

with them until they emigrate; but if they ask for your aid in religion, it is your duty to aid them, except against a people with whom you have a compact. And God sees whatever you do. The infidels are allies of each other. Unless you do this [aid other Muslims], there would be temptation [to apostatize] on earth and much corruption. Those who believed and have emigrated and fought in the path of God and those who sheltered and aided [them], they are the faithful truly. For them, there will be forgiveness and generous sustenance' (VIII 72–4). These verses established a close solidarity among the Muslims, Mekkan Emigrants and Medinan Helpers (*anṣār*) assembled in the Community at Medina. Yet verse 75, which follows the passage and was evidently added later, modified the meaning in favour of the blood relations even if they joined the Medinan Community at a later date: 'Those who believed afterwards and emigrated and fought together with you, they are of you. And blood relations have closer ties with each other in the Book of God.' The latter sentence, according to the commentators of the Qur'ān, specifically restored the right of inheritance of the relatives in disregard of the alliances earlier concluded with strangers.<sup>18</sup>

The obligation to provide for the needy kin must not be suspended because of personal grudges: 'Let not those among you who are [materially] favoured and have ample means commit themselves by oath not to help their kin (*ulī l-qurbā*) and the needy and the Emigrants in the path of God. Let them forgive and overlook. Do you not desire that God shall forgive you? And God is forgiving, merciful' (XXIV 22). According to the commentators, this verse referred to Abū Bakr and his nephew Miṣṭaḥ. The latter had been among those who cast doubt on the fidelity of 'Ā'isha during the affair of her absence from the camp of the Muslims. Abū Bakr, deeply offended by the conduct of his nephew, vowed that he would no longer provide for him as he had done in the past, even after Miṣṭaḥ formally repented of his mistake. The Qur'ān, however, commanded him not to neglect his duty towards his needy nephew and to pardon him.<sup>19</sup>

In the story of the past prophets, as it is related in the Qur'ān, their families play a prominent role. The families generally provide vital

<sup>18</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir and Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo, 1373–88/1955–69), XIV, 89.

<sup>19</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Cairo, 1321/1903), XVIII, 72–3. Miṣṭaḥ is 'Awf b. Uthātha b. 'Abbād b. al-Muṭṭalib (Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *al-Iṣāba fī tamayīz al-Ṣaḥāba* (Cairo, 1323–5/[1905–7]), VI, 88; al-Zubayrī, *Kitāb Nasab Quraysh*, ed. E. Lévi-Provençal (Cairo, 1953), 95). As a Muttalibid he was also entitled to support from the Prophet's fifth of booty and *fay'*. He is mentioned among the recipients of the produce from Muḥammad's share of Khaybar (see W. Madelung, 'The Hāshimiyāt of al-Kumayt and Hāshimī Shi'ism', *Studia Islamica*, 70 (1989), 5–26, at 12 and n. 36).

assistance to the prophets against the adversaries among their people. After the death of the prophets, their descendants become their spiritual and material heirs. The prophets ask God to grant them the help of members of their family and they pray for divine favour for their kin and their offspring. The prophets of the Banū Isrā'īl were in fact all descendants of a single family from Adam and Noah down to Jesus: 'Truly, God chose Adam, Noah, the family of Abraham, and the family of 'Imrān above all the worlds, as off-spring one of the other' (III 33–4). After narrating the story of Moses, Ishmael and Idrīs, the Qur'ān adds: 'Those were the prophets on whom God bestowed his blessings of the off-spring of Adam and of those whom We carried [in the ark] with Noah, and of the off-spring of Abraham and Israel, of those whom We guided and chose' (XIX 58).

The chain of the prophets and their families is described with more detail in the following verses: 'And We gave him [Abraham] Isaac and Jacob, all of whom We guided. And before him We guided Noah, and of his off-spring, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, and Aaron. Thus We recompense those who do good. And Zachariah, and John, and Jesus, and Elias, all of them among the righteous, and Ishmael, and Elisha, Jonah, and Lot: Each of them We preferred above the worlds, and [some] of their fathers, their descendants, and their brothers: We chose them and We guided them to the straight path. That is the guidance of God with which He guides whomever He wishes of His worshippers. But if they had set up partners [with Him], whatever they have been doing would have been in vain for them. They are the ones to whom We have given the Book, the rule (*ḥukm*) and prophethood' (VI 84–9).

