

## Article

# The Covenants of the Prophet and the Subject of Succession

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**Abstract:** In order to advance their argument that Imām ‘Alī was the divinely and prophetically designated spiritual and political successor of the Prophet Muḥammad, Shī’ite Muslim scholars have primarily drawn evidence from the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth which was supplemented by reason and rational arguments. Oddly enough, in their quest to legitimize the Caliphate and Imāmate of *Ahl al-Bayt*, the People of the House of the Prophet, Shī’ite scholars have generally ignored one of the most important bodies of literature, namely, the letters, treaties and covenants of the Prophet Muḥammad. The following study examines the Messenger of Allāh’s Covenants with Christians and Jews in search of previously overlooked material on the subject of succession, shedding light on the state of Islām prior to the definitive rupture of the early Muslim community into Sunnīs and Shī’ites.

**Keywords:** Covenants of the Prophet; Imām ‘Alī; Caliphate; Imāmate; Jews; Christians; Zaydīs; Twelvers; Kitāb Dhimmat al-Nabī Muḥammad; Muḥammad’s Writ of Protection; Dhimmah; Ahl al-Kitāb; People of the Book; Maqnā

## 1. Introduction

The succession of the Prophet Muḥammad is one of the most contentious and divisive subjects in the history of Islām. The Sunnīs insist that the Messenger of Allāh did not provide specific instructions as to whom his successor should be, and that the decision ultimately rested with the elders of the community. Some even allege that the Messenger of Allāh implicitly appointed Abū Bakr. The Twelver Shī’ites assert that the Messenger of Allāh explicitly appointed ‘Alī as his political and spiritual successor and reject the legitimacy of Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, and ‘Uthmān. The Zaydī Shī’ites adopt an intermediate stance between Sunnism and Twelver Shī’ism, namely, between complete acceptance of the first three Caliphs and their complete repudiation. The Sulaymānī Zaydīs believe that Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, and ‘Uthmān acted erroneously but not sinfully. They insist that ‘Alī was the preferred candidate to be the first Caliph. The Jarūdiyyah Zaydīs reject Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, and ‘Uthmān. The Sulaymānī Zaydīs therefore place them in the category of Rawāfiḍ or Rejectors along with the Twelvers. Finally, the Ṣūfīs, in their attempt to extricate themselves from political conflict and focus on the inner dimension of Islām as opposed to worldly affairs, generally recognized Abū Bakr as the de-facto political successor of the Prophet while distinguishing ‘Alī as both the political and spiritual successor of the Prophet. If the Covenants of the Prophet can provide insight into Islām’s attitude towards interfaith relations, diversity, and pluralism, perhaps they can also shed light on the issue of succession. In the following study, I will carefully peruse the Muḥammadan Covenants in an effort to elucidate the Messenger of Allāh’s expressed will and intent in matters of succession.

## 2. The Succession of the Prophet in the *Sīrah*, the Covenants of the Prophet, the *Sunnah*, and Historical Sources

As we read in the *Sīrah* of (Ishāq 1987) (b. 704 CE), one of the earliest extant biographies of the Prophet Muḥammad, one of the first things that the Messenger of Allāh did after receiving revelation was to identify his divinely appointed successor:

‘Which of you, then, will help me in this, and be my brother, my executor and my successor amongst you?’ All remained silent, except for the youthful ‘Alī who spoke up: ‘O Prophet of God, I will be thy helper in this.’ The Prophet then placed his hand on ‘Alī’s neck and said, ‘This is my brother, my executor and my successor amongst you. Hearken unto him and obey him.’ (118)

The words employed were *akhī* or brother, *waṣī*, executor or testamentary trustee, and *khalīfah*, or successor which, contrary to Sunnī claims, are not in the least bit ambiguous in the Arabic language. If this tradition is indeed authentic, then it appears evident that ‘Alī was explicitly appointed as the successor of the Prophet from the very beginning of the mission of Muḥammad; namely, that the establishment of the Imāmate was co-dependent on the declaration of the final prophetic mission. In other words, the closure of the age of *nubūwwah* or prophecy would usher in the age of *wilāyah* or guardianship. As the Messenger of Allāh said, “I am the master of the prophets; my heir [‘Alī] is the master of the *waṣīyyūn*, and his *awṣiyyā*’ [the others Imāms] are the masters of the other *awṣiyyā*” (Amīr-Moezzi 1994, vol. 42, p. 170, note 211).

While there is a plethora of sources, both Sunnī and Shī‘ī, that are cited by Shī‘ite scholars to support their claims regarding the succession of ‘Alī, the same cannot be said of the Covenants of the Prophet which appear to have been ignored. While the correspondence of the Prophet includes hundreds of letters, which have been compiled from scores of sources and studied by scholars such as (Ḥamīdullāh 1956) and (Miyānī 1998), among others, the Covenants of the Prophet consist of dozens of documents.

The Christian Covenants include: the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Monks of Mount Sinai*, the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Christians of the World*, which survives in two versions, the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Christians of Najrān*, which includes short, medium, and long versions, the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Christians of Persia*, the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Assyrian Christians*, the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Armenian Christians*, the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Syriac Orthodox Christians*, and the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Coptic Christians*, among others. The Jewish Covenants include: the *Covenant of Madīnah*, the *Treaty of Maqna*, and the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Children of Israel* of which half a dozen versions survive. A single *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Samaritans* survives as does a *Covenant of the Prophet Muhammad with the Parsis*. Some Covenants of the Prophet Muḥammad are found in Muslim sources, both Sunnī and Shī‘ī. Others are found in Jewish, Samaritan, and Zoroastrian sources.

