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The *Khatim an-Nabiyyin* (The Seal of the Prophets) and Its Inclusive Abrahamic Perspective: Muhammad and ‘Isa ibn Maryam in Dialogue

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Abstract: “Muhammad is not the father of any one of your men; he is God’s messenger and the Seal of the Prophets: God knows everything.” (33:40). The deconstruction of the concept of “the Seal of the Prophets” through identifying its different spiritual-historical meanings is particularly important and partially analyzed through an inter-religious methodological approach. If indeed the Prophet Muhammad is undoubtedly the last of the prophets in order of time in the Abrahamic tradition, and thus in a literal sense “the Seal of the Prophets”, the background of the 7th-century pre-urban Hijaz reflects a different cultural-economic and historical development in comparison with the Mediterranean-Mesopotamian basin. This article aims to reflect on the meanings that “the Seal of the Prophets” assumed in the Qur’anic verse 33:40, as the adoption of different narratives to establish an Abrahamic prophetic continuity with a clear emphasis on Islamic–Christian dialogue; the significance of these meanings reflects the opportunity for reciprocal understanding between the two most important global religions and their awareness of prophets and prophecy, i.e., on relations with God, the pact with human beings and eschatological predictions.

Keywords: *Khatim an-Nabiyyin* (the Seal of the Prophets/Prophecy); Islamic–Christian dialogue; prophecy; Islamic eschatology; Muhammad; ‘Isa ibn Maryam



Citation: Demichelis, Marco. 2021. The *Khatim an-Nabiyyin* (The Seal of the Prophets) and Its Inclusive Abrahamic Perspective: Muhammad and ‘Isa ibn Maryam in Dialogue. *Religions* 12: 4. <https://dx.doi.org/10.3390/rel12010004>

Received: 5 November 2020

Accepted: 11 December 2020

Published: 23 December 2020

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1. Introduction. The Double *Khatim*: Jesus and Muhammad

“The Seal of the Prophets” is a particular topic for Islamic–Christian dialogue; the analysis here will highlight the eschatological assumption on the one hand that salvation is a shared understanding of God, but on the other hand, there will also be a hermeneutical comprehension of its Abrahamic complexities starting from the analysis of the verse 33:40.

The main aim of this article is to emphasize an inner Islamic reasoning on the concept of “the Seal of the Prophets” from an Islamic–Christian and Abrahamic perspective, adopting the same reasoning that Muslim scholars used in their “classical” age. At the same time, this article will focus on the juxtaposition between Jesus and Muhammad as prophetic figures in parallel with the Islamic narrative to frame a hermeneutical continuity that from the Old-New Testament-specific stories reaches the understanding of Qur’anic verses.

The Islamic particularity could be summed up as the continuity of this faith with the earlier Abrahamic religions (Judaism and Christianity, then Iranian dualism such as Manicheism), but also as where the Prophet (*Nabi*) coincides with the Messenger (*Rasul*), at least in the figures of Moses, Mani, Jesus and Muhammad who are Prophets of God, but also those to whom a new Word was entrusted.

Reflecting on both revelations, the Qur’an and the Gospels, underlined the understanding of religious awareness and religious “otherness” as a dialogical dimension in a different way. This is the starting point for putting both Prophets and their reciprocal prophetic vision in dialogue, clearly considering that the approach is quite different.

In the Qur’an, the dialogue with “otherness” is deeply rooted in the common Abrahamic tradition and the Covenants of the Prophet’s narrative/literature: “Believers, argue

only in the best way with the People of the Book, except with those of them who act unjustly. Say, we believe in what was revealed to us and in what was revealed to you; our God and your God is one and the same; we are devoted to Him." (Q. 29: 46; Haleem 2010) as well as "Say, People of the Book, let us arrive at a statement that is common to us all: we worship God alone, we ascribe no partner to Him, and none of us takes others beside God as lords. If they turn away, say, Witness our devotion to Him." (Q. 3: 64; Haleem 2010). The religious respect for the other is based on the recognition of Muhammad as a Prophet or of the early "Islamic" message as trustworthy.

In the Gospels, it is the behavior of the other as well as the recognition of Christ as the *Messiah*, rather than belonging to a different religion or nation, which decrees his evangelic importance: the recognition of Christ's holiness by the Roman soldier at the foot of the cross (Luke 23, p. 47), and in the Acts (10:1–48), the figure of Cornelius, who is emblematically identified as the pagan believer, are soldiers, who belong to an army of occupation.

Islam and Christianity are religions, which in a relatively short period of time, abandoned an exclusive praxis: of being Jewish and circumcised in Christianity, and of belonging to specific Arab clans who first converted to Islam for the Islamic faith (Hodgson 1974, vol. 1; Brockelmann 1948).

This double dynamic effectively ostracized the Semitic clan attitude of excluding the dissimilar, revolutionizing *de facto* the link between Christianity/Islam and their original geographical landscapes, but also widening the factor of influence over the cultural *paradigma* of both revelations. In other words, the archetype of a faith able to reach every nation on Earth effectively expanded without limits the connection between the Word of God and the ancient and late antique civilizations (Hellenistic, Byzantine and Sassanid specifically) that were increasingly confronted by and converted to these two religions (Kung 1994; Agha 2003).

In a dynamic of Islamic–Christian dialogue, it is therefore important to learn how both Jesus of Nazareth and Muhammad were given the role of 'the Seal of the Prophets'. The importance of this aspect highlights the awareness of a common background of reciprocal understanding, even though the differences remain prominent.

Regarding the former, Jesus is the Seal who confirmed the messianic Old Testament and Jewish tradition (as well as being the Word of God made flesh John 19, 25–30, 1 Cor 15, 20–28), identified as David's heir (Khalidi 2001). In John 19, 25–30, the Father is glorified through the "Son" as a symbol of God's infinite love for all nations and the final perfection of Jesus who decided to sacrifice himself like a lamb to cleanse all sins.

Jesus is the Seal because his reign that started in this world will continue in the next one (Haight 1999), as partially confirmed by the same Islamic tradition, which endorsed Jesus's soteriological role (Leirvik 2010). At the same time, in 1 Cor. 15, 20–28, Paul establishes the parallel between Adam and Jesus to show how in Christ a new life of grace and forgiveness will expose the falsity of the concept of Adam's primordial sin, which is completely non-existent in Islam. Jesus is thus for different reasons the Seal of an Old-New Testament tradition as well as in the Qur'an, the Seal of Holiness, which the Arabic words *bi-ruh. al-Quds* clearly reflect on as that Holy Spirit which Allah transmitted to 'Isa ibn Maryam from his conception. Originally, according to the Islamic narrative, 'Isa's capability to make miracles is directly linked to the presence of the Holy Spirit in himself (Parrinder 2014).

