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Contents

Articles

- Imam ‘Ali’s Theory of Justice Revisited5
Ali Paya
- The Establishment of the Office of the *Shurtab* during the
Caliphate of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib..... 31
Alireza Ashtari Tafreshi, Ali Bayat & Fatemeh Ahmadvand
- The Shi‘a of Baghdad at the time of the ‘Abbasid Caliphs
and the Seljuq Sultanate (447-575 AH)..... 53
Mohammad Taher Ya’ghoubi & Asghar Montazerolghaem
- Beyond the Karbala Paradigm: Rethinking Revolution and
Redemption in Twelver Shi‘a Mourning Rituals..... 75
Edith Szanto

Book Reviews

- A Code of Conduct: A Treatise on the Etiquette of the Fatimid
Ismaili Mission. A critical edition of the Arabic text and
English translation of Ahmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Naysāburī’s
al-Risāla al-mūjaza al-kāfiya fi ādāb al-du‘āt* ed. and trans. by
Verena Klemm and Paul Walker, 201193
Sumaiya A. Hamdani
- The Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam:
Essays in Honour of Harald Motzki* ed. Nicolet Boekhoff-van
der Voort, Kees Versteegh, and Joas Wagemakers, 2011..... 98
Andrew Rippin
- Fabarīs al-Shi‘ah* by Mahdi Khuddamiyan al-Arani, 1431
AH/2010.102
Karim Douglas Crow

<i>City of Knowledge in Twentieth Century Iran: Shiraz, history and poetry</i> by Setrag Manoukian, 2012	109
<i>Alessandro Cancian</i>	
<i>Diwan al-Shi'r al-Farsi (al-juz' al-awwal, al-qarn al-rabi' – al-tasi')</i> by Muhammad Sadiq Muhammad (al-Karbasi), 2011	115
<i>Mohammad E. Mesbahi & Mohanmad M. Baghi</i>	
Book Notes	119
Transliteration	125



Imam 'Ali's Theory of Justice Revisited

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ABSTRACT: Justice is a topic which many thinkers in the East as well as the West have expressed diverse opinions about since antiquity. The differences between these views, as far as their belonging to the old or modern worlds are concerned, are such that subjecting them to even a cursory examination would suffice to reveal whether their authors are among the inhabitants of the modern world or the old world. The central thesis of this paper is that Imam 'Ali's views on justice have interesting conceptual capacities which liken them to modern doctrines of justice despite the fact that the author of those views was living in a pre-modern world and therefore his views should, of necessity, reflect his own time and place. The paper tries to show that the essence of Imam 'Ali's views on justice resembles the core of the ideas of some modern realist and rationalist philosophers. The importance of this point lies in the fact that it would provide, among other things, a strong argument for the objectivity of justice and against the views of those who regard it as a social construct and relative to differing social norms. In order to substantiate the main claim of the paper, the views of four prominent philosophers from antiquity and modern times are compared with each other and with Imam 'Ali's views. The four philosophers in question are Plato, Aristotle, Popper, and Rawls. It will be argued, without falling into the trap of anachronism, that the views of Imam 'Ali on justice are closer to the two modern thinkers than the two philosophers of antiquity whose ideas were dominant in ancient era.

KEYWORDS: justice, modern world, realism, democracy, fairness

*Plato on justice*¹

Justice is among the most fundamental virtues in any society; it is deemed as one of the main principles that contribute to the durability of any social order.² The insightful adage attributed to the Prophet Muhammad that a state/political regime can survive blasphemy but not injustice, highlights the pivotal role of justice in social relations.³ Evidence of serious deliberations on the notion of justice can be found among all nations and cultures and can be traced back to antiquity. However, the views of thinkers on this 'concept' or 'theoretical entity' have undergone a sea-change in the course of time.⁴

The Greeks, who are famed as having been the first people to engage in systematic philosophical investigations (that is, well-structured second-order reflections on phenomena and affairs), considered justice as an attribute for everything. Justice was as much an adjective for describing a city as it was for evaluating human beings. In the *Republic*, Plato proposes a model for the introduction of justice in the city-state and then utilises the same model for characterising the just man.⁵ The model proposed by Plato presupposes the presence of three classes or groups of people in each city: the rulers (the guardians), the administrators (auxiliaries), and other citizens (such as soldiers and farmers). Each member of these three groups has his own virtues and functions. According to Plato, justice is realised when these members actualise their specific virtues and bring to fruition their special functions. A justice-based city-state, like an organic entity, can have harmonious growth only when justice is observed in all of its constituent parts. Failing to observe this harmonious relationship (based on the order that Plato defines) is tantamount to abandoning justice.⁶

In the *Republic*, Plato presents different aspects of his views on justice through a dialogue between Socrates and a number of his disciples, and some of the sophists such as Thrasymachus. Contemplation on the dialectical process that Plato utilises in the dialogues between Socrates and his interlocutors reveals many points regarding the Platonic idea of justice and his approach to this concept. In the discussion on justice, Plato – who is presenting his views through Socrates' words – follows the routine Socratic method to broach different layers of meaning for the concept of justice. Then through providing counter-examples, Plato shows the inaccuracy of each of the proposed definitions and moves on to the next definition. Eventually he defines justice on the basis of what is just or fair for the city-state. A city-state whose system is just has the

highest level of benefit and expedience for the best government. In a just society, hierarchical order between various classes exists and is willingly respected and preserved by all members of the society. A just individual too is defined on the basis of such a system. Such an individual is the one whose 'internal constitution mirrors that of a just state': each and every constituent part of a just person's soul and body remains in its own place and helps to preserve the overall order of the of the whole.⁷ In society too, a just person occupies his specific place and respects the hierarchical social order.

To back his argument for his particular conception of justice, Plato utilises a 'noble lie' (or a 'kingly deception') and elevates the discussion to a cosmic-ontic level: God has made the essence of those who are able to rule from gold, that of the warriors from silver, and that of the rest of the classes from iron and copper-brass. Amalgamation of these metals results in the destruction of the city-state. In the third book of the *Republic*, in the course of a discussion between Socrates and Glaucon over whether the administrators (auxiliaries) should be chosen to govern the society or whether the guardians are better suited for this task, Plato explains the noble lie in the following manner:

'Very well, then,' I said. 'What is the next question we have to decide? Isn't it which of these people are to rule, and which be ruled?' [...]

'Unquestionably.'

'Then we must select from the guardians the kind of men who on examination strike us most strongly, their whole lives through, as being utterly determined to do what is in the city's interest, and refusing to act in any way against its interest. [...] From our children, from our young and grown men, the one who under constant testing emerges as pure is the one who should be appointed as a ruler and guardian of our city.' [...]

'I think my views are pretty much the same as yours,' he said.

'In that case, aren't they really the people who can most accurately, be called full guardians – making sure friends within do not *want* to harm it, and enemies without are not *able* to harm it? The young people whom we have been calling guardians up to now we can call auxiliaries, the defenders of rulers' beliefs.'

'I agree.'

'In that case,' I said, 'how can we contrive to use one of those necessary falsehoods we were talking about a little while back? We want one single, grand lie which will be believed by everybody – including the rulers, ideally, but failing that the rest of the city.'

'What kind of thing do you mean?'

'A very familiar story, of Phoenician origin. It has happened in the past, in several places. So the poets tell us, and they have found believers. But it has not happened in our time, and I don't even know if it *could* happen. People would take a lot of persuading.'

'You seem a bit reluctant to tell your story,' he said.

'With good reason – as you will see when I do tell you.'

'Don't worry,' he said. 'Tell it.'

'Very well. I will. Though I don't know how I shall have the nerve, or find the right words. I have to try and persuade first of all the rulers themselves and the soldiers, and then the rest of the city, that the entire upbringing and education we gave them, their whole experience of it happening to them, was after all merely a dream, something they imagined, and that in reality they spent that time being formed and raised deep within the earth – themselves, their weapons and the rest of the equipment which was made for them. When the process of making them was complete, the earth their mother released them, and now it is their duty to be responsible for defending the country in which they live against any attack – just as they would defend their mother or nurse – and to regard the rest of the citizens as their brothers, born from the earth.'

'No wonder you were so embarrassed about telling us your lie.'

'Yes, I had good reason,' I said. 'But you must listen to the second half of the story as well. "You are all brothers," our story will tell them, "all of you in the city. But when god made you, he used a mixture of gold in the creation of those of you who were fit to be rulers, which is why they are the

most valuable. He used silver for those who were to be auxiliaries, and iron and bronze for the farmers and the rest of the skilled workers. Most of your time you will father children of the same type as yourselves, but because you are all related, occasionally a silver child may be born from a golden parent, or a golden child from a silver parent, and likewise any type from any other type. The first and most important instruction god gives the rulers is that the thing they should be the best guardians of, the thing they should keep the most careful eye on, is the compound of these metals in the souls of the children. If their own child is born with a mixture of bronze or iron in him, they must feel no kind of pity for him, but give him the position in society his nature deserves, driving him out to join the skilled workers or farmers. On the other hand, any children from those groups born with a mixture of gold or silver should be given recognition, and promoted either to the position of guardian or to that of auxiliary. There is a prophecy, god tells them, that the end of the city will come when iron or bronze becomes its guardian.” Well, that’s the story. Can you think of any possible way of getting people to believe it?’

‘No,’ he said. ‘Not the actual people you tell it to. But their children might, and *their* children after them, and the rest of the population in later generations.’⁸

Popper’s criticism of Plato

Notwithstanding Plato’s lofty status in the history of philosophy, one cannot help but shudder with fear when reading this passage. The Platonic perspective on politics and his theory of justice carries with it the seeds of political fascism, and rational ‘justification’ for racism and even eugenics. While it has not been appreciated by a number of writers, what Karl Popper, the renowned Austro-British philosopher, has argued in criticising the frightening consequences of Plato’s political philosophy clearly shows the intellectual depth of the Viennese philosopher and his insightful analysis of an influential, and potentially very dangerous, system of political thought. In his highly influential *Open Society and Its Enemies*, Popper clearly and meticulously exposes the undesirable consequences of Plato’s political viewpoints including opposition to

democracy,⁹ promotion of utopianism, consolidation of a closed society, and providing justification for the policy of eugenics.

As for the Platonic perspective on justice, Popper shows, in a section called 'Totalitarian Justice', how Plato developed a theory of justice that was at odds with people's intuitive perception of 'justice'. According to Popper, in Plato's theory, many of the positive aspects of justice, which are better understood in the modern world,¹⁰ are either ignored or suppressed.¹¹

Popper explains that in modern times a better understanding of justice and its capacities has become possible. For those who belong to the modern world and subscribe to a humanitarian outlook, justice means:

(*a*) an equal distribution of the burden of citizenship, i.e. of those limitations of freedom which are necessary in social life; (*b*) equal treatment of the citizens before the law, provided, of course, that (*c*) the laws show neither favour nor disfavour towards individual citizens or groups or classes; (*d*) impartiality of the courts of justice; and (*e*) an equal share in the advantages (and not only in the burden) which membership of the state may offer to its citizens.¹²

Platonic justice, however, is quintessentially opposed to such perspective because it is based on an apartheid system of citizenship (a caste system). In the Platonic society special privileges are considered for certain individuals and the citizens are divided into first, second, and third class categories. Plato insists on persuading the citizens, through propaganda and deception, that this discrimination is pre-determined and that Heaven has thus ordained it and it is not possible to change it. In this manner, in Plato's political system any attempt to change one's fate, and struggle against inequality, is deemed an improper and inappropriate activity and an endeavour in vain to alter an immutable order.

But political considerations aside, from an epistemological point of view, it can be pointed out that, according to Plato, justice is a construct of the elite and not an objective value. The elite can, and indeed must, turn their own narrative of justice into a comprehensive social fact through propaganda, and even deception and myth. This perspective, as will be noted later, has similarities with the views of the postmodern writers,¹³ but it is in sharp contrast with the views of critical rationalists.¹⁴

Aristotle's theory of justice

Another influential theory of justice in antiquity, comparable to that of Plato, was the theory of his disciple, Aristotle. Like his teacher, Aristotle did not have any interest in democracy. He too maintained that human beings did not all enjoy the same level of humanity. Slaves were not even considered as human beings but were viewed as 'animated tools'.¹⁵ Women too enjoyed only half of the human rights and citizenship rights accorded to men. Justice's full functions could only be exercised among free citizens. Workers and craftsmen would not be considered as citizens. Only citizens (i.e. the rulers and landowners) had the right to vote and participate in the political process.¹⁶ Later on we will discuss why the philosophers' view on democracy is closely connected to their theory of justice and why there is a close relationship between justice and democracy.

Although various aspects of Aristotle's philosophy, including his theory of justice, are heavily influenced by Plato's views, the fact remains that Aristotle has somewhat tempered some of Plato's rather extreme views and, like other areas of his philosophical system, has brought the Platonic ideas on justice from Heaven to earth.

Aristotle discusses the notion of justice in some of his writings including, at some length, in the fifth chapter of *Nicomachean Ethics*.¹⁷ There he not only explains the general conception of justice, but also discusses some more specific theories of justice, such as distributive justice, corrective justice, political justice and describes the difference between natural justice and legislative justice. But the main guiding principle for Aristotle in his discussion of justice is the famous doctrine of the 'mean'.¹⁸

Aristotle writes:

Justice is a kind of mean, but not in the same way as other virtues, but because it relates to an intermediate amount, while injustice relates to the extremes. And justice is that in virtue of which the just man is said to be a doer, by choice, of that which is just.¹⁹

As Lloyd has stated, Aristotle's doctrine of the mean was influenced, for a large part, by the prevalent medical and physiological views in Greece, according to which healthiness in the body and the soul depended upon some sort of balance between the four humours (phlegm, yellow bile, black bile, and blood) and their four qualities

(cold and moist, cold and dry, warm and dry, and warm and moist). In introducing his own doctrine of the mean, Aristotle himself uses two analogies – one related to art and crafts, and the other to medicine.²⁰

The doctrine of the mean has received many criticisms. Among these criticisms, one of the most important states that this theory is vague and that it cannot provide an objective evaluation because its limits are not clear and it is subject to the vagaries of individual assessment. But aside from these critiques and other practical limitations of Aristotle's theory of justice, here too, just as in the case of Plato, one can highlight those epistemic limitations of this theory which would expose its attachment to the ancient world. Of course, it is possible to find some similarities between these ancient perspectives with some of the viewpoints that have been introduced in the modern era. These viewpoints, notwithstanding their introduction in modern era, are at loggerheads with a rationalist modernity.²¹ The epistemic limitations of Aristotle's viewpoint are rooted in his linguistic essentialism. Aristotle was of the view that one can reach the 'essence' of things through comprehensive and proper definitions. But this linguistic essentialism, as critical rationalists have shown, is sterile and does not provide an insight into the affairs of the world.²²

I have chosen Plato's and Aristotle's theories of justice as two important and typical views of antiquity. One can also cite the views of other thinkers of the classic era with regard to the notion of justice which bear resemblance to the theses of the two Greek philosophers. For instance, one can examine the views of Muslim philosophers on justice. The ideas of Plato and Aristotle, as we know, had influenced the views of many of Muslim thinkers, whether philosophers, theologians, jurists or mystics. But the aim of this short paper is not to evaluate the evolution of the views of different Muslim thinkers with regard to the notion of justice. Other researchers have attended to this topic.²³ A case in point is 'Ali Akbar Alikhani who, at the end of a discussion on the viewpoints of earlier and later Muslim philosophers, writes, rather pessimistically:

On the whole it can be said that most of the consensus reached by earlier Muslim scholars on the idea of justice is achieved in the context of the discussion of the four types of virtues, namely, wisdom, bravery, chastity and justice. Such discussions concerning virtues are rooted in Greek thought. Other topics [in the works of earlier Muslim philosophers concerning the notion of justice] are either so similar that they cannot be separately classified and hence all of them

have to be viewed as belonging to the same category, or they are so different that one cannot locate a common denominator between them or view them as complementing one another. Moreover, in the arena of political philosophy no coherent, well-developed and scholarly theory, in its specialised sense, can be found in their works. [...] Later generations of Muslim scholars have, each in their own way and from their own perspective, discussed the idea of justice but we cannot find any thinker in the Islamic world who has discussed the notion of justice in a comprehensive and specialised way [...].²⁴

Popper's and Rawls's theories of justice

In the West, however, with the onset of modernity, new paradigms and intellectual systems emerged; and diverse topics, including the crucial topic of 'justice', were evaluated comprehensively from new angles. In the course of such explorations, many interesting views emerged concerning these topics, in particular the notion of justice.²⁵ In this paper, from among different intellectual approaches to the concept of justice, I have chosen the views of two eminent philosophers, Karl Popper and John Rawls, as the main points of reference for critical assessment of various theses under consideration and further development of my main argument.

Popper is a critical rationalist, and John Rawls also, with some qualifications, could be included in this camp.²⁶ Critical rationalist philosophers (who are also realist) maintain that justice is an objective theoretical entity that has emerged in the sphere of values (part of what Popper calls World 3)²⁷ simultaneous with the emergence of human communities, and is concomitantly evolving along with the evolution of human societies and is unfolding new aspects of its objective values. As man's cognitive powers increase, his chances of discovering more aspects of justice (unknown to the previous generations) increase.²⁸ In order to identify different aspects of justice as an objective value, we need to utilise the tools, technics, and technologies which can help extend and enhance our cognitive abilities. In the ancient world, religious teachings as well as the lifestyle they prescribed were among the tools that would assist people to better understand justice and its capacities. In the modern world, in addition to the tools inherited from the ancient world, human beings have succeeded in constructing a

powerful tool for exploring justice's capacities. In the same manner that a telescope's main function is to help us gain knowledge about the stars, the function of this new tool is to aid modern man to gain more detailed knowledge of vast and diverse potentials of justice. This modern tool is called 'democracy' which, as a constantly improving technology, has remarkably lent a hand to modern man to discover new aspects of justice.²⁹

One of the most effective and successful types of democracy is liberal democracy. Liberalism, as a theoretical framework and as a tool for social change, like other similar modern or traditional frameworks, has been subject to many changes and transformations since its inception (circa seventeenth century). Of various types of democracy, this paper draws on the models proposed by Popper and Rawls. These two thinkers have introduced profound insights with regard to the concept of justice and have paid attention to aspects of this theoretical entity that have been very helpful both from an epistemic as well as a practical standpoint.

The views of these two liberal philosophers of the twentieth century have recently been the topic of a comparative study by Alan Boyer whose views have been incorporated in this article.³⁰

As a political philosopher, Rawls has mainly been preoccupied with issues in the field of political philosophy, and his favourite topic in this field has been justice on which he has written an important book: *A Theory of Justice*.³¹ Popper, however, did not write a treatise specifically devoted to justice. His views on this topic are scattered in his different books, including *Open Society and Its Enemies* which is his major contribution to the field of political philosophy.

Despite a good deal of similarity between the views of the two philosophers with regard to the notion of justice, as Boyer's analysis shows and is also evident from the research projects of these two like-minded philosophers, Popper's views on justice are more effective and fruitful than those of Rawls in explaining different conceptual and theoretical aspects of justice. If Rawls had gained a more accurate grasp of Popper's views, which were extremely fertile due to Popper's mastery of different theoretical fields including philosophy, philosophy of science, ethics, social science, history and classics, he could have further enriched his research project, which was in its own turn innovative and epoch-making.³²

We have briefly referred to Popper's views on justice. Rawls fully approves of these views. For both philosophers, justice is essentially a

rejection of arbitrary privileges and establishing an appropriate share and equilibrium among competing claims within the structure of a social practice.³³ Both philosophers emphasise the role of freedom, reason-based and argument-based approaches, ethical attitudes and the existence of a 'life plan' for individuals; constructive and supportive (though not too intrusive) actions by the state; utilisation of democracy as a tool; and the importance of continually evolving institutions for promotion and realisation of justice. Both emphasise the struggle against oppression; efforts towards reducing human suffering instead of a utilitarian approach which aims at maximising the benefit for the maximum number of individuals; avoidance of utopianism; and utilising gradual, step-by-step methods, for improving the lot of humankind.

According to the views of these two liberal philosophers, justice, as was mentioned above, is not a social construct, at the beck and call of powerful classes. Both philosophers view justice as a real entity which, like other real entities, has a causal power to influence different fields of human interaction, and human beings can only succeed in realising its different aspects through attempts to better understand it.

A reconstruction of Imam Ali's theory of justice

For those who are familiar with the views of Imam 'Ali, as outlined in a collection of his sermons, letters, and aphorisms compiled by Sayyid Radi (c. eleventh century CE/fourth century AH) under the title of *Nahj al-Balaghah* (*Peak of Eloquence*) and in his other statements, letters, and sermons,³⁴ the views of Popper and Rawls concerning justice have a familiar ring. As we shall argue below, there appears to be a good deal of overlap between the views of Imam 'Ali, a religious leader who lived 1,400 years ago, with the views of the two ethical and humanist thinkers of the modern era concerning the pivotal concept of justice. I would argue that one of the most important aspects of this rather extensive overlap between the views of these thinkers from two different cultures and two different eras lies in the fact that the themes agreed upon by them are objective truths and objective values. This means that these truths and values can be discovered and utilised by other observers in other cultures and other time-space frameworks.

The significance of what was stated will be better understood when we realise that in the past decades and since the emergence of the intellectual fad of postmodernism, authors who follow this trend have

claimed that whatever is introduced in the field of human interaction, whether knowledge of natural phenomena or rules and regulations concerning what is utilised in the human society, is arbitrary, and that conventional identities and are all socially constructed. One of the epistemic corollaries of this perspective is that since social constructs emerge according to the needs of human beings, their identities change from one culture to the next. From here postmodern writers conclude that there are no universal concepts that can transcend specific cultures. I will elaborate on this later.

Imam 'Ali was not a philosopher in the strict sense of the word. Even though, according to critical rationalists, all human beings are by nature philosophers, in the sense that they all think about the so-called ultimate questions such as the nature of reality, their own place in the universe, and their moral responsibilities towards other creatures; and they try to find answers for these questions.³⁵ At any rate, Imam 'Ali did not intend to establish a fully-fledged philosophical system regarding the concept of justice. However, what he has discussed with regard to the concept of justice and other concepts such as liberty, the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, living as is worthy of a true believer, and the like, could be considered as parts of such a system. Utilising these parts, one can define, more or less, a system of philosophical thought based on his views. The set of evidence that follows is not the result of a comprehensive research. The cases cited below are meant to provide a general outline of a theory of justice which can be constructed based on some of the views expressed by Imam 'Ali.³⁶ They do not represent an exhaustive study of his views on this subject. But it is my contention that even the few samples discussed here suffice to corroborate the main argument of the present paper.