Although the Covenants of the Prophet Muḥammad are contentious in the estimation of some scholars, they have been in circulation since the early centuries of Islām. For a survey of scholarly opinion on the subject, spanning from the seventh century until the twenty-first century, readers are referred to “The Provenance of the Prophet’s Covenants” (Morrow 2017e, pp. 1–213). Since the publication of *The Covenants of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Christians of the World* in 2013, several peer-reviewed studies have been published addressing some of the polemics surrounding the Covenants of the Prophet. The works of (Considine 2016; El-Wakil 2016, 2017, 2019; Rane 2019; Morrow 2019) are the most pertinent in this regard. All in all, there is enough evident that the Covenants of the Prophet are “authentic” or “correct,” and hence credible, in the sense that they can be traced back, as far as is reasonably possible, to the Prophet, and in the sense that they are consonant with the spirit of the Qur’ān.

The purpose of the Covenants of the Prophet Muḥammad with the People of the Book is clear: to provide complete religious freedom, to place Jews, Samaritans, Christians, and Zoroastrians under the protection of Islām, to establish alliances, and to create a Confederation of Believers. As Aḥmed El-Wakīl has argued, the similarity between these documents, which were offered to the People of the Book throughout the Middle East, suggests that the Prophet Muḥammad was granting them on based on a Master Template (El-Wakīl 2017, pp. 469–526). In other words, the Messenger of Allāh was inviting people of faith to share the same set of rights and freedoms. And while the Covenants of the Prophet Muḥammad shed light on the pluralistic nature of early Islām, they also suggest that the Household of the Prophet, namely, his daughter Fāṭimah, her husband ‘Alī, and the Imāms from their descendants were appointed as guardians and protectors of the Covenants of Allāh and His Prophet.

The copy of the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Christians of the World* from 1630, which was first published by Gabriel Sionita in Paris, in both Arabic and Latin, and which dates from the fourth year of the *hijrah*, reads:

I commit myself to grant alliance and pledges to those who requested them from me and from all of my families from among the Muslims to give them the Covenant of Allāh and His Pledge and I place them under the safeguard of His Prophets, His Messengers, His Elect, His Saints, from the Muslims and the Believers, among the first of them and the last of them. (Morrow 2013, p. 233)

The copy of the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Christians of the World* from 1538, which was first published in 2013, and which dates from the fourth year of the *hijrah*, reads:

I started by committing myself to the Covenant, granted alliances and pledges to those who requested them from me and from all my Muslim Community. I gave them the Covenant of Allāh and His Pledge and I placed them under the safeguard of His Prophets, His Chosen Ones, His Friends from among all the Believers and the Muslims over time. (Morrow 2013, p. 237)

The *Covenants of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Christians of Najrān*, which dates from seventh year of the *hijrah*, reads:

I commit myself to an alliance and pledge with them on behalf of Allāh and I place them under the safeguard of His Prophets, His Elect, His Saints, the Muslims and the Believers, the first of them and the last of them. Such is my alliance and pact with them. (Morrow 2013, p. 297)

The terms employed in the Covenants of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Christians include *ahlī* or “families,” *aṣfiyyā’*, which means “Chosen Ones,” and *awliyyā’* which signifies “Friends of Allāh,” “Saints,” and “Guardians.” Since Shī’ism revolves around the centrality of the progeny of the Prophet, the term, *Ahl al-Bayt* is used prolifically in Twelver traditions. The terms *awliyyā’* and *aṣfiyyā’* are also typically associated with the Imāms of the Household of the Prophet. Take, for example, the following sacred saying in which the Messenger of Allāh asks “O Lord! Are these my Heirs [referring to the pre-existential luminous entities of the Imāms]?” The response is revealing:

O Muḥammad! These are my Friends [*awliyyā’ī*], My Pure Chosen Ones [*aṣfiyyā’ī*], and My Proofs after you for men; they are your Heirs and your Vicars and the best of My creatures after you. By My Glory and My Majesty! I will show My religion through them. (qtd. Amīr-Moezzī 1994, p. 227, note 664)

The Prophet Muḥammad describes his Covenants with the Christians as *Hujjāt Allāh* or “Proofs of Allāh for all Creation” (Morrow 2013, pp. 215, 233, 237), the very same expression that is used in Shī’ite traditions to describe the Twelve Imāms. As Moḥammad ‘Alī Amīr-Moezzī notes, in Twelver

Shī'ism, "the Imām is described as being the 'Proof of God' (*ḥujjat Allāh*) [and] the 'Vicar of God' (*khalīfat Allāh*)" (45).

The term '*ahd* or *mīthaq* is richly symbolic: it denotes the primordial Covenant between God and the pure beings in the First World of Shadows in which they attested that there was no god but Allāh, Muḥammad was the Messenger, 'Alī was the Leader of Believers, and his Heirs were the directors of God's Order and the Guardians of His Treasure (Amīr-Moezzī 1994, p. 34). It also denotes the sacred pact between God and Humanity in the Second World of Particles in which the elements of Adam's descendants bore witness to Allāh's unicity and would be destined to obedience or disobedience (35–37). Finally, the '*ahd* or *mīthaq* denotes the Covenant between the Prophet Muḥammad and the People of the Book. If all these meanings merge together, the Covenants of the Prophet would span worlds and transcend time and space.