Muhammad, on the other hand, is "the Seal of the Prophets" of the Abrahamic tradition and as the Qur'an highlights: "Muhammad is not the father of any one of your men; he is God's messenger and the Seal of the Prophets: God knows everything." (33:40). As reported by A. Bausani:

This unique and important passage became the basis for the dogma of Historical Islamism: so, although all the prophets before Muhammad are true messengers of God to respect and venerate, after the prophet of Islam there can be no further revelations and any self-declaring prophet could only be a false prophet. (Bausani 1988, pp. 627–28)

However, David S. Power (Power 2011) and Uri Rubin (Rubin 2014), in antithesis with the idea that Islam has a monolithic position on this subject, stressed an analytical Abrahamic understanding which can give a wider interpretation, partially linked with the historical as well as the personal relationship between the Prophet and Zayd ibn Harithah, his adopted son (d. 629).

Accordingly, if the dual understanding “prophets/prophecy” is the most significant interpretative key concerning this topic, this contribution also aims to stress the different methodological approaches taken by Islam in describing Muhammad and Jesus as “the Seal of the Prophets”: the historical-geographical and the theological-hermeneutical (Friedmann 1986, 1989).

As recognized by some Islamic Sufi scholars (Ibn al-‘Arabi, Jalal ad-Din Rumi), as well as by the Shi‘te tradition (Leirvik 2010, p. 74 ff.), Jesus is emblematically “the Seal of the Prophets” from an eschatological-hermeneutical point of view, where there is no intention of asserting that Christianity is superior to Islam, but from a plural-dialogical way and to which we will return later (Rubin 2014, pp. 93–95). Firstly, we should contextualize the verses 33:40 against the concrete interpretative background of Islam.

2. “Muhammad Is Not the Father of Any of Your Men”: Hermeneutical Analysis, Contextualization and Speculation

It is therefore important to develop a short exegetical analysis of this verse (33:40) and of the previous ones (33:36–39), stressing the *consensus* of interpretation during the classical period of Islam (8th–12th centuries): the later distinction made between prophets and prophecy, but also between *Nabi* and *Rasul* (Charfi 2008), tried to contextualize these verses’ narrative in relation to the historical and Abrahamic framework. The Qur’anic praxis of obtaining God’s approval for personal or political decisions made by the Prophet is a common *adagio* not only adopted in these verses.

In 24:11–25, it is God who officially absolved ‘A’isha from having committed any kind of adultery, when, lost in the desert, she returned to the believers’ camp the following day, escorted by a young Bedouin. It is God again who stressed the direction of the *Qibla* in a Medinan debate that can probably be attributed to the first conflicts with the Jews (2:142–150). Finally, it is God who assumed a clear position in the debate on the Prophet’s lawfulness in marrying his adopted son’s wife after Zayd Ibn Harithah had divorced her: this was a praxis that had certainly shown some moral discontent at the time (33:36–40).

If, in the *Tafsir* by al-Tustari (d. 896) or in the *Asbab al-Nuzul* by al-Wahidi (d. 1075), there are no comments on this verse (33:40), the *Tafsir* attributed to Ibn Abbas highlights the dispensation of God to allow the Prophet to marry Zaynab bint Jahsh, a cousin of Muhammad and one of the, at least, six wives of Zayd. However, as the Qur’an states: “[. . .] the Prophet is not at fault for what God has ordained for him. This was God’s practice with those who went before, God’s command must be fulfilled and with all those who deliver God’s messages and fear only Him and no other: God’s reckoning is enough” (33:38–39). Ibn Abbas’s *tafsir*, in referring to the Old Testament, emphasized the reference to the behavior of King David in relation to Uriya’s wife, Bethsheba, and to Solomon and *Bilqis* (the Queen of Sheba). For all of them, Muhammad included, it is the fear of God which allowed those figures to marry the woman that God had designated for them (Ibn Abbas 2007, pp. 477–78).

This Abrahamic narrative, to which we will return later, is “historically” established by al-Tabari, who argues in the *Tarikh*:

“Zayd bin Harithah, who lived in Muhammad’s household and came to be regarded as his adoptive son-so that he was regularly addressed as Zayd, son of Muhammad. Whether the marriage between Zayd and Zaynab was a *mésalliance* from the beginning is speculation, though the account maintains that Zayd was not reluctant to divorce his wife and allow her to marry Muhammad. Muhammad is portrayed as reluctant to proceed with the marriage because of scruples about whether marrying one’s adopted son’s former wife violated the prohibited

degrees of marriage. Arab customary practice recognized kinship relations not based on blood ties: fosterage (having nursed from the same woman) was one such relationship; the question whether adoption fell into this category must have been unclear among Muslims. The marriage did not take place until after a Qur'anic revelation was received, giving permission for believers to marry the divorced wives of their adopted sons". (Tabari 1997, vol. 8, pp. 1–4)

However, this event, which al-Tabari placed before the battle of the Trench, at approximately 626, is not reported by Ibn Ishaq in an early version of the *Sira an-Nabawiyya* (Guillame 1955), but by Ibn Sa'd (d. 845) in his *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir* (Sa'd 1904–1940, vol. 8, pp. 47–55) as well as in the *Sahih* of al-Bukhari, who confirmed how the aforementioned Qur'anic verses referred to Zayd and Zaynab (Al-Bukhari 2001, vol. 65, n. 4787).

Tabari's narrative is quite unlikely in relation to the link with the Prophet's family: the famous historian usually displays a gossipy attitude towards personal obstacles or new and improbable juridical norms, such as the possibility of marrying the divorced wife of the Prophet's adopted son. This explanatory exegesis is more elaborate in Zamakhshari's *Kashshaf* in allowing the Prophet to help his former adopted son divorce from Zaynab because it was well known that Zayd's soul was no longer filled with affection for her. Zamakhshari's finding a comparative example argues that:

When the emigrants arrived in Medina, the helpers shared everything with them, even to the extent that a man who had two wives renounced one of them and the emigrants married her. (Zamakhshari 1953, vol. 3, 243ff.)

This is not unlikely in relation to the historical evidence that this praxis could have been concretely planned, even if only for economic reasons, but it was doubtful that a norm *ad personam* was so important as to be considered as the Word of God, in the Islamic revelation. The presence of verse 40 can be considered as part of the answer, even though contemplating both aspects—the separation of Zayd and Zainab and Muhammad as “the Seal of the Prophets”—as excessively connected is problematic. As argued by U. Rubin (Rubin 2014, 70ff), 33:40 is also linked with 33:4:

God does not put two hearts within a man's breast. He does not turn the wives you reject and liken to your mother's back into your real mothers; nor does He make your adopted son your real sons (*wa ma Ja'ala 'ad'iyakum 'abna'kum*). These are only words from your mouths, while God speaks the truth and guides people to the right path.

