adding "and he is their father" is more easily viewed as having arisen as a secondary interpretation of the canonical wording of the text. (For a further argument against this variant, see Rubin, "Seal", p. 84.) I would submit that the primary reason why the text shies away from explicitly calling Muhammad a "father" of the Believers is due to v. 4, which justifies the Qur'anic abolishment of adoption by a critique of the non-literal employment of paternal language. Possibly, the Qur'an might also be wary of paternal metaphors due to their prominence in Christian discourse (but see Q 22: 78, speaking of "your father Abraham"). However, even though Q 33 conspicuously fails to call Muhammad the "father" of the

the beginning of an otherwise chronological list of prophets from Noah to Jesus, thus implying his pre-eminence over them. Probably the best-known statement made in surah 33 is the characterisation of the Qur'anic Messenger as the "seal of the prophets" (v. 40). Traditionally, the phrase is understood to assert that Muhammad is the final prophet, a construal that has been questioned as a later imposition.[47] Whether or not the seal metaphor connotes the aspect of finality, it is likely that it conveys the idea that Muhammad fulfils and thereby confirms and validates the announcements of prior prophets: various Medinan passages claim that Muhammad and his community were predicted in the Torah and the Gospel.[48] Beyond this aspect of confirmation, however, it also seems probable, on purely inner-Qur'anic grounds, that the seal metaphor is indeed meant to imply finality as well: as pointed out by Uri Rubin on the basis of Arne Ambros' *Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic*, the verb *ḫatama* ("to seal"), from which the expression for "seal" is derived, generally means "to seal something so that it must remain closed" in the Qur'an.[49]

Believers, it is still defensible to characterise the text as ascribing to him a *quasi*-paternal role: not just because his wives are the Believers' "mothers", but also because his relationship to the Believers is said to override all other relations among them, even real genealogical links.

[47] Rubin, "Seal", p. 75 (citing Friedmann, Madelung, Bobzin, Powers, and Hawting).

[48] According to Q 2:129, Abraham petitioned God to send a messenger to the Meccans (the fulfilment of which request is affirmed in 2:151). Q 3:81 evokes a scene in which the prophets (primordially?) commited themselves to recognising subsequent prophets who "confirm" their message. Q 7:157 speaks of "the gentile (*ummī*) prophet whom they find written in the Torah and the Gospel". According to Q 48:29 (which is ultimately inspired by the New Testament's sower parables, see Matthew 13:1–30 and Mark 4:26–29), both the Torah and the Gospel contain descriptions (sg. *maṯal*) of Muhammad's adherents. Finally, Q 61:6 has Jesus announce a messenger "whose name will be *aḥmad"*. – For an employment of the seal metaphor in the sense of confirmation and validation see the quotation from the *Didascalia Apostolorum* in Holger Zellentin, *The Qurʾān's Legal Culture: The Didascalia Apostolorum as a Point of Departure*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2013, p. 171, where the Gospel is described as the "seal" of the Law.

[49] Rubin, "Seal", p. 74; Ambros, *Dictionary*, p. 83.

Given the singular importance of Muhammad that emerges from the material surveyed above, it is only fitting that the Medinan Qur'an should devote attention to the proper etiquette of interacting with Muhammad and his household, especially with his wives (Q 24:62–63, 33:28–33.53–55, 49:1–5, 58:12–13). The strong insistence on honouring and respecting the Messenger that is palpable here also comes through in the demand that he must not be insulted (Q 9:61–63, 33:57). A later verse in surah 33 underpins this by reference to Moses, who functions as a prototype for Muhammad already in the Meccan Qur'an.[50] "O you who believe, do not be like those who insulted Moses, and then God declared him innocent of what they said, and he was eminent with God!" (Q 33:69) As pointed out already by Heinrich Speyer, the Qur'an here alludes to an incident reported in Chapter 12 of the Biblical book of Numbers, where Moses comes under criticism by Miriam and Aaron for his marriage to a Cushite woman, a constellation which bears some resemblance to the situation in which Muhammad apparently found himself as a result of his marriage to the former wife of his adoptive son Zayd (Q 33:37).[51] This allusion to Numbers suggests that the Messenger re-enacts a Mosaic paradigm not only in Moses' capacity as a warner and admonisher but also insofar Moses functioned as a communal leader who guided the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land.[52] Incidentally, two other Medinan verses (Q 2:108 and 4:153) also present disobeying or doubting the Messenger as equivalent with disobeying or doubting Moses.