As the Prophet Muḥammad makes explicitly clear, the Covenants with the People of the Book were the product of divine revelation. In the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Christians of Persia*, the Messenger of Allāh states that its words were "in accordance with the prompting of God" (Morrow 2017a, vol. 3, p. 5). The *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Assyrian Christians* commences with the words: "God has told me in a vision what to do, and I confirm His Command" (Morrow 2017a, vol. 3, p. 31). Version G of the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Jews* states that its words were revealed to the Messenger of Allāh (Morrow 2017a, vol. 3, p. 291). Version A of the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Jews* states that its words were "revealed ... from Allāh" (Morrow 2017a, vol. 3, p. 294). The *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Banū Zākān* also asserts that it was revealed to the Messenger of Allāh (Morrow 2017a, vol. 3, p. 534). Consequently, the Covenants of the Prophet Muḥammad could be categorized as sacred sayings of *ahādīth qudsiyyah* or treated as a body of literature within its own rights. For Charles Upton, at least, the Covenants of the Prophet represent "a third foundational source for Islām" that complements the Qur'ān and the Hadīth (Morrow 2013, p. xi).

Not only are the Covenants of the Prophet presented as extra-Qur'ānic revelations, they are described by the Messenger of Allāh as being among the weightiest that any *nabī mursal*, prophet sent, or *malak muqarrab*, angel of proximity, has ever received. This evokes images of Ghadīr Khumm and the *Ḥadīth al-Thaqalayn*, the Tradition of the Two Weighty Things, in which the Messenger of Allāh called upon Muslims to follow the Qur'ān and *Ahl al-Bayt*. As for the angel of proximity or angel drawn near, it is mentioned in many Covenants of the Prophet. The *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Syriac Orthodox Christians* is described as "the most solid Covenant and treaty that Allāh has given a Prophet or an angel drawn near in truth" (Morrow 2017a, vol. 3, p. 342). "With a firm bond do I bind this Compact," states the Messenger of Allāh in the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Christians of Persia*, "the like of which no prophets of the past ever have bound, and as no angels standing before God have found it easy to command" (Morrow 2017a, vol. 3, p. 5; Morrow 2013, p. 223). In the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Christians of the World* (Mount Carmel manuscript), the Messenger of Allāh describes his protection and his pact as "the most solid covenant that God has given a prophet sent or an angel drawn near" (Morrow 2017a, vol. 3, p. 20; Morrow 2013, p. 233).

The term *malak muqarrab*, angel of proximity or angel drawn near, is found in the following tradition attributed to the Prophet Muhammad: "There is a moment (*waqt*) for me with God, which neither an intimate angel (*malak muqarrab*), nor a messenger-prophet (*nabī mursal*) can share with me" (Hussainī 1983). This tradition, which is not found in canonical books of *ahādīth*, but which is frequently cited in Ṣūfī works, is also translated as "I have a moment with God (*lī ma'a Allāh waqt*) in which no angel drawn near (*malak muqarrab*) or prophet sent (*nabī mursal*) rivals me" (Böwering 2012, p. 108). Reference to the angel of proximity also appears in a saying shared by several of the Twelve Imāms: "Our teaching is arduous; the only ones who can withstand it are a prophet sent to men, an angel of proximity, or an initiated one whose heart has been tested by God for faith" (Amīr-Moezzī 1994, pp. 5, 55, 182, note 283; Mavānī 2013, p. 46).

References to the *malak muqarrab* are found in (Sa'dī 1965) (d. 1291 CE) *Gulistān* or *Rose Garden* (119), the *Arā'is al-bayān fī hadā'iq al-Qur'ān* of Rūzbihān al-Baqlī (d. 1209 CE) (Godlas 1991), Mutannabī's (d. 965 CE) *Panegyrics* (Hāmori 1991), and the work of Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. 1021 CE) (Walker 1999), among many others. Since the *malak muqarrab* tends to be mentioned in early Ṣūfī-Shī'ite works, the Covenants of the Prophet seem to surface from the same current of Islām. For Sayyid Ḥaydar Amulī (d. 1385), Shī'ism and Ṣūfism were one and the same (Naṣr 14). As (Tihirānī 2003) expresses, "the straight path is one which combines the exoteric and the esoteric" (1). For proponents of *'irfān/taṣawwuf*, true Muslims are believers who are put to the test. What greater test than to observe the Covenants of the Prophet Muḥammad in dealing with the People of the Book? Some Sunnīs of the Umayyad and 'Abbāssid lines might argue that the Shī'ite and Ṣūfī traits found in the Covenants of the Prophet suggest that they were forged. However, the Sunnīs of the anti-Umayyad and anti-'Abbāssid lines, along with Shī'ites and Ṣūfīs, would argue otherwise.

Further evidence that the Muḥammadan Covenants emerged from the traditional, civilizational, Islām centered around *sharī'ah*, *ṭarīqah*, and *ḥaqīqah*, is found in the *Covenants of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Jews*. The works in question, which were previously studied by (Hirschfeld 1903; Wāsi'ī 1928; Goitein 1971; Rivlin 1935; Ahroni 1981, 1998; Nini 1983; Gamlieli 1978; Firestone 2014), are even more explicit in espousing the central spiritual and political role of *Ahl al-Bayt*. In Version H of the document, which was found in Egypt, and which was published by Hartwig Hirschfeld in 1903, we read that "The Family of the House of the Messenger of Allāh and all the Muslims are charged to fulfill all that is in this letter" (Morrow 2017c, vol. 2, p. 289). Rather than using the word *ahl* or family, as appears in the Christian Covenants, the Jewish Covenants employ the term *ahl al-bayt Rasūl Allāh* or the People of the House of the Messenger of Allāh, the meaning of which cannot be clearer.