These verses clarify that adopted sons belong to their biological fathers while the words used by the Prophet in describing Zayd as his adopted son did not come from God, but from Muhammad's personal will. The following verse 33:5–6 continues in the same direction as the previous one, even though it is contrary to what will be argued in 8:75 (a verse that considering the *Naskh* doctrine, would have abrogated the 33:6):

“[. . .] blood-relatives have a stronger claim than other believers and emigrants, though you may still bestow gifts on your *protégés*. All this is written in the scripture”.

This failure to recognize an adopted son, even although in Islamic history the sons of former female slaves had the right to become Caliphs as well as Sultans, is probably related to the paradigmatic second part of the verse 33:40:

[Muhammad] is God's Messenger and the Seal of the Prophets: God knows everything—*wa Lakin Rasula Allahi wa Khatama an-Nabiyyina, wa Kana Allahu bikulli Shay'in 'Aliman*.

and the comprehension of *Rasul Allah* as that of the *Khatam an-Nabiyyin's* concrete meaning. There is no unanimity in the understanding of this verse during the early centuries of Islam; as argued by Y. Friedmann (1986, 1989), it is possible that the above term was initially identified to corroborate Muhammad's role in contrast with pre-Islamic Arab prophets that were not even mentioned in the Qur'an, such as *Sadiq*, *Masduq* and *Salum* in order

to indicate how Muhammad's phenomenal success was not a unique event in the history of Arabia. This also explains how claimants to prophethood do not cease to appear there from time to time, even after the coming of Islam. A real upsurge to prophetic claims seems to have occurred during the Prophet's lifetime and shortly after his death. Muslim tradition argues about the number of people such as Musaylima, Sajah, al-Aswad al-'Ansi and Tulayha b. Khuwaylid, who put forward claims of their prophetic status in order to emphasize their aspirations to tribal or regional independence.

Important exegetes such as al-Zamakhshari (d. 1143) and Ibn Khatir (d. 1373), as well as the *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* (al-Mahalli and al-Suyuti 2007), unequivocally interpret this passage as "the Seal of the Prophets" and not as "the Seal of Prophecy".

The Mu'tazilite commentator in his *Tafsir al-Kashshaf* as well as the author of the *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Adhim* argued how 33:40 clearly refers to the prophetic inheritance of Muhammad and no longer to "false" prophets: although Muhammad had different sons—al-Qasim, al-Tayyib and al-Tahir from the first wife Khadija (Kister 1993; Ishaq 1978; Kathir 1966) and Ibrahim from Marya al-Qibtiyya—none of them survived infancy; similarly, his adopted son, Zayb ibn Harithah (d. 629), as well as dying at Mu'tah before the Prophet, could not inherit, referring to specific religious warnings (33:5, 37). It is therefore evident that the Prophetic phase ended with Muhammad because no inheritance was possible. The Prophet's grandchildren and 'Ali's sons, al-Hasan (d. 670) and al-Husayn (d. 680), were too young in 632 and Muhammad, as the verse recites, was not their father; the *fitna*, inner conflicts, moreover, would already have opposed early "believers" internal factions when both of them reached adulthood (Cheema 2013).

This interpretation, in addition to being confirmed by a number of *ahadith mutawatir* (traditions on which there are no doubts), persists in assuming an Abrahamic contextualization in the attempt to strengthen Muhammad against hypocrites and opponents (33:38–39; 33:60–62) as well as part of his closer family (33:69): "Believers, do not like those who insulted Moses—God cleared him of their allegations and he was highly honoured in God's eyes.", reported by U. Rubin, referred to Numbers 12:1–15 when Miriam and Aaron disparage Moses for having taken a Cushite woman, Zipporah, as a wife.

However, this is contemporary speculation (Paret 1971, p. 401) which finds no effective matches in Islamic tradition, whether in the *Tafsir* of Tabari, Zamakhshari, Ibn Kathir or Jalalayn. Rubin's reference to the verses in Numbers 12:1–15, reflects how Moses' own brother Aaron and sister Miriam slander and reproach him for having married a foreign woman, an "Ethiopian", when he reached the land of Madian: this event took place before Moses became the prophet of Israel, in a personal period of inner emigration before he became the leader of his nation.

At the same time, Miriam's criticism was to be punished by God immediately, contracting leprosy instantly, although it healed after seven days of purification.

Therefore, putting the Qur'an and the Pentateuch in parallel (considering the above verses only) is quite perplexing—Moses will marry Zipporah, while the accusations against Muhammad are related to incest in marrying the former wife of his former adoptive son. In this case, as in David Power's analysis, it seems that there is an ongoing attempt, partially evident in the Qur'an and partially attributed later by Islamic and non-Islamic interpretations (as framed by David Power), to try and create a direct connection between the Old Testament and the Islamic revelation, even though the links are not so evident. This case could be one of them.

As argued by D. Power:

The exact meaning of the linguistic metaphor *khatam al-nabiyyin* (lit. "Seal of Prophets") is equivocal. In the first century, Muslims took the phrase as signifying that Muhammad confirmed the revelations sent previously to Moses and Jesus. This understanding quickly gave way to the understanding that Muhammad brought the office of prophecy to an end. The later signification was facilitated by the fact that prophecy is portrayed in the Quran as the exclusive possession of Abraham's descendants. The office is hereditary, and it passes from father to

son—albeit with occasional intervals between one prophet and the next. From this premise, two corollaries follow: In order to be a prophet, Muhammad must be a lineal descendant of Abraham; and in order to be the Last Prophet, he must be sonless. This is why the assertion in Q. 33:40 that Muhammad is “the messenger of God and seal of Prophets” is preceded by the pronouncement that “Muhammad is not the father of any of your men,” this is why it was necessary for Muhammad to repudiate Zayd, and this is why it was necessary for Zayd to predecease Muhammad. (Power 2011, p. 226)

According to this attempt, Zayd returned to a leading role and the “speculative” interpretation of his position could start again:

Like Ishmael, he is repudiated by his father so that he will not be his heir. When he informs Zaynab of her impending marriage to the Prophet, he becomes Abraham’s trusted servant who secures a wife for Isaac. Like Uriah the Hittite, he is sent to certain death on a battlefield in southern Jordan by the man who fell in love with his wife. Like the Isaac of some Jewish *midrashim*, he is sacrificed by his father. Zayd had to pass five tests in order to make it possible for Muhammad to become the Last Prophet: He chose to remain with Muhammad rather than return to Syria with his birth family; he exposed himself to public humiliation by divorcing his wife so that his father might marry her; he carried out Muhammad’s distasteful instruction that he inform his former wife that she was to be married by her father-in-law; he relinquished his status as Muhammad’s son, his name, Zayd b. Muhammad, and the right to inherit from the Prophet; and he willingly gave up his life for the sake of Muhammad and Islam. (Power 2011, p. 227)

However, the interpretative conjecture of the above passage is clear, as well as how David Power is influenced by contemporary Jewish Kabbalism. The repudiation of Ishmael is inconsistent if we reflect on: “Now as for Ishmael, I will heed you: I hereby bless him. I will make him fertile and will multiply him exceedingly. He will become the father of twelve chieftains, and I will make of him a great nation” (Genesis 17, 20), even though in, 21: 8–21, the banishment of Agar and Ishmael to the desert is concrete.

