

“SHA'BĀN IS MY MONTH...”

A STUDY OF AN EARLY TRADITION

“Sha'bān is my month”: this utterance attributed to the Prophet is widely current and usually coupled with his statement about the status of Rajab and Ramaḍān.¹ A corroborative utterance, linking the month of Sha'bān with the person of the Prophet, evaluates the status of Sha'bān in relation to other months as follows: “The superiority of Sha'bān over other months is like my superiority over other prophets”.² Peculiar is the commentary of Sūra 28:69: “Thy Lord creates whatsoever He will and He chooses . . .”, stating that this verse refers to the month of Sha'bān: “God adorns everything by something and He embellished the months by the month of Sha'bān”.³ In numerous utterances attributed to the

1 Al-Munāwī, *Fayḍ al-qadīr, sharḥ al-jāmi' al-ṣāghīr*, Cairo 1391/1972, IV, p. 162, no. 4889; al-'Azīzī, *al-Sirāj al-munīr*, Cairo 1377/1957, II, p. 369; 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *al-Ghunya li-ṭālibī ṭarīqī l-ḥaqq 'azza wa-jalla*, Cairo 1322 A.H., I, p. 211; al-Suyūṭī, *al-La'ālī al-maṣnū'a*, Cairo n.d., II, p. 114; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, Tehran 1388 A.H., XCVII, pp. 68–69, 71, 75–77, 181–183; al-Ṣaffūrī, *Nuzhat al-majālis*, Beirut n.d., pp. 190, 195 ult.; Ibn Dayba', *Tamyīz al-ṭayyib min al-khabīth*, Cairo 1382/1963, p. 81 (and see *ibid.*, p. 91, l. 1); Ibn Bābūyah, *Thawāb al-a'māl*, Tehran 1375 A.H., p. 60; Id., *Amālī*, Najaf 1389/1970, p. 17; al-Zandawaysitī, *Rauḍat al-'ulamā'*, Ms. BM, Add. 7258, fol. 255b; and see Kister, *IOS*, 1 (1971), p. 198 note 50.

2 Al-Daylamī, *Firdaus al-akhbār*, Ms. Chester Beatty 3037, fol. 109b, penult.; al-Zandawaysitī, *op. cit.*, fol. 255b; cf. al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, Cairo 1314 A.H., III, p. 236: . . . sha'bānu shahrī fa-man 'aẓẓama shahra sha'bāna fa-qad 'aẓẓama amrī wa-man 'aẓẓama amrī kuntu lahu farṭan wa-dhukhran yauma l-qiyāmati . . . (the ḥadīth is marked as *munkar*); and see Aḥmad b. Ḥijāzī, *Tuḥfat al-ikhwān fī faḍā'il rajab wa-sha'bān wa-ramaḍān*, Cairo 1308 A.H., p. 41: . . . kāna rasūlu llāhi (ṣ) yaqūlu idhā dakhala sha'bānu: ṭahhirū anfusakum li-sha'bāna wa-aḥsinū niyyatakum fīhi, fa-inna llāha 'azza wa-jalla faḍḍala sha'bāna 'alā sārī l-shuhūri ka-faḍlī 'alaykum . . .; and see *IOS*, 1, p. 199, note 55.

3 Al-Zandawaysitī, *op. cit.*, fol. 255b: qāla fī tafsīrī ḥādhihi l-āyati: wa-rabbuka yakhluqu mā yashā'u wa-yakhtārū mā kāna lahumu l-khiyaratu, inna llāha ta'ālā zayyana kulla shay'in (on marjīn: bi-shay'in) wa-zayyana l-shuhūra bi-sha'bāna; fa-kamā zayyana bihi l-shuhūra ka-dhālika yatazayyanu l-'abdu bi-l-ṭā'ati fīhi li-l-ghufrāni . . .

Prophet, he is said to have recommended the devotional practice of fasting, prayer, vigil and supplication during this month, especially on the eve of the 15th of Sha'bân (= the night of the 15th of Sha'bân).

Practices of the night of the 15th of Sha'bân, closely resembling those of *laylat al-qadr*, were scrutinized by A.J. Wensinck, who regarded these two nights as determining a New Year's period of six weeks to two months. This was challenged by K. Wagtendonk, who considered the 15th of Sha'bân to be "a starting day of a voluntary fast, which arose out of the ascetic tendency of extending the fast of Ramaḍān".⁴

A survey of the traditions on the virtues of the month of Sha'bân may clarify some of the controversies in reports of practices performed during this month, explain diverse tenets of certain circles of Muslim scholars and aid in gaining insight into the ideas of the virtuousness of Sha'bân.

I

The traditions on the Prophet's fast during the month of Sha'bân are controversial. It is not clear whether the Prophet would fast throughout the entire month of Sha'bân, or whether he would fast only part of the month. The reports on this subject are often vague; some say merely that he used to fast during this month (. . . *kāna yaṣūmu sha'bāna*); others, ambiguous in style and cast, assert that he would fast most of the month, or the entire month (. . . *kāna yaṣūmuḥu kullahu illā qalīlan, bal kāna yaṣūmuḥu kullahu . . .*). Still others, unequivocal but contradictory, relate that he fasted the entire month of Sha'bân or, on the contrary, that he never completed an entire month's fasting except in Ramaḍān (. . . *kāna yaṣūmu sha'bāna kullahu . . . confronted by: . . . wa-lā ṣāma shahrān kāmīlan qaṭṭu ghayra ramaḍāna . . .*).⁵

4 *El2* Sha'bân (A.J. Wensinck); A.J. Wensinck, *Arabic New Year and the Feast of Tabernacles*, VKAW, Afd. Let., N.R. XXV, 2, Amsterdam 1925; K. Wagtendonk, *Fasting in the Koran*, Leiden 1968, pp. 100–105; S.D. Goitein, *Studies in Islamic History*, Leiden 1968, pp. 90–110: Ramaḍān the Muslim Month of Fasting.

5 Al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan*, Beirut n.d. (reprint) IV, pp. 151–153, 199–201 (and see e.g. other versions *ibid.*, in *ṣāma shahrān ma'lūman siwā ramaḍāna ḥattā maḍā li-wa-jhihi . . . ; . . . wa-lam yaṣūm shahrān tāmmān mundhu atā l-madinata illā an yakūna ramaḍānu . . . etc.*); al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Sharḥ ma'ānī l-āthār* (ed. Muḥammad Zuhri l-Najjār), Cairo 1388/1968, II, pp. 82–83; al-Tirmidhī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Cairo 1350/1931, III, p. 273; Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ* (ed. 'Abd al-Khālīq al-Afghānī), Hyderabad 1388/1968, III, p. 103 (and see *ibid.*, another version: . . . *kāna yaṣūmu sha'bāna illā qalīlan*); Abū Dāwūd, *Ṣaḥīḥ sunan al-muṣtafa*, Cairo 1348 A.H., I, p. 381 inf. –382 sup.; al-Ṣaffūrī, *op. cit.*, p. 198; al-Qasṭallānī, *Irshād al-sāri*, Cairo 1323 A.H., III, pp. 401–403; 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ* (ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-A'zamī), Beirut 1392 A.H., IV,

Debate turned on the word *kullahu* in the tradition relating that the Prophet fasted the entire month of Sha'bān. Muslim scholars tended to limit the connotation of "wholeness" in the word, making it mean a major part. This was the explanation of 'Abdallah b. al-Mubārak (d. 181) as recorded by al-Tirmidhī.⁶ The phrase that the Prophet fasted the entire month (*kullahu*) conveys in fact that he would fast for the major part of the month (*akthara l-shahri*), argues Ibn al-Mubārak, basing himself on the Arab manner of speech: when a man says that he spent the whole night in vigil, he means in fact to say that the major part of the night was spent in vigil. This interpretation indeed clears away the contradiction inherent in the two traditions: the one that the Prophet would fast the entire month (*kullahu*), and the other that 'Ā'isha never saw him completing an entire month's fast (. . . *istakmala shiyāma shahrin* . . .) save Ramaḍān.⁷ The contradiction can thus be removed on the basis of Ibn al-Mubārak's interpretation: the only complete month during which the Prophet would fast was Ramaḍān; he also fasted for the major part of Sha'bān. Al-Qasṭallānī could rightly remark that the Prophet did not complete an entire month's fasting during Sha'bān, so as to dismiss any thought that the fast of Sha'bān was obligatory.⁸

This interpretation of *kull* cannot, however, be applied to other traditions in which the Prophet's Sha'bān fast was coupled with that of Ramaḍān, and in which the account was preceded by a verb or noun denoting wholeness and referring to both months. Certain *ḥadīths* relate

pp. 292–293, nos. 7858–7861; Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-bārī*, Cairo 1301 A.H., IV, pp. 186–188; Ibn Rajab, *Laṭā'if al-ma'ārif*, Cairo 1343 A.H., pp. 127–142; Nūr al-Dīn al-Haythamī, *Majma' al-zawā'id*, Beirut 1967, III, p. 192; al-Mundhirī, *al-Targhib wa-l-tarhib* (ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd), Cairo 1379/1960, II, pp. 241–243, nos. 1481–1486; al-Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak*, Hyderabad 1342 A.H., I, p. 434; al-Muttaqī l-Hindī, *Kanz l-'ummāl*, Hyderabad 1380/1960, VIII, p. 409, no. 2969; al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ al-mawāhib al-laduniyya*, Cairo 1328 A.H., VIII, pp. 124–126; al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā*, Hyderabad 1352 A.H., II, p. 210; al-Shaukānī, *Nayl al-auṭār*, Cairo 1372/1953, IV, pp. 274–277; al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ muwaṭṭa'ī mālīk*, Cairo 1381/1961, pp. 451–460; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta'rikh*, Cairo 1349/1931, IV, p. 437; Ibn Wahb, *Juz'*. Ms. Chester Beatty 3497, fol. 37a, inf. (. . . *wa-kāna shiyāmuhu ft sha'bān*); Aḥmad b. Ḥijāzī, op. cit., p. 42; al-Ghazālī, *Mukāshafat al-qulūb*, Cairo n.d., p. 249; Maḥmūd Muḥammad Khaṭṭāb al-Subkī, *al-Manhal al-'adhb al-maurūd, sharḥ sunan abī dawūd* (ed. Amīn Maḥmūd Khaṭṭāb), Cairo 1394 A.H., X, p. 55.

