Scientific Quarterly
Journal of Ahl al-Bayt (as) Teachings
Vol. 3, Issue 4, Winter 2026

The Issue of Succession and Caliphate after the Prophet (pbuh): A Qur'anic Critique of Orientalists' Perspectives with Emphasis on Moshe Sharon's Views

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(Received: February 25, 2026, Accepted: May 28, 2026)

Abstract

The issue of succession to the Prophet (pbuh) after his demise has been one of the most fundamental challenges in the Islamic world. This issue has given rise to extensive debates and arguments throughout Islamic history. Western scholars engaged in Islamic studies have often been influenced by Sunni biographical and historical sources, and consequently have put forward interpretations largely aligned with the Sunni theory of the caliphate. Within this scholarly context, Moshe Sharon, a specialist in the history of the medieval Islamic period, has undertaken a new examination of the succession to the Prophet Moḥammad (pbuh). In his works, Sharon critically reviews and rejects several major theories proposed by earlier Orientalists and places particular emphasis on kinship with the Messenger of God as a key factor in succession. However, by offering a specific interpretation of the term Ahl al-Bayt (as), he advances a perspective on leadership after the Prophet (pbuh) that stands in opposition to the foundational principles of Shiʿi doctrine concerning the Imamate. This article analyzes and critically evaluates Sharon's views and seeks to answer the following two questions: 1.What are the views of Orientalist scholars who have studied the issue of the Prophet's succession, and what criticisms can be raised against them? 2.What are Moshe Sharon's views on the issue of the Prophet's succession, and what criticisms can be made of them in light of Shiʿi beliefs?

Keywords: Qur'an, Orientalists, Succession of the Prophet (pbuh), Sharon.

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Introduction

The issue of succession to the Prophet is one of the most fundamental questions in Islam, and perhaps few issues have exerted such a profound and lasting impact on the Islamic community. The fundamental importance of this issue lies in the fact that, following the Prophet's death, it became a decisive factor in shaping political and religious orientations and in generating deep divisions among Muslims. From that time until the present, the question of succession has continued to influence the Islamic world in significant ways.

The debate over the caliphate is not confined to the event of the Saqīfa or, in the Sunni perspective, to the period of the first four caliphs. Rather, it has remained a persistent and recurring theme throughout Islamic history, with successive governments seeking to legitimize their authority by appealing, in various ways, to this debate. Consequently, the issue of succession was actively pursued under later regimes, including the Umayyads and the Abbasids, each of which promoted particular slogans and narratives to assert its superiority and claim to be the rightful successor to the Prophet. In some instances, the political system itself shifted from caliphate to monarchy (*mulk*), a transformation that was notably reinforced by Muʿāwiya in the years following the arbitration (*taḥkīm*).

Efforts to clarify Islam's position on the question of succession have prompted both Muslim scholars and Western researchers interested in Islamic studies to examine Islamic sources and the history of early Islam. As a result, a wide range of theories concerning the Prophet's succession has been proposed. In this process, however, Shiʿi doctrines and perspectives have received comparatively little attention, while Sunni views have often been presented in Orientalist scholarship as the dominant or normative position. Most Western studies, relying primarily on Sunni historical and narrative sources, have reached conclusions consistent with those sources, analyzing and interpreting the caliphate largely through a Sunni framework.

Among Western scholars engaged in Islamic studies, Wilferd Madelung stands out for his critical approach to both the sources and the prevailing scholarly interpretations. His theory diverges from the dominant trend in Western scholarship and, to some extent, approximates the Shiʿi perspective, although it does not fully conform to Shiʿi doctrinal foundations.

1. Orientalists and Orientalism

The term Orientalist derives from the word Orient and originally refers to individuals engaged in the study or exploration of the East, or to those who resemble Eastern peoples or have become assimilated into Eastern

cultures. Today, however, the Persian term *mostashreqīn* (Orientalists) carries a broader semantic range than the Western term orientalist, which traditionally denotes scholars specializing in Eastern studies. In nineteenth- and twentieth-century usage, the term orientalist encompassed both cultural and scholarly dimensions. Orientalists were academic specialists in Eastern languages and cultures. They were expected to possess not merely linguistic expertise, but also profound knowledge of one or more Eastern cultures, along with extensive studies of Eastern languages and cultures—past and present—as well as other cultural dimensions such as art and archaeology (Brill Academic Publishers, 2017, p. 713).

Until the late nineteenth century, the term Orient primarily referred to the Near East, while also encompassing other parts of the Ottoman Empire and North Africa. The ancient East extended from the Near East to the geographical limits of Christianity during the era of Eastern Christianity, and subsequently, following the Islamization of these regions, took the form of the Islamic East. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the concept of the Orient expanded to include the whole of Asia, incorporating numerous cultures that were largely unfamiliar to the West and which Western scholars sought to understand. Up to the period of the Second World War, Orientalism, in its broader sense, represented a distinct cultural orientation in Europe and North America, while in its narrower sense it referred to empirical studies of the East (ibid.).

Following the 1960 Moscow Conference, the term Orientalist was increasingly challenged for various reasons. Asian cultures are considered "Eastern" only when studied from a European perspective; when scholars themselves originate from these regions, the application of the term Orientalist becomes largely metaphorical. Consequently, contemporary scholarship tends to prefer references to the humanities in Asia and North Africa rather than employing the term Orientalism. In Islamic studies, however, the term Orientalist is generally used to denote specialists in Islam and Islamic societies and cultures, and in its broader sense it encompasses the field of Islamic studies as a whole.

The meaning of this term has undergone significant transformation. In the past, it referred exclusively to non-Muslim Western scholars who conducted research on Islam. Today, however, it includes Muslim Western scholars, non-Muslim scholars outside the Western world, and Muslim scholars working in this field both within and beyond Muslim-majority countries. Whereas the West and the Muslim world were once regarded as two geographically distinct spheres, Islamic communities are now firmly established within Western societies. In the contemporary context, Orientalists in Islamic studies should therefore be understood as

encompassing all moderate and unbiased scholars who conduct research on Islam, Islamic cultures, and Islamic societies—whether Western or non-Western, Muslim or non-Muslim, and whether working in the West or elsewhere (ibid.).