In parallel, David’s lust for Bethsheba, as the death of her husband in war, is hardly comparable with the narrative on Zayd and Zaynab. David’s sin is absolutely denigrated and emphasized in Samuel 2: 11–12. God’s condemnation is categorical, because it is linked to one of God’s main commandments, the 11th, so much so that the firstborn of the King with Uriah’s former wife will die of disease.

This is a very different literary understanding; David S. Power overstressed Zayd as a “sacrificial lamb” more than with the Old Testament’s relevant protagonists but in a unique Arab-Bedouin juridical landscape (Landau-Tasserou 2003). Zayd will be sent by the Prophet Muhammad as the main authority of a mission in the north, an expedition that was probably crushed by northern Arab-Christian clans near to *Mu’tah* (actual Jordan) in 629.

However, it is more credible, in my opinion, that Muhammad sent Zayd ibn Harithah to the north (being killed in *Mu’tah*’s battle), to Palestine and to Syria, in the attempt to update diplomatic relations with the Christianized clan of the region, taking advantage of Zayd ibn Harithah’s clan lineage in the Kalb confederation, on the Udhra branch, as well as on his mother’s side through the Banu Tayy, a clan linked with residents in Medina but also on the side of the Banu Lakhm and Ghassanid confederations (Landau-Tasserou/Tabari 1998, vol. 39, p. 6ff).

The speculation to try to accommodate the stories on Muhammad as “the Seal of the Prophets” with Old Testament biblical narratives brings up more problems than solutions in understanding this specific verse better.

The entire conjecture is like clutching at straws in trying to hermeneutically interpret a Qur’anic passage (33:40) which remained obscure for at least one century after the Prophet’s death, while afterwards it was hypothetically connected with Old Testament stories but without having been able to correctly decipher them.

According to the above methodological analysis, the concept of “the Seal of the Prophets”, which referred to the Christian-Abrahamic tradition, overstressed that, when Jesus returns to Earth as eschatologically reported in Sunnism and Shi’ah (Al-Bukhari 2001; Wahidi 2008), he leads the world in relation to Shari’ah, the law of the last revelation.

This interpretation, however, is directly contradicted by the literary understanding of the same Qur’anic verse 5, 48 which is:

We sent to you Muhammad the Scripture with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it, and with final authority over them: so, judge between them according to what God has sent down. Do not follow their whims, which deviate from the truth that has come to you. We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God has so willed, He would have made one community, but He wanted to test you through that which He was given you, so race to do good: you will all return to God and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about.

In the canonical collections of Hadith, the *Khatim an-Nabiyyin* is confirmed as already mentioned as “the Seal of the Prophets” and not “the Seal of Prophecy”: Muhammad is the last brick which makes the home complete and perfect because he has no male inheritance, and he is also figuratively represented as “exceptional”.

Al-Bukhari (Al-Bukhari 2001, no. 5760) Muslim (1955) and Al-Tirmidhi (Al-Tirmidhi 1987, 1996) not only confirmed Muhammad as “the Seal of the Prophets” but identified its symbolic and physical confirmation in the red tumor (protruding flesh), the size of a pigeon’s egg, between Muhammad’s shoulders (Al-Tirmidhi 1996): *رَأَيْتُ الْخَاتِمَ بَيْنَ كَتِفَيْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ، غُدَّةَ حَمْرَاءَ، مِثْلَ بَيْضَةِ الْحَمَامِ*. Ibn Majah in his *Sunan* (5: no. 959) refers to the Prophet as “the Seal of the Prophets”, as does Ibn Malik in his *Muwatta* (no. 1891), who, in referring to the names of Muhammad, argues:

I have five names. I am Muhammad. I am *Ahmad*. I am *al-Mahi* (the effacer) by whom Allah effaces disbeliefs and infidelity. I am *al-Hashir* (the gatherer) before whom people will be gathered, and I am *al-‘Aqib*. (the last prophet and messenger)

It is consequently clear that from the beginning, the *Khatim an-Nabiyyin* was literally interpreted so it had to physically prove something abnormal or exceptional in Muhammad’s body, which was also quite a common praxis in pre-Islamic tradition about Jesus’ miracles, Daniel’s premonitory dreams, etc. The Islamic Prophet, then, was the last Prophet not only because he had no male heirs, as rationally interpreted from the 9–10th centuries onwards, but also because of the presence of physical evidence and oracular predictions, as confirmed by the role of the monk Bahira (Guillame 1955, 79ff; Lings 2004). In other words, the biographers of the Prophet, from the 8th century onwards, stress the singularity of Muhammad’s life from infancy to adulthood, reframing the same Abrahamic *topos*: the prophet as *Khatim an-Nabiyyin* is only the last of them.

This literal hermeneutical interpretation, however, raises several concerns from the beginning of the Islamic age: the decision not to recognize in the lineage of the Prophet his cousin ‘Ali and his sons (al-Hasan and al-Husayn) clearly portends the existence of an anti-Shiite position. The Arab hereditary practice in the Umayyad (caliphs from 661–750), and ‘Abbasid (caliphs from 750–1258) clans, and in the pre-Islamic age highlights how political succession was normally granted to cousins and offshoots in the absence of direct sons.

It is possible indeed that this interpretation had more to do with the illegality of granting a prophetic continuity to the Alid branch of Muhammad’s clans (Goldziher 1971), for political reasons, than to an effective Seal, although it was a few centuries before the meaning of this term was confirmed in the hermeneutics as well as in building up the narrative of the Prophet’s Covenants (Morrow 2019). In other words, it is difficult to comprehend the “unclear” reasons behind an interpretative understanding of these literal verses which confirmed the lack of Prophet Muhammad’s male inheritance: it was an evident fact, considering the absence of sons who survived him, but which is historically in contrast with the normal Arab praxis with reference to the political legacies of cousins and other family members in giving royal/caliphate inheritance to them.

However, it is relevant here before entering in the debate on prophets and prophecy to emphasize the attention given to the historical and geographical paradigm of the Seal.

3. Reinterpreting the “Seal”: The Historical-Geographical Paradigm

The aforementioned exegetes confirmed Muhammad’s role in connection with verse 33:40. Reflecting on the *forma mentis* of a pre-urban Hijazi-Arab world, on the one hand, Muhammad confirms the *Mithaq* (the pact), the alliance that God gave human beings in keeping with the tradition of Abraham, on the other hand, he also needs the *Shura*, i.e., the inter-tribal consensus necessary to ensure that the early community would be in harmony during the prophetic phase, as well as with the end of it, following his death (Gardet 2002; Madelung 1997). The pact, therefore, both with the divine and with the human, is a key component of the Arab-Islamic world: the former emphasizes continuity with the prophetic past, the second, continuity in the future. Muhammad’s death leaves no prophetic continuity, but only some Vicars who then assumed a more political-religious-administrative role.

