

## REVIEW ARTICLE

*Muhammad is Not the Father of Any of Your Men: The Making of the Last Prophet*, by David S. Powers. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009. 376 pp., 7 illus. Hb \$55.00/£36.00. ISBN-13: 9780812241785.

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Keywords: Muhammad, inheritance, Quran codex

Revisionism in Islamic Studies has finally become a farce. Like any high-brow farce this monograph is a mixture of gravitas and flippancy. The claims made here by Powers are not humble or confined to minor issues; Powers is claiming that he has now illuminated for us the origins of Islam, and all thanks to a single word. The monograph reviewed here consists of a series of hypothetical or, rather, fanciful presuppositions that are hardly sustainable, let alone cogent; confusing and confused, they claim both one thing and its opposite at the same time. The flawed nature of this monograph, however, should not prevent us from seeing its contribution to the field, a contribution that is a by-product of the monograph and is made despite the intentions of the author. This contribution far outweighs the silliness of its substantive claims and makes up for the tediousness of reading it. First of all, this monograph leaves no doubt as to who is the leading scholar in quranic studies: François Déroche. To paraphrase a Lebanese proverb, Déroche is now the giant jar whose handles we, the not-so-tall, are all trying to reach.<sup>1</sup> If you are going to revise the outline of early Islamic history, you had better fit your story into the timeline supplied now by Déroche; for the manuscripts brought to light by Déroche are not easily dismissed. To this end, Powers attempts to fit his theory inside the parameters of Déroche's scholarship. The work of Déroche is such that it has changed the manner of doing quranic studies; by making the study of codices the center of our research on the Quran, Déroche has brought quranic studies to a level never before seen in Anglo-American scholarship, harkening back to the work of the German school on the eve of the WWII.

The second contribution of this study is that since the Quran was codified early, very early it seems, alterations to the Quran were also minis-

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1. See now François Déroche, *La transmission écrite du Coran dans les débuts de l'islam: Le codex Parisino-petropolitanus* (Brill, 2009).

cule, apparently only the invention of the word *kalālah* and the addition of one verse at the end of Sura 4.

#### Codex Arabe 328a

Powers builds much of his argument around his analysis of the Codex Arabe 328a which has been studied by Déroche. The flaws in his analysis are numerous and not difficult to point out. I will start with the most glaring, the factual. Codex Arabe 328a has a correction to the word *kalālah* in verse 4:12. It was originally written as k-l-h. The word was corrected to k-l-l-h by the same original scribe adding the missing letter L, (the plain script (*scriptum plenum*) with vowels is *kalālah*, since medial long vowel “ā” was usually not written in this early codex). The explanation offered for the correction of k-l-h to k-l-l-h in this codex is the topic of Powers’ monograph. Powers believes that the correction was due to a shift in the perception of the character of Muhammad by the Muslims that necessitated the claim that he was a childless man (which he was, but more on this later). Be that as it may, the correction of the word is according to Powers the result of an attempt to cover up for the original understanding of the nature of Muhammad and thereby to change the meaning of the Quran.

It is remarkable that Powers does not consider the possibility that the scribe of Codes Arabe 328a had committed a mistake in the transcribing of this word. There is actually a word for this very type of scribal error: haplography (the accidental omission of a letter or letter group that should be repeated in writing). The strongest evidence that this particular transcription was one such mistake is that the original scribe himself went back and corrected the omission. It is not as if Powers is not aware of such mistakes; in his very analysis of the same verse he does affirm without the slightest hesitation that Scribe A (the original scribe of the Codex) did write *lahu* as *lahā* and then corrected the word back to *lahu* (the orthography in Arabic of these two words is very different, since *lahā* has a long *alif* at the end which leaves no doubt about the pronunciation). That the scribe here made a mistake is an explanation that I find straightforward and sensible (although it would be interesting to know why Déroche when he edited this codex chose *lahā* with the long *alif* at the end). The refusal on Powers’ part to countenance the possibility of a haplography for k-l-h is not an insignificant issue; to refuse to admit to this possibility is to refuse the most sensi-

ble explanation. Moreover, the reader is deprived of a valid alternative explanation and is thus kept in the dark. In this context let me quote the leading palaeography scholar of Arabic manuscript, Adam Gacek: “Omissions. These are the most common errors in Arabic manuscripts. Here mention should be made of haplography, which is the error of writing a sequence of letters (or a word) once, when they should have been written twice.”<sup>2</sup> Haplography is not just another explanation; it is the most obvious explanation.