The *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Christians of Persia*, which was granted to the Armenian Christians, also specifies that Muslim men may only marry Christian women in *mut'ah* or fixed-term marriages as opposed to *nikāḥ* or permanent marriages (Morrow 2013, p. 225). If this is correct, then this document would support the Twelver Shī'ite narrative since both Zaydī and Ismā'īlī Shī'ites insist upon its prohibition. If some of the other Muḥammadan Covenants refer to the rulers that would succeed the Prophet as *sultāns*, the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Christians of Persia* speaks of the ruler as the Imām, once again, in keeping with Shī'ite tradition. As we read, "Those who travel ... shall not be subject to land taxes, except that in the event any of them shall fall heirs to property on which the Imām has a legal claim" (Morrow 2013, p. 224). Similarly, the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Jews* (Version H and A) also describes the legitimate successor of the Messenger of Allāh as being an Imām.

Another Shī'ite characteristic is found in the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Assyrian Christians* where the mention of Imām 'Alī is followed by *'alayhi al-salām* or "peace be upon" in accordance with Shī'ite practice (Morrow 2013, p. 314). This feature is also found in Version H of the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Jews*. The document in question also promises that "If any of you follows the religion of the Messenger of Allāh and his command, he shall have one fourth of what the Messenger of Allāh has ordered to be given to the People of his House" (Morrow 2017c, vol. 2, p. 289).

As is evident, the Messenger of Allāh promised that any rabbinical Jewish converts to Islām would receive one fourth of the *khums* destined to *Ahl al-Bayt*, the People of the House, namely, Muḥammad, Fāṭimah, 'Alī, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn. Tellingly, the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the House of Salmān*, which was directed to Zoroastrian priests, also speaks of *khums*, in this case, in the context of exemption (Morrow 2017b, vol. 2, pp. 444–45). Mentioned in the Qur'ān, and practiced during the life of Muḥammad, *khums* virtually disappeared from the Sunnī scene after the passing of the Prophet, only being maintained and mandated by the Shī'ites of *Ahl al-Bayt*, namely, the partisans of the Progeny of the Prophet. If they insisted so much upon preserving the *khums*, they must have had a basis, the source of which could have included the Covenants of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Jews and Zoroastrians.



According to the account that accompanies the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Samaritans*, the religious leaders of the latter requested that the Messenger of Allāh's treaty be re-written in the handwriting of Imām 'Alī. It was as if they were aware that 'Alī was the appointed successor and wanted to ensure that their protections would not be revoked after the Messenger of Allāh passed away. Likewise, the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Banū Zākān* reassures this Jewish sub-tribe that "None of your rights shall be infringed upon so long as you listen to the Messenger of Allāh or the messenger of the Messenger of Allāh" (Morrow 2017d, vol. 2, p. 534). Who, then, was the messenger of the Messenger of Allāh? A mere envoy or emissary or someone of far greater significance? The answer appears to be found in the *Treaty of Maqnā*.

Cited or mentioned in Wāqidi (2013, d. 823 CE), Sa'd (2001, d. 845 CE), Zanjaway (1986, d. 865 CE), Balādhuri (1866, d. 892 CE), Kathīr (Kathīr 2013, d. 1373 CE), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (Qayyim 1997, d. 1350 CE), among many others, and dated toward the end of the prophetic mission, the *Treaty of Maqnā* promises the sons of Ḥanīnah, which can also be vocalized as Ḥabībah or Janbah, who were Jews of Maqnā, along with the rest of the inhabitants of the city located near Aylah, that "There will be no chief [*amīr*] over you other than one of you or one of the Messenger of Allāh's people [*Ahl Rasūl Allāh*]" (Morrow 2017c, vol. 2, p. 285; see also, Sa'd 1993, vol. 1, part 2, p. 29; Balādhuri 1866, p. 59; Gil 1997, p. 29; Qureshi 1991, p. 182). A similar promise is found in Version H of the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Jews*, which asserts that "You shall have no other ruler [*walī*] except out of your own midst, or from the Family of the Messenger of Allāh" (Morrow 2017c, vol. 2, p. 289).

If the version of the Jewish Covenant transmitted by Ibn Sa'd and Balādhuri says that the Jews of Maqnā will have no other *amīr* (prince, leader, commander, ruler, chief) than their own or a member from the Household of the Prophet, Version H, found in the Cairo Geniza, uses the word *walī* (guardian, custodian, protector, helper, friend). While *amīr* evokes *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* or the Leader of the Believers, the term *walī* has a quintessentially Shī'ite sense for 'Alī is the *Walī* of Allāh, the Chief of the *Awliyyā'* who was granted *Wilāyah* or Guardianship over Islām and believing Muslims. For El-Wakīl (2016, p. 41), "The Jewish Covenant's stipulation that the Jews may have a ruler either from among themselves or 'from the Family of the Messenger of Allāh' denotes a strong, familial bond between both communities which came to be established through the Prophet's marriage to Ṣafīyyah".