The end of the prophetic phase (the relationship between God and Muhammad ends with the prophet’s death) introduces the historical-geographical paradigm: the Word of God is still “young”, still to be transcribed, at the risk of falsification and for this reason in need of a definitive confirmation. Who better than the close friends of the Prophet could have succeeded him as the leading authority? However, as the history of the rightly-guided Caliphs (632–661) showed, hostility and sectarianism were not irrelevant to this phase (Ouardi 2016); the same early community indeed would precisely be fragmented in relation to the political inheritance of the Prophet only a few decades afterwards and antithetically with what the same Qur’an affirms about the disunity of Jews and Christians (2: 253; 3: 105; 5:14, 64; 6: 59).

If then Muhammad and the Qur’an are, within an Abrahamic tradition, the expression of a definitive agreement (*Mithaq*) between the one God and his “people”, in the broadest sense, the Qur’an in 5:48 clarifies first of all the prophetic “historicity” of the Word of God and its role as a word fixed within different phases of history.

There can be no doubt considering the Qur’an (Madelung 1997; Donner 1998; Lings 2004) that Muhammad is the last prophet in relation to the reading that the same gives to the Old Testament and evangelic traditions: in different verses, the presence of references to the Apocryphal Gospels in addition to the canonical texts has been confirmed by many specialists (Abd al-Jalil 1950; McAuliffe 1981; Parrinder 2014); however, the conceptualization of the prophecy in Islam as well as the historical role that the prophets have played in the Biblical tradition are evidently different from the narrative that emerges from the Qur’anic revelation.

For “*Consecutio Temporum*”, Muhammad and the Qur’an are, respectively, the last of the Prophets and the last revealed scripture. Nevertheless, the fact that Muhammad is “the Seal of the Prophets” (*Khatam an-Nabiyyin*), even though not recognized by Judaism and Christianity, does not make him de facto “the Seal of Prophecy”, which, on the contrary, universally belongs to human nature. In different periods and different geographical areas, the existence of these “alliances” between God and his nations had been confirmed according to different revelations, but also through the intellectual and hermeneutical work of many authors.

Al-Alusi argues quoting Abu Hurayra on the Prophet Muhammad:

I and the Prophets before me are like the following example: A man builds a fine and beautiful house, except for a single corner brick. The people walk around it and wonder at its beauty, but they say, ‘Would that this brick be put in its place!’ I’m that brick and I’m the last of the Prophets. [. . .] All of this indicates that prophecy ended with the Seal Muhammad, peace be upon him. For *ijtihad*, however, we have seen no evidence of its termination, either in the book of God or the Sunna of his messenger or even in the sayings of the Companions. (Alusi 2002, p. 163)

However, there is a fundamental aspect that must be considered in this analysis: the historical-geographical paradigm of prophecy, which is the pivotal archetype of Modernity, or better, of Western Modernity rooted in a historical-critical methodological approach. It is critical to understand that although the Qur'anic message has a universal value, this inclusive approach is mainly due to the impact of emigration and trade, as well as the conquering campaigns which allowed the proto-Islamic message to reach a vast geographical area from Morocco to the Indonesian archipelago.

The Qur'an indeed is rich in many verses in which reference is made to humanity in its widest sense (2: 161–164, 2: 221; 35: 45, etc.), but there are also others which emphasize that this scripture is in Arabic, and so, by historical and geographical association, the first people that could properly understand were Arabs only (16: 103; 43: 3, etc.).

We cannot question here, due to constraints of time, the status of the Arabic language in the Peninsula during the 7th century. It is important to emphasize that it was not until the end of it that this language reached a form that could be understood and recognized, although it was the third rightly guided caliph Othman (644–656) who decided to collect the parts of the Revelation that had already been transcribed in a unique *Mushaf* (Burton 1977; Anghelescu 1993; Motzki 2001) and we also probably have to wait until the Umayyad caliphate of 'Abd al-Malik (d. 705) to consider a first canonized version of the same (Sinai 2017; Hamdan 2011; Schoeler 2011).

It is clear that there is an obvious correlation between the Qur'an as the Word of God and the history and geography in which this scripture was revealed. At the same time, it is important to stress this paradigm in identifying the Arabs of the Hijaz as the first who accepted the monotheistic message of a Prophet who transmitted the Word of God to inhabitants of a pre-urban society, linked to commercial activities and transhumanism (pre-urban, partly nomadic) still existing in the early 20th century. If "the Seal of the Prophets" is Muhammad and the Qur'an is the last scripture in the Abrahamic tradition, the Arab world that in the Peninsula of the 7th century received this divine message is not commensurate with that of the Mediterranean-Mesopotamian region of the late ancient era which it would shortly conquer.

The Arabs of the Hijaz in the 7th century did not yet fully understand what monotheism was: the meaning of *Hanif* as well as the emergence of *Hanifiyya* is symptomatic of the increasing sensitivity to monotheistic religions (Rubin 2010; Evstatiev 2002). However, concrete knowledge regarding Christianity (the presence of Ebionites, Nestorians and Arians) and Judaism was limited to direct and personal experience with a preliminary basic understanding of the complexity regarding Christology, religious sectarianism and eschatology. The Arabs of the Hijaz probably had a partial understanding of what Hellenism, Greek philosophy, Epicureanism or Zoroastrian Dualism were and how they were intermingled with Judaism and Christianity in the ancient and late ancient era: in other words, they partially ignored the complexity of human ethical and religious speculation on God, his nature and existence as well as the assumption of Jesus' complex Christology.

Therefore, if Muhammad is the last of the Prophets, the society in which the Islamic revelation was initially welcomed is historically more isolated and less permeated by the "humanism" of its time, even if it can be considered as included in a religious Abrahamic *milieu* from which only a partial understanding of Jewish and Christian complexity emerged. At any rate, this issue was not to prevent the Arab-Islamic world, two centuries later, during the 'Abbasid (9th–11th centuries) era, from becoming the main architect of a classical "Renaissance" that was to directly affect the European Middle Ages (Morgan 2008; Essa and Ali 2016).

For this reason, this paradigm is crucial for confirming the significance that the prophetic role assumed in relation to the environment in which it initially established roots. Muhammad and the Qur'anic revelation could not have settled in a geography other than the Hijaz, because the Mediterranean-Mesopotamian basin had already long understood Jewish monotheism, the Christian 'revolution', which had established itself through di-

alogue and confrontation both with Judaic Pharisaism and Essenism, but also in a more 'universal' approach, with Hellenism and Neoplatonism (Gutas 2002; D'Ancona 2005).