1. Equality of human beings in their humanity

In his famous letter to his renowned commander Malik al-Ashtar at the time of his appointment as the governor of Egypt, Imam 'Ali advises him on how to rule in an appropriate manner. He stresses mercy, compassion and kindness towards the governed and avoidance of oppression of the ruled. It is worth pondering on the Imam's argument for explaining his point. He says, 'The people that you [Malik al-Ashtar] will be governing are of two types: they are either your brother in religion, or similar to you in creation.'³⁷

A comparison between this view and the views of Plato and Aristotle, both of whom maintained that people differ according to their different degrees of humanity, and also the views of Popper and Rawls who, influenced by Kantian thought, hold all human beings as equal, clearly shows that the Imam was promoting a position which had no affinity with the dominant philosophical positions of the ancient world. And yet his message, despite the fact that it had been penned many centuries ago, was rich with a content that sounds quite familiar for those who live in the modern era and subscribe to that trend of modernity which emerged with the Enlightenment and is regarded as the most rational manifestation of the project of modernity. It is this trend in modernity which has stressed the equality of human beings in their humanity as a fundamental ontological, epistemological, and methodological principle.³⁸

2. Taking side with the oppressed in the struggle against the oppressor

In different sayings or short texts ascribed to him and in a manner totally consistent with other parts of his epistemic system, Imam 'Ali argues that siding with the oppressed in their struggle against the oppressor is a moral imperative for all human beings. For instance, in his last letter, which constitutes his Will and Testament, addressed to his two sons following the assassination attempt on his life by Ibn Muljam, the Kharijite,³⁹ the Imam reminds them of a few important points. The letter is full of moral teachings and contains a wealth of inspirational ideas regarding humanity and justice. Imam 'Ali starts his letter by recommending his sons to remember God at all times and then exhorts them to speak the truth, take a stand against oppressors, and extend a helping hand to the oppressed.⁴⁰ The tone of the Imam's advice in the context of his letter makes it clear that, in his view, religion, race, and other cultural, historical, and genetic affiliations cannot and should not act as pretexts for disregarding this important moral obligation.

In the aftermath of an infamous incident during which golden anklets were forcefully removed from the ankle of a Jewish woman under his rule, the Imam's sharp rebuke of his companions and his stern warning to them are a glaring example of his justice-inspired attitude towards other fellow human beings. This attitude is wholly in tune with the intuition of the majority of the people in all times and

places, though of course diametrically opposed to the inclinations and preferences of those who are supporting a class-ridden society, in which a particular class, such as the aristocrats, the proletariats, the clerics, and their ilk, enjoy a privileged status at the expense of other classes.

The compatibility of the Imam's conception of justice with people's intuition of a just society further corroborates the position of the critical rationalists who maintain that justice is an objective and universal value. Those who wish to undermine it must go to great lengths, as Plato's Noble Lie clearly shows.

3. Public participation

One of the other remarkable points about the political views of Imam 'Ali, which distinguishes him from the thinkers of his time and brings him closer to the views of modern thinkers, is the genuine importance that he attaches to people's political participation and their having an active role in defining their own destiny. The Imam's approach in this respect is congruent with modern democratic aspirations. Imam 'Ali thus makes a radical departure from the prevailing approaches of the tyrannical and autocratic rulers in the ancient world. In modern discussions regarding political justice, the focus of discussion is that all human beings are equal in humanity, and this is the foundation of the equal 'human rights' of all individuals (whether female or male, black or white, poor or rich).⁴¹ Without endorsing this fundamental principle (which, of course, many regimes try to undermine) one cannot provide a robust and cogent argument for political justice. All despotic, dictatorial, totalitarian, authoritarian, and non-democratic regimes deny the principle of equality of people in their basic human rights, and in doing so they deprive all those whom they regard as 'the other' from political justice. Among the most important criteria of political justice is maximal and comprehensive political participation of the citizens. The model of governance generically known as democracy has made it clear that political justice cannot be realised without maximal political participation: citizens who are denied representation (let alone the right to be representatives) in the political arena remain voiceless. As a result their rights will be violated and indeed trampled; they will be deprived of necessary capacities for healthy development and will become the target of all sorts of discrimination while having no recourse to justice.

In the aftermath of the assassination of the third caliph, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan, Imam 'Ali demonstrated, in the clearest possible way, his

democratic attitude, his deeply-held views concerning respect for people's right to self-determination, his full and comprehensive commitment to justice, and his deep conviction of the categorical status of the moral imperative of siding with the oppressed against the oppressor. When believers turned to him in droves, demanding that he accept the mantle of leadership of Islamic society, he made his position clear to them by stating the following in a famous sermon recorded for posterity in *Nahj al-Balaghah*:

If people had not come to me and supporters had not exhausted the argument [concerning the necessity of accepting the office of the caliph by me], and had it not been for the pledge taken by Allah from the learned that they should not acquiesce to the [practice of] the gluttonous tyrant and should assist the hungry who are oppressed, I would have cast the reins of caliphate on its own shoulders.⁴²

It sounds as if the above statements are being made by a fully enlightened political leader in *our* time. In the above proclamation, the Imam stresses two points: (a) the significance of being knowledgeable about the situation and (b) the importance of being committed to one's responsibilities towards God and people. This clearly distinguishes the Imam from many leaders in the past and in the present who were/are power-hungry, careerist demagogues. The sincerity of the Imam's utterance is quite apparent and clearly shows that he does not aspire to occupy a political office for his own personal benefit. It is his concern for the oppressed and his responsibility to establish justice (in the profound sense that the Imam explains) that motivate him to take part in the political process and present his skills in dealing with the society's problems. It is the popular support plus his sense of duty – and not the political machinations and the promises and the material support of the mighty and the wealthy – that convinces him to accept this responsibility.

The Imam's statement also shows that if the premise of the conditional proposition in his proclamation, which made it incumbent upon him to accept the office of the leader, were negated – that is, if people were to give up their support – he too would not hesitate to abdicate the responsibility that the people had put on his shoulders. Unlike the demagogues in the circus of politics, be it in the modern world or in the ancient world, Imam 'Ali would not be attempting to stay in power through stratagem, subterfuge, deception,

or artifice; he would not be resorting to all sorts of immoral means like kickbacks and bribes, or using brute force for the sake of prolonging his term in the public office. The Imam's approach corresponds with the modern method that Popper discusses regarding the democratic way to assign political power. In a brilliant discussion concerning the conception of leadership in political philosophy, Popper, in his *Open Society And Its Enemies*, explains that since the time of Plato the main question in the field of politics has always been about the ways in which the most qualified person for managing affairs in the political arena should be chosen. Popper explains that this question is wrong. The correct question should be: what mechanisms should be in place so that if the ruler is not able render his/her duties and fails to sustain the support of the people, a new ruler can be appointed in his/her place without violence or bloodshed?

In his sermon, quoted above, Imam 'Ali has clearly defined this mechanism: real popular support and the oath of allegiance (or in modern parlance votes) votes of the citizens. Imam 'Ali makes it clear that if such support is not there, the leader must transfer power to the candidate on whom people have reached a consensus.

4. The objective nature of justice

That justice is a social construct is a view proposed by philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, their intellectual heirs, and also post-modern philosophers and their like-minded fellows in the modern world who believe that everything with which human beings deal is socially constructed. The views of these philosophers are informed by the assumption that all things are post-social and even natural entities can only gain importance and significance when human beings choose to pay attention to them. This perspective, as demonstrated by critical rationalist philosophers, leads to a debilitating relativism which not only blocks the path to dialogue among groups, cultures, and civilisations, but also paves the way for violence.⁴³ To say that justice is a construct means that those who are constructing it can decide to modify its conceptual capacities and interpret it in any manner that they please or their interests would require. In the world of Islam, the Ash'arites, in relation to the notion of Divine justice, maintained that justice is not an objective value which could be assessed by means of objective criteria; it is whatever God chooses to do.⁴⁴

Critical rationalist philosophers, as stated earlier, believe in the objective nature of justice and view democracy as a powerful instrument for exploring and realising its capacities. These philosophers apply the theory of the 'three worlds' to argue that justice, like other values and virtues, is among the entities that has emerged with the increase in the complexity of World 1 (reality as a whole) simultaneous with the formation of human societies. According to the theory of the 'three worlds', each individual uses his/her World 2 (which represents an individual's subjective cognitive and emotive capacities, memories, tacit knowledge, intuitions, and so on) in their interaction with World 1 and in response to the 'problems' introduced by reality (whether physical/natural reality or socially constructed reality) and come up with 'solutions' in the shape of conjectures, theories, stories, melodies, music, poetry, rules and laws, conventions, principles, technologies, and so on. World 3 represents the abode of all such products. World 3 is a real world since it possess causal power and can impact World 2 and thus make changes in World 1.⁴⁵

What can be inferred from Imam 'Ali's comments on justice is that, according to him, justice is an objective concept and is not a man-made construct.⁴⁶ Imam 'Ali's reply to the question of whether justice is better than generosity is a case in point which clearly shows his realistic views regarding justice.⁴⁷ He says: 'Justice is a universal path, while generosity is a particular case; hence, justice is the superior and nobler of the two.'⁴⁸

In another sermon Imam 'Ali says: 'There is a vast capacity in justice. He who finds justice as a constraint, will [surely] find oppression much more restricting.'⁴⁹ Here too the statement by the Imam shows that he views justice as an objective entity with vast real potentials into which we can tap to improve social conditions. The elimination of these capacities will make life difficult and unbearable for all.

5. Justice as fairness

In his discussion of justice, Rawls tries to show, through an ingenious thought experiment, that if all people are placed in a situation where they have to decide about their future without any privileged knowledge about their situation, then none of them, conscious of the fact that others are exactly in the same position with respect to deciding their own futures, would choose a privileged position. Each participant in the experiment would come to the conclusion that the best possible

situation for him/her is to be on an equal footing with the rest, with no extra head start. The participants would realise that in their bid to find a fair and just place in their future life, the only thing upon which they could/should rely is their innate abilities and not any external privileged status. In such a situation, what shapes one's future, apart from one's inherited and innate potentials, is one's determination and hard work (or lack thereof).⁵⁰

Rawls's idea of 'justice as fairness', following its first appearance, became conceptually richer as a result of critical assessments by various critics and commentators. For instance, it was agreed that if certain individuals, through mental or physical disabilities, could not compete on a level playing field with able-bodied individuals, certain measures would have to be adopted in their favour so that the possibility of [a fair] competition can be obtained. An important Popperian theme that can be used to enrich Rawls's view is the notion of cooperation through competition. This idea is rooted in the conjecture that in a democratic society, the vast and diverse capacities hidden in individuals and in the society/community will be realised/actualised only when all the individuals in the society participate in a never-ending competition which is based on moral principles and whose aim is not eliminating others but to add to the positive capacities in the society through epistemic exchanges and also cooperation in non-epistemic areas.⁵¹

The idea of justice as fairness appears to be the idea emphasised by Imam 'Ali. With respect to the notion of justice as fairness, the Imam says: 'Regarding God's injunction (in the Qur'an): 'Lo! Allah enjoineeth justice and kindness, and giving to kinsfolk' (90:16), justice equals fairness and giving to kinsfolk equals kindness.'⁵² A cursory glance at the life and deeds of Imam 'Ali suggests that the idea of cooperation through competition is also endorsed by him. Imam 'Ali's constructive cooperation with the first three caliphs during the twenty-five years after the passing of the Prophet, despite the fact that according to the Shi'a he had been appointed by Prophet to serve as the Prophet's successor, is the best example that shows the Imam's strong conviction in the principle of cooperation through competition. During the period of twenty-five years after the death of the Prophet, Imam 'Ali never stopped providing the three caliphs with his wise and sincere counsel which combined advice with critical assessments.

We can mention other examples and refer to more diverse aspects of similarity/commensurability between the views of Imam 'Ali and the critical rationalist thinkers on justice and its rich conceptual

framework. But the important point that needs to be emphasised is that in the modern world, in contradistinction with the traditional world, institutions have gained central importance and 'institutional ethics' as opposed to 'individual ethics' has become the accepted norm in social interactions.

Imam 'Ali was, in modern parlance, a virtue ethicist.⁵³ We can see this in the intellectual legacy that he left behind. But the important question that we need to ask, in relation to the main theme of this article, is this: was Imam 'Ali as concerned, as modern thinkers are, with the importance of institutions and the necessity of constant monitoring and critical assessment of their activities?

As was mentioned earlier regarding the selection of political leaders, modern thinkers, especially Popper and Rawls, maintain that even though the integrity and moral uprightness of individuals are important virtues that should be promoted by the educators in any society, being a moral agent – even being a moral agent with exceptional leadership capabilities – is not sufficient for making an individual fit for the purpose of managing the affairs of modern societies; for this purpose it is essential to establish appropriate and effective institutions, and continually increase their effectiveness through never-ending processes of critical assessment of their functions and activities.

We can only define Imam 'Ali's thought as being closer to modern thought than the views prevalent in the ancient world if we can show that he too, within the limits of his time and society, was not oblivious of the importance of institutions and the need for incessantly and critically monitoring their activities.

A close examination of *Nahj al-Balaghah* and other documents attributed to the Imam shows that, in addition to promoting virtue-based ethics, he was also keen on institution building, reforming institutions, and reforming the society through reforming the institutions, even though he may not have pursued such goals as explicitly and extensively as contemporary philosophers deal with them.

As an example of the Imam's awareness of the significance of the institutions, one need not to look further than the Imam's view on the way in which the Muslim treasury (*bayt al-mal*) should be managed. The Imam's discussions of this issue in various contexts clearly show that he believed in the institutional audit of the *bayt al-mal* in a way in which the financial allocations of each individual would be calculated and any type of malfeasance would be punished. In reply to one of his companions, 'Abd Allah ibn Zama'ah, who had asked him for a

portion from the Muslim treasury, the Imam says: 'These funds are not mine or yours; they are public funds for all Muslims.'⁵⁴

Exactly the same theme is raised in his letter to Masqalah ibn Hubayrah al-Shaybani, his representative in the city of Ardashir Khurrah (modern-day Firuzabad) in Fars: 'Beware that the Muslims who are with either you or us have the same right to this booty; they come to me, get what is rightfully theirs, and return.'⁵⁵

Consistent with this same policy, which can be found in other parts of *Nahj al-Balaghah*, the Imam emphasises that he will return to the Muslim treasury whatever was illegally taken out during the time of caliph 'Uthman, even though this wealth might have already been spent for different purposes. In the same passage, he adds that there is a vast capacity in justice; if an individual or society cannot tolerate it, the same society or individual would have a harder time tolerating tyranny because tyranny does not have such a capacity.⁵⁶

An assessment of the intellectual legacy of Imam 'Ali shows that justice is one of the most pivotal concepts for him with respect to social interactions, not only at the level of individuals, but also as a principal social institution. The Imam's dialogues with his political opponents, his governors, other rulers, and the masses, which have been handed down to us in the form of letters, sermons, and sayings, clearly show his main concern. The Imam's recommendations regarding the responsibilities of ministers, judges, army personnel, scribes, and other governmental classes, as well as craftsmen and guild members, average people and the deprived, are all imbued with a concern for justice, not merely as an individual virtue, but as a main social institution.

Conclusion

One can cite further examples for the cases we have discussed above, but it appears that what has been mentioned suffices to corroborate the main argument of this paper. This paper has attempted to argue, within its limited scope, and by means of a number of specific cases, that Imam's 'Ali's theory of justice, unlike the theories of some of the greatest thinkers in the ancient world that were geared towards justification of injustice or creating special privileges for particular groups in the society, is compatible with some of the most important modern theories of justice. By emphasising the common nature of humanity and the equality of all human beings with respect to basic human rights, the Imam's theory – in line with these modern theories –

paves the way, in an effective way, for the promotion and dissemination of social and political justice.

It must nevertheless be emphasised that the claim of the present paper is a minimalist one. It only states that Imam 'Ali, despite belonging to a traditional world, has discussed some issues which, on a sympathetic reading, can be shown to be more or less similar to some of the most important themes discussed in modern theories of justice. But of course one cannot and should not conclude from what has been discussed that the totality of Imam 'Ali's epistemic constellation, or what has been handed down to us as his views, belongs to the modern world. Since Imam 'Ali was an inhabitant of the ancient world, and of necessity had to interact with people of his time, he had no choice but to modulate the horizons of his thought and action to make them commensurate with the historical capacity of his era.⁵⁷ Despite this, the amazing insights that we have seen in the Imam's thought show that, notwithstanding what most anti-realist thinkers of the twentieth century have stressed with respect to the incommensurability of the ancient/traditional and modern paradigms,⁵⁸ Imam 'Ali was not a helpless prisoner of the paradigm of his time.

Notes

¹ A shorter Persian version of this paper appeared in 'Ali Akbar 'Alikhani (ed.), *Daramadi bar Nazariyeh-yi Siyasi-yi 'Idalat dar Islam* (Tehran: Pazhuhishkadih Mutali'at-i Farhangi va Ijtima'i: Danishgah-i Imam Sadiq, Markaz-i Tahqiqat, 1388 AH (solar)). A number of colleagues have read earlier drafts of this paper and have made constructive comments on it. I would like to thank in particular Yaser Mirdamadi, Daryoush Muhammadpoor, Mohammed Ali Ismail, and the anonymous referees of the *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* for their helpful observations.

² Cf. Harry Brighouse, *Justice* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), vi.

³ *Al-mulk yabqa ma'a al-kufr wa la yabqa ma'a al-zulm*. Ayatollah Surush Mahhallati maintains that this statement has not been quoted in authentic sources on *hadith*; however, its content is so close to the Prophet's way of thinking that Muslim thinkers have accepted it as a *hadith*. Surush Mahallati, 'Kudam Dawlat?' (Muhammad Surush Mahallati, 1390 AH (solar)) <<http://www.soroosh-mahallati.com/modules.php?name=News&file=print&sid=70>>. Accessed 22 January 2013.

⁴ For an overview of the most important theories on justice in Western history, see Alan Ryan, *Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁵ Plato, *The Republic*, ed. G.R.F. Ferrari, trans. T. Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁶ Brighouse, *Justice*, vi, note 4.

⁷ Brighouse, *Justice*, 2.

⁸ Plato, *The Republic*, 104-108 (Book 3, 414-415).

⁹ The question might arise whether the use of the term 'democracy' here is anachronistic, since some might hold that Plato would not affirm the modern concept of democracy which, in his era, would have come across as mob rule. This view would be factually accurate but not normatively valid. The fact that Plato regarded 'democracy' as the rule of mob does not mean that 'democracy', even then, was a horrible political system. Anti-democratic writers were doing their best to portray it in the worst possible light. For example, Heraclitus, whose ideas had greatly influenced Plato, writes: '[...] the mob fill their bellies like the beasts [...]. They take the bards and popular belief as their guides, unaware that the many are bad and that only the few are good [...]. The mob does not care, not even about the things they stumble upon; nor can they grasp a lesson – though they think they do.' (Heraclitus, *Fragments*, quoted in Popper, *Open Society and Its Enemies* (London: Routledge, 1966), 12). Athenian democracy was against tyranny and oligarchy. Of course, like all man-made constructs it was not perfect. But relatively speaking it was superior to its rivals.

¹⁰ In this text I use the terms 'pre-modern'/'traditional'/'old world' as more or less interchangeable and in contrast to the term 'modern world'. The modern world is distinguished from the traditional world by a number of features including the rise of the bourgeoisie and capitalism; subjectivity and individualism; colonialism, Western imperialism and neo-Colonialism; the emergence of nation-states and nationalism; industrialisation and urbanisation; democratisation and the rise of mass culture (including mass movements, mass literacy, mass production and mass media); secularisation, disenchantment and re-enchantment with the world. The following three mottos by three modern thinkers nicely capture the spirit of the modern time: 'Have courage to use your own intellect!' (Kant); 'All that was solid melted into air' (Marx); 'Human, all too human' (Nietzsche).

¹¹ Karl Popper, *ibid.*, 255-351.

¹² *Ibid.* 259-260.

¹³ Postmodernism is a broad church and comprises many views developed by writers from different fields. However, despite differences in style and subject-matter, a core of common themes can be identified in the works of almost all postmodern writers. The list includes belief in the relativity of truth, context-dependency of the criteria for assessing the validity of claims, the subjectivity of values, the universal validity of the claim to knowledge, and the social-constructedness of reality. For a critical reader of postmodernism see Peter Brook, *Modernism/Postmodernism* (London & New York: Longman, 1992); for a critique of postmodern approaches see David Miller, *Out of Error: Further Essays on Critical Rationalism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

¹⁴ Critical rationalism is a philosophical school of thought introduced by Karl Popper in the twentieth century and further developed by his students. It is a realist school which maintains, among other things, that all knowledge is conjectural, and yet it is not impossible to get closer to the truth about reality by means of correcting our past mistakes. It also emphasises the objective nature of knowledge and truth, the importance of subjecting all views to critical assessment for the sake of exposing their shortcomings, and the objectivity of values. It takes an anti-justificationist and anti-foundationist approach towards epistemic issues. For a thorough treatment of some of the main themes of critical rationalism see Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations* (London: Routledge, 1963); *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach* (Oxford:

Clarendon Press, 1979); David Miller, *Critical Rationalism: A Restatement and Defence* (Chicago Open Court, 1994); and David Miller *Out of Error*.

¹⁵ Otfried Höffe, *Aristotle*, trans. C. Salazar (Albany: State University of New York, 2003), 176.

¹⁶ Fred Miller, *Nature, Justice, and Rights in Aristotle's Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

¹⁷ Aristotle, *The Ethics of Aristotle: the Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. J. Thomson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

¹⁸ For a more comprehensive discussion of the doctrine of the 'mean', see G.E.R. Lloyd, *Aristotle: The Growth and Structure of His Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 217-223.

¹⁹ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. L. Brown, tr. D. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 90.

²⁰ G.E.R. Lloyd, *Aristotle*, 517.

²¹ Some post-modern writers have pointed out that post-modernism is, in one sense, a return to the pre-modern era. See, for instance, Ihab Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987).

²² Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, Ch. 11 ('The Aristotelian Roots Of Hegelianism').

²³ See, for example, Majid Khadduri, *The Islamic Conception of Justice* (Baltimore & London, John Hopkins University Press, 1984); 'Ali Akbar 'Alikhani, "Idalat az Didgah-i Imam 'Ali" (PhD thesis, Imam Sadiq University, Tehran, 1996). I am indebted to Dr 'Alikhani for providing me with a copy of his thesis. I have benefitted from this thesis in developing some sections of the present paper.

²⁴ 'Alikhani, "Idalat az Didgah-i Imam 'Ali'.

²⁵ For development of theoretical discussions on justice, see Serge-Christophe Kolm, *Modern Theories of Justice* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002); Brian Barry, *Theories of Justice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Stewart Jay, *Theories of Justice* (Seattle: University of Washington School of Law, 1989).

²⁶ Strictly speaking, John Rawls cannot be regarded as a thoroughgoing critical rationalist. However, there is a great deal of affinity between his views and the views of a philosopher like Karl Popper to qualify the former as a fellow critical rationalist. On this point see, Alan Boyer, 'Is an Open Society a Just Society? Popper and Rawls', in *Learning for Democracy*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2005), 7-27.

²⁷ For Popper's view on World 3 and his theory of three worlds see his *Objective Knowledge*.

²⁸ For a theoretical discussion concerning the objective world of values in the realm of moral values, see Ali Paya, 'System-ha-yi Baz, System-ha-yi Bastih, va Falsafih Akhlaq-i Muhtani bar Isalat-i Misdaq' (Open Systems, Closed Systems and Particularism in Ethics), in *Jashn namih-i Duktur Muhsin Jabanghiri* (Tehran: Hermes Publications, 2007).

²⁹ For a discussion on technologies, their main functions, and their role in responding to man's epistemic needs, see Ali Paya, *Fannavari, Farhang va Akhlaq* (Technology, Culture, and Ethics) (Tehran: Pazhuhishgah-i Farhang, Hunar va Irtibatat-i Islami, 2009); also Ali Paya, 'Critical Observations Concerning the Two Notions of "Islamic Science" and "Indigenous Science"', in *Hikmat va Falsafih*, vol. 3, nos. 2-3 (concurrent issues 10-11, Spring 2008), 39-76.

