

Teaching by Example

Charismatic Figures in Islam's Past and Present¹

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Charisma als Fachbegriff hilft uns dabei, wandelnde Definitionen von Führung und Gefolgschaft in religiösen Gemeinschaften zu identifizieren und miteinander zu vergleichen. Für die islamische Tradition umfasst dies politische Führer, Gelehrte und Sufi-Heilige aus Vergangenheit und Gegenwart. Dieser Beitrag vermittelt einen kurzen Überblick über die weberianische Theorie charismatischer Autorität, unterzieht sie einer kritischen Betrachtung und diskutiert sie anschließend im Licht von Beispielen aus früheren und heutigen Zeiten. Er argumentiert, dass der Akt des Erinnerns an Vorbilder aus der Vergangenheit eine Vorlage dafür schafft, wie man heute Muslim sein kann. Wie wir die Geschichte dieser Persönlichkeiten vermitteln, ist daher nicht einfach eine Frage unvoreingenommener Wissenschaft, sondern ein Umgang mit einer lebendigen Geschichte. Im Erinnern und im Erzählen der Geschichten großer Führungsgestalten unserer Vergangenheit und Gegenwart liegt eine besondere Kraft, denn indem wir ihre Geschichten erzählen, tragen wir dazu bei, ihre Bedeutung für andere mitzugestalten.

Vorbildliche Persönlichkeiten spielen eine wichtige Rolle in der Geschichte des Islams. Vom Propheten Muḥammad und Hārūn ar-Rašīd bis hin zu Süleyman dem Prächtigen werden große Herrscher ihre Taten und ihrer Frömmigkeit wegen erinnert. Der Beitrag zeigt, wie dieser Akt des Erinnerns eine Vorlage dafür schafft, wie man heute Muslim sein kann, und dass gegenwärtige Führungspersönlichkeiten – etwa der deutsche Prediger Pierre Vogel oder die amerikanische Gelehrte Amina Wadud – ihre eigene Autorität auf der Nutzung dieser Vorlage aufbauen. Ihre Anhänger und Schüler verleihen ihnen Autorität unter anderem deshalb, weil sie ein Vokabular und ein Set von Symbolen einsetzen – von Koran-Zitaten bis hin zu bestimmten Formen der Kleidung und des Auftretens –, die ihrer Aura von Macht Substanz verleihen.

¹ I want to thank Prof. Dr. Mouez Khalfaoui and the organizers of the Ringvorlesung for inviting me to give this paper and the RomanIslam Institute of the University of Hamburg for awarding me the fellowship that facilitated my research stay in Germany.

Charisma as a technical term helps us to identify and compare changing definitions of leadership and followership in religious communities. For the Islamic tradition, this includes political leaders, scholars, and Sufi saints from the past and present. This paper briefly reviews and critiques the Weberian theory of charismatic authority and then discusses this theory in light of examples from the past and present. It argues that the act of remembering exemplars from the past creates a template of how to be a Muslim today. How we teach the history of these individuals, therefore, is not simply a matter of unbiased scholarship, but an interaction with a living history. There is a power in the act of remembrance and teaching the stories of great leaders in our past and present, because in telling their stories we co-create their importance for others.

Exemplary individuals play an important role in the history of Islam. From the Prophet Muḥammad and Hārūn ar-Rašīd to Süleymān the Magnificent, great leaders are remembered for their actions and their piety. This article to suggests that this act of remembrance creates a template of how to be a Muslim today, and that current leaders, such as the German preacher Pierre Vogel or the American scholar Amina Wadud, build their own authority on their use of this template. Their followers and students grant them authority, in part, because they wield a vocabulary and set of symbols, ranging from Qur'ān quotations to modes of dress and comportment, that add substance to their aura of power.

Defining Charisma

Noting the role of powerful figures in human history, Thomas Carlyle (d. 1881) saw in them an expression of the divine. He wrote:

»[A]ll things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realization and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world: the soul of the whole world's history.« (Carlyle 1993 [1841], 3)

They are, he averred »the living light-fountain« (Carlyle 1993, 3). In contrast to this divine view of history, Karl Marx (d. 1883, and Carlyle's contemporary in London) understood history in an atheistic fashion, as the interaction of impersonal economic and social forces. Great leaders, in this reading, are simply those who ride the wave of these forces.

