

Chapter I
Muhammad
Prophet and Statesman

Muhammad was admired by his contemporaries for his courage, resoluteness, and impartiality, and for a firmness that was tempered by generosity. He won men's hearts by embodying the qualities of equity and justice. He became for later Muslims an exemplar of virtuous character, and stories presented him as realizing the Islamic ideal of human life. In contrast to Jesus, who was mostly successful in his spiritual life, Muhammad had a very active political life while he devoted his evenings and nights to meditation and prayers. Hence, for Muslims, he realized the perfect equilibrium between the material life and the spiritual life. From a Muslim perspective, Moses symbolizes the material life as expressed in the religious law while Jesus represents the spiritual life as unveiled in his spiritual exegesis of the law. Muhammad came to reconcile Moses and Jesus. The Western misperception of Islam can be attributed to many causes, but I believe that it comes partly from the fact that many non-Muslims are unable to grasp the Muslim viewpoint about Muhammad. Therefore the purpose of this chapter is to present how Muslims portray Muhammad. The objective is to understand why Muhammad is so greatly idealized and has become an exemplar of the Muslim way of life.

Pre-Islamic Arabia and Makka

According to Muslims, never in the history of the world was the need so great for the appearance of a Deliverer. In order to appreciate the achievement of Muhammad during his time, it is necessary to take a quick survey of the religious and social condition previous to the emergence of Islam. Arabia geographically was rather isolated from the other nations of the world. The Byzantines and the Persians came close to its borders but they failed to penetrate them. This immense region was inhabited by two kinds of people: the people of the towns and the dwellers of the desert. Poetry transmitted orally was highly appreciated. Eloquence of speech was greatly valued. The tribes were very distinct, each honoring a particular deity. One's tribe determined all honor, social status

Chapter 1 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History

and relations. If one did not belong to a tribe, one's life was in danger. The Arabs were devoted to their clan and had a strong sense of honor. When their clan or their honor was attacked, they did not hesitate to indulge in excessive bloody revenge, showing their disregard for human life. Unfortunately Muhammad was entirely unable to abolish blood-vengeance; it was too deeply rooted in the legal understanding of Arabs. However, he attempted to limit this abusive behavior by stipulating that only one life could be taken in exchange for one life (i.e. the life of a free man for a free man, of a woman for a woman, of a slave for a slave). Muhammad succeeded in convincing the tribes that unintentional homicide did not give one the right to blood-vengeance; the family of the victim must be satisfied with a resolution consisting of one hundred camels for a man.

Makka, the city where Muhammad was born, was a center of commerce and of polytheistic worship and was highly populated. At its center was a temple containing various idols as well as a cubic black-stone (Ka'ba) venerated by the people. Many Arabs were addicted to drinking and gambling. Dancing and singing were practiced by a class of women who were called *kiyān* (or in the singular *kayna*); they were appreciated by the greatest chieftains, who paid public court to them. Polygamy was practiced to an unlimited extent; thus when later the Qur'ānic injunction reduced the number of women per man to four, it was a great improvement. This type of society based on power and physical strength for survival did not appreciate women and therefore the killing of baby girls was extensive. Later again, the Qur'ān (XVI: 59) will come to the rescue of women by condemning this sexist practice.

Many tribes that worshipped different idols were living in Makka during that time. The Kināna, closely allied by blood to the Quraysh (the tribe of Muhammad), besides the star Aldoran, served the goddess 'Uzzā, represented by a tree at a place called Nakhla, not far from Makka. The Hawāzin, in the south-east of Makka, worshipped the goddess Lāt, located at Tāyif. Manāt was symbolized by a rock on the caravan road between Makka and Syria. The majority of tribes were addicted to fetishism: worshipping animals (gazelle, horse), plants (palm-tree) and also pieces of rock, stones, etc.

Besides the Arabs, the Jews (who were persecuted by the Assyrians, the Greeks, and the Romans) had found a refuge in Arabia. They were able to convert many Arabs to Judaism. At the time when Muhammad received his revelation, Judaism was practiced in

Chapter 1 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History

Yaman, Kinda, Khaybar, and Yathrib. The Nestorians and the Jacobite Christians, established in Southern Arabia, were engaged in many bloody conflicts. The Nestorians and the Jacobites did not agree with the doctrine, established at the Council of Chalcedon (in Rome in 451), according to which Christ is one person in two natures. The Nestorians took their name from Nestorius, a Vth (fifth) century monk at Antioch, who believed that in the Incarnate Christ there had been two separate persons, one human, one divine. The Jacobites are the disciples of Jacob Baradaeus, they are Syrian Monophysites who rejected the doctrine of the two natures (human and divine) and adhere to the thesis that Christ has only one nature. But there was also a minority, neither Jews nor Christians, who believed in the idea of a Supreme Divinity.