Readers who think I am being overly critical of this book should realize that I have actually been very willing to give Powers the benefit of the doubt. I have accepted one of Powers’ central claims, that the original word in the codex was k-l-h and that it was corrected by the same scribe into k-l-l-h. I actually think that there is simply an original k-l-l-h here. (This original k-l-l-h has faded and was corrected by a later hand, the ‘Abbasid hand which is visible now, but we are not concerned here with this secondary correction). The ultraviolet reconstruction tells us that there was an original *ḥijāzī* k-l-l-h. The claim made by Powers that it was first written k-l-h and then corrected by the same scribe is rather difficult to ascertain. I have serious reservations about his analysis of the underlying script. Be that as it may, I am however willing to give him the benefit of the doubt in this case. Of course even if the case is what he describes it to be, Powers’ analysis does not stand.

The claim that the original correction was the result of a forgery also makes Codex Arabe 328a a rarity of rarities, a handwritten manuscript without mistakes (since Powers is insisting that its corrections are mostly conspiratorial in nature). But Codex Arabe 328a does indeed show signs of mistakes, corrections and different spellings for the same words—we can easily see those corrections from the work of Déroche who edited this text. I will give here some examples of the irregularities of the script. Let us look at beginning of verse 2:106, “*yawm tabyaḍḍ wujūh wa-taswadd wujūh.*” The word *wujūh* (plural for face) occurs twice in this verse. Yet it is written as w-j-h-y-h when it first appears, then written regularly the second time as w-j-w-h.<sup>3</sup> Here the scribe did not correct it. Another rather strangely written word is *wa-faḍl* in 3:171, which is clearly not

2. *Arabic Manuscripts: A Vademecum for Readers* (Brill, 2009), 234.

3. See the facsimile edition François Déroche and Sergio Noja Nosedá, *Sources de la transmission manuscrite du texte coranique, I: Les manuscrits de style ḥijāzī*. Vol. 1, Le manuscrit arabe 328(a) de la Bibliothèque nationale de France. Les: Fondazione Ferni Noja Nosedá, 1998, fol. 4b line 23.

regular (although it is not clear what was the issue here, since the word seems to have been elongated to fill the space of three words).<sup>4</sup> The spacing shows that the scribe most probably made a mistake and wrote some word after the original *wa-faḍl* that was not part of the Codex. When he discovered this he removed them and then wrote an elongated *wa-faḍl* to fill the whole space now between the original words. One other example not pointed out by Déroche is from folio 22b. In line 13 we have the word *jazā'u* written without the *waw* for the *hamzah* (thus j-z-a). The *waw* here was added later by a different hand (the 'Abbasid corrector). On the same folio, in line 23, the same word is written by the original scribe with the *waw* (these kinds of irregularities can be multiplied with careful reading). There is no need to presume an explanation for these irregularities that presupposes any cause beyond what we know from the rules of early Arabic palaeography. The science of palaeography establishes the threshold for anyone who wishes to argue for conspiratorial emendations. That threshold has not been met by Powers.

Haplography is actually a very plausible explanation in the case of *kalālah*, the mistaken word (k-l-h) written instead of the correct one has a very common Arabic equivalent or counterpart: k-l-h (masculine: *kullih*, *kullah*, *kulluh*, "all of it"; feminine: *kullahā*, *kulluhā*, *kullihā*) which is a quranic word. The word *kull* ("all" in Arabic) and its many variations (add: *kullahum*, all of them male, *kullahunna*, all of them female) are all over the Quran and could have easily influenced the hand of the scribe. I am here discounting the word *kullamā* (written k-l-m-a), although it could be drawn into the argument. One can see why k-l-l-h could be easily written as k-l-h, since k-l-h is a very common Arabic word.