³⁰ Alan Boyer, 'Is an Open Society a Just Society?'

³¹ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

³² In the conclusion of his comparison of the views of Popper and Rawls, Boyer writes: 'An open society is not necessarily a Rawlsian perfectly "just" one, but a Rawlsian just society would be necessarily an open society' (Boyer, 'Is an Open Society a Just Society?', 25). Boyer's point, due to its succinctness, can be misleading. The following explanation is aimed at making his point clearer. Where Boyer says that an open society is not necessarily a just society in a Rawlsian sense, he is referring to a very important difference between the Popperian and Rawlsian systems which needs to be examined. For Popper, an open society is a regulating principle, or an ideal type (in the Weberian sense); that is, it is an ideal model which societies should approach. In such a well-developed society, responsible citizens and rational institutions (whose functions are improved through critical evaluation) provide the best context for the realisation of justice. But from a Popperian point of view, the citizens' understanding of the concept of justice and its capacities, like their understanding of all other concepts and phenomena, are constantly evolving and as a result, particular instances of justice which are produced in line with people's understanding of justice also constantly evolve. In this context, the openness of the society means exactly that the society's capacities for developing new approaches towards justice are never depleted and since no preconceived/a priori scheme governs the development of these approaches (rejection of determinism); and since according to the critical rationalism inductivism (i.e., the recurrence of past events or past order of things) is untenable, agents possessing freedom and rationality continually try to gain a better and newer understanding of justice by means of learning through and from their past mistakes. Hence, in the Popperian open society, the Rawlsian model of justice will only be one of the models that will be at the service of the agents till it will be replaced by a better, more accurate and more comprehensive model. Therefore, a Popperian open society is not necessarily a Rawlsian perfectly 'just' society. But as Boyer has mentioned, the reverse of this is not correct: no just society, including the society in which Rawlsian justice is established, can be a closed (i.e. a non-open) society.

The Rawlsian model of justice, as Boyer has mentioned, is a static model despite all of its points of strength. In this model little attention has been paid to the unwanted negative consequences of institutions. The importance of critiques and the fact that individuals can always transcend themselves and achieve higher goals have not been duly developed in this model. Popper's keen insight in complementing Rawls's treatment of a 'life plan' clearly shows to what extent Popper's views can be utilised to enrich Rawls's ideas. That is why Boyer in his article has rightly stressed that 'Rawlsians should read Popper'. Ibid., 8.

³³ J. Rawls, *Collected Papers*, ed. S. Freeman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 191.

³⁴ Another collection of the Imam's sermons, letters, and maxims was compiled by 'Abd al-Wahid Tamimi Amidi (c. twelfth century CE/fifth century AH) under the title of *Ghurar al-Hikam wa Durar al-Kalim*.

³⁵ Karl Popper, 'How I see Philosophy', in *In Search of a Better World: Letters & Essays from 30 Years* (London, Routledge, 2000).

³⁶ I have used the following source for a number of cases discussed above: 'Ali Ansariyan, *al-Dalil 'ala Mawdu'at Nahj al-Balaghah* (Tehran: Intisharat-i Mufid, 1357 AH).

³⁷ *Nahj al-Balaghah*, letter 53.

³⁸ For a philosophical discussion on the phenomenon of modernity see Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1984); also see my paper 'Mulahizati Intiqadi dar barih Tajrubih Mudirniti dar Iran' (Critical Observations Concerning the Experience of Modernity in Iran), in *Falsafih va Hikmat*, no. 15 (Autumn, 2008), 63-90.

³⁹ The Kharijites (lit. 'those that seceded') were members of the earliest sect in Islam who were part of Imam 'Ali's army in his battle against Mu'awiyah, the governor of Damascus and a close relative of 'Uthman. They rebelled against 'Ali because 'Ali, under their serious threat of killing him, had to enter into peace negotiations with Mu'awiyah despite having the upper hand. The Kharijites were very strict in their adherence to a literal interpretation of the Qur'an. They would not tolerate any deviation from their strict and dogmatic understanding of the teachings of Islam and would punish those who, in their eyes, had gone astray with the death penalty.

⁴⁰ *Nahj al-Balaghah*, letter 47 ('usikum bi taqwa Allah...wa qawlan bil-haqq...wa kunna li al-zalim khasman wa li al-mazlum 'awnan').

⁴¹ Many writers have noted that 'human rights', though a modern invention or construct, is a notion whose general sentiment which can be traced back to many religious teachings. For example, the Qur'an clearly and explicitly states: 'O mankind, We have created you male and female, and appointed you races and tribes, that you may know one another. Surely the noblest among you in the sight of God is the most godfearing of you. God is All-knowing, All-aware.' (Qur'an 49:13, Arberry translation).

⁴² *Law la hudur al-hadir wa qiyam al-hujjah bi-wujud al-nasir, wa ma akhadha Allah ta'ala 'ala al-'ulama' alla yuqaru 'ala kizzatin zalim, wa la saghab-i mazlum, la-alqaytu hablaha 'ala gharibiha*. Translation from Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib, *Peak of Eloquence, Nahjul Balagha*, ed. Yasin T. Al-Jibouri (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 2009), 316 (quoted with slight modification to the translation).

⁴³ For critiques of the views of constructivists, relativists, and post-modern writers from the standpoint of critical rationalism, see: Popper, *Open Society*; Ali Paya, *Falsafih Tablili va Tablil-i Falsafi: Masa'il, Chishmandaz-ha va Karburd-ha* (Tehran, Tarh-i Naw, 1392 AH (solar)); Paul Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006). For the relationship between epistemic relativism and violence, see my *Dialogue in the Real World* (Tehran: Tarh-i Naw, 1381 AH (solar)); Karl Popper, *The Myth of the Framework* (London: Routledge, 1994).

⁴⁴ See Murtada Mutahhari, *Divine Justice*, trans. S. Abidi et al. (Qum: International Center for Islamic Studies, 2004); Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

⁴⁵ Karl Popper, *The Myth of the Framework*.

⁴⁶ Ayatollah Mutahhari in his *Divine Justice* extensively discusses the history of the discussions concerning justice in the Islamic culture. According to him the theories of Shi'a scholars on justice, inspired by the views of the Shi'a Imams, became much more refined and accurate in comparison to the views of the other Muslim scholars: Shi'a philosophers came to regard justice as an objective concept.

⁴⁷ Muhammad 'Abduh (ed.), *Nahj al-Balaghah* (Beirut: al-Dar al-Islamiyyah, 1992), 605 (saying no. 431).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ *Nahj al-Balaghah*, tr. J. Shahidi (Tehran: Intisharat-i 'Ilmi va Farhangi, 1992), 16 (sermon 15).

⁵⁰ J. Rawls, *Collected Papers*, Ch. 18.

⁵¹ See Popper, *Open Society And Its Enemies; Objective Knowledge; The Myth of the Framework*.

⁵² *Nahj al-Balaghah*, trans. J. Shahidi, 399.

⁵³ Virtue ethics is concerned with moral characters and traits. Its main thesis is that moral agents can make better informed, rightful moral decisions and better behave in accordance with the norms of morally good conduct through acquiring virtuous traits. For a general introduction to virtue ethics see Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁵⁴ *Nahj al-Balaghah*, trans. J. Shahidi, 265 (saying no. 232). There are numerous other occasions in the Imam's life in which he set high standards of probity with regards to dealing with what belongs to the people and the public domain. The following cases are just two examples of such an attitude. On one occasion when Imam was auditing the *bayt al-mal* in the middle of the night and a companion entered his chamber and asked him to advise him on a personal matter, the Imam immediately put out the lamp burning with oil paid for from the treasury and lit a lamp which had oil that he had purchased by himself. (Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar* XL (Beirut: Dar Ihya' Turath al-'Arabi, 1403 AH, 136) On another occasion, his blind brother 'Aqil asked him to give him an extra amount from the treasury which was not due to him. In response, the Imam brought a very hot iron rod close to 'Aqil's hand and asked him to touch it. 'Aqil complained that the Imam had treated him unkindly. The Imam replied, 'You could not tolerate the pain caused by a man-made flame and yet you expect me to tolerate the fire of Hell' (*Nahj al-Balaghah*, sermon no. 215).

⁵⁵ *Nahj al-Balaghah*, trans. J. Shahidi, 316.

⁵⁶ 'By God if I see that this [wealth] has been included as part of dowry of your wives, or for purchase of women slaves, I will reclaim it [for the Muslim treasury] because there is plenitude in justice, and he who does not accept justice will find it harder to accept tyranny.' *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁷ In this context, some of the Imam's observations and proclamations which may seem not quite in tune with the above progressive attitude should be understood and interpreted. Imam 'Ali's approach to the entrenched and deep-rooted traditions in his society, just like the approach of the Prophet, and based on their understanding of the teachings of the Qur'an, was geared towards the policy of gradual improvement. It is clear from the way the Imam was trying to educate the people that he maintained that in the light of better understanding the true spirit of the Islamic teachings, people would be better prepared to get rid of unjust traditions, practices, customs, and institutions. The sad fact that the Imam's ideal and aspiration have not been fully actualised is not a refutation of the validity of his approach. It is rather a verdict against the policies of those who were/are supposed to promote and disseminate the Imam's project.

⁵⁸ For the views of some of the anti-realist philosophers and the notion of the 'incommensurability of paradigms' see Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: Verso, 1988).

The Establishment of the Office of the *Shurtah* during the Caliphate of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib

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ABSTRACT: Although some historical accounts refer to the existence of a *shurtah* before the caliphate of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, other accounts which refer to the *shurtah* during the caliphate of 'Ali show that the real formation of the *shurtah* as a governmental organization occurred during the caliphate of 'Ali. During this time, the military and to some extent the social and political characteristics of this organization were directly linked with 'Ali's political and ideological supporters; that is, originally, the *shurtah* was the same as the *shurtat al-khamis* or *shurtat al-jaysh*, which was comprised of an elite group of dedicated, faithful adherents of 'Ali. Subsequently, the composition of the *shurtah* changed, and it developed into a full-fledged governmental organization in the Islamic empire

KEYWORDS: *shurtah*, *shurtat al-khamis*, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, Iraq, Shi'a, governmental organization.

*Introduction*¹

In the golden age of Islamic civilization, various governmental organizations undertook the administration of the affairs of the society and the government. The *shurtah* was one of those organizations which even today exists with the same title and with almost the same responsibilities in Arab countries. During its evolution in the mediaeval period of Islamic civilization, this organization was performing duties in two main areas. First, the *shurtah* kept the peace inside urban areas and combated theft, looting, and aggression in general; in addition, it handled violations of Islamic teachings, such as drinking wine or assaults against the sanctity and doctrine of the religion.² Second, it helped the government and governmental organizations carry out their aims and was under the government's command; for instance, members of the *shurtah* used to deliver messages under the orders of caliphs or rulers. They also used to act as town criers to convey the will of the government in cities and to summon people or assist judges in handling convicts.³

Despite an almost ideal understanding of the organization of the *shurtah* in the middle and even early ages of Islamic civilization, there are still some ambiguities regarding the nature and formation of the *shurtah* in the early decades of the establishment of Islamic caliphate. When precisely was this organization founded? Was this organization called the *shurtah* when it was established, and why? And what was the function of this organization when it was founded? These questions will be addressed in this article.

The shurtah before the caliphate of 'Ali

When the Islamic caliphate was established, cities in the Hijaz began to develop, and new cities were established in Iraq and Egypt. The primary socio-political needs of these urban regions were maintaining order and establishing security, in addition to maintaining the sovereignty of the ruling powers. Most likely, some specific individuals were appointed to establish order and security in cities like Kufa, which did not have a homogenous population and consisted of various tribes and other groups, and which was often the focal point of tribal and political conflicts and skirmishes.

It cannot be decisively said that these people were referred to as the *shurtah* in that period. However, some accounts refer to the use of the

term *shurtah* during the caliphate of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (13-23 AH) and 'Uthman ibn al-'Affan (23-35 AH). For example, Ya'qubi (d. 284 AH) refers to 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas as the head of 'Umar's *shurtah* and also as his chamberlain (*hajib*).⁴ Tabari (d. 310 AH) narrates a poem from Abu Shajarah ibn 'Abd al-'Uza al-Sulami (known as Ibn al-Khansa') against 'Umar,⁵ and the word *shurtatibi* used in the poem is believed to refer to the *shurtah* of 'Umar.⁶ Elsewhere, Ibn Sa'd (d. 230 AH) states that in the year 32 AH, some individuals from the *shurtah* gave orders for the funeral ceremony of 'Abbas ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib, the Prophet's uncle, to be held.⁷ In another case, 'Abd Allah ibn Qunfudh al-Taymi was named as the head of *shurtah* of 'Uthman (*sahib shurat*).⁸ Even Khalifat ibn Khayyat (d. 240 AH) reiterates that for the first time, 'Uthman established such a position (*sabibu shurat*).⁹ There is another account from Tabari which states that in 33 AH, 'Abd al-Rahman Asadi, the head of the *shurtah* of Sa'id ibn al-'As, the governor of 'Uthman in Kufa, sided in favour of Sa'id in an argument between Sa'id and Malik ibn al-Harith al-Ashtar.¹⁰ Also Yaqut (d. 626 AH)¹¹ states that the district of Zurarah in the suburbs of Kufa was assigned to Zurarah ibn Yazid ibn 'Amr, and he considers him to have been the head of the *shurtah* of Sa'id ibn al-'As.

Although these accounts clearly refer to a *shurtah* before the caliphate of 'Ali, they do not present conclusive proof that the word *shurtah* was used during the caliphates of 'Umar or 'Uthman. First, in these accounts, *shurtah* is used as a noun in an *idafah* phrase (a genitive grammatical construction) – for instance, the *shurtah* of 'Umar, the *shurtah* of 'Uthman, and the *shurtah* of Sa'id ibn al-'As. *Shurtah* in these usages may simply refer to their personal guards or the guards of their ruling headquarters, such as the *dar al-imarah* belonging to Sa'id in Kufa, instead of an actual organization called a *shurtah*. Second, in Tabari's account of the poem of Ibn al-Khansa', the word *sh-r-t-h* may be read as a verb (*sharattubu* or *sharrattubu*) instead of as a noun (*shurtatibi*); the former would be more in agreement with the atmosphere of the poem and, ironically, would mean 'to lance the soul of 'Umar with the poet's poem'. Third, in the account by Ya'qubi, while Ibn 'Abbas is mentioned as the chamberlain and head of the *shurtah* of 'Umar, it is doubtful that the post of the chamberlain (*hajib*) existed during the caliphate of 'Umar.¹² It seems that the words *hajib* and *shurtah* were added anachronistically to the accounts of the first decades of the Islamic caliphate in the following centuries; not only was it common in Islamic hagiography to use later terminology to describe

the history of the preceding periods, but, additionally, it is not recorded elsewhere that Ibn ‘Abbas was the head of ‘Umar’s *shurtah* or his *hajib*.¹³ Finally, Yaqut’s account is exactly the same as that of Baladhuri (d. 279 AH);¹⁴ the only thing he adds is that Zurarah was in the *shurtah* of Sa‘id. Nevertheless, despite the question over terminology, it can be deduced that these individuals were carrying out the duties of the *shurtah* even if there was no organization called the *shurtah*, and this was sufficient for later historians to refer to them as a *shurtah*, as was common in their eras; this will be expanded on in the subsequent discussion.

The shurtah during the caliphate of ‘Ali (35-40 AH)

Shortly after becoming caliph, ‘Ali moved the capital of the Islamic state from the Hijaz to Iraq; hence, the accounts related to the *shurtah* in the period of his caliphate are more connected with that region, and in particular Basra and Kufa. These accounts are of different types and are not dated, so the best way to study them is to categorize them according to who they are about. For example, concerning the organization of the *shurtah* in Basra, there is one account about Hukaym (Hakim) ibn Jabalah in *Wafayat al-A‘yan* by Ibn Khallikan (d. 681 AH). As for the biography of Hukaym, Ibn Khallikan¹⁵ states that he was one of the companions of ‘Ali and ‘Uthman ibn Hanif Ansari, the ruler of Basra on behalf of ‘Ali, appointed by Ibn Hanif as the head of the *shurtah* of Basra. Hukaym kept this position until the opponents of ‘Ali (the *ashab al-jamal*) came to Basra, and Hukaym was killed in a battle against ‘Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr, one of the opponents’ commanders. In some older sources,¹⁶ there are some materials related to Hukaym which have some common points and differences with Ibn Khallikan’s biography on Hukaym. The common point is that Hukaym was one of the serious opponents of ‘Uthman and Bani Umayyah and was a faithful adherent of ‘Ali; the most important difference here is that only Ibn Khallikan refers to the *shurtah* of Basra and Hukaym’s connection with it.

Other sources about Hukaym and the battle of Jamal in Basra show Hukaym protecting Basra against the arrival of the opponents of ‘Ali and against their desire to capture the city. In these accounts, there is information about some military groups: Ibn Hanif’s bodyguards (*haras*), Ibn Hanif’s riders (*khayl*), and also a group of Sababajah and Zuts.¹⁷ These groups constantly accompanied Ibn Hanif, protecting the

seat of his government and his treasury; they were composed of Ibn Hanif's and Hukaym's military forces who protected the local government of Basra.¹⁸ It is likely that due to the political disputes and skirmishes which took place in cities like Basra after the murder of 'Uthman and 'Ali's coming to power, upon arrival in Basra, Ibn Hanif had appointed Hukaym as the head of these elite and special forces in order to protect the local government. This is probably why the later historians drew a parallel between Hukaym and *shurtah* commanders in their own age, such as the head of the *shurtah* in Basra. Therefore, like the abovementioned accounts, this account which speaks about the *shurtah* in Basra in the early days of the caliphate of 'Ali does not absolutely prove the existence of *shurtah* as a governmental organization which was actually called the *shurtah*.

Another individual connected with the *shurtah* of 'Ali is Abu Juhayfah Wahb ibn 'Abd Allah al-Suwa'i (d. 74 AH in Kufa) from the tribe of Bani Suwa'ah and who was known as Wahb al-Khayr.¹⁹ There is a tradition from 'Ali in *Fada'il al-Sahabah* (by Ahmad ibn Hanbal, d. 241 AH) in praise of the *shaykhayn* ('Umar and Abu Bakr) which says that Wahb was a member of the *shurtah* of 'Ali.²⁰ According to this tradition, it seems that, usually, when 'Ali was preaching from the pulpit, Wahb would stand at the foot of the pulpit. *Fada'il al-Sahabah* also contains other traditions with a similar content but with different chains of transmitters. All of these traditions and the first one were narrated through Wahb; however, as has been said, only the first one refers to Wahb as a *shurti*, or a member of the *shurtah*.²¹

The image presented by that tradition showing 'Ali on the pulpit with at least one personal bodyguard at its foot is reasonable. The phrase used here – *kana min shurat 'Ali* (he was one of the members of the *shurtah* of 'Ali) – is an old form of reference to the *shurtah*. This phraseology was used less in books attributed to the following centuries and changed over time; for instance, Dhahabi (d. 748 AH) says the same thing in his biography of Wahb in *al-Ibar*²² and *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'*,²³ but he describes him as 'the head of the *shurtah* of 'Ali' (*sabib shurtat 'Ali*), which, linguistically speaking, is a later form of expression describing the connection between Wahb and the *shurtah* of 'Ali, particularly in using *sabib* to mean 'head'.²⁴ Also Dhahabi is using an exaggerated style by introducing a simple *shurti* as the head of the *shurtah*.

Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani (d. 852 AH) also says that 'Ali had appointed Wahb as the head of the *shurtah* of Kufa.²⁵ This is the only account

which treats the *shurtab* in the age of the Rashidun caliphs (r. 11-41 AH) as being limited to a city. The allocation of the *shurtab* to a city in the mediaeval period of Islamic civilization or the evolution of the administrative organization of Islamic civilization was a common form in Islamic historiography. However, accepting it for the age of the Rashidun caliphs is a difficult issue and is another area where the historical horizon of the historiographer mixed in with the historical events of the age of the Rashidun caliphs. The last important point about Wahb is that he was mentioned as one of the close companions of 'Ali, in particular in the battle against his opponents.²⁶

Another person who was known as the head of the *shurtab* of 'Ali is Yazid ibn Qays ibn Tamam al-Hamdani al-Arhabi. Ibn Hajar 'Asqalani²⁷ is the only person that in his biography on al-Arhabi has claimed that he was appointed by 'Ali as the head of his *shurtab*. Elsewhere, he is described as one of the influential figures of Yemeni Arabs and a tough opponent of 'Uthman and Sa'id ibn al-'As. In the conflict between 'Ali and Mu'awiyah, he is described as a dedicated companion and advisor of 'Ali and a senior commander of his army.²⁸

Additionally, someone by the name of Yazid al-Rab'i al-Wasiti is mentioned as the head of the *shurtab* of 'Ali. Unfortunately, there is little information available about him, and only Dhahabi²⁹ says that he converted into Islam through 'Ali and later on was appointed by him as the head of the *shurtab*.

Other accounts have mentioned Malik ibn Habib al-Yarbu'i as the head of the *shurtab* of 'Ali. Without referring to the connection between Malik and the *shurtab*, Baladhuri states that Malik was one of the *qurra'* (Qur'anic reciters) of Kufa; his full name was Malik ibn Habib ibn Khirash; and he was from the tribe of Bani Tha'labah ibn al-Yarbu'.³⁰ Ibn Khayyat lists Malik al-Yarbu'i and Ma'qil ibn Qays al-Riyahi as the heads of the *shurtab* of 'Ali, but he does not specify whether they were administering the *shurtab* together, or one after another.³¹ In some accounts from other sources – in particular about the Battle of Siffin – these two people are associated with each other as senior commanders of 'Ali's army.³² *Waq'at al-Siffin* by Nasr ibn Muzahim (d. 212 AH) is another old source which mentions the name of Malik al-Yarbu'i several times with the title *sahib al-shurtab*.³³ Though Nasr's use of this term should be considered as one of the oldest examples of the use of this term in Islamic sources, this still seems to be an application of later, anachronistic terminology to describe the early decades of the Islamic caliphate; this view is supported by the use of the word *sahib* in

combination with *shurtab* here.³⁴ In any case, the accounts of Nasr³⁵ on Yarbu'i which had been narrated later by Ibn Abi al-Hadid (d. 655 AH)³⁶ also present Yarbu'i as one of the companions of 'Ali and one of the senior commanders of his army who, under the command of 'Ali, carried out duties such as gathering the armies of Iraq in al-Nukhaylah to move towards Siffin.³⁷

In addition to this military role, it is mentioned in one place that when 'Ali was departing from al-Nukhaylah towards the battle against Mu'awiyah, he appointed Yarbu'i in al-Nukhaylah to recruit those who had refused to join the army, and to behead them if they disobeyed. Even Nasr speaks about the murder of an individual by Yarbu'i for the crime of not joining the army in Iraq and the upheaval which took place by his kinsfolk after his murder.³⁸ However, another account by Nasr states that Yarbu'i made 'Ali aware of the correspondence of a person suspected of espionage with Mu'awiyah, who later on was sent to exile in al-Ruha.³⁹ In total, from the above reports, it can be concluded that Yarbu'i, in addition to military responsibilities on the battlefield, had the responsibility of maintaining security off the battlefield, which of course would be part of the disciplinary duties of the *shurtab*.