6 Al-Tirmidhī, op. cit., III, p. 273.

7 'Abd al-Razzāq, op. cit., IV, p. 293, no. 7861; al-Qasṭallānī, op. cit., III, pp. 401–403; al-'Aynī, *Umdat al-qārī*, Cairo 1348 A.H., XI, pp. 82–85; Ibn Hajar, *Fath*, IV, p. 187.

8 Al-Qasṭallānī, op. cit., III, p. 401 (. . . *li'allā yuzanna wujūbuhu*).

that the Prophet did not fast an entire month (*shahran kāmīlan*) except Sha'bān, which he concatenated with (the fast of) Ramaḍān;⁹ other *ḥadīths*, on the authority of 'Ā'isha, say: "I did not see the Prophet fasting two consecutive months except Sha'bān and Ramaḍān".¹⁰ As it was out of the question that the Prophet would fast for only the major part of Ramaḍān, the interpretation of *kull* or *kāmīl* as "a greater part" (scil. of the month) had to be abandoned. Scholars accepted the explanation of *kull* as "entire", but found another way to reconcile the contradictory traditions: the Prophet would sometimes fast the entire month of Sha'bān, and sometimes only a part of it. Another explanation tending to soften the contradiction was that the Prophet would fast during different periods of the month of Sha'bān, sometimes at the beginning, sometimes in the middle and sometimes at the end.¹¹ It is evident that scholars sought to draw a clear line between the obligatory fast of the entire month of Ramaḍān and the voluntary fast of Sha'bān, adjusting the controversial traditions to the orthodox view, which approved of fasting for only a part of Sha'bān.

Certain reports give the reasons for the Prophet's fast during Sha'bān. The Prophet, says one tradition, would fast during Sha'bān to replace the days of voluntary fast which he had missed over the course of the year.¹² Another tradition held that, as a person's fate is decided in Sha'bān, the Prophet said he would prefer the decision of his fate to be made while he was fasting.¹³ Slightly different is the utterance of the Prophet in which he defined Sha'bān as a month straddled by the two significant months of Rajab and Ramaḍān, and remarked that people were heedless of the virtues of this month. It is in Sha'bān that the deeds of men are brought before the Presence of God, and the Prophet said he would prefer his

9 Abū Dāwūd, op. cit., I, p. 368; al-Dārimī, *Sunan* (ed. 'Abdallāh Hāshim Yamānī), Medina 1386/1966, I, p. 350: . . . Umm Salama: *mā ra'aytu rasūla llāhi (ṣ) ṣāma shahran tāmmān illā sha'bāna, fa-innahu kāna yaṣīluhu bi-ramaḍāna li-yakūnā shahraynī mutatābi'aynī wa-kāna yaṣūmu min al-shahri ḥattā naqūl . . .*; Murtaḍā l-Zabīdī, *Ithāf al-sādātī l-muttaqīn bi-sharḥi asrārī ihyā'i 'ulūmi l-dīn*, Cairo 1311 A.H., IV, p. 257, ll. 1-2; al-Muttaqī l-Hindī, op. cit., VIII, p. 410, no. 2972; Maḥmūd Khaṭṭāb al-Subkī, *ibid.*

10 Al-Tirmidhī, op. cit., III, p. 272; Ibn Mājah, *Sunan al-muṣṭafā*, Cairo 1349 A.H., I, pp. 505-506: . . . *kāna yaṣūmu sha'bāna kullahu ḥattā yaṣīlahu bi-ramaḍāna.*

11 Al-'Aynī, op. cit., XI, p. 83; al-Qaṣṭallānī, op. cit., III, pp. 401-402.

12 Ibn Rajab, op. cit., p. 141; al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ al-mawāhib*, VIII, p. 125;

13 Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, op. cit., IV, p. 437; Ibn Abī Hātim, *'Ilal al-ḥadīth*, Cairo 1343 A.H., I, p. 250, no. 737 (the *ḥadīth* is marked as *munkar*); Ibn Rajab, op. cit., p. 140; al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ al-mawāhib*, VIII, p. 126; al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ al-ṣudūr bi-sharḥi ḥāli l-mawṭā wa-l-qubūr*, Cairo n.d., p. 22.

deeds to be brought before God while he was fasting.¹⁴ The month of Sha'bân, says one story, complained before God that He had placed it between the significant months of Rajab and Ramaḍân; God consoled Sha'bân, ordering the reading of the Qur'ân during that month. Sha'bân was indeed called "The Month of the Qur'ân Readers" (*shahr al-qurrâ*); during it pious scholars would redouble their efforts in reading the Qur'ân.¹⁵

As is usual in the "literature of virtues" (*al-faḍā'il*), the qualities and merits of deeds, places, times and devotional practices are measured and assessed, and a scale of merit is established. In an utterance attributed to the Prophet, the voluntary fast of Sha'bân is unequivocally set over the fast of Rajab. When he heard of persons fasting in Rajab, the Prophet said: "How far are they from those who fast in the month of Sha'bân" (scil. in reward)!¹⁶ This, however, faced a reported statement of the Prophet that the most meritorious fast (apart from Ramaḍân) was that during Muḥarram. Scholars explained that the Prophet received knowledge of the superiority of the fast of Muḥarram only in the last period of his life; and though he expressed the preference, there was no time to put fasting in Muḥarram into practice, or he may have been held up by current affairs.¹⁷

The virtue of fasting during Sha'bân was closely linked with the

14 Al-Shaukānī, *Nayl*, IV, p. 276; al-Muttaqī l-Hindī, op. cit., VIII, p. 410, no. 2973; al-Mukhallis, *Majālis*, Ms. Ṣāhiriyya, majmū'a 60, fol. 108a; Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyya, *I'lām al-muwaqqi'in* (ed. Tāhā 'Abd al-Ra'ūf Sa'd), Beirut 1973, IV, p. 297; Ibn Rajab, op. cit., pp. 127 inf., 136 ult. — 137 sup.; al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ al-mawāhib*, VIII, p. 126 sup.; al-Ghazālī, *Mukāshafa*, p. 249; al-Zandawaysitī, op. cit., fol. 255b; Abū Nu'aym, *Hilyat al-auliya'*, Beirut 1387/1967 (reprint), IX, p. 18; Maḥmūd Khaṭṭāb al-Subkī, *ibid.*

15 Ibn Rajab, op. cit., pp. 141 inf. — 142 sup.; cf. al-Zandawaysitī, op. cit., fol. 256a (. . . 'an anas b. mālik (r) annahu qāla: kāna aṣḥābu rasūli llāhi (ṣ) idhā nazarū ilā hilāli sha'bāna nkabbū 'alā l-maṣāḥifi yaqra'ūnahā wa-akhrāja l-muslimūna zakāta amwālihim li-yataqawwā bihā l-ḍa'ifu wa-l-miskīnu 'alā ṣi'yāmi ramaḍāna wa-ḍa'ū l-wulātu aḥla l-sujūni fa-man kāna 'alayhi ḥaddun aqāmū 'alayhi, wa-illā khallau sabīlahu wa-ṭalaqa l-tujjāru (above the line: al-sujjān) fa-qaḍau mā 'alayhim wa-qtadau mā lahum.

16 'Abd al-Razzāq, op. cit., IV, p. 292, no. 7858; al-Shaukānī, *Nayl*, IV, p. 277; al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ muwaṭṭa'a* mālik, II, p. 458; Id., *Sharḥ al-mawāhib*, VIII, p. 126; Ibn Abī Shayba, op. cit., III, p. 102; Ibn Bābūyah, *Thawāb*, p. 59; al-Majlisī, op. cit., XCVII, p. 77; and see *IOS*, I, p. 206, note 96.

17 Al-Qaṣṭallānī, op. cit., III, p. 402; Al-'Aynī, op. cit., XI, p. 84; al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ al-muwaṭṭa'a*, II, p. 458; Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath*, IV, p. 187 inf.; cf. Ibn Rajab, op. cit., p. 29; al-Shaukānī, *Nayl*, IV, 271 sup.; Nūr al-Dīn al-Haythamī, op. cit., III, pp. 190-191; al-Tirmidhī, op. cit., III, pp. 276-277; Ibn Abī Shayba, op. cit., III, p. 103.

veneration of Ramaḍān: to fast in Sha'bān was held to be a means of honouring Ramaḍān.¹⁸ All the traditions but one,¹⁹ stress the superiority of Ramaḍān — the month of obligatory fast — over the other months. Consequently a clear line had to be drawn between Ramaḍān and the virtuous months of voluntary fast, and a distinction made between Sha'bān and Ramaḍān. The Prophet indeed is said to have prohibited fasting on the day or two days preceding Ramaḍān. In other traditions this concept was defined slightly differently: the Prophet is said to have forbidden fasting to be carried over uninterruptedly from Sha'bān to Ramaḍān; accordingly, a pause in fasting (*faṣl*) between these two months was to be observed.²⁰ Some sources record an utterance of the Prophet in which the period forbidden for fasting, between Sha'bān and Ramaḍān was extended considerably: fasting in Sha'bān was to be suspended from the 15th of the month until the 1st of Ramaḍān.²¹ The interdiction against fasting on the days immediately preceding Ramaḍān was, however, affected by the dispensation (*rukḥṣa*) for those who were continuing a fast begun earlier in Sha'bān.²²

18 Al-Shaukānī, *Nayl*, IV, p. 275 inf.: ... *su'ila rasūlu llāhi (ṣ) ayyu l-ṣaumi afḍalu ba'da ramaḍāna, fa-qāla: sha'bānu li-ta'ẓīmi ramaḍāna*; al-Daylamī, op. cit., Ms. Chester Beatty 4139, fol. 93b; al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ al-muwaffa'*, II, p. 458; Ibn Abī Shayba, op. cit., III, p. 103; al-Jilānī, op. cit., I, p. 210; al-Munāwī, op. cit., II, p. 42, no. 1277; al-Muttaqī l-Hindī, op. cit., VIII, p. 348, no. 2535; al-Mukhalliṣ, *Majālis*, Ms. Ḥāhiriyya, majmū'a 60, fol. 110b; Ibn Bābūyah, *Thawāb*, p. 59; al-Majlisī, op. cit., XCVII, p. 77; al-Ṭahāwī, *Sharḥ ma'ānī*, II, 83 inf.; cf. al-Daylamī, op. cit., Ms. Chester Beatty 4139, fol. 130a: *allāhumma bārik lanā fī rajab wa-sha'bān wa-ballighnā ramaḍān*...