According to the Muslims, the Prophet came from a noble family. When Allāh selected Muhammad, He chose the best tribe of Banū Kināna, in which He found the best subdivision Quraysh, and from the Quraysh He selected the family of Banū Hāshim. Jews and Christians as well believed that Prophets come from a very specific noble lineage. According to the legend, Hāshim was an important man who used to equip the two annual caravans to Yaman and Syria. His son ‘Abd al-Muttalib, was the grand-father of the Prophet, in whose house Muhammad was raised. ‘Abd al-Muttalib, a respected leader among his people, used to apportion the water from the well Zamzam to the pilgrims. ‘Abd al-Muttalib, through a dream-revelation, uncovered the meaning of the well Zamzam. According to the legend, Allāh once made the well spring forth for Ishmael, the ancestor of Muhammad. His mother Hagar was wandering about in the desert close to Makka. When her son was on the point of dying of thirst she first ascended Safā and then Marwa to ask for help. Thereafter Allāh sent the Angel Gabriel who struck the ground with his foot so that water began to trickle upwards.

‘Abd al-Muttalib’s son ‘Abd Allāh, the father of the Prophet, married Āmina bin Wahb. Soon after this marriage ‘Abd Allāh died in Madīna. When Muhammad was six, he lost his mother also and he became an orphan. He was adopted by his grandfather ‘Abd al-Muttalib who loved him more than his own children. But after two years the grand-father died and Muhammad went to live with his uncle, Abū Tālib, who cared for him greatly. His uncle was the father of ‘Alī who became Muhammad’s foster-brother.

Chapter 1 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History

When Muhammad was twelve years old, he followed his uncle who had to go Syria with a trade caravan. Now in Bostra, in Syria, there was a monk named Bahīra, who was holding all the Christian esoteric knowledge. It was a knowledge transmitted from generation to generation and kept in a book. Many caravans of the Quraysh had often passed the monk's dwelling but he had never paid any attention to them. But this time, he invited the whole caravan to a feast. Muhammad was considered too young to be taken to the feast, but Bahīra especially wanted to see him. The motive for this was that Bahīra had seen how a cloud shaded Muhammad as he was riding in the caravan, and how a tree had lowered its branches over him to give him shade at the resting-place. Of course in the desert under a burning sun this was very useful! When Muhammad arrived the monk examined him attentively and found on him the signs he was looking for, in accordance with the secret knowledge contained in his book. Between his shoulders he discovered the seal of the prophetic office.

When Muhammad was twenty-five years of age, his uncle suggested that he offer his services to Khadīja, who was sending a caravan to Syria. Khadīja was the widow of a merchant, an energetic and resolute woman, the most distinguished, and richest among the Quraysh. Khadīja accepted Muhammad's offer with pleasure. After a time, she was so fond of Muhammad that she proposed marriage to him and he accepted her proposal. According to tradition, when Muhammad began his career as a Prophet, she stood loyally by him. Muhammad is reported to have said about her: "No, no one is better than Khadīja. She believed in me when all others were unbelieving; she took my words to be true when all others treated me as a liar." (Nabhani, 96 cited by Andrea, 40-41)

When the time was ripe for the revelation to come down, Muhammad was now forty years old, a respected man also called Al-Amīn (the reliable); the holy element became noticeable in his dreams. He had sublime visions; he came to love solitude and wandered upon mountain paths. The earliest biographer, Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767) (whose biography has been preserved by Ibn Hishām (d. 218/833)) related that the first revelation came upon him on the Mount Hirā towards the end of Ramadān (610). That night called the Night of Power (*Laylat al-Qadr*) is considered extremely powerful on the spiritual plane and this is why Muslims focus on the spiritual matter and fast during this holy month. That night, Gabriel came to the Prophet asking him to recite. According to

Chapter 1 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History

Muslims, Muhammad was illiterate (*ummī*) so this is why he hesitated and replied: “I cannot recite.” Muslims give different explanations about this Prophetic state of “illiterateness.” The famous Sufi Rūmī (d. 672/1273) explains that this does not mean that Muhammad was incapable of writing and studying the sciences. Muhammad was called “illiterate” because he did not have to acquire science and wisdom: they were an innate knowledge for him. Every one with their partial intellect learned from the Prophet, who was at the spiritual level of the Universal Intellect (Rūmī, 185). The Angel said: “Recite thou, in the name of the Lord who created man from a clot of blood. Recite thou! For thy Lord is the most beneficent, who hath taught the use of the pen, hath taught man what he knoweth not” (96: 1-4). Muhammad explained that he awoke from his sleep, and it was as if they had written a message in his heart. He went out of the cave and saw Gabriel in the form of a man (Andrea, 42-44).