Noah was saved together with his family while the rest, or the great majority, of his people were drowned in the Flood because of their sins: 'And [remember] Noah when he implored [Us] in former time, and We responded to him and rescued him and his family from the great disaster. We aided him against the people who treated Our signs as lies. They were an evil people, so We drowned them all together' (XXI 76–7). 'We rescued him and his family from the great disaster and made his descendants the survivors' (XXXVII 76–7). God commanded Noah: 'Place in it [the ark] pairs of every [species] and your family (*ahl*) except for those of them against whom the sentence has already gone forth. Do not address Me concerning those who were unjust. They shall be drowned' (XXIII 27; see also XI 40). The wife and one of the sons of Noah were in fact excluded from the rescue, even though Noah pleaded for his son: 'And Noah called to his Lord and said: O my Lord, surely my son is of my family, and Your promise is the truth, and You are the justest of judges. [God] said: O Noah, he is not of your family. Surely, it is not

righteous action. Do not ask of Me that of which you have no knowledge' (XI 45–6).

Likewise, the family of the prophet Lot was saved together with him while the remainder of the people of his town were annihilated: 'The people of Lot treated the warnings as lies. We sent against them a shower of stones, except for the family of Lot. We rescued them at dawn, as a favour from Us. Thus We recompense those who give thanks' (LIV 33–5). The family of Lot had acquired a state of purity which distinguished them from the ordinary people. When Lot reproached his people for having surrendered to turpitude, 'the only answer of his people was to say: Expel the family of Lot from your town. They are indeed people who purify themselves (*yataṭahharūn*). But We saved him and his family, except his wife. We desired that she be of those who stayed behind' (XXVII 56–7). Lot's wife, like Noah's, was punished because of her betrayal of her husband. 'God has set as an example for the unbelievers the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. They were married to two of Our righteous servants but betrayed them. Thus they were of no avail at all for them before God, and they were told: Enter the fire together with those who will enter it' (LXVI 10).

Abraham was the patriarch of the prophets of the Banū Isrā'īl. All later prophets and transmitters of the scripture among them were of his descendants: 'And We sent Noah and Abraham and placed among their off-spring prophethood and the Book' (LVII 26). The father of Abraham, however, was an obstinate idolater and a persecutor of the confessors of the unity of God. As mentioned above, Abraham at first prayed for him, on account of a promise made to him, but later dissociated himself from him. When God chose Abraham as imam for his people, Abraham prayed to his Lord that He grant this honour also to his descendants: 'And remember when Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain commandments which he fulfilled, [God] said: I shall make you an imam for the people. He said: And also of my off-spring? [God] said: My compact will not comprise the evil-doers' (II 124). God's compact thus covered the just among the descendants of Abraham. God gave him his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob who became prophets: 'When [Abraham] had turned away from them [the idolaters of his people] and from what they worshipped besides God, We granted him Isaac and Jacob, and each one We made a prophet. We bestowed of Our mercy on them, and We accorded them a high truthful repute' (XIX 49–50). 'And We gave him Isaac and Jacob and placed among his progeny prophethood and the Book. We gave him his reward in this world and surely he will be of the righteous in the hereafter' (XXIX 27).

When the angels announced to Abraham the imminence of the birth of

his son Isaac and, after him, of his grandson Jacob, his wife Sarah doubted the good news in view of their advanced age, but the angels reminded her of her elevated rank as the spouse of Abraham: 'And his [Abraham's] wife was standing, and she laughed. Then We gave her good tidings of Isaac and, after Isaac, Jacob. She said: Alas for me, shall I bear child, as I am an old woman and this my husband is an old man? This is indeed a wonderful thing. They said: Do you wonder at God's order? The mercy and the blessings of God are upon you [m. pl.], o people of the house (*ahl al-bayt*). He is indeed worthy of praise and full of glory' (XI 71–3). The 'people of the house' are here certainly the family of the prophet Abraham to whom Sarah belonged through marriage, not the adherents of the cult of the House, i.e. the Ka'ba, as has been suggested by R. Paret.<sup>20</sup> The miraculous birth of Isaac is justified by God's supreme favour for the family of his chosen prophet. Those distinguished by such favour of God must not be envied their elevated rank: 'Or do they envy the people for what God has given them of His favour? We had already given the family of Abraham the Book and wisdom (*hikma*), and bestowed upon them a mighty kingship (*mulk*)' (IV 54).