However, the Qur'an clearly assumed and reflects a deep influence of the Biblical milieu: the famous order Gabriel gave Muhammad to recite—"Iqra'!"—became the first words of sura 96, with his reluctance and fear clearly finding confirmation in the Biblical accounts of Exodus 3:11 and Jeremiah 1:6. The setting of this event in a cave reflects the life of Elijah (1 Kings 19: 9–18) while Muhammad's reply: *ma aqra'u* echoes that in Isaiah 40:6.

The essential requirement of Muhammad being recognized as a Prophet by other religious figures, such as the monk Bahira or Waraqa Ibn Nawfal, the Christian paternal cousin of Khadija bint Khuwaylid, is emblematically reported in the same revelation. This is a clear attempt to strengthen the existence of a prophetic continuity between the previous revelations and Prophets with Muhammad (Sinai 2017, pp. 42–43), as well as Jesus, who had earlier been recognized as the Messiah by pagan soldiers of an army of occupation. The recognition of Early Islam, like early Christianity, by those who held great power (even after the Arab conquests of the Middle East) is, emblematically, an important parallelism to be considered.

According to the above analysis, John Andrew Morrow's emphasis on Muhammad's Covenants (Morrow 2019) needs to be better understood and historically framed. No one can speak with any certainty of the nature of these treaties as well as whether they really existed. It is possible that during the Prophet's life and after his death, several *'ahd-ta'adat/Ilaf* were signed between Medina and different confederations of clans and villages where Arab Christians, Jews or still Polytheists lived. In parallel, the end of the *Ridda* wars overstressed the endorsement of agreements between the Hijazi forces and different Arab confederations of the Peninsula (Shoufani 1973, p. 144; Donner 1981, pp. 88–90; Haleem 2001). On the contrary, Morrow's focus on the various Covenants presumably signed by the Prophet Muhammad with the Christians of Persia, the Jews (as generally understood), the Samaritans, the Assyrian Christians, etc., are doubtful not because they are not reported by the 9th- and 10th-century historians, but because this is linked to the inconsistencies of what Islam was after its Prophet's death.

Historically speaking, every religion needs time to appear and to be institutionally framed about its *Credo* and what distinguishes it from other religions: in this case, Christianity and Judaism. It is hard to believe that a new faith which, after its prophet's death in 632, was split over for political-inheritance reasons, was previously able to interact with unspecified religious communities sharing a spiritual continuity on a unitarian *Credo*. On the contrary, these Covenants are probably part of an Islamic narrative performed in a later historical period when the ideological conflict between the 'Abbasids and the *Ahl al-Bayt* became increasingly stronger after the Umayyad fall (Agha 2003).

According with the historical-geographical paradigm and the above debate on the Covenants of the Prophet, the complex hermeneutical understanding of Q. 33:40 needed a longer period of time to be understood and this was probably the main reason for which we needed to wait until the 8th–9th centuries to have a clearer identification of its interpretative meanings and speculation.

4. Deconstructing the "Seal": The Islamic Prophets and Their Prophecy from an Islamic–Christian Perspective

The last main topic that needs to be addressed here reflects on the Islamic understanding of prophecy and in which way this impacted framing the imaginary on the Prophets: his qualities, competences from an Abrahamic perspective. If Muhammad is the last of the prophets, prophecy continues to be vital and dynamic in Islam, as in Christianity and other faiths. The Qur'an is unclear in stating the main differences between *Rasul* (Messenger) and *Nabi* (Prophet), diametrically opposed to what emerges from the Old and New Testament:

One is tempted to imagine a distinction between *Rasul* and *Nabi* such as is found in Christian literature; the apostle is at the same time a prophet, but the prophet is not necessarily at the same time an apostle. [. . .] As to the close relation

which exists between the Rasul and his Ummah, it may be compared with the doctrine of the *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, according to which the twelve apostles divided the whole world among them so that each one had the task of preaching the Gospel to certain people. [. . .] In the 'Aqida by Abu Hafṣ 'Umar an-Nasafi, the two categories are treated together, and the author makes no difference between Rasul and Nabi. (Wensinck 1995, vol. 8, pp. 454–55)

Wensinck's interpretation, in my opinion, suffers from an excessively Christian-centric approach: the term *Rasul* to identify or be compared with the apostles in the Gospels is erroneous. On the contrary, figures such as Samuel, Jeremy, Isaiah, etc., in the Old Testament are the exegetes of the sole God in the history of Israel: those *Anbiya* clarify God's will, they seek to keep human nature vigilant, as well as the leading figure of the community in preserving the dictates of the divine in order not to suffer the wrath of God. However, the complexity of Israel's prophets (and the seven prophetesses) needs to be briefly analyzed: some of them, such as Abraham, Isaac, Moses, Aaron and Joshua, are prophets but also the leaders of an emigrating nation, military chiefs and conquerors; others, such as Phineas, Eli, Samuel, Gad and Nathan, are more religiously linked with the shaping of a sacerdotal caste, which directly interacts with the Kings of Israel. However, some of the latter are also considered prophets—David and Solomon—due to their personal wisdom but which did not preserve them from sins and punishment. After the golden age of Israel's monarchy, the prophets once again took on a more hermeneutical role, with minor (Iddo, Amoz, Joel, etc.) and more important figures (Elijah, Jeremiah, Isaiah, etc.), when the nation was fragmented between the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, external invasions and the Babylonian captivity (7th–6th centuries BC), preserving the relationship between God and his nation.

In the Qur'an, on the contrary, the historical relevance of the Biblical prophets is not clearly recognized and only some of the list of the Old and New Testament are considered. In parallel, as already reported, there are different names, more related to a proto-Islamic background, as well explained by John Esposito in *Islam: the Straight Path*:

The word 'prophet' is applied far more inclusively in Islam than in the Judeo-Christian traditions. It is applied to Abraham, Noah, Joseph, and John the Baptist as well as non-biblical prophets of Arabia like Hud and Salih. 'Messenger' is limited to men like Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad who are both prophets and messengers. (Esposito 2005, pp. 5–8)

T. Fahd (Fahd 1987, 103ff.), however, in relation to the term *Nubuwwa*, "prophecy", highlights an Islamic tradition which recites *la kihana ba'ad al-Nubuwwa*, no more divination after prophecy. Even though neither the Qur'an nor the Sunna abolish predicting *de facto*, they both despise belief in the *Kahin*, that is the oracle of antiquity, a man or woman practicing divination, because this now belongs exclusively to the Word of God and his prophet.

In the 14th century, prophecy is still considered an extension of prediction and the famous historian and sociologist Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) referred to it like a veil that separates men from what no one can know, except the one to whom God revealed this knowledge through dreams and a path of holiness. It is therefore wrong to assume, with a modernist approach, that Islam separates prophecy and divination, and this aspect is extremely important. Only the Prophets possess many qualities, including that of prediction; Muhammad, as "the Seal of the Prophets", is also the one who was finally able to take advantage of this ability.

