Al-Dawla al-nabawiyya

Appropriating the Prophet's Authority in the Islamic State's Media

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Now the caliphate has returned; we ask God the Exalted to ground it on the way of prophethood.

ABŪ MUḤAMMAD AL-‘ADNĀNĪ, *Hādha wa’d Allāh*

Whenever people have referred to the Prophet Muḥammad as a role model, they have “detached” him to a certain degree from his specific historic and socio-religious context, constructing a shell that preserves the essence of the Prophet and that might tell us more about these people and their aspirations than about the historical person that was Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh. The “aura of factuality”¹ created around the Prophet Muḥammad in the manifold domains of Muslim cultural production does not only bolster hierarchical power structures. It even incentivises authorities to cloak themselves in the aura of the past in order to legitimise their present endeavours.

As the above quotation of Abū Muḥammad al-‘Adnānī, the late spokesperson of the Islamic State, indicates, ideologues of the Islamic State and its predecessors² have used texts, speeches, and audio-visual media to claim the prerogative of interpreting Muḥammad’s biography, his deeds, thoughts, and

¹ Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System”, 90.

² For the sake of brevity, I use the emic designation “Islamic State” to denote the militant Jihādī-Salafī group that has announced the establishment of an Islamic state (*dawla islāmīyya*) in July 2014/Ramadan 1435. The use of this designation in this chapter encompasses all stages of organisational and denominational evolution, including *al-tawḥīd wa-l-jihād*, *tanẓīm qā’idat al-jihād fī bilād al-rāfidayn*, *ḥilf al-muṭayyabīn*, *dawlat al-‘Irāq al-islāmīyya*, and *al-dawla al-islāmīyya fī l-‘Irāq wa-l-Shām*. Furthermore, I use “ideologues” to designate anyone affiliated with the Islamic State who is involved in conceiving and articulating the group’s world view through various media, reflecting and shaping the standpoint of the group and its interest based on supposedly shared moral and ethical premises.

his personal qualities. They have sought to define the “essence” of the Prophetic model and to classify who truly acts according to the divine ordinances instantiated by him. Such delineation serves to present the situation and mindset of the Prophet Muḥammad and his companions as an analogy to that of the Islamic State’s ideologues and their followers. The paragon that is the Prophet in terms of leadership, morality, and proximity to God is evoked as the foundation for their conceptualisation of how any sphere of life should be organised. Despite their general reliance on the acknowledged canonical compilations of Prophetic traditions,³ their use of *ḥadīth* to present the Prophet as a source of authority and legitimation for Jihādī-Salafī thought and action has received widespread public criticism by a number of Sunnī scholars and laity.⁴

In this chapter, I will trace some ways in which the Islamic State’s ideologues have appropriated and elicited the Prophet as a source of authority to shape a clearly defined collective identity and, at the same time, to justify domination of the territories under their control. For the discussion of the uses of the Prophetic model by the Islamic State vis-à-vis its various international and local audiences, I draw on my previous work on the various sources of authority employed by the Islamic State to substantiate its claim for legitimate domination.⁵ In light of the broad range of appeals to the exceptional achievements and virtues of the Prophet and his companions made by the Islamic State’s ideologues through reference to specific phrases and texts, I argue that Max Weber’s concept of *charismatic domination*, that is, “specific gifts of body and mind that were considered ‘supernatural’ (in the sense that not everybody could have access to them)”, can help to systematically describe the ways in which they employ the Prophet Muḥammad as a paragon of morality, strength, and justice to further their cause.⁶

Appeals to charismatic authority that feed on references to the Prophet and the *ṣaḥāba* can be found in at least three areas of the Islamic State’s self-representations across different media. These include (a) the creation and performative manifestation of its symbolic repertoire, (b) the way the Islamic State frames its leader, the caliph, and (c) the way it portrays its fighters. More specifically, though, they appeal to their fighters’ and (potential) followers’ will to emulate the Prophet. It is hardly surprising, however, that some of the Prophet’s eminent traits endorsed in Muslim traditions that illustrate his outstanding position among his fellow human beings are scarcely addressed in the

3 Boutz et al., “Exploiting”; Fouad, “Zeitgenössische muslimische Kritik am Salafismus”.

4 Ya’qūbī, *Refuting ISIS*; “Open Letter”.

5 Günther and Kaden, “Authority”.

6 Weber, *Economy*, 1112.

Islamic State's media. "Milder" qualities such as mercy, kindness, and forgiveness are underrepresented in favour of others that accentuate the Prophet's role as a warrior and as leader of a small community, which had to reassert itself, in its immediate environment and beyond, against constant social, political, and economic pressure. Attributes such as strength, steadfastness, justice, military success, and asceticism are emphasised instead and play an important role in the way the Islamic State characterises the Prophet as a model for emulation.

16.1 Recreating a Powerful Symbol: The Black Banner

With its black banner (Figure 16.1), the Islamic State established a powerful symbol, which not only had been omnipresent throughout the global media for quite some time, but more importantly serves as a visual expression of its identity and self-conception. The banner's monochrome black-and-white design immediately catches the eye and attention of the beholder.

Many will also recognise the Muslim profession of faith inscribed on the banner, that is, the confession of the unity and uniqueness of God (*lā ilāha illā Allāh*). It is visually separated on the banner from its second part, the confirmation of Muḥammad as a messenger of God (*Muḥammad rasūl Allāh*), written below in a white circle.

Since the black banner functions as an emblem, hence a visual and material manifestation of the Islamic State's ideology and claims for power, its

FIGURE 16.1 The black banner of the Islamic State

monochrome design points to the group's clear-cut distinction between believers and unbelievers, a paradigm described in issue 7 of the Islamic State's online magazine *Dabiq* as the "extinction of the grey zone".⁷ The black banner thus conveys clarity and strength by virtue of its robust form and composition. More important, however, is the fact that the Islamic State's ideologues created a pictorial signet that may help to bolster their claims to the spiritual and political inheritance of the Prophet Muḥammad and his companions. Appropriating the affective power of shared Sunnī historical memories of the early Islamic period, the Islamic State's ideologues render the black banner an iconic bridge to an idealised past, hence the visual and material manifestation of their pledge to reform the Muslim community in conformity with divine ordinances. It thus became an indication of their claim to absolute political power, an emblem of their vision of purified "genuine" Sunnī Islam, and an epitome of the extent to which the Islamic State wanted to be seen as the Prophet Muḥammad's spiritual and political heir.