Precedents for the Medinan role of Muhammad

[50] On the close link between Muhammad and the figure of Moses see Prenner, *Muhammad und Musa*, and Angelika Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry and the Making of a Community: Reading the Qur'an as a Literary Text*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014, p. 277–305.

[51] See Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Koran*, p. 72–73.

[52] The concluding reference to Moses at Q 33:96 might be considered to form a complement to v. 7, which lists Muhammad alongside various Biblical prophets including Moses.

The Medinan reconfiguration of Muhammad may well have responded to specific historical circumstances: there might, for instance, have been a leadership vacuum in Medina that Muhammad was able to fill. Nonetheless, it stands to reason that the peculiar contours of Muhammad's role and status in Medina are likely to have been informed by certain precedents or archetypes of communal authority with which at least parts of the Qur'anic audience were familiar. One such archetype is certainly the figure of Moses as the leader of the Israelite polity after the Exodus, briefly touched upon at the end of the previous section. Already the Meccan surahs pattern Muhammad's prophetic experience on that of Moses,[53] and many of the functions that the Medinan Qur'an ascribes to Muhammad visibly mirror the role of Moses after the Exodus, who transmits to the Israelites a corpus of revealed laws, leads them in battle (Exodus 17:8–16, Numbers 21), and oversees the administering of justice among them (Exodus 18:13–27). In terms of explicit Qur'anic evidence for such a parallelisation of the Medinan Muhammad with Moses, there is, firstly, the invocation of Moses at Q 33:69, highlighted above. Secondly, Medinan passages imply that the covenant (*mīṯāq*) that God has concluded with the Israelites corresponds to, and is surpassed by, a new covenant with the Qur'anic community, whose obedient response to God – "We hear and obey!" (*sami ʿnā wa-aṭa ʿnā*) – contrasts with the Israelites' insubordinate "We hear and disobey" (*sami ʿnā wa- ʿaṣaynā*).[54] The fact that the Qur'an charges its addressees to "remember"(*ḏakara*) the "blessing" (*ni ʿma*) that God has "bestowed" (*an ʿama*) upon them, a command also given by Moses to the Israelites, further reinforces the Mosaic overtones of the

[53] See above, n. 50.

[54] Cf. Q 2:93 (the Israelites' response to God's covenant) and 5:7 (the response of the Qur'anic Believers). The response "We hear and disobey / obey" also occurs at Q 2:285, 4:46, and 24:51. On the Israelites' and Christians' alleged violation of God's covenant see Q 2:27.63–64.83–85, 3:187, 4:154–162, and 5:12–14.70–71.

Medinan representation of Muhammad.[55] Interestingly, Claudia Rapp points out that late antique Christians viewed Moses as the supreme "model of leadership", uniting a wide range of spiritual, moral, and political aspects.[56] Hence, the fact that the Qur'an casts Muhammad in the image of Moses resonates with wider late antique discourses.

Yet despite the Biblical archetype for the Medinan Muhammad that is constituted by the figure of Moses, one may still wonder whether Muhammad's authority and prerogatives are also continuous with any contemporary form of communal leadership. One possible precedent that may spring to mind is the figure of a traditional tribal chief. This is invoked by Watt in order to explain the fact that Muhammad is said to be entitled to a fifth of all spoils (Q 8:41).[57] A further potential precedent, cursorily suggested by Walid Saleh, is that of the late antique holy man.[58] Although the context in which Saleh puts forward this idea is Muhammad's portrayal in the *sīra* literature rather than in the Qur'an, the fact that the Medinan surahs credit the Messenger with the ability to pray and intercede for the Believers is certainly reminiscent of late antique Christian saints and ascetics.[59] Finally, in view of the

[55] Q 2:40.47.122.231, 3:103, 5:7.11.20; see also the Meccan occurrences at 14:6 and 35:3.

[56] Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition*, Berkeley, University of California Press, p. 125.

[57] Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, p. 232: "It was customary in Arabia for the chief of a tribe to receive a quarter of the spoils, partly for his own use, but partly in order to perform certain functions on behalf of the tribe, such as looking after the poor and giving hospitality."

[58] Walid A. Saleh, "The Arabian Context of Muḥammad's Life", in *The Cambridge Companion to Muḥammad*, edited by Jonathan E. Brockopp, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 21–38, at p. 25.