The absurdity of Powers' argument can only be appreciated when one reviews his linguistic analysis about what took place on the eve of the alleged conspiracy. First he asserts that the word *kalālah* is an invention, a word that was not in existence before the conspiracy. This is a remarkable claim and one without foundation. The word surely did exist, even if commentators differed on its meaning (although even here the degree of dispute is not out of the ordinary, more on this later). That there are no cognates for *kalālah* in other Semitic languages is hardly an argument for its invention, as Powers seems to think. There are many, many Arabic words with no equivalent in other Semitic languages and they are

4. Déroche and Noja Nosedá, *Sources de la transmission manuscrite du texte coranique*, I, fol. 8a, line 13.

hardly inventions. Readers should keep in mind that the Arabic lexicon is the richest among Semitic languages and Arabic is the best-attested Semitic language we have.

Far more remarkable is his assertion that the word *kannah* (daughter-in-law) in Arabic was also invented in the process of the forgery of the word *kalālah*. The term that designates a daughter-in-law in any language is a household word (let us not forget that every married woman is a daughter-in-law also). Can one imagine that the Arabs, now spread all over the Middle East, woke up one day and decided to forget a basic word in their language. Power is claiming that the original word for daughter in law in Arabic is *\*kallah*, which is never attested in Arabic nor is there any residue of such a usage—that much Powers has to admit. Yet Powers nonetheless insists that this is the word that the Arabs used to denote daughter in law. One might imagine a cabal of conspirators wishing for such a miracle, but how then did they manage to erase all evidence of the word from the spoken lexicon? Each of the claims raised by Powers is impossible linguistically: on the one hand, he causes the Arabs to forget completely a basic term, while on the other, he compels them to use a new term to replace it. The supposed coincidence of these two hypothetical linguistic events is nothing short of miraculous. This is not to deny that such a process could happen in the course of a protracted historical development, but to posit such an event as the result of a conspiracy that took place at a particular moment in history without it leaving any trace is to misunderstand the dynamics of sociolinguistic transformation (Powers again has to admit that this is a first in the history of linguistic development, albeit in a footnote).

I am not here discounting or refusing to countenance the idea that *kalālah* could have been an invented word (inventing words is not uncommon, this is not what I am denying). But to stack the deck as Powers does defies logic: his notion of the Muslims inventing a new word, forgetting another basic word, and then replacing it with yet another, invented word, sounds more like farce than linguistic or historical analysis. To posit collective national lexicographic amnesia, at a time when language was the beginning and the end of Arabic culture, is absurd. How is this feasible? The Arabs by then had spread all over the Near East, and the total erasure of a fundamental kinship word from their language is inconceivable. The lexicographic revolution that the early Muslims brought to the study of the Arabic lexicon is a marvel and still unsur-

passed to this day. Not only did they manage to collect all the words of their language but they developed a theoretical scheme to account even for roots that were possible but not used in Arabic. Much of the Arabic lexicon was gathered from informants from tribes that were not contaminated by the urban centers of early Islam. Collecting synonyms was a major concern. That not one Arab tribe remembered the original word for daughter in law is inconceivable.

As Powers' monograph shows, revisionism in Islamic Studies is a rhetorical artifice rather than a coherent analysis of evidence; it functions as an intellectual exercise that has little to do with the history it purports to explain. One starts with the axiomatic assumption that things are not what the tradition has been telling us (and by tradition here I mean mainstream Western scholarship); then one moves forward by means of presuppositions, plausible or implausible, that are sustainable only because they presuppose a different reality than the one attested by our sources, not because they are cogent in themselves. These presuppositions turn out to be conceivable only because of their value as counterclaims. The entire exercise is sustained rhetorically by a tone of condescension.

Far more fascinating is the claim of Powers that the forgers who somehow managed to enforce all of these remarkable acts of public amnesia also managed to stick to the rules of comparative Semitic philology when performing their supposed inventions. We have to remember that the rules governing the phonetic transformation of words in Semitic languages (as they change away from Proto-Semitic and as they borrow from each other or from other languages into their lexicon) were discovered in the nineteenth century European universities (German for the most part). These rules are inherent characteristic of the Semitic languages; they are not rules that the speakers were consciously aware of — meaning there was no one individual who knew how to forge linguistic changes according to the rules of comparative Semitic philology. Yet all the same Powers' forgers more than a thousand years ago managed to know to change the letter l in *kallah* into n to give us the Arabic *kannah*. How remarkable that this happens to be the most common phonetic transmutation of the letter L in Semitic languages. Powers is mistaken in thinking that since most Semitic languages have k-l-l-h as the word for daughter-in-law, Arabic should follow suit; this is not the case. There is nothing in the rules of comparative philology that stipulates such a necessity. Arabic has a word for daughter-in-law that is easily derived