Another significant transformation concerns the scope of Orientalist expertise. Unlike earlier periods, when Orientalist scholarship was largely confined to linguistics, often with a historical orientation, recent decades have witnessed the engagement of scholars from a wide range of disciplines with Islamic cultures and societies. This group includes social historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and other social scientists, as well as specialists in literature, the arts, and religious studies (ibid., p. 715).

The social function of Orientalists has also undergone notable change. In the past, Orientalists were specialists within Western societies who studied particular aspects of Islam and Islamic cultures and societies, and alongside their research and teaching, they often fulfilled additional roles. They were called upon to provide information when needed, to act as intermediaries in cross-cultural interactions, and in certain circumstances were entrusted with specific responsibilities. Society exerted pressure on them to give their expertise a social dimension, compelling them to align their work with the needs of their own institutions. To a large extent, they were specialized researchers who remained unaware of the social and political implications of their scholarly activities for either their own societies or the societies they studied, and—like many other scholars—they were largely defenseless against the potential misuse of their academic work.

2. Moshe Sharon's Viewpoint

Moshe Sharon (b. 1937) is a Jewish-born scholar, an Israeli historian, and the head of the Baha'i Studies Unit at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He holds a PhD in Islamic History from the same university and has taught Islamic history and civilization with a particular emphasis on Shiʿi Islam. His scholarly works primarily focus on the history of early Islam and the formation of Shiʿism.

Sharon maintains that Western leaders have failed to attain a proper understanding of Islam. He argues that there is no such thing as a fundamental or essential Islam and claims that wherever Islam exists, conflict and warfare are inevitable, asserting that such tendencies are inherent in the Islamic worldview. In this section, we examine his views on the issue of succession to the Prophet (pbuh).

The Book *Black Banners from the East*

The book Black Banners from the East was written in English in two volumes and published in 1983. The first volume examines the conditions preceding the establishment of the ʿAbbāsid dynasty. In this volume, the circumstances of Islamic society after the uprising of al-Mukhtār are analyzed, along with the ideas, intellectual trends, and activities of this movement. The second volume is devoted to an examination of the revolution itself (Sharon, 1983).

In the second chapter of this work, entitled A Question of Legitimacy, Sharon seeks to articulate a number of points concerning succession after the Prophet. At the outset of his discussion, he cites a report from Ibn Qutayba, according to which al-Maʾmūn, in a debate with Imam al-Riḍā, claimed that Imam al-Ḥasan and Imam al-Ḥusayn were genealogically closer to the Prophet, and that Imam ʿAlī had deprived them of this right. According to the report, Imam al-Riḍā remained silent and did not respond. Sharon then presents this narration as one example among many quotations found in Arabic literature concerning the legitimacy of political authority. He attributes the abundance of such reports to the emergence of Shiʿism, arguing that after the establishment of Shiʿi thought, debates within Islamic literature increasingly revolved around objections and counterarguments exchanged between ruling authorities and their Shiʿi opponents (Sharon, 1983).

Sharon maintains that the problem of political legitimacy existed in Islam from its very inception. In his view, the legitimacy of the Prophet of Islam was rooted in divine power bestowed upon him, in whom the rare conjunction of authority and divine representation was realized. His followers believed in his spiritual authority, a pattern that sharply contrasted with pre-Islamic practices, in which emphasis was placed solely on personal qualities. After the establishment of the Islamic polity in Medina, the Prophet increasingly emphasized the divine origin of his authority and governance. To support this claim, Sharon refers to the Prophet's recitation of verse 101 of Sūrat Yūsuf (Qurʾān 12:101). He further argues that the Prophet consistently stressed power (*mulk*) and divine knowledge (*ḥikmah*) as two bestowed gifts that characterized the divinely appointed prophets whose succession he embodied (Sharon, 1983).

Sharon then argues that this conduct of the Prophet led to the replacement of ethnic status and wealth with precedence in Islam as the primary criterion of distinction. He maintains that the establishment of ʿUmar's dīwān, in which stipends were allocated according to one's precedence in embracing Islam, has its roots in this Prophetic practice. As

long as the Prophet was alive, there was no conflict between this system and the system based on tribal power and wealth.

The Prophet's death occurred at a critical moment, while the Islamic polity was still in its formative stage. Even if the Prophet had contemplated the issue of succession, Sharon argues, he did not articulate anything explicit regarding it. All reports concerning the Prophet's heirs, he maintains, are the products of later political struggles and reflect the positions of competing political schools and factions. Sharon asserts that each of these groups—including the Umayyads, the ʿUthmānids, the ʿAlids, Banū Hāshim, the ʿAbbāsids, the Khārijites, and others—employed the highest level of ingenuity in fabricating traditions in order to attribute statements and actions to the Prophet and thereby demonstrate that their leader or leaders had been appointed by him. The production of forged ḥadīths thus developed into a dynamic and highly sophisticated enterprise. In this process, reports were fabricated with the most impeccable chains of transmission, and no boundary remained that was considered inviolable (Sharon, 1983, p. 34). In order to legitimize such fabricated traditions, recourse was made to every conceivable and even absurd pretext, including appeals to dreams.

According to Sharon, this phenomenon is particularly evident with regard to the first four caliphs, since later Islamic problems stemmed from this issue and, because none of them had been explicitly appointed by the Prophet, traditions were fabricated to show that the Prophet had designated them as his successors. He then provides examples offered by the supporters of each faction (Sharon, 1983, p. 35). Referring to the statement of Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār, Sharon further argues that, given the immense respect accorded to the Prophet during his lifetime and after his death, as well as his divinely bestowed authority and power, it is inconceivable to assume that he had left an explicit testament that anyone would have dared to oppose (Sharon, 1983).

He continues by stating that the question of leadership was ultimately resolved by force; however, because this question was of vital importance in Islam, even coercion and compulsion required an ideological foundation. At this point, Sharon endorses Ignaz Goldziher's theory in Muslim Studies, which explains how the mechanism of employing ḥadīth was used by the contending parties to construct a form of religious legitimacy (Sharon, 1983).

Immediately after the Prophet's death, the swift action taken by Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, and Abū ʿUbayda rendered the Medinan Anṣār's demand for a share in leadership ineffective. Sharon emphasizes that this action was of great historical significance, as it transformed the political nature of Islam.

The Meccan Muhājirūn seized power, and as a result, the international commercial outlook of Mecca came to exert a decisive influence on Islam. The people of Medina, by contrast, could have reduced Islam to a local, desert-centered religion. The notion of Qurayshite superiority became institutionalized following its consolidation in the early caliphate.