[59] See the discussion of some extant correspondences of late antique holy men from Egypt and Palestine in Rapp, *Bishops*, p. 67–73. Rapp notes that it "is not only the holy man who prays for his followers, but his correspondents also offer up prayers for him" (*Bishops*, p. 68). This might potentially shed light on Q 33:56, where the Believers are bidden to "pray for" the Prophet. However, given that the first part of the verse states that "God and His angels pray for (*yuṣallūna ʿalā*) the Prophet", *ṣallā* is here perhaps more appropriately rendered as "to bless" rather than as "to pray for".

Islamic tradition's agreement that there was a significant Jewish population at Medina one might look to Jewish institutions of religious leadership as a contextual background for the role and functions of Muhammad in the Medinan Qur'an. Indeed, the Qur'an itself clearly testifies that Jewish religious leaders did fulfil some of the same functions as the Qur'anic Messenger: Q 5:44 ascribes to the Jewish "rabbis (*rabbāniyyūn*) and scholars (*aḥbār*)" the task of "adjudicating" (*ḥakama*) among the Jews "according to what they have been entrusted with of God's Scripture", and the accusation voiced in Q 9:34 that the *aḥbār* "wrongfully consume people's possessions" and "hoard gold and silver" suggests that they had some measure of control over communal finances as well.[60]

It would be unconvincing to deny that the three potential precedents just enumerated have pertinence for understanding the Medinan transformation in the Qur'an's image of Muhammad. Nonetheless, all of them yield at best a partial fit. Thus, neither tribal chieftains nor the rabbinate provide models for Muhammad's sacerdotal function or for the Qur'anic emphasis on comprehensive obedience to him; and ascetics and holy men, unlike the

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The importance of prayer for the remission of sins is emphasised in Rapp, *Bishops*, p. 73: "the prayers that were most valued were those for the lightening of the burden of one's sins".

[60] On the precise significance of the terms *rabbāniyyūn* and *aḥbār* see Zellentin, "*Aḥbār* and *Ruhbān*", p. 270–271. *Pace* Zellentin, I am not convinced that the Qur'an does imply a clear "hierarchy [...] between regular rabbis and *aḥbār*". To my mind, the few Qur'anic occurrences of the two terms (Q 5:44.63, 9:31.34) do not preclude treating them as largely synonymous; the fact that Q 9:31.34 only name the *aḥbār* and not also the *rabbāniyyūn* is explicable in different ways than by positing, with Zellentin, that the former were the superiors of the latter. For example, the fact that Q 9:31 employs the former rather than the latter term might be due simply to its concatenation with the possessive pronoun *-hum;* to the best of my knowledge, the Qur'anic corpus contains no occurrence of a sound plural (such as *rabbāniyyūn*) combined with a possessive pronoun (this perhaps double-checking). I do however accept Zellentin's assessment that the Qur'an envisages the relationship between the *rabbāniyyūn* and *aḥbār*, whatever that relationship may be, as equivalent to that obtaining between the *qissīsūn* and the *ruhbān* (ibid., p. 273). – On communal payments to the rabbis see ibid., p. 270.

Medinan Muhammad, did not have control of communal finances.[61] There is however a further paradigm of communal authority that deserves consideration. This is the figure of the Christian bishop, perhaps the most widespread late antique template of religiously based urban leadership.[62] As I shall now attempt to demonstrate, it presents a host of close parallels to the Medinan Qur'an's boosting of Muhammad's status, authority, and range of functions.[63]

A key similarity between the Medinan Muhammad and Christian statements about the episcopate consist in a shared stress on obedience. Bishops are to be obeyed: similarly to Q 4:80, the letters of Ignatius (martyred in the early second century CE) go so far as to equate obedience to the bishop with obedience to God.[64] In fact, the bishop is constructed as a locus of divine presence, thus recalling the "godward movement" of Muhammad that David Marshall has detected in the Medinan surahs.[65] For instance, Ignatius demands that "we should look upon the bishop even as we would upon the Lord Himself" (*Letter to the Ephesians* 6), and the Syriac *Didascalia Apostolorum*, an early church order that Holger Zellentin has recently brought to the attention of Qur'anic scholars,[66] calls for the bishop to

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[61] Rapp, *Bishops*, p. 219.

[62] David M. Gwynn, "Episcopal Leadership", in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, Oxford, Oxford University Press 2012, p. 876–915, at p. 882: "Every city was expected to have a bishop." – Note that bishops could be presented as possessing, and in many instances undoubtedly did possess, features of ascetic holy men; see e.g. Michael Gaddis, *There Is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire*, Berkeley, University of California Press 2005, p. 260–268 (on the *Life of Rabbula*).

[63] What follows discusses some material that is cursorily adduced already in Sinai, "The Unknown Known".