This allows us to distinguish only in part the *Rasul* from the *Nabi*, confirming the slight confusion, which, however, does not affect the necessary prophetic continuity following Muhammad's death. The *Rasul*, in spite of this, is the one who, by bringing Word of God into the world, could assume an interpretative task in continuity with that of the *Nabi*.

To confirm this assumption, both in the Sunnite and the Shiite world, we need to observe the presence of eminent personalities who have not only managed to preserve the prophetic message, but also stimulate the exegetical interpretation of the Word and tradition, without which there is no capacity to "transcend" the divine through history.

Those who are not *Rasul* or *Anbiya* have taken on the task of preserving the interpretation of the revelation for centuries. From the beginning of the Islamic era, interpretative necessity kept prophecy alive even though Muhammad was no longer on this earth.

However, proto-Shi'ah, and the later Twelver Shiite, institutionalized this role from the 8th–9th centuries through the figures of the *Marja' al-Taqlid*, namely, the jurist-theologians who specialize in Qur'anic studies, but also in the work and writings of the most eminent Imam, with the fundamental task through the use of *Ijtihad* (mental or physical effort) for interpreting and placing in history not only Islamic law but the sources from which it draws inspiration (Sachedina 1988). Sunnite Islam, where the same role does not exist, has nevertheless historically ascertained the existence of Imams who have taken a lead similar to *Marja'*.

This is the case of the founders of the main Sunnite juridical schools: Imam Abu Hanifa (d. 767), forefather of Hanafism; Malik ibn Anas (d. 795) of Maliki; Imam al-Shafi'i (d. 820) of the same school; and finally Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (d. 855), the founder of the Hanbalite school. All of them played a significant role in the formative process of Islamic law, but also in the theological debate of their time, for example, the clash between the Mu'tazilite Kalam authors and Ibn Hanbal during the first half of the 9th century on the "dogma" of the Created-Uncreated Qur'an cannot be ignored (Abu Sahlieh 2008, 35ff.; Hallaq 1997).

Prophecy does not die out with the Prophet, but continues, pursuing its own path in relation to those who transcend the Word and the tradition to make it understandable to the people of their era.

The "literalist" Ibn Hazm (d. 1064) interpreted God as beyond our moral categories of just and unjust, the individual impact of *niyya*, denying causation de facto; for him, prophecy is possible because it is rooted in the revelation and in the manifestation of miracles. Ibn Hazm perfectly fits with the saying attributed to Tertullian: "*credo quia absurdum*". On the contrary, al-Ghazali (d. 1111), in *Ma'arij al-Quds*, produces a theoretical approach in considering prophecy something that is so elitist that only a very limited number of philosophers or mystics can understand what prophecy really is; only through "divine favour and gifts" can someone assume these paradigmatic qualities which are intellectual and imaginative as well as connected with a personal and individual gift, a quality link with the human soul and that denies every kind of political connection (*siyasa*): prophetic qualities are not political ones (Rubin 2014, pp. 94–95; Friedmann 1989, p. 63; Friedmann 1986, p. 192).

Finally, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), in his *Kitab al-Nubuwwat*, emphasized the importance of the moral imperative in the attempt to limit the personification of the interpretation made by mystics; however, his ethical approach is still based on *Fitra* and in the recognition of its absolute need to promote community rectitude: the prophet is the apex of this *Ummah* (Anjum 2012, 215ff.). The prophetic *visio* of the Islamic legacy after the end of Muhammad's prophetic phase is only partially linked with the emerging Qur'anic understanding rooted in an Abrahamic tradition: as David S. Powers and U. Rubin stressed in a different way but in unison, the prophecy and the prophetic are partially intermingled in a Jewish and Christian tradition in which the miraculous is added to the symbolic and physical identification of the prophecy.

Muhammad's protruding flesh is only a partial identification of prophecy; 'Abd al-Muttalib ibn Hashim's vows to sacrifice his son (the Prophet's father), the Prophet's presentation to his mother's family in Medina, as well as Muhammad's attendance at the political assembly with his grandfather at the Ka'bah are all aspects which find a parallel with the New and Old Testament narratives and all the symptomatic aspects that the Islamic tradition considered as fundamental to stress prophetic inheritance (Guillame 1955, pp. 69–82; Lings 2004, pp. 28–31). However, as the biography of the Prophet emphasized, Muhammad's rectitude usually needs the confirmation of God, not only in relation to saving the life of 'A'isha or in marrying Zaynab but in praying towards Mecca as well as in

considering all the juridical verses of the Qur'an, i.e., the Prophet is not autonomous as David and Salomon were, and unlike Samuel or Nathan were not.

In other words, the autonomy of the Prophets, as described in the Islamic tradition is completely given to God's real intention, contrary to the possibility of the Prophets themselves in making mistakes and errors, in contrast with those committed by David and Solomon, for example, in the Biblical tradition. It is as if, in the Islamic tradition, Prophet Muhammad is not allowed to concretely act in contrast with God's will as for Jesus ("not my will, but Yours be done" Mark 14, 36; Luke 22, 42) in the Gospels, but in contrast with some Prophets of the Old testament.

This "difficult" narrative, moreover, will tend to disappear when, with the end of the prophetic phase, the prophecy must be actualized, preserved and adapted to the passage of the centuries, in the theological, juridical and philosophical debates that the Islamic world was to face, above all in the first centuries.

In parallel, the Islamic classical tradition on prophecy, only briefly mentioned earlier, emphasized the necessary de-politicization of the Prophet as well as of Plato's philosopher in ancient times, in the attempt to really be prophetic, which can be compared with Muhammad's attempt to be politically *super-partes* among *ansar* and *muhajirin*, but also early converts and Meccans. His attempt to lessen the power of the pre-Islamic clan system for a more unitary new religious community will be unsuccessful (Guillame 1955, 627ff.; Lings 2004, pp. 316–20) in comparison to his attempt to preserve unity until, at least, his death in 632. It is in relation to this debate on the politicization of prophecy that a different reflection needs to be considered in mirroring Islam in contemporary times.

According to the canonization process of the Islamic tradition (Muslim 1955, no. 183 a, n. 2901, no. 2897; Al-Bukhari 2001, no. 3439, no. 3440, no. 5760; Abu Dawud, no. 4311, no. 4321; Al-Tirmidhi 1987, no. 4004, no. 3999; Al-Tirmidhi 1996, no. 7, no. 16, no. 21; Ibn Majah 2017, no. 959; Malik 2007, no. 1891), the last Prophet who will return to Earth to fight and kill the *Dajjal* (the Beast), at least on the Sunnite side, will be Jesus, the son of Mary.