Sharon traces the rationale for Qurayshite superiority to Abū Bakr's statement at the Saqīfa, in which he described the Muhājirūn as the earliest converts to Islam, portrayed Quraysh as possessing the noblest ancestors, and identified them as the people most closely related to the Prophet (Sharon, 1983). He argues that this statement goes far beyond a mere claim of Qurayshite superiority and represents one of the earliest reports laying the foundation for political legitimacy as it later became institutionalized under the Umayyads. This discourse emphasizes notions of nobility, leadership, and the pre-Islamic mentality of Qurayshite superiority over other tribes. All of these elements—superiority, precedence in Islam, and kinship with the Prophet—constitute the central axes of debates over political legitimacy. Sharon contends that the Shiʿa personalized this early mode of reasoning and employed precedence in Islam, and more importantly kinship with the Prophet, to substantiate the exclusive right of the Commander of the Faithful (*Amīr al-Muʾminīn*) to leadership (Sharon, 1983, p. 38).

Sharon writes that the reality of the matter is that the Imam himself also came to power by relying on this very principle of precedence in Islam. His kinship with the Prophet through his father, Sharon argues, was of little significance, since he was not the only relative of the Prophet; moreover, his marriage to the Prophet's daughter was not particularly important either, given that ʿUthmān had married two of the Prophet's daughters. In addition to this, Imam ʿAlī lacked the social standing enjoyed by Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, and even ʿUthmān, because their Islamic stature had never been challenged (Sharon, 1983).

Sharon further claims that it is difficult to imagine that anyone would have regarded Imam ʿAlī as a candidate for leadership immediately after the Prophet's death, and that even after he attained the caliphate there were Companions, such as Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr, whose political weight was considered comparable to his. He was not chosen through a shūrā, nor did he enjoy the consensus of the community. Thus, in Sharon's view, the Imam became the cause of a rupture in the unity of the Muslim community. From this perspective, the Imam represented a faction that harbored an inclination toward division: the Anṣār sought to attain political power through him, while the people of Kūfa regarded the Imam as an

oppositional alternative to the concentrated supremacy of the people of Syria (Sharon, 1983, p. 41).

The victory of Muʿāwiya, although not achieved through open warfare, represented the triumph of pre-Islamic aristocracy, the victory of political centralization over regional fragmentation, and the ascendancy of Syria. Sharon maintains that the Umayyads introduced an innovation into Islam that has persisted to the present day. Unlike the legitimacy of the early caliphs, Umayyad rule was founded upon military power.

According to Sharon, the disputes during Imam ʿAlī's lifetime over the legitimacy of his rule stemmed from a single question: whether or not he possessed the consent and consensus of the people. No one, Sharon argues, was able—or attempted—to introduce another principle into this equation. Although the Shiʿa later found it necessary to develop more persuasive arguments against their opponents, when they were unable to rely on the concepts of consent (*riḍā*) and communal consensus (*jamāʿah*), they introduced the principle of kinship into their reasoning and emphasized the Imam's closeness to the Prophet. After this argument was rejected, they resorted to the notion of a testament (*waṣiyyah*), according to which the Prophet had appointed ʿAlī through explicit designation (*naṣṣ*) (Sharon, 1983, p. 41).

Appointment by explicit designation (*naṣṣ*) constituted the final stage in the evolution of Shiʿi argumentation. Thousands of traditions were fabricated to support this claim, each competing with the others in excess and exaggeration. Naturally, the introduction of these traditions into the debate nullifies the legitimacy of all caliphs other than ʿAlī. The narrative of the Imamate, Sharon continues, begins with Adam and proceeds through divinely chosen individuals until it reaches the Prophet, after which it is transferred to ʿAlī and his progeny.

The Ahl al-Bayt (as)

In Shiʿi literature, as in Sunni usage, the term Ahl al-Bayt (as) is generally understood to mean the family of the Prophet. At times, this term is accompanied by qualifiers such as Āl Moḥammad or Āl al-Nabī. There has been considerable اختلاف of opinion regarding which individuals encompassed by this broad designation are truly entitled to be counted among the Ahl al-Bayt. Although the term itself carries a strong connotation of reverence, it was not this honorific dimension that rendered it controversial once it entered common usage. Rather, the controversy arose from the fact that Ahl al-Bayt (as) became a central element in the struggle for power in Islam and a crucial instrument in the construction of political legitimacy.

During the Umayyad period, the ʿAlids and their supporters—who were later identified as the Shiʿa—used this term exclusively for the family of ʿAlī. In a more general sense, Shiʿi literature sometimes extended the term to include the descendants of Abū Ṭālib as a whole. Among Twelver Shiʿites, however, Ahl al-Bayt is specifically applied to ʿAlī, Fāṭima, and their progeny. The ʿAbbāsids rose in opposition to this interpretation, as restricting the term to these figures directly challenged the legitimacy of their rule. If, as was claimed during the reign of al-Mahdī, the ʿAbbāsids grounded their legitimacy in descent from Abū Hāshim, the grandson of Imam ʿAlī, this claim was undermined by the fact that they were not descendants of Fāṭima. If, alternatively, they identified themselves as descendants of al-ʿAbbās, the paternal uncle of the Prophet, the Shiʿi response was that al-ʿAbbās does not fall within the Shiʿi conception of Ahl al-Bayt.

In Sunni literature, no single precise definition of Ahl al-Bayt (as) exists. Despite prolonged efforts by the ʿAbbāsids, Sunni discourse never accepted the ʿAbbāsid interpretation of Ahl al-Bayt (as) as the sole or even the primary understanding of the term. The concept of Ahl al-Bayt (as) , which later became a focal point in many of the most bitter conflicts in Islamic history, underwent significant stages of transformation and development. The purpose of this article is to examine the evolution of this term from its pre-Islamic roots as reflected in the Qurʾan to its later doctrinal and political meanings (Sharon, Moshe, "Ahl al-Bayt – People of the House," Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam 8 [1986]).