In the year 612, Muhammad inaugurated his preaching in Makka. The first revelations were concerned with ethical and spiritual teachings, the Unity of God and the Judgment Day. They attacked the richness of the Makkan leaders and denounced idols. The Makkan leaders expressed their opposition immediately, because they felt threatened at every level and particularly in the political and economic realms. If the Ka‘ba pilgrimage was attacked, the position of the tribe of Quraysh was at risk. The heart of Muhammad’s prophetic message is the certainty that the Judgment Day will occur. In the judgment, no soul can bear the burden of another: a father will not be able to do anything for his son, nor a brother for his brother. Everyone will be judged according to their deeds. An angel will weigh each deed on a scale. God will show his mercy by giving ten times more weight to a good action than to a bad action. Here is a good illustration of the style of these Qur’ānic verses from Chapter 81 entitled “The Overturning” revealed during this period.

When the sun is overturned, when the stars fall away, when the mountains are moved, [...] when the seas are boiled over, when the girl-child buried alive is asked what she did to deserve murder, when the pages are folded out, when the sky is flayed open, when *jahīm* is set ablaze, when the garden is brought near, then a soul will know what it has prepared...

This style resembles the Apocalypse, which means “unveiling” in Greek. At the end of time, the sky, the seas, the mountains will be overturned to unveil their deepest secrets. In

Chapter 1 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History

pre-Islamic Arabia, female children, considered as a financial burden, were not appreciated and female infanticide was common. This verse condemns the murder of baby girls as a severe crime. The assassins will enter *jahīm* (the fire of hell). Also each soul will become conscious of what it has done (Sells, 48-49).

Three years after the beginning of Muhammad's prophetic mission, according to the Sunnī historian al-Tabarī, a revelation came down (XXVI: 214): "Warn your closest relatives." Afterwards Muhammad invited forty members of the clan 'Abd al-Muttalib to a meal. This episode is reported by 'Alī:

Then the Apostle of God addressed them saying: "O family of 'Abd al-Muttalib by God, I do not know of anyone among the Arabs who has brought his people anything better than what I have brought you. I have brought you the best of this world and the next. God Almighty has ordered me to call you to Him. And which of you will assist me in this cause and become my brother, my Trustee and my Successor among you." And they all held back from this while I ['Alī], although I was the youngest of them in age, the most diseased in eyesight, the most corpulent in body and thinnest in legs, said: "I, O Prophet of God, will be your helper in this matter." And he put his arm around my neck and said: "This is my brother, my Trustee and my Successor among you, so listen to him and obey." And so the people arose and they were joking, saying to Abū Tālib ['Alī's father]: "He has ordered you to listen to your son and obey him." (Al-Tabarī, vol.1, 1172-1173 quoted by Momen, 12)

This incident was not taken seriously by the people, because it was always the custom to appoint elders in positions of leadership and 'Alī was considered too young. Of course for the Shī'ites this shows that, from the beginning, Muhammad wanted 'Alī to succeed him. Muhammad had constantly been very close to 'Alī. During a severe famine, Muhammad decided to adopt his cousin 'Alī. Muhammad had lost all his sons at an early age; in the love of 'Alī, he found some comfort. The future marriage of 'Alī with his youngest daughter Fātima reinforced his deep attachment toward his cousin and son-in-law.

For three long years he tried to convince his people to abandon the worship of idols. But polytheism was deeply rooted among them; the ancient cult offered privileges, which Islam did not offer. The Makkans had vested interests in the old worship; their prestige was involved in its maintenance. His uncle, Abū Tālib, disapproved the injustice and intolerance of the Makkans towards Muhammad. The hostile Makkans prevented the Prophet and his disciples from offering their prayers at the Ka'ba. They covered them

Chapter 1 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History

with dirt and filth when they were engaged in their devotions. They incited the people of the town to insult them. Amidst all these trials, Muhammad remained confident in his heavenly mission. Several times his life was endangered, but Muhammad never ceased calling on the people to abandon their evil ways.

Muhammad continued to preach with all his heart and soul, giving birth slowly to a revolutionary movement. Conversions to Islam increased. The Makkan leaders were now thoroughly alarmed. Their power and prestige were at stake. They were the guardians of the idols whom Muhammad threatened with destruction. Muhammad's preaching was intensely democratic; in the sight of his Lord all human beings were equal. This leveling of old distinctions was contrary to all their traditions. They were afraid to lose their exclusive privileges. Urgent measures were needed to prevent the movement from gaining further strength. They consequently planned the persecution of Muslims in order not to infringe their laws of vendetta. Each clan decided to exert pressure on each member who was sympathetic to Muhammad's cause. Muhammad, who was protected by Abū Tālib and his kinsmen, was at the beginning exempt from persecution. Many Muslims were thrown into prison, starved, and then beaten with sticks. Some were exposed to cruel tortures such as being exposed to the burning heat of the desert, until they accepted to renounce their faith in Islam or die of thirst. The slave Bilāl, the first *Mu'addhin* (Muezzin) of Islam, was submitted to such cruel tortures that he was on the verge of death; but fortunately he was ransomed by Abū Bakr just in time.