All of these dimensions are encoded in the visual composition of the black banner. Alluding to the early Islamic period, the banner's black colour is at first meant as a reminder of the Prophet's war banners. According to a document released in 2013 under the title *Mashrū'yyat al-rāya fī l-islām* (Legal permissibility of the banner in Islam), "the leader of the faithful issued a decree in consultation with knowledgeable people that the Islamic State's banner shall be black ... and it was decided that it shall be written upon it what had been written on the banner of the Prophet (sas): There is no God but God, Muḥammad is His messenger."⁸ To substantiate this decision, the document's authors quoted *ḥadīth* literature that describes the colour of the Prophet's banner as well as its epigraphy, that is, the *shahāda*. Noticeably, though, quotations that concern the writing on the banner are all drawn from non-canonical *ḥadīth*. Equally, the authors ignored canonical sources that emphasise the variety of colours of the banners carried by the Prophet and his followers during times of war.⁹

One can trace this attempt to develop and establish a notion of absolutely valid truth through conscious reduction of the complex and multilayered Islamic tradition in the self-positioning of the group towards historical uses of black banners. Presenting the Islamic State as a movement dedicated to the purification and reform of the *umma*, choosing a black flag as its emblem was only logical. Its symbolic charge is not only fed by the descriptions of the

7 al-Hayat Media Center, "Dabiq 7", 54–66.

8 "Mashrū'yyat al-rāya".

9 On the variety of colours reportedly used on the banners and flags of the nascent Muslim community under the Prophet's command as well as on a recent critique of the great play that is made of the mythical black banners in the present, see Jābir, "Hawas".

Prophet's war banner, but also by an apocalyptic-messianic *ḥadīth* according to which the revivers of "genuine" Islam "would arise and bear the black flags that would lead them to a final victory against the rule of tyranny and restore justice."¹⁰ Based on this Prophetic tradition, although its authenticity is doubtful, numerous religio-political movements throughout Islamic history have sought to bolster their claims to righteous revolt and true rulership by appropriating the symbolic power of the colour black and of black banners in particular,¹¹ among them the 'Abbāsīd caliphate.¹² Alluding to the memories of this caliphate, of its origin and achievements, the Islamic State's ideologues may have sought to trigger favourable responses among some of their audiences, and to project the various meanings of the black flag and its multiple connotations including notions of Prophetic succession, rebellion, and unification, as well as notions of revenge and the obliteration of dishonouring actions, on the Islamic State, using it for the formation of social identities.¹³ The visual composition of the banner hence reflects claims of the Islamic State coming into an ontological inheritance of the Prophet Muḥammad. As will be detailed below, the Islamic State's ideologues asserted not only such an abstract and indirect relation to Muḥammad, but presented their leader as a descendant of the Prophet. This assertion is expressed on the black banner primarily through the use of the circular form in the lower half, which is meant to resemble the putative seal of the Prophet stamped on letters supposedly written on the Prophet's behalf, which are preserved in the Topkapı Museum, Istanbul.¹⁴ Although the seal is probably a forgery, it is used here to authenticate the Islamic State's claim for power and to symbolically transmit the Prophet's authority onto the Islamic State's leader, Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī.

Through any of the aforementioned allusions to Islamic history, the movement's ideologues not only seek to link the Islamic State to the Prophet Muḥammad and the early Islamic state but also identify it as part of a continuous strand in Islam that is devoted to reforming the religion, bringing Islam back to its roots and ridding it of all wrongful innovations and misinterpretations. This movement "back to the origins" is also reflected in the design of the typeface in the upper part of the banner: the confession of monotheism is

10 Athamina, "Black Banners", 307.

11 McCants, *ISIS*, 25–29.

12 Sharon, *Black Banners from the East*.

13 On how the Islamic State's ideologues use the creation of knowledge and meaning to engineer social identities, see Günther, *Entrepreneurs of Identity*.

14 On the seal, see Allan and Sourdel, "Khātām, *Khātim*". On doubts concerning the authenticity of the letters, see Dunlop, "Another 'Prophetic' Letter".

FIGURE 16.2 Frontispiece of Muhājir, *al-Nabī al-qā'id*

written in the Kūfī style and thus in the type of writing in which the Qur'ānic text is presumed to have been first written down as a single compilation.¹⁵

The Islamic State's ideologues hence not only sought to create an official symbol that reflects the identity of the group, but rather an authentic image of the standard of the Prophet, which places its present bearers in a line of continuity. With this banner, its bearers position themselves at the same time as authorities over the definition of the true, pure, authentic Islam. A remarkable and blatantly clear example of this claim can be found on the frontispiece of a document entitled *al-Nabī al-qā'id* (Figure 16.2), which includes, among other things, the above-mentioned treatise on the appearance of the Prophet's flag.¹⁶

15 Witkam and Sukanda-Tessier, "Nuskha". The writing is hence, in contrast to McCants' (*ISIS*, 20–21) suggestion, neither "scrawled" nor is it helpful to focus on the fact that it appears "deliberately ragged, meant to suggest an era before the precision of Photoshop even though the flag was designed on a computer".

16 Republished in 2016 by the group's Maktabat al-Himma, it appears that the 377-page document had been originally compiled by the then "minister of war" (*wazīr al-ḥarb*)

Against the backdrop of the above-described claim for classificatory power whereby the Islamic State's ideologues sought to gain the prerogative of defining the appearance of the Prophet's banner, this cover picture is a remarkable example of how the group visualises the *maghāzī* period. The digital collage not simply depicts an ancient fortress above a pre-modern army of horsemen and foot soldiers with swords, spears, and black standards. The alignment of the horsemen in combination with the observer's perspective and the blurred faces, moreover, allude to miniature paintings in Islamic manuscripts that depict the period after the *hijra* and the battles fought by the Prophet and his companions. In addition, the title and subtitle of the document, which circumscribe the image of the soldiers, rather suggest that this image is an authentic representation of the nascent Muslim community and its war campaigns. Figure 16.2 hence is a remarkable example not only of an appropriation of Islamic visual culture, but also of what Mirzoeff¹⁷ has described as "visuality", that is, the visualisation of history in which power and visual representation intersect, because it highlights an actor's ability to assemble information, images, and ideas so as to picture history and, at the same time, manifest his or her authority. It can therefore be argued that this image has been intended to create an authentic, "true" visualisation of the *maghāzī* and thus helps free what the Islamic State defines to be the design of the Prophet's banner of any criticism, enabling sociopolitical actors to picture and define a sequence of history as "authentic" vis-à-vis their audiences.