[64] Rapp, *Bishops*, p. 27 and n. 13 (citing Ignatius, *Letter to the Ephesians* 6.1, *Letter to the Magnesians* 3.1–2; *Letter to the Trallians* 2.1; *Letter to Polycarp* 6.1).

[65] Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers*, p. 164–175.

[66] See Zellentin, *The Qurʾān's Legal Culture*. I follow Zellentin in viewing the *Didascalia* as a document that is apt to illuminate the Christian traditions that may have been circulating in the Qur'anic milieu, although not therefore a document that was necessarily a direct source of the Qur'an.

be honoured like God, "because the bishop sits for you in the place of God Almighty".[67] Furthermore, like the Qur'anic Messenger, bishops are described as "moral exemplars" for their flock.[68] Thus, the *Didascalia Apostolorum* enjoins the bishop "to be an example to the people, because you also have Christ for an example. Be you then also a good example (*dmuthā shappirthā*) to the people."[69] Here, the Syriac expression *dmuthā shappirthā* forms a strikingly close equivalent of the Arabic phrase *uswatun ḥasanatun*, employed at Q 33:21.[70]

The scriptural origin of this idea of the bishop as a moral exemplar would seem to be a passage in the First Letter to Timothy (3:1–7), which inter alia requires the bishop to be someone who "must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way – for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church?" (3:4–5) Viewed from this New Testamental vantage point, it is not surprising that the Medinan Qur'an pays a good deal of attention to the domestic situation of the Messenger. In a sense, the entire community constitutes the bishop's household, for he is routinely cast as a paternal figure; according to the *Didascalia*, he is "your father after God"[71] and is to be loved and honoured accordingly.[72] Thus, the fact that

[67] Arthur Vööbus (ed. and trans.), *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac*, 2 parts in 4 vols., Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO 1979 (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium vols. 401–402 and 407–408), p. 103, lines 24–26 (Syriac text). See also ibid., p. 112, lines 2–4 (Syriac text): "love the bishop as a father, and be afraid of him as of a king, and honor him as God."

[68] Gwynn, "Episcopal Leadership", p. 877–878 and Rapp, *Bishops*, p. 27–28 (on Ignatius' description of the bishop as an *exemplarion*), p. 31 (on the imitation of the bishop in the *Didascalia*), and p. 170.

[69] Vööbus, *Didascalia*, p. 57, lines 20–22 (Syriac text).

[70] A Greek author might use the term *hypodeigma* to express the same notion (see Rapp, *Bishops*, p. 170).

[71] Vööbus, *Didascalia*, p. 103, line 21 (Syriac text). See also Rapp, *Bishops*, p. 31.

[72] Vööbus, *Didascalia*, p. 112, lines 2–4 (Syriac text): "love the bishop as a father, and be afraid of him as of a king, and honor him as God." Further references to the bishop as a father "after God", who

Q 33:6 comes close to presenting Muhammad as a paternal figure is likewise explicable as the assimilation of an episcopal trait. The same applies to the Medinan Qur'an's stress on the proper etiquette of interacting with the Messenger, which creates an almost courtly aura around him: bishops are to be honoured like kings, demands the *Didascalia*.[73]

Late antique bishops, whose courts of law could even apply corporeal punishments, offer a parallel to the Messenger's adjudicatory role as well.[74] The range of cases brought before episcopal courts shows at least some overlap with the subject matter of Qur'anic law and includes, according to one scholar, "questions of the proper division of an inheritance, questions of personal status, whether a person be considered slave or free, charges and counter charges of sexual misconduct, and accusations of abuse".[75] We may even note some overt phraseological parallels: just as surah 5 underlines the need to "judge according to" (*ḥakama bi-*) the Torah, Gospel, or "what God has sent down" (Q 5:41–50), so the *Didascalia* demands that bishops "judge sinners according to the Scripture" (*d-ak ktābē tehwōn dāynin le-aylēn d-ḥāṭṭin*)[76]; and similar to the Qur'anic censure of those who "seek the judgement of

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is therefore worthy of love and honour, can be found ibid., p. 81, lines 5–6 (Syriac text) and ibid., p. 109, line 17 (Syriac text).

[73] Vööbus, *Didascalia*, p. 110, lines 12–13 and ibid., p. 112, lines 2–4 (Syriac text).