from the Pro-Semitic root k-l-l-h according to the rules of comparative Semitics. As such it is not an invented word. That the word *kannah* is phonetically connected to *kallah* is indisputable, the former is indeed a transmutation of the latter, but there is nothing remarkable about this. The total absence of the word \**kallah* in Arabic and the sole existence of the term *kannah* can only be explained by the fact that its transformation in Arabic occurred very early on, soon after splitting from proto-Semitic; it could not have been carried out by an individual in the seventh century. Powers is proposing a forgery only the Gods could pull off. The Gods, alas, are the least satisfactory explanation for historical events, as Powers keeps telling us so condescendingly.

Let us move now to Powers' handling of the physical nature of Codex Arabe 328a the manuscript that was allegedly forged back then. First, Powers must actually admit that the scribe of Codex Arabe 328a and the forger are the same person. This is a brilliant solution to a rather unsolvable problem. It gets Powers out of a very strange situation: the fact that the supposedly forged folio is an integral part of the Codex. The tight-wiggleroom syndrome is now forcing Powers to make the Scribe of the Codex its forger at the same time. It is not an unusual thing to find forgeries in manuscripts or alterations by another scribe; that is not the issue here. It is also not unusual to have a forgery that is seamlessly added to the original. But to claim that while writing a work that you intend to forge, you first write the original page that you intend to forge, that you then tear it in order to do your forgery, and then continue to add the forged part—sounds very contrived. For if Powers is to prove that he has uncovered a forgery, not only must he have a torn folio, but the forged folio that is supposed to have replaced the original one has to have been added to the original quires. This is not the case here; the supposedly forged folio is part of the codex, written after the tearing of the damaged folio on what were still white pages. That is why Powers has to admit that the forger and the scribe are the same person. But that leaves Powers with a course of events whose improbability he never cares to address.

Now if the forged parts are in fact the result of a major cultural shift, as Powers is claiming, then the forgery must have been contemplated, “cooked” so to speak, and ready at hand; but to write the very original page you are supposed to forge only to tear it and then add the forgery, to repeat, strikes one as very odd. It is as if the forgery occurred by an inspiration, *ex nihilo*, on the spot. To add to a Codex must have been a

very deliberate act, initiated not by the scribe, but merely executed by him; the forgery was not concocted on the spot, but must have been the result of the work of an organized cabal. The forgery must have been in hand, waiting to be seamlessly added (if the forger is the scribe). The scenario proposed by Powers is thus nothing short of a parody of how manuscripts are written. He is envisioning that at the very moment the scribe had just finished copying the very page that the scribe was supposed to forge—not one page before, not one page after—someone materialized and ordered him (or he himself decided) to tear it and add the forgery and continue to transcribe the codex. A more natural mode of forgery would have been for a forger to come upon a completed work and modify it, or write a work anew and graft the added parts seamlessly. Or if you were forced to tear pages, then you add pages. Powers' scenario is too convenient. There are endless possible explanations as to why a folio was cut from Codex Arabe 328a while it was being transcribed; once again the simplest of explanation is refused by Powers: damage to the folio. That it is damage that happened before the copying can be proven by the fact that the removed folio did not disrupt the flow of the manuscript. As a matter of fact this is a circumstance around which Powers has to work his theory of forgery. He has to take into account the fact that the torn folio did not disrupt the flow of the manuscript and as such was torn before the copying of the manuscript had proceeded beyond that folio. Hence the implausible scenario offered us that of the inept writer/forgery.

Indeed the cutting of accidentally damaged folios is not an unusual phenomenon. To presume that the cutting of a folio can only be explained as the result of an attempt at forgery is not convincing. We have another example from the same manuscript of a damaged folio that was used nonetheless, since the damage was at the lower end of the folio. Folio 28 has a hole at the lower end which was skipped over by the scribe, leaving no doubt that it was a case of damage to the original codex before it was written.<sup>5</sup>

There is another complication that is even more absurd were we to follow Powers' logic. To accept his story line is to envision an impossible scenario wherein the forgers commit their act and leave every trace to incriminate themselves. Readers should keep in mind that we have two folios that were tampered with according to Powers. Folio 10b, where

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5. Déroche and Sergio Noja Nosedá, *Sources de la transmission manuscrite du texte coranique*, I. fol. 28a line 25.