As for the second person in the account from Ibn Khayyat – that is, Ma'qil ibn Qays al-Riyahi – some of the oldest sources mention him as the head of *shurtab* of 'Ali. Ma'qil, like Malik, was from the tribe of Bani al-Yarbu'. The account of Ibn Khayyat is confirmed by Ya'qubi who mentions that Ma'qil was the head of the *shurtab* of 'Ali (*'ala shuratibi Ma'qil*).⁴⁰ In addition to Ya'qubi, Ibn 'Asakir⁴¹ (d. 571 AH) and Ibn Hajar⁴² both narrate from the famous historian Haytham ibn 'Adi al-Ta'i (d. 207 or 209 AH) that Ma'qil was the head of the *shurtab* of 'Ali (*sahib shurtat 'Ali*). As for the character of Ma'qil, the sources describe him as an influential figure among the Arabs of Kufa and as one of the sincere, firm companions and eminent advisors of 'Ali. Without doubt, he was one of the senior commanders of 'Ali's army⁴³ since, before the departure of the army of Iraq to Siffin, 'Ali dispatched him there with three thousand forces.⁴⁴ Also, under the command of 'Ali, Ma'qil suppressed the political and military revolts of al-Kharit ibn Rashid al-Naji (around Ahwaz and Fars) and Hilal ibn 'Alqamah (in Masabadhan).⁴⁵ The other important mission of Ma'qil during the caliphate of 'Ali was to leave Kufa for the Hijaz to prevent the armies of Mu'awiyah from controlling the Hijaz and the hajj.⁴⁶

In addition, Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani mentions Sa'id ibn Sariyyat ibn Murrah from Bani Ghadirat ibn Hubshiyah as the head of *shurtab* of

‘Ali.⁴⁷ Tha‘labah ibn Yazid Himmani from the clan of the tribe of Bani Himman of Bani Tamim is another person who is mentioned by Ibn Jawzi (d. 597 AH)⁴⁸ and Dhahabi⁴⁹ as the commander of the *shurtah* of ‘Ali. Unfortunately, there is not much recorded about these individuals.

Shurtah, shurtat al-khamis, or shurtat al-jaysh?

Along with these accounts about the *shurtah* during the caliphate of ‘Ali, there are other accounts which are also noteworthy. Most of these remaining accounts are about two individuals: al-Asbagh ibn Nabatah and Qays ibn Sa‘d ibn ‘Ubadah Khazraji. The most relevant point here about these two people is a contradiction concerning their relation with the three organizations of the *shurtah*, *shurtat al-khamis* and *shurtat al-jaysh*. Some accounts connect Asbagh with the *shurtat al-khamis*. For example, Ibn Khayyat,⁵⁰ the oldest source which distinguishes the *shurtah* from the *shurtat al-khamis*, differentiates the two by stating that Asbagh was the head of the *shurtat al-khamis* while Malik al-Yarbu‘i and Ma‘qil al-Riyahi were the heads of the *shurtah* of ‘Ali. In addition to Ibn Khayyat, Nasr ibn Muzahim (d. 212 AH) also describes Asbagh as the head of the *shurtat al-khamis*.⁵¹ While Shi‘a traditionalists such as al-Tusi (d. 460 AH)⁵² and al-Mufid (d. 413 AH)⁵³ describe Asbagh only as one of the members of the *shurtat al-khamis* and do not refer to his position as the head of it, in contrast, Ibn Sa‘d in a tradition describes Asbagh as a Shi‘a and as the head of the *shurtah* of ‘Ali (*sahib shurtat ‘Ali*).⁵⁴ The other notable point about Asbagh is his closeness to ‘Ali as one of his firm companions and his effective presence in the battles during his caliphate, in particular the Battle of Siffin.⁵⁵

There are more accounts about Qays than Asbagh. However, at the same time, these accounts are more perplexing and contradictory. There is an account in *al-Gharat* by al-Thaqafi al-Kufi (d. 283 AH),⁵⁶ also related by Ibn Athir (d. 630 AH),⁵⁷ which includes a commandment by ‘Ali addressed to Qays on his arrival to Kufa and appointment as the head of *shurtah* after his disposal from the government of Egypt. At the same time, another account in Thaqafi’s work introduces Qays as one of the commanders of the *shurtat al-khamis* during the caliphate of ‘Ali.⁵⁸ Ibn Sa‘d also mentions Qays as the commander of the *shurtat al-khamis* during the caliphate of ‘Ali.⁵⁹ In contrast, Tabari presents Qays as the commander of the *shurtat al-khamis* at the end of the short period of caliphate of Hasan,⁶⁰ when, after the self-made peace of ‘Ubayd Allah ibn ‘Abbas (the commander of Hasan’s army) with Mu‘awiyah – which

was a form of treason to the Iraqi army – Qays was chosen as commander by the *shurtat al-khamis* in the subsequent leadership vacuum. In addition, Ibn 'Asakir (d. 571 AH) states that 'Ali summoned Qays to Kufa before himself after his disposal from governing Egypt and appointed him as the head of the vanguard of Iraq's army which was named the *shurtat al-khamis*.⁶¹ Another account in Ibn 'Asakir's work says that when Hasan became caliph, in order to start a military confrontation against Mu'awiyah, he appointed Qays as the commander of part of the army of Iraq, which numbered twelve thousand soldiers and were called the *shurtat al-khamis*.⁶² Though these accounts about Qays have some contradictions, they show that Qays – like the other individuals mentioned – was one of the eminent advisors and companions of 'Ali and a serious opponent of Mu'awiyah. Moreover, in most of the political clashes during the caliphate of 'Ali which were mainly between two parties of 'Ali and 'Uthman (and Bani Umayyah), Qays fully believed in the lawfulness and rightfulness of the policies of 'Ali and was assisting him on the basis of this belief.⁶³ Interestingly, a number of Sunni traditions express tremendous admiration for Qays and consider his position before the Prophet to have been equal in status to that of the *sahib al-shurtah* before an *amir*.⁶⁴ However, biographical works about the Prophet do not describe Qays as taking an active role during the Prophet's lifetime. Therefore, it seems that these traditions were fabricated due to the special position of Qays during the caliphate of 'Ali and the caliphate of Hasan.

As will be shown, the ambiguity regarding the governmental position of Asbagh and Qays and their relation with *shurtah* and *shurtat al-khamis* was largely due to the lack of a clear understanding of the *shurtah* versus the *shurtat al-khamis*. Now it is time to study the accounts about the *shurtat al-khamis* in order to present a clear analysis of and conclusion regarding this matter. In the early sources, there are two types of information on *shurtat al-khamis*. The first type includes definitions of the *shurtat al-khamis* and the identity of this group or organization. The second type includes accounts of political and social events during the caliphate of 'Ali with references to the presence of members of the *shurtat al-khamis* and their roles in those incidents.

In the first type, in an attempt to define *shurtat al-khamis*, historians make a connection between an infinitive of the root of *sh-r-t* meaning 'to make a pledge or a promise' with the first part of the term *shurtat al-khamis* and consider *shurtat al-khamis* to have been derived from that root. It seems that the oldest example of this definition was presented by

Ibn Nadim (d. 385 AH) who offers a definition of ‘Shi’a’ during the time of the caliphate of ‘Ali.⁶⁵ He also categorises the Shi’a of that age and, in this classification, identifies *shurtat al-khamis* as a specific group of Shi’a who made an oath to ‘Ali to assist him, and to whom ‘Ali had given a promise of paradise in exchange for their loyalty. In the other definition, al-Mufid narrates a tradition with a similar content to the definition of Ibn Nadim – that is, regarding an oath between ‘Ali and his companions.⁶⁶ However, here, the oath is not only between ‘Ali and the members of the *shurtat al-khamis*; instead, it is a promise between ‘Ali and all his companions. In contrast, the previous and subsequent traditions in the text speak about the *shurtat al-khamis*, and so it is understood that the *shurtat al-khamis* were also part of those companions. The other definition of *shurtat al-khamis* is originally given in a tradition narrated by Asbagh in *Ikhtiyar Ma’rifat al-Rijal* of Tusi in which Asbagh says the name *shurtat al-khamis* came from an oath between its members and ‘Ali.⁶⁷ The tradition says that the individuals of the *shurtat al-khamis* had promised to keep their loyalty towards ‘Ali and to sacrifice their lives if necessary, and that ‘Ali had promised them victory. In addition, Ibn ‘Asakir believes that the *shurtat al-khamis* were individuals from the army of Iraq who had made a vow with each other to continue the conflict against Mu’awiyah until they gave up their lives.⁶⁸

As is clear, all these definitions neglect to explain the second part of the phrase *shurtat al-khamis* – namely, *al-khamis*; this suggests that these definitions are incorrect. As was seen, there are some similarities among these four definitions. In particular, all of them speak of an oath. However, they also have significant differences, such as disputes about the nature of the *shurtat al-khamis*, the precise content of ‘Ali’s promise, the reason why they made the oath, and who exactly was involved. Without doubt, such differences can be another serious obstacle in accepting these definitions as acceptable definitions of *shurtat al-khamis*. However, it is likely that these accounts have a real historical origin in a vow between ‘Ali and at least one group of his faithful companions, or between his companions, in the tough conditions of encountering powerful opponents. For even Nasr ibn Muzahim – without referring to the *shurtat al-khamis*, introduces Asbagh as one of the individuals who had made a serious oath to assist ‘Ali.⁶⁹ In addition, we learn from the tradition of Mufid that some of the *shurtat al-khamis* participated in such a vow. It seems that this very issue – that is, the inclusion of the *shurtat al-khamis* in this vow – gave Muslim historiographers a good excuse to refer to the similarities of these words in their effort to

present a definition of *shurtat al-khamis*, although they ended up being misleading.

Nonetheless, such definitions are revealing with regards to mediaeval Muslim historiography. Islamic traditionalists and historians chronicled the initial decades of Islam by collecting traditions and accounts from that time and obsessively maintaining and narrating them without any criticism or historical contextualization. Therefore, they were perplexed when they came across the term *shurtat al-khamis* in old traditions and accounts. Since there was almost no historical criticism to help to understand the real meaning of this term, they resorted to presenting definitions through their own methods and interpretations. In any case, while historical sources failed to present a clear and acceptable definition of *shurtat al-khamis*, early Arabic dictionaries and other historical evidence can be used to find another definition for it. The definition which is derived from them is the most reliable; apart from the fact that, linguistically, it makes sense, it resolves the disputes about the *shurtat al-khamis*, *shurtat al-jaysh*, and *shurtah* in the historical sources.

Clearly, the term *shurtat al-khamis* is an *idafah* (genitive construction) composed of *shurtah* and *al-khamis*. To understand the meaning of this term, it is better to study the semantic meanings of these two words separately. According *al-'Ayn* by Farahidi (d. 175 AH),⁷⁰ the oldest extant dictionary, the root word *sharata* has two meanings: 'making a contract or a promise' and 'the beginning of everything or every phenomenon'. Most likely, the first meaning is the one used in the above-mentioned definitions of the term of *shurtat al-khamis*. However, given the critiques (expressed above) of the use of this meaning in the phrase *shurtat al-khamis*, it is better to apply its second meaning. Regarding '*al-khamis*', Farahidi and Jawhari (d. 393 AH) in *al-Sihah* say it means '*al-jaysh*' ('the army') because the army is divided into five parts: the vanguard, the right wing, the left wing, the 'stem' (*saqah*), and the 'heart' (*qalb*); therefore, it was called *al-khamis* or 'the five parts'.⁷¹ So, if we consider this phrase an *idafah* of these two words with these two meanings, it would literally mean 'the vanguard of the army'. That is to say, out of the five mentioned parts in the army, its vanguard was called the *shurtat al-khamis*.

This definition of *shurtat al-khamis* is both linguistically and historically acceptable. Historical accounts confirm it in two ways. First, historical accounts refer to the military nature of the *shurtat al-khamis* by describing it as part of the Iraqi army or even directly referring to it as the vanguard of the Iraqi army. One of these accounts

is from Tusi who holds that the *shurtat al-khamis* was a group of five to six thousands soldiers of 'Ali's army.⁷² In other accounts, Qays, who was one of the most outstanding commanders of 'Ali's army and who took part effectively in important battles such as Siffin,⁷³ is described as the head of the *shurtat al-khamis* in the army of 'Ali.⁷⁴ In general, the *shurtat al-khamis* had a very active role in the accounts of the battles of 'Ali.⁷⁵ As mentioned earlier, Tabari states that Qays, in the absence of a commander, was appointed as the commander by the *shurtat al-khamis* which was a determining part of the army.⁷⁶ In addition, the two accounts by Ibn 'Asakir which were mentioned earlier provide notable details. According to the first account, 'Ali appointed Qays as the commander of 'the vanguard of the Iraqi army or the *shurtat al-khamis*'.⁷⁷ According to the second one, Hasan appointed Qays as the 'vanguard of the Iraqi army or the *shurtat al-khamis*' which had twelve thousand members.⁷⁸

Considering the *shurtat al-khamis* as the vanguard of the army will also help us to understand the meaning of the term *shurtat al-jaysh* which is found in some other accounts concerning the caliphate of 'Ali and Hasan. Now, it is obvious that, despite a small difference, the two terms *shurtat al-khamis* and *shurtat al-jaysh* in practice mean the same thing and refer to the same part of the Iraqi army. The first account about *shurtat al-jaysh* is narrated by Ibn Jawzi⁷⁹ who considers Qays to be the head of an important division of the army of Iraq which was called *shurtat al-jaysh*. Ibn 'Asakir also gives the same information about Qays and *shurtat al-khamis*;⁸⁰ his account is significant because it is similar to another account in the same work in which the term *shurtat al-khamis* has been used instead of the term *shurtat al-jaysh*.⁸¹ In addition to these, there is another account by Ibn Hajar which describes the *shurtat al-jaysh* of Iraq as the vanguard of the army of Hasan which had been under the command of Qays.⁸²

After clarifying the nature of the *shurtat al-jaysh*, a study of the *shurtat al-khamis* will also clarify the nature of the *shurtab*. First, we will study some accounts which show that, in addition to military duties, the *shurtat al-khamis* used to have some disciplinary functions. Our information in this field is very limited; however, the information available has a high level of authenticity. There are some traditions regarding this in the early Shi'a sources; for instance:

One day in Kufa, 'Ali came into [the bazaar] along with some members of the *shurtat al-khamis* who were accompanying

him, and then he prohibited sellers from selling some goods such as [the meat of] eels which was unlawful in his view.⁸³

According to some other traditions, in Kufa, 'Ali commanded Qanbar, his famous servant, to call some individuals of *shurtat al-khamis* to deal with the crimes of those who had committed actions against the shariah. Then, each member of the *shurtat al-khamis* captured one of the offenders and tied him to a column so that 'Ali could judge him.⁸⁴ Another tradition says that, in a case of dealing with offenders in an action against the divine law in Kufa, 'Ali summoned some individuals of the *shurtat al-khamis* to capture the offenders and bring them to the suburb of Kufa for judgment and punishment.⁸⁵ In addition, Thaqafi Kufi narrates an account which says that, after some residential regions of Sawad were looted, the *shurtat al-khamis*, led by Qays, were dispatched to that region at 'Ali's command, defeated the looters, and made them flee to the Syrian borderlands.⁸⁶

These traditions, including Thaqafi's account, clearly demonstrate some of the disciplinary functions of the *shurtat al-khamis*, including its duties in urban environments and off the battlefield. But, obviously, these duties were exactly the duties of the *shurtah*. If we claim that a separate organization called the *shurtah* had been founded during the caliphate of 'Ali or even before him, then it would be necessary to ask why this organization had given its duties to another organization; namely, the *shurtat al-khamis*. This problem can only be resolved by determining that the *shurtah*, *shurtat al-khamis*,⁸⁷ and (of course) the *shurtat al-jaysh* were the same thing. Considering these three to have been one and the same not only solves this problem but also solves other problems which arise during a study of the *shurtah* and the *shurtat al-khamis* during the caliphate of 'Ali, especially when considering that *shurtat* was used as an abbreviation for *shurtat al-khamis* for ease of speech in those days.

Taking each of the three terms to mean the same thing brings other things to light. As has been mentioned, historical sources speak primarily about the military aspect of the *shurtah*. Figures such as Arhabi, Yarbu'i, Ma'qil, and most importantly, Asbagh and Qays, are simultaneously described as heads of the *shurtah* of 'Ali and as commanders of the Iraqi army. Additionally, in the accounts related to the battles of caliphates of 'Ali and Hasan, these figures have a frequent, active, and determining presence. Even regarding Asbagh and Qays, the sources declare that they were heads of the *shurtah*,

shurtat al-khamis, and the *shurtat al-jaysh*, as well as being commanders of the army.

In addition to the above, the old Arabic dictionaries support the view that all three terms refer to the same thing. The strongest evidence is found in *Lisan al-‘Arab* by Ibn Manzur (d. 711 AH),⁸⁸ where, in the definition of *shurtah*, he uses the term *shurtat al-khamis* and continues by saying that ‘the *shurtah* forces are the vanguard of the army or the first group of army which starts the war’. Moreover, Farahidi refers to the *shurtah* not only as a part of army but as its elite forces.⁸⁹

Additionally, the identicalness of the *shurtah* and *shurtat al-khamis* is also supported by the role of the Shi‘a and ‘Ali’s companions in both of them. As we know, in different sources and, in particular, in the written heritage of the Shi‘a, the *shurtat al-khamis* is described as the most important force of ‘Ali, and its members are considered to be the most outstanding of his Shi‘a.⁹⁰ However, based on historical accounts, the presence and active role of the close companions of ‘Ali and individuals with an obvious inclination towards Shi‘ism is found even more in the accounts related to the *shurtah* than specifically the *shurtat al-khamis*. As it was seen, all individuals connected with *shurtah* of ‘Ali – in particular, figures such as Wahb al-Khayr, Arhabi, Yarbu‘i, Ma‘qil, and also Asbagh and Qays – were prominent companions of ‘Ali and believed in his right and truthfulness. These individuals’ inclination towards Shi‘ism was so notable that some of the Sunni traditionalists considered them to be weak and unreliable narrators of traditions, just as Ibn Sa‘d had considered the traditions narrated by Asbagh to be weak,⁹¹ and the traditions narrated by Tha‘labah ibn Yazid were rejected by the Sunnis.⁹²

Now that the connection between the vanguard of Iraq’s army, the *shurtah*, the *shurtat al-khamis*, and the *shurtat al-jaysh* has been established, there remains the question of the number of its members. As seen above, sources differ on this matter. The smallest number given is three thousand under the command of Ma‘qil who was dispatched to that front before the Battle of Siffin began. Elsewhere, in Shi‘a traditions, this force is identified with the companions of ‘Ali who are said to number five to six thousand.⁹³ However, as was seen, some accounts said they numbered twelve thousand under the commander of Qays. And, Ibn ‘Asakir holds that they were forty thousand.⁹⁴

While these figures may be exaggerated, there is no doubt that the *shurtat al-khamis* was a significant part of the army. However, it seems that their number was not fixed and changed in accordance with

conditions. For instance, during the caliphate of Hasan and under the commandship of Qays, when preparing for the war against Mu'awiyah, it totalled twelve thousand members; but when it was dispatched towards the front before the Battle of Siffin and under the commandship of Ma'qil, it was comprised of three thousand members. The lack of a fixed number suggests that this force – despite definitions which say the members of the *shurtab* wore special badges and uniforms⁹⁵ – did not have special badges or uniforms during the time of the caliphate of 'Ali, because having a special uniform would suggest that they had a fixed number. The adoption of a special uniform occurred later after the evolution of the *shurtab*, at the earliest during the Umayyad period and definitely during the Abbasid period, but not during the caliphate of 'Ali.

Conclusion

While some historical accounts refer to a *shurtab* during the caliphate of 'Umar and the caliphate of 'Uthman and describe a force with duties similar to those of the *shurtab* in those days, the application of the term of *shurtab* with regards to such a force during that time is not historically correct. However, despite doubt about the existence of a governmental organization called the *shurtab* before the caliphate of 'Ali, historical evidence shows that an organization of a military, disciplinary and governmental nature which was called the *shurtat al-khamis* or *shurtat al-jaysh* existed during the caliphate of 'Ali. These expressions were abbreviated as *shurtab*, and this organization was the progenitor of the later governmental organization of the *shurtab* in Islamic civilization. Therefore, the accounts in which the terms *shurtat al-khamis* or *shurtat al-jaysh* are used are the most authentic accounts which refer to the existence of an organization called the *shurtab* during the caliphate of 'Ali; however, other accounts which refer to the *shurtab* during the caliphate of 'Ali also provide information on the same organization.

It can be deduced that from the period of the caliphate of 'Ali, the shortened expression *shurtab* was used instead of *shurtat al-khamis* or *shurtat al-jaysh* for ease of speaking. The use of *shurtab* instead of *shurtat al-khamis* or *shurtat al-jaysh* became more common after the caliphate of 'Ali. Eventually, this group was only referred to as the *shurtab*, and this led to a misunderstanding about the early meaning of *shurtab* in the following centuries. In fact, during the caliphate of 'Ali, the *shurtab* –

or, more precisely, the *shurtat al-khamis* – was the vanguard of his army, or the army of Iraq. Thus, when the need arose to dispatch forces to the battlefield or to serve the needs of the government, the *shurtat al-khamis* was the force that was most prepared to assist.

While the *shurtaḥ* during the caliphate of ‘Ali had a number of specific features, the most important was its members’ belief in the rightful position of ‘Ali. It is likely that this relationship between the members of the *shurtaḥ* and their leader shaped the later emphasis among Muslims on the necessity of a sincere relationship between the *sahib al-shurtaḥ* and the *amir*.⁹⁶ The special relationship between ‘Ali and his companions in the *shurtat al-khamis*, along with the special conditions of his caliphate, such as the battles against various opponents, the establishment of the centre of his caliphate in Iraq, and the complexity of administering the new Islamic cities in that region, as well as the deep-rooted, ancient traditions there, made ‘Ali rely on the assistance of these faithful forces in order to manage the caliphate in accordance with the Islamic tradition. This made the *shurtat al-khamis* into a very active force both in the city and on the battlefield and helped it become fixed in the evolving administrative organization of the Islamic caliphate.

The formation of the *shurtaḥ* and its canonization in the administrative organization of the caliphate of ‘Ali resulted in the *shurtaḥ* becoming a permanent fixture in the administrative organization of the Islamic caliphate even after the establishment of the Umayyad caliphate and the transfer of the centre of caliphate from Iraq to Syria. After the advent of the Umayyad caliphate, the distinguishing features of the *shurtat al-khamis* changed; for instance, it was no longer limited to loyal supporters of ‘Ali, nor was it shaped by the special circumstances that ‘Ali faced during his caliphate. During the Umayyad caliphate, the simplicity of the earlier caliphates was lost and, in the complex administration that followed, a new *shurtaḥ* organization evolved from the earlier *shurtat al-khamis* which existed during the time of ‘Ali. The difference between the two *shurtas* was such that most Muslim authors in the following decades and centuries could not imagine any historical link between the *shurtaḥ* and the *shurtat al-khamis*. Therefore, they began to present different definitions of the *shurtaḥ* and *shurtat al-khamis* and tried to describe them as different organizations. However, it has been shown here that this was not truly the case, and in fact the *shurtaḥ* and the *shurtat al-khamis* were one and the same.