To avoid these persecutions, Muhammad advised the Muslims to seek refuge, for a while, in the neighboring Christian Kingdom of Abyssinia, which was ruled by a pious and just King. This is called the first Exile in the Islamic history and happened in the fifth year of Muhammad's mission. The Makkan leaders pursued them even there. They sent deputies to the King to demand the delivery of these refugees that they might be put to death because they rejected their old religion and adhered to a new one. The King asked the refugees: "What is this religion for which you have abandoned your former faith and adopted neither mine nor that of any other people?" Ja'far, son of Abū Tālib, acting as spokesman for the fugitives, spoke thus:

O king, we were plunged in the depth of ignorance and barbarism; we adored idols, we lived in unchastity; we ate dead bodies, and we spoke abominations; we disregarded every feeling of humanity, and the duties of hospitality and

Chapter 1 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History

neighborhood; we knew no law but that of the strong, when God raised among us a man, of whose birth, truthfulness, honesty, and purity we were aware; and he called us to the unity of God, and taught us not to associate anything with Him; he forbade us the worship of idols; and enjoined us to speak the truth, to be faithful to our trusts, to be merciful, and to regard the rights of neighbors; he forbade us to speak evil of women, or to eat the substance of orphans; he ordered us to abstain from evil; to offer prayers, to render alms, to observe the fast. We have believed in him, we have accepted his teachings and his injunctions to worship God, and not to associate anything with Him. For this reason our people have risen against us, have persecuted us in order to make us forego the worship of God and return to the worship of idols of wood and stone and other abominations. They have tortured us and injured us, until finding no safety among them, we have come to thy country, and hope thou wilt protect us from their oppression.” (Ameer Ali, 29-30)

Afterwards the King asked them if they had an excerpt from their Holy Book. Then Ja’far recited the Chapter of Mary from the Qur’ān and the King replied: “Truly, this and what Jesus brought both came from the same niche.” (Williams, 42) The demands of the Makkan delegates were not accepted by the King; subsequently they returned to Makka.

While his disciples were seeking safety in other lands, Muhammad himself remained courageously at his post, supporting every insult. The Makkan leaders wanted to seduce him with promises of honor and wealth but he never wavered, replying that he was not looking for dignity nor wealth, but to deliver a message from God. They laughed at him and ridiculed him, trying to insinuate that his teachings were false. Muhammad never resorted to the miraculous to assert his influence or to prove the authenticity of his message. He invited people to observe attentively the physical creation and nature to discover the signs of the divine presence. In contrast to Moses and Jesus, Muhammad did not perform any spectacular miracles. Instead he encouraged people to use their human intellect to uncover in the physical creation proofs of God’s existence. Muhammad encourages empirical observation in order to uncover “the signs of God” in the natural order. Every element of the cosmos worships God by following the laws of its inner nature. Muhammad also incited people to reflect carefully on the beauty of the Qur’ān and to recognize that this revelation was not written by a human but that it came from a heavenly source. Islam is a profoundly scientific religion, inviting everyone to found their faith on their intellect. Muhammad is even reported to have said:

Chapter 1 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History

Acquire knowledge, because he who acquires it in the way of the Lord performs an act of piety; he who speaks of it, praises the Lord; who seeks it, adores God; who dispenses instruction in it, bestows alms; and who imparts it to its fitting objects, performs an act of devotion to God. Knowledge enables its possessor to distinguish what is forbidden from what is not; it lights the way to Heaven; it is our friend in the desert, our society in solitude, our companion when bereft of friends; it guides us to happiness; it sustains us in misery; it is our ornament in the company of friends; it serves as an armor against our enemies. With knowledge, the servant of God rises to the heights of goodness and to a noble position, associates with sovereign in this world, and attains to perfection of happiness in the next (Ameer Ali, 360-361).

Muhammad also said: “the ink of the scholar is more holy than the blood of the martyr” and he encouraged his disciples to seek knowledge as far as China, if necessary (Ameer Ali, 361).

During the periods of acute conflict with the Makkans, Muhammad was accustomed to pray and meditate during the night on the esplanade of the Temple of Makka. One night, he was transported on a night journey from Makka to Jerusalem and up to the seventh sky (XVII: 1). In this mythical account, the Rock rose but the Angel Gabriel retained it on the ground. Muhammad met the Prophets at different heavens before rising to Allāh.