we have verse 4:12 which contains the first appearance of the word k-l-l-h (this one was supposedly first written k-l-h); and folio 20b where we have the supposed addition of the last verse of Sura 4, verse 176, with the word k-l-l-h clearly written with no mistakes. According to Powers the whole forgery was envisioned to neutralize verse 4:12 by addition of verse 176. According to Powers the two verses are contradictory. Since Powers is giving the forgers complete control over the codex, changing words and adding verses, why then did the forgers not think of taking out the sentence in 4:12 that has the word k-l-h in the first place, and simply adding 4:176? Powers fails to consider this or any similar obvious arguments against his case.

Two important details: Powers makes much of the fact that one of the sides of the folio (folio 20a) has 27 lines. He presents this as an unusual characteristic there, and insists that the original folio was 23 lines (in fact, we have no evidence of how the “original” looked, or even if it really existed as a written folio). In a footnote Powers does have to admit that there are many pages in the Codex that have 27 lines, and even 28 lines. The question is this, how did Powers know that it ought to be 23 lines here, when that Codex contains pages with 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, and 28 lines?

The other point is that Powers makes much of the irregular margins of the other page of the folio (folio 20b). He forgets to mention that this is not as odd as he claims. A careful look at the facsimile edition of the Codex shows that it does not have regular margins consistently. The issue is actually far easier to explain if we take into consideration that the “irregularities” in folio 20b are almost a consistent feature of this codex for the simple fact that in folio 20b we have the end of a Sura and the beginning of another Sura. Thus folio 51b, which also has 27 lines and is a folio that documents the shift from Sura 13 to Sura 14, shows the very same features. Here we have the inverse situation of folio 20b: the irregular margins are at the bottom of the page and not at the top. The other folio that exhibits the same characteristics as folio 20b is folio 53b, which has 28 lines and very irregular margins (two lines are what I would call very odd, lines 10 and 11). Folio 53b is where the codex shifts from Sura 14 to Sura 15. What Powers is witnessing in folio 20b was not a conspiracy, but a scribe’s anxiety in anticipating the shift from one Sura to another. It seems this anxiety was more evident in Scribe A than in the other four scribes. That the scribe (and all my examples here have

been from folios written by scribe A) saw nothing odd about ending a line before it reached a regular margin is clearly visible from folio 30b line 27, which ends mid-way in the line (an anomaly corrected by a later ‘Abbasid hand’<sup>6</sup>). Here in folio 30b, the scribe was not anticipating a new Sura, he just did it; we can offer sensible guesses, but the only conclusion is that we have to admit that the margins of Codex Arabe 328a can be irregular.

So many details must be exactly as Powers envisioned them or else his entire scenario becomes impossible. Yet even the scenario envisioned by Powers as it stands is improbable. Remember this is a Codex written by multiple scribes (five scribes according to Déroche), each with his own preferences and line/page variations. It exhibits variations, even in orthography, such that one cannot predict what a non-existent page could have looked like, or for that matter what any given existing page ought to look like.

#### Muhammad’s adopted son

The forgoing are the factual mistakes in the book. The really fanciful parts of the book are to be found when Powers analyzes the story of Muhammad’s adopted son Zayd. Here he commits the most characteristic manoeuvre of revisionist discourse. Powers claims that the historical story told by the tradition is a *fabula*, a claim that can only be asserted because his alternative historical reconstruction is supposedly based on solid historical certitude that things were otherwise than they appear; his historical reconstruction, however, functions as a mysterious background which is invoked intermittently whenever he needs to affirm a “rationalist” explanation of events. That background, however, is never fully adumbrated. The bulk of the work is a dismantling of the traditional story of Zayd, while the implied historical facts which lie at the basis of Powers’ revisionism remain unexamined. In this sense revisionism is playing a game of rhetoric that cannot be challenged; it declares the tradition to be a figment of the “salvific” imagination and proceeds to dismantle it, yet it can only do that because it already has a pre-conceived idea of how things ought to have been. Yet, this rhetorical stratagem, to succeed, has to withhold its view of the truth, for Powers is in no

6. Déroche and Sergio Noja Noseda, *Sources de la transmission manuscrite du texte coranique*, I, fol. 30b line 27—see the Arabic transcription on the opposite page which makes clear what was going on.

hurry to disclose to us what really happened. Powers does not commit himself to any clear statement of how things actually unfolded. At the same time, all possible counterclaims to this phantom scenario are ruled out of court before they can arise, for Powers' discourse appears and disappears at will, in a rhetorical setting that deprecates any attempt to examine it.

