



ḤASAN B. 'ALI B. ABI ṬĀLEB

ḤASAN B. 'ALI B. ABI ṬĀLEB, eldest surviving grandson of the Prophet Moḥammad through his daughter Fāṭema, and second Imam of the Ši'a after his father 'Ali. According to traditional sources, he was born on 15 Ramaẓān 3/2 March 625 and was brought up in the Prophet's household until the age of seven, when his grandfather died. Moḥammad slaughtered a ram for the poor on the occasion of his birth, as he did later for his brother Ḥosayn. He chose the names of both grandsons, even though 'Ali had intended other names, such as "Ḥarb." Fāṭema shaved their heads and gave the weight of their hair in silver as alms. There are numerous reports illustrating the great love and tenderness of the Prophet toward his grandsons, which he did not conceal in public. He is described as carrying Ḥasan on his shoulders, seating him on his knees, kissing him on his belly, allowing him to ride on his back as he was prostrating himself in prayer, and interrupting his sermon in order to caress him when Ḥasan climbed the pulpit to join him. Widely reported was Moḥammad's statement that his two grandsons would be the lords of the youth (*sayyedā šabāb*) of Paradise and his prediction that Ḥasan would make peace between two factions of Muslims. Some reports may imply a slight preference of Moḥammad for Ḥasan over Ḥosayn, and Ḥasan was commonly described as the one who looked most like his grandfather. Ḥasan later remembered prayers Moḥammad had taught him and other statements and acts of the Prophet, such as his removing a date belonging to the alms (*ṣadaqa*) from his grandson's mouth while explaining that partaking of alms was not licit for any member of his family.



According to an account of Ebn Esfandiār, Ḥasan, together with the older 'Abd-Allāh b. 'Omar, took part in a Kufan military campaign to Āmol in Ṭabarestān during 'Omar's caliphate (I, pp. 73, 155). His father may well have wished to expose him early to war experience. Under 'Oṭmān in 30/651, Ḥasan is said to have refused to comply with his father's suggestion that he apply the legal punishment of forty lashes for drunkenness on the caliph's uterine brother al-Walid b. 'Oqba, governor of Kufa; as a result, 'Ali chided him and had his nephew 'Abd-Allāh b. Ja'far carry out the flogging. Together with other sons of prominent Companions, such as 'Abd-Allāh b. al-Zobayr and 'Abd-Allāh b. 'Omar, Ḥasan is listed among the defenders of the palace of 'Oṭmān before the latter's murder. At the order of the caliph, he laid down his weapons on the final day. According to one report, he was slightly wounded (Balāḍori, V, p. 95). Ḥasan is reported to have criticized his father repeatedly for not defending the caliph 'Oṭmān more vigorously.

Ḥasan is said to have been opposed to his father's assertive war policy, which he saw as dividing the Muslim community. When 'Ali halted at al-Rabaḍa on his way to meet the Meccan Qurayshite rebels in Basra, Ḥasan is described as having come up to him weeping and entreating him to withdraw and wait for the Arabs to unite in seeking his leadership; 'Ali brushed aside his counsel (Balāḍori, II, p. 167). At the next station, Fayd, 'Ali sent him together with 'Ammār b. Yāser to Kufa in order to rally support. Ḥasan was able to raise an army of six to seven thousand men, whom he led to Du Qār, rejoining 'Ali. He is also mentioned as being among those present at the battles of the Camel and Ṣeffin, but not as a prominent participant.

In a testament dated 10 Jomādā I 39 / 2 November 658, 'Ali put Ḥasan in charge of his land endowments (*ṣadaqāt*) in Arabia, to be succeeded by Ḥosayn if he were to survive him (Ebn Ṣabba, pp. 225-28). Although 'Ali did not formally appoint him his successor as Commander of the Faithful, this does not necessarily mean that he did not intend him to succeed. In any event, when 'Ali was murdered on 19 Ramaḗān 28/28 January 660, Ḥasan received the backing of the Kufans despite suspicions that he might surrender rather than carry out his father's war plans. Ḥasan was prepared to sacrifice the rights of the Family of the Prophet for the sake of the peace and unity of the Muslim community, while at the same time he recognized that he would have to negotiate an honorable peace with a general amnesty for his supporters. After two months of inactivity he sent Mo'āwia a letter summoning him to pledge allegiance since, as the grandson of the Prophet, he was more entitled to reign



(Eṣfahāni, pp. 55-57). Aware of Ḥasan's pacifist disposition, Mo'āwia answered courteously that he recognized the excellence of the Prophet's family and would readily follow his summons were it not for his own superior experience in governing. He asked Ḥasan to accept his authority to rule, in which case he would cede the succession to him after his own death, and he promised Ḥasan the present contents of the treasury of Iraq, to be followed by the revenue of any province of Iraq he might choose, as well as consultation in all matters of government.