Beyond the amalgamation of symbolic meaning apparent in the black flag, it also functions as insigne of the actual authority and power exerted by the Islamic State. When the group seized control of territories in Iraq and Syria, it did not just tear down national flags or the badges of opposition militias but also hoisted the black flag. It was also used in the form of banners, posters, or graffiti for the emblematic demarcation of areas, regions, cities, or buildings, declaring them to be under the power and control of the group. The flag was used in this sense to signal the takeover of official buildings such as courts, police stations, and other governmental facilities to indicate that the hitherto known order had been removed (Figure 16.3). The symbolic meaning of such acts became particularly salient when Islamic State's fighters raised the black flag over the destroyed sand wall of the border between Syria and Iraq, parts of which the group had bulldozed in a media-effective operation.¹⁸ It

of the Islamic State of Iraq, 'Abd al-Mun'im b. 'Izz al-Dīn al-Badawī (alias Abū Ḥamza al-Muhājir) to examine the governing practices of the Prophet.

17 Mirzoeff, "On Visuality", passim; Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, 1–2.

18 al-Hayat Media Center, *Sykes Picot*.

FIGURE 16.3 Stills from Islamic State videos

gained wider international attention when images with Islamic State's fighters parading through Mosul with black flags mounted to their vehicles dominated international media for some time in summer 2014. The black banner was also evoked in public speeches to the Islamic State's soldiers, when their commander told them that "the flag of *lā ilāha illā Allāh* will be established with which our Prophet Muḥammad came, with which he broke the Persians and the Romans".¹⁹

ʿAdnānī in January 2014 charged the symbolic content of the black flag even further, when he asserted that "we didn't see since ten years for this blessed banner except assistance, support, and aid from God Almighty, and maybe you felt that by yourselves, since whenever this banner enters God Almighty throws in your heart tranquillity, pride and fortitude, boldness and courage, and throws in the hearts and souls of the people love and veneration for you, as He throws fear [of you] in the souls of your enemies."²⁰

Both quotes indicate that the Islamic State's ideologues see the black flag not merely as a means of representation. Rather, they identify the signifier (the black flag) with the signified (the Islamic State/caliphate) and hence render this sign a constituent of the Islamic State and its identity-building project. For this reason, it can be argued that the black flag transmits the positive characteristics of the Prophet and his companions onto the Islamic State's followers. It thus became a vital element of the charismatic authority that the Islamic State has claimed for itself.

19 al-Maktab al-ʿIlāmī li-Wilāyat Šalāḥ al-Dīn, *Wa-Allāh mutimmu nūrihi*.

20 ʿAdnānī, *Wa-l-rāʿid*.

16.2 Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī: Descendant of the Prophet?

In the perspective of the Islamic State's ideologues and their followers, the removal of regional and local order at the hands of the group's fighters had gone hand in hand with the establishment of a new sociopolitical order, that is, the caliphate. These ideologues have gone at length to substantiate the eligibility and qualification of the group's leader, Ibrāhīm b. 'Awwād al-Badrī (alias Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī alias Khalifa Ibrāhīm), to guide the entire Muslim community in worldly and spiritual affairs.²¹ Their claim is predominantly bolstered with ideas of traditional authority that rest on what Max Weber termed "an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them",²² hence shaping the legal and organisational architecture of the Islamic State in its self-representation as a "caliphate on the Prophetic way". Nominally elected by the group's *shūrā* council, the Islamic State's ideologues have brought a person to the fore who would embody their conceptualisation of authority and society.²³ However, in order to render Abū Bakr an identification figure for their followers and to create the impression that he would be rightfully invested with caliphal status, the Islamic State's ideologues attributed specific personal qualities to him.

A prominent example for such an attribution can be found in a segment of a speech wherein the group's "official spokesperson" (*al-mutaḥaddith al-rasmī*), 'Adnānī, announced the establishment of the caliphate.

Therefore, the *shūrā* council of the Islamic State studied this matter after the Islamic State – by Allah's grace – gained the essentials necessary for *khilāfa*, which the Muslims are sinful for if they do not try to establish. In light of the fact that the Islamic State has no constraint in terms of religious law or excuse that can justify delaying or neglecting the establishment of the caliphate such that it would not be sinful, the Islamic State – represented by the people of authority (*ahl al-ḥall wa-l-'aqd*), consisting of its senior figures, leaders, and the *shūrā* council – resolved to announce the establishment of the Islamic caliphate, the appointment of a caliph for the Muslims, and the pledge of allegiance to the shaykh, the *mujāhid*, the scholar who practises what he preaches, the worshipper and leader, the brave, the reviver, descendant from the family of the Prophet,

21 Badrī had been killed on 26 October 2019 and was replaced by a widely unknown person with the *kunya* of Abū Ibrāhīm al-Hāshimī al-Qurashī. See Qurashī, *Wa-man awfā*.

22 Weber, *Economy*.

23 See Günther, *Entrepreneurs of Identity*.

the servant of Allah, Ibrāhīm b. ‘Awwād b. Ibrāhīm b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Badrī al-Hāshimī al-Husaynī al-Qurashī by lineage, al-Sāmarrā’ī by birth and upbringing, al-Baghdādī by residence and scholarship. And he has accepted the pledge of allegiance (*bay’a*). Thus, he is the imam and caliph for the Muslims everywhere.²⁴

Praising the new leader of the global Muslim community, ‘Adnānī makes it clear that whatever the qualities of the caliph are, they have been determined within, and are guaranteed by, the actions of “people of authority” (i.e. the *ahl al-ḥall wa-l-‘aqd*) who gain their power from the traditional order in which they are embedded.²⁵ Against the backdrop of this firm framework, ‘Adnānī asserts that the *shūrā* council and the *ahl al-ḥall wa-l-‘aqd* have selected an individual who is ascribed charismatic qualification in the sense of what Weber has described “a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities”.²⁶

‘Adnānī then proceeds to name a number of personal qualities of the caliph, several of which are purely personal traits like “the scholar who practises what he preaches” or “the reviver”. It is notable, however, that these qualities are mentioned before the caliph is referred to by name. While this arrangement is in accordance with the literary form of eulogy, the structure of ‘Adnānī’s announcement implies that while the caliph must have these qualities, they still are the qualities of the (office of the) caliph, not the qualities of (the person) Abū Bakr. It is the first form of charismatic authority the Islamic State ascribes to its leader, the “charisma of office”, that is based on “a dissociation of charisma from a particular individual, making it an objective, transferrable entity”.²⁷ In sum, this particular arrangement of attributes not only reflects an appropriation of a specific literary form, but also plays a role in safeguarding the group’s claim for power, because it is, in Weber’s terms, a “routinization” of charisma.²⁸ It lends potential stability to the Islamic State’s rule since it provides a justification to replace the current caliph, should he fail or be killed, without damaging the ruling structure.