Isaac and Jacob are also described as imams who direct the people by the order of God: 'And We gave him Isaac and Jacob as an additional gift, and We made all of them righteous men. We made them imams who guide by Our command, and We inspired them to do good things, to perform the prayer, and to give alms. They constantly served Us' (XXI 72–3). But there were also renegades among the descendants of Abraham and Isaac: 'We blessed him [Abraham] and Isaac, but of their progeny there are some who do good and some who manifestly wrong themselves' (XXXVII 113; see also LVII 26).

In the face of the opposition of the Banū Isrā'īl, Moses implored his Lord to grant him the help of his brother Aaron: 'Give me an assistant from my family, Aaron, my brother, increase my strength through him and make him share my task' (XX 29–32). God responded to his prayer: 'We indeed gave Moses the Book and appointed his brother Aaron with him as an assistant' (XXV 35; see also XX 36). Aaron thus was chosen as the associate of Moses in the revelation: 'Certainly We gave Moses and Aaron the salvation (*furqān*) and a light and a reminder for the pious who fear their Lord in the unseen and are frightened of the hour [of the Judgment]' (XXI 48–9). A mysterious relic (*baqiyya*) of the family of Moses and the family of Aaron became one of the signs of the divine investiture with the royalty of the Banū Isrā'īl: 'Their prophet [Samuel]

<sup>20</sup> R. Paret, 'Der Plan einer neuen, leicht kommentierten Koranübersetzung', in *Orientalistische Studien Enno Littmann zu seinem 60. Geburtstag*, ed. R. Paret (Leiden, 1935), 121–30, at 127–30.

said to them: The sign of his [Saul's] rule is that the Ark of the Covenant shall come to you, carried by angels, containing a divine immanence (*sakīna*) from your Lord and a relic of what the family of Moses and the family of Aaron left. Truly, in that is a sign for you if you have faith' (II 248).

To David, prophet and vicegerent (*khalīfa*) on earth, God gave his son Solomon as his assistant and successor: 'We gave to David Solomon, how excellent a servant' (XXXVIII 30). Solomon inherited from David both his kingship and his prophetic wisdom and judgement: 'And Solomon became David's heir (*wa-waritha Sulaymānu Dāwūda*) and said: O people, we have been taught the speech of the birds and have been given of every thing' (XXVII 16). Jointly David and Solomon gave judgment, witnessed by God, in a case of damage to the fields (XXI 78).

Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, said in his prayer: 'Indeed, I fear the *mawālī* after my death. My wife is barren, so grant me a descendant (*waliyyan*) from you who will inherit from me and inherit from the family of Jacob, and make him, o my Lord, pleasing [to You]' (XIX 5–6). The commentators generally take the term *mawālī* to mean relatives.<sup>21</sup> As R. Blachère has observed, however, it seems that there is here rather an allusion to the hostility of the other priests towards Zachariah, who had no offspring, as narrated in the Gospel of Thomas.<sup>22</sup> In any case, John became the heir of the family of Jacob.

In the story of the non-Israelite prophets, their families likewise play a vital part as their disciples and protectors. The sinful people of Madyan answered their prophet Shu'ayb: 'O Shu'ayb, we do not understand much of what you say, and surely we see you weak among us. If it were not for your clan (*raḥt*) we would certainly have stoned you, for you are not powerful over us' (XI 91). A group of Thamūd, the people of the prophet Ṣāliḥ, said to each other: 'Swear a mutual oath by God that we attack him and his family by night. Then we shall say to the one entitled to his vengeance: We did not witness the destruction of his family, and we are surely telling the truth' (XXVII 49). God prevented their plot and annihilated the guilty and all the people of Thamūd.

The eminent position of the families and the descendants of the past prophets and the parallelism often observed between the history of the former prophets in the Qur'ān and that of Muḥammad must raise expectations of a distinguished place reserved for his family. The kin of Muḥammad are mentioned in various contexts, sometimes probably in a wider sense than that of his family. This order is addressed to the Prophet: 'Warn your nearest clan (*ashīrataka l-aqrabīn*), and lower your wing to the faithful who follow you' (XXVI 214–15). The 'nearest clan'

<sup>21</sup> Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, XVI 32.