The Qur’ān does not relate the rise of the Prophet very clearly, but the Muslim traditions offer more details. Here is the Qur’ānic chapter the Star (LIII: 1-18) referring to his mystical experience:

By the star as it falls, your companion has not lost his way nor is he deluded. He does not speak out of desire. This is a revelation taught him by one of great power and strength that stretched out over while on the highest horizon— then drew near and came down two bows’ lengths or nearer. He revealed to his servant what he revealed. The heart did not lie in what it saw. Will you then dispute with him his vision? He saw it descending another time at the lote tree of the furthest limit. There was the garden of sanctuary when something came down over the lote tree, enfolding. His gaze did not turn aside nor go too far. He had seen the signs of his lord, great signs.

This chapter of the Qur’ān is the most explicit allusion to Muhammad’s prophetic vision. Allāh is swearing by the falling star that your companion (Muhammad) does not speak out of desire (*hawā*). The poets speak out of desire but Muhammad is not a poet. God, who is beyond any definition, is never portrayed in the Qur’ān; therefore the object of

Chapter 1 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History

vision is never actually described. His vision is never depicted in detail or given fixed form. The expression “he saw it” remains vague: is “it” referring to God or Gabriel? (Sells, 45).

According to several Muslim traditions, there would have been two journeys of the Prophet: the night journey from Makka to Jerusalem (*isrāʾ*) and the other where he rose to the seventh sky (*miʾrāj*). A tradition tells that Muhammad was sleeping close to the Kaʿba when the Angel Gabriel appeared to him and made him go up on a winged Mare (Burāq) who transported him to Jerusalem. During his rise, Muhammad met Prophets at different skies. Before beginning his rise, Muhammad left the print of his foot on the Rock of Jerusalem, like Abraham on the Kaʿba and Jesus at the Chapel of the Ascension.

The dominant position considers the rise as a veracious vision that the Prophet achieved with his entire body and spirit. According to the Sufis, Muhammad during his spiritual visit did not try to enter into the private life of God; he hesitated and stopped before reaching the point of union with Him. Muhammad, like Moses, did not dare to penetrate into the burning Bush. When Muhammad began his journey in Makka, he was at a certain spiritual level. The sacred Mosque of Makka represents the station of the heart with which no bodily faculties may be associated. The one who is at this station perceives the signs of the Lord. When Muhammad arrived in Jerusalem, he had reached a higher spiritual level. The Mosque al-Aqsāʾ of Jerusalem represents the station of Spirit which is the most remote from the physical world. One reaches this station by contemplation. The one who is on this level perceives and understands the real meaning of the divine signs. (Steigerwald, 1997, 95-109)

The Makkans persistently asked Abū Tālib to stop his nephew from preaching against their religion. At first, he turned them down; when it became unbearable, he begged Muhammad to renounce his task. Muhammad replied: “O my uncle, if they placed the sun on my right hand and the moon on my left, to force me to renounce my work, Verily I would not desist there-from until God made manifest His Cause, or I perished in the attempt.” When Muhammad was on the point of leaving, Abū Tālib called aloud: “Son of my brother, come back,” and he came. And Abū Tālib said: “Say

Chapter 1 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History

whatsoever thou pleasest; for by the Lord, I shall not abandon thee, nay, never.” (Ibn Hishām cited by Ameer Ali, 37)

Emigration to Madīna

The year 620 is called in the history of Islam the Year of mourning because the Prophet lost the support of Abū Tālib and Khadīja, who had died. In Abū Tālib, Muhammad lost the guardian of his youth who protected him against his enemies. In Khadīja, Muhammad lost his first and greatest love. Not only was she the first Muslim woman to believe in him and his divine revelation, she was his true consoler during difficult times; and God says tradition comforted him through her when he returned to her. After Khadīja, his cousin ‘Alī was the first male to accept Islam. The death of Abū Tālib, whose personal influence restrained the anger of Makkans, became the signal for the Makkans to increase their persecutions. Muhammad was forced to immigrate to Yathrib later called Madīna; it was the *Hijra* in 622. The inhabitants of the oasis of Yathrib heard about the wisdom and good reputation of Muhammad and they invited him to become the leader of their community. The Makkan leaders plotted his assassination but Muhammad went to sleep in a nearby cave while ‘Alī slept that night in the Prophet’s bed in order to fool the assassins. In the morning, the assassins were furious to find out that Muhammad had escaped.

Madīna was situated about eleven days’ journey to the north of Makka. The two tribes of Aws and Khazraj, forgetting their previous bloody conflicts in the brotherhood of the faith, gathered round the standard of Islam. The Muslims of Madīna received the respectable designation of *ansār* (helpers). Those who had abandoned their beloved birthplace and the ties of kith and kin received the title of *muhājirīn* (emigrants or exiles). In Madīna, Muhammad designated the Jews and the Christians as people of the Book (*ahl al-Kitāb*). He became aware that he was a direct descendant of Ishmael, the son of Abraham. Thus he claimed, like the Jews and the Christians, to be part of the family of Abraham and his faith. He received several Qur’ānic revelations supporting his point of view. For the Muslims, some Jews and some Christians have distorted the original religion of Abraham. Their understanding of God is erroneous because they give God associates. The Mission of the Prophet was to restore the original monotheist religion (hanifism) of Abraham. The People of the Book received only the partial truth.