As the Prophet professed in his "Letter to the Jews," "This is a letter from Muḥammad, the Messenger of Allāh, the brother of Moses ibn 'Imrān, and his co-missionary" (Morrow 2013, p. 53). As an Arab, and descendant of Ishmael, the Prophet was therefore proud to connect himself, by marriage, to the Jewish people or descendants of Isaac. However, the significance is more profound than El-Wakīl proposes. The Prophet was not simply connecting two ordinary families. The family of Muḥammad, the *Ahl al-Bayt*, was becoming bound to the family of Aaron, the *Kohanim*. The Imāms from *Ahl al-Bayt* would assume the role of religious authorities in Islām in the same fashion that the direct descendants of Aaron, the brother of Moses, had assumed priestly authority in Judaism.

If the Prophet Muḥammad really wanted Muslims to select his successors based on *shurā* or consultation of tribal elders, why would he have promised his subjects that either they would be ruled by their own representatives or they would be governed by a person from the Family of the Messenger of Allāh? We are not dealing with family ties for short-term personal or political purposes. *Ahl Rasūl Allāh* or the Family of the Messenger of Allāh is a loaded term. Stating that they would rule directly or indirectly is highly significant. The Prophet was laying the foundation of what was supposed to be an enduring religious and political model: the *wilāyah* or guardianship of the Imāms of *Ahl al-Bayt*. And what were they entrusted to guard? The rights and freedoms found in the Covenants of God and His Prophet: the Islāmic Declaration of Divinely Granted Human Rights.

Version A of the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Jews*, which was published by (Ahroni 1998), is the most elaborate of all when it comes to describing the position of the Imām as head of the Muslim Ummah. It reads: "And they should pay it [the poll-tax] to the Imām who is entrusted by God, the one who guides [to the true path], the just, the one who dispenses justice" (Morrow 2017c, vol. 2, pp. 294–95).

In other words, the *jizyah* is to be paid to the Imām, a leader who is assigned by God, guides to the true teachings of Islām in all its dimensions, both exoteric and esoteric, who is just, and who administers justice. Version A of the *Covenant of the Prophet with the Jews* describes the first necessary attribute of the Imām as follows: “And the Imām must have the following qualities. First, he must be acquainted with the knowledge of justice, God fearing and pure” (Morrow 2017c, vol. 2, p. 295).

This view is consistent with Twelver Shī’ite teachings which assert that the successors of the Prophet, namely, the Twelve Imāms from *Ahl al-Bayt*, were appointed by God, and were just, pious, and pure. The key here is pure or *ṭāhir*, a word with deep spiritual significance and an allusion to the Event of the Cloak which is so central to Twelver Shī’ism. To be succinct, the Prophet gathered ‘Alī, Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, and Fāṭimah under his cloak, announced that they were his *Ahl al-Bayt*, and received the revelation of the thirty-third verse of the thirty-third chapter of the Qur’ān, known as *Ayat al-Taṭhīr* or Verse of Purification, which states: “Allāh’s wish is but to remove uncleanness far from you, O People of the House, and purify you with a thorough purification.”

Although it is alleged that the Covenants of the Prophet with the Jews were forged by Yemenite Jews to seek favor from their Zaydī Shī’ite overlords, the insistence on the immaculate nature of the Imām is inconsistent with such claims as only the Sevens and Twelver Shī’ites believe in the doctrine of *iṣmah* or Imāmic infallibility. As far as the Zaydīs are concerned, their Imāms are divinely inspired human beings. They are not, however, *maṣ’umīn* or infallibles. Why would a Jewish fraudster invoke an Ismā’īlī and Ithnā-‘Asharī dogma when appealing to Zaydī sentiments?

Version A of the *Covenant of the Prophet with the Jews* describes the second necessary attribute of the Imām as follows: “he must lead a life of piety and renunciation of the world and its gain. [He must be] a warrior against the heathens and should provide the [appropriate] finances for the *jihād* against the heretics; he must eject oppressors and establish the rights of the oppressed in the face of his oppressor before God. He should have compassion for the weak and the poor” (Morrow 2017c, vol. 2, p. 295).

The attitude towards the lesser *jihād*, the physical struggle against the oppressors and in defense of the downtrodden, is consistent with Shī’ite teachings, according to which only the Just Imām can declare an offensive war and in whose absence only defensive wars are allowed (Amīr-Moezzī 1994, p. 135). The Islāmic attitude to warfare is comparable with the one found in the Old Testament, namely, the law of retribution, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, with one important distinction. Although Islām calls for justice, it also encourages forgiveness: “And the retribution for an evil act is an evil one like it, but whoever pardons and makes reconciliation—his reward is [due] from Allāh” (42:40). The Qur’ān describes the believers as “those who pardon the people” (3:134) and those who are “patient and forgive” (42:43). Since, the Hour is approaching, Allāh advises people of faith to “forgive with gracious forgiveness” (15:85).

Version A of the *Covenant of the Prophet with the Jews* describes the third necessary attribute of the Imām as follows: “he should be valiant at the time of the *jihād*, wars and battles” (Morrow 2017c, vol. 2, p. 295). Evidently, any leader needs to be valiant, courageous, and altruistic. However, this does not necessarily mean that the Imām needs to expose himself to danger unnecessarily. The bravery of Imām ‘Alī in battle was legendary. Imām al-Ḥasan and Imām al-Ḥusayn also proved themselves formidable fighters in Persia and North Africa and the final battle of the latter at Karbalā’ was epic in proportions. What is more, all the Twelve Imāms met death through martyrdom. Imām ‘Alī suffered the death-blow of a sword while praying in his mosque. Imām al-Ḥusayn died in glorious battle. And the rest of the Imāms were poisoned by the oppressive rulers of the age.