When Ḥasan failed to reply, Mo'āwia sent a more threatening letter and mobilized his army to invade Iraq. Ḥasan now also mobilized to meet the threat. He sent a vanguard under 'Obayd-Allāh b. 'Abbās to Masken in order to block the advance of the enemy and followed them with the main army. The choice of 'Obayd-Allāh, who had been reprimanded by 'Ali for abandoning his governorship of Ṣan'a' without a fight, reflected Ḥasan's continued hope to avoid battle and to reach a peaceful settlement. At Sābāt near al-Madā'en, Ḥasan gave a sermon to his army revealing his pacifist inclination. This provoked a mutiny among his men; his pavilion was overrun and looted, and Ebn Ja'al al-Azdi pulled the tunic off his shoulders, leaving him undressed, clinging to his sword. Order was restored by loyal tribesmen of Rabi'a and Hamdān. As the army moved on, however, at Moẓlem Sābāt, al-Jarrāḥ b. Senān al-Asadi, a man with Khārijite convictions, attacked him, accusing him of having associated partners with God as his father 'Ali had done. He cleft Ḥasan's thigh with a pick-axe before being overpowered and killed. Ḥasan was carried to al-Madā'en, where he was lodged with the governor Sa'd b. Mas'ud al-Ṭaqafi until his wound had healed (Eṣfahāni, pp. 63-64; Balāḍori, II, pp. 381-82). At Masken, Mo'ā-wiya sought to persuade the Kufan vanguard to surrender, claiming that Ḥasan had sought a truce. They refused, but 'Obayd-Allāh b. 'Abbās deserted at night on a promise of a million dirhams. The warlike Qays b. Sa'd took command and blocked the Syrian advance.

Mo'āwia now initiated serious negotiations. After an exchange of high-level envoys, he committed himself in a witnessed letter to cede power after his own death to Ḥasan and to grant him a million dirhams annually in addition to the land tax of Fasā and Darābjerd, for which Ḥasan could send his own tax-collectors. On reading the letter Ḥasan commented that Mo'āwia was trying to appeal to his greed for something which he, if he desired it, would not surrender to him. He instructed his envoy to tell Mo'āwia that if he granted safety to the people he would pledge allegiance to him. Mo'āwia now sent him



a blank sheet with his seal at the bottom, inviting him to stipulate whatever he wished. Ḥasan wrote that he was surrendering the reign to Mo'āwia on the basis that he act in accordance with the book of God, the Sunna of His Messenger, and the conduct of the righteous caliphs. Mo'āwia would not be entitled to appoint his successor, but an electoral council (*šurā*) would be set up for this task. Everyone would be safe, wherever they were, with respect to their person, property, and offspring. Mo'āwia would neither seek to harm Ḥasan openly or secretly nor intimidate any of his companions (Balāḍori, II, pp. 385-86). Ḥasan relinquished his control of Iraq in Rabi' II 41/August 661 after a reign of seven months.

The truce secured, Mo'āwia moved with his army to Kufa. At the public surrender ceremony he demanded that Ḥasan rise and apologize. After first declining, Ḥasan reminded the people that he and Horsaḡn were the only grandsons of the Prophet Moḡammad. Mo'āwia had contested a right that belonged to Ḥasan, who ceded it to him in the best interest of the community, in order to spare their blood. In his own speech Mo'āwia disowned all his previous stipulations and promises to Ḥasan and others, which were made merely in order to extinguish the fire of rebellion and to cut short the war. His aim had been to seek revenge for the blood of 'Oṡmān, and anyone failing to pledge allegiance within three days would not be pardoned. Ḥasan chose to return to Medina with his family. As he reached al-Qādesiya, Mo'āwia sent after him demanding that he fight a band of Khārijites who had taken up arms against the new ruler. Ḥasan declined, stating that he had abandoned the war against Mo'āwia for the sake of the reconciliation of the community, and would not fight for him (Balāḍori, *Ansāb* II, pp. 387-89).