In the early twentieth century, Max Weber (d. 1920) was among the first to organize the various qualities of leadership we see in history according to type. In addition to the patriarch, who led a traditional society, he identified the bureaucrat and the charismatic leader; the former is the epitome of rational organization, whereas the latter is opposed to order and to rational economics. Charismatic lead-

ers, in Weber's view, arise at »times of psychic, physical, economic, ethical, religious, political distress«, and their very creativity allows for significant changes to the other two more stable forms (Weber 1968, xxiii).

As Peter Berger has argued, Weber was responding to Marx, »concerned to demonstrate that religious ideas have a historical efficacy of their own and cannot simply be understood as a ›reflection‹ or even ›function‹ of some underlying social processes« (Berger 1963, 940–950, esp. at 949). Indeed, the very word *charisma* derives from ancient Greek culture, where the *kharites* were the three ›graces‹ who shared their divine gifts with their followers. As Christianity spread into the Hellenistic world, it picked up this notion of charisma, such that the apostle Paul spoke of divine gifts (*charismaton*) granted by the Spirit of God to the believers (1 Corinthians 12:4). But whereas modern psychologists have continued this focus on the individual, arguing that narcissism is central to the charismatic personality (Kohut 1971), sociologists, including Weber and his school, have emphasized the production of charismatic authority by followers.

My own contribution to this discussion has been to regard history as a dynamic force in the process of creating charismatic authority. Here, I am picking up on insights from both Carlyle and Weber, who noticed related phenomena but did not explain them. For example, Carlyle noted that leaders in many ancient societies – whether of Rome, Egypt, or China – were considered to be divine, a claim that is reduced to the divine right of kings in more recent history, and further dismissed in the nineteenth century as myth. Carlyle wrote:

»[D]oes it not look as if our estimate of the Great Man, epoch after epoch, were continually diminishing? We take him first for a god, then for one god-inspired; and now in the next stage of it, his most miraculous word gains from us only the recognition that he is a Poet, beautiful verse-maker, man of genius, or such like!« (Carlyle 1993, 72)

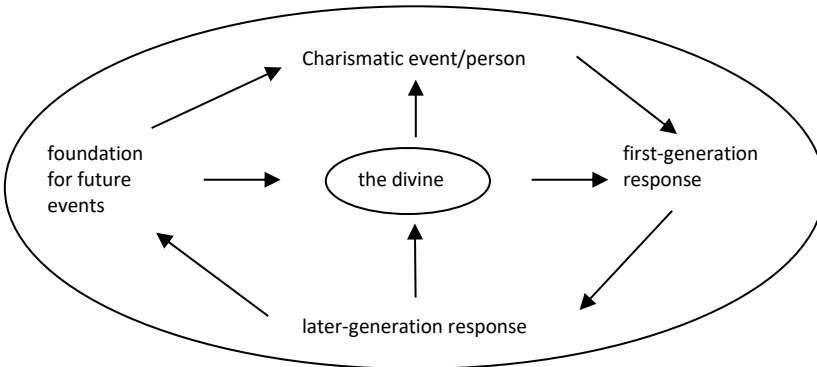
Carlyle pins this dynamic not on a change in the intrinsic qualities of leaders, but rather »that our notions of God, of the supreme unattainable Fountain of Splendour, Wisdom and Heroism, are ever rising *higher*; not altogether that our reverence for these qualities, as manifested in our like, is getting lower« (Carlyle 1993, 72). In other words, Carlyle considers his history of ›great men‹ within in a sort of evolution of religion, with Protestantism as a natural development and improvement over previous forms (he even predicted the eventual fall of Catholicism as an »inevitably receding ocean tide«; Carlyle 1993, 117 f.). As I will discuss below, I believe Carlyle has the causality reversed, that we regard past paragons to be greater in order to make room for present acts of charismatic power within that same tradition.