As reported by Rubin (93–96) in al-Mughira ibn Shu'ba (d. 670, tradition number 6705), a prophet's companion, who reflected on the *Khatam an-Nabiyyin*, argued: "Suffice it to say that Muhammad is *khatam al-Nabiyyin*, because, we have been taught that Jesus is about to appear; and when he does, he will be a prophet before as well as after him, i.e., after Muhammad" (Ibn Abi Shayba 1979–1983, vols. 5, 9, pp. 110, 204; Bobzin 2011, pp. 565–66). The second coming of Jesus in Islamic eschatology is a prominent inter-religious Islamic-Christian overture in the attempt to harmonize the *Khatam* with an afterlife vision that cannot be considered as univocally Islamic.

Paraphrasing Jesus's final fight against the *Dajjal*: more than Muhammad, who was the Prophet of the Arabs par excellence and whose Word of God is in Arabic, Jesus's return is for all the monotheistic believers and it will be after him that God will judge them in relation to their singular revelations, as expressed in Qur'an 5:48. Ibn Qutayba (d. 890), as reported by Friedmann (1986, pp. 192–94; Sangaré 2018), interprets the second coming of Jesus as not linked with the abrogation of Muhammad's religion, also in agreement with the Qur'an, but in a chronological sense.

5. Conclusions: Prophecy and History

Jesus came as the awaited Messiah for Jews in the attempt to update the pact signed with God by Moses; unrecognized by the majority of them, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire in the 4th century, assuming a universal attitude which makes 'Isa ibn Maryam the only logical candidate in fighting the *Beast* against the eschatological armies of the unbelievers.

When the *Dajjal* and his forces reach Syria, Jesus will come down leading his armies and the *Beast* and his fellow believers, on seeing Jesus, will dissolve like salt in water. Islamic orthodoxy, albeit acknowledging and recognizing the second coming of Jesus, will preserve Muhammad as the *khatam an-Nabiyyin* in the spiritual and historical sense, questioning

whether Jesus is the last one in chronological order. Muhammad is the last carnal prophet of the Abrahamic tradition, who came to lead the Arabs, the last Semitic nation without a prophet. This interpretation supported by al-Mawardi and al-Zamakhshari is still rooted in the Arab assumption that Muhammad, dying without a male heir, is clearly “the Seal of the Prophets”.

In parallel, the Muslims recognizing the second coming of Jesus will be allowed to logically define him as the *Khatam an-Nabiyyin*, as “the Seal of Prophecy”, because if the last carnal prophet was Muhammad, the prophecy will necessarily remain active until the eschatological Jesus’ fight against the *Dajjal*.

“The Seal of the Prophets” can still assume a double opposing attitude, on the one hand, exclusively attributing to Islam only, as well as to a Muslim Jesus, a role of eschatological salvation and religious primacy (i.e., antithetical to 5:48). On the other hand, *al-Khatam an-Nabiyyin* may be interpreted by reference to the historical-prophetic figure of Muhammad as the last prophet of the Abrahamic tradition, but not as “the Seal of Prophecy”, starting from what the Qur’an, itself argues in an eschatological understanding (5:69, 2:62, 3:199, 29:46) about a shared salvation linked to the individual scriptures of belonging: the Torah for the Jews, the Gospels for the Christians and the Qur’an for the Muslims.

It is in relation to this Qur’anic suggestion that the narrative of the Covenant of the Prophet, even if historically questionable, could properly be considered an expression of the Islamic–Christian interconnection in a prophetic-eschatological dimension. The “*Parousia*”, indeed the second coming of Jesus, could be considered as prophetically shared in an Islamic–Christian messianic dimension both in relation to the Qur’anic “Seal of Holiness” as well as the undearth of ‘Isa ibn Maryam on the cross, which could finally reach a sort of logical conclusion.

The ‘Seal’ has to be understood as a prophetic revelation that is not relegated to *Revelatio in Historia*, but to a *Revelatio Historiae*. If the former stressed the importance of the Word of God in taking place in a specific historical phase as well as a geographical place, the latter makes it perennial and inter-religious, at least, until the end of the human existence on earth.

There is, however, a plural duplicity in identifying “the Seal of the Prophets/Prophecy”:

- That of Jesus as well as that of Muhammad,
- That of Christianity as well as that of Islam, and
- That of the Gospels and that of the Qur’an.

As stated above, Jesus and Muhammad are both Seals to the extent that their religions have respectively interpreted the eschatological and prophetic dimensions. Christianity is the Seal of Judaism and Islam is that of the Abrahamic narrative; the Qur’an is the last chronological revelation, which makes Jesus the last owner of a prophetic assumption in considering both eschatological traditions of Christianity and Islam. The Bible is the base in which the Qur’an is rooted and on which Prophets, prophecy and the hereafter have been shared in an updated Islamic narrative.

Finally, while the figures of prophets are historically and geographically limited, prophecy and the prophetic understanding have been able to elaborate and re-elaborate a very impressive number of narratives in the Abrahamic *milieu* that remained vital and actively interpreted.

Unfortunately, this historical-critical and religious excursus today finds a partial opposition in both Muslim and Christian spheres because excessively related to a logical-rational methodology. Regrettably, on the Christian side, the skepticism about the figure of Muhammad as a prophet remained deeply linked to his carnal and human behavioral attitude, while, on the Islamic side, the identification of ‘Isa ibn Maryam and its Christology in the Qur’an remained deliberately dark and overshadowed. Both aspects reflect on the different priorities that Christianity and Islam have posed on Christ and Muhammad.

- Christ’s humanity has been historically kidnapped since the early centuries to show a spiritual figure who forgives the sins of the world in close relation to the concept of

the original sin. The canonical Gospels' exaltation of his humanity on few occasions (in the Gethsemane's garden, for example) is evident.

- Muhammad, on the contrary, is representative of an Arab peninsula background in which praxis and materiality are extremely central in reaching the main target: the monotheistic advancement against the polytheism. This revolutionary step was achieved through alliances, matrimonial policies, economic agreements, etc., as well as faith in Allah. However, the Qur'an usually mixes up both, highlighting Muhammad as a human being only (as the previous Jewish prophets).

In parallel, the historical phase of difficult relations between the West and the Islamic world, as generally intended, increased the evidence of this suitability. The limits of this study reflect on the concrete absence in finding academic and religious figures willing to spend time in emphasizing, where possible, a reconciliatory understanding of the Abrahamic narratives in the eschatological and more general theological domains. However, there is huge potential to find religious interconnection between Islam and Christianity when considering prophecies in order to limit the "clash of civilizations" that characterizes our age. The reciprocal recognition that 'Isa ibn Maryam and Muhammad are prophetically interconnected in Christianity and Islam is the first step to frame an Abrahamic-inclusive understanding of our necessary coexistence.

Funding: This research received not external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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