<sup>22</sup> R. Blachère, *Le Coran* (Paris, 1957), 329, n. 5.

refers most likely to the Quraysh, although a narrower interpretation does not seem impossible.

Shi'ites frequently quote as evidence verse XLII 23 where Muḥammad is commanded to address the faithful: 'Say: I do not ask you for any recompense for this [the communication of the revelation] except the love for near kinship (*al-mawadda fi l-qurbā*).'<sup>23</sup> They interpret it as asking the Muslims to love the *ahl al-bayt*, the family of the Prophet. This interpretation, however, does not agree with the wording of the text. Al-Ṭabarī in his commentary on the verse<sup>23</sup> offers three interpretations and prefers the first one, according to which the demand is for love of the faithful for the Prophet to whom they are related by blood ties. This explanation would be the most plausible if the verse were Mekkan and addressed to the Quraysh. The verse is, however, usually considered Medinan, pronounced at a time when many Muslims were not related to Muḥammad by blood ties. Preference might thus be given to the third interpretation of al-Ṭabarī (the second is rather improbable), that love towards relatives in general is meant. However, an interpretation close to that preferred by al-Ṭabarī seems to suggest itself by reference to another verse which affirms that Muḥammad is nearer to all Muslims than they are to each other: 'The Prophet has closer ties (*awlā*) to the faithful than they themselves have to each other, and his wives are their mothers' (XXXIII 6).

There are, in any case, other references to the kin of the Prophet which certainly refer to his family and blood relations. The Qur'ān reserves a part of the fifth (*khums*) of booty (*ghanīma*) and a part of the *fay*, that is property of the infidels taken by the Muslims without combat, to the kin of Muḥammad in association with himself: 'Know that whatever you capture as booty, the fifth of it belongs to God, to the Messenger, to the near kin (*dhi l-qurbā*), the orphans, the poor, and the wayfarer, if you believe in God and in what He has sent down on His servant on the day of salvation, the day of the meeting of the two groups' (VIII 41). 'What God has granted as *fay*' to His Messenger from the people of the towns belongs to God, the Messenger, the close kin, and the orphans, the poor, and the wayfarer, in order that it may not circulate among the rich among you' (LIX 7). The Sunnite and Shi'ite sources agree that by the 'near kin' in these verses were meant the descendants of Hāshim b. 'Abd Manāf, the great-grandfather of Muḥammad, and of Hāshim's brother al-Muṭṭalib,<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Ṭabarī, *ḥamī*, XXV, 13–15.

<sup>24</sup> According to a report of the 'Alid 'Īsā b. 'Abd Allāh, Muḥammad also gave portions of the *khums* to the Banū 'Abd Yaghūth (Ibn Shabba, *Ta'rikh al-Madīna al-munawwara*, ed. Fahīm Muḥammad Shaltūt (Qumm, 1410/[1989/90]), 645). The descendants of Muḥammad's maternal uncle 'Abd Yaghūth b. Wahb b. 'Abd Manāf of the clan of Zuhra are meant.

to the exclusion of the descendants of the other two brothers of Hāshim, ‘Abd Shams (the ancestor of the Umayyads) and Nawfal. The association of the Banu l-Muṭṭalib with the Banū Hāshim dated from the pre-Islamic *hīlf al-fuḍūl*, a pact grouping these two families and some other clans of Quraysh in an alliance opposed to the other two and their allies.<sup>25</sup> This alliance was confirmed at the time of the boycott of Muḥammad by the Quraysh when the Banu l-Muṭṭalib joined the Hāshim in extending protection to him.<sup>26</sup> Because of their association with the Banū Hāshim, a number of the Banu l-Muṭṭalib received portions of the produce of Khaybar belonging to the Prophet.