Weber also noticed a similar phenomenon, pointing out that »the further we look back in history, the more we find ... holders of specific gifts of the body and spirit« (Weber 1968, 18). For Weber, though, this change is not due to our newly developed perception of God as ›higher‹, but rather due to the march of science,

which serves to disenchant the world. Now, 100 years later, we can certainly agree that the role of religion in public life had changed, but by no means have religious charismatic figures disappeared as exemplary teachers, especially as we face new kinds of economic and political distress.²

The enduring usefulness of *charisma* as a technical term depends on its ability to identify and compare changing definitions of leadership and followership, especially in religious communities. For the Islamic tradition, this includes political leaders, scholars, and Sufi saints. Moreover, *charisma* should help us understand the dynamic of mythologizing prophets, saints, and other religious leaders. To illustrate this dynamic, I want to suggest a cycle of relationships among four historical actors, all circling around a perception of the divine. This is not a static model, but a dynamic one in which all elements are in creative contact with one another. In the following diagram, I have attempted to visualize the relationship of these four stages, with the four outside arrows representing temporal relationships.

Diagram I: A Dynamic Model for Charisma



The diagram has no beginning and no originating moment; rather, each instance of *charisma* is seen in relationship to other forms of *charisma*.³ A charismatic person at any individual moment is at the top of this cycle where the leader and the followers are in a dynamic relationship with past and present examples. Importantly,

² I presented the lecture, based on this paper, on November 5, 2024, the eve of the re-election of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States. Thus far, it seems that this charismatic individual (seen by many of his followers as a religious figure, sent by God) is taking full advantage of his power to re-shape the United States into an authoritarian regime, but only time will tell how this moment is remembered.

³ For a fuller explanation of this model, see Brockopp (2005, 129–158).

these examples are ones that are recognized and have meaning within the ›present‹ and are contrasted with similar examples that are rejected. That is to say, both leader and followers reject aspects of the current order as Weber predicts, but they also incorporate other aspects; in either case, appropriate actions are determined by negative as well as by positive examples.

Moving with time in a clockwise fashion, after the death of the charismatic founder (who remains an example for future leadership), followers respond to the charismatic event through history and memory. In Weber's terminology, this is the routinization of pure *charisma*. From the perspective of the followers, however, what is routinized are aspects of charismatic authority that were intimately shared with the leader, and in both cases proper and accepted interactions with the divine are determined. If the movement survives and defines itself against its antecedents, a new religious tradition is born, with its own sense of history and time.

The role of history in my model is essential for explaining why, over time, historical accounts of charismatic individuals tend to develop and enhance their charismatic qualities beyond normal human limitations. But these narratives also feed the process of routinization, which, in my view, is not only about defining the boundaries of new leaders but also a matter of redefining the charismatic event. In other words, one side of routinization is concerned with legitimizing post-Prophetic authority by explaining how the line of original, pure *charisma* continues into the routine of daily life. This was Weber's interest. But another side of the process separates and defines routine from ›pure‹ *charisma*: The farther we recede in time from the Prophet Muḥammad, for example, the more signs and miracles are attached to him, and the more anomalous he appears in comparison with seventh-century Arabia.⁴ This separation seals off pure *charisma* from its antecedents and also renders it unattainable for anyone else, but at the same time it makes room for new leaders as the ever higher position of the Prophet places him above the most far-reaching claims, even those of caliphs, saints, and scholars.

My model suggests, therefore, that routinized *charisma* is not subordinated into a binary relationship with pure *charisma*, but spins off into its own cycle of *charisma*. This new cycle is in a dynamic relationship, a creative tension, with the original *charisma* of the Prophet. The ties that bind these *charismas* can break, in which case ›heresies‹ such as the Ahmadiyya are formed, or new religious traditions, such as the Baha'is. I am more interested, however, in derivative forms of *charisma* that do not break off, but rather seek to influence the central cycle through interpretation. Here, I will focus on two instances of exemplary leadership from

⁴ This is one of the reasons, I believe, that Weber considered antinomian behavior essential for the charismatic figure (Weber 1968, 19–21; partly quoted above); it is partly the interpretive work of the charismatic community that makes the founder seem out of place in his original context.

Islam's legal tradition: the great scholars Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795) and Ṣaḥnūn b. Sa'īd (d. 240/854), particularly the way their examples are used in the teaching of a new generation.