19 Al-Jilānī, op. cit., I, p. 211: ... *wa-khtāra min al-shuhūri arba'atan: rajaba wa-sha'bāna wa-ramaḍāna wa-l-muḥarrama, wa-khtāra minhā sha'bāna wa-ja'alahū shahra l-nabiyyi (ṣ): fa-kamā anna l-nabiyya (ṣ) afḍalu l-anbiyā'i ka-dhālika shahruhu afḍalu l-shuhūri*.

20 'Abd al-Razzāq, op. cit., IV, pp. 158–160; Ibn Abī Shayba, op. cit., III, pp. 21–22; Nūr al-Dīn al-Haythamī, op. cit., III, p. 148; al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan*, IV, pp. 207–208; al-Muttaqī l-Hindī, op. cit., VIII, p. 310, nos. 2140–2141, 2144; cf. Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyya, *Badā'i' al-fawā'id*, Beirut n.d. (reprint), III, p. 96.

21 Ibn Abī Shayba, op. cit., III, p. 21; 'Abd al-Razzāq, op. cit., IV, p. 161, no. 7325; al-Sakhāwī, *al-Maqāṣid al-ḥasana* (ed. 'Abdallāh Muḥammad al-Ṣiddīqī), Cairo 1375/1956, p. 35, no. 55; al-Dārimī, op. cit., I, p. 350; al-Murtaḍā l-Zabīdī, op. cit., IV, p. 256; al-Suyūṭī, *Jam' al-jawāmi'*, Cairo 1391/1971, I, p. 430, nos. 489–490, 445 no. 540, 745–746, nos. 1517–1519, 760, no. 1566; al-Munāwī, op. cit., I, p. 304, no. 494; al-Tirmidhī, op. cit., III, p. 274; Abū Dāwūd, op. cit., I, p. 368; al-Ṣaffūrī, op. cit., p. 198; al-Shaukānī, *Nayl*, IV, pp. 290–292; al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan*, IV, p. 209; Maḥmūd Khaṭṭāb al-Subkī, op. cit., X, p. 56.

22 Al-Dāraquṭnī, *Sunan* (ed. 'Abdallāh Hāshim Yamānī), Medina 1386/1966, II, p. 191, no. 57; Ibn Abī Shayba, op. cit., III, p. 23; al-Dārimī, op. cit., I, p. 336; Abū

The traditions explicitly recommending fasting in the final days of Sha'bân were controversial.²³ The Prophet is said to have made the following utterance: "He who fasts on the last Monday of Sha'bân, God will forgive him for his sins".²⁴ Another tradition of the Prophet promises those who fast on the first and last Thursdays of Sha'bân entrance into Paradise.²⁵ God will protect from hellfire the body of a believer who fasts even a single day of Sha'bân and he will be granted the company of Yûsuf in Paradise and given the reward of Dâwûd and Ayyûb. If he completes the entire month in fasting, God will ease the pangs of his death, remove the darkness of his grave and hide his shame on the Day of Resurrection.²⁶

Especially stressed were the virtues of devotional observance of the first night of Sha'bân. "He who performs on the first night of Sha'bân 12 prostrations (*rak'a*), reading during the first of them the *fātiḥa* and repeating five times *qul huwa aḥad*, God will grant him the reward of 12,000 martyrs and he will be absolved of his sins, as on the day his mother bore him, and no sin will be reckoned against him for eighty days",²⁷ says a tradition attributed to the Prophet.

The month of Sha'bân was considered by the Prophet as protection from the fires of Hell; he enjoined those who sought to meet him in Paradise to fast at least three days in Sha'bân.²⁸

Dâwûd, op. cit., I, p. 368; al-Shaukānī, *Nayl*, IV, pp. 290–292; al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan*, IV, p. 210; al-Muttaqī l-Hindī, op. cit., VIII, p. 310, nos. 2142–2143; Ibn Mājah, op. cit., I, p. 506; al-Ṭahāwī, *Sharḥ ma'ānī*, II, p. 84; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad* (ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākīr), Cairo 1373/1953, XII, p. 188, no. 7199, XIV, 192, no. 7766; Maḥmūd Khaṭṭāb al-Subkī, op. cit., X, p. 54.

23 See al-Bahyaqī, *Sunan*, IV, pp. 210–211; al-Shaukānī, op. cit., IV, p. 291; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Fa'iq* (ed. 'Alī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī, Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm), Cairo 1971, II, p. 171. And see Ibn Rajab, op. cit., pp. 149 inf. — 150 (. . . *wa-kharraja abū dâwûd fī bâbi taqaddumi ramaḍāna min ḥadīthi mu'āwiyata annahu qāla: innī mutaqaḍdimun al-shahra fa-man shā'a fa-l-yataqaddam: fa-su'ila 'an dhālika fa-qāla: sami'tu l-nabiyya (ṣ) yaqūlu: ṣūmū l-shahra wa-sirrahu . . . fa-yakūnu l-mā'nā: ṣūmū awwala l-shahri wa-ākhirahu, fa-li-dhālika amara mu'āwiyatu bi-ṣi'yāmi ākhiri l-shahri . . .*); Maḥmūd Khaṭṭāb al-Subkī, op. cit., X, pp. 45–49; see *Lisān al-'Arab*, s.v. *srr*.

24 Al-Daylamī, op. cit., Ms. Chester Beatty 3037, fol. 143a; al-Jilānī, op. cit., I, p. 210 (Al-Jilānī adds the reservation that this utterance does not apply when this Monday coincides with the last days of Sha'bân during which fasting is forbidden).

25 Al-Ṣaffūrī, op. cit., p. 195.

26 Ibid., p. 196.

27 Ibid., p. 195; cf. al-Nāzili, *Khazīnat al-asrār al-kubrā*, Cairo 1349 A.H. (reprint), p. 43 inf.

28 Al-Ṣaffūrī, op. cit., p. 195.

Shi'i tradition does not differ from Sunni in content; it is, however, richer in *faḍā'il* — lore and its stories are of course marked by specific Shi'i features. A lengthy report on a victory of a Muslim expedition against unbelievers during Sha'bān contains an account of a miracle wrought for the leaders of the expedition — Zayd b. Hāritha, 'Abdallah b. Rawāḥa and Qays b. 'Āṣim al-Minqari — on account of their pious deeds at the beginning of Sha'bān. The Prophet, who welcomed the victorious expedition on its return, expounded to the people the virtues of pious deeds on the first day of Sha'bān: alms-giving, reading the Qur'ān, visiting the sick, reconciling husbands and wives, parents and children, praying and fasting and performing other deeds of piety and devotion. Such deeds would afford a hold on a branch of the Paradise-tree of *Ṭubā*, to appear on the first day of Sha'bān. Those who perpetrate evil deeds on that day will grasp the branches of the Hell-tree of *Zaqūm*, which will emerge from Hell. On the first day of Sha'bān God dispatches His angels to guide the people and summon them to perform good deeds, while Iblīs sends his accomplices to lead them astray. The faithful are to be alert and to revere the month of Sha'bān in order to gain happiness.²⁹ Detailed lists of rewards for fasting each day of this month, compiled after the pattern of the lists of rewards for fasting in Rajab, record the graces and rewards to be granted to the pious who exert themselves in the Sha'bān fast.³⁰ Even serious crimes will be forgiven those who fast during Sha'bān.³¹ The two months of fasting prescribed in cases of incidental killing (Sūra 4:92) were interpreted as synonymous with the two consecutive months of Sha'bān and Ramaḍān.³²

The idea of intercession linked with the rewards of fasting during this month is remarkable. According to tradition, the Prophet will intercede on the Day of Resurrection for him who fasts even one day of Sha'bān.³³ The month itself is called "The Month of Intercession", for the Prophet is to intercede for those who utter the prayer of blessing for the Prophet during this month.³⁴

29 Al-Majlisī, op. cit., XCVII, pp. 55–65 (from the *Tafsīr* of the Imām al-'Askarī).

30 Al-Majlisī, op. cit., XCVII, p. 65 ult. — 70; Ibn Bābūyah, *Thawāb*, pp. 60–61; Id., *Amālī*, pp. 20–22.

31 Al-Majlisī, op. cit., XCVII, p. 74.

32 Al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr* (ed. Hāshim al-Rasūli l-Maḥallātī), Qumm 1380 A.H., I, p. 266, nos. 232, 235; Ibn Bābūyah, *Thawāb*, pp. 57–58.

33 Al-Majlisī, op. cit., XCVII, p. 81, no. 49; Ibn Bābūyah, *Amālī*, pp. 17, 486.

34 Al-Majlisī, op. cit., XCVII, p. 78: . . . *wa-summiya shahru sha'bāna shahra l-shafa'ati li-anna rasūlakum yashfa'u likulli man yuṣallī 'alayhi fīhi*.