Chapter 1 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History

Muhammad invited the Jews and the Christians to accept his revelation, which completes former revelations. People of the Book examining their Writings attentively should find the confirmation of Muhammad's message. The Prophet considers the Judeo-Christian Writings corrupted and falsified, each time that they do not agree with the Qur'ānic truth. According to Muslims, all the Prophets that preceded Muhammad brought the same religious truth to their peoples; even if religious law could evolve in order to adapt to changing times. Muhammad saw his task, therefore, not as introducing a new set of beliefs, but as continuing in the path carved by previous revelations and giving them their ultimate form.

In Madīna, Muhammad established the Muslim community, founded on social and economic justice. He supervised the construction of the first Mosque while showing his disciples the proper way to worship God. The sūras revealed at Madīna were concerned with social legislation and the politico-moral principles for ordering the community. Muhammad put in place the Constitution of Madīna demonstrating how Muslims were in the vanguard for their time in the way they respected other religions and cultures. This Constitution stipulated that:

“The state of peace and war shall be common to all Muslims. [...] The Jews who attach themselves to our commonwealth shall be protected from all insults and vexations; they shall have an equal right with our own people to our assistance and good offices. The Jews of Yathrib shall form with the Muslims one composite nation; they shall practice their religion as freely as the Muslims; the clients (the protected) and allies of the Jews shall enjoy the same security and freedom; the guilty shall be pursued and punished; the Jews shall join the Muslims in defending Yathrib (Madīna) against all enemies. [...] All true Muslims shall hold in abhorrence every man guilty of crime, injustice, or disorder: no one shall uphold the culpable, though he was his nearest kin. [...] All future disputes between those who accept this Charter shall be referred, under God, to the Prophet.” (Ibn Hishām cited by Ameer Ali, 58-59)

Many Jews recognized that, in medieval times, the Muslims were more tolerant than Christians because of the example set by the Prophet in this Constitution.

The Prophet prepared for an expedition to Tabūk leaving ‘Alī in charge of Madīna. ‘Alī was not happy to be left with the women and children but Muhammad replied to him: “Are you not content to be with respect to me as Aaron was to Moses, except that after me there shall be no other Prophet.” (Ibn Hanbal, 1313/1896, vol. 1, 170;

Chapter 1 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History

Tirmidhī, vol. 2, 301, Muslim, vol. 2, 323-324) Aaron in the Bible is the High Priest who replaced Moses when he went up to Mount Sinai. In the Qur'ān, Aaron, called *Nabī* (Prophet) (XIX: 142), is mentioned along with other prophets as having received a revelation (IV: 163). He replaced Moses (VII: 150) and was sent as an assistant Minister (*Wazīr*) to ease the task of Moses (XX: 29-36). Aaron should not be blamed for the episode of the golden calf; it is the people who not only did not obey him (XX: 90-94), they even oppressed Aaron and were about to kill him (VII: 150).

The Muslims had to fight three battles against the Makkans. In 624 their first major meeting brought the victory to the Muslims at Badr (a valley between Madīna and the Red Sea). There only three hundred Muslims beat a thousand men from Makka. Badr laid the foundation of Muhammad's power; this first military victory was understood as embodying the will of Allāh. At the battle of Uhud (close to a mountain a few miles from Madīna) in 625, the Muslims were defeated by the Makkans. In 627 the Muslims broke the force of the cavalry charges of the Makkans by the ditch which they dug around Madīna. During all these battles the Muslims had to kill some Jews who betrayed them. Unfortunately the Jews had close business relations with the Makkans and contacts with people who were hostile to the faith. The Jews were not happy that they could not use Muhammad to help the conversion of Arabia to Judaism. Furthermore, Muhammad reprimanded the Jews for considering themselves to be the race chosen by God. The Jews did not appreciate the fact that his belief was so much simpler than their Talmudic legends; they soon broke off and became enemies of the new faith. The Jews tried to create hostility among his people. They defamed Muhammad and his followers. By their union with the party of the *munāfikīn* (the disaffected), and by the strong unity, which prevailed among them, in contrast to the disunion of the Arabs, the Jews became the most dangerous enemies within the State.