[74] Gwynn, "Episcopal Leadership", p. 881–882; John C. Lamoreaux, "Episcopal Courts in Late Antiquity", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3 (1995), p. 143–167 (on corporeal punishments see p. 163–164). The bishop's duty to pass "judgement" (*dīnā*) among his flock is discussed in Vööbus, *Didascalia*, p. 58ff. of the Syriac text (ch. 5), p. 63ff. (ch. 6), 87 (from ch. 7), p. 115f. (end of ch. 9; inter alia, instructs laymen to "leave judgement in the hand of" the bishop), p. 121–124 (from ch. 10), and, in particular, p. 127ff. (ch. 11).

[75] Lamoreaux, "Episcopal Courts", p. 161.

[76] Vööbus, *Didascalia*, p. 71, line 17 (Syriac text).

idols" (Q 4:60) or "the judgement of ignorance" (Q 5:50), so the *Didascalia* decrees that a Christian must not "go to the judgement (*dīnā*) of the pagans".[77]

Another traditional episcopal function that overlaps with the role of the Qur'anic Messenger is the redistribution of charity.[78] According to Rapp, the "bishop's access to financial resources is the crucial distinction that sets him apart from the holy man."[79] Finally, bishops would in some cases take a leading role in confronting and converting pagans and Jews, whether by purely discursive means or by condoning and even instigating acts of violence against them.[80] Thus, the expulsion of the Medinan Scripturalists that is alluded to in Q 33:26–27 and Q 59:2–8 as well as the banning of those who "associate" other beings with God (*al-mušrikūn*) from the Qur'anic sanctuary in Q 9:17–22.28 call to mind similar measures taken by late antique bishops, who made it their business to oust or forcibly proselytise groups and individuals whom they deemed to be beyond the pale of orthodoxy. For instance, bishop Rabbula of Edessa (d. 435) "destroyed several pagan temples, seized a synagogue for conversion into a church, and confiscated the meetinghouses and exiled the leaders of a variety of heterodox Christian sects."[81]

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[77] Vööbus, *Didascalia*, p. 128, line 20. Cf. also Lamoreaux, "Episcopal Courts", p. 153. This command to eschew secular courts has its origin in 1 Corinthians 6:1–6.

[78] Rapp, *Bishops*, p. 223–226; Gwynn, "Episcopal Leadership", p. 879 and 885–886.

[79] Rapp, Bishops, p. 219 (correcting "set" to "sets").

[80] See Garth Fowden, "Bishops and Temples in the Eastern Roman Empire A.D. 320–435", *Journal of Theological Studies* 29 (1978), p. 53–78, and Gwynn, "Episcopal Leadership", p. 887–888 (with a summary list of cases in which bishops endorsed, were involved in, or even instigated violence against pagans and Jews, with further references). See also Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009, p. 109, n. 5 (referencing a passage in the Zuqnin Chronicle "where a Chalcedonian bishop is said to have called his monks 'troops' as he deployed them for the persecution of local anti-Chalcedonians").

[81] Gaddis, *There Is No Crime*, p. 265–266.

In sum, the Medinan Muhammad combines a range of tasks similar to that performed by late antique bishops, such as communal exhortation,[82] serving as a moral exemplar, arbitration and adjudication, the redistribution of wealth for charitable purposes, and confronting pagans and Jews, both discursively and violently. Interestingly, late antique bishops were also frequently portrayed as emulating Moses in his capacity of an ideally comprehensive leader combining spiritual, ethical, and political authority: Moses was "the biblical model par excellence for bishops, especially among Greek authors".[83] Thus, the fact that the Medinan Qur'an continues the late antique habit of casting an eminent individual in the image of Moses could at least in part be rooted in the fact that episcopal leaders in particular would often map specific situations in their life onto situations in the life of Moses.[84]

In view of all these parallels, it would not be amiss to characterise the Qur'anic Messenger as playing the role of an "overseer" (which is of course the literal meaning of the Greek word *episkopos*) of the spiritual and communal well-being of the Believers. Captivatingly, Q 2:143 and 22:78 actually describe the Messenger as a "*šahīd* set up over" the Believers. While the term *šahīd* certainly has the literal meaning "witness", the two verses

[82] Gwynn, "Episcopal Leadership", p. 885, who remarks that the bishop was "expected to be the leading preacher of his church". Many Medinan passages can certainly be seen as fulfilling such an exhortatory and paraenetic function.

[83] Rapp, *Bishops*, p. 125–131 (quoting p. 125), according to which various bishops were designated as a "new Moses". See also Gaddis, *There Is No Crime*, p. 266 (on Rabbula, who is said to have "imitated" Moses "in everything"). For another example, see Gwynn, "Episcopal Leadership", p. 896: during the siege of Constantinople, bishop Sergius carries around the image of Christ "just as the first Moses cried towards God when he made the tabernacle to proceed before the people: 'Arise, O Lord, let your enemies be scattered abroad, and all the ones who hate you run away'" (Numbers 10:35).