Like Sunni scholars, Shi'i scholars were concerned with the permissibility of uninterrupted fasting over the two consecutive months of Sha'bān and Ramaḍān. And as in Sunni sources, the traditions in the Shi'i sources are contradictory or divergent. According to one Shi'i report, the Prophet would fast over the two months without pause (*faṣl*) between them; however he forbade believers to do this.³⁵ A means of breaking the fast, thus discontinuing a fast of two consecutive months, was provided by advice given by the Imām, to desist from fasting for a single day after the 15th of Sha'bān, and then to continue fasting uninterruptedly.³⁶ Some Shi'i traditions recommended fasting the last three days of Sha'bān, continuing uninterruptedly into the fast of Ramaḍān;³⁷ others report that the Prophet would fast three days at the beginning of Sha'bān, three days mid-month, and three days at the end.³⁸ Later Shi'i scholars quoted early traditions concerning Sha'bān, traced back to the Shi'i Imāms, in an attempt to reconcile the controversial reports and to establish fixed patterns for the observances and devotions of this month.³⁹

Both Shi'i and Sunni traditions are imbued with sincere reverence for Sha'bān and its devotional observances and recommend almost without exception⁴⁰ fasting during the month and performance of pious deeds. The only controversy was over the period of fasting during the month and the pause separating the voluntary fast of Sha'bān from the obligatory month of fasting of Ramaḍān.

II

The eve of the 15th of Sha'bān is the holiest time of the month and it is recommended to spend the night in vigil prayer and supplication, and the

35 Ibn Bābūyah, *Thawāb*, p. 58; al-Majlisī, op. cit., XCVII, p. 76 (from Ibn Bābūyah).

36 Al-Majlisī, op. cit., XCVII, p. 72, no. 13: . . . *mā taqūlu fī ṣaumi shahri sha'bāna? qāla: ṣumhu. qultu: fa-l-faṣlu? qāla: yaumun ba'da l-niṣfi, thumma ṣil.*

37 Al-Majlisī, op. cit., XCVII, p. 72, no. 16; p. 80, no. 47.

38 Ibn Bābūyah, *'Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, Najaf 1390/1970, II, p. 70, no. 330; al-Majlisī, op. cit., XCVII, p. 73, no. 18.

39 See e.g. al-Baḥrānī, *al-Ḥadā'iq al-nāḍira fī aḥkām al-'itra l-tāhira* (ed. Muḥammad Taqīyy al-Ayrawānī), Najaf 1384 A.H., XIII, pp. 382–386.

40 But see al-Baḥrānī, op. cit., XIII, p. 383 (quoted from Kulīnī's *al-Wasā'il*): . . . *annahu su'ila ['alayhi l-salām] 'anhu fa-qāla: mā ṣāmahu [i.e. Sha'bān — K] rasūlu llāhi (ṣ) wa-lā aḥadun min ābā'i . . .*; and see the interpretation given by al-Kulīnī, *ibid.*; and see the contradictory traditions, al-Majlisī, op. cit., XCVII, p. 76, nos. 32–33; p. 82, no. 51.

morrow in fasting.⁴¹ At sunset, says a tradition, God would descend to the lowest heaven, grant His forgiveness to those seeking it, food to those begging for it and health to the sick, and would respond to those imploring His aid for other needs until the break of day.⁴² A version (recorded in the early compilation of 'Abd al-Razzāq) holds that on the night of mid-Sha'bān God would look upon His servants and grant forgiveness to all people on earth save unbelievers and those bearing a grudge against others. Other versions include drunkards, wizards, prostitutes and sinners of other varieties in the list of those denied forgiveness.⁴³

The prayers and supplications on the night of mid-Sha'bān are connected with the idea that this is the night when the life and death of all creatures in the world are decided. Some commentators on the Qur'ān took verses 2–4 of *Sūrat al-Dukhān* (44): "We have sent it down in a blessed night . . . therein every wise bidding determined as a bidding from Us . . ." to refer to the night of the 15th of Sha'bān. They consequently interpreted the pronominal suffix in *anzalnāhu*, "We have sent it down", as relating to "the bidding", "the order", "the decree". This

41 But see the *ḥadīth*, reported on the authority of Abū Hurayra, forbidding fasting on the 15th of Sha'bān, al-Suyūṭī, *Jam' al-jawāmi'*, I, p. 760, no. 1566.

42 Ibn Mājah, op. cit., I, p. 421; Ibn Khuzayma, *Kitāb al-tauḥīd* (ed. Muḥammad Khalīl Harrās), Cairo 1387/1968, p. 136; al-Suyūṭī, *Jam' al-jawāmi'*, I, p. 761, no. 1568 (cf. ibid., no. 1567); Id., *al-Durr al-manthūr*, VI, p. 26 inf.; Aḥmad b. Ḥijāzī, op. cit., p. 51; Ibn Rajab, op. cit., pp. 143, 145; al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ al-mawāhib*, VII, pp. 412–413; al-Jamal, *al-Futūḥāt al-ilāhiyya*, Cairo n.d., IV, p. 100; al-Fākihī, *Ta'rikh Makka*, Ms. Leiden Or. 463, fol. 418b; al-Khāzin, *Tafsīr*, Cairo 1381 A.H., VI, p. 120; al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, VI, p. 119 (on margin of al-Khāzin's *Tafsīr*); al-Mundhirī, op. cit., II, p. 244, no. 1491; al-Muttaqī l-Hindī, op. cit., XVII, p. 143, no. 467; al-Majlisī, op. cit., XCVIII, p. 415; al-Ṭurṭūshī, *al-Ḥawādith wa-l-bida'* (ed. Muḥammad al-Ṭalbi), Tunis 1959, p. 118; al-Sha'rānī, *Lawāqih al-anwār al-qudsiyya*, Cairo 1381/1961, p. 185; cf. al-Malaṭī, *al-Tanbih wa-l-radd 'alā ahli l-ahwā'i wa-l-bida'* (ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kautharī), n.p. 1388/1968, p. 113; Abū Shāma, *al-Bā'ith 'alā inkāri l-bida'i wa-l-ḥawādith* (ed. Muḥammad Fu'ād Miṣqāra), Cairo 1374/1955, p. 26.

43 'Abd al-Razzāq, op. cit., IV, p. 316, ult., no. 7923; Ibn Mājah, op. cit., I, p. 422; cf. al-Suyūṭī, *Jam' al-jawāmi'*, I, p. 761, no. 1659; al-Mundhirī, op. cit., V, p. 123, no. 4007 (and see nos. 4009–4010); Ibn Rajab, op. cit., p. 143 (and see p. 144: the list of sinners, and p. 146: the explanation of the grave sins); Aḥmad b. Ḥijāzī, op. cit., p. 50; cf. al-Munāwī, op. cit., II, p. 316, no. 1942; IV, p. 459, no. 5963; al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ al-mawāhib*, VII, p. 410 ult. — 411 sup.; Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Kāfi l-shāf fī takhrijī aḥādīthi l-kashshāf*, Cairo 1354 A.H., p. 148, nos. 380–381; al-Sha'rānī, op. cit., p. 185; al-Naysābūrī, *Gharā'ib al-Qur'ān* (ed. Ibrāhīm 'Aṭwa 'Awāq), Cairo 1393/1973, XXV, p. 65; al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, Cairo 1357/1938, XXVII, p. 238; al-Muttaqī l-Hindī, op. cit., XVII, p. 143, no. 467; XIII, pp. 269–270, nos. 1481–1482, 1485, 1489, 1491.

interpretation was vehemently rejected by commentators asserting that the verses refer to the "*laylat al-qadr*" and the pronominal suffix to the Qur'ān, sent down in Ramaḍān.⁴⁴

But the widespread popular belief was indeed that the night of the 15th of Sha'bān was the night of decrees concerning life and death. Those destined to die would plant trees, set out on pilgrimage, beget children, not knowing that they were to die in the course of the year.⁴⁵ On this night God would order the Angel of Death to seize the souls of those upon whose death during the following year He had decided.⁴⁶ As the Angel of Death is thus occupied in receiving the decrees of death from God, no one dies between sunset and nightfall of this eve.⁴⁷ This night is indeed called *laylat al-ḥayāt*, *laylat al-qisma wa-l-taqdir*, *laylat al-raḥma*,

44 See Aḥmad b. Ḥijāzī, op. cit., p. 47 inf. — 48; cf. al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ al-mawāhib*, VII, p. 414; al-Qurtubī, *Tafsīr*, Cairo 1387/1967, XVI, pp. 126–127; Ḥasan al-Madābighī, *Risāla fīmā yata'allāqu bi-laylati l-niṣfi min sha'bān*, Ms. Hebrew University, AP Ar. 8^o 439, fol. 9b–10a; al-Luddī, *Fayḍu l-ḥannān fī faḍli laylati l-niṣfi min sha'bān*, Ms. Hebrew University, AP Ar. 8^o 479, fol. 4a: . . . *fa-l-hā' fī anzalnā ḍamīru l-amri, ay innā anzalnā amran min 'indinā fī ḥādhihi l-laylati, qaḍaynāhu wa-qaddarnāhu min al-ājāli wa-l-arzāqi* . . . And see contradictory explanations Ibn al-'Arabī, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* (ed. 'Alī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī), Cairo 1388/1968, p. 1678: . . . *fī laylatin mubārakatin* . . . *ya'nī anna llāha anzala l-qur'āna bi-l-layli* . . . *wa-jumhūru l-'ulamā'i 'alā annahā laylatu l-qadri, wa-minhum man qāla innahā laylatu l-niṣfi min sha'bāna, wa-huwa bāḥilun* . . .; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, Beirut 1385/1966, VI, p. 245; al-Ṭurṭūshī, op. cit., pp. 118–121; cf. al-Rāzī, op. cit., XXVII, p. 238.

45 'Abd al-Razzāq, op. cit., IV, p. 317, nos. 7925–7926; cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* (Būlāq), XXV, p. 65; al-Muttaqī l-Hindī, op. cit., XVII, p. 143, no. 468; al-Madābighī, op. cit., fol. 15a–b.