Exemplary Figures from the Past

Born between 708 and 716 CE, Mālik b. Anas was by the time of his death in 179/795 the most famous jurist from Medina.⁵ He studied with several experts on *ḥadīṭ*, some of whose parents knew the Prophet. Mālik attracted students from all over the Islamic world, and his book, the *Muwaṭṭa'*, was taught in all medieval centres of learning, especially Egypt, Iraq, North Africa, and Spain. Still today, he is a larger than life figure whose influence in Islamic history extends far beyond the Mālikī school of law, dominant in North and West Africa.

Mālik was also known as a teacher. For example, 'Iyād b. Mūsā al-Yaḥsubī (d. 544/1149) begins his eight-volume dictionary⁶ with a full biography of Mālik b. Anas, including this excerpt from a chapter on Mālik's character:

» 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Ḥakam [d. 214/829] said: Mālik invited [his] students [to dinner] while I was among them, so we went with him to his dwelling (*dārihi*). When we had entered the courtyard (*dār*), he said: »This is the restroom (*al-mustarāḥ*), and here is water.« Then we entered the sitting room (*al-bayt*), though he did not enter with us but afterwards. Then he brought us something to eat, though he did not bring water beforehand for the washing of our hands but afterwards.

So when the people had left, I asked him about what I had seen. He said: »As for my showing you the restroom and water, I mentioned [it to] you to be of benefit to you; perhaps one of you needed to urinate or something and would not know where to go to relieve himself. As for my leaving you to enter the sitting room yourselves, perhaps if I had said: »Over here Abu So-and-So: sit down, and over here Abu So-and-So: sit down« I might have forgotten one of you, and he would take this as a slight. So, I left you to take your own places and entered afterwards. And as for my omitting to bring water before the meal, ablutions before [a meal] is a foreign custom (*sunnat al-a'āgīm*), while there is a *ḥadīṭ* about [bringing it] afterwards.« ('Iyād, *Tartīb*, 1:129; also Brockopp 2020, 249–275, at 255–260)

This story is one of many in 'Iyād b. Mūsā's collection that record the intimate relationships between Mālik and his students, and these detailed notes on Mālik's most mundane actions (how he ate, washed his hands, served his guests, etc.) help

⁵ For recent overviews of Mālik's life, see Abd-Allah (2013) and Rapoport (2013, 27–41).

⁶ 'Iyād b. Mūsā titled his biographical dictionary of the Mālikī school *Classification of the Sources and Approximation of the Paths to Knowledge of the Scholars of the Mālikī School* (*Tartīb al-madārik wa-taqrīb al-masālik li-ma'rīfat al-'ulamā' maḥab Mālik*, 1982–3). That the »sources« alluded to here are persons, and not the four *uṣūl al-fiqh*, is indicative of a dependence on exemplary individuals as the ultimate vehicle of the law. 'Iyād describes this organization and its purpose (1:27 f.), establishing the intentionality of this arrangement.

to signal that Mālik is unlike any other man: His every act is worth emulating. His house in Medina was apparently a simple affair consisting of a walled garden (*dār*) within which was a series of rooms. We are told that one of these was the lavatory and another the reception room in which students and teacher shared a meal and conversation that, presumably, ranged beyond purely legal topics. In this period, the private home was apparently the most common site for education, as formal teaching institutions (such as the *madrasa*) would not appear for centuries.⁷

As a teacher in these stories, Mālik is approachable and human, explaining his actions to his students and expressing fatherly concern for them. After his death, however, Mālik's reputation grew. He appeared to later scholars in their dreams, and his book was treasured and passed on. Early manuscript copies are formally written with student notes in the margins, evidence of the care and attention given to his words. Yet, these manuscripts are rather simple compared with later manuscripts, such as the one currently in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, that were lavishly produced, with liberal use of gold as well as an unusual amount of red ink. Even its marginal remarks are written in a decorative, zig-zag pattern.