Sharon proceeds to examine the Qurʾanic usages of the term and their exegetical interpretations. He argues that the primary source for interpreting Ahl al-Bayt as the family of the Prophet is the Qurʾan itself. The term appears twice in the definite form in Sūrat Hūd and Sūrat al-Aḥzāb, and once in the indefinite form in Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ. Most Muslims and Qurʾanic exegetes have understood the first two instances to refer, respectively, to the family of Abraham and the family of the Prophet:

"Do you wonder at the decree of God? The mercy of God and His blessings be upon you, O People of the House. Indeed, He is Praiseworthy, Glorious." (Qurʾan 11:73)

"Remain in your houses and do not display yourselves as in the former days of ignorance; establish prayer, give alms, and obey God and His Messenger. God only desires to remove impurity from you, O People of the House, and to purify you completely." (Qurʾan 33:33)

The Verse of Purification constitutes the most significant textual foundation for both Shiʿi and ʿAbbāsid claims to Islamic leadership. The Shiʿa restrict this verse exclusively to the family of ʿAlī and exclude the

Prophet's other relatives. Sharon notes that this interpretation is supported by a non-Shiʿi report transmitted within Sunni tradition. Even Ibn Ḥaytham al-Makkī—who might be expected to present an opposing Sunni view—states that most exegetes have maintained that this verse was revealed concerning ʿAlī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥusayn. Sharon then refers to the ḥadīth al-kisāʾ. According to him, traditions that portray love and support for the Ahl al-Bayt as a religious obligation and hostility toward them as a sin belong to the same political category of ḥadīth (Moshe Sharon, "Ahl al-Bayt – People of the House,"

Once the doctrine of the "Chosen Five" (*al-khamsat al-Muntajabah*) was adopted as the principal Shiʿi interpretation of Ahl al-Bayt, there was no reason not to associate the notion of purification mentioned in the verse more explicitly with this divinely chosen family. Alongside the term Ahl al-Bayt, expressions such as *al-ʿitra al-ṭāhirah* and *al-dhurriyya al-ṭāhirah* also came into use.

When the ʿAbbāsids came to power, the basic conception of Ahl al-Bayt as referring to the ʿAlids had already gained currency, but the status of Fāṭima and, more specifically, her descendants had not yet been firmly established. In opposing the Umayyads, the supporters of the ʿAlids initially had no need to distinguish even among the broader family of Abū Ṭālib, let alone among the various descendants of ʿAlī. However, once the ʿAbbāsids assumed power, this understanding of Ahl al-Bayt worked against the ʿAlid Shiʿa, as the ʿAbbāsids grounded their leadership claims against the Umayyads in the alleged testament of Abū Hāshim, the grandson of Imam ʿAlī. Abū Hāshim's father, Moḥammad, was not a descendant of Fāṭima and had no direct lineage connection to the Prophet. At this stage, the hopes of the ʿAlid supporters became focused on the person of ʿAlī, and in their view Moḥammad possessed no less legitimacy than his two brothers.

The earliest and most organized group among the ʿAlids concentrated on the figure of Moḥammad and, after his death, pledged allegiance to his son Abū Hāshim. This group, known as the Hāshimiyya, became the point of departure for the ʿAbbāsid movement and ultimately a key source of legitimacy for their rule (ʿAlī b. Jamāl Ashraf Ḥusaynī & Sulaymān b. Ibrāhīm Qandūzī, Yanābīʿ al-Mawadda li-Dhawī al-Qurbā, vol. 1, p. 11).

The term Ahl al-Bayt was transformed in two opposing directions by both groups. While the Shiʿa moved toward the formulation of the concept of the Khamsa al-Ṭāhira (the Pure Five), the ʿAbbāsids sought to broaden the notion of the Prophet's family so as to include al-ʿAbbās as well. In order to neutralize the ʿAbbāsid claim to legitimacy, the Shiʿa attempted to present Fāṭima as the primary source of the pure progeny (*al-dhurriyya al-*

ṭayyibah) and to invalidate the claim of anyone who asserted descent from ʿAlī through Moḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya.

The ʿAbbāsid response was to emphasize that a woman—regardless of how sacred or noble she may be—cannot serve as a reference point for designation and succession, and that in the absence of the father, the paternal uncle occupies a position equivalent to that of the father. On this basis, al-ʿAbbās, the Prophet's uncle, was presented as the most significant member of the Prophet's family.

The expansion of the scope of Ahl al-Bayt during the ʿAbbāsid period followed an earlier trajectory. Traditions concerning the process of divine selection within the Hāshimite clan were extended so as to encompass all families of this clan, including both the house of Abū Ṭālib and the ʿAbbāsids. Nevertheless, not all interpretations of Ahl al-Bayt conform to this pattern. There also exist neutral interpretations that identify Ahl al-Bayt with the wives of the Prophet (Kamāl Basyūnī Zaghlūl & ʿAlī b. Aḥmad al-Wāḥidībī, n.d., p. 230).

In addition, among those interpretations that attempt to reconcile the two positions, one encounters the coexistence of both ʿAbbāsid–ʿAlid and neutral tendencies. These are reflected in reports concerning Umm Salama's question as to whether she was included among the Ahl al-Bayt, to which the Prophet is reported in some versions to have replied affirmatively and in others negatively. There are also interpretations that define Ahl al-Bayt in such a way as to include both the Prophet's family and his wives.

The need for an explicitly ʿAbbāsid interpretation of Ahl al-Bayt became urgent during the reign of the second ʿAbbāsid caliph, Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr. The resentment of the ʿAlids toward the rise of the ʿAbbāsids manifested itself in the uprising of the Ḥasanid branch of the ʿAlid family in Medina. This revolt, led by Moḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Ḥasan, a descendant of Imam al-Ḥasan, ended bitterly for the Ḥasanids but ignited an intense debate over the legitimacy of ʿAbbāsid rule.

The ʿAbbāsid claim to descent from Abū Hāshim, the son of Moḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya, was strongly rejected in a letter addressed to al-Manṣūr, on the grounds that only the Fāṭimid descendants could be regarded as the Prophet's true kin. In response, al-Manṣūr argued that ʿAbbāsid legitimacy had nothing to do with belonging to the family of ʿAlī, but rather derived from their direct descent from al-ʿAbbās, the Prophet's paternal uncle, who was considered equivalent in rank to the Prophet's father. From the time of al-Mahdī, the son of al-Manṣūr, the notion that al-ʿAbbās constituted the source of ʿAbbāsid legitimacy became the core focus of their propaganda.