46 Al-Munāwī, op. cit., IV, p. 459, no. 5964; Ibn Rajab, op. cit., p. 148, ll. 1–2; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, VI, p. 26; al-Muttaqī l-Hindī, op. cit., XIII, p. 269, no. 1483. The story of the tree in Paradise (see G.E. von Grunebaum, *Muḥammadan Festivals*, New York 1951, pp. 53–54, quoted from Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*) is recorded by al-Luddī, op. cit., fol. 5b: The tree at the side of the Throne (*al-'arsh*), resembling a pomegranate-tree, has as many leaves as there are human beings in the world. On each leaf is written the name of a person. The Angel of Death watches the leaves; when a leaf yellows he perceives that the date of the death of the person is imminent and he dispatches his helpers; when the leaf falls the Angel of Death catches his soul. According to a version of this tradition, when the leaf falls on its back, it denotes a positive decree for the person (*ḥusn al-khātima*); if it falls on its underside, it denotes an unfortunate decree. Al-Suyūṭī records the tradition on this tree on the authority of Muḥammad b. Juḥāda in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, III, p. 15 (commenting on Sūra 6:60) and in his compilation *Sharḥ al-sudūr*, p. 22.

47 Aḥmad b. Ḥijāzī, op. cit., p. 48 inf.; al-Luddī, op. cit., fol. 5b inf. — 6a sup.; al-Madābighī, op. cit., fol. 17a.

laylat al-ijāba, *laylat al-takfīr*.⁴⁸ In reference to the forgiving of sins, the current popular name of this night is *laylat al-sukūk* or *laylat al-barā'a*, "the night of acquittance".⁴⁹ It is the "feast of the angels" (*id al-malā'ika*)⁵⁰ and the "night of intercession" (*laylat al-shafā'a*); on the 13th of Sha'bān the Prophet pleaded for intercession for a third of his people and this was granted; on the 14th he was granted intercession for a second third and on the 15th of Sha'bān he was granted intercession for his entire people.⁵¹ An exceptional night, indeed, distinguished by peculiar virtues.⁵²

A lengthy report, recorded on the authority of 'Ā'isha, gives us details of the origin of the devotions of this night. 'Ā'isha missed the Prophet in her bedchamber that night and sought him eagerly; she found him prostrated in supplication, praying a most moving prayer. The Prophet explained to 'Ā'isha the importance of this night, conveying to her the good tidings that God would grant His forgiveness to a countless multitude of believers, as many as the hairs of the flocks of the tribe of Kalb.⁵³

48 See al-Jamal, op. cit., IV, p. 100; Aḥmad b. Ḥijāzī, op. cit., pp. 48–49; al-Ghazālī, *Mukāshafa*, pp. 249–250; al-Luddī, op. cit., fol. 5b–6a.

49 For the expression *barā'a* as "acquittance", "discharge of sins", see the story about the letter sent by God and found on the breast of 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz during his burial: Ps. Ibn Qutayba, *al-Imāma wa-l-siyāsa* (ed. Tāhā Muḥammad al-Zaynī), Cairo 1378/1967, II, p. 102: *bi-smi llāhi l-raḥmāni l-raḥīm, kitābun bi-l-qalami l-jalīl, min allāhi l-'azīzi l-'alīm, barā'atun li-'umara bni 'abdi l-'azīz min al-'adhābi l-alīm*. And see al-Madābighī, op. cit., fol. 17b: *... fa-fī laylati l-barā'ati mithlu dhālika yu'ḏa l-wāḥidu barā'atan, fa-yuqālu aufayta l-ḥaqqā wa-qumta bi-sharā'ihi l-'ubūdiyyati fa-khudh barā'atan min al-nāri; wa-yuqālu li-wāḥidin istakhfafta bi-ḥaqqi wa-lam taqum bi-sharā'ihi l-'ubūdiyyati, fa-khudh barā'ataka min al-jinnāni*.

50 Al-Jilānī, op. cit., I, p. 216; al-Luddī, op. cit., fol. 6a; Aḥmad b. Ḥijāzī, op. cit., p. 48 inf.; al-Ghazālī, *Mukāshafa*, p. 249; al-Madābighī, op. cit., fol. 17a–b.

51 Al-Jamal, op. cit., IV, pp. 100; Aḥmad b. Ḥijāzī, op. cit., p. 49; al-Ghazālī, *Mukāshafa*, p. 250; al-Naysābūrī, op. cit., XXV, p. 65; al-Rāzī, op. cit., XXVII, p. 238.

52 'Abd al-Razzāq, op. cit., IV, p. 317, no. 7927; Ibn 'Asākir, *Tahdhīb ta'rīkh* (ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Badrān), Damascus 1330 A.H., I, p. 47; III, p. 296; Ibn Rajab, op. cit., p. 144 inf.; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, VI, p. 26; al-Zandawaysī, op. cit., fol. 259a; al-Jilānī, op. cit., I, p. 215; Aḥmad b. Ḥijāzī, op. cit., pp. 48, 51; Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Kāfi l-shaf*, p. 148, no. 382; al-Waṣṣābī, *al-Baraka fī faḍli l-sa'yi wa-l-ḥaraka*, Cairo n.d., p. 78; al-Madābighī, op. cit., fol. 17a.

53 See Ibn Mājah, op. cit., I, pp. 421–422; al-Mundhirī, op. cit., II, p. 243, nos. 1488, 1490; V, p. 124, no. 4008, 126, no. 4012; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, VI, pp. 26–27; al-Jilānī, op. cit., I, pp. 213–215; Ibn Rajab, op. cit., p. 143; Aḥmad b. Ḥijāzī, op. cit., p. 49; al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ al-mawāḥib*, VII, pp. 410–411; al-Majlisī, op. cit., XCVII, pp. 88–89 (no. 16); XCVIII, pp. 416–419 (and see XCVII, p. 86, no. 8); al-

Special prayers and supplications were recommended and precious rewards promised to those who would exert themselves in devotion and prayer during this night. Among the numerous rewards were forgiveness of sins and entry into Paradise. Orthodox scholars sharply criticized these *ḥadīths*, often branding them as weak or forged.⁵⁴

Shī'ī sources outdo the Sunni in propagating the virtues of the night of the 15th of Sha'bān; they emphasize that the Imāms were singled out by the blessings of this night. God granted the Prophet *laylat al-qadr*, while He granted the Imāms (*ahl al-bayt*) the night of the 15th of Sha'bān, according to a report transmitted on the authority of al-Bāqir.⁵⁵ A tradition attributed to the Prophet says that the position of 'Alī within the family of the Prophet (*ālu muḥammadin*) is like that of the best of the days and nights of Sha'bān, i.e. the night of the 15th of Sha'bān.⁵⁶ Noteworthy is the tradition recommending a visit to the grave of Ḥusayn on this night; forgiveness of sins will be the assured reward.⁵⁷

Orthodox Muslim scholars emphasized the superiority of *laylat al-qadr* over the night of the 15th of Sha'bān, *laylat al-barā'a*. Although some scholars opined that there is no fixed date for *laylat al-qadr* and that it

Dhahabī, *Mizān al-i'tidāl* (ed. 'Alī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī), Cairo 1382/1963, IV, p. 262, no. 9081; al-Zandawayṣī, op. cit., fol. 259b–260b; al-Rāzī, op. cit., XXVII, p. 238; al-Madābighī, op. cit., fols. 18a–20b; al-Muttaqī l-Hindī, op. cit., XIII, p. 270, nos. 1486–1488, 1491.

54 Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, VI, p. 27 inf. — 28 sup.; Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, Cairo 1351/1932, I, p. 93; al-Muttaqī l-Hindī, op. cit., XVII, p. 144, no. 469; Aḥmad b. Ḥijāzī, op. cit., p. 52 inf. — 53; al-Jīlānī, op. cit., I, p. 216; al-Shaukānī, *al-Fawā'id al-majmū'a fī l-aḥādīthi l-mawḍū'a* (ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mu'allamī l-Yamānī), Cairo 1380/1960, pp. 50–51, no. 106; Id., *Tuḥfat al-dhākirin bi-'uḍḍati l-ḥiṣn al-ḥaṣīn min kalāmi sayyid al-mursalin* (ed. Muḥammad Zabāra al-Ḥasanī al-Ṣan'ānī), Cairo 1393/1973, pp. 182–183; al-Ṣaffūrī, op. cit., p. 197; al-Jamal, op. cit., IV, p. 100; al-Majlisī, op. cit., XCVII, pp. 85–86 (nos. 5, 7), 87 (no. 13), 89 (no. 17); XCVIII, pp. 408–418; Ibn Bābūyah, *'Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, I, p. 228; Id., *Amālī*, p. 24; al-Ṭūsī, *Amālī*, Najaf 1384/1964, I, p. 303; Ibn al-Jauzī, *al-Mawḍū'āt* (ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad 'Uthmān), Medina 1386/1966, II, pp. 127–130; al-Suyūṭī, *al-La'ālī al-maṣnū'a fī l-aḥādīthi l-mawḍū'a*, Cairo n.d., II, pp. 57–60; Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Kāfī al-shāf*, p. 148, no. 379; al-Waṣṣābī, op. cit., pp. 76–78; Mā' al-'Aynayn, *Na't al-bid'ayāt wa-tauṣīf al-nihāyāt*, Fās(?) 1312 A.H., pp. 184–185; al-Nāzilī, op. cit., pp. 43–44; al-Rāzī, op. cit., XXVII, p. 238.