The decoration and marginalia of *Chester Beatty Ar. 3001* suggest that by the time it was composed, Mālik's *Muwatta'* had been transformed from a utilitarian text into an object that demanded veneration; part of an explicit and intentional process by which generations of Mālik's students gradually transformed him from a flawed human being into an ideal exemplar of legal and moral authority (Brockopp 2020, 265–270). The manuscript record is a witness to this process, but its inner workings are best seen in literary sources, such as biographical dictionaries and *manāqib* literature, that detailed the lives and exploits of early scholars (for example, Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī 1416/1995–6).

These literary sources tell us that a generation after Mālik's death, Saḥnūn b. Sa'īd (d. 240/854), the famous Mālikī scholar of Kairouan, was also remembered as a teacher:

»We used to listen to Saḥnūn seated in front of his house, on the ground. He appeared one day with a plow in his hand and the oxen in front, and he said to us: »The slave has a bad fever, so your lessons are finished for the day!« So I said to him: »I'll go plow and you lecture to our colleagues; when I come back, I will recite for you what I have missed. So, he did this, and when I returned, he presented his dinner to me: barley bread and old oil.« ('Iyād b. Mūsā, *Tartīb al-madārik*, 4:54)

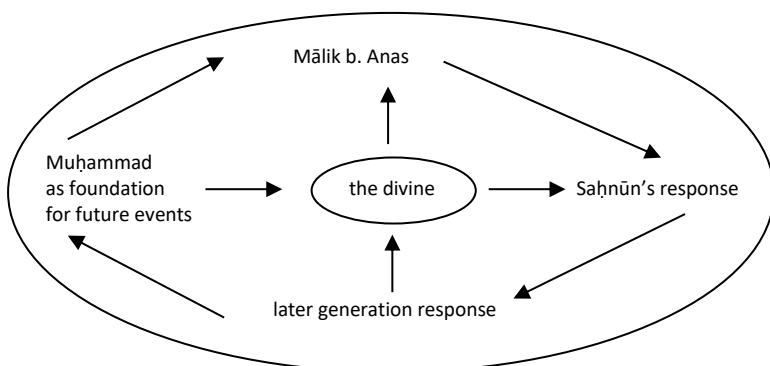
As with Mālik b. Anas, Saḥnūn's home is the site of teaching, work, and simple meals. It also, apparently, served as the first library, since elsewhere we are told that Saḥnūn had volumes in his house containing two years of lecture notes from Sufyān b. 'Uyayna (d. 196/811) ('Iyād b. Mūsā, *Tartīb al-madārik*, 4:50).⁸ In his

⁷ The first firm reference appears to date from Nishapur in 340/951 (Tritton 1957, 102).

⁸ At this point neither mosque nor palace had yet been established as public libraries.

simple lifestyle and devotion to Mālik and other past authorities, Saḥnūn provides the typical first generation response, lifting Mālik b. Anas up from the ranks of ordinary teachers to someone who is worthy of emulation in his own right, near to the Prophet Muḥammad in his piety and learning. We can therefore return to our diagram of the dynamic cycle of charisma, demonstrating the role that each of these men play.

Diagram II: *Charisma of Mālik and Saḥnūn*



This dynamic helps to explain the process by which scholars of Saḥnūn's generation began to see Mālik as something more than just one great teacher among many, but rather as the primary conduit to the Prophet and his *sunna*, his righteous path. For this generation – Saḥnūn, who focused on collecting Mālik's every utterance, Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā al-Maṣmūdī (d. 234/851), who brought the *Muwaṭṭaʿ* to Cordova, and ʿAbd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb (d. 238/852), who gave a triumphal history to those early jurists – their authority was linked to that of Mālik, whose importance was raised above that of his peers. Because Mālik's knowledge could no longer be accessed orally, but only through texts, the teachers of those texts became vital conduits to sacred knowledge.