[84] Rapp, *Bishops*, p. 128.

in question may well invoke the idea of episcopal oversight over the Believers.[85] Against the claim that the Medinan Muhammad has a strong episcopal dimension it could be objected that Muhammad is presented as leading the Believers in battle (e.g., Q 3:121–128) , whereas late antique bishops did not normally play a properly military role. However, a breakdown of imperial order might force a bishop to step into the breach in this respect, too.[86]

The Qur'anic critique of the Christian episcopate

Although the parallels presented above are numerous and specific, one might wonder whether we are entitled to assume that the institution of the Christian episcopate was sufficiently known in the Qur'anic milieu in order to constitute a plausible template for the Medinan reconstruction of Muhammad's image. In general terms, there is no reason to doubt that this could have been the case: despite the absence of evidence for institutionalised Christian congregations in the Hijaz, where I would continue to locate the Qur'an's emergence,[87] there were bishops ministering to Arab Christian communities in the Ǧafnid sphere of influence, in

[85] I am therefore inclined to translate the relevant part of Q 2:143 as follows: "Thus We have made you a middle community so that you may be overseers of the people (*li-takūnū šuhadāʾa ʿalā l-nāsi*) and so that the messenger may be an overseer over you (*wa-yakūna l-rasūlu ʿalaykum šahīdan*) set up over you". See also Q 22:78. Against this suggestion, one might point to Q 4:41 and 16:89, where the Qur'anic Messenger is described as a "witness against (*šahīd alā*) these" in the sense of an eschatological witness for the prosecution. However, it cannot entirely be taken for granted that the term *šahīd* at Q 2:143 and 22:78 is employed in the same sense as at Q 4:41 and 16:89, for the former two verses would appear to envisage the presence of a *šahīd* as a divine favour: a *šahīd* conveys divine guidance (which is explicitly mentioned in Q 2:142) and is based on divine election (22:78: *iǧtabākum*).

[86] See Gwynn, "Episcopal Leadership", p. 891 and 896.

[87] See Sinai, *Historical-Critical Introduction*, Chapter Three.

al-Ḥīra, and in Naǧrān.[88] From there, some familiarity with the institution of the episcopate could certainly have radiated into the Hijaz. The post-Qur'anic Islamic tradition implies as much, insofar as it depicts Muhammad's grandfather ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib as having conversed with the bishop of Naǧrān by the Kaʿba.[89] In any case, whatever historical scenario one wishes to imagine, the Qur'an itself corroborates that the Messenger and his audience, wherever they were located, were familiar with some form of Christian communal leadership. This evidence emerges from Holger Zellentin's recent and, in my view, convincing argument that the Qur'anic references to a group of Christian dignitaries designated as *ruhbān* (Q 5:82, 9:31.34) and to the corresponding institution of *rahbāniyya* (Q 57:27) should not be construed as denoting specifically monks and monasticism, as traditionally assumed, but rather as a general reference to communal "overseers", or bishops, whether these were celibate or married.[90] Based on Zellentin's work, an adequate rendering of the term *rahbāniyya*, whose consonantal root undeniably expresses the notion of fear, would have to be something like "communal oversight based on the fear of God". Zellentin compellingly

[88] See for instance Greg Fisher, Philip Wood, et al., "Arabs and Christianity", in *Arabs and Empires before Islam*, ed. Greg Fisher, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 276–372, at p. 315–316 (the Ǧafnid leader al-Ḥāriṯ ibn Ǧabala requests the appointment of a bishop named Theodore), 350–357 (on the missionary work of the miaphysite bishop Aḥudemmeh in the Ǧazīra); Isabel Toral-Niehoff, "The ʿIbād of al-Ḥīra: An Arab Christian Community in Late Antique Iraq", in *The Qurʾān in Context: Literary and Historical Investigations into the Qurʾānic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth et al., Leiden, Brill, 2010, p. 323–347, at p. 335–336; Irfan Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, Washington, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1989, p. 374–378.

[89] Henri Lammens, *L'Arabie occidentale avant l'hégire*, Beirut, Imprimerie Catholique, 1928, p. 25. I am grateful to one of *Arabica*'s anonymous reviewers for drawing my attention to this tradition. Of course, the story bears all the hallmarks of a hagiographic legend, yet it nonetheless throws interesting light on what post-Qur'anic Muslims deemed historically credible.