Sharon maintains that on the basis of this new theory, a body of traditions was set in motion that sought, on the one hand, to portray al-ʿAbbās as the sole individual qualified to be the Prophet's legatee, and, on the other hand, to establish that Ahl al-Bayt referred to no one other than al-ʿAbbās and his descendants. In some of these fabrications, the ʿAbbāsids merely altered names within earlier traditions; for example, the ḥadīth al-kisāʾ was reworked so as to apply to al-ʿAbbās and his sons. Poets such as Bashshār b. Burd also contributed to this process.

Sharon then turns to an examination of the original meaning of Ahl al-Bayt. In his view, all of these political interpretations of the term arose because its primary meaning was either deliberately or inadvertently forgotten. According to him, had the term simply meant "family" or "the people of a household," such a wide variety of interpretations would not have been possible. He therefore argues that a distinction must be made between the general and the specific uses of the term.

From a linguistic perspective, Sharon maintains that Ahl al-Bayt originally referred to the "people of the House," that is, those who worship at the Kaʿba, and that in all instances where al-Bayt is mentioned, it denotes the sacred sanctuary of the Kaʿba. Citing Rudi Paret, he states that Ahl al-Bayt in Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt, insofar as it occurs within a discussion of purification from impurity, alludes to the cleansing of the Kaʿba from defilement by Abraham and Ishmael. It can therefore be stated with confidence that in this context the referent is the worshippers of the House, namely the Kaʿba. On this basis, Sharon suggests that prior to its Islamization by the Prophet, Ahl al-Bayt referred to the Quraysh tribe. He concludes by observing that if this interpretation is accepted, one is then confronted with the problem of explaining how Islamic exegesis arrived at its later metaphorical understanding of the term.

The initial response to this question is to be found in the Qur'an itself, for exegetes did not differentiate between the definite and indefinite usages of the term and understood it in its primary and original sense. However, once the term was connected to the Prophet, its original meaning was gradually forgotten and obscured.

In Arabic literary usage, the term Ahl al-Bayt or ahl al-bayt is employed to denote the noble and distinguished families of a tribe or a society, whether Arab or non-Arab. In this sense, the term predates Islam, yet it has been used extensively in the writings of Arab authors. At times, in order to emphasize nobility, the word sharaf (honor) is also appended to it. The use of Ahl al-Bayt as a marker of honor and distinction is therefore not confined to the Arabic language or culture alone.

After the advent of Islam, the family members of the caliphs were also referred to as Ahl al-Bayt. It might be assumed that once the institution of the caliphate was established, the pre-Islamic practice of designating noble tribal families as Ahl al-Bayt (as) became restricted to the families of the caliphs. However, since the caliphate of Imam ʿAlī was contentious, the designation of his family as Ahl al-Bayt was not universally accepted by the entire community. When the Umayyads challenged the legitimacy of ʿAlī's rule, the Shiʿa and his Iraqi supporters confined this designation exclusively to ʿAlī and his household. It was at this point that the term began to diverge from its original meaning.

Once Ahl al-Bayt became explicitly associated with the Prophet, the path was opened for Qurʾanic exegetes—who had emerged within Shiʿi circles—to attribute its origin directly to the words of God. According to Sharon, around the year 100 A.H., this term was employed extensively in all major fabricated traditions in order to establish the exclusive right of ʿAlī to succeed the Prophet. Among these traditions were the ḥadīth al-kisāʾ and the tradition of Ghadīr Khumm. Indeed, the interpretation of Ahl al-Bayt as referring specifically to the family of the ʿAlids had already become firmly embedded in the public consciousness, or at least in the minds of the people of Iraq.

The Umayyad Perspective on *Ahl al-Bayt (as)*

At this point, Sharon once again refers to the modifications introduced by both the ʿAbbāsids and the ʿAlids to the concept of Ahl al-Bayt, each in accordance with their own political needs. The ʿAbbāsids sought to expand the notion of Ahl al-Bayt to such an extent that it would reach Hāshim, thereby encompassing both the house of ʿAlī and that of Abū Ṭālib. Under such a formulation, once the ʿAbbāsids attained power, both lineages would fall under ʿAbbāsid leadership (Moshe Sharon, "Umayyads as Ahl al-Bayt," Institute of Asian and African Studies at the Hebrew University, The Max Schloessinger Memorial Foundation).

From Sharon's perspective, the Qur'an itself is neutral, and it is the traditions that endow Qur'anic verses with specific meanings by situating them within particular historical backgrounds, temporal frameworks, geographical settings, and human activities. Consequently, traditions and historical narratives are susceptible to fabrication in order to support the beliefs of various groups. In this article, Sharon examines the process of historical construction. The phenomenon of ḥadīth fabrication has drawn the attention of Orientalist scholarship; Goldziher undertook its systematic study and substantiation, and after him many scholars accepted his conclusions (ibid., p. 117).

As an example of historical distortion, Sharon refers to a report attributed to the people of Syria, who, when asked why they chose the Umayyads over the Banū Hāshim, replied that they had never previously heard that the Messenger of God had a family. Sharon remarks that although we cannot be certain of the authenticity of this report, it is nonetheless evident that when the ʿAbbāsids came to power, there existed traditions portraying the Umayyads as relatives of the Prophet—traditions that the ʿAbbāsids felt compelled to eliminate. According to Sharon, there is little doubt that such reports were fabricated in the struggle over political legitimacy (Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī, Kitāb al-Futūḥ [Hyderabad, 1975]).

In Sharon's view, various groups of believers—including the Shiʿa, the Umayyads, and the Hijazis—developed independently, and what connected them was their shared belief in the unique revelation of the Prophet (Sharon, "Umayyads as Ahl al-Bayt," p. 121). This revelation had not yet assumed its final form until the early and mid–seventh century. Each of these communities of believers preserved the essential components of this revelation, which originated in Arabia, primarily through oral transmission. Later, supplementary elements were added to this revelation, all of which were attributed to the Prophet. Reports concerning the compilation of the Qur'an during the caliphate of ʿUthmān, the production of a single codex, and the intense debates over the Qur'an's content and vocabulary bear witness to this diverse local development of the Qur'an among different communities of believers.