Let me here, however, ask some very concrete historical questions. Powers is claiming that with the development of the doctrine that Muhammad was the final prophet, any filial relationships he had were a danger to this doctrine. Accordingly, his relationship with his adopted son had to be severed, hence the invention of the whole Zaynab episode, and the renunciation of his adopted son etc. According to Powers, such was the power of the filial relationship in early Islam that to keep that bond with Zayd was to undermine the whole new theory of the finality of prophecy. Why this was so, was because a son by Muhammad, even an adopted son, would have inherited the mantle and office of prophecy and disrupted the notion that Muhammad was the last prophet. Therefore, Zayd, had to be repudiated, and had to die before Muhammad died and not after.

If Zayd was not the adopted son of Muhammad there would have been no need for the invention of the repudiation of Zayd (unless Powers is also claiming that is the case, but he is not, or is he?). The tradition needed to invent the episode of renunciation if and only if the following obtained: Zayd was indeed Muhammad's adopted son, Zayd was never repudiated, and Zayd died after Muhammad. The new *fabula*, according to Powers, set out, to undo all of these facts. Powers is claiming that the traditional story is a fiction, but then should not the reverse be fact (i.e. that he remained Muhammad's son and outlived him)? We are never clearly told if Muhammad had or did not have an adopted son. Be that as it may, the opposite of the *fabula* would then constitute solid historical facts and are necessary for Powers' arguments to make sense; he is implicitly using it, the opposite of what the *fabula* set out to undo, as the backdrop of his revisionist approach. Yet, Powers never really comes out clearly to state emphatically that this is the case. Now, if Zayd was indeed never repudiated, if he did not die before Muhammad, and if the notion that a prophet's mantle is inherited by his son was as operative as Powers claims it should have been, why did Zayd not inherit the mantle of prophecy? And if he did inherit it, how do we account for his total irrelevance in Islamic

history? Zayd is fundamental only for inheritance rules, not for succession history. This is a fact. We do know who was jockeying to inherit the role of Muhammad, and neither Zayd nor his children were ever in the melee. What Powers in effect is saying is that all of early Islamic history was invented, especially the Abū Bakr-‘Umar-‘Uthmān caliphates, and, all this entire invention was a cover-up for the central role of Zayd and his right of inheritance. The implications of this conspiratorial vision of Islamic history have to be followed through, thus not only the Zaynab episode is a *fabula*, but the whole succession history of Muhammad must have also been a fiction. Powers minutely examines the narrative history of Zayd, yet he totally disregards the larger Islamic setting. Once more, revisionist historians want to have their cake and eat it too. Did Zayd inherit Muhammad’s prophecy or not? If he did not, then how could he pose a danger to the belief that Muhammad is the last prophet? Powers, moreover, is noncommittal about the meaning of the Seal of Prophecy—since it suits him all too well to have it tied to the notion of the end of prophecy. He also claims that this term was invented with the story of the repudiation. He is here once again claiming both the thing and its opposite. An early date for the doctrine of Seal of Prophecy (without it necessarily meaning finality of prophecy) is something that would undermine Powers’ argument.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of this book is the total absence of early Islamic history as a background to Islam. In this sense Islamic history is noncumulative; 50 years into the life of the new religion, Powers presents Islam to us as only concerned with Jewish paradigms. This is a book about the finality of Muhammad’s prophecy that has nothing to say about the Ridda wars. The Ridda wars are not even mentioned as a backdrop in Powers’ entire book (only once in passing page 80). But if the Muslims needed to invent the notion that Muhammad was the last prophet, then they needed it early on in the story, just as he died, since Musaylamah “al-Kadhdhāb” (one of the many prophets that sprung up in Arabia) was already in the picture. The issue of Muhammad’s place in salvific history was an issue from the moment Muhammad died. The succession wars and battles fought by the Muslims are the true background, not the Jewish midrashic literature that Powers installs as the reference point for early Islam. Islam is thus de-historicized in Powers’ book, made into a discursive *fabula* that only has the Jewish midrashic paradigm as its base.