The portion of the booty and *fay*’ reserved to the kin of the Prophet was, according to numerous reports in the sources, a recompense for them for their exclusion from the alms (*ṣadaqa*, *zakāt*). The relatives of Muḥammad were, like himself, forbidden to receive any part of the alms. The reason usually given for this exclusion was that the alms accrued from the defilements (*awṣākh*) of the people, alms-giving being considered an act of purification. On account of their state of purity, it was improper for the close kin of the Prophet to receive or to handle the alms. The schools of religious law, Sunnite and Shi’ite alike, have preserved this prohibition for the Banū Hāshim to partake of the alms of the ordinary Muslims.<sup>27</sup>

This state of purity, which distinguished the family of Muḥammad from the common Muslims, agreed with the elevated rank of the families of the earlier prophets. As mentioned above, the Qur’ān described the family of Lot as people who kept themselves pure (*yataṭahharūn*). The same state of purity is evidently referred to in the verse addressed to the wives of the Prophet: ‘Stay in your houses, and do not show yourselves in spectacular fashion like that of the former time of ignorance. Perform the prayer, give alms, and obey God and His Messenger. God desires only to remove defilement from you, o people of the house (*ahl al-bayt*), and to purify you (*yuṭahhirakum*) completely’ (XXXIII 33). Who are the ‘people of the house’ here? The pronoun referring to them is in the masculine plural, while the preceding part of the verse is in the feminine plural. This change of gender has evidently contributed to the birth of

<sup>25</sup> W. M. Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford, 1953), 6–8.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 8, 120–1. In his *Muhammedanische Studien* (Halle, 1889–90), I. Goldziher suggested that the hadith of Jubayr b. Muṭ’im about the Prophet’s preference of Hāshim and al-Muṭṭalib over ‘Abd Shams and Nawfal was an ‘Abbasid anti-Umayyad partisan invention. This judgement rests on a complete disregard of the facts of Muḥammad’s career and his conflict with his Mekkan opponents.

<sup>27</sup> See Madelung, ‘The Hāshimiyyāt’, 24–6. Caetani mistranslated the phrase (*ahl baytiḥ man ḥurrima l-ṣadaqa ba’dah*) in the hadith about Ghadīr Khumm attributed to Zayd b. Arqam as ‘people of his house are those who are excluded from the obligation of paying the legal alms after the death of the Prophet’ (*Amali*, X, 455). There was no such exclusion.

various accounts of a legendary character, attaching the latter part of the verse to the five People of the Mantle (*ahl al-kisā'*): Muḥammad, 'Alī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. In spite of the obvious Shi'ite significance, the great majority of the reports quoted by al-Ṭabarī in his commentary on this verse support this interpretation.<sup>28</sup>

It seems quite unlikely, however, that this part of the verse could have been in effect a separate revelation which was later attached to the rest, as these reports imply. Just as in respect to the similar verse addressed to the wife of Abraham, R. Paret has argued that *ahl al-bayt* may here rather refer to the adherents of the cult of the Ka'ba.<sup>29</sup> This interpretation, however, is incompatible with the clear aim of the verse to elevate the rank of the wives of the Prophet above all other Muslim women. The previous verse begins with the declaration: 'O women of the Prophet, you are not like any other women' (XXXIII 32). The women are addressed here as members of the purified family of the Prophet through marriage. It is known that Muḥammad on other occasions addressed his wives individually as *ahl al-bayt*, evidently with the intention of honouring them.<sup>30</sup> Here they are admonished in clearly critical terms to conform to their elevated state in their conduct. The *ahl al-bayt* of Muḥammad meant, as was consistent with the general usage of the term at the time, primarily his blood relations, the same Banū Hāshim who were forbidden to receive alms in order that their state of purity not be soiled and, in second place, the wives.

There is still the verse of the 'mutual imprecation (*mubāhala*)' whose religious significance is, in view of the uncertainty about the circumstances surrounding its revelation, difficult to evaluate.<sup>31</sup> Muḥammad is addressed:

<sup>28</sup> Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, XXII, 5–7.      <sup>29</sup> Paret, 'Der Plan', 127–30.

<sup>30</sup> Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad* ([Cairo] 1313/1895), III, 246. In his *Fāṭima et les filles de Mahomet*, 99, Lammens asserted that *ahl al-bayt*, as understood in Arabic, basically means a man's wives assembled under the same roof. Yet the references given by him in n. 4 as evidence for the use of the term with respect to families other than Muḥammad's clearly show that the primary meaning was close kin, blood relations.