Table of Key Transliterated Terms

Term Appearing in Text	Arabic/Persian	Term With Diacritics
Shurtah	شرطة	Shurṭah
Sahib al-shurtah	صاحب الشرطة	Ṣāḥib al-shurṭah
Sahib shurat	صاحب شُرط	Ṣāḥib shuraṭ
Shurtat al-khamis	شرطة الخميس	Shurṭat al-khamīs
Shurtat al-jaysh	شرطة الجيش	Shurṭat al-jaysh
Shurti	شُرطي	Shurṭī
Sharata	شُرط	Sharāṭa
Sharattuhu	شُرطتُه	Sharāṭtuhu
Kana min shurat 'Ali	كان من شُرط علي	Kāna min shuraṭ 'Alī
Hajib	حاجب	Ḥājib

Notes

¹ This research was supported in part by grant number 387007-1391 from the Imam Khomeini International University.

² See 'Abd Allah ibn Muhammad ibn al-Sayyid al-Batlayusi (d. 521 AH), *Iqtidab: Sharh Adab al-Katib* I, ed. M. Saqa and H. 'Abd al-Majid (Cairo: al-Hay'at al-Misriyyah al-'Ammah, 1981), 159.

³ Ibid. Also, for samples of announcing the government's orders in Abbasid Baghdad see 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Ali ibn al-Jawzi (d. 597 AH), *al-Muntazam* V, ed. Muhammad 'Ata and Mustafa 'Ata (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1412 AH), 171 (in the section on permitting fireworks and feasting on Nawruz); VI, 276 (in the section on announcing the prohibition on the supporters of Barbahari gathering during the time of their unrest).

⁴ Ahmad ibn Wadih Ya'qubi (d. 292 AH), *Tarikh* II (Beirut: Dar Sadir, c. 2005), 159. A *hajib* was a courtier or a military official who managed a caliph's or sultan's meetings with officials and people.

⁵ Muhammad ibn Jarir Tabari (d. 310 AH), *Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk* II (Beirut, 1407 AH), 267. The poem reads as follows:

Danna 'alayna Abu Hafṣ bi-na'ilibi
Wa kullu mukhtabitin yawman lahu waraḥu
Ma zala yurhiquni hatta khuthaytu lahu
Wa hala min duni ba'di al-raghbati al-shafaqu
Lamma rabibtu Aba Hafsin wa shurtatabu (sharrattubu/sbarattuhu)
Wa al-shaykhu yafza'u ahyanan fa-yanbamiqū

⁶ Muhammad al-Sharif al-Rahmuni, *Nizam al-Shurtah fi al-Islam* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1983), 37-38; Ahmad Sha'ib, *al-Tarikh al-Shi'r al-Siyasi ila Muntasif Qarn al-Thani al-Hijri* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Nihzah al-Misriyyah, 2nd ed, 1953), 114.

⁷ Muhammad ibn Sa'd (d. 230 AH), *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra* IV (Beirut: Dar Sadir, c. 1965), 32.

⁸ Ahmad ibn Wadih Ya'qubi, *Tarikh* II, 173; Khalifat ibn Khayyat al-'Ufuri (d. 240 AH), *Tarikh*, ed. A. al-'Umari (Damascus and Beirut, 1397AH), 179; Ahmad ibn 'Ali ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *al-Isabah fi Tamyiz al-Sahabah* VI, ed. A. al-Bajawi (Beirut: Dar al-Jayl, 1992), 229. Ibn Hajar has called him 'Muhajir ibn Qunfudh al-Taymi' which is a confusion since Muhajir was of more significant fame than 'Abd Allah in the Islamic sources.

⁹ Khalifat ibn Khayyat, *Tarikh*, 179.

¹⁰ Tabari, *Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk* II, 637.

¹¹ Yaqut, *Mu'jam al-Buldan* III (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, c. 1975), 135.

¹² This is doubtful because numerous accounts about 'Umar and the other Rashidun Caliphs show them as having a normal relationship with ordinary people. Additionally, some traditions say that Prophet and the Rashidun Caliphs forbade their government officials to have a doorkeeper. For more information see Ahmad Rida Khidri, 'Hajib' in *Danishnamih Jahan-i Islam* (n.p.: n.d.), 283-285.

¹³ For example, Arab historiographers used the two words *hajib* and *shurtab* with reference to the Pahlavi administrative organization of Sassanid Iran (224-651AD). See, for instance, 'Amr ibn 'Umar Jahiz, *Rasa'il al-Jahiz (risalah 12, Kitab al-Hijab)* II, ed. A. Harun (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanji, 1384 AH), 39; Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad Jahshiyari (d. 331 AH), *Kitab al-Wuzara' wa al-Kuttab* (Cairo, 1357AH), 2.

¹⁴ Ahmad ibn Yahya Baladhuri (d. 279 AH), *Ansab al-Ashraf* II, ed. I. 'Abbas (Beirut: 1400 AH), 346.

¹⁵ Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Khallikan (d. 681 AH), *Wafayat al-A'yan wa Anba' Abna' al-Zaman* VII, ed. I. 'Abbas (Beirut: Dar al-Thaqafah, 1968), 59-60.

¹⁶ Sayf ibn 'Umar (d. 200 AH), *al-Fitnat wa Waq'at al-Jamal*, ed. A. 'Armush (Beirut: Dar al-Nafa'is, 1391AH), 42-63, 95, 126-137; Muhammad ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra* III, 71; Khalifat ibn Khayyat, *Tarikh*, 168-183; Tabari, *Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk* II, 639, 652, 654, 666, 668, 700-701; III, 16-24; Muhammad ibn Muhammad Mufid, *al-Jamal* (Qum: Maktabat al-Dawari, c. 1406 AH), 152 & 178.

¹⁷ Two groups of Zuts/Jats and Sababajah/Sayabajah, originally from India or southern Asia, came to Iran in ancient times and mainly inhabited the south and southwest or Khuzistan province. Many were involved in military activities. By the time of the Islamic conquest, some groups of them had come to Basra and even converted to Islam. For more information see Maryam Sadiqi, 'Jat' in *Da'irat al-Ma'arif Buzurg Islami* XVII (Tehran: 1388 AH (solar)), 592-599.

¹⁸ Sayf ibn 'Umar, *al-Fitnat wa Waq'at al-Jamal*, 129, 137; Tabari, *Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk* III, 24; Mufid, *al-Jamal*, 152, 178.

¹⁹ Muhammad ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra* I, 434; VI, 63; Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 241 AH), *Fada'il al-Sahabah* I, ed. W. 'Abbas (Beirut: al-Risalah Institute, 1403 AH), 303; Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *al-Isabah fi Tamyiz al-Sahabah* VI, 626.

²⁰ Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Fada'il al-Sahabah* I, 306.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 80, 84, 156, 266, 303, 369, 375, 527.

²² Shahab al-Din Muhammad Dhahabi (d. 748 AH), *al-'Ibar fi Khabar man 'Abar* I, ed. S. Munjid (Kuwait City: Maktabat al-Hukumat al-Kuwait, 1948), 84.

²³ Shahab al-Din Muhammad Dhahabi, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'* III, ed. S. Arnaw'wt and M. al-'Arqasusi (Beirut: 1413 AH), 203.

²⁴ W. P. Heinrichs, 'Sahib' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* VIII (Leiden: Brill, 1995, 2nded), 831.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Ahmad ibn 'Ali Khatib al-Baghdadi (d. 463 AH), *Tarikh Baghdad* I (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, c. 1970), 199; Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *al-Isabah fi Tamyiz al-Sahabah* VI, 626.

²⁷ Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *al-Isabah* VI, 702.

²⁸ Sayf ibn 'Umar, *al-Fitnat wa Waq'at al-Jamal*, 54; Muhammad ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra* V, 32-33; Tabari, *Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk* II, 650; III, 79, 85-87. Regarding Al-Arhabi's military advice to 'Ali see Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 218.

²⁹ Dhahabi, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'* VI, 354.

³⁰ Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Asbraf* IV, part 1, 529.

³¹ Khalifat ibn Khayyat, *Tarikh Khalifat ibn Khayyat*, 200.

³² For example see Nasr ibn Muzahim al-Minqari, *Waq'at Siffin*, ed. A. Harun (Beirut: al-Arabiyyah al-Hadithah Institute, 1382 AH), 132; Abu Hanifah Ahmad ibn Dawud al-Dinawari (d. 282 AH), *al-Akhbar al-Tiwal*, ed. A. 'Amr (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1960), 166-167.

³³ See Nasr ibn Muzahim al-Minqari, *Waq'at Siffin*, 4, 121, 133.

³⁴ As Heinrichs in the entry 'Sahib' in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1997) states, the use of *sahib* to mean 'head, ruler and commander' developed over time; it was not used with this meaning during the Rashidun caliphates. In addition, in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* entry on 'Shurtah', Nielsen implicitly maintains that the term *sahib al-shurtah* is related to the early ages of 'Abbasids. His implicit view is disproven in this article which shows that the *shurtah* dates back to the times of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib.

³⁵ Nasr ibn Muzahim al-Minqari, *Waq'at Siffin*, 4, 121, 133.

³⁶ Ibn Abi al-Hadid, *Sbarh Nahj al-Balaghah* III, ed. M. Ibrahim (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, c. 1965), 103, 191, 201, 202.

³⁷ Al-Nukhaylah is a town near Kufa.

³⁸ Nasr ibn Muzahim al-Minqari, *Waq'at Siffin*, 140; Although a similar command is narrated by Abu Hanifah Dinawari (d. 282 AH), his account does not mention anything about beheading the offenders there (see al-Dinawari, *al-Akhbar al-Tiwal*, 166).

³⁹ Nasr ibn Muzahim al-Minqari, *Waq'at Siffin*, 96-97.

⁴⁰ Ya'qubi, *Tarikh* II, 213.

⁴¹ Ibn 'Asakir, *Tarikh Madinat Dimasbq* LVIII, ed. A. Shiri (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, c. 1996), 368.

⁴² Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *al-Isabah fi Tamyiz al-Sahabah* VI, 306.

⁴³ See Nasr ibn Muzahim al-Minqari, *Waq'at Siffin*, 96, 132, 148, 195; al-Dinawari, *al-Akhbar al-Tiwal*, 167; Ibrahim ibn Muhammad Thaqafi Kufi, *al-Gharat*, ed. S. al-Muhadith (Iran: Bahman printers, c. 1360AH (solar)), I, 351-352, 355, 358; II, 638-672, 771.

⁴⁴ Nasr ibn Muzahim al-Minqari, *Waq'at Siffin*, 148; al-Dinawari, *al-Akhbar al-Tiwal*, 167; Tabari, *Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk* III, 72.

⁴⁵ Thaqafi Kufi, *al-Gharat* II, 771; Ya'qubi, *Tarikh* II, 194-195; Tabari, *Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk* III, 137-144; Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Athir (d. 630 AH), *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh* III, ed. A. 'Abd al-Qadi (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmyyah, 1995), 142.

⁴⁶ Ibn 'Asakir, *Tarikh Madinat Dimasbq* LVIII, 367.

⁴⁷ Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *al-Isabah fi Tamyiz al-Sahabah* III, 257.

⁴⁸ 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Ali ibn al-Jawzi (d. 597 AH), *Kitab al-Du'afa' wa al-Matrukin* I, ed. A. 'Abd al-Qadi (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmyyah, 1406 AH), 161.

⁴⁹ Shahab al-Din Muhammad Dhahabi (d. 748 AH), *Mizan al-I'tidal fi Naqd al-Rijal* I, ed. A. Bajawi (Cairo: n.p., 1963-1964), 371.

⁵⁰ Khalifat Ibn Khayyat, *Tarikh*, 200

⁵¹ Nasr ibn Muzahim al-Minqari, *Waq'at Siffin*, 406.

⁵² Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Tusi, *Ikhtiyar Ma'rifat al-Rijal* I, ed. Mirdamad, M. Husayni, and S. Raja'i (Qum: Al al-Bayt Institute, 1404 AH), 321.

⁵³ Muhammad ibn Muhammad Mufid, *al-Ikhtisas*, ed. A. Ghaffari (Qum: Jama'ah al-Mudarisin fi al-Hawzah al-'Ilmiyyah, c. 1360 AH (solar)), 65.

⁵⁴ Muhammad ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra* II, 225. Ibn Sa'd also says that the traditions narrated by Asbagh should be considered weak. This is evidence of Asbagh's Shi'a inclinations. (Ibid.)

⁵⁵ Nasr ibn Muzahim al-Minqari, *Waq'at Siffin*, 406, 442-443; Muhammad ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra* VI, 225; Ya'qubi, *Tarikh* II, 214.

⁵⁶ Thaqafi Kufi, *al-Gharat* I, 257.

⁵⁷ Ibn Athir, *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh* III, 226.

⁵⁸ Thaqafi Kufi, *al-Gharat* II, 489.

⁵⁹ Muhammad ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra* VI, 52.

⁶⁰ Tabari, *Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk* III, 168.

⁶¹ Ibn 'Asakir, *Tarikh Madinat Dimashq* XLIX, 428.

⁶² Ibid., XIII, 262.

⁶³ For example see Thaqafi Kufi, *al-Gharat* I, 209, 223, 257; Muhammad ibn Jarir ibn Rustam Tabari Amuli (d. 5th century AH), *Dala'il al-Imamah* (Qum: al-Bi'thah Institute, 1413AH), 58; Ibn 'Asakir, *Tarikh Madinat Dimashq* XLIX, 428. About Qays's loyalty towards 'Ali, see also Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad*, 35.

⁶⁴ For example see Muhammad ibn Isa Tirmidhi (d. 279 AH), *Sunan al-Tirmidhi* V, ed. A. 'Abd al-Latif (Beirut: 1403AH), 353; Sulayman ibn Ahmad al-Tabarani (d. 360 AH), *al-Mu'jam al-Kabir* XVIII, ed. A.al-Salafi (Cairo: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, c.1978), 346; 'Abd Allah ibn 'Adi (d. 365 AH), *al-Kamil fi Du'afa' al-Rijal* II, ed. Y. al-Ghazawi (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 3rd ed., 1409 AH), 108.

⁶⁵ Muhammad ibn Ishaq ibn al-Nadim, *al-Fihrist* (Beirut: 1978), 249.

⁶⁶ Mufid, *al-Ikhtisas*, 2-3.

⁶⁷ Tusi, *Ikhtiyar Ma'rifat al-Rijal* I, 321.

⁶⁸ Ibn 'Asakir, *Tarikh Madinat Dimashq* XLIX, 428.

⁶⁹ Nasr ibn Muzahim al-Minqari, *Waq'at Siffin*, 422-423.

⁷⁰ Khalil ibn Ahmad Farahidi (d. 175 AH), *Kitab al-'Ayn* VI, ed. M. al-Makhzumi and M. al-Samira'i (Qum: Dar al-Hijrah, 1409 AH), 234.

⁷¹ Ibid., 364; Abu Nasr Jawhari (d. 393 AH), *al-Sihab*, ed. A. 'Atar (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm, 2nd ed., 1407 AH), II, 672; III, 924.

⁷² Tusi, *Ikhtiyar Ma'rifat al-Rijal* I, 25.

⁷³ See Tabari, *Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk* III, 168; Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani (d. 356 AH), *Maqatil al-Talibiyyin*, ed. K. al-Muzaffar (Qum: Dar al-Kitab Institute, 1385 AH), 42, 47; Ibn al-Jawzi, *al-Muntazam* V, 185-186; Thaqafi Kufi, *al-Gharat* I, 209, 257; Ibn Rustam Tabari Amuli, *Dala'il al-Imamah*, 58.

⁷⁴ Muhammad ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, VI, 52; Thaqafi Kufi, *al-Gharat* I, 223.

⁷⁵ For example see Thaqafi Kufi, *al-Gharat* I, 120-121; Mufid, *al-Jamal*, 218.

⁷⁶ Tabari, *Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk* III, 168.

⁷⁷ Ibn 'Asakir, *Tarikh Madinat Dimashq* XLIX, 428.

⁷⁸ Ibid., XIII, 262.

⁷⁹ Ibn al-Jawzi, *al-Muntazam* V, 185-186.

⁸⁰ Ibn 'Asakir, *Tarikh Madinat Dimashq* XLIX, 429.

⁸¹ Ibid., XLIX, 428.

⁸² Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *al-Isabah fi Tamyiz al-Sahabah* II, 72.

⁸³ Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn Husayn ibn Babawayh al-Saduq, *Kamal al-Din wa Tamam al-Ni'mah*, ed. A. Ghaffari (Qum: Al-Nashr al-Islami Institute, 1405 AH), 536; Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni, *al-Kafi* I, ed. A. Ghaffari (Tehran and Qum: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah, 1388 AH), 346.

⁸⁴ Kulayni, *al-Kafi* VII, 37, 371; Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn Husayn ibn Babawayh al-Saduq, *Man la Yahduruhu al-Faqih* III, ed. A. Ghaffari (Qum, 1404 AH), 25; Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Tusi, *Tabdhib al-Abkam* VI, ed. S. al-Kharsan and M. Akhundi (Tehran: n.p., 1365AH (solar)), 316.

⁸⁵ Kulayni, *al-Kafi* IV, 182.

⁸⁶ Thaqafi Kufi, *al-Gharat* II, 489.

⁸⁷ Yaccov Lev in his article 'Police' in *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia* intelligently, but very briefly and without any reference to Islamic sources or giving any information about the *shurtah* or the *shurtat al-khamis* during the period of the Rashidun Caliphs, has mentioned the possible relation between the *shurtah* and *shurtat al-khamis*. Yaccov Lev, 'Police' in *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 622

⁸⁸ Jamal al-Din ibn Mukarram ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-'Arab* VII (Beirut: Dar Sadir, c. 1955), 329-330.

⁸⁹ Farahidi, *Kitab al-'Ayn* VI, 234.

⁹⁰ For example see Tusi, *Ikhtiyar Ma'rifat al-Rijal* I, 24-25 & 60; Mufid, *al-Ikhtisas*, 2-3, 7, 65.

⁹¹ Muhammad ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra* II, 225.

⁹² Muhammad ibn 'Amr 'Aqili (d. 322 AH), *Kitab al-Du'afa' al-Kabir*, part 1, ed. A. Qal'aji (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmyyah, 1404 AH), 178; Ibn al-Jawzi, *Kitab al-Du'afa' wa al-Matrukin* I, 161; Maghlatay ibn Qalij (d. 762 AH), *Ikmal Tabdhib al-Kamal fi Asma' al-Rijal* III, ed. A. ibn Muhammad and U. ibn Ibrahim (Cairo: al-Faruq al-Hadithah, 1422 AH), 101.

⁹³ For example see Tusi, *Ikhtiyar Ma'rifat al-Rijal* I, 25.

⁹⁴ Ibn 'Asakir, *Tarikh Madinat Dimashq* XLIX, 429.

⁹⁵ For example see Abu Nasr Jawhari, *al-Sibah* III, 1136; Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-'Arab* VII, 329-330; Tusi, *Ikhtiyar Ma'rifat al-Rijal* I, 25.

⁹⁶ For more information see Muhammad al-Sharif al-Rahmuni, *Nizam al-Shurtah fi al-Islam*, 100-107.



The Shi'a of Baghdad at the time of the 'Abbasid Caliphs and the Seljuq Sultanate (447-575 AH)

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ABSTRACT: After the fall of the Buyids at the hands of the Seljuq Turks and the Seljuqs' entry into Baghdad, the apparatus of the 'Abbasid caliphs and the Sunnis once again gained control of Baghdad. However, this should not be considered as having been to the downfall or detriment of the Shi'a, because it is in this period that we come across three powerful and influential forces in Baghdad: first, the 'Abbasid caliphs and the Sunnis; second, the Seljuqs; and third, the Shi'a. Despite the fact that the Seljuqs were followers and defenders of the Sunnis, their relationship with the 'Abbasid caliphs had many ups and downs which saw them turn from allies to foes over time. Similarly, the position of the Seljuqs in relation to the Shi'a was not such that they felt the Imami Shi'a were a force that acted in opposition to them; rather, in certain instances, the Shi'a would be treated favourably, peaceably, and respectfully by the Seljuq rulers. In this article we aim to show that in the period when the Seljuqs ruled Baghdad, the Shi'a were recognized as a third effective power broker in the political and social scene, and there was no clear unified stance between the caliphs and the sultanate against the Shi'a.

KEYWORDS: Shi'a, Baghdad, Seljuqs, 'Abbasids, Sunnis

Introduction

Baghdad enjoys a particular importance in Islamic history because of its political and cultural standing in the Islamic world due to its long-time

status as the centre of the 'Abbasid caliphate. The 'Abbasid caliphs chose Baghdad as their administrative capital, and it remained their centre until the year 656/1258 when it fell to the Mongol Hulagu Khan. Although the 'Abbasids had used the slogan 'the contented one from the progeny of Muhammad' (*al-Rida min Al Muhammad*, referring to the eighth Imam, Imam 'Ali al-Rida) in order to gain the support of the Shi'a and the Iranians against the Umayyads, very soon after their triumph they became enemies of the Shi'a and began supporting Sunni doctrines.

Baghdad was host to followers of different Islamic schools of law, including the four schools of the Sunnis (Shafi'i, Hanbali, Maliki, and Hanafi) and the Twelver Shi'a. Among these, the Shi'a and the Hanbalis had the strongest presence.¹ From the four Sunni schools, the Hanbali school that followed the Ash'arite theology was in the majority. The formation of the Hanbali school had fundamentally taken place in Baghdad, and this was where most of its adherents could be found.² The main confrontation of the Shi'a was thus with the Hanbalis, and they did not have much of a problem with the other Sunni schools. Rather, other schools like the Shafi'is even had close ties with the Shi'a. The Hanbalis were opposed to the open propagation of Shi'ism, and this opposition at times led to confrontation.

The selection of Kufa by Imam 'Ali (A) as the capital of his caliphate, and the proximity of Kufa to Baghdad resulted in the adoption of the Shi'a creed by the people of this area. Iraq became the centre of confluence for the Shi'a, and this influence was augmented by the presence of the Imams of the Shi'a in Baghdad, especially when the mausoleums of two Shi'a Imams, the seventh and ninth, came to be located in Baghdad. As a result of the particular beliefs of the Shi'a, this place became the focal point of their gatherings and settlements. Similarly, the presence of the four representatives of the twelfth Imam, Shi'a scholars, and well-known Shi'a families played an important role in spreading Shi'ism in Baghdad. After the Buyids gained control over Baghdad from 336/947 to 447/1055, because the Buyids propagated the Shi'a creed, it was natural that this period became a special opportunity for the Shi'a to strive to propagate their creed.

After the fall of the Buyids, the power of the 'Abbasid caliphs and the Sunnis was revived, and this was facilitated by the entry of the Seljuqs into Baghdad and their victory over the Shi'a Buyids. In this period, the Shi'a of Baghdad found themselves alongside two other influential powers, namely the 'Abbasid caliphs and the Seljuq Turks.

When the Seljuqs took up the novel role as supporters of the caliphs and of the Sunnis, the Shi'a of Baghdad found themselves in a new situation. The reign of the Seljuqs in Baghdad coincided with the caliphate of eight 'Abbasid caliphs from the time of Abu Ja'far 'Abd Allah Qa'im (422-467/1031-1075) and lasted until the time of Abu Muhammad Hasan Mustadi' (566-575/1170-1180). Analysing the relationship between the Seljuq Turks and the 'Abbasid caliphs, and the relationship of each with the Shi'a of Baghdad, results in a picture of the condition of the Shi'a during this period. This article aims to answer the question: in the face of these two emerging powers of the caliphs and the sultanate, what situation did the Shi'a find themselves in? Were the caliphs and sultanate a unified front in opposition to the Shi'a that made them the target of sectarian bigotry and hatred?