As predicted by the model, scholars from the next generation then sought to build their own reputations by focusing on both Saḥnūn and Mālik b. Anas as touchstones of authentic jurisprudence. Manuscript evidence demonstrates that in their time, the generation after Saḥnūn continued this process of establishing the Mālikī school of law by differentiating themselves from other trends. It is a student of Saḥnūn's, for example, Yaḥyā b. ʿUmar al-Kinānī, who wrote a book refuting the leader of a rival legal school (*Kitāb al-ḥuḡḡa fī-l-Radd ʿala aṣ-Ṣāfi*). In yet later generations, as the history of the school is written, the independence of these scholars is suppressed, and Saḥnūn himself literally gets in line. His place in history is perhaps best expressed by these words from one of his disciples: »In a vision, I saw the Prophet (God's blessings and peace be upon him) walking on a path, and

Abū Bakr behind him, and ‘Umar behind Abū Bakr, and Mālik behind ‘Umar, and Saḥnūn behind Mālik» (‘Iyāḍ b. Mūsā, *Tartīb al-madārik*, 4:87).⁹

Historians, therefore, help to produce charismatic authority in retrospect, selectively remembering and recording details of these heroes’ lives. ‘Iyāḍ b. Mūsā, for example, places Saḥnūn at the head of his list of scholars from North Africa, and makes Saḥnūn’s biography the longest of any, after Mālik.¹⁰ Likewise, Saḥnūn’s famous book, the *Mudawwana*, was considered second in importance only to Mālik’s *Muwattaʿ*. It survives in dozens of manuscript copies and has been the subject of numerous commentaries. Similar to what we saw with manuscripts of Mālik’s *Muwattaʿ*, early manuscripts of Saḥnūn’s book, the *Mudawwana*, are rough copies, likely produced in a classroom as part of instruction. We see student notes and what are known as *samāʿ* ‘remarks that note when the manuscript was studied and with whom. Some of these date from the lifetime of Saḥnūn himself, making them among the oldest Arabic legal manuscripts known to exist.¹¹ We also see the same process of collation of these classroom notes into a final version of a book that occurs in the generations after Saḥnūn’s death. Eventually, as with the *Muwattaʿ*, fine copies of the *Mudawwana* are produced on high-quality paper with lavish decorations (for example, BNRM, Ms 343, depicted in Bongianino 2022, 134). These mark the text as something extraordinary, and like the Chester Beatty manuscript of the *Muwattaʿ*, they appear to be a kind of reliquary that prepares the reader »for the proper reception and treatment« of the text, which can be thought of as a textual relic of the charismatic teacher.¹² In both these cases, then, we can observe a process of solidifying the text and removing variants, thereby establishing a canonical version. Like the Qurʾān, these legal texts become fixed, to be transmitted verbatim to future generations, even while the classroom remains a lively place of debate and exchange. This relationship between the veneration given to past paragons like Mālik and Saḥnūn and the critical, sometimes playful engagement in the classroom, is an essential feature of Muslim education. It is certainly visible in the modern world, where leaders draw from and adapt lessons from the past.

⁹ This is just one of several visions of Saḥnūn in heaven.

¹⁰ ‘Iyāḍ b. Mūsā (*Tartīb al-madārik*, 4:45–88); see also (Talbi 1968, 86–136). For an extensive list of the Arabic sources on Saḥnūn’s life, see aḍ-Ḍahabī (1994, yrs. AH 231–240, 247–249).

¹¹ I analyze this fragment in Brockopp (2014, 129–141, esp. 135–138).

¹² In Hahn (2012, 9), she is speaking of saint’s relics, but I believe it is useful to apply this language to highly decorate manuscripts as well.

Charisma in the Present

Charismatic leaders continue to appear in the modern Muslim world, and for examples I draw on the history of Islam in the Americas.¹³ This history goes back hundreds of years, when many West African Muslims were caught up in the brutal system of enslavement. In the twentieth century, some African Americans built a new identity on Muslim foundations, seeing here both a heritage and a liberating message, quite in contrast to the use of Christianity to enforce slaving norms. In his very name, the charismatic leader Elijah Muhammad (1897–1975) was dependent on both biblical and Muslim traditions in forming the movement known as the *Nation of Islam*. While Elijah Muhammad diverged from many of the central tenets of the Islamic tradition, the *Nation of Islam* eventually split, with one branch continuing the development of a new religious tradition while the other emphasized those aspects of its history that connected with Sunni Islam. Again, Weber emphasized that charismatic leaders arise at times of social distress, and Elijah Muhammad's protégé Malcolm X (1925–1965) is one such example. It was Malcolm X who, during his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1964, saw the connecting threads that would lead to a rapprochement with the larger world of Islam, thus demonstrating that a charismatic cycle might first spin off into a new religious movement (*Nation of Islam*), but then eventually be brought back into the orbit of the main charismatic cycle (Sunni Islam).