Sharon further argues that our understanding of the emergence and development of Shiʿism must also be revised. The traditional and widely accepted view that traces the birth of Shiʿism to the conflict between ʿAlī and Muʿāwiya over leadership of the entire Muslim community merely reflects later historical developments. Shiʿism does not represent a rupture within an otherwise cohesive Islamic polity, because no such politically and theologically unified body existed in the seventh century. Rather, Shiʿism represents a community of believers in Iraq who had their own Commander of the Faithful and developed their own version of the Qur'an and traditions. These were heavily influenced by Judaism, absorbing a significant number of Jewish legal concepts as well as Talmudic narratives concerning biblical figures and events.

These Iraqi—or more specifically, Kufan—believers were influenced by the narrative of the chosen family of David and their exclusive rule over society. The fact that Imam ʿAlī was a relative of the Prophet was elevated into a central element of his leadership. The only difficulty was that the Prophet had no male offspring, and this widely accepted fact rendered the identification and definition of the Prophet's family a fluid and unsettled

matter. According to Sharon, the Shiʿa encountered no serious difficulty in this regard until the seventh century. They incorporated this issue into their own version of the Qur'an, and their accusation against the Umayyads—that they had altered the Qur'an and removed verses concerning ʿAlī and his descendants—should not be dismissed merely as an anti-Shiʿi polemical claim.

Since the Prophet had no son, it became necessary to determine which Qurayshite clan constituted his immediate family. This, in turn, required an examination of Meccan pre-Islamic history. The verse concerning the nearest kin (*al-aqrabīn*) thus assumed particular importance. During the Umayyad period, the superiority of Quraysh over other tribes was actively promoted. Once this superiority was accepted without restriction or opposition, it logically followed that Arab leaders were also the leaders of the Muslims. Sharon maintains that the report claiming that the Prophet summoned the clan of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib as his nearest kin for warning was most likely fabricated during the reign of al-Mahdī in order to reconstruct early Islamic history in accordance with ʿAbbāsid propagandistic needs. The ʿAbbāsids likewise presented the family of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib as the Ahl al-Bayt within Quraysh. This maneuver confined the ʿAlids within specific limits while excluding the descendants of Banū ʿAbd Shams and the Umayyads, yet at the same time it curtailed the ʿAlids' exclusive claim to being the sole Ahl al-Bayt.

In the Syrian version of the concept of Ahl al-Bayt, ʿAbd Manāf was regarded as the central genealogical nexus, a formulation that consequently encompassed all three groups—the ʿAlids, the ʿAbbāsids, and the Umayyads. However, since this narrative, which recognized the house of ʿAbd Manāf as a politically and socially acknowledged group, existed prior to the emergence of the ʿAbbāsids on the historical stage, it cannot be considered a product of the Umayyad–ʿAbbāsid conflict (ibid., p. 139).

According to Sharon, the claim that the framework of ʿAbd Manāf in the pre-Islamic period functioned as the framework of Quraysh is difficult to challenge, especially in light of the existence of a tradition that promotes the Hashimite theory, which he traces back to the reign of al-Mahdī. He then refers to traditions that identify ʿAbd Manāf as the relatives of the Prophet (ibid., p. 143). Within this context, there also exist composite traditions that merge ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib and ʿAbd Manāf into a single genealogical unit.

The ʿAbbāsids, more than the ʿAlids, felt an urgent need to invalidate the Umayyads' claim to being Ahl al-Bayt. Once they came to power, they undertook extensive efforts to rewrite Islamic history in order to legitimize their own rule. In this process, they reconstructed the image of al-ʿAbbās

and assigned him a key role alongside the Prophet in the formation of Islam. At the same time, their historians produced historical narratives and traditions aimed at delegitimizing the Banū Umayya. In order to negate the superior status of ʿAbd Shams as the leader of ʿAbd Manāf and to replace him with Hāshim, the well-known story of the munāfara (contest of rivalry) between Hāshim and ʿAbd Shams was fabricated (ibid., p. 145). According to this narrative, ʿAbd Shams envied Hāshim and challenged him to a contest; he was defeated and consequently exiled to Syria, marking the beginning of enmity between the two. This account stands in direct contradiction to traditions that portray ʿAbd Shams as the leader of ʿAbd Manāf (ibid., p. 146).

Sharon ultimately concludes that the elevated status of the Umayyads in Syria and the Hijaz as Ahl al-Bayt, following the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik and his efforts to unify the Islamic empire and to consolidate Islam as an independent ideological system, gradually spread throughout the empire. The attempts of ʿAbd al-Malik and his successors to provide Islam with a solid background and historical depth led to the production of a systematic genealogy of Quraysh, in which ʿAbd Manāf was presented as the ruling clan and the Umayyads as the principal family, or Ahl al-Bayt. In this genealogy, ʿAbd Manāf was also identified as the Prophet's nearest kin (*al-ʿashīra al-aqrabīn*). Through this process, the Banū Umayya portrayed themselves as both the leading tribe and the family of the Prophet (pbuh).

After removing the Umayyads from power, the ʿAbbāsids were compelled to deprive them of this historical capital as well. By manipulating traditions, they restricted the Prophet's relatives to ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib and Hāshim and supplemented pre-Islamic Meccan history with claims of their own ancestral superiority over the Umayyads. This undertaking required more than a generation of extensive reconfiguration of early Islamic narratives.

Critique and Review

In Sharon's article on *Ahl al-Bayt (as)*, as well as in his other works, there are several thought-provoking points that dominate his entire discourse and are clearly evident throughout. The most important of these may be summarized as follows:

1. Incorrect Attributions to Shiʿi Thought and a Negative Stance toward It.

Sharon repeatedly attributes positions to Shiʿi thought that do not accurately reflect its doctrinal foundations and adopts an overtly negative posture toward Shiʿism.

2. Insufficient Attention to the Status and Rank of Ahl al-Bayt

In this article, the author makes no use of the numerous Qurʾanic verses and mass-transmitted (mutawātir) traditions that establish the authority (*wilāya*) and superiority (*afḍaliyya*) of the infallible figures, such as the Verse of *Wilāya*, the *Ḥadīth of Ghadīr*, and the *Ḥadīth al-Thaqalayn* (Moḥammadi, Muslim; Rezaei, Hasan, 2016, p. 12).