55 Al-Ṭūsī, *Amālī*, I, p. 303; al-Majlisī, op. cit., XCVII, p. 85, no. 5 (from the *Amālī*).

56 Al-Majlisī, op. cit., XCVII, p. 87, no. 9 (from the *Tafṣīr* of al-Imām al-'Askarī).

57 Al-Majlisī, op. cit., XCVII, p. 85, no. 4, p. 87, nos. 10–11.

can occur on any night throughout the entire year,⁵⁸ the majority held that *laylat al-qadr* is a night of Ramaḍān, thus inherently excelling any night of the inferior month of Sha'bān. The early scholar and judge Ibn Abī Mulayka⁵⁹ is reported to have sharply rebuked those scholars who held that the reward for observance of the night of the 15th of Sha'bān equals that of *laylat al-qadr*.⁶⁰ This report indicates that orthodox scholars were reconciled to the veneration of the night of the 15th of Sha'bān, and merely stressed the inferiority of this night (*laylat al-barā'a*) in comparison with *laylat al-qadr*. Legitimization of *laylat al-barā'a* was linked with the elaboration of the idea of its virtues and merits as compared with those of *laylat al-qadr*. Scholars stressed the difference between the two nights, as well as their relationship: the date of *laylat al-barā'a* was announced and fixed, but that of *laylat al-qadr* (referring to that during Ramaḍān — K) is not revealed, for *laylat al-barā'a* is the night of judgement and decree, while *laylat al-qadr* is the night of mercy. Were the date of *laylat al-qadr* divulged and precisely determined, people would abstain from every exertion and rely upon the mercy of God.⁶¹ A report, recorded on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, defines the mutual, complementary functions of the two nights: God issues His decrees on *laylat al-barā'a*, but delivers them for execution on *laylat al-qadr*.⁶² In another, more detailed version, the copying from the Preserved Tablet commences on *laylat al-barā'a* and is completed on *laylat al-qadr*, when the list of sustenances is handed over to the angel Mikā'il, the list of earthquakes, lightning and wars to Jibril, and the list of deeds (*a'māl*) to the angel Ismā'il who is in charge of lower Heaven and is an angel of very high rank.⁶³

58 See al-Ṭahāwī, *Sharḥ ma'ānī*, II, p. 92: . . . *anna bna mas'ūdin qāla: man qāma l-sanata kullahā aṣāba laylata l-qadri* . . . (see the contradictory opinion of Ubayy b. Ka'b, *ibid.*); Ibn 'Asākir, *op. cit.*, II, p. 324; al-'Āmilī, *al-Kashkūl* (ed. Ṭāhir Aḥmad al-Zāwī), Cairo 1380/1961, I, p. 405: . . . *wa-minhum man qāla: hiya fī majmū'i l-sanati, lā yakhtaṣṣu bihā shahru ramaḍāna wa-lā ghayruhu; ruwiya dhālika 'ani bni mas'ūdin, qāla: man yaqumi l-ḥaula yuṣibhā*.

59 See on him Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, V, p. 306, no. 523; Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, Beirut 1377/1957, V, p. 472; al-Fāsi, *al-'Iqd al-thamīn* (ed. Fu'ād Sayyid), Cairo 1385/1966, V, p. 204, no. 1570; al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-huffāz*, Hyderabad, I, p. 101; Wakī, *Akhhār al-quḍāt* (ed. 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Marāghī), Cairo 1366/1947, I, p. 261.

60 'Abd al-Razzāq, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 317, no. 7928; al-Turṭūshī, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

61 Al-Jilānī, *op. cit.*, I, p. 216; al-Ṣaffūrī, *op. cit.*, p. 198; cf. al-Zandawaysitī, *op. cit.*, fol. 273b.

62 Al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, VI, p. 120, l. 7; al-Jamal, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 100, ll. 25–26; al-Majlisī, *op. cit.*, XCVIII, p. 414.

63 Al-Jamal, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 100 inf.; Aḥmad b. Ḥijāzī, *op. cit.*, p. 48 sup.; al-Luddī, *op. cit.*, fol. 5b; al-Naysābūrī, *op. cit.*, XXV, p. 65; al-Madābighī, *op. cit.*, fol. 10b.

The beginnings of the devotional observance of *laylat al-barā'a* seem to go back a long way. A legendary report of an expedition sent by Abū 'Ubayda, during his conquest of Syria, contains an interesting passage on *laylat al-barā'a*. The commander of the expedition, appointed by Abū 'Ubayda, was 'Abdallah b. Ja'far, son of the uncle of the Prophet, the famous martyr Ja'far al-Ṭayyār. Among the warriors of his troop was the pious Wāthila b. al-Asqa'.⁶⁴ When the troop was about to set out, 'Abdallah noticed the brightness of the moon. Wāthila declared that it was the night of the 15th of Sha'bān, the blessed night of great virtue. On that night, he said, sustenances and decrees concerning life and death are set down, sins and wrong deeds are forgiven. Wāthila stressed that, regardless of his desire to spend the night in vigil (*wa-kuntu aradtu an aqūmahā*, scil. in devotional observance — K), setting out to fight for God's sake was preferable. Consequently the troop indeed marched out.⁶⁵ Some reports relate that certain *tābi'ūn* in Syria would perform the devotional practices of this night, mentioning specifically Makḥūl⁶⁶ Luqmān b. 'Āmir⁶⁷ and Khālid b. Ma'dān.⁶⁸ The well-known scholar Ishāq b. Rāhawayh⁶⁹ adopted their view and was favourable toward the observance of *laylat al-barā'a*. 'Aṭā' b. Abī Rabāḥ,⁷⁰ Ibn Abī Mulayka⁷¹ and the majority of the scholars of al-Ḥijāz opposed these practices; Mālikī and Shāfi'ī scholars followed in their path, severely criticizing the obser-

64 See on him Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, XI, p. 101, no. 174; Abū Nu'aym, op. cit., II p. 21, no. 120; Ibn Hajar, *al-Iṣāba* (ed. 'Alī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī), Cairo 1392/1972, VI, p. 591, no. 9093; Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *al-Istī'āb* (ed. 'Alī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī), Cairo 1380/1960, p. 1563, no. 2738.

65 Ps. Wāqidī, *Futūḥ al-Shām*, Cairo 1348, I, p. 57.

66 See on him Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 404, no. 5; Ṣafiyy al-Dīn al-Khazrajī, *Tadhhīb tahdhīb al-kamāl* (ed. Maḥmūd 'Abd al-Wahhāb Fāyid), Cairo 1391/1971, III, p. 54, no. 7178.

67 See on him Ibn Hibbān al-Bustī, *Kitāb al-thiqāt* (ed. 'Abd al-Khālīq al-Afghānī, Hyderabad 1388/1968, p. 229; Ṣafiyy al-Dīn al-Khazrajī, op. cit., II, p. 372, no. 6005.

68 See on him Ibn Hibbān al-Bustī, op. cit., p. 55; Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, III, p. 118, no. 222; al-Bukhārī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, no. 601; Ṣafiyy al-Dīn al-Khazrajī, op. cit., I, p. 284, no. 1802.

69 See on him al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-huffāz*, p. 433; Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, I, p. 216, no. 408; Ibn Abī Hātim, *al-Jarḥ wa-l-ta'dīl*, Hyderabad 1371/1952, II, p. 209, no. 714; al-Dhahabī, *Mizān al-i'tidāl*, I, p. 182, no. 733; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt* (ed. Muḥammad Yūsuf Najm), Wiesbaden 1391/1971, VIII, p. 386, no. 3825 (and see the references of the editor); al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi'iyya* (ed. al-Ḥulw — al-Ṭanāḥī), Cairo 1383/1964, II, p. 83, no. 19.

70 See on him Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 31; al-Fāsī, *al-'Iqd al-thamīn*, VI, pp. 84–93.

71 See on him above, note 59.

vances, branding them as *bid'a*. Amongst the Syrian scholars advocating the devotions there were certain differences of opinion concerning the forms of observance: some of them would wear fine garments, scent themselves with incense, anoint their eyes with collyrium and spend the night in the mosque praying and supplicating publicly. Others preferred solitary prayer and devotion in the privacy of their homes. Some persons, says the tradition, refrained from observing this night when they learned that the scholars and pious men who advocated such veneration based their belief of *Isrā'iliyyāt* traditions.⁷²

There were some extremist opinions, which totally denied the basis of the traditions on the virtues of *laylat al-barā'a* and branded the reports as forged.⁷³ But generally orthodox circles merely reproved the manner of these devotions. A late report vividly describes them as practiced in the seventh century of the Hijra. Mosques were lavishly lit and the governor would come to the courtyard of the mosque; firebrands were kindled and the seated governor would act as judge. People would submit complaints against the unjust and wicked, and those convicted were punished on the spot. The adversaries shouting their arguments, the cries of the punished, the barking of the guards (*janādīra*) and the noise of the crowd turned the mosque into a police-station (*dāru shur'a*), as noted by Ibn al-Ḥājj.⁷⁴ The latter especially denounced processions to cemeteries, performed on this night by mixed crowds of men and women. Some women sang, some beat tambourines; a sort of cupola-shaped canopy (*ka-l-qubba 'alā 'amūd*), surrounded by lamps (*qanādīl*) was carried in the crowd and so the people arrived at the cemetery. Wooden posts were set up on the graves and hung with the clothes of the dead. Relatives sat down on the graves and talked to the dead about their troubles and sorrows, or complained at the graves of scholars and the righteous. Ibn al-Ḥājj stresses that some of these practices resemble those of the Christians, who would dress their statues and pray before their images.⁷⁵

A rather late date for the introduction of the prayer of the night of the

72 Al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ al-mawāhib*, VII, p. 413; Ibn Rajab, op. cit., p. 144; Aḥmad b. Ḥijāzī, op. cit., p. 52; 'Alī Maḥfūz, *al-Ibdā' fī maḍārr al-ibtidā'*, Cairo 1388/1968, p. 295.

73 See e.g. Ibn 'Arabī, op. cit., IV, p. 1678: . . . wa-laysa fī laylati l-niṣfi min sha'bāna ḥadīthun yu'awwalu 'alayhi, lā fī faḍliḥ wa-lā fī naskhi l-ājāli fihā, fa-lā taltafītū ilayhā. And see note 44 above.