24 ‘Adnānī, *Hādha wa’d Allāh*.

25 Still, the members of this eminent circle are not specified in any of the Islamic State’s media. On the *ahl al-ḥall wa-l-‘aqd* in the Islamic State’s self-conception, see Günther, *Ein zweiter Staat im Zweistromland?*, 210–15.

26 Weber, *Economy*, 241.

27 Weber, *Economy*, 248.

28 Weber, *Economy*, 246–54.

The Islamic State's ideologues, however, could not dissociate person and office completely, for they still have referred to features of Abū Bakr that point to him as a specific individual. Besides the above-mentioned *Hādha wa'd Allāh*, 'Adnānī, in another speech already published in 2011, characterises Abū Bakr as "a practising scholar as well as a devout worshipper and *mujāhid*. I saw within him the '*aqīda*, endurance, fearlessness, and aspiration of Abū Muṣ'ab, as well as the tolerance, justice, guidance, and humility of Abū 'Umar, alongside the intelligence, resourcefulness, determination, and patience of Abū Ḥamza."²⁹ 'Adnānī here emphasised that Abū Bakr embodies a combination of the best virtues of his predecessors, hence marking the summit of the group's evolution. In another text, the Bahraini scholar Turkī al-Bin'alī, who had affiliated himself with the Islamic State in 2013, undertook the task to explain Abū Bakr's qualification in more detail.³⁰ He describes Abū Bakr as a brilliant theologian and emphasises that he "has mastered the ten *qirā'āt* of the Qur'ān", implying that he has acquired a sound knowledge of the holy text and extraordinary proficiency in the theological discipline of reading the Qur'ān.³¹ Also Abū Bakr's insights into the Qur'ānic text qualify him to discover and revive the original and "genuine" meaning of the scripture. These compendia of Abū Bakr's virtues emphasise his eligibility for the office of caliph/imam since they render his personal qualifications in conformity with the requirements set out in the classical texts of Sunnī theorists on statehood. These sought to present the ideal candidate as an emulation of the paragon that was the Prophet Muḥammad in terms of worldly and spiritual leadership.

Another feature that pertains to these prerequisites is the genealogy of the *amīr al-mu'minīn* and caliph. Both 'Adnānī's speech *Hādha wa'd Allāh* and Bin'alī's text present the "Commander of the Faithful" as a descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad and his grandson Ḥusayn b. 'Alī by an Iraqi lineage.³² Sharīfian descent as criterion for the legitimate authority of the Islamic State's leader had also been claimed for Abū Bakr's predecessor, Abū 'Umar al-Baghdādī. The latter's designation as *amīr al-mu'minīn* after the announcement of the Islamic State of Iraq in late 2006 had received the esteem of key figures of the global Jihādī-Salafī current, emphasising the hereditary charisma embodied by him. Anwar al-Awlākī, an American-born cleric affiliated with al-Qā'ida, published a speech in which he endorsed the fact that "the

29 'Adnānī, *Inna dawla*.

30 Bin'alī, "Maddū".

31 Paret, "Qirā'a".

32 See Günther, "Al-Qaida in Iraq". In the above-mentioned text Turkī al-Bin'alī provides a list of Abū Bakr's ancestors (Bin'alī, "Maddū"). For a thorough critique of the lineage presented in this leaflet, see "Faḍiḥa".

current head of that [Islamic] state being a descendant of Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī carries a lot of importance [because] it represents a move of the idea from the theoretical realm to the real world. The idea of establishing the Islamic rule and establishing *khilāfa* on earth now is not anymore talk. It is action.”³³

The presentation of both leaders as descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad points to a second way in which the Islamic State routinises charismatic authority, namely, by framing it as “hereditary charisma”. The charisma of the Prophet as the prime authority is seen as being able to be “transmitted by heredity; thus that it is participated in by the kinsmen of its bearer”.³⁴ Identifying the caliph in this way accounts for respect for the Prophet’s house and places its bearers into a – albeit construed – line of continuity providing legitimation by ascribing the broad range of religious, social, and political meanings of this descent to the Islamic State’s leader. Moreover, this claim is widely recognisable in Iraqi society, for not only the importance of genealogical records had increased since the 1990s, but also the caliph’s tribe, the Bū Badrī, is indisputably recognised to be of Sharīfian descent. With regard to hereditary charisma attributed to the Islamic State’s leaders, a spiritual dimension that draws on popular beliefs around the emanation of *baraka* in the Prophet’s descendants is also apparent, although it is not explicitly addressed by the group’s ideologues. By tracing Abū Bakr’s and Abū ‘Umar’s lineage back to Ḥusayn and the Prophet’s daughter Fāṭima, the Islamic State makes indirect allusions to this beneficent force. Presenting both of its leading figures as being blessed with this spiritual power, it opens up a space for those who apprehend the caliphate as a spiritual mission in the first place and for whom these leaders must be equipped with extraordinary spiritual qualities, which in turn validates their eligibility as political leaders.

The leader’s claim to Sharīfian descent constitutes yet another symbolic bridge between past and present, which was built by the Islamic State’s ideologues seeking to evoke motifs of glory, dignity, pride, and honour through an appropriation of ideas, historical memories, and emotions pertaining to the family of the Prophet. This also feeds into their idealised concept of the caliphate and of their identity-building project. In this sense, it does not matter whether the Islamic State’s leadership circle or their various audiences believed in the genealogical continuity linking Abū Bakr and his predecessor

33 Awlākī, *Hearts and Minds*. This piece of Awlākī’s speech had also been included in one of a series of videos entitled *The Establishment of the Islamic State* in 2013 where the Islamic State’s ideologues saw it fit using this reference to bolster the genealogy they had ascribed to Abū Bakr. See al-I’tiṣām, *Iqāma al-dawla*.

34 Weber, *Economy*, 248.

to the Prophet's family. The Islamic State's ideologues in fact provided propositions to which many Sunnī Muslims could potentially relate, and they evoked historical memories and images in the minds of their audiences that were connected with distinct individual and collective emotions.