3. A Biased Approach in Examining the Term Ahl al-Bayt

In discussing the term Ahl al-Bayt, the author adopts a clearly partisan perspective. Lexicographers have defined Ahl al-Bayt as the inhabitants of a house; accordingly, a man's wife and children constitute his Ahl al-Bayt. However, al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī notes that the meaning of Ahl al-Bayt (as) was expanded to include a man's tribe and relatives as well (al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, 1427 AH, p. 29). Consequently, considering both the core meaning of Ahl and its extended usage, this term is not restricted to the members of the caliph's household alone; rather, this represents merely one of the meanings of Ahl al-Bayt, which could apply to the inhabitants of any house. Therefore, the author's conclusion regarding the meaning of this term is also incorrect (Moḥammadi, Muslim; Rezaei, Hasan, 2016, p. 14).

Moreover, as is evident, the author first presents the discussion in such a way as to suggest that belief in the Five Pure Ones (*al-Khamsa al-Ṭāhira*) as the primary Shiʿi interpretation of Ahl al-Bayt is merely a construct of Shiʿi imagination. Second, he implies that the purity (*ṭahāra*) attributed by the Shiʿa to these five figures on the basis of verse 33 of Sūrat al-Aḥzāb stems solely from the belief that they were divinely chosen. In reality, however, the selection of Ahl al-Bayt as divinely appointed leaders of the people, as well as their infallibility (*ʿiṣma*) from error and sin both before and after the imamate, is grounded in firm rational and revelatory evidence derived from the Qurʾan and the Prophetic Sunnah (Qurʾan 2:124; 4:59; 33:33; 5:3, 55–56; al-Seyed al-Murtaḍā, 1407 AH, vol. 2, pp. 44–48; al-Ṭūsī, 1406 AH, pp. 313–314).

Elsewhere, the author places the Shiʿa and the ʿAbbāsids in opposition to one another, as if each group merely sought to assert legitimacy on the basis of its own subjective beliefs: the Shiʿa allegedly attempting to direct people's beliefs toward the Five Pure Ones, and the ʿAbbāsids seeking to expand the scope of the Prophet's family. In this portrayal, no divine origin is acknowledged in the selection of the pure and chosen family. Such a presentation is contrary to historical reality and appears to stem from the author's biased approach to the subject. Furthermore, this Shiʿi theory can also be substantiated through Sunni sources (see: al-Āmidī, 2012, vol. 3, p. 173; al-Ṭaḥāwī, n.d., vol. 1, p. 332).

4. Excessive Repetition of a Single Meaning of Ahl al-Bayt (as) under the Heading of the Quraysh Tribe as Its Referent

The author repeatedly emphasizes the identification of Ahl al-Bayt with the tribe of Quraysh (Moḥammadi, Muslim; Rezaei, Hasan, 2016, p. 14). He proposes numerous referents for the term Ahl al-Bayt, including the Quraysh tribe. In response, it should be noted that such reports—and others of a similar nature—pertain to a specific historical context in which the Quraysh were asked, during the pilgrimage season, to assist in hosting and feeding the pilgrims. Because the Quraysh lived in proximity to the House of God, people addressed them as follows: "O assembly of Quraysh, you are the neighbors of God, the people of His House, and the people of the Sanctuary" (al-Azraqī, 1416 AH, vol. 1, p. 195).

Thus, the application of the term Ahl to the tribe of Quraysh arises from the fact that they constituted one instance of the customary usage whereby the inhabitants of a city or region are referred to as its people. Such usage has existed in linguistic cultures from the past to the present; for example, a person born and residing in Najaf is described as ahl Najaf. In general, when a term has multiple meanings, it is not permissible—absent a contextual indicator (*qarīna*)—to assign one specific meaning as its sole referent. In verse 33 of Sūrat al-Aḥzāb, there is no contextual indicator that would justify interpreting Ahl al-Bayt as the inhabitants of Mecca, namely the tribe of Quraysh. On the contrary, there exist strong contextual and textual indicators that the intended referent of Ahl al-Bayt is the Five People of the Cloak (Ahl al-Kisāʾ) (al-Ḥākim al-Ḥaskānī, 1414 AH, p. 30).

The traditions concerning the occasion of revelation (*shaʾn al-nuzūl*) of this verse, as well as several other similar verses, further support this interpretation. Salama reports that when this verse was revealed to the Prophet, he summoned ʿAlī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥusayn and declared: "These are my Ahl al-Bayt." This narration appears not only in Shiʿi sources but is also transmitted in Sunni sources in a mutawātir form (al-Ḥākim al-Nīsābūrī, n.d., vol. 3, p. 158). Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal likewise reports that when the verse of mubāhala was revealed, the Prophet summoned ʿAlī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥusayn and then said: "O God, these are my Ahl al-Bayt (as)" (Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, 1416 AH, vol. 1, p. 185).

5.The author of this article relies exclusively on Sunni sources, a point that must be regarded as one of its major shortcomings. Such an approach reflects a lack of due attention to the important Shiʿi ḥadīth sources in the interpretation of a Qurʾanic verse revealed concerning the Ahl al-Bayt of the Prophet, and indicates a failure to employ the full range of available sources relevant to this discussion. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that authentic Shiʿi sources and teachings, in a manner befitting the stature and requirements of Shiʿism, have not been adequately published or made accessible to scholars worldwide, and that the valuable

works produced in the international arena after the Islamic Revolution of Iran have not been sufficient. It is noteworthy that the author, after denying the Ḥadīth al-Kisāʾ, characterizes that narration as bearing a "political message." What, precisely, is meant by the "political" nature of a narration? If politics is understood as the rightful sovereignty of the *Walī* of God on the basis of divine selection, aimed at establishing justice, implementing divine commands articulated in the Qurʾanic sūras, and combating oppression, then this characterization is entirely correct, for numerous Qurʾanic verses address political matters, including those related to the implementation of legal punishments (*ḥudūd*), *jihād*, and the enjoining of good and forbidding of evil. However, if by politics one means the use of opportunistic tactics such as deception and falsehood in order to attain power and wealth within society, such a meaning has no place in the words or conduct of the infallible figures, for they are immune from error and sin, and worldly desires have no presence in them (Moḥammadi, Muslim; Rezaei, Hasan, 2016, p. 17).