First, we will look at the presence of the Seljuqs in Baghdad and the subsequent relationship between the Seljuq sultans and the 'Abbasid caliphs. We will examine the sectarian politics of the Seljuqs and their impact on the situation of the Shi'a. We will also delve into the state of the Shi'a vis-à-vis the 'Abbasid caliphs and the Sunnis, the sectarian politics of the Seljuqs, and the way in which they related to the 'Abbasid caliphs. These are some of the determining factors that influenced the situation of the Shi'a in Baghdad.

The politics of dissimulation and acquiescence which were practiced by the Shi'a in this period yielded positive results for them both politically and socially. In fact, we do not witness any unity between the 'Abbasid caliphs and the Seljuq sultans against the Shi'a in this period because the relationship between the Seljuqs and the 'Abbasids was not a relationship based on their following the same creed; rather this relationship was founded on the mutual benefit that accrued from it and, due to this, their politics revolved around mutual benefit, their relationship often turning from friendly to unfriendly and at times resulting in heightened hostility and all-out war. Aside from the fact that the sectarian politics of the Seljuqs with the Shi'a was generally a politics of peace and at some point even of respect and honour, the Shi'a also, in the initial stages of the presence of the Seljuqs in Baghdad, did not take an adversarial stance against them. Rather, they opted for collaboration and co-operation. Another noteworthy point is that what has been narrated about the opposition of the Seljuqs to the Shi'a does not refer to the Twelver Shi'a but rather to the Isma'ili Shi'a. The difference between these two is clear, as we know that unlike the Isma'ili Shi'a, who would undertake armed resistance and carry out

assassinations, the Imami Shi'a believed in dissimulation and co-operation. This attitude on the part of the Twelver Shi'a, the sectarian tolerance of most of the Seljuq sultans, and the rivalry between the caliphs and the sultans created a positive atmosphere for the Shi'a. As a result, not only did the Shi'a not get side-lined, but rather they continued to hold sway in the political and social scene in Baghdad and gradually became influential powerbrokers in the government.

1. The Presence of the Seljuqs in Baghdad

The chain of the Seljuq Turks started officially with the reign of Tughrul Beg. After the battle of Dandaniqan in 431/1039-40 where Tughrul Beg was able to defeat Sultan Mas'ud al-Ghaznawi, he set up the Seljuq government in Khurasan and in the following year (432/1040) the 'Abbasid caliph al-Qa'im bi-Amr Allah officially recognized his government.³ When he entered Baghdad for the second time in 449/1058, al-Qa'im gifted him with the black mantle of the caliphate.⁴

At this time, changes were taking place in Baghdad. The Fatimids, who established their government in 397/1006 in Tunisia, stood toe-to-toe with the 'Abbasid caliphs after conquering Egypt and Syria; and because they were opposed to the 'Abbasids in their ideology and jurisprudence, they were considered rivals and dangerous foes.

One of the important events that took place at the end of the Buyid rule and in the beginning of the Seljuq reign was the uprising of Abu Harith ibn Arslan al-Basasiri, which resulted in the strengthening of the role of the Seljuqs in Baghdad. Ibn Khallikan and Ibn al-'Abri relate that Basasiri was a Turkish slave of Baha' al-Dawlah, the son of 'Adud al-Dawlah.⁵ After joining the army of the Buyids, Basasiri quickly progressed and advanced until he gradually gained control of all of Iraq, and his renown spread to such an extent that in Iraq the sermon was read out in his name.⁶ Malik Rahim, the Buyid ruler, and the 'Abbasid caliphs were ostensibly the rulers, but the de facto ruler was Basasiri.⁷

Ibn Maslamah, the vizier of the 'Abbasids, would accuse Basasiri of conspiring with Mustansir, the Fatimid caliph of Egypt, who was the bitter rival of the 'Abbasids. During this same period, one of the Fatimid missionaries by the name of al-Mu'ayyad fi al-Din al-Shirazi was very active in Iraq.⁸ After the disagreement between Basasiri and the 'Abbasid caliphs came about, Basasiri revolted and took control of

Baghdad. He had with him flags that bore the name of Mustansir, the Fatimid caliph. On Friday the thirteenth of Dhu al-Qa'dah 450/1059, a sermon was read out in the name of the Fatimid caliph in Jami' Mansur.⁹

Various Sunni sources can be combined to form a narrative which begins with Basasiri ruling over Baghdad for one year, during which time he severely punished his opponents.¹⁰ The caliph was forced to remain outside Baghdad and practically underwent a form of house arrest. At this time, the caliph wrote a letter to Tughril the Seljuq and sought his assistance to subdue Basasiri's movement. The caliph's letter of request to Tughril read: 'By God! A Muslim has been overcome by his enemy and the motto of the Qaramitah has become manifest.'¹¹ Tughril responded to the 'Abbasid caliph's cry for help; and after he gained victory over his own brother, Ibrahim Yanal, he wrote a letter to Quraysh ibn Badran, who was allied with Basasiri during the conquest of Baghdad and asked him to help the caliph and threatened him. Quraysh obeyed the wishes of Tughril but also requested that Tughril come to his aid as he did not have the strength to confront Basasiri. Tughril sent a contingent of troops to fight Basasiri and in the end Basasiri was defeated and killed; his head was returned to Baghdad and his body was hanged.¹² From this point in time, the presence of Seljuqs in Baghdad became official.

2. The relationship between the Seljuq sultans and the 'Abbasid caliphs

The relationship of the Seljuqs with the 'Abbasid caliphs, which had begun from the time of the advancement of Tughril's conquests and the establishment of his government in Khurasan, took a new turn after the uprising of Basasiri and the request of the 'Abbasid caliph to Tughril to enter Baghdad. That which can be deduced from the position of the Seljuqs before their entry into Baghdad and after their entry into Baghdad is that the advancement of the Seljuqs towards Baghdad was imminent, and how much better it was for the caliph to turn this danger into an opportunity by which he could both get rid of the Buyids and quell the dangerous uprising of Basasiri while at the same time establishing a working relationship with Tughril and the Seljuqs, thereby stopping the wave that was rushing towards Baghdad and gaining something with one stroke of political genius. However, this friendly

relationship between the two only lasted for the first few years and then gradually turned into opposition and intimidation, and in the end it resulted in war and even the imprisonment of the 'Abbasid caliph.

The first sultan to have the sermons in Baghdad read out in his name was Tughril.¹³ In the year 454/1062 the caliph al-Qa'im gave his daughter's hand in marriage to Tughril Beg at a time when the caliph was not pleased with this union and Tughril had achieved his wish to marry her through threats and intimidation, so much so that 'Amid al-Mulk Kunduri, Tughril's vizier, warned that he would confiscate all the parcels of land that the caliph owned and leave only the lands that were previously in the name of the caliph's father.¹⁴

In the year 456/1064, Sultan Alp Arslan (455-465/1063-1073) pledged allegiance to the caliph al-Qa'im and thereafter the sermon in Baghdad was read out in his name.¹⁵ He later appointed his son Malikshah as crown prince and gave orders that in all the cities, including Baghdad, the sermon should be read out in his name, without seeking the opinion of the caliph about it.¹⁶

During the final days of the sultanate of the Seljuq Malikshah, the relationship between the sultan and the 'Abbasid caliph became very sour, and the sultan proceeded towards Baghdad. He sent a message to the caliph Muqtadi to leave Baghdad and to go wherever he pleased. Muqtadi became upset and sought some time, and after the mediation of Taj al-Mulk Abu al-Ghana'im, the vizier of Malikshah, the caliph was given ten days' time, and it was during this very time that Malikshah passed away and his army returned to Isfahan.¹⁷

After the death of Malikshah in 485/1092, the Seljuq government became divided because of internal wrangling, and the government of the Seljuqs of Iraq separated from the great Seljuq Empire. This separation was pleasing for the 'Abbasid caliphs because it meant that they felt that they were freed from the pressure of the Seljuqs and were no longer forced to do their bidding, and therefore they started trying to re-establish their power and authority.

In 530/1135, Sa'd al-Dawlah, the governor of Baghdad, was forced to leave Baghdad because of his differences with the supporters of the caliph. He began urging Sultan Mahmud to attack Baghdad, and the sultan agreed and began marching towards Baghdad. A number of skirmishes took place and the caliph took the first opportunity to flee from Baghdad, leading to the voicing of protests by the people. In the end, after many battles, in which the upper hand was with Sultan Mahmud, a peace treaty was enacted between the two sides.¹⁸

The animosity that formed between the caliph Mustarshid and Sultan Mas'ud resulted in war, the imprisonment of the 'Abbasid caliph, and his transfer to Maraghah. However, when sultan Mas'ud became negligent of the caliph, a group of Batinis carried out the caliph's assassination. The caliph Mustarshid was buried in Maraghah. Ibn Taqtaqi says: 'When I travelled to Maraghah in [the year] 697 [AH] I saw his tomb which had been built beautifully.'¹⁹

After Sultan Mas'ud, the caliph Muqtafi sought to take advantage of the internal differences between the Seljuqs and worked to revive the power of the caliphs. In 535/1140, the cloak and staff of the Prophet (S) were sent by Sultan Sanjir to the caliph Muqtafi because these items had been taken by Sultan Mas'ud after the defeat and imprisonment of the caliph Mustarshid.²⁰

From the events that transpired between the caliphs and the sultans, it becomes evident that the Seljuqs remained allies of the caliphs as long as there was no harm to their interests and in circumstances other than this, they opposed the caliphs. The situation of the Shi'a of Baghdad was practically linked to these two powers and the type of relationship they had could be affected by either of the two, depending on their weakness and strength, and similarly on the prevailing situation in Baghdad and its inhabitants. In fact, the discord between the sultanate and the caliphs created a somewhat peaceful atmosphere for the Shi'a, because even though the Shi'a did not have any ostensible political power, their opponents were not in a state of peace and harmony with one another. Similarly, in these situations that were generally fraught with confrontation, the issue of sectarian differences and religious bigotry – which had been the main source of strife between the Sunnis and the Shi'a – was not a problem; rather the open rivalry between the caliphs and the sultanate resulted in the creation of a suitable environment for the Shi'a, such that they were able to benefit from the peaceful atmosphere of Baghdad at that time.

3. A Look at the Sectarian Politics of the Seljuqs and its Effect on the Situation of the Shi'a

Sectarian tolerance. The Seljuqs were followers of the Sunni creed and defended it with zeal. Right from the beginning, they communicated their loyalty to the 'Abbasid caliphs. Of course, with their entry into Baghdad, which coincided with the fall of the Buyids, the Shi'a became

weakened, and the Sunnis once again became the undisputed rulers of Baghdad. But were the sectarian politics of the Seljuqs such that they would put the Shi'a in a critical situation and cause them to become the targets of their enemies' sectarian hatred and bigotry?

The Seljuqs did not adopt a single and unchanging policy throughout their reign; however, it can be seen that for the most part, they followed and supported Hanafi law and theology. A short while after Tughril's entry into Baghdad, when Ibn Makula, the Shafi'i chief justice, passed away, the Hanafi judge Abu 'Abd Allah Damaghani was appointed to take his place.²¹ Similarly, in the year 445/1053, by his order, the Ash'aris were cursed from the pulpits of Khurasan and senior scholars such as Abu al-Qasim Qushayri (406-502/1015-1108) and Imam al-Haramayn Juwayni (d. 478/1085) were forced to leave Nayshapur and take refuge in the holy sanctuary in Mecca. After Tughril's death, even though the vizier Nizam al-Mulk tried to reduce the persecution of the Shafi'is, this policy nevertheless continued, and even the 'Abbasid caliphs adopted the policy of supporting the Hanafis as a show of respect for the Seljuq sultans. They even appointed Hanafi judges to their courts. Therefore, the sectarian discord between the Sunnis themselves reached its peak and gave rise to intense altercations, such that in 479/1086, the conflicts between the Hanbalis and Ash'aris led to many deaths on both sides.²² In 475/1082, despite the protection of the police and the Turks, the Hanbalis assassinated the Ash'ari preacher of the Jami' Mansur mosque by stoning him and hitting him on the head with a brick.²³

These sectarian differences among the Sunnis sprang forth from the heart of power where the Seljuqs showed support for the Hanafis, and in opposition to them people like Nizam al-Mulk gave their backing to the Shafi'is and the followers of Shafi'i would also try and seek the favour of the 'Abbasid caliphs in order to gain their support. This type of division and opposition among the different groups of the Sunnis resulted in their neglecting the Shi'a for the most part and a great reduction in altercations between the Shi'a and the Sunnis; however this should not be mistaken for complete peace with the Shi'a. Rather, what is meant is that the enemies of the Shi'a were not united enough to come together and join forces in their planning and action against the Shi'a. However, restrictions and pressures were put on the Shi'a, especially from the time that Tughril entered Baghdad, so much so that the Shi'a were prevented from saying 'rush to the best of actions' (*bayya 'ala khayr al-'amal*) in their call to prayers as they normally do, and were forced to say 'prayer is

better than sleep' (*al-salat khayrun min al-nawm*) in their morning prayer calls. The Sunnis attacked the district of Karkh and effaced all the emblems of the Shi'a, such as 'Muhammad and 'Ali are the best of humankind' from the doors and walls of Karkh. Criers entered into the city of Karkh and began shouting out couplets in praise of the caliphs, and by the order of the vizier Ibn Maslamah, Abu 'Abd Allah al-Jallab, the chief of the cloth merchants of Karkh, was hanged outside his shop for the crime of extremism (*ghuluw*) in his Shi'a beliefs.²⁴

That which can be deduced from the vicissitudes of this period is that the hardest time for the Shi'a was the beginning of the Seljuq reign. This was firstly because of the uprising of Basasiri and the initial participation of some Shi'a in that uprising, and secondly, when the Seljuqs first entered Baghdad, they came as supporters of the caliph. It is obvious that the anti-Shi'a attitude that was prevalent among the Sunnis and the caliphs at the time did influence the thinking of the Seljuq sultans. This was coupled with the fact that some of the Persian Sunnis had infiltrated the government of the Seljuqs, especially during the reign of Tughril, when they played a pivotal role and were responsible for inciting Tughril to march against Baghdad in order to quash the uprising of Basasiri.²⁵

This approach of the Seljuqs can only be seen in the beginning of their presence in Baghdad, but in the later periods, just as Nizam al-Mulk has recorded in his *Siyasatnamih*, they adopted a policy of tolerance towards the Shi'a; and the initial harshness of the Seljuqs was not out of sectarian hatred or bigotry but rather it was in order to firmly establish themselves on the seat of power.²⁶ Another reason for their heavy-handedness was that the Shi'a had been accused of aiding the enemies of the Seljuqs. Otherwise, we see that when Tughril first entered Baghdad in 447/1055, he was warmly welcomed by the people of Karkh, and he showed them favours and sent his vizier 'Amid al-Mulk Kunduri to express his gratitude to them.²⁷ But why did the Shi'a of Karkh do this? It was because they were suffering hardships during the final days of the reign of the Buyids and the discord between the Shi'a and the Sunnis had reached its peak during this period. This state of affairs was caused in one way by the weakness of the Buyid leadership, and the people felt that the Seljuqs would be able to bring an end to these altercations. Of course, the policy of dissimulation and acquiescence that was practiced by the Shi'a could also have been another reason for their co-operation with the Seljuqs because opposition could have brought about disastrous consequences for the Shi'a.

Tughril's harsh dealings with the Shi'a could therefore have been brought about by two possible reasons: one, the politics of establishing a foothold on authority and two, the fact that some Shi'a had participated in Basasiri's uprising, even though they left his side after he had the Friday sermon read in the name of the Fatimid caliph because the Shi'a of Baghdad were Twelvers and thus did not consider the Fatimid claim to the caliphate to be legitimate. However, the mere fact that there were some Shi'a in Basasiri's army gave a negative impression to Tughril, so much so that when Tughril entered Baghdad for the second time, all the Shi'a went into hiding. The Dar al-'Ilm Library of Shapur ibn Ardish was burnt down, and the house of Shaykh Tusi was pillaged until he was forced to leave Baghdad.²⁸

On the whole, however, the policy of the Seljuq sultans towards the Shi'a was one of tolerance and acquiescence. As a general principle, the Seljuqs treated the Imams of the Shi'a with respect and this form of sectarian politics obviously had an effect on the state of the Shi'a.

Honouring and respecting the Shi'a creed. What can be deduced from historical sources is that the Seljuq sultans had taken a position of respect and veneration towards the Imams (A). It has been mentioned that Alp Arslan went for the ritual visitation (*ziyarah*) of the mausoleum of Imam Rida (A) after the conquest of Khwarzm in Iran.²⁹ It has also been narrated that in 479/1086, after visiting the grave of Abu Hanifah, Malikshah passed by the graves of Ma'ruf Karkhi and the seventh Imam, did the *ziyarah* of Salman, and visited the tomb of Ivan of Mada'in, after which he proceeded for the *ziyarah* of the Imams (A) in Najaf and Karbala.³⁰ During his battle with his brother, Malikshah went for the *ziyarah* of Imam Rida (A), and just as he himself related to Nizam al-Mulk, his vizier, he prayed to God to make whichever of the two brothers who was more beneficial to the people successful.³¹ This type of conduct of the Seljuq sultans in relation to the Shi'a Imams (A) obviously had a direct impact on the Shi'a themselves. In 475/1082, when Malikshah visited the shrines of Imam Musa al-Kazim (A) and Salman, and performed the *ziyarah* of Imam Husayn (A) and the Commander of the Faithful 'Ali (A), he gave the order to reconstruct the enclosure of the shrine at Karbala, gave three hundred dinars to the people who resided near the shrine of Commander of the Faithful (A), commanded that a canal be dug so that water could flow to Najaf.³² The Shi'a also showed respect towards the Seljuqs, and when Ahmad, the son of Malikshah and heir to his throne passed away in 481/1088, the people of Baghdad held mourning ceremonies for seven days, and in

the city of Karkh too, many Shi'a came out of their houses to pray, and in order to express their grief and mourning the people of Karkh hung black cloth over the doors and windows of their houses.³³

The relationship of the Seljuq Malikshah with the Shi'a has been recalled so fondly that some even considered him to have been a Shi'a or to have had inclinations towards Shi'ism. There is even a book that was published about his having been a Shi'a and recounting the story of the debate between an 'Abbasid and an 'Alawid. This story that is narrated is a debate which took place between one person who was 'Alawi and an 'Abbasi who was Sunni. The debate took place in the presence of Malikshah and his vizier Nizam al-Mulk, and matters pertaining to the differences between Sunni and Shi'a beliefs were discussed and analysed in detail, one by one. The acceptance of Shi'ism by Malikshah and story of this debate has been recounted in a small booklet entitled *Mu'tamar 'Ulama' Baghdad* which has an introduction by Ayatollah Mar'ashi Najafi.³⁴ There is also a commentary on this book written in Arabic.³⁵

The actual subject of the debate between the 'Alawid and 'Abbasid at the time of Malikshah has not been recorded in any historical sources, but its sources have been documented in the translations and commentaries of the original book. Even though the material and arguments presented in this debate are correct, and this story may have been written based on correct information, it is likely to have been fictional. If this debate did in fact take place, it would have been recorded in at least one of the Shi'a historical sources. In any case, the main objective is twofold: to remind people of these matters and to clarify the position of the Seljuq sultans with respect to the Shi'a.

The book *al-Naqd* of 'Abd al-Jalil Qazwini is one of the best examples of expositions about the situation of the Shi'a and the sectarian politics of the Seljuqs. According to the author of this book, at the time of Tughril, who is considered an example of one whose reign was hard upon the Shi'a, a person by the name of Amir Abu-Fadl 'Iraqi, who was one of the people very close to Tughril and highly respected by him, reconstructed the enclosures of the cities of Ray and Qum, renovated the 'Atiq Mosque in Qum, and re-built the mosque and traditional dome of the shrine of Lady Ma'sumah (A) in Qum.³⁶

'Abd al-Jalil narrates from the author of the book *al-Fada'ih*, which is the subject of his critique, that the Shi'a were persecuted at the time of the Seljuqs and during the reign of Malikshah and Sultan Mahmud, and they were prevented from running *madrasahs*. However, Qazwini

rejects this and gives examples of the *madrasabs* that were established in different areas.³⁷

The author of *al-Naqd* believes that the Seljuqs did not have any particular enmity against the Shi'a. Rather the Seljuqs opposed the Isma'ili Shi'a and the Batinis, but the Imami Twelver Shi'a had fundamental differences with this group because the Isma'ilis were after power, and to this end, they planned to carry out acts of terror such as assassinating rulers. 'Abd al-Jalil Qazwini writes at length about the difference between the Batinis and the Imamiyyah and explained the inception of the works of the Isma'ilis. He believes that the founders of the Batini sect were mostly from the Mushabbihah and Mujabbirah (two branches of the Ahl al-Hadith among the Sunnis).³⁸

4. *The Shi'a of Baghdad, the caliphs, and the Sunnis*

Simultaneous co-operation and opposition. The most common area where the Shi'a of Baghdad would gather was the district of Karkh, and the altercations between its residents and the Sunnis who lived in other parts of Baghdad would many times result in bloody battles and raids in the different areas. These altercations reached their peak during the reign of the Buyids, because when the Buyids and the Shi'a began openly declaring the tenets of the Shi'a faith, a strong negative reaction from the Sunnis resulted, and this discord was very strong during the last days of the Buyids. After the fall of the Buyids also, this contention would be seen in scattered areas and would sometimes intensify, but it never reached the level of discord that had been there previously. This was because the Shi'a were under pressure from the caliphs and the Sunnis, and they were not in a position where they could manifest their faith openly; and because of the restrictions and clampdowns, the Shi'a adopted a policy of dissimulation and acquiescence. However, sometimes this acquiescence turned into strife as was the case in the year 478/1085 when a huge fight broke out between the people of Karkh and those of all the other districts of Baghdad, resulting in the conflagration of Karkh. The caliph's vizier, Abu Shuja', dispatched a contingent of troops to try and quell the situation and prevent bloodshed, but he was unsuccessful and the scope of the turmoil became wider and resulted in a great deal of destruction.³⁹ In the year 451/1059 also, according to what Ibn Athir narrates, in the Karkh district, in the big Dar al-'Ilm library of Shapur ibn Ardish, an arson attack took place whose cause has been attributed to 'Amid al-Mulk

Kunduri, Tughril's vizier. This library housed ten thousand volumes, out of which one hundred were copies of the Holy Qur'an in the calligraphy of Ibn Muqlah. 'Amid al-Mulk Kunduri was personally present during the arson attack, and he selected and took some of the best books for himself.⁴⁰

In the year 458/1065, the Shi'a of Karkh commemorated the ritual ceremonies of the day of 'Ashura, closed down their shops, recited elegies, and mourned for Imam Husayn (A). The Sunnis complained about this act and this led the caliph Qa'im bi-Amr Allah to rebuke the leader of the 'Alawis, who in turn pretended that he did not know anything about it. When the Sunnis' complaints became more widespread, it became evident that the chief of police in Baghdad had given permission to the Shi'a to conduct these rituals of mourning. The chief of police became frightened of retribution and went into hiding, and, in the end, a statement was released cursing all those who said anything against the companions.⁴¹ In the year 460/1067, the jurists and *hadith* scholars asked the caliph to read out the Qadiri Creed (*i'tiqadnamih-yi qadiri*) which was a document which had been prepared from the time of the caliph al-Qadir bi-Allah in which the Rafidis and Mu'tazilis were cursed.⁴²

In 482/1089, a huge fight broke out between the two groups. It started when the people of Bab al-Basrah, who were Sunnis, attacked the district of Karkh, killing one person and injuring another. The people of Karkh closed down the marketplaces and raised copies of the Qur'an on spears, demanding that the murderers be brought to justice, but this did not bring the desired results. Fights then broke out and, as a result, the district of Karkh was raided. Soon after, the caliph Muqtadi sought the assistance of Sayf al-Dawlah Mazyadi who in turn sent a contingent under the command of Abu al-Hasan Farisi and raided the houses of those who had participated in the murder of the 'Alawis, cutting short their beards, killing some of them and banishing others until the situation came under control.⁴³ This was one of the biggest battles between the Shi'a and Sunnis during the reign of the Seljuqs in Baghdad. Afterwards, through the initiative of the Mazyadid ruler, Baghdad was relatively calm for the next few years.