Conquest of Makka

In 628 the Muslims went to Makka as pilgrims, but their arrival upset Makkans and negotiations began. The reputation of Muhammad had so grown by then that the Makkans felt obliged to make a treaty with him. A truce was signed between the two parties at Hudaibiyya (nine miles from Makka). The treaty virtually ended the war with

Chapter 1 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History

his people and led to the occupation of the city two years later by the Muslims. The conquest of Makka was the greatest achievement of the Prophet. He reclaimed the sanctuary of the Ka'ba for worship after its original builder, Abraham; with 'Alī, he destroyed the idols. Usually the losers in tribal wars were killed and women turned into slaves but this time Muhammad showed his mercy toward the Makkans without seeking revenge; he just wanted to destroy the idols, not the people. In time, most of the Makkans accepted Islam. During the last two years of his life, the Prophet deployed efforts to bring as much of Arabia as possible under the control of Islam. Muhammad, through marriages with women of different tribes, strengthened alliances with various clans in order to preserve the unity of the Islamic State. Other marriages were contracted out of mercy with widows who had been left without a protector.

Shortly before Muhammad died, an event took place at Ghadīr Khumm. This event is both reported by Sunnīs and Shī'ites but interpreted differently. This event related by the Sunnī jurist Ibn Hanbal (Ibn Hanbal. n. d. vol. 1: 84, 118-119, 152, 331; vol. 4: 281, 327, 370) is expressed this way by the Shī'ite Muhammad al-Bāqir Majlīsī (d. 1699):

When the ceremonies of the pilgrimage were completed, the Prophet, attended by 'Alī and the Muslims, left Makka for Madīna. On reaching Ghadīr Khumm, he (the Prophet) halted, although that place had never before been a halting place for caravans. The reason for the halt was that verses of the Qur'ān had come upon him. [...] The message that came from the Most High was this: "O Apostle, declare all that has been sent down to thee from thy Lord. No part of it is to be withheld. God will protect you against men, for he does not guide the unbelievers" (V: 71). [...] When the crowd had all gathered, Muhammad walked up on to the platform of saddles and called 'Alī to stand at his right. After a prayer of thanks he spoke to the people, informing them that he had been forewarned of his death, and saying, "I have been summoned to the Gate of God, and I shall soon depart to God, to be concealed from you, and bidding farewell to this world. I am leaving you the Book of God [Qur'ān], and if you follow this you will not go astray. And I am leaving you also the Members of Household (*Ahl al-Bayt*), who are not to be separated from the Book of God until they meet me at the drinking fountain of Kawthar." He then called out, "Am I not, more precious to you than your own lives?" They said "Yes." Then it was that he took 'Alī's hands and raised them so high that he showed the whites of his armpits, and said, "Whoever has me as his Master (*Mawlā*) has 'Alī as his Master. Be friend to his friends, O Lord, and be an enemy to his enemies. Help those who assist him and frustrate those who oppose him." (Majlīsī 1909 vol. 3: 339; Donaldson 1933: 5)

Chapter 1 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History

This verse from the Qur'ān was revealed on the same occasion: “This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed my favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion” (V: 3). The event of Ghadīr Khumm is not denied by Sunnīs but is interpreted differently by them. For the Sunnīs, Muhammad did not explicitly appoint a Successor, but he left this responsibility to the companions who elected the one they considered the best Caliph Abū Bakr. As Muhammad had done on other occasions for Abū Bakr, he just wanted to honor ‘Alī at Ghadīr Khumm. The Sunnīs understood the term *Mawlā* in the sense of close Friend, whereas the Shī‘ites recognized ‘Alī as their Master. For Shī‘ites, Muhammad at Ghadīr Khumm explicitly designated ‘Alī as his Successor; afterward the spiritual authority of ‘Alī was transferred to his direct descendants, the rightful Guides (Imāms).

Concerning the phrase “*Ahl al-Bayt*” which appears twice in the Qur'ān, once in regard to the family of Abraham (XI: 73) and in this verse (XXXIII: 33) about purification (*tathīr*): “Verily Allāh only wishes to keep uncleanness away from you, O the *Ahl al-Bayt*, and to purify you completely.” Wilferd Madelung makes the following observation: “Who are the ‘people of the house’ here (XXXIII: 33)? 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 various accounts of a legendary character, attaching the latter part of the verse to the five People of the Mantle (*Ahl al-Kisā*): Muhammad, ‘Alī, Fātima, Hasan and Husayn. In fact when this specific verse was revealed, Muhammad enveloped them with his mantle. In spite of the obvious Shī‘ī significance, the great majority of the reports quoted by al-Tabarī (Sunnī historian) in his commentary on this verse support this interpretation.” (Madelung, 14-15.) In South Asia, these five people are therefore called “the five pure ones” (*pañj tan-i pāk*).