<sup>31</sup> The significance of the verse of the *mubāhala* has been barely discussed in western studies and biographies of Muḥammad. L. Massignon's monograph *La Mubāhala de Médine et l'hypothèse de Fatima* (Paris, 1955) and W. Schmucker's articles 'Die christliche Minderheit von Naḡrān und die Problematik ihrer Beziehungen zum frühen Islam', in *Studien zum Minderheitenproblem im Islam*, Bonner Orientalistische Studien, Neue Serie, ed. O. Spies (Bonn, 1973), vol. XXVII/1, 183–281 and 'Mubāhala' in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd edn, Leiden, 1954–) deal largely with later doctrine and legend. Schmucker argues that the part ascribed to the Christians of Naḡrān is wholly fictitious and that the verse, which he describes as obscure, does not relate to any historical event. The wording of the verse would seem, however, to refer to a historical occasion. Yet even if the verse were merely intended to extol Muḥammad's religious rank in abstract terms, the question would remain why his 'wives and sons' were included in it and who was meant by them. The contemporaries could hardly avoid understanding it as referring to his *ahl al-bayt*.



'If anyone dispute with you in this matter [concerning Jesus] after the knowledge which has come to you, say: Come let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves, then let us swear an oath and place the curse of God on those who lie' (III 61). The commentators are agreed that the verse was occasioned by the visit of a delegation of Christians from Najrān in the year 10/631–2 who did not accept the Islamic doctrine about Jesus. Modern scholars have critically noted a certain tendency of the commentators to relate many Qur'anic passages concerning Christians to this visit.<sup>32</sup> Who is meant by 'our sons' and 'our women' on the part of Muḥammad? The *mubāhala*, according to the reports, did not take place, since the Christians excused themselves from it, and the majority of the Sunnite reports quoted by al-Ṭabarī do not identify the members of the family of Muḥammad who were expected to participate. Other Sunnite reports mention Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, and some agree with the Shi'ite tradition that the *ahl al-kisā*, including 'Alī, were assembled for the occasion. Irrespective of the circumstances, there does not seem to be a plausible alternative to the identification of the 'sons' in the verse with the two grandsons of Muḥammad and, in that case, the inclusion of their parents, 'Alī and Fāṭima, would be reasonable. The term 'our women', in place of 'our wives', does not exclude the daughter of the Prophet. The participation of the family was perhaps traditional in the ritual of the *mubāhala*. Yet the proposal itself of this ritual by the Prophet under circumstances of an intense religious significance and its sanction by the Qur'ān could not have failed to raise the religious rank of his family.

The Qur'ān thus accorded the *ahl al-bayt* of Muḥammad an elevated position above the rest of the faithful, similar to the position of the families of the earlier prophets. God desired to purify them from all defilement. Certainly the renegades of the Prophet's family who opposed his mission were excluded from the divine grace, just like the renegades among the families of the past prophets. Abū Lahab, the uncle of Muḥammad, and his wife were even singled out for divine curse in a Sūra of the Qur'ān. But such exceptions did not affect the divine favour for the *ahl al-bayt* in general.

Insofar as the Qur'ān expresses the thoughts of Muḥammad, it is evident that he could not have considered Abū Bakr his natural successor or have been pleased by his succession. The Qur'ān certainly does not fully reflect Muḥammad's views about the men and women surrounding him and his attitude towards them. Yet he could not have seen his succession essentially other than in the light of the narrations of the

<sup>32</sup> T. Nöldeke and F. Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorāns* (Leipzig, 1909–38), I, 177, n. 2.

Qur'ān about the succession of the earlier prophets, just as he saw his own mission as a prophet, the resistance of his people with which he met, and his ultimate success by divine grace in the light of the experience of the former prophets as related in the Qur'ān. These earlier prophets considered it a supreme divine favour to be succeeded by their offspring or close kin for which they implored their Lord. Modern Sunnite apologists argue against this on the basis of Qur'ān XXXIII 40 which describes Muḥammad as the Seal of the Prophets. They maintain that, as the last of the prophets, Muḥammad was not to be succeeded by any of his family according to God's design. In order to reveal this design, God also let all of Muḥammad's sons die in infancy.<sup>33</sup> For the same reason Muḥammad did not appoint a successor, since he wished to leave the succession to be settled by the Muslim Community on the basis of the Qur'anic principle of consultation (*shūrā*).