The Islamic State has thus employed numerous techniques of legitimising the authority of the caliph as an extraordinary, charismatically endowed person while still constraining his authority in the framework of a traditional order marked by divine ordinances. Abū Bakr was seen as indispensable to the Muslim community, because his presence guaranteed the observance of divine ordinances, the validity of certain religious practices, and individual salvation. Although his primary duties reduced his activities to a representative role, the charismatic qualification of both incumbent and office rendered the caliphate symbolically and affectively powerful. Since this sort of authority was much more significant to the Islamic State than the ruler's determination, the movement's ideologues apparently conceptualised the figure of the caliph not as an absolute ruler, but rather as a nominal leader who was nevertheless still seen as the locus of power, because without a caliph there can be no "genuine" Muslim society.

16.3 The Prophetic Way (*minhāj al-nubuwwa*)

The ideological framework of a traditional order is plainest represented in the Islamic State's claim to establish a "caliphate in accordance with the Prophetic way" (*khilāfa 'alā minhāj al-nubuwwa*). Since the announcement of the caliphate in July 2014/Ramadan 1435, the Islamic State had emphasised that the nature of this new order orients itself by "the Prophetic way", hence creates an all-encompassing system that affects all domains of society and individual life.

In this self-characterisation, the Islamic State's ideologues have selected a quote from the *ḥadīth* literature and adopted it as a slogan for their proto-state that helped to bring their thought and action in relation to historical precedent, and to make it appear as the fulfilment of a prophecy.³⁵ The chosen ref-

35 The *ḥadīth* in full is: "Prophethood will remain amongst you for as long as Allah wishes. Then Allah will remove it whenever He wishes to remove it, and there will be a caliphate upon the Prophetic methodology (*minhāj*). It will last for as long as Allah wishes it to last, then Allah will remove it whenever He wishes to remove it. Then there will be an abiding dynasty, and it will remain for as long as Allah wishes it to remain. Then Allah will remove it whenever He wishes to remove it. Then there will be tyrannical [forceful] kingship, and it will remain for as long as Allah wishes it to remain. Then He will remove it whenever He

erence to this tradition helps to bolster the Islamic State's claims for a distinct mode of sociopolitical organisation that is set in contrast to those based on democracy, secularism, and nationalism, among others. In his announcement of the caliphate, 'Adnānī emphasised this motif when he asserted that "nothing remains after the elimination of these borders, the borders of humiliation, and the breaking of the idol, the idol of nationalism, except the caliphate in accordance with the Prophetic way."³⁶ 'Adnānī's statement indicates that this notion was also used in many instances in order to reaffirm the "right" path pursued by the Islamic State, and to dismiss any criticism and attacks from outside as mere proofs of its righteousness.³⁷

The claims to traditional authority associated with the idea of a "caliphate in accordance with the Prophetic way" plays an eminent role in justifying the Islamic State's actions, including the exertion of extreme violence,³⁸ which can be seen in the range of quotations from the *ḥadīth* literature that we find in many of the group's texts, videos, or speeches. This strategy of symbolic enhancement combined with the creation of meaning through media, however, is only apparently a theologically immunised exercise of power, because many quotations come from canonical collections, but some have weak chains of transmission or are selectively shortened and combined to support the Islamic State's cause.³⁹

In its videos in particular, the Islamic State's ideologues sought to convey the impression that its followers would not only quote the Prophet to justify their actions, but would emulate him in doing what they did. As I have argued elsewhere, the leadership of the Islamic State and its predecessors created a symbolic repertoire of concepts, social practices, and forms of cultural production that served to bolster the meaningfulness of their claim to a

wishes to remove it, and then there will be a caliphate upon the Prophetic methodology." See Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 17939. Some clerics, however, consider the *ḥadīth* weak due to its weak *isnād*.

36 'Adnānī, *Hādha wa'd Allāh*.

37 Usāma bin Lādin, in a speech released in 2008, assessed that the foremost reason for the Islamic State of Iraq being attacked and treated with hostility by forces from within and outside of the country lay in the fact that they were closest to the truth and the method of the Prophet, proclaiming the truth and pleasing the Creator.

38 See Mu'assasat al-Furqān, *Ālā minḥāj*. It is in this 36-minute video compilation which was distributed shortly after the announcement of the caliphate under the title of "*Ālā minḥāj al-nubuwwa*" that the Islamic State's leadership presented their interpretation of how an Islamic state operates that emulated the Prophet's example. Their focal point was on military operations, conquering territories, retaliation against inner-Islamic enemies, unification with tribal and other rebel forces, and iconoclasm.

39 Boutz et al., "Exploiting".

historical continuity between the Prophet Muḥammad, his followers, and the Islamic State. Publicly visible practices in particular bore many references to the Prophet's role as the political leader of his nascent community. Due to the spatial limitations of this chapter, only one specific example, the oath of allegiance (*bay'a*), will be discussed here. Other practices related to the exertion of regulatory authority,⁴⁰ like Eid festivities or the administration of *zakāt*,⁴¹ and body practices such as the dying of beard and eye lashes and the cleaning of one's teeth with a *miswāk*, will have to be left out.⁴² In all these cases, the Islamic State implicitly or explicitly refers to the Prophet Muḥammad as a source of inspiration.

In order to demonstrate that its leadership legitimately strives to exercise regulatory authority over the Muslim community, the Islamic State issued many textual and audio-visual publications that demanded an oath of allegiance (*bay'a*) from all Muslims.⁴³ They sought to revive a practice whereby a person of authority enters into a social contract with the Muslim community and receives legitimation from it in return. They drew on concepts of *bay'a* that were used by early Muslims who offered a pledge of allegiance to the Prophet Muḥammad and physically touched him during the ceremony, which is interpreted as indicating unity and dedication.⁴⁴ To the best of my knowledge, Abū Ḥamza al-Muhājir, the then "minister of war" of the Islamic State of Iraq, in October 2006 had been the first member of its leadership to announce his loyalty to the newly appointed *amīr al-mu'minīn*, Abū 'Umar, declaring "to listen and obey in hardship and in ease, in pleasure and displeasure even if someone is wrongly favoured over us, and pledging not to dispute the rule of those in authority and that we should speak the truth wherever we are and not to fear those who blame us regarding God".⁴⁵ The Islamic State's ideologies

40 Mu'assasat al-Furqān, *Ṣarḥ al-khilāfa*; Revkin, "Legal Foundations".

41 al-Maktab al-I'lāmī li-Wilāyat Ninawā, *Yawm al-jā'iza*; Mu'assasat al-Furqān, *Wa-āta al-zakāt*.