The Quran is remarkably apathetic towards a filial understanding of salvation. Yet in Powers' work, once more early Islam is deprived of the capability of being nuanced; it is deprived of the capacity to both accept the Jewish paradigm and at the same invent another for itself. The Quran shows profound distrust of the filial language of both Judaism and Christianity. As a matter of fact, God, far more than Muhammad, is declared to be neither a father nor a son. Family ties are mocked, and the Quran enshrines personal responsibility. What scandalized the Arabs most about Muhammad was his disregard for kinship ties. In verse 5:18-19 the Quran goes to the heart of the sonship-fathership theology of Judaism and Christianity, only to mock it and tie the coming of Muhammad to the absence of prophetic missions. The two verses are of such relevance to Powers' argument that I will cite them here (since Powers does not):

The Jews and the Christians say: "We are the children of God and His loved ones." Say: "Why then does He punish you for your sins? Surely you are mortals of His own creation. He forgives whom He will and punishes whom He pleases. God has sovereignty over the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them. All shall return to him."

People of the Book! Our apostle has come to you with revelations after an interval which saw no apostles, lest you say: "No one has come to give us good news or to warn us!" Now someone has come to give you good news and to warn you. God has power over all things.

If I wanted to know about the theology of early Islam regarding sons, fathers and inheritance, then I would have expected an analysis of the quranic data. The issue of kinship in the Quran is central, but only insofar as it was revolutionary, making a profound critique of Arab kinship ties. As a matter of fact, the Quran as well as the Ummah it envisioned were based on the negation of father-son ties, and on the breaking of kinship ties. As far as salvation is envisioned, it is not tied to blood.

The fact of the matter is that every assertion made by Powers is shaky. Every supposition is contrived, and his sweeping disregard for early Islamic history is all too convenient for us to take this work seriously. The blame here, I suppose, can perhaps be attributed to an innocent man: Jon Levenson. His book *The Death and the Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity*—a masterpiece, especially in its literary analysis of the stories of the Bible—has exerted such a pull on Powers that he tries here to replicate the

paradigm in Islam. Alas, Islam is not Judaism and it is not Christianity, and the central myth of father-son sacrificial bond is not an important motif in the Quran, no matter how hard Powers tries. Those who have read Levenson's work and read Powers' contrived literary approach will understand what I mean. By the end of Powers' "intertextual" analysis of Zayd's literary profile, he turns out to be everything and nothing. Zayd is Jacob, Zayd is Joseph, Zayd is Dammeseq Eliezer, Zayd is Ishmael, Zayd is Uriah the Hittite, Zayd is Solomon. Powers does not seem to notice how absurd this exercise is, and genuinely marvels at the complexity of the character of Zayd (which of course is his own contrivance). That Zayd can be made to be almost anything at all is the clearest indication that we are dealing here with a historical figure that is too unique to fit any literary paradigm. Zayd is Zayd, a historical figure—indeed, the only one of Muhammad's followers mentioned by name in the Quran. The irony of Powers' work is too exquisite not to enjoy. Here at last revisionism is having a cannibalistic moment, discarding evidence right and left while claiming that all it does is go after evidence. The only name mentioned in the Quran of any of the followers of Muhammad turns out to be a fiction of sorts. Revisionism has consumed itself at last. Insofar as there is a historical record of the names of any of Muhammad's followers, it is of Zayd. But we poor naïve non-literary types are stuck with the documentary evidence and know not how to appreciate intertextuality.

One last word on scripture and interpretation: There seems to be a notion in revisionist circles that if the Quran says something and Muslims did something else, then we have to presume that the Quran was not there to start with. Let me here emphasize that what a scripture announces can easily by interpretation be overturned. The idea that what a scripture pronounces is clear is another fallacy. Even when clear, scripture is not clear; it needs interpretive authority to sanction it. In the case of inheritance in Islam, the needs of the Muslims and the quranic injunctions interacted to produce a very complicated system. I find the analysis of Agostino Cilardo in his *The Qur'ānic Term Kalāla: Studies in Arabic Language and Poetry, Ḥadīth and Fiqh. Notes on the Origins of Islamic Law* (Edinburgh, 2005) to be more than adequate as an explanation for the term *kalālah* and its use in Islam, and Powers would have been advised to read this book more carefully.