Version A of the *Covenant of the Prophet with the Jews* describes the fourth necessary attribute of the Imām as follows: “he must be of the progeny of Fāṭimah, the daughter of the Prophet” (Morrow 2017c, vol. 2, p. 295). This belief, namely, that the Imām of the Muslim Ummah had to be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad through his daughter Fāṭimah and his cousin and son-in-law Imām ‘Alī is shared by all Shī’ite groups. As the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Jews* explains, these qualities must be embodied by any legitimate Imām; otherwise: “Whoever does not possess these qualities, is not entitled to the Imāmate and the poll-tax” (Morrow 2017c, vol. 2, p. 295).

Although Version A of *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Jews* does contain elements that resonate with Zaydī beliefs, it also contains elements that appeal to Sevener and Twelver ones. Rather than evidence late forgery, these aspects might point to the document's antiquity, namely, predating the development of doctrines and dogmas that eventually differentiated Shī'ite groups.

The *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Jews* was known to Ibn al-Sabbāgh (d. 1451 CE), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (Qayyim 1997, d. 1350), Dhahabī (Dhahabī 2001, d. 1348), Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328 CE), and al-Nawawī (d. 1277) (El-Wakīl 2017, pp. 27–31). It was invoked in Natan'el al-Fayyūmī's *Bustān al-'uqūl* in the twelfth century CE. It was familiar to al-Khāṭib al-Baghdādī (d. 1071) (El-Wakīl 2017, pp. 27–28). The document was also cited in shortened form by Ibn Ḥibbān in the tenth century, along with Balādhurī (d. 892 CE), Ibn Zanjawayh (d. 865 CE), Ibn Sa'd (d. 845 CE), and Wāqidī (d. 823 CE), in the ninth century CE. According to the analysis of Hartwig Hirschfeld, the antiquity of Version H, which was found in the Cairo Geniza, "is so great that we may safely date it from the tenth century, if not still earlier" (174). Clearly, the document, in one form or another, dates to the early days of Islām. Consequently, one cannot speak of forgeries. At the very most, one can speak of reworking of ancient material by contraction or expansion.

If Version A of the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Jews* is indeed genuine, it could explain the crisis that took place during the Caliphate of Abū Bakr. As is well-known, many of the tribes of Arabia revolted when Abū Bakr, as opposed to 'Alī, was appointed as the heir of the Prophet. If the Jews, Judeo-Christians, Christo-Muslims, Judeo-Muslims, and Muslims had been informed, by the Prophet himself (in writing in the cases of the Jews) that the successor of the Prophet had to belong to the progeny of Muḥammad, then it is no wonder that they revolted against the first Caliph during the so-called *riddah* wars. If the Messenger of Allāh had instructed them specifically that no *jizyah* was to be paid to any leader who did not possess the four specified qualities, then they had every right to refuse to pay it on principle. If this was the case, then the revolts that followed the death of the Prophet were wars of integrity as opposed to wars of apostasy.

Besides the *jizyah* and property taxes, Version A of the *Covenant of the Prophet with the Jews* affirms that the Imām is entitled *khums*, namely, one-fifth of any mining activity:

"It is incumbent upon the subjects to pay the Imām property taxes, and the dues to which he is entitled, one-fifth of the mines of the land and its booties, and its resources. He will take that which is incumbent upon the Jews, the protected People, in accordance with what they have in terms of property. Those who [travel] by land or sea, own camels, boats, male slaves and female slaves—each will pay five *qaflas* annually, and the poor [will pay] one and a half *qafla*. But the poor should have food for twelve months and clothing for one year; if not, he should be exempt from payment." (Morrow 2017c, vol. 2, p. 295)

The extent of *khums* mentioned above is consistent with both Zaydī and Ja'farī jurisprudence. The same applies to the factors used to determine whether a person is poor or not. Such jurisprudential positions could have been derived in part from the *Covenants of the Prophet with the Jews*.

Not only does Version A of the *Covenant of the Prophet with the Jews* identify that the only leader authorized to receive *jizyah* is the righteous, divinely appointed, just, and pure Imām, it places obligations upon him; namely:

"The [Imām] will be entitled to the *jizyah*, only after having granted them [the Jews] protection, three days eastward, and three days westward, and three days to the north, and three days to the south. This accords with the zodiac, they [the Children of Israel] being twelve tribes. And [the Imām] should grant them the protection of God, and the protection of the Messenger and his community." (Morrow 2017c, vol. 2, p. 295)

In other words, there are no rights without obligations. In short, no ruler has the right to collect *jizyah* unless he fulfils his obligation of protecting the covenanted Jewish community.



After completing the Farewell Pilgrimage on the 10th year of the *hijrah*, the Messenger of Allāh stopped at the Pond of Ghadīr Khumm on the 18th of *Dhū al-Ḥijjah*, a date that corresponds with March 10th of the year 632 CE. It was there that he received the revelation: “O Messenger! Deliver what has been sent down to you from your Lord; and if you do not do it, you have not delivered His message (at all); and Allāh will protect you from the people” (Qur’ān 5:67). There, in the presence of 120,000 Muslims, he delivered a three-hour long sermon, in which he stated:

“It seems the time has approached when I shall be called away (by Allāh) and I shall answer that call. I am leaving for you two precious things and if you adhere to them both, you will never go astray after me. They are the Book of Allāh and my Progeny, that is my *Ahl al-Bayt*. The two shall never separate from each other until they come to me by the Pool (of Paradise).”