In Sha'ban of 502/1108, the Shi'a and the Sunnis of Baghdad came to a peace agreement, and what is interesting is that this pact was enacted without mediation or intervention by anyone, whereas in the past, many attempts were made by others to bring about peace between these two groups, but all were futile. Ibn Athir believes that the reason for the

co-operation of the Shi'a with the Sunnis at this time was their feeling a sense of weakness, because Sultan Muhammad Seljuqi had ordered the execution of Sayf al-Dawlah, and after this the people of Karkh were fearful for their lives, because Sayf al-Dawlah and his family were Shi'a and had influence and power.⁴⁴

The Shi'a, while showing their co-operation and affability, were at the same time serious in defending their beliefs, and in 569/1173, when one of the preachers of Baghdad by the name of Muhammad al-Tusi declared that Ibn Muljam had not become an apostate by killing the Commander of the Faithful (A), the Shi'a attacked him and threw stones at him, and he had to be whisked away under the protection of the Turks. The next day, the people were ready to stone him again, but he did not attend the gathering.⁴⁵

Despite all the altercations and the hostilities that have been mentioned, it should not be surmised that the Shi'a and Sunnis were always at war with each other. Rather, they were living side by side in peace and harmony most of the time, busy dealing with each other; especially since the Shi'a primarily opted to adopt a policy of dissimulation and tolerance. The few disputes that took place once every few years, nevertheless, were usually caused by the fanaticism of some people who were driven by sectarian bigotry that led to the rising of tensions and hostilities.

The Role of the Shi'a in the Political and Governmental Structure/Hierarchy. During the period of the Turkish Seljuqs, while the role and presence of the Shi'a in the courts of the caliphs was initially weakened, it gradually revived, up to the point where they acquired the post of vizier. The influence of the Shi'a in this period cannot be compared to the later period – meaning from the beginning of the caliphate of al-Nasir li-Din Allah until the end of the 'Abbasid caliphate (575-656/1179-1258) – but they generally had an effective presence. Even though the Shi'a were side-lined from the government, the lenient and flexible positions of the Seljuq sultans and also their differences with the 'Abbasid caliphs became the means for the Shi'a, who had experienced playing a pivotal role in the government at the time of the Buyids, to establish a presence therein. Actually, the period of Malikshah should be considered a period of revival for the Shi'a which manifested itself in their active participation in politics and society.

In the sixth century AH, although the four Sunni schools were present in Ray and the Seljuq government supported the Sunnis, the clerical work that was done by the Shi'a led to their greater involvement

in matters of government. The presence of Shi'a ministers in the courts of the Abbasids and the Seljuqs is clear evidence of this.⁴⁶

One of the well-known Shi'a personalities was Sharaf al-Din Anushirwan ibn Muhammad ibn Khalid ibn Muhammad al-Qasani (Kashani) who was the vizier of the caliph and also the vizier of the Seljuqs. He was the vizier of caliph Mustarshid from 526/1131 to 528/1133; and from 528/1133 to 530/1135, he was the vizier to Sultan Mas'ud. His title was Sharaf al-Din Kashani and he was one of the famous personalities, custodians and viziers at the time of the Seljuqs, and was a scholar and a historian. He authored a book on history titled *Sudur Zaman al-Futur wa Futur Zaman al-Sudur* and another book titled *Nafahat al-Masdur*. The title of the second book has been mentioned in the introduction to *Marzaban-namih*, and 'Imad Isfahani has narrated copiously from *Sudur Zaman al-Futur* in the book *Nasrat al-Fatrah* which is a book about the history of the Seljuqs.⁴⁷

Another Shi'a personality who was able to attain a governmental post was 'Ala al-Din Tanamish, who was one of the great chiefs of Baghdad against whom the caliph was powerless. In 569/1173, a dispute arose between the people of Karkh and Bab al-Basrah when the water of the Tigris began to overflow. The people of Bab al-Basrah built a dam in order to stop the flow of water, but the water flooded a mosque in which there was a tree and that tree was uprooted. When the people of Karkh saw this they began crying out 'The curse of God be upon the Ten' (*la'an Allah al-'asharah*, referring to the famous Sunni *hadith* about ten personalities who are guaranteed Paradise), and cursed the first three caliphs, Talhah, and Zubayr. This led to a battle between the people of Karkh and those of Bab al-Basrah. The caliph al-Mustadi' bi Amr Allah signalled to 'Ala al-Din Tanamish to quell the turmoil. 'Ala al-Din used to mistreat the Sunnis of Bab al-Basrah because he himself was a Shi'a, and when he wanted to enter the district of Bab al-Basrah, the people of that district prevented him from entering and closed the gates and stood on the walls. 'Ala al-Din wanted to burn down the gates, but the caliph rebuked him and prevented him from doing so. The turmoil continued for one week and finally, it ended without the use of force.⁴⁸ Another of the Shi'a chiefs of Baghdad was Amir Yazdan. When he passed away, a fight broke out between the Shi'a and Sunnis in the town of Wasit, because the Shi'a went into mourning, whereas the Sunnis celebrated.⁴⁹

From the time of Muqtafi (530-555/1135-1160), the Shi'a became more active in acquiring political power, and during the reign of the caliph Mustanjid (555-566/1160-1170) and Mustadi' (566-575/1170-1179) the trend

of increased Shi'a power and influence in Baghdad was on the rise. The growing power of the Shi'a made the caliph Mustanjid anxious, and it was for this reason that he embarked on a programme to limit their influence. It was as part of this programme that he decided to expel the most important Shi'a tribe, the Bani Asad, from Iraq. The tribe of Bani Asad were spread out between Wasit and Basra, and they had helped Sultan Muhammad Seljuqi during the siege of Baghdad. Hence, the caliph Mustanjid had a particular dislike for them, and so he gave the responsibility of expelling them to Amir Yazdan ibn Tammaj, who was one of the chiefs and highly regarded personalities of Baghdad and was himself a Shi'a. Thus, Amir Yazdan subdued them and expelled them from Baghdad. This event took place in the year 558/1162.⁵⁰

The dynasty of Bani Mazyad is another example of the role of the Shi'a in politics and power. The Bani Mazyad from the Bani Asad ibn Khuzaymah was a branch of the tribes of Mudar.⁵¹ The tribe of Bani Asad was Shi'a, and Bani 'Adir was a branch of this tribe that was reported to have been responsible for burying the martyrs of Karbala.⁵² It was in the first half of the fifth century when the Bani Asad began gaining power under the leadership of Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn Mazyad, also known as Sana' al-Dawlah. At this time, the marauder tribes of Arabs were taking advantage of the weakness of the Buyids and carrying out raids and plundering.⁵³ They would block the hajj caravans, and it was Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn Mazyad who vanquished them. It was for this reason that his name became popular, and this gave him and the Bani Mazyad the opportunity to gain power.⁵⁴

Both the 'Abbasids and Seljuqs would endeavour to strengthen or weaken the Bani Mazyad in accordance with their own benefit or gain, and this was an opportunity for the Shi'a to execute their role. Even though Nur al-Dawlah forcefully opposed Tughril and joined hands with Basasiri, Tughril never tried to wipe the Mazyadis off the stage; instead he protected them and thereby made his government last longer.⁵⁵ The reason for this was the discord and rivalry between the Seljuqs and the 'Abbasid caliphs, whereby each would use a variety of different weapons in order to gain the upper hand over each other.

Malikshah Seljuqi also benefitted greatly from the military strength of Bani Mazyad. In 465/1072 when Qawurd, the uncle of Malikshah, rebelled against him and a battle was fought between them, Nur al-Dawlah sent a contingent under the command of his son Baha' al-Dawlah to participate in this battle in order to support Malikshah, and the primary reason for the defeat of Qawurd's army was the

participation of this contingent of the Bani Mazyad – so much so that the soldiers of Malikshah became envious of them and attacked their tents.⁵⁶

The Shi'a in the Arena of Science and Culture. Before the entry of the Seljuqs into Baghdad, the academic circles in this city had great vibrancy, but with the entry of the Seljuqs into Baghdad and with the clampdown of the Sunnis, many restrictions were put on the Shi'a, to the extent that the district of Karkh and even the house of Shaykh Tusi came under attack and were raided.⁵⁷ After the migration of Shaykh Tusi to Najaf, Baghdad lost its place as the centre of learning and the number of Shi'a scholars present in Baghdad was greatly reduced. However, there were still a few Shi'a scholars in certain areas who were active and whose presence was felt in Baghdad. Some of these scholars were:

1. Ibn Shahr Ashub Mazandarani (489-588/1096-1192) – exegete, narrator, linguist and jurist. After Shaykh Tusi's migration from Baghdad to Najaf, the illuminating rays of knowledge were no longer seen in Baghdad until Ibn Shahr Ashub emerged and wrote his scholarly works. He himself mentions twelve of his works in the book *Ma'alim al-'Ulama'*.⁵⁸ It was in Baghdad that he authored the book *Manaqib Al Abi Talib*, which is the most famous of Ibn Shahr Ashub's works and shows his mastery over historical and *hadith* literature. In the introduction, he uses interesting expressions to explain his reason for writing the book and then goes on to use both Shi'a and Sunni references to substantiate his positions.⁵⁹ In the end, though, due to the pressure of Hanbali scholars, he too had to leave Baghdad and move to Hillah.

2. Another Shi'a scholar was Abu al-Asghar Muhammad ibn Humam al-Baghdadi. He was a historian, a linguist and one of the most reliable narrators of *Nahj al-Balaghah*. Abu al-Asghar was a student of Sharif Radi.⁶⁰

3. Abu Sa'd Hasan ibn Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn Hamdun al-Baghdadi (546/1151), who was one of the most renowned scribes and accountants of the 'Abbasid court. He had strong control over the collection and spending of the state funds. Abu Sa'd was the dynast of the knowledgeable family of Al Hamdun in Baghdad. Some of his important works include *Kitab al-Hisab* and a book about the machinery of government and state.⁶¹

4. Abu Muhammad 'Abd Allah, better known as Ibn Khashshab. He was a Shi'a scholar well-versed in grammar, language, poetry, philosophy,

alchemy, mathematics, jurisprudence and *hadith*. He had a good grasp of most of the Islamic sciences. He was the primary authority on Arabic grammar in Baghdad. He had a large library which he endowed to the students of religion.⁶²

5. Abu Nasr Muhammad Ghars al-Dawlah (488-545/1095-1150). He was from the family of Hamdun and was one of the Shi'a scholars who had a mastery over many of the sciences and also held an important post in the court of the 'Abbasids. From the year 513/1119, he was made the chief scribe and became the private clerk of the 'Abbasid caliph.⁶³ His son Baha' al-Din Abu al-Ma'ali Muhammad was also in charge of teaching and issuing religious edicts (*fatawa*) and was also a Minister of the Court. These were the two offices that he held. One of his most well-known works is the book *al-Tadhkirah* or *Tadhkirat Ibn Hamdun* which is one of the sources used by 'Allamah Majlisi in his *Bihar al-Anwar*.⁶⁴

6. Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah Balkhi Wa'iz, better known as Ibn Zarif. He was one of the Shi'a who lived in Baghdad. He was born in Balkh and later came to Baghdad and began preaching there. One of the places that he would frequent in Baghdad was the Nizamiyyah where he would openly preach the beliefs of the Shi'a and attack the beliefs of the Sunnis.⁶⁵

7. Abu 'Ali al-Tusi. During the time of Muqtafi, Baghdad was at a juncture where it had become a centre of erudition and knowledge of Shi'ism. The reason for this was the presence of the son of Shaykh Tusi (Abu 'Ali al-Tusi) in Baghdad and the numerous groups of Shi'a who would come to him to acquire knowledge and education. Safdi writes about them: 'The status of this Shi'a scholar was so high that 'Imad al-Tabari has said about him: "If prayers could be sent on other than Prophets and Imams, I would send prayers and salutations on him."⁶⁶

Conclusion

The Shi'a of Baghdad during the reign of the Seljuqs (447-575 AH) were faced with two powers – the 'Abbasids and the Seljuqs. The Shi'a, who had before this time been under the umbrella of the Shi'a Buyids, now found themselves in a new situation because the strength of the caliphs, and the Sunnis had been revived by the support of the Seljuq sultans.

Despite the presence of the Seljuqs in Baghdad and their support for the caliphs, there was no unity between the 'Abbasid caliphs and the Seljuq sultans in dealing with the Shi'a because the relationship of the

Seljuqs with the 'Abbasids was not one of mutual co-operation as far as creed and ideology was concerned; rather it was based on mutual benefit. If the Seljuq sultans had acknowledged the legitimacy of the 'Abbasid caliphs, it would not have behoved them to rise up and even wage war against them as they did at times. This type of relationship could not unite these two forces politically and ideologically against the Shi'a. The lack of unity between these two powers strengthened the sectarian politics of the Seljuqs, because the Seljuqs were tolerant towards other sects, just as the attitude of the sultans in relation to the Shi'a and their beliefs was based on respect and acceptance, while the Shi'a also followed the policy of dissimulation and co-operation. Except in rare cases, such as during the time of Tughril, the Seljuqs would, for the most part, practice a policy of tolerance towards and even show respect for Shi'a rites. All in all, the Seljuqs firstly were not prejudiced, and secondly were only interested in securing their interests; and this is yardstick they used to determine how to deal with the 'Abbasid caliphs and the Shi'a. This milieu was an opportunity for the Shi'a to easily come out of the void that had been left after the fall of the Buyids, without becoming the target of the wrath of the caliphs and the Sunnis and without having to confront the Seljuq sultanate. It is for this very reason that, despite the fall of the Buyids and revival of power of the caliphs and the Sunnis, the Shi'a of Baghdad were able to act as an important and influential force and make their presence felt despite being deprived of political power. In the beginning, they had to bear great losses due to their altercations with the caliphs and Sunnis after the fall of the Buyids. Most of the Shi'a areas lost their liveliness, and some of these areas had even become desolate. However, after some time, the tensions began to reduce and even ceased completely; there were far less frequent and less intense disputes between the Shi'a and Sunnis during the Seljuq than the Buyid era, and the peace-seeking position of the Shi'a coupled with their policy of dissimulation was very effective in this regard.

On the whole, in order to preserve their acquisitions and secure their survival, the Shi'a neither had to fight with Tughril or the other Seljuqs, nor give any response to the rancour of the Sunnis. Of course, another reason for not confronting the Seljuqs was the inappropriate actions of the Buyids; because during the time of the Buyids, and especially during their last days, the hostilities between the Shi'a and Sunnis reached their peak, to the degree that Shi'a districts such as Karkh became the targets of raids and arson attacks, and this was not something the Shi'a could

bear, so in comparison, the presence of Tughril was not as difficult for the Shi'a, because they had just gone through their toughest period.

Even though the Shi'a lost most of their political power with the fall of the Buyids, they were nevertheless able to preserve their status as an influential force in various fields because, in their sectarian politics, the Seljuqs showed respect to the beliefs of the Imami Shi'a. Additionally, the tumultuous relationship between the Seljuqs and 'Abbasid caliphs prevented these two powers from uniting against the Shi'a. This attitude of the Seljuq sultans and their policy of co-operation and acquiescence with the Shi'a resulted in the Shi'a not being dealt with as an opposition group. Thus, the Shi'a gradually emerged from isolation and regained important roles in the government.

Notes

¹ Yaqut al-Himawi, *Mu'jam al-Buldan* IV, ed. F. Jundi (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1990 (1410 AH)), 255.

² Ibn 'Imad al-Hanbali, *Shadharat al-Dhahab* II (n.p.: n.d.), 96.

³ Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn Sulayman Rawandi, *Rahat al-Sudur wa Ayat al-Surur dar Tarikh-i Al-i Saljuq*, ed. M. Iqbal (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1986 (1364 AH (solar))), 95, 105; Zahir al-Din Nishapuri, *Saljuqnamih* (Tehran, Gilalekhawar, 1954 (1332 AH solar)), 15-17.

⁴ Bosworth and Molvin, *Saljuqiyan*, translated into Persian by Y. Azhand (Tehran: Mawla Publications, 1380 AH (solar)), 79.

⁵ Shams al-Din Ahmad Ibn Khallikan, *Wafayat al-A'yan fi Anba' Abna' al-Zaman* I (Beirut, Dar al-Ahya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1997 (1417 AH)), 104; Ibn al-'Abri, *Tarikh Mukhtasar al-Duwal* (n.p.: n.d.), 184.

⁶ Sermons such as the Friday prayer sermons and the 'Eid day sermons would normally be read out in the name of the ruler of the land.

⁷ al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Tarikh Baghdad* IX (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1997 (1417 AH)), 407; Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn 'Uthman al-Dhahabi, *Tarikh al-Islam wa Wafayat al-Mashahir wa al-'Alam* XXX, ed. U. Tadmiri, 2nd ed. (Beirut, Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabi, 1989 (1409 AH)), 30; Abu al-Fida Isma'il ibn Kathir, *al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah* XIII, 4th ed. (Beirut, Dar al-Ma'rifah, 1998 (1419 AH)), 521.

⁸ J. A. Boyle (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran: The Saljuq and Mongol Periods* V (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 202.

⁹ Abu al-Faraj Ibn Jawzi, *al-Muntazam fi Tarikh al-Muluk wa al-Umam* IX (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1995 (1415 AH)), 405-406; Dhahabi, *Tarikh al-Islam wa Wafayat al-Mashahir wa al-'Alam* XXX, 29; Jalal al-Din Suyuti, *Tarikh al-Khulafa'* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.), 334.

¹⁰ Ibn Jawzi, *al-Muntazam fi Tarikh al-Muluk wa al-Umam* IX, 410-417; Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah* XII, 4th ed. (Beirut, Dar al-Ma'rifah, 1998 (1419 AH)), 539.

¹¹ Ibn 'Asakir, *Tarikh Madinat Dimishq* LIII, ed. U. al-'Amrawi (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1998 (1419 AH)), 84; Ibn Jawzi, *al-Muntazam fi Tarikh al-Muluk wa al-Umam* IX, 408.

- ¹² Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah* XII, 540-543; Dhahabi, *Tarikh al-Islam wa Wafayat al-Mashahir wa al-A'lam* XXX, 272.
- ¹³ Suyuti, *Tarikh al-Khulafa'*, 336.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 355; Ibn Athir, *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh* VI, 4th ed. (Beirut, Mu'assasah al-Tarikh al-'Arabi, 1994 (1414 AH)), 371; J. A. Boyle (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran* V, 48.
- ¹⁵ Ibn Athir, *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh* VI, 227.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 236.
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Beyond the Karbala Paradigm: Rethinking Revolution and Redemption in Twelver Shi'a Mourning Rituals

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ABSTRACT: In the mid-90s, Lebanon's Hezbollah movement and the Iranian Ayatollah Khamene'i both banned bloody forms of self-flagellation such as *tatbir* (cutting the forehead with a sword), calling them backward and un-Islamic. They argued that Shi'a Muslims ought to imitate Husayn by actively fighting against oppressors rather than passively mourning Husayn's martyrdom. This prohibition has not been unanimously applied in all Muslim countries, including Syria, where such practices persisted until the Arab Spring (when virtually all Shi'a Muslims left the shrine-town where these practices were performed). By closely reading the linguistic, conceptual, and juridical discourses that circulated in Syria in order to justify this position, the paper shows that the performers of *tatbir* conceived of these rituals in revolutionary, rather than reactionary, terms. By examining the performance and reception of flagellation processions in terms of differing modalities of affect, the paper opens up spaces for rethinking 'revolution' and 'redemption' in contemporary Twelver Shi'ism.

KEYWORDS: Karbala Paradigm, Shi'a Muharram practices, self-flagellation, affect, Syria, Sayyidah Zaynab

Introduction

In the mid-90s Lebanon's Hezbollah movement and the Iranian Ayatollah Khamene'i both banned bloody forms of self-flagellation such as *tatbir* (cutting the skin on the top of the head with a sword) calling them backward and un-Islamic.¹ They forbid bloody forms of self-

flagellation because, they claim, it portrays a negative image of Twelver Shi'ism.² They argue that Shi'a Muslims ought to emphasize 'modern, revolutionary' rather than 'traditional, soteriological' interpretations of Imam Husayn's martyrdom at the Battle of Karbala.³ Hezbollah in particular calls on Shi'a to imitate Husayn by actively fighting against oppressors, rather than passively mourning Husayn's martyrdom.⁴

In Syria, in contrast to Lebanon and Iran, bloody self-flagellation practices are legal and increased in popularity over the last two decades until the spring of 2011, when thousands of Shi'a fled from the violence that accompanied the Syrian uprising.⁵ As Twelver Shi'a backed, as well as received support from, Syria's 'Alawi government, they have been increasingly targeted. For example, in January of 2012, 18 Iranian pilgrims were kidnapped.⁶ In April, the head of the Ayatollah Sadiq Shirazi's *hawzah* Zaynabiyah, the oldest and one of the largest Shi'a seminaries in Syria, was shot and died on his way to the seminary.⁷ By July, the shrine-town was divided into sectarian zones at war with one another. Afghan and Iraqi Shi'a were fleeing en masse because they were threatened by Sunni Syrians, Iraqis, and Palestinians who live in and around the shrine-town of Sayyidah Zaynab, around ten kilometres south of Damascus. Other inhabitants have fled because of several attempts at bombing the shrine and its surroundings.⁸

Before this unrest, however, Shi'a memorial rites could be observed in the Syrian shrine-town of Sayyidah Zaynab. Sayyidah Zaynab is the granddaughter of the Prophet Muhammad, daughter of 'Ali and Fatimah. She is a key figure in Shi'ism because she witnessed the Battle of Karbala, wherein her brother Husayn, the third Shi'a Imam, was killed in 680 CE during the Islamic month of Muharram. After Husayn's death, Zaynab was taken prisoner along with the other women and children from the camp of Husayn. They were brought to Damascus, where Zaynab confronted the Umayyad caliph Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah and spread the story of the injustice through commemorative mourning gatherings (*majalis 'aza*). According to Um Husayn, the principal of Ayatollah Muhammad Shirazi's Syrian seminary that I attended as part of my fieldwork, Sayyidah Zaynab was not only the first to lead ritual mourning gatherings, but also the first to self-flagellate and cut her head in mourning.⁹

This, according to the 'modern pious' Shi'a, which anthropologist Lara Deeb describes, is a 'traditional' interpretation.¹⁰ 'Modern pious' Lebanese Shi'a often follow Hezbollah and value 'rationalism' over 'emotion'. For them, rationalism means the use of Modern Standard

Arabic in mourning gatherings, rather than the southern Iraqi dialect which dominates Arab Shi'ism. They invoke rationalism as a slogan in order to oppose bloody forms of self-flagellation including *tatbir*. Proponents of *tatbir*, such as the Shirazis, do not deny the importance of rationalism.¹¹ Instead, they emphasize hemic rituals in an attempt to claim legitimacy through the concept of tradition. Both opponents and proponents frame their arguments about *tatbir* with reference to dualistic terms: tradition and modernity, healing/salvation and revolution.