Within the logic of Islam, politics in this latter sense has never existed; rather, governance and political authority have always constituted one of the pillars of the Sharīʿa for the realization of justice and the struggle against injustice. Although this ideal has not yet been fully actualized in practice, according to divine promise its complete realization will occur through the advent of Imam al-Mahdī (ibid., p. 18). In this regard, the Commander of the Faithful states in Nahj al-Balāgha:

"By God, who split the grain and created living beings, were it not for the presence of the multitude of those who pledged allegiance, and were it not that the supporters had completed the proof against me, and had God not taken a covenant from the scholars that they should not remain silent in the face of the gluttony of the oppressors and the hunger of the oppressed, I would have cast the reins of the caliphate upon its back and let it go" (Nahj al-Balāgha, Sermon 3).

Final Remarks

Between 1900 and 1960, nearly 60,000 books on the East were written by Western scholars, a figure that has increased significantly up to the present day. The fact that Islamic countries are often seen struggling with issues that they are not easily able to resolve reflects the West's deep familiarity with Eastern societies. The Western approach to the study of Islam—even if its proponents are regarded as scholars who adhere to impartial scientific methods—suffers from numerous shortcomings. Even when these scholars attempt to be fair, they are unable to fully and adequately evaluate historical and *ḥadīth* sources.

One of the fundamental problems in Orientalist studies is the cultural distance of most Orientalists and their remoteness from the internal religious concerns of Muslim societies. When an individual from a different cultural background seeks to speak about Islam, this inevitably imposes certain limitations upon their understanding. Moreover, it is difficult to find anyone who is entirely free from attachment to a particular religion, belief system, ritual tradition, or ideology. When a person who is culturally affiliated and emotionally invested—even if striving for scientific objectivity—undertakes to write about or critique another culture or religion, they cannot reasonably claim complete neutrality.

This issue becomes even more complex when Orientalism serves as a means for advancing colonial objectives, or when an unfair scholar engages in criticism of a belief system or doctrine. In the former case, Orientalism becomes a tool for expanding influence and power within another country or culture. In the latter case, one may point to Orientalists such as Henri Lammens, Leone Caetani, and Moshe Sharon, whose works—some portions of which have been discussed in this article in accordance with its subject—reflect anti-Shiʿi and, in some instances, anti-Islamic positions, and demonstrate a marked distance from impartiality in many respects. The writings of these scholars have largely been produced on the basis of Sunni sources. An examination of Sharon's article on Ahl al-Bayt (as) and his other writings indicates that he makes extensive use of Qurʾanic verses, and his research reflects considerable investigation of Islamic sources. Nevertheless, the presence of non-negligible errors suggests that he either lacked access to, or sufficient mastery of, all authoritative Islamic sources related to Ahl al-Bayt (as), particularly Shiʿi sources. Due to his one-sided reliance on Sunni sources and his failure to engage with Shiʿi materials, Sharon has neglected the views of Shiʿi scholars concerning Ahl al-Bayt, a shortcoming that diminishes the scholarly credibility of his work. The neglect of Shiʿi sources constitutes a major problem not only in Sharon's research but also in the studies of many Orientalists. That said, there are scholars—such as Wilferd Madelung—who have had access to Shiʿi sources and have critically examined the views of figures like Sharon. Insufficient attention to the status and rank of the infallible Imams, combined with an overt preference for Sunni doctrines and theories, ultimately prevents the realization of a balanced, realistic, and methodologically sound analysis in the writings of scholars such as Sharon.

Conclusion

The present study, focusing on Moshe Sharon's views on the issue of succession and caliphate after the Prophet of Islam (pbuh), sought to examine the Western Orientalist approach to this subject with particular

emphasis on Qurʾanic and historical critique. The findings of this research indicate that despite the vast volume of Orientalist works produced during the twentieth century and thereafter, the dominant approach among many Orientalists—including Sharon—is accompanied by significant methodological and substantive shortcomings.

First, the cultural estrangement and linguistic–identity distance of Orientalists from the Islamic world have hindered a deep and comprehensive understanding of religious and historical concepts. Even if one assumes the personal fairness of a researcher, this cultural distance inevitably and often unconsciously affects the selection of sources, the interpretation of narrations, and the reading of Qurʾanic verses. In the case of Sharon, although he conducted extensive research in Islamic sources (predominantly Sunni) and made frequent use of Qurʾanic verses, his neglect of Shiʿi sources and disregard for the views of Imami scholars rendered his analysis one-sided and incomplete.

Second, ideological affiliations and political–colonial orientations have undermined scientific impartiality in many Orientalists works. Clear examples such as Henri Lammens, Leone Caetani, and Sharon himself demonstrate that Orientalism has at times been transformed into a tool for advancing non-academic objectives, with anti-Shiʿi or even anti-Islamic positions presented under the guise of scholarly research. Such orientations not only diminish the academic credibility of these works but also convey a distorted and incomplete image of Islamic history to Western audiences.

Third, unequal access to sources and a tendency to rely on official narratives (primarily Sunni) have led to the neglect of alternative viewpoints and differing readings—such as those found in Shiʿi sources. In his article on Ahl al-Bayt and other writings, Sharon, despite claiming a comprehensive examination, consulted only a portion of the available sources and failed to address the status of the infallible Imams and the theories of Shiʿi scholars. This deficiency prevented his analysis from achieving a realistic and balanced portrayal. By contrast, more balanced approaches, such as that adopted by Wilferd Madelung, demonstrate that by consulting sources from both traditions and adhering to methodological impartiality, it is possible to arrive at a more scientific and equitable analysis. Accordingly, the present critique of Sharon's views does not entail a wholesale rejection of Orientalist scholarship; rather, it emphasizes the necessity of:

Observing methodological impartiality and avoiding ideological bias;

Utilizing all primary sources (both Sunni and Shiʿi) and subjecting them to rigorous source-critical analysis;

Attending to the cultural–historical context of Islam and avoiding the imposition of Western frameworks upon religious concepts; and

Finally, engaging critically and constructively with the Islamic intellectual heritage instead of reducing it to a political or propagandistic instrument.

In conclusion, the issue of succession and caliphate after the Prophet (pbuh) is not merely a historical–theological disagreement, but also a test case for the methodology of Orientalist scholarship. The examination of Moshe Sharon's views and their Qurʾanic–historical critique demonstrates that achieving a scientific and fair analysis requires overcoming the cultural, ideological, and methodological limitations that continue to cast a shadow over much of the Orientalist literature. It is hoped that the present study represents, albeit modestly, a step toward correcting this approach and offering a more balanced reading of Islamic history.

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