Malcolm X's place in his own charismatic cycle thus changed through his lifetime. As a convert to the *Nation of Islam* from Christianity, he initially embodied a typical first-generation response to Elijah Muhammad's *charisma*, seeing him as a unique conduit to the Divine. But when he rejected the teachings of the *Nation of Islam*, he became a charismatic figure in his own right, now drawing directly on the legacy of both the Sunni Muslim tradition and also the fight for Black liberation in post-slavery United States. I argue that these complex legacies and choices face every charismatic figure, whether in the present or in the past, but that history writing itself smooths over these complexities and contradictions through a process of selective memory. In some ways, this makes it harder to notice charismatic figures in our own time. They appear, as Carlyle suggested, merely as »a Poet, beautiful verse-maker, man of genius, or such like!« (Carlyle 1993, 72).

¹³ For an excellent overview of the figures I discuss here, see Curtis IV (2002).

My final example is just such a woman of genius,¹⁴ the American teacher and scholar Dr. Amina Wadud (b. 1952).¹⁵ Firmly within the Muslim tradition, Wadud is also an African-American feminist, writing important analyses of Muslim sources and their sometimes patriarchal interpretations. Wadud is also well-known for leading public prayers, both in South Africa and in North America, yet hers is not a break with Muslim tradition. Rather, she finds inspiration in the examples of scholarly women and women who have led prayer from Islamic history, even from the earliest companions of the Prophet Muḥammad. Like Malcolm X and Pierre Vogel, however, Wadud was not born a Muslim, and this very break from her earlier Christian tradition might be a source of strength as she helps to reform her chosen tradition.¹⁶ As with Malcolm X, her complex set of identities and influences complicate her charismatic personality, the contours of which may well be shaped by others in the future.

Conclusions

Considering modern examples of charismatic individuals like Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, and Amina Wadud helps to clarify the powerful role of history and historians in shaping and selecting the exemplary charismatic personality. In a religious tradition, like Islam, this shaping helps to accommodate the rise of new charismatic authorities, who respond to the crises of the moment, while maintaining a continuity with the tradition. As these examples proliferate, the Prophet Muḥammad's own personality is reshaped and transformed, such that he becomes the ideal warrior, peacemaker, healer, and businessman, as demanded by the present moment.

In my historical model of charismatic leadership, followers have an important role, as it is their memories and their interpretations that shape the charisma of past paragons and lay the foundation for future leadership. Followers include those actually present with the charismatic leader as well as anyone who remembers and passes on their example to others. This means, however, that as a historian of reli-

¹⁴ It is important to recognize that most exemplars of *charisma* in Muslim traditions, whether pure or routinized, are men. I believe this is due to the fact that the public routinized charismatic sphere was usually taken up by men, while women participated in a less appreciated, but nonetheless vital, sphere of private charismatic authority. However, my model suggests that Muslim feminists, like Wadud, are laying a foundation for an increasingly central role for charismatic religious authority among women in Islam.

¹⁵ Wadud's books include the semi-autobiographical *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (2006), with an important introduction by Khalid Abou El Fadl.

¹⁶ This is my interpretation; Wadud speaks rather of a »reversion« to Islam as the original religion, not of a conversion.

gion, I am also a follower of these individuals and, in a sense, so are all who read these words, as you choose to accept or reject my account. There is a power in the act of remembrance and repeating the stories of great leaders in our past and present, because in telling their stories we co-create their importance for others. So, at the end, what are the stories of Muslim leaders that we want to remember and to tell to others? We do have a choice, after all. We can pass on those stories that anger and enrage us, or we can tell stories that give hope and that pave the way for a better future for all. In fact, the Islamic tradition is full of inspiring individuals, like Amina Wadud and Saḥnūn b Saʿīd, who represent the full spectrum of humanity. The examples we choose to remember, therefore, may say more about us than about Islam itself.

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