Muhammad died at home in Madīna, probably of malaria. It is possible that the subsequent development of Islam is due to the inspiration of his disciples to follow the example of Muhammad. Many researchers have credited him with great intelligence, skill, a remarkable tenacity and diplomacy in dealing with contentious issues. Muhammad showed, in many cases, clemency, forbearance, and he was often very demanding of himself. He had an open-minded way of knowing how to benefit from a

Chapter 1 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History

plurality of views and his words were wise and very progressive for his time. His private life influenced his ideas. He was particularly attached to his close family: his daughter Fātima, his son-in-law 'Alī, and his two grandsons Hasan and Husayn.

The reputation of the Prophet Muhammad continued to grow after his death. He became the symbol of the unity of the new faith and he was called the founder of a new civilization. Muhammad was a reformer who has left a considerable mark on culture and civilization. He was an eminent judge who spoke with knowledge and wisdom. He gave speeches to build bridges between rival tribes and he taught religious ethics. This great Prophet was able to unite all Arabia in a short period of only nine years. He united rival peoples scattered in a desert of two million square kilometers - peoples who were ignorant, undisciplined, uneducated and engaged in a permanent state of internecine warfare —under one banner and gave them a unified religion, culture, civilization and community (*umma*). The Prophet was able to cure the chronic tribal rivalries and disunity of Arabian society. The main social achievement of Muhammad was the bonding of a hundred feuding tribes into one nation based on a faith that supersedes the ties of kinship and the enmity of blood-feuds. Muhammad changed how tribesmen think, their habits and even their morals. He transformed the society of his time into civilized, pious, and righteous people.

Thanks to the influence of Muhammad, from a nation that had not seen a single great man for many centuries, many scientists emerged who travelled to preach and teach the principles of religion, of morality and civilization. In the beginning, the Muslims were so united that the power of Byzantium and Persia could not resist them. The new religion gave so great an impetus that within one generation the Muslims had conquered a vast territory extending from Tunisia to India. The reason for this great success is that the people of the surrounding dominions were fed up with their previous regime; the Muslims were therefore received as liberators. Moreover, the Muslims did not rule with a heavy hand over these lands. Following the example set forth by the Prophet in the Constitution of Madīna, they entered into alliance with the local people, letting them practice their faith freely.

Muslims believe in the prophetic lineage (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad) and this belief is based on the need for the continuous divine guidance

Chapter 1 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History

of men throughout their lives for their own salvation. This prophetic light reappears regularly on earth to remind believers of the same truthful message. Indeed, it is the same divine presence, which manifests itself in the succession of revelations, from Adam to Muhammad.

Selected Bibliography

Ameer Ali, Syed, *The Spirit of Islam*, Delhi: Islamic Book Trust, 1981.

Andrea Tor, *Mohammad the Man and His Faith*, New York: Harper & Row, 1960.

Donaldson, Dwight. *The Shī'ite Religion: A History of Islam in Persia and Iraq*. London: Luzac, 1933.

Hitti, Philip, *History of the Arabs*, London: MacMillan, 1985.

Hodgson, Marshall G.S. *The Venture of Islam*, 3 vols. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974.

Ibn Ishāq, *Life of Muhammad*, translated by Alfred Guillaume, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955. (The earliest biography of Muhammad)

Ibn Hanbal, Ahmad. *Al-Musnad*, 6 vols. Beirut, n.d.

Ibn Hanbal, Ahmad. *Al-Musnad*, 6 vols. Cairo, 1313/1896.

Madelung, Wilferd. *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate*, Cambridge, NY and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Al-Majlīsī, Muhammad al-Bāqir, *Hayāt al-Qulūb*, Tehran, 1909.

"Muhammad" in *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

Nabhani, *Al-anwar al-muhammadiyya min al-mawahib al-laduniyya*, Cairo, 1320.

Momen, Moojan, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

Muslim, Abū al-Husayn ibn al-Hajjāj, *Sahīh*, 2 vols. Cairo, 1349/1939.

Rūmī, Jalal al-Dīn, *Fīhi mā fīhi*, translated in French by Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch. Paris, Sindbad, 1982.

Chapter 1 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History

Sells, Michael. *Approaching the Qur'ān*. Ashland : White Cloud Press, 2002.

Steigerwald, Diane, "Jérusalem: Ville de l'ascension du Prophète Muhammad," *Studies in Religion/Sciences religieuses*, Vol. 26.1 (1997): 95-109.

Steigerwald, Diane, *L'islam: les valeurs communes au judéo-christianisme*. Montréal/Paris: Médiaspaul, 1999.

Al-Tabarī, Abū Ja'far Muhammad, *Ta'rīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, ed. M. J. de Goeje, 15 vols. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1901.

Al-Tirmidhī, Abū 'Īsā Muhammad, *Sunan*, 4 vols. Cairo, 1292/1875.

Watt, William Montgomery, *Muhammad at Mecca*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953.

Watt, William Montgomery, *Muhammad at Medina*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956.

Williams, John Alden (ed.), *The Word of Islam*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994.