74 Ibn al-Ḥājj, *al-Madkhal*, Beirut 1972, I, pp. 302–303.

75 Ibid., pp. 304–307.

15th of Sha'bân in Jerusalem is recorded by al-Ṭurṭūshī. According to his report, a man from Nābulus came to Jerusalem in 448 A.H. and performed this prayer in the mosque of al-Aqṣā. From then onward the prayer became current and was held in al-Aqṣā and in homes, coming to be considered a *sunna*.⁷⁶

III

The reports on the early origin of the observance of *laylat al-barā'a* seem to be trustworthy. The favourable attitude of the Syrian *tābi'ūn* (in the second half of the first century of the Hijra) towards these practices probably points to an earlier tradition, to be traced back to some of the Companions, such as Wāthila b. al-Asqa'; indeed Makḥūl, who championed the observance of *laylat al-barā'a*, was a student of Wāthila and transmitted *ḥadīth* on his authority.⁷⁷ These practices were, as we have said, attributed to the Prophet himself.

The observance of the night of the 15th of Sha'bân was not confined to Syria; so much can be deduced from the utterance of Ibn Abī Mulayka, quoted above. Ibn Abī Mulayka was a Qurashite appointed by 'Abdallah b. al-Zubayr as judge in Ṭā'if and in Mecca. It is implausible that his utterance (in which he vigorously opposed the idea of granting *laylat al-barā'a* equal rank with *laylat al-qadr*) was directed solely against the people of Syria; more probably it was aimed at the people of Mecca and Ṭā'if. Furthermore, the transmitter of this report is Ayyūb (al-Sakhtiyāni)⁷⁸ who lived in Baṣra and may have been interested in knowing the opinion of his teacher on a practice observed in his town, or country, al-'Irāq. It is to be remarked that the utterance of Ibn Abī Mulayka was directed against a *qāṣṣ*;⁷⁹ it is well known that the *quṣṣās* were obliged to edify and encourage people to exert themselves in devotional practices such as *laylat al-barā'a*. Finally, a short passage in the biography of Ibn

76 Al-Ṭurṭūshī, op. cit., p. 121; Abū Shāma, op. cit., p. 24 (from al-Ṭurṭūshī); 'Alī Maḥfūz, op. cit., pp. 296–297 (from al-Ṭurṭūshī); Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Iṣlāḥ al-masājid min al-bida'i wa-l-'awā'id*, Cairo 1341 A.H., p. 106 (from al-Ṭurṭūshī).

77 Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, I, p. 108, no. 96.

78 See on him Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 87, no. 12.

79 'Abd al-Razzāq, op. cit., IV, 317, no. 7928: ... 'an ma'mar, 'an ayyūb qāla: qila li-bni abī mulaykata inna ziyādan al-minqariyya (probably: al-namariyya; see al-Suyūṭī, *Taḥdhīr al-khawāṣṣ* (ed. Muḥammad al-Ṣabbāgh), n.p. 1392/1972, p. 179; al-Dhahabī, *Mizān al-i'tidāl*, II, p. 90, no. 2945), wa-kāna qāṣṣan, yaqūlu inna ajra laylati l-niṣfi min sha'bāna mithlu ajri laylati l-qadri, fa-qāla: lau sami'tuhu yaqūlu dhālika, wa-fi yadi 'aṣan, la-ḍarabtuhu bihā; Abū Shāma, op. cit., p. 25 sup.

Abi Mulayka, recorded by Ibn Sa'd, may serve to illuminate his disapproval of putting *laylat al-barā'a* on a par with *laylat al-qadr*: Ibn Abi Mulayka used to lead the prayers of the people in Mecca during Ramaḍān.⁸⁰ It is thus clear why he would stress the superiority of *laylat al-qadr*, celebrated during Ramaḍān, over the night of the 15th of Sha'bān.

The charge that the celebration of the night of the 15th of Sha'bān was based on *Isrā'iliyyāt*⁸¹ should be taken with reserve; it was not uncommon for scholars to discredit their opponents by ascribing *bid'a* ideas to them, or accusing them of adopting *Isrā'iliyyāt* traditions. In the same category was the accusation that the lavish lighting of mosques on the night of the 15th of Sha'bān was an innovation of the Barmakids, who were thus actually advocating fire-worship.⁸²

The data stating that the majority of Hijāzī scholars objected to the observance of the night of the 15th of Sha'bān seem to be inaccurate, at least as far as the third century of the Hijra is concerned. The account given by al-Fākihi is a detailed and vivid description of the devotional practices performed at Mecca on that night. The entire population of Mecca, says al-Fākihi, would go out to the mosque and spend the night reading the Qur'ān, so as to finish the recitation of the entire Qur'ān and perform the *ṭawāf*; some of them would perform a hundred *rak'a*, reciting *Sūrat al-Ḥamd* (i.e. the *Fātiḥa* — K) and *qul huwa llāhu aḥadun* (i.e. *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* — K) at every prostration. They would drink the waters of Zamzam, wash (their faces — K) in it and take a supply of the water home to heal their ills through the blessings of this night (combined, of course, with those of the waters themselves — K).⁸³ We have here, indeed, the first reliable information on the prayers of the night of the 15th of Sha'bān, as recorded in the sources,⁸⁴ and as performed in

80 Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., V, p. 473 sup.

81 Al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ al-mawāhib*, VII, p. 413: ... wa-'anhum akhadha l-nāsu ta'zimahā, wa-yuqālu innahum balaghahum fī dhālika ātharun isrā'iliyyatun, fa-lammā shtahara dhālika 'anhumu khtalafa l-nāsu fīhi, fa-minhum man qabilahu minhum, wa-minhum man abāhu ...

82 Abū Shāma, op. cit., p. 25 inf.

83 Al-Fākihi, op. cit., fol 418b: dhikru 'amali ahli makkata laylata l-niṣfi min sha'bāna wa-jithādhim fihā li-faḍlihā. wa ahlu makkata fimā maḍā ilā l-yaumi, idhā kānat laylatu l-niṣfi min sha'bāna kharaja 'āmmatu l-rijālī wa-l-nisā'i ilā l-masjidi fa-ṣallau wa-tāfū wa-aḥyau laylatahum ḥattā l-ṣabāhi bi-l-qirā'ati fī l-masjidi l-ḥarāmi ḥattā yakhtimū l-qur'āna kullahu wa-yuṣallū, au man ṣallā minhum tilka l-laylata mi'ata rak'atin, yaqra'u fī kulli rak'atin bi-l-ḥamdi wa-qul huwa llāhu aḥad 'ashra marrātin, wa-akhadhū min mā'i zamzama tilka l-laylata fa-sharibūhu wa-ghtasalū bihi wa-khaba'ūhu 'indahum li-l-marqā yabtaghūna bi-dhālika l-barakata fī hādhihi l-laylati.

84 See above note 54; and see Abū Shāma, op. cit., pp. 27, 29.

the *ḥaram* in the third century A.H. The prayer mentioned here is one of the prayers recommended for the night of the 15th of Sha'bān, recorded by Ibn al-Jauzī and branded by him as forged. Needless to say, the *ṭawāf* and drinking of Zamzam water are features peculiar to certain devotional practices and feasts in Mecca.

A tradition of the "reward promise" type, recorded by al-Fākihi, belongs to the lore of current traditions on this subject and is reported by Ibn al-Jauzī; He who recites a thousand times within a hundred *rak'a: qul huwa llāhu aḥad*, on the night of the 15th of Sha'bān, will not die before God sends him a hundred angels: thirty to bring him good tidings that God is to introduce him into Paradise; thirty to shield him from God's chastisement; thirty to deter him from sin, and ten to aid him against his enemies.⁸⁵ This indicates how widespread the traditions concerning the virtues of the night of the 15th of Sha'bān were in Mecca — and Mecca scholars were considered orthodox and were said to be opposed to public observance of this night.

The continuity of the observance of the night of the 15th of Sha'bān can be traced from the second half of the first century A.H. It is attested in the second century in the traditions recorded by 'Abd al-Razzāq. The passage in al-Fākihi's *Ta'rikh Makka* gives a description of the celebration in Mecca in the third century. Al-Zandawaysiti records the virtues of this night in the fourth century. Al-Ṭurṭūshi's account refers to the practices witnessed in the fifth century, and Ibn al-Ḥājj's description depicts the observance at the end of the seventh century. A rich polemical literature concerning this night was produced over the centuries, and numerous *faḍā'il* treatises were compiled. The night of the 15th of Sha'bān is revered even today, and modern compilations still attack the popular observance, branding it as *bid'a* and quoting, as usual, early sources.

The continuity of custom and usage during these celebrations can be illustrated by example. At the end of the seventh century A.H. Ibn al-Ḥājj mentions the sittings of the governor in the courtyard of the mosque on the night of the 15th of Sha'bān, at which he would judge and punish the guilty. In the fourth century al-Zandawaysiti includes among the laudable deeds of the various classes during Sha'bān the sessions of the rulers, who would summon the imprisoned, punish the guilty and free the innocent.⁸⁶ This practice seems to reflect the idea of God's judgment

85 Al-Fākihi, op. cit., fol. 418b; Ibn al-Jauzī, *al-Mauḍū'āt*, II, p. 128; al-Naysābūrī op. cit., XXV, p. 65; al-Rāzī, op. cit., XXVII, p. 238.

86 See above note 15.

in this month or during this night. The custom of visiting cemeteries on this night (Shi'i sources promoted visits to the tomb of Ḥusayn) may be related to the *ḥadīth* according to which 'Ā'isha found the Prophet praying in the cemetery of Baqī' al-Gharqad on this night; it was at this spot that he explained to her the virtues of the night of the 15th of Sha'bān.

The observances and celebrations of the night of the 15th of Sha'bān seem to be rooted in Jāhiliyya belief and ritual, as rightly assumed by Wensinck.⁸⁷ When the month of Ramaḍān became the month of the obligatory fast, however, the night of the 15th of Sha'bān apparently lost its primacy: *laylat al-qadr* was fixed by the majority of Muslim scholars within Ramaḍān (usually as the night of the 27th of Ramaḍān⁸⁸) and became one of the most venerated nights of the Muslim community. But esteem of the night of the 15th of Sha'bān survived and, lacking the support of official scholars, it became a favoured occasion for devotional practices in pious and ascetic circles, as well as a night of popular celebration (including practices disapproved of by zealous conservative scholars). Moderate orthodox scholars strove to reconcile the traditions of the two nights, granting legitimacy to the devotions of *laylat al-barā'a* but establishing the superiority of *laylat al-qadr*. Also conciliatory was the idea of a division of functions between the two nights: *laylat al-barā'a* was considered as the night of decrees, *laylat al-qadr* as the night in which God's biddings (or His mercy) were carried out. All this is, of course, a later development; hence Wensinck's theory of two genuine New Year's nights seems to be untenable.

