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THE MAKING OF THE LAST PROPHET
A Reconstruction of the Earliest Biography of Muhammad
Gordon Darnell Newby

“The book’s importance is enormous. No one else has worked through this opaque and largely unused material to the extent that the author has done in the present volume. . . . No one who is concerned with formative literary elements in the classical period of Islam will be able to ignore this book.”—Bruce Lawrence, Duke University

The sacred biography of Muhammad has shaped Muslims’ perceptions of the place of Islam in the religious history of the world and located the Islamic founder and prophet as the last of God’s messengers. As Muslims established political control over ancient Jewish and Christian communities, they also claimed hegemony over the panoply of biblical prophets and holy men. In the eighth century, the author of the first complete biography of Muhammad set out a plan for a history of the world that culminated with the advent of Muhammad and the religion of Islam. The biography not only gave the details of Muhammad’s life but also retold the stories of past prophets from an Islamic perspective. The Making of the Last Prophet is an examination of the reshaping and retelling of the biblical past to form the image of Muhammad as the “Seal” of the prophets of God. Through a translation of the reconstructed Arabic text, the sources, the form, and uses of the eighth-century biography are examined for the ways in which attitudes toward Muhammad were shaped in early Islam. The work particularly underscores the interplay of Jewish, Christian, and other Near Eastern religious ideals in the formation of Islam’s notions of prophethood.

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The companions of the Prophet had gathered round his house with tearful eyes and grieved hearts. The reports which were pouring out from the house showed that his condition was extremely serious, and there was very little hope of his recovery. This showed that only a few moments of his precious life were left. Conversely, if he is the Last Prophet, he cannot have a son. In *Muhammad Is Not the Father of Any of Your Men*, Powers contends that a series of radical moves were made in the first two centuries of Islamic history to ensure Muhammad's position as the Last Prophet. The fact that none of Muhammad's natural sons reached the age of maturity makes it appear as if God could not test Muhammad by instructing him to sacrifice a beloved son. Appearances can be deceptive. Verse 37 of Sūrat al-Aḥzāb is one of the few verses in the Qurʾān that appears to refer to an event in the life of the Prophet: Muhammad's marriage to the former wife of his adopted son Zayd. The circumstances surrounding this marriage would have been familiar to the Prophet's Companions.