42 al-Maktab al-I'lāmī li-Wilāyat Ninawā, *Yawm al-jā'iza*.

43 See 'Adnānī, *Hādha wa'd Allāh*.

44 On the origins of *bay'a*, see Landau-Tasseron, "Religious Foundations"; Tyan, "Bay'a"; Wagemakers, "Concept".

45 Muhājir, *Inna al-ḥukm*. See Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1709. For more *ḥadīths* on "listening and obeying" (*sam' wa-tā'a*), see the references in Wensinck, *Concordance*, 2:540ff (*sam'*, *al-sam' wa-l-tā'a*). *Ḥadīth* collections refer to different occasions on which the Prophet taught his companions how to swear him allegiance, thus recording slight variations in wording, which are also to be found in several of the Islamic State's publications. For instance, a 2009 document quotes a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet answers a query of his companions by saying: "Swear me allegiance by listening and obeying, with activity and inaction, in what pleases and displeases [you], by commanding good and forbidding wrong." "Khuṭṭa", 29, and *ḥadīth* compilations referred to therein.

hence established a ritualised framework for a recognition of their authority based on the mutual acceptance of a hierarchical social structure embedded in divine ordinances.⁴⁶ In this sense, *bay'a* also affirms the contractual relationship between rulers and their subjects as a basis for individual salvation. Consequently, the Islamic State's ideologues base their calls for the public to show obedience upon Q 4:59 and have frequently invoked a *ḥadīth* according to which any Muslim who dies without being bound by an oath of obedience dies as a pagan (*man māta wa-laysa fī 'unqihī bay'a fa-māta mītan jāhiliyya*).⁴⁷ They have lent this practice public effectiveness and community-building character as a sign of the unity of the Muslim community and sought to emphasise the performative aspects of the *bay'a*, which plays a significant role in the Islamic State's videographic representation of its rule and in attesting its recognition by its subjects.

The audio-visual coverage interprets the people's "general oath" (*bay'at al-ʿamma*) rather as a form of acclamation than a prerequisite for legitimate authority.⁴⁸ After all it was an elite circle, the *shūrā*, whose members finalised the appointment of the ruler and induced their constituencies to swear loyalty to the caliph. They have nonetheless placed notable emphasis on public performances of such oaths of allegiance in order to reaffirm the acceptance of the Islamic State's rule both on the ground and through various (audio-) visual publications. Several videos of the group depict the staging of such performances in public by showing "ordinary people" applauding and cheering the movement's soldiers or vowing an oath of allegiance to Abū Bakr in public, which in turn can be interpreted as a form of recognition of the Islamic State's authority.⁴⁹ Beyond such allegedly spontaneous offerings of allegiance to the movement, videographic records of the *bay'a* (Figure 16.4) show a highly formalised ceremony and imply that the Islamic State had a great interest in displaying procedural regularity. By this it obviously wanted to support its claim

46 See, among others, Maktabat al-Himma, "Mukhtaṣar"; Azdī, "Muwajjabāt"; Mu'assasat al-Furqān, "I'lām"; also Maktabat al-Himma, "Aḥkām", a leaflet outlining the "Provisions for the Pledge of Allegiance to the Caliphate" (*aḥkām bay'at al-khilāfa*). The flyer was supposedly produced for distribution in the territories controlled by the Islamic State.

47 Q 4:49 reads: "O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you." Kister, "Social", 106, notes that "it is quite in character that this tradition was transmitted by Mu'āwiya". Despite its chain of transmission, the tradition had been included in Muslim's compendium; see Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:549; 1851. On variations of the *ḥadīth*, see Wensinck, *Handbook*.

48 Badry, *Beratungsgedanken*, 131–32; Anjum, *Politics*, 120.

49 There are numerous examples showing people – children and adults alike – lauding the Islamic State by pledging allegiance to Abū Bakr. For early instances of individual and collective advocates throughout the region demonstrating their support, see Tamimi, "Bay'ah".

FIGURE 16.4 Stills from Islamic State videos

to regulatory authority, to demonstrate reliability, and to build trust and confidence in its rule. This is particularly obvious in cases where local notables, elders, tribal members, and several dozens of fighters swore the oath of allegiance to Abū Bakr.⁵⁰

16.4 Emulating Muḥammad as a Warrior Prophet

Since its very first public self-definitions, the Islamic State's ideologues have frequently referred to the *maghāzī* period in the earliest years of the *hijra* to describe themselves as a group that emulates the example set by the Prophet and his companions during times of hardship and military confrontation.⁵¹ I will describe in more detail below how they built up and employed such an analogy between the Islamic State and the nascent Muslim community to bolster their self-image as a social-revolutionary vanguard (*ṭalī'a*) whose reformative and missionary impetus is inextricably linked to the formative period of Islam. Moreover, the Islamic State's ideologues appropriated the personality traits of Muḥammad and his companions, ascribing them to the Islamic State's leadership and fighters in particular and thus establishing a symbolic analogy

⁵⁰ al-Maktab al-I'lāmi li-Wilāyat Ninawā, *Ashā'ir*; Mu'assasat al-Furqān, *Alā minhāj*.

⁵¹ See Zarqāwī, *Risāla*; Zarqāwī, *Hādha bayān*; al-I'tisām, *Iqāma al-dawla*; al-Maktab al-I'lāmi li-Wilāyat al-Baraka, *Sa-yuhzamu l-jam'*.

between the Islamic State and the nascent Muslim community. Equally, they drew on the characteristics of the Prophet's opponents and enemies to brand their own military, religious, social, and political adversaries, hence to locate the Islamic State in a continuing battle between "good" and "evil".

Muhājir, in an audio message that was titled *al-Dawla al-nabawiyya* and released in September 2008/Ramadan 1429, paradigmatically demonstrated the way in which the Islamic State's ideologues have emphasised personal-ity traits of Muḥammad and his early followers with regard to Muḥammad's role as a warrior prophet, and to the hardship endured by the nascent Muslim community. Muhājir dedicated his 1 hour 20 minutes speech to an exploration of the reasons for the perseverance of this community in the earliest years after the *hijra* against great odds. He underlined the scarcity of wealth and resources that had been at the disposal of the Prophet and his companions after their flight from Mecca.