[90] Zellentin, "*Aḥbār* and *Ruhbān*", p. 271–284.

relates this Qur'anic choice of words to the fact that the *Didascalia* betrays a clear "association of bishops with both fear and awe".[91]

The sole Qur'anic pronouncement on *rahbāniyya*, found at Q 57:27, actually merits closer examination in the present context.[92] The sequence of verses to which it belongs begins at v. 25: "In the past We sent our messengers with the clear proofs", the divine voice announces, and then goes on to list three of the Qur'an's most prominent prophets: Noah, Abraham, and Jesus (vv. 26–27). Immediately after adducing Jesus, v. 27 affirms that "We placed in the hearts of those who followed him compassion and mercy and the institution of god-fearing communal oversight that they originated (*wa-rahbāniyyatani btadaʿūhā*). We only prescribed it for them by way of seeking God's satisfaction (*mā katabnāhā ʿalayhim illā btiġāʾa riḍwāni llāhi*), yet they did not observe it properly (*fa-mā raʿawhā ḥaqqa riʿāyatihā*)."[93] The ambivalence of this statement is arresting. The Qur'an's assertion that the institution of God-fearing communal oversight (assuming that this is indeed the meaning of the word *rahbāniyya*) was "devised" or "originated" by the Christians themselves might be

[91] Zellentin, "*Aḥbār* and *Ruhbān*", p. 283–284.

[92] See also the discussion of this passage in Zellentin, "*Aḥbār* and *Ruhbān*", p. 277–284.

[93] I take it that *mā katabnāhā ʿalayhim* belongs together with *illā btiġāʾa riḍwāni llāhi*, the combination of a negation with the exceptive particle *illā* being the standard Qur'anic way of expressing "only" (see Ambros, *Dictionary*, p. 325). Alan Jones' rendering "We did not prescribe it for them [but it arose] through desire for God's satisfaction" needlessly separates the negation from the following exceptive clause. The same construal is also found in Rudi Paret's German translation, who patches up the fragmented syntax resulting from it by various parentheses: "Wir haben es ihnen nicht vorgeschrieben. (Sie haben es) vielmehr (von sich aus) im Streben nach Gottes Wohlgefallen (auf sich genommen)." See Rudi Paret (trans.), *Der Koran*, 8th edition, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 2001, *ad* Q 57:27; the negation is also separated off in Zellentin, "*Aḥbār* and *Ruhbān*", p. 278. Most likely, both Jones and Paret opt to treat *mā katabnāhā ʿalayhim* as a self-standing negation because they accept the traditional understanding of *rahbāniyya* as monasticism and assume that the Qur'an could therefore not possibly have articulated even the limited and qualified endorsement of *rahbāniyya* that is implied by my reading.

taken to imply a lack of divine endorsement of it. At the same time, however, the term *rahbāniyya* is grouped together with two virtues that God "placed in the hearts" of Jesus' followers, and *rahbāniyya* is said to have been divinely mandated at least in a conditional sense, as a supererogatory manner of pleasing God. Thus, it is not the institution of *rahbāniyya* as such that is condemned but rather the Christians' corruption of it, their failure to "observe it properly" – an indictment that is most likely further detailed at Q 9:31.34, according to which the incumbents of the office of *rahbāniyya* are elevated to a quasi-divine status and are guilty of misusing communal funds.

According to Q 57:27 and other Qur'anic statements, the Christian episcopate has proven a failure: Christian communal leaders have been mistaken for "lords beside God" (Q 9:31) and have been able to abuse their authority for selfish ends (Q 9:34). Given that Muhammad's position is visibly modelled on the Christian episcopate, why would acceptance of the authority that the Medinan Qur'an invests in him not similarly amount to adopting a human leader as a "lord beside God"? From the Qur'anic perspective, of course, there is a crucial distinction between the Messenger and Christian communal "overseers": the Messenger is himself a member of the sequence of prophets evoked in Q 57:26–27, rather than merely occupying a position of conventional human authority among the followers of one of these prophets. It would appear to be assumed that Muhammad's direct revelatory link to God precludes a recurrence of the same ills for which Christian, and also Jewish, communal leaders are castigated in Q 9:31.34: Muhammad's prophetic status is likely taken to rule out the misunderstanding that he might be a "lord beside God" and thereby come to blot out his divine sender, and also to ensure that he would immediately be taken to task for any dereliction of duty on his part (cf. Q 3:79). After all, the Qur'an contains instances of

surprisingly candid criticism of Muhammad.[94] Needless to say, such close divine supervision of the Messenger does not translate into any humanly enforceable checks and balances on the plenitude of his power.