Then the Messenger of Allāh continued: “Do I not have more right over the believers than what they have over themselves?” The people cried and answered: “Yes, O Messenger of Allāh.” It was then that the Messenger of Allāh held up ‘Alī’s hand and said: “For whoever I am his master [*mawlā*], ‘Alī is also his master [*mawlā*]. O God, love those who love him, and be hostile to those who are hostile to him.” Immediately after concluding his sermon, the following verse of the Qur’ān was revealed: “This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islām as your religion.” (Qur’ān 5:3).

Most *aḥādīth* or prophetic traditions are *aḥad*; namely, they were transmitted by a single person. Such sayings are not facts. Other traditions are *mutawātir* or continuous; namely, they were transmitted by numerous authorities. *Ḥadīth* scholars differ as to how many narrators are needed for a tradition to be considered continuous. Some place the minimum at four, five, seven or ten. Others raise the bar to forty or even seventy.

The *Ḥadīth* of Ghadīr Khumm, however, has been transmitted by the Household of the Prophet: ‘Alī, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. It was transmitted by one hundred and ten companions of the Prophet, including ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, ‘A’ishah, Abū Hurayrah, Abū Dharr al-Ghiffārī, Salmān al-Fārsī, Zubayr ibn al-‘Awwām, Jābir ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī, among many others. It was transmitted by eighty-three followers of the companions of the Prophet. It was transmitted by three hundred and sixty Sunnī scholars from the second to the fourth century after the *hijrah*. It was also transmitted by all the major Shī‘ī scholars, such as Kulaynī, Qummī, Mufīd, and Sharīf al-Murtazā. The *Ḥadīth* of Ghadīr Khumm is authentic according to Islāmīc scholarly standards, and not only that: it is arguably a historical fact according to Western scholarly standards. Since it is pointless to expound upon the evident, readers are directed to *al-Ghadīr fī al-Kitāb wa al-Sunnah*, the eleven-volume encyclopedic work by ‘Allāmah Āminī. If all this evidence is indeed genuine, then all that can be said is that the case is closed.

It is important to note that during the Event of Ghadīr Khumm, the Prophet Muḥammad used the term *mawlā*, which means “master,” “guardian,” or “one vested with guardianship or authority,” to refer to ‘Alī or, in some sources, *walī*, which essentially means the same thing, namely, “friend,” “guardian,” “saint” or “one vested with guardianship or authority.” The Prophet was granting *wilāyah* or guardianship to ‘Alī, whom he described as a *mawlā*, master, or one invested with guardianship, in the same fashion that he was granting Covenants of the Prophet in the name of the *awliyyā’* who would succeed him, namely, those invested with guardianship.

If we are to accept the aforementioned sources found in prophetic traditions, prophetic biographies, prophetic history, and prophetic covenants, then the evidence appears to support the claim that Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh, the Messenger of Allāh, explicitly designated ‘Alī as his spiritual and political successor at the beginning of this mission, during the entire interval of his mission, and at the very end of his mission, and that he entrusted the Imāms of *Ahl al-Bayt* to watch over Islām and ensure that the rights and freedoms that God and His Prophet had granted all people were respected for all times to come.

Allegations of forgery could be presented to counter such claims; however, these would be nonsensical. Opponents of the Covenants of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Christians claimed that they were concocted by Christians. Opponents of the Covenants of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Jews alleged that they were forged by Jews. Opponents of the Covenants of the Prophet with the Samaritans postulated that they were fabricated by the Samaritans. Opponents of the Covenants of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Zoroastrians pretended that they were forged by Zoroastrians. Will the narrative now conveniently change to assert that all the Covenants of the Prophet Muḥammad were falsified by Shī'ites? Or were the Christians, Jews, Samaritans, and Zoroastrians, all the People of the Book, collaborating with Shī'ite "heretics" in some grand conspiratorial scheme?

The *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Assyrian Christians* surfaced in a Christian community in upper Mesopotamia, in what is now modern-day Turkey, that was surrounded by Sunnī Muslims. The *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Christians of Najrān* originated in the city of its namesake in which Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians co-existed. It was found Ḥabīb the monk in the Bayt al-Ḥikmah or House of Wisdom of Bīr Manthā, a suburb of Baghdād, in the ninth century and included in the *Chronicle of Seert*. The city in question, located in southeastern Turkey, has been traditionally surrounded by Sunnī Muslims. The copy of the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Christians of the World* from 1630 was reportedly found at Mount Carmel in a Sunnī environment. The copy of the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Christians of the World* from 1538 was taken from Egypt at a time the country was solidly Sunnī.

The *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Samaritans* was included in the *Kitāb al-Tārīkh* of Abū al-Faṭḥ al-Sāmīrī, a fourteenth century chronicler who was apparently based in Palestine, a Sunnī milieu. Version H of the *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Jews* does indeed come from the Cairo Geniza and could have been copied during Fāṭimid Shī'ite times; however, it also appears as the *Treaty of Maqnā*, cited by Ibn Sa'd (d. 845 CE) and Balādhurī (d. c. 892 CE), during 'Abbāsīd times. The claim that it originates in a Shī'ite forgery, which was made by Ḥamīdullāh (1956) and Qureshī (1991), is therefore debunked (Morrow 2013, p. 355; Morrow 2017c, vol. 2, p. 284).