The argument rests, however, on a fancifully wide interpretation of the term 'Seal of the Prophets'. For even if its meaning in the Qur'ān is accepted to be the 'last of the prophets', which is itself not entirely certain,<sup>34</sup> there is no reason why it should imply that Muḥammad as the spiritual and worldly leader of the Muslim Community, aside from his prophethood, should not be succeeded by his family. In the Qur'ān, the descendants and close kin of the prophets are their heirs also in respect to kingship (*mulk*), rule (*ḥukm*), wisdom (*ḥikma*), the book and the imamate. The Sunnite concept of the true caliphate itself defines it as a succession of the Prophet in every respect except his prophethood. Why should Muḥammad not be succeeded in it by any of his family like the earlier prophets? If God really wanted to indicate that he should not be succeeded by any of them, why did He not let his grandsons and other kin die like his sons? There is thus good reason to doubt that Muḥammad failed to appoint a successor because he realized that the divine design excluded hereditary succession of his family and that he wanted the Muslims to choose their head by *shūrā*. The Qur'ān advises the faithful to settle some matters by consultation, but not the succession to prophets. That, according to the Qur'ān, is settled by divine election, and God usually chooses their successors, whether they become prophets or not, from their own kin.

<sup>33</sup> The argument has a basis in hadith. According to statements ascribed to several Companions, Muḥammad's son Ibrāhīm did not survive because he would have become a prophet. See Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*, II, 105–6; Y. Friedmann, 'Finality of Prophethood in Sunni Islam', *JSAI*, 7 (1986), 177–215, at 187–9.

<sup>34</sup> Friedmann, 'Finality of Prophethood'; G. G. Stroumsa, 'Seal of the Prophets: The Nature of a Manichaean Metaphor', *JSAI*, 7 (1986), 61–74; C. Colpe, 'Das Siegel der Propheten', *Orientalia Suecana*, 33–5 (1984–6), 71–83, revised version in C. Colpe, *Das Siegel der Propheten*, (Berlin, 1990), 227–43.

Why then did Muḥammad fail to make proper arrangements for his succession, even though he presumably hoped for a successor from his family? Any answer must remain speculative. A simple Islamic explanation would be that in an important decision of this nature he expected a Qur'anic revelation, but did not receive one. Non-Muslim historians may be more inclined to speculate that Muḥammad hesitated because he was aware of the difficulties a Hashimite succession might face given the intense rivalry for leadership among the clans of Quraysh and the relative weakness of the Banū Hāshim. In the year 10/631 Muḥammad sent 'Alī as his representative to the Yemen, where his conduct seems to have provoked some criticism. Upon his return, just three months before the Prophet's death, Muḥammad found it necessary to make a strong public statement in support of his cousin.<sup>35</sup> It was evidently not a suitable occasion to appoint him successor. Muḥammad might also have delayed a decision hoping to live long enough to be able to appoint one of his grandsons. His death was generally unexpected among his followers even during his mortal illness. He himself may also have been unaware of the approaching end until it was too late.

### Two witnesses: 'Ā'isha and 'Abd Allāh b. al-'Abbās

Among the extant reports about the succession and the early caliphate those attributed to Abū Bakr's daughter 'Ā'isha and to 'Abd Allāh b. al-'Abbās, cousin of Muḥammad and of 'Alī, are of primary importance. Both were in a position to observe closely the events in which they were emotionally deeply involved and in some of which they played a direct part, although in opposite camps. 'Ā'isha, as is well known, championed her father's right to the succession of Muḥammad and backed the caliphate of his appointed successor, 'Umar. In the election of the *shūrā* after the murder of 'Umar, she clearly preferred 'Uthmān to her personal enemy 'Alī. She soon became, however, a vocal critic of 'Uthmān's conduct as caliph and her agitation against him contributed to the outbreak of open rebellion. When 'Uthmān was murdered by the rebels and they raised 'Alī to the caliphate, she immediately turned against the latter, claiming revenge for the dead caliph. After the defeat of her alliance in the battle of the Camel, she withdrew from active politics. Her relations with the Umayyad Mu'āwiya, under whose reign she died in 58/678, were cool.<sup>36</sup>

'Abd Allāh b. al-'Abbās, born in 619, three years before the *hijra*,

<sup>35</sup> L. Veccia Vaglieri, 'Ghadīr Khumm', *EI* (2nd edn) and below, 253.

<sup>36</sup> On the life of 'Ā'isha see especially N. Abbott, *Aishah the Beloved of Mohammad* (Chicago, 1942).