Medina, Muhājir asserts, had not been a safe haven for the nascent Muslim community that needed protection. Their flight rather heralded the start of "a new period of sacrifices in terms of self and money, with a new chapter of poverty, fear, starvation ... [and a life characterised by] fear, dread, periods of attention vis-a-vis their enemies, and alertness throughout all times".⁵² During this period, Muhājir elaborates further, the nascent Islamic State in Medina suffered from poverty and starvation that spared none of its inhabitants who could only prove themselves in these trials because they emulated the traits of the Prophet – "the best, and most honourable, and most courageous" among the people. Beyond his emphasis on Muḥammad as a paragon of steadfastness, he extensively dwells on the *ahl al-ṣuffa*, a group of emigrants from Mecca that, due to a lack of shelter, took refuge under a shed roof at the Prophet's mosque.⁵³ Quoting several *ḥadīths* that underline their asceticism and their willingness to endure material and physical deprivations due to their faith in Islam alone, he presents in detail the distinct traits of these people. The quintessence of his exposition is that the Prophet and his followers were able to build a state without even the most basic things, such as food and drink, and instead perceived their belief in the one God as a source of strength that made them endure any hardship. Muhājir presents these people as role models and calls today's Muslims (and followers of the Islamic State) to follow their path. Their endurance despite the number of hardships distinguished them from other people and likewise, the Islamic State's leadership seeks to appeal to its

52 Muhājir, *al-Dawla al-nabawiyya*.

53 Watt, "Ahl al-Ṣuffa".

(potential) followers, calling upon them to put their wealth, health, and life at risk to distinguish themselves from the majority.

Such a distinction is most explicitly pronounced with regard to the Islamic State's soldiers who are seen as the nucleus of the vanguard that is the Islamic State in its self-description. In order to justify the need for violent action, the Islamic State's ideologues have frequently cited a *ḥadīth* from Ibn Ḥanbal's collection: "The Messenger (peace be upon him) said, 'I was sent with a sword in my hands before the Hour so that God alone would be worshipped without a partner. My sustenance was provided in the shade of my spear (*ju'ila rizqī taḥta ḥilli rumḥī*). Humiliation and disdain were placed on those who oppose my order. He who imitates a people is one of them.'"⁵⁴ This *ḥadīth*, which is alluded to in several ways throughout the Islamic State's media production,⁵⁵ also helps to reinforce the notion of Muḥammad as a warrior prophet, and Islam as religion of war:

O Muslims, Islam was never for a day the religion of peace. Islam is the religion of war. Your Prophet (pbuh) was dispatched with the sword as a mercy to the creation. He was ordered with war until God is worshipped alone. He (pbuh) said to the polytheists of his people, 'I came to you with slaughter.' He fought both the Arabs and non-Arabs in all their various colours. He himself left to fight and took part in dozens of battles. He never for a day grew tired of war.⁵⁶

It is thus not only by their deeds and convictions that the Islamic State's soldiers follow the example of the Prophet and his companions but also "by their swords, they have repeated the stories of the *ṣaḥāba*".⁵⁷ This notion is alluded to in at least two ways by the Islamic State's ideologues when they emphasise analogies between past and present. First, they frequently refer to the Islamic State as an epitome of *al-tā'ifa al-manṣūra/al-tā'ifa al-zāhira*, quoting several versions of a *ḥadīth* according to which the Prophet said: "A group of my *umma* continues to fight in the cause of God, defeating their enemy, undeterred by

54 Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 5667; see also other references in Wensinck, *Concordance*, 2:254 (*rizq*).

55 Boutz et al., "Exploiting", 8; see also al-Maktab al-I'lāmī li-Wilāyat Ḥimṣ, *Taḥta ḥillāl*.

56 Baghdādī, *Infirū khifāfan*. The modification of a Qur'ānic verse (Q 21:107: *wa-mā arsalnāka illā raḥmatan li-l-'ālamīn*) by adding "with the sword" (*bi-l-sayf*) with reference to the above-mentioned *ḥadīth* had been used before by the Islamic State's spokesperson 'Adnānī and was subsequently criticised by a number of Muslim clerics in "Open Letter". See Boutz et al., "Exploiting", 18.

57 'Adnānī, *Mā kāna*.

those who are against them, until Judgement Day.”⁵⁸ Second, they present themselves as the force that continues the deeds of the Prophet and his companions during many of the battles (*ghazawāt*) between the nascent Muslim community and their adversaries shortly after the *hijra* such as Ḥamrā’ al-Asad, al-Aḥzāb, al-Qādisiyya, and al-Yarmūk. Although some of these battles are remembered as events from which the Prophet and his companions emerged triumphantly, the traditions still carry memories of a small outnumbered and outpowered Muslim community, which yet deeply trusted their Lord who protected and saved them.

Other battles such as the campaign against Khaybar and the decisive victory at Badr in particular are referred to as overall successful. Not only is the Prophet’s example as being closest to the enemies and being the strongest and most courageous frequently cited as a role model for the Islamic State’s soldiers.⁵⁹ The Battle of Badr is furthermore relevant in justifying the socio-economic strategies of modern rebel warfare, because it allowed the nascent Islamic State to overcome a state of poverty and starvation due to the spoils of war obtained there.⁶⁰ Spoils of war from the wealth of the disbelievers are regarded as “the noblest and most delicious gains” (*ashraf al-kasb ‘alā l-iṭlāq wa-atyabuhā*).⁶¹ Taking the Prophet as an example, the Islamic State’s fighters and leadership should seek their earnings through booty and spoils of war since alms are restricted to be distributed among the needy. Booty is also legalised with reference to the above-mentioned *ḥadīth* according to which the Prophet’s “provision has been placed beneath the shade of my spear”. Following this approach, the Islamic State’s leadership and media apparatus have in many publications emphasised the permissibility of looting and taking spoils of war in accordance with the Prophet’s deeds: “How can a monotheist *mujāhid* not seek for booty when it is clear that the Prophet and most of his companions sought for it, and the hypocrites were stingy with booty?”⁶²

Beyond characteristics that make them sustain in the exertion of violence, the Islamic State’s ideologues have, in numerous texts, speeches, and videos, attributed their soldiers with a range of traits such as patience (*ṣabr*), physical strength, volition, faith (*īmān*), and piety (*taqwā*). Referring to the role model that is the nascent Muslim community during the first years after the *hijra*, they have appealed to these traits in order to define and distinguish the

58 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1037. Quoted in e.g. Baghdādī, *Ḥaṣād al-sinūn*; Baghdādī, *al-Bunyān al-marṣūṣ*.