The Qur'anic statement that the institution of *rahbāniyya* was "devised" by the Christians rebuffs the claim that the ecclesiastical hierarchy is, through the apostolic succession, directly continuous with the ministry of Jesus. Thus, the episcopate is at best an appendix to the series of divinely appointed emissaries featuring in Q 57:25–27. Muhammad, by contrast, constitutes the latest and, at least according to surah 33, the final and most eminent member of this prophetic sequence. That Muhammad's authority towers above that of contemporary Christian leaders is also highlighted in surah 57's conclusion. It urges the audience to "fear God and believe in His Messenger, as a result of which He will give you a double portion of His mercy (*yuʾtikum kiflayni min raḥmatihi*), will bestow upon you a light by which you can walk, and will grant you forgiveness" (Q 57:28). The verse's reference to a "double portion" of divine mercy stands in subtle contrast with the single portion of mercy that God, according to v. 27, has granted to the Christians.[95] The salvific significance of Muhammad that is thrown into relief here is also asserted in the passage criticising Jewish and Christian leaders in surah 9: vv. 31 and 34, condemning these leaders' alleged deification and their unjust appropriation of "people's possessions", form a frame around two verses invoking, like the conclusion of surah 57, God's "light" (Q 9:32) and the eminent position of Muhammad: "It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the true religion to cause it to prevail over all other religion." (9:33) To follow Muhammad is to be bathed in

[94] See especially Q 80:1–10 but also Q 33:37 (implying that Muhammad was guilty of "fearing the people" more than God).

[95] "We placed in the hearts of those who followed him [Jesus] compassion and mercy (*raḥmatan*) [...]".

divine light and to have unfettered access to God's guidance and forgiveness.[96] The Medinan Qur'an betrays a triumphant sense that God has showered the Believers with grace by once again making Himself as fully accessible to humans as possible, through Muhammad: "God has bestowed favour upon the Believers when He raised up among them a messenger from among themselves who recites to them His signs, purifies them, and teaches them the Scripture and wisdom, while they had previously been in manifest error." (Q 3:164) The Qur'anic community is thus presented as being equipped with a model of leadership that is far superior to that of the Christians, despite its numerous phenomenological similarities to it. Appropriately, surah 57's final verse therefore reminds the "People of the Scripture" that they "have no power over any of God's grace, but that the grace is in the hand of God, to give to whom He wishes; and God's grace is abundant".

We thus find in the Medinan Qur'an both an ascription of recognisably episcopal traits to Muhammad and a critique of the institution of the episcopate as falling far short of the direct prophetic mandate and salvific significance that characterise Muhammad. This critique is rooted in the fact that the Medinan Messenger, unlike a Christian bishop, does not owe his authority to being ordained by an ecclesiastical hierarchy; Muhammad does not occupy an office that imparts authority independently of the person occupying it.[97] Because the authority of the Qur'anic Messenger is grounded in his own prophetic charisma rather than being institutionally derived, he would not have been vulnerable to being upstaged by

[96] Cf. verses like Q 4:64, 47:19 etc., discussed above, which charge the Messenger with praying for God's forgiveness.

[97] This formulation is inspired by Rapp, *Bishops*, p. 29: "spiritual authority can reside not just in the *person* of the bishop, but also in the episcopal *office* per se."

charismatic holy men, as Christian bishops sometimes were.[98] As a result of this crucial difference, the Qur'anic Messenger does not simply adjudicate disputes on the basis of pre-given laws, whether Biblical or not, as bishops did,[99] but can actually lay down law, like Moses himself. The underived, charismatically grounded authority of the Messenger also accounts for his ultimately very different relationship to Moses. Although a number of late antique bishops were described as a "new Moses",[100] it is Moses, rather than any of the bishops in question, who retained paradigmatic status. Muhammad, however, is at least in some respects elevated above Moses: he leads the list of prophets in Q 33:7, and God's covenant with Muhammad's community supersedes previous covenants. Ultimately, this paved the way for Muhammad to become, not just a perfect embodiment of the Mosaic paradigm, but a paradigm in his own right.

[98] See Gwynn, "Episcopal Leadership", p. 889, who notes that "Antony the hermit, Symeon Stylites, and other great ascetics derived their influence from their personal holiness and charisma, not from the possession of clerical office."

[99] Lamoreaux, "Episcopal Courts", p. 159–160.

[100] See again Rapp, *Bishops*, p. 125–131.