One of the most important studies on the *Treaty of Maqnā* to date was authored by El-Wakīl (2016, p. 80) who has forced scholars, including myself, to reconsider chronological considerations. The comparison he made of the Jewish and Muslim versions of the document "reveals the extent to which the latter has been manipulated". While I was initially inclined to conclude that the version of the *Treaty of Maqnā* related by Ibn Sa'd and Balādhurī was relatively trustworthy, and that other versions became bloated due to Jewish additions, I must bow in the face in evidence for, as El-Wakīl (2016) has painstakingly proven:

A comparison of the Covenant with the Jews of Khaybar and Maqnā and al-Balādhurī's Compact demonstrates that there was a deliberate manipulation of early Islāmic history to suit the powers that be and this despite the clear, staunch warning of the Prophet not to alter the covenants. (p. 62)

In other words, the version of the *Treaty of Maqnā* found in the Cairo Geniza, namely, Version H of the *Covenant of the Prophet Muhammad with the Jews*, which is the oldest of all according to Hartwig Hirschfeld (174), appears to be authentic while the version passed down by Muslim sources, which was based upon a second-hand fragmentary rendition, as per Balādhurī's informant (173), seems to have been trimmed and shortened for reasons of state. However, even in its censored and truncated version, it establishes, without doubt, that the Prophet Muḥammad had reconciled with the Jews and that there are no grounds for anti-Semitism in Islām.

Although one Jewish Covenant was discovered in Egypt, the others were passed down by Jewish families and communities in the Yemen. While it is true that there were Zaydī Shī'ites in the region, they were always a minority: currently, they represent 44% of the population. Why, then, would the Jews try to endear themselves to a persecuted Shī'ite Muslim minority that was historically targeted by the Sunnī powers of the region and the greater Muslim world? It simply makes no sense.

The *Covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the House of Salmān* appears in Persia—not in Ṣafavid times, but at a time when Persia was almost exclusively Sunnī. The document surfaces in the works of Sunnī *ḥadīth* scholars such as Abū al-Shaykh (d. 979 CE) and Abū Nu‘aym (d. 1038 CE), only appearing in Shī‘ite sources a century later when Ibn Shahrāshūb (d. 1192 CE) included a recension. This version was reproduced integrally by Majlisī (d. 1698), the Ṣafavid Shī‘ite scholar, five hundred years later in his *Biḥār al-anwār*. If the Shī‘ites forged the Covenants of the Prophet, why were they among the last to record them?

### 3. Conclusions

As can be appreciated from this short study, the Messenger of Allāh described ‘Alī as a *walī*, *waṣī*, *mawla*, and *khalīfah* in authentic *aḥadīth* or prophetic traditions. When the Prophet of Islām granted Covenants of Protection to Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians, he did so in the name of the *aṣfiyyā’* and *awliyyā’*, namely, in the name of the chosen ones and the righteous friends of Allāh who were vested with guardianship over the community. He specifically told the Jews of Hanīnah that nobody would rule over them other than one of them or a member of *Ahl Rasūl Allāh*, the Family of the Messenger of Allāh. He specifically told the Yemenite Jews that nobody would rule over them other than a member of his *Ahl al-Bayt*. Who was the Messenger of Allāh describing when he spoke of the *aṣfiyyā’*, *ahlī*, *awṣiyyā’*, *mawālī*, *khulafā’*, *Ahl Rasūl Allāh*, and *Ahl al-Bayt*? Who were the chosen ones, the progeny, the executors, the masters vested with authority, the successors, the Household of the Messenger of Allāh, and the People of the House other than the Twelve Imāms from *Ahl al-Bayt*?

Although the supporting arguments may seem subtle and elusive, the Imāms of *Ahl al-Bayt* appear to be the successors of the Prophet and the protectors of the People of the Book mentioned in the Covenants. The Covenants of the Prophet are made in the name of God’s Elect and Saints, namely, the followers of esoteric religion. They warn that any Sultāns, namely, followers of exoteric religion, will be damned if they violate them. In other words, the Muḥammadan Covenants appear to distinguish between spiritual and political authorities. Could this be an indication that these documents post-date the Sunnī-Shī‘ī split? I think not. On the contrary, their lack of sectarian specificity suggests that they pre-date it. Apart from certain Jewish Covenants that have a slightly stronger Shī‘ite taste, and which might provide a doctrinal and jurisprudential basis for Zaydīs and Twelvers, the Shī‘ism in the rest of the Muḥammadan Covenants is subtle. In fact, it reminds one of early Imāmism which was very much a synthesis of Shī‘ism and Ṣūfism. It could also recall traditional forms of Ṣūfism which trace their spiritual lineages back to the Imāms of *Ahl al-Bayt*. The Covenants of the Prophet do not contain any tell-tale traces of Christian, Jewish, Sunnī, Ṣūfī or Shī‘ite forgery. They are not Fiver, Sevens or Twelver frauds. They seem to be the product of an early Muslim milieu. They contain the seeds that would sprout to form different schools of thought, jurisprudence, and spirituality. They appear to belong to the proto period, the original or primitive period of Islām.

As much as they challenge our understanding of the Prophet Muḥammad and early Islām, the Covenants of the Prophet with the Christians, Jews, Samaritans, and Zoroastrians are not forgeries: if anything, extensive research suggests that they are the embodiment of integrity on paper. They demonstrate that the Muslim community deviated from the teachings of the Messenger of Allāh in major ways: firstly, in the failure to follow his divinely and prophetically appointed successors, the Imāms of *Ahl al-Bayt*; secondly, in the failure to follow, apply, and implement the Covenants of the Prophet which were entrusted by God, the Prophet, and His Heirs; and thirdly, by failing to embrace democracy in the absence of a divinely appointed Imām.

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