59 Baghdādī, *al-‘Izz bi-ṣiyyāna*.

60 See Muhājir, *al-Dawla al-nabawīyya*.

61 Muhājir, *al-Dawla al-nabawīyya*.

62 Muhājir, *al-Dawla al-nabawīyya*.

mujāhid from his environment. To make clear what they expect of soldiers who defend “true” Islam based on their faith alone, they appealed to characteristics such as steadfastness (*ṭhabāt*) and endurance despite “afflictions with wounds and losses in people and weaponry”,⁶³ the lack of resources and water “except what the Lord of the earth and the heavens expended upon them [the Prophet and his companions]”,⁶⁴ as well as “the hardship of fear, hunger, and cold”.⁶⁵ These soldiers are warned to humble themselves and are described as being “in a state of *ribāt*, day and night.”⁶⁶ They sleep on the ground and use heaven as a blanket. The heat of the sun strains them in the summer, and their extremities become frozen during winter when they support God’s religion.”⁶⁷

What was to be remembered as a glorious history indeed only became such due to the hardships and sacrifices endured by the early Muslim community that had to stand the test imposed on them by God. Likewise, the Islamic State’s ideologues have frequently referred to Q 2:155 to frame any military defeat in terms of a test that God imposes on them so that they could prove the strength of their faith.⁶⁸ Muhājir asserted that

he who seeks a higher level through his faith is not deterred from *jihād* against the enemy by the harm caused by the people of worldly pleasure. This is even when the harm reaches its extreme limits. He is pleased with God’s ruling, fate, and His way that rules over His creation. He frees his heart of desire and truth ignites in his heart and certainty covers it. He never has a preference or puts himself forward before God’s and His Messenger’s hands, for the matter is a matter of belief and disbelief. These are two distinct parts that never meet. Events on the ground only make him more resistant, perseverant, and more certain about the truthful promise because God is the Subduer, the King, and the Overcomer. To Him is the refuge when a calamity strikes and to Him belongs the

63 Zarqāwī, *Hādha bayān*.

64 See Muhājir, *Inna al-ḥukm*. Also quoted in al-I’tisām, *Iqāma al-dawla*.

65 Muhājir, *al-Dawla al-nabawiyya*.

66 Baghdādī, *Risāla*.

67 al-Maktab al-ʿIlāmī li-Wilāyat Ḥimṣ, *Taḥta ṣilāl*. In this context, the term *ribāt* refers to the conceptualisation of the Islamic State’s soldiers as warriors fighting on the frontier between (and defending) the abode of Islam (*dār al-islām*) and the abode of disbelief (*dār al-kufr*). On a comprehensive examination of the term, see Chabbi and Rabbat, “Ribāt”.

68 “And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient”.

final return. He warns, gives notice, and gives glad tidings of victory to those who believe in Him, perform *hijra* and *jihād* for His sake, and are patient.⁶⁹

This notion is also apparent in a fighter's statement who directly addresses his fellow Muslims and (potential) followers of the Islamic State in a video, asserting that "you know that the path to paradise is plastered with hardship (*makāriḥ*) and hell is full of desires. And this is the way of the Prophet Muḥammad and of the companions and who followed after them and who followed after them. If you see tribulations (*balā'*) then you know that you are on the way of truth."⁷⁰

16.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented a tentative examination of the appropriation of the Prophet's authority in the Islamic State's media. It used the concept of charismatic authority to show how, beyond the extensive quotation of *ḥadīths*, the Islamic State's ideologues have created an aura of factuality around their symbolic repertoire by interweaving a range of allusions to the figure of the Prophet and reclaiming the spiritual and worldly inheritance of Muḥammad and the *ṣaḥāba*.

I have shown that the Islamic State's ideologues have created the black banner as a signifier of its claim for legitimate authority. This visual sign is enchanted and symbolically loaded through its colour scheme, the typography, the *shahāda*, and the Prophet's signet, hence giving off the charismatic authority of the Prophet in its *statu nascendi* that surrounded his leadership and, at the same time, drawing on historical structures and tradition that helped to "preserve" his charisma.

The Islamic State's ideologues followed the same strategy when they attributed charismatic qualifications to their leader, Abū 'Umar al-Baghdādī, and to his successor, Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī. They played on the sense of loyalty and obligation on which traditions of Muḥammad's prophecy rest and employed the alleged Prophetic descent of both leaders to bolster their claim for legitimate authority. Drawing on Sunnī theories of statehood developed between the tenth and the fourteenth century CE, they have portrayed Abū Bakr in

69 Muhājir, *Ṣadaqa Allāh*.

70 al-Maktab al-ʿIlāmī li-Wilāyat Ḥimṣ, *Taḥta ḡilāl*.

particular as holding an office that itself transfers charisma, and as a person who is extraordinarily qualified to fulfil the requirements for the caliphate and to emulate the Prophet.

Such emulation of the paragon that is the Prophet in terms of morality and leadership has also been incorporated into social practices on which the Islamic State based its reformatory mission. I have described in more detail one such practice, that is, the oath of allegiance (*bay'a*). In reviving this practice, and by using a formula adopted from the Prophetic tradition, the Islamic State's ideologues not only sought to display procedural regularity in order to support their claim to regulatory authority. They could also count on a framework of knowledge based on which people swearing the *bay'a* recognised that they entered into a social contract guaranteed by loyalty and obligation to the Prophet and his community, and to the attempt to build a coherent Muslim community despite hardships and tribulations.

The Islamic State's ideologues have frequently alluded to such adversities during the *maghāzī* period to create an analogy between the condition of their group and the nascent Muslim community in the first years after the *hijra*. They have highlighted personal qualities of the Prophet and his companions, which have distinguished them from their environment and proved their righteousness, piety, and proximity to God. Moreover, the traits attributed to the early Muslims are likewise attributed to the *mujāhidīn*, so as to encourage them in both exertion of (violent) rule and perseverance in the light of defeat. The constant references of the Islamic State's ideologues to the exemplary figure of the Prophet and an idealised early period of Islam are central epistemes of the group, as is self-location as the only "righteous" representative of divine ordinances. These ideas have an important function, especially against the backdrop of the highly fluctuating and defensive situation of the group in an exceedingly unstable context, as they guarantee the continued existence of the caliphate in virtual space and help to route its potential resurgence elsewhere in the world.

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