As Mo'āwia came to realize that Ḥasan would not give active backing to his regime, relations between them deteriorated. Ḥasan rarely, if ever, visited Mo'āwia in Damascus. Although he is reported to have accepted gifts from the caliph, the bulk of Mo'āwia's gifts to the Banu Hāšem went to Ḥasan's cousin, 'Abd-Allāh b. Ja'far, who had no political ambitions nor any following and would spend the money on poets, musicians, and singers. At the same time Ḥasan was denounced to his face by a few of his father's most ardent supporters as having humiliated the faithful by surrendering to Mo'āwia. Many, however, still put their hopes on his succession to the caliphate after Mo'āwia's death. Umayyad propaganda began to insinuate that Ḥasan was plotting to seize the caliphate.

During the last decade of his life in Medina, Ḥasan concluded numerous



marriages. According to his grandson ‘Abd-Allāh b. Ḥasan, he normally had four free wives, the limit allowed by the law (Ebn Sa’d, p. 68). His frequent divorces earned him the epithet *meṭlāq*, “habitual divorcer.” Stories and anecdotes expanded on this theme and have led to absurd suggestions that he had 70 or 90 wives in his lifetime (al-Madā’eni, in Ebn Abi’l-Ḥadid, XVI, pp. 21-22), and that he maintained a harem of 300 concubines. According to Ebn Sa’d (pp. 27-28), whose information appears to be the most reliable, he had 15 sons and 9 daughters from six wives and three named concubines. Many of these children died in infancy. Reports that ‘Ali publicly warned the Kufans not to give their women in marriage to Ḥasan, and that he expressed fear that the numerous marriages and divorces of his son would provoke enmity among the Arab tribes, deserve no credit; living in his father’s household, Ḥasan was in no position to enter into any marriages not arranged or approved by him. He evidently considered these marriages as political alliances in his father’s interest, for he gave the name of his *konya*, Moḥammad, to the first son from his first freely chosen wife after ‘Ali’s death, Kawla bt. Manzur b. Zabbān, daughter of a Fazāra chief and previously married to Moḥammad b. Ṭalḥa. He seems to have intended to make this son his primary heir. When Moḥammad died, Ḥasan chose his second son from Kawla, called Ḥasan, as his heir with control over the family endowments. In his dealings with his wives, as with others, he sought to act as a noble and forbearing (*ḥalim*) Arab *sayyed*. At the same time he patterned his self-image after his grandfather, not his father; two of his sons were named Moḥammad, but none ‘Ali. He was punctilious in fulfilling the obligations of the religious law and carried out numerous pilgrimages to Mecca on foot. Shi’ite sources attribute to him, as to all Imams, numerous miracles.

Ḥasan died, according to the most reliable reports, on 5 Rabi’ I 50/2 April 670 (Ebn Sa’d, p. 91). The early sources are nearly unanimous that he was poisoned. While most accuse his wife Ja’da, daughter of the Kinda chief al-Aš’at b. Qays, of the crime, others mention his wife Hend bt. Sohayl b. ‘Amr of ‘Āmer Qorayš. Usually Mo’āwiya is identified as the instigator. Ḥasan is reported to have refused to identify his suspect to Ḥosayn lest the wrong person be killed in revenge. Mo’āwiya would naturally be suspected of having a hand in a murder that removed an obstacle to the succession of his son Yazid which he was promoting, and, in any case, he did not try to hide his pleasure on news of Ḥasan’s death.

Ḥasan’s burial nearly provoked fighting. He had instructed Ḥosayn to bury



him with his grandfather, but if there were opposition to that threatening bloodshed, to bury him next to his mother in the cemetery of Baqī' al-Ġarqad. The Omayyad governor, Sa'id b. al-'Āṣ, did not interfere, but Marwān b. al-Ḥakam, who had been deposed the year before, swore that he would not allow Ḥasan to be buried next to Moḥammad with Abu Bakr and 'Omar as long as 'Oṭmān was buried in al-Baqī', and informed the caliph. Ḥosayn summoned the *ḥelf al-foḏul*, a defensive alliance of several clans of Quraysh, to back the right of the Banu Hāšem against the Banu Omayya. As the parties were about to start fighting, Moḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiya and others prevailed upon Ḥosayn to heed Ḥasan's desire to avoid bloodshed and to bury him next to his mother. The funeral prayer was led by Sa'id b. al-'Āṣ. Mo'āwiya eventually rewarded Marwān for his stand by reappointing him governor of Medina (Ebn Sa'd, pp. 85-98). Ḥasan's tomb became a pilgrimage site, especially for Shi'ites, and later a dome was built over it, one of the highest in the cemetery. It was twice, in 1806 and 1927, destroyed by the Wahhābis.

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