Orthodox Muslim scholars, though disapproving of the public celebrations, agreed to private devotional observances on the night of the 15th of Sha'bān.⁸⁹ On these conditions *laylat al-barā'a* could gain their approval and became a recommended night of devotional exertion.

The fasting of the Prophet over the two consecutive months of Rajab and Sha'bān may be linked with the *taḥannuth*, which he was wont to

87 See Wensinck, *op. cit.*, p. 6 ("This belief is already recorded by Ṭabarī; it is probably pre-Islamic").

88 See Wagtendonk, *op. cit.*, pp. 106, 112, note 5.

89 See the *fatwā* of Abū 'Amr b. Ṣalāḥ, as recorded by Abū Shāma, *op. cit.*, p. 32, 1.5: . . . *wa-ammā laylatu l-niṣfi min sha'bāna fa-lahā faḍīlatun wa-iḥyā'uhā bi-l-'ibādati mustaḥabbun, wa-lākin 'alā l-infirādi min ḡhayri jamā'atin; wa-ttikhādhū l-nāsi lahā wa-laylata l-raghā'ibi mausiman wa-shi' āran bid'atun munkaratun.*

observe in the following month of Ramaḍān.⁹⁰ The *taḥannuth* is said to have been initiated by the Prophet's grandfather, 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib,⁹¹ and was observed by some people of Quraysh.⁹² This socio-religious observance combined the element of charitable deeds with a practice of veneration toward the *ḥaram* of Mecca. It was observed on Mount Ḥirā' and is sometimes referred to as *i'tikāf* or *jiwār* in the story of the first revelation of the Prophet. Some reports say that the Prophet sojourned on Mount Ḥirā' in solitude, but others explicitly state that he stayed there in the company of his wife Khadija.⁹³ Some details on the *jiwār* of the people of Mecca and its purpose are given by al-Azraqī: the Qurashites would leave Shi'b al-Ṣufiyy and sojourn on Jabal al-Rāḥa "out of veneration of the *ḥaram*". This practice was followed in summer.⁹⁴ The place of the *jiwār* of 'Ā'isha⁹⁵ and its duration are indicated in a report recorded by al-Fākihī. 'Ā'isha sojourned for two months at a spot between Mount Ḥirā' and Thabir. People would visit her there and converse with her. In the absence of 'Abdallāh b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abi Bakr the prayer was headed by her servant, Dhakwān.⁹⁶ The two

90 See Goitein, op. cit., p. 93 sup.; Wagtendonk, op. cit., pp. 32–35.

91 See BSOAS, 31 (1968), pp. 232–233.

92 See al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb* I, p. 105, no. 192: *kānat qurayshun idhā dakhala ramaḍānu kharaja man yuridu l-taḥannutha minhā ilā ḥirā'a*.

93 See BSOAS 31 (1968), p. 225, note 15; p. 227, notes 26–27; and see al-Muṭṭawī, *Man ṣabara zaḥira*, Ms. Cambridge, Or. 1473(10), fol. 43b: . . . *ḥattā idhā kāna l-shahru lladhī arāda llāhu fīhi bihi mā arāda min karāmatihī wa-raḥmatihī l-'ibāda min al-sanati llati ba'athahu llāhu tabāraka wa-ta'ālā fīhā, wa-dhālika l-shahru ramaḍānu, kharaja rasūlu llāhi (ṣ) ilā ḥirā'a kamā kāna yakhruju li-jiwārihi wa-mā'ahu ahlulu khadijatu* . . . A significant version is recorded by al-Fākihī, op. cit., fol. 499b, ult. — 500a, ll. 1–2; the Prophet sojourned on Ḥirā'. Khadija used to come to him from Mecca in the evening. The Prophet descended from the mountain and stayed with her in (the place in which later) the mosque of Shi'b Qunfudh (was erected. — K). In the morning they used to depart. (. . . *anna l-nabiyya (ṣ) kāna yakūnu fī ḥirā'a bi-l-nahāri fa-idhā* (the verb is missing; perhaps: *atā, jā'a* or another similar verb has to be supplied) *l-laylu nazala min ḥirā'a fa-atā l-masjida lladhī fī l-shi'bi lladhī khalfa dāri abī 'ubaydata yu'rafu bi-l-khalafiyin wa-ta'tīhi khadijatu (r) min makkata fa-yaltaqiyāni fī l-masjidi lladhī fī l-shi'bi, fa-idhā qaruba l-ṣabāḥu ftaraqā, au nahwahu*). About the place, Shi'b al Qunfudh, see al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka* (ed. F. Wüstenfeld), p. 491 penult. — 492.

94 Al-Azraqī, op. cit., p. 482 inf.: . . . *li-anna qurayshan kānat fī l-jāhiliyyati takhruju min shi'bi l-ṣufiyyi fa-tabītu fīhi* (the suffix *hi* refers to *al-rāḥa* — K) *fī l-ṣayfi ta'zīman li-l-masjidi l-ḥarāmi, thumma yakhrujūna fa-yajlisūna fa-yastariḥūna fī l-jabali* . . .

95 See Wagtendonk, op. cit., p. 35.

96 Al-Fākihī, op. cit., fol. 486b: . . . *'ani bni abī mulaykuta qāla: inna 'ā'ishata (r) jāwarat bayna ḥirā'a wa-thabirin shahrayni, fa-kunnā na'tihā wa-ya'tihā nāsūn min*

reports may help us in the evaluation of the *jiwār* of the Prophet (apparently identical with *taḥannuth*): the Prophet, like the people of Shi'b al-Ṣufiyy, used to leave his home in summer and sojourn on Mount Hira'. Like them he did it "out of veneration of the *ḥaram* of Mecca"; like 'Ā'isha he sojourned there for some fixed time. None of the reports mentions fasting explicitly.

The duration of the Prophet's fast during Rajab and Sha'bān was not fixed; it was sporadic and the Prophet broke fast arbitrarily. The *ḥadīths* reporting this manner of the Prophet's fasting⁹⁷ seem to be trustworthy. The reports of his fasting during the month of Sha'bān recorded in early sources are not questioned anywhere, nor doubted by any authority; they are certainly as reliable as the reports of his fasting during Rajab.⁹⁸ It may be stressed that there were no rules of fasting, nor any regulations; the Prophet's fast was a voluntary, pious observance, the duration of which he fixed at his own discretion.

In Medina, after his *hijra*, the Prophet was faced with the task of establishing a code of law and ritual. One of the injunctions of this code was to fast. The verses of the Qur'ān imposing the fast of Ramaḍān upon the emerging Muslim community were revealed against the background of the confrontation with the Jewish community,⁹⁹ the encounter with the hostile Meccan unbelievers and their allies and the victory won on the battlefield of Badr. Even if affected by Jewish, Christian or other influences, these rules formed a genuine independent trend in the nascent body of law for the Muslim community.¹⁰⁰

The injunction of the fast of Ramaḍān did not, however, abolish voluntary fasting during Rajab or Sha'bān. Some of the controversial traditions concerning the change in the Prophet's fast during Sha'bān after his arrival in Medina may facilitate a better insight into the persistence of this voluntary fast. Some scholars asserted that the Prophet, while in Mecca, fasted only some parts of the month of Sha'bān; after his arrival in Medina, however, he fasted the entire month. Al-Qaṣṭallānī refutes this report, basing himself on the *ḥadīth* of 'Ā'isha, who stated

qurayshin yataḥaddathūna ilayhā, fa-idhā lam yakun thamma 'abdu llāhi bnu 'abdi l-raḥmāni bni abī bakrin (r) ṣallā bihā ghulāmuḥā dhakwānu abū 'amrin (r); Ibn Sa'd, op. cit., V, pp. 295–296.

97 See e.g. al-Nasā'ī, op. cit., IV, pp. 150–151: . . . *kāna rasūlu llāhi (ṣ) yaṣūmu ḥattā naqūlu lā yuḥfiru, wa-yuḥfiru ḥattā naqūlu lā yaṣūmu . . .*

98 See Goitein, op. cit., pp. 93–94.

99 See *ibid.*, pp. 95–102.

100 See Wagtendonk, op. cit., p. 144 inf.

that the Prophet, after his arrival in Medina, never fasted any full month, except Ramaḍān.¹⁰¹ This tradition transmitted on the authority of 'Ā'isha deserves our trust. The phrase in this *ḥadīth* of 'Ā'isha "*mundhu qadima l-madīnata*" gives us a clue in assessing the change at Medina. 'Ā'isha is indeed a reliable witness of the Prophet's life in Medina, and her *ḥadīth* with the quoted phrase, limiting it to Medina, is apparently sound. The voluntary fast of Sha'bān was now transfigured into an obligatory fast, that of Ramaḍān, the month of the Prophet's own devotional exertions, the month of his *taḥannuth* in Mecca. This fast became a distinctive mark of the Muslim community and one of the pillars of Islam.

The importance of the fast during Sha'bān consequently declined, but it never lost its virtuous position as a recommended voluntary fast, observed over the ages and revered especially by pious and devout Muslims; the night of the 15th of Sha'bān became the culmination of the month's devotions. The observances of Sha'bān were finally approved of and legitimized by moderate orthodox scholars. The high esteem of Sha'bān was clearly expressed in the utterance attributed to the Prophet: "Rajab is the month of God, Sha'bān is my month, Ramaḍān is the month of my community".

101 Al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ al-mawāhib*, VIII, p. 125.