



AHL-E BAYT

AHL-E BAYT (Ahl al-Bayt), the “family of the house” or “household,” i.e., of the Prophet. In pre-Islamic Arabia *bayt* included the meaning of a noble family within a tribe (Ebn Manẓūr, *Lesān al-‘arab al-moḥīṭ*, ed. Y. Ḳayyāt, I, Beirut, n.d., p. 292). Thus the term Ahl al-Bayt in its most generalized understanding refers to the descendents of the Prophet’s forbear Hāšem, who had been a *bayt* or a family possessing honor among the pre-Islamic Qorayš; during the Islamic period the term continues to refer to all the descendents of Hāšem, including the ‘Abbasids. In a tradition Zayd b. Arqam interprets Ahl al-Bayt as the families of ‘Alī, ‘Aqīl, Ja‘far, and ‘Abbās (Ebn Kaṭīr, *Tafsīr al-Qor‘ān al-‘aẓīm* III, Beirut, 1969, p. 486). There is some evidence that the Omayyads claimed that the honor of this *bayt* went back not to Hāšem but to ‘Abd Manāf; thus they attempted to include themselves among its members (W. M. Watt, *The Formative Period of Islam*, Edinburgh, 1973, p. 39).

The phrase Ahl al-Bayt occurs in Qur‘ān 33:33: “God only intends to keep evil away from you, Family of the Household, and to purify you thoroughly.” The vast majority of the traditions quoted by Ṭabarī explain Ahl al-Bayt in this verse as referring to the Prophet, ‘Alī, Fāṭema, Ḥasan, and Ḥosayn; in some of these traditions the Prophet gathers the others under his cloak (see *Āl-e ‘Abā*). However, Ṭabarī does include one tradition that interprets Ahl al-Bayt as referring to the Prophet’s wives (*Jāme‘ al-bayān* XXII, 3rd ed., Cairo, 1968, pp. 6-8). The first interpretation is strenuously supported by Shi‘ite commentators (‘Alī b. Ebrāhīm al-Qomī, *Tafsīr al-Qomī*, ed. S. Ṭ. Mūsawī Jazā‘erī, II, Najaf, 1387/1967, p. 193). Much later Ebn Kaṭīr suggests in his commentary that Ahl



al-Bayt includes the wives of the Prophet, but he is not prepared positively to exclude 'Alī, Fāṭema, Ḥasan, and Ḥosayn. A typical Sunni compromise is to make Ahl al-Bayt in this verse refer both to the wives of the Prophet and to 'Alī and Fāṭema (*Lesān al-'arab*, loc. cit.). Shi'ite writers generally refer to Ahl al-Bayt in the loose sense of the totality of the descendents of 'Alī and Fāṭema, but in theological writings they reserve it for 'Alī, Fāṭema, Ḥasan, Ḥosayn, and the remaining Imams. The Koranic verse is regarded as evidence that all of them were without sin (Shaikh Ṭūsī, *Tafsīr al-tebyān*, ed. A. Ḥ. Qasīr, VIII, Najaf, 1968, pp. 307-08; Ṭabarī, *Maǧma' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qor'ān*, ed. A. Ša'rānī, 5th ed., VIII, Tehran, 1395/1975, p. 358; Faḡr-al-dīn Ṭerīhī, *Maǧma' al-baḥrayn*, ed. S. A. Ḥosaynī, II, Najaf, n.d., pp. 193-94).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

See also *EI*² I, pp. 257-58.