In this article, I rethink these binaries by first reviewing academic approaches to Muharram mourning practices and discourses. Second, I introduce the Syrian shrine and town of Sayyidah Zaynab and local debates surrounding Muharram rituals. Third, I examine Twelver Shi'a mourning rituals in Syria, including *majalis 'aza* and *tatbir*, through two related dichotomous concepts, the Karbala Paradigm and affective mourning modalities, which I discuss below. Fourth, I show how paying attention to affect can help in reconsidering the concepts of 'revolution' and 'redemption.'

The Karbala Paradigm

Muharram rituals have been a favourite topic of discussion among historians, anthropologists, and political scientists. Prior to the Iranian Revolution of 1979, scholars framed their analysis in terms of the 'Passion of Karbala,' which they treated as a Shi'a genus of the passion play common in Christian Easter observances.¹² Following the Revolution, however, scholars such as Nikki Keddie and Michael Fischer became interested in the politicization of Shi'a Muharram practices and discourses.

In 1981, the anthropologist Fischer was the first to coin the phrase 'the Karbala Paradigm' in order to distinguish Shi'a Muharram practices from those of Catholic Penitentes. His construction pointed to the narrative's rhetorical operation, dramatic form, and significance in differentiating Shi'a. The paradigm, according to Fischer, 'provides models for living and a mnemonic for thinking about how to live.'¹³ By 1983, historian Nikki Keddie framed the analysis in terms of a duality with a relationship to politics. The duality in the subtitle of Keddie's edited volume, *Shi'ism from Quietism to Revolution*, which Mary Elaine Hegland rephrased as 'accommodation and revolution,' became the dualism through which scholars came to understand the Karbala Paradigm.¹⁴ Around the same time, anthropologist Michael Gilsean

published his comparison of Muharram rituals in Iran with Lebanon. He designated politically quietist versus revolutionary modes, 'passive' versus 'active' modes of piety.¹⁵

In their more recent studies, Kamran Aghaie, Lara Deeb, and Sophia Pandya have not only adopted earlier politically focused and dichotomous views of the Karbala Paradigm, but have argued that there has been a shift over the course of the latter half of the twentieth century from 'traditional' and 'salvific' interpretations to 'modern' and 'revolutionary' interpretations.¹⁶ At first, Shi'a in Iran, Lebanon, and Bahrain followed 'traditional' and 'salvific' interpretations, according to which Shi'a should participate in all forms of mourning and self-flagellation in order gain salvation in the afterlife as well as in this lifetime. Then, many Shi'a began following 'modern' and 'revolutionary' interpretations, according to which Shi'a should strive for 'modern' values, such as education, progress, political awareness, and social involvement.

The dichotomous concepts these academics have been using largely mirror those of religious Iranian ideologues such as 'Ali Shari'ati who in the decades prior to the Revolution had turned the Karbala narrative into a revolutionary manifesto. (Notably, Shari'ati lies buried in the cemetery adjacent to the shrine of Sayyidah Zaynab in Syria.) Shari'ati argued that there are two types of Shi'ism: the first type was the 'pure, just, and populist' Shi'ism of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, the first Imam. The second was Safavid Shi'ism, the worldly, complacent, and corrupt piety of the scholarly elite, the ulema.¹⁷ The clerics' 'worldly Shi'ism' implied that they were more concerned with the details of ritual observance than struggling against the corrupt regimes that had co-opted them.¹⁸ By holding up 'Alid Shi'ism as the pure, just, and true form of Shi'ism and delegitimizing scholarly authority, Shari'ati emphasized 'active emulation of Husayn in the form of active rebellion against corrupt rulers.'¹⁹ He transformed the Battle of Karbala from a religio-historical account, central to mainly soteriological practices, into an on-going moral and political obligation to revolt against injustice.²⁰ Husayn became the 'model for rebellion against the Shah and the foreign imperialist powers.'²¹

My caveat with both Shari'ati and the aforementioned academics is that the dichotomous interpretation of the Karbala Paradigm posits two mutually exclusive options. Muharram rituals and symbols are either traditional or modern, salvific or revolutionary. My objection to this binary is that it simultaneously depoliticizes salvation and desacralizes revolution.²²

In what follows, I complicate and reconcile this politically focused and dichotomous interpretation of the Karbala Paradigm. I do so by drawing attention to two underlying modes of affect, which are not only conceptually and linguistically inter-related, but interdependent. I argue that Muharram symbols, discourses, and rituals affect participants in two affective modes: *athara* and *thara*. They can transmit, have influence, and make an impression,²³ or they can stir up, arouse, and excite.²⁴ The first term derives from the root *a-th-r*; the noun *athar* designates 'traces' or 'tradition.'²⁵ The second derives from the root *th-ā-r*, which is also the root of the word 'revolution,' *thawrah*. The two terms are closely related both in form and in content, linguistically and with regard to their meanings.

To illustrate my theory, I show how *athara* and *thara* are both at work in two kinds of mourning rituals, which I observed in Sayyidah Zaynab: weekly women's mourning rituals (*majalis 'aza*) and men's annual 'Ashura processions including *tatbir*. I demonstrate how the concepts of *athara* and *thara* help reconcile and, at the same time, illuminate interpretive differences with regard to the Karbala Paradigm. Finally, I claim that an analytic focus on affect, rather than political effectiveness, allows scholars to rethink both 'revolution' and 'salvation' with regard to contemporary Twelver Shi'ism.



Figure 1: The eastern side of the shrine of Sayyidah Zaynab. It is the side one sees when entering from the prayer hall. Above the entrance, it reads: '*Al-salam 'alayki ya Zaynab al-Kubra'* ('Peace be upon you, O Zaynab the elder').

At the shrine

It is ironic that the country which has been most tolerant of public Shi'a mourning rituals over the last decades is the same place where Sayyid Muhsin al-Amin (d. 1952), the highest ranked Shi'a jurist or *mujtabid* of Damascus of his time, published a tract condemning flagellations in the 1920s, sparking a debate over bloody flagellation practices. Opponents accused Amin of giving in to Sunni pressure. Supporters argued that he only sought to reform 'Ashura practices by criticizing, for instance, the participation of unveiled women in public rituals. By removing the visually offensive aspects from these practices, Amin hoped to make these rituals into aesthetically pleasing spectacles, which would serve as proselytizing tools.²⁶

Despite Amin's disapproval, bloody flagellation processions are generally tolerated in Sayyidah Zaynab. Unlike the Iraqi government under Saddam, the Syrian regime does not fear the rituals' 'revolutionary potential.' And unlike both Iran and Lebanon, Syria is not mainly concerned with the 'modern' and 'authentic' image of Twelver Shi'ism. Struggling to rule over a majority Sunni country, the Syrian regime (which is largely 'Alawi) is indulgent towards Twelver Shi'a because it derives its Islamic credentials and legitimacy from them.²⁷ Moreover, Syria's stance towards Shi'a piety has made religious tourism a lucrative source of income. Thus, the Syrian state has sought to merely contain 'Ashura practices, but not to control or abolish them. The Syrian government sought to side-line and hide these practices in 2009, when the ties between Saudi Arabia and Syria became stronger and the Saudi king came to visit Damascus. However, they remained legal and lively.

The main promoters of self-flagellation rituals in Sayyidah Zaynab are the Shirazis and other exiled elite Shi'a. They first started coming from the Iraqi shrine-town of Karbala in the early 1980s, when Saddam Hussein exiled forty thousand Shi'a suspected of Iranian descent. In 1982, Ayatollah Hasan Shirazi was murdered in Beirut, Lebanon. Meanwhile his brother, Ayatollah Muhammad Shirazi, had left Iraq for Kuwait, but following the Iranian Revolution of 1979, he moved to Qum, Iran. Muhammad Shirazi had had high hopes for Iran and the Revolution. The Shirazis had been close friends and helpers to Ayatollah Khomeini before the Revolution. However, they had a falling out by the mid-80s. The Shirazis disagreed with Khomeini's *wilayat al-faqih al-mutlaq* and preferred *shurat al-fuqaha*, a system that would allow them to have a voice

in politics. Moreover, as the Supreme Leader of Iran, Khomeini had become more concerned with domestic matters. The Shirazis remained dedicated to their transnational network and ideology. Despite their political failures in Iraq and Iran, the Shirazis have been successful in building networks and institutions in Syria. They head the oldest and one of the largest seminaries in the shrine-town Sayyidah Zaynab, the Zaynabiyyah.

Significantly, the most important religious space in town, the shrine of Sayyidah Zaynab and its prayer hall does not fall under the authority of the Shirazis. The shrine is under the influence of Hezbollah and under the control and authority of Khamene'i.²⁸ Women visibly affiliated with Hezbollah 'manage' female crowds on Fridays. The Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamene'i controls the shrine in the sense that his views are preached from the pulpit and his advice is disseminated from 'Islamic information offices' in the shrine complex, across the entrance to the prayer hall. His influence is substantiated by the fact that it is Iranian money which has been funding much of the recent renovation of the shrine.²⁹ Notably, both Khamene'i and Hezbollah oppose *tatbir*. (However, they do not oppose *latmiyyat*, or rhythmic clapping on the chest.) As political actors, both are mainly concerned with the image of Twelver Shi'ism. They are opposed to bloody 'Ashura practices, because they argue that it makes Shi'ism look 'irrational' and 'backward.' They are afraid that seeing such practices leaves negative impressions on Sunnis and non-Muslims.³⁰

The Shirazis are also concerned with defending the image of Shi'ism, though their position as a minority within a minority make them more willing to embrace provocative practices. Their defence and active encouragement of *tatbir* performance demonstrates their defiance of and opposition to Khamene'i and his claim to be the sole supreme leader.³¹ The Shirazis compare their own exile and loss of power to that of the Family of the Prophet. They claim to be the defenders of 'tradition', in the sense that they equate 'flagellation' with the 'tradition' of Sayyidah Zaynab. Another sense in which the Shirazis invoke 'tradition' is by arguing that *tatbir* flagellation in particular constitutes a 'prophetic' (and thus, 'traditional') form of medicine. They claim that it is a form of 'cupping' which draws '*damm fasid*', rotten or corrupt blood, out of the body, thereby healing it.³² Tradition connotes healing.

In Syria, the Shirazis promote bloody forms of self-flagellation such as *tatbir* at their seminary, which lies around two hundred metres north of the shrine of Sayyidah Zaynab, on the road to Damascus. They also have

a satellite television station. However, as noted earlier, they do not control the shrine. Khamene'i's representatives manage the shrine. This means that casual visitors and pilgrims, as well as local Sunnis who may also visit the shrine, are much more likely to hear and be exposed to Khamene'i's views. The Shirazis can only reach out to those who attend classes or mourning gatherings held at their Zaynabiyah seminary. Who attends classes and rituals at the Zaynabiyah? Though short-term visitors do occasionally come in and participate, most of the attendees are long-term foreign residents who live in Sayyidah Zaynab or its surrounding areas. They include mainly Iraqis, Iranians, Afghans, Africans, some Kuwaitis, and sometimes Syrian or Lebanese Shi'a. The demographic split between those who support Khamene'i versus those who support Muhammad Shirazi separates and even alienates locals from visitors and non-Shi'a locals, who are likely to hear Khamene'i's view if they visit the shrine. As foreign long-term residents perform bloody mourning rituals, Sunni locals and pilgrims from all over the world learn that extreme forms of flagellation are not acceptable. One might even posit that the hostilities post-2011 between on the one hand Iraqi and other long-term Shi'a residents and on the other hand Syrian, Golani, and Palestinian Sunnis, who came to the area largely before Shi'a began arriving, have been influenced by the discursive divide between the Shirazis and Khamene'i.³³ What influence it has on Shi'a in Syria as a whole after the uprising is another question entirely.

Affective mourning practices

While Ayatollahs Shirazi and Khamene'i do not agree on *tatbir*, they do agree on a variety of other Muharram practices which are regularly performed in the shrine and town of Sayyidah Zaynab. They both support *latm*, wearing black clothing, and crying. One of the most vital pious practices in Sayyidah Zaynab is the weekly mourning gathering (*majlis 'aza*), wherein Shi'a commemorate the oppression and deaths of the Imams.

The *majlis* begins when the *mullayah* ascends the *minbar* (or podium). The *mullayah* may begin with reading a *ziyarah*, a 'visitation prayer' for the particular member of the Prophet's family to be mourned during the gathering. *Ziyarat* are standardized prayer-formulas found in Shi'a prayer books, particularly *Mafatih al-Jinan*.³⁴ Alternately, a *mullayah* may begin with a slow *latm*, a mourning chant accompanied by rhythmic chest beating (though many women will slap

their hands on their knees or thighs instead of their chests). Following this introduction, the *mullayah* reads *salawat*, greetings to the Prophet's family, the *abl al-bayt*, which includes a short formulaic description of their oppression and ends with the wish '*ya laytana kunna m'akum fa-nafuzu fawzan 'adhiman*' (literally, 'O, how we wish we had been with you [at the Battle of Karbala], we would have won a glorious victory'). The *salawat* are usually chanted in the manner of a dirge. They set the mood melodically and pre-shadow the *na'i* lament, which follows later. Though this *na'i* is short, many women pull their *abayat*, black outer garments, over their faces as if practicing, readying themselves for the mourning to come later in the ritual gathering.

Next, the *mullayah* introduces the topic of her sermon either quoting Qur'an or a relevant *hadith*. In her talk, the *mullayah* may address doctrinal or legal questions.³⁵ 'Alawiyyah 'Aliya, a teacher at the Shirazi seminary, explained in a rhetoric class, that the preacher or *mullayah* should keep it short.³⁶ This way, the audience will be moved, but not bored. The *mullayah* should engage her audience through interesting stories and she should talk about something useful.³⁷ For example, it is useless to tell an audience of veiled women to veil. Instead, a *mullayah* should encourage them to pray on time. A *mullayah* should adapt their sermons or lessons to the interests of her audience. A carefully chosen topic will actually leave deeper effects; it will make the audience think.

To further illustrate this point 'Aliya related the following story: 'There was once a shaykh who went to a rural community where he wanted to perform ritual mourning gatherings. To his surprise, his audience did not respond to his lamenting chant as he held his first *majlis*. Disappointed, he asked his hosts whether they thought his voice was lacking. The hosts assured the shaykh that his lament during the *majlis* had been beautiful. The shaykh thought for a while and then asked the host: "What occupations do the villagers practice?" The answer was animal husbandry. The next day, the shaykh retold the Karbala story in a local idiom. He explained that the cattle of Yazid killed the animals of Husayn. And the audience wept almost immediately!' When 'Aliya finished the story, the seminary students laughed. They understood that using local idioms helps move listeners and causes them to reflect.

The *na'i*, which follows the sermon, covers a range of lament styles which follow a set order (*wannah*, *tahmis*, *muthaqqal*), but allows for improvisations within the parameters of this form. An accomplished *mullayah* has memorized countless lines of mourning poetry, which help her improvise while chanting.³⁸ She has recourse to standard

classic collections and newer fashionable collections for the *na'i*. In both cases, the poetry is in *shruji*, Southern Iraqi colloquial Arabic. In this, the *majalis* in Sayyidah Zaynab differ from the self-consciously 'modern and revolutionary' *majalis* in Lebanon, which use Modern Standard Arabic.³⁹

Though the emphasis lies on the *mullayah*, she is not solely responsible for the felicitous performance of *majalis*. Participants are expected to noisily, actively lament and cry during the *na'i* in response to the *mullayah's* chant. *Mullayah* Um Zaynab often tells her audience: 'If you can't cry, pretend to cry (*tabaki*)! Performing *tabaki* carries the same divine reward as crying and it will, *insha' Allah*, help you learn to cry with more ease.'⁴⁰ Pulling one's *abayah* over one's face, or simply hiding one's face in one's hands and acting 'as if' one cried is not only acceptable, but a necessary first step towards becoming a better, more pious Shi'a.

To signal the end of her *na'i*, the *mullayah* invariably recites the formula usually invoked when hearing the news of someone's death: '*Inna li-Allah wa inna ilayhi raji'un*' (or 'we are from and belong to God and to Him we return'). As if on cue, women cease their lament, dry their tears, pull back their *abayah*, and uncover their faces.

At this point, the *mullayah* has the option to perform *latmiyyat* (which are chants accompanied by rhythmic chest beating) before ending the ritual gathering. Syrian and Lebanese *mullayahs* tend to minimize or omit this part, while Iraqis tend to extend it. At the Shirazi seminary, all *majalis* include at least three *latmiyyat*. Each increases in tempo, agitating and exciting devotees. The first *latmiyyah* may be accompanied by clapping on the thighs, the second by chest-beating, and the third by slapping one's cheeks.

The *majlis* comes to a close with one or more of three standard prayers. The *mullayah* tells her audience to '*salli 'ala Muhammad wa Al-i Muhammad*,' bless the Prophet and his family, and then recite Surah al-Fatihah for the benefit of the sponsors of the *majlis* and for themselves, for the sake of healing and for the fulfilment of their needs. If someone has a particular need or request, she may request the *mullayah* to ask everyone to respond to another '*salli 'ala Muhammad wa Al-i Muhammad*' and recite another Surah al-Fatihah.

In short, the weekly mourning gathering goes through a cycle of affect. It begins with a slow, 'heavy' chant. After this initial 'impression', the *mullayah* transmits a lesson, which ends in *na'i*. Through *na'i*, devotees descend into crying or *tabaki*, an emotional, cathartic low. Then, they ascend via *latmiyyat* to a rhythmic crescendo. Finally, the ritual ends

in a sudden stillness, a redirection, and a plea for the Mahdi, the Hidden Imam, to return and to save his Shi'a devotees.

One day after class at a seminary in Sayyidah Zaynab, I brought up the binary of *athara* and *thara* for discussion with Um Muhammad, a classmate at the Zaynabiyyah seminary. She liked the idea and suggested that another way to conceive of these two modes of affect is to link them to another dichotomy: 'theory' and 'practice.' She explained that there is a correlation: 'the traces (*athar*) which mourning gatherings leave are theoretical, dogmatic, *nazari*. The 'revolutionary' mode of Shi'a piety (*thawrah*), for her, constitutes 'practice.' It is '*amali* (or practical).'

⁴¹ Her attribution of the adjectives, 'theoretical' and 'practical', to the two modes of affect is complementary. One necessarily implies and requires the other. The theoretical traces of mourning gatherings occupy attendees' minds; mourning gatherings also agitate, engender practice and encourage practical action. 'They are like [the duality of] mind and body,' explained Um Muhammad. They encompass both salvation and revolution.

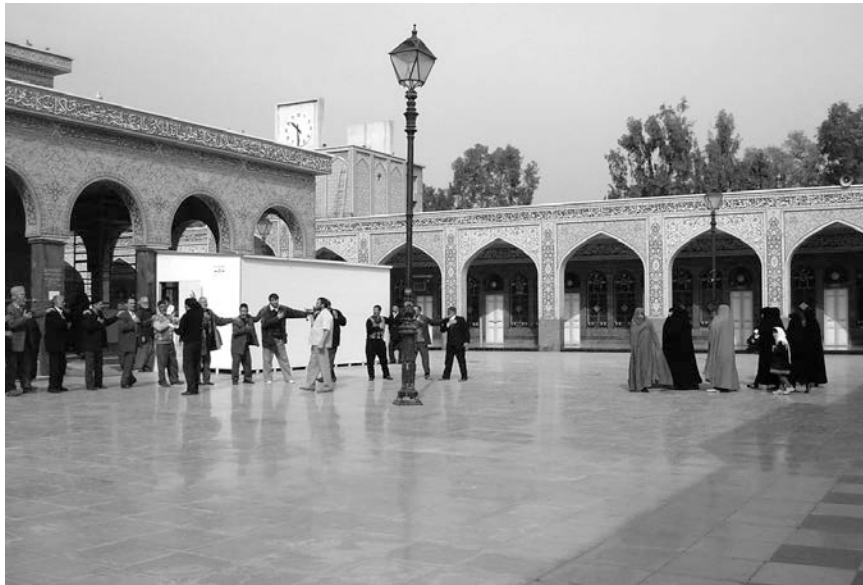


Figure 2: This photo was taken in 2007, when the eastern side of the shrine's compound was not yet exclusively dedicated to women. The men and women in the photo belong to the same tour group. The men are performing *latm* (a form of self-flagellation which consists of rhythmically slapping one's chest), while the women are lamenting loudly. The tour guide usually has some seminary education and leads the ritual chant which accompanies the *latm*.

'Revolutionary' and 'salvific' interpretations

While ritual mourning gatherings in Sayyidah Zaynab are often held on a weekly basis throughout the whole year, there are also calendar specific mourning rituals, such as 'Ashura processions, which take place on the tenth of Muharram. Some 'Ashura processions include *tatbir*, the practice of cutting oneself on one's forehead with a blade until blood flows. Others do not. I examine *tatbir* here is because it is an extremely popular practice, which draws both crowds and controversies.

Tatbir processions, in a sense, form the pinnacle of the annual Muharram cycle. In Sayyidah Zaynab, Shi'a perform *tatbir* processions at dawn on 'Ashura. Just after sunrise, rows of young men dressed in white *dishdashabs*, or long-sleeved robes, emerge from various seminaries and *husayniyyat*.⁴² Accompanied by boys and men carrying drums, the men rhythmically chant '*ya Haydar*' ('O lion', an epithet for Imam 'Ali, Husayn's father). Some carry their own swords and rhythmically hit themselves on their freshly shaved heads with the flat side of the blade in preparation for *tatbir*. The older, more experienced men cut themselves. First-timers let an elder hit them once or twice. In a sea of mourning Shi'a dressed in black, the flagellants stand out in their blood-stained white *dishdashabs*. The bleeding men march proudly around the shrine, pay their respects to Sayyidah Zaynab. They promise her, the gathered crowds and themselves that they stand by Husayn. Similarly to the weekly mourning gatherings, they wish: '*Ya laytana kunna ma'akum fa-nafuzu farwazan 'aziman!* O how we wish we had been with you [at the Battle of Karbala], we would have won a glorious victory!'

The flagellants range from five-year-old boys, whom their fathers carry on their shoulders, to elderly men. The majority, however, who perform this rite of masculinity, are young men from their late teens to early forties. They include Iranians, Afghans, and South Asians, but the majority is Iraqi. (There were roughly two million Iraqis in Syria around 2006 and many of those were Shi'a.) Crowds form in anticipation of the flagellation procession, consisting of women – the flagellants' mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters – and other men, both Sunni and Shi'a. Many cry while watching the flagellants. The atmosphere is both sad and energetic. When I watched the processions in 2008 and 2009, a few of the women who knew me proudly pointed out their male relatives who were performing *tatbir*.

Even after the procession is over and the crowds dispersed, dozens of young male flagellants continue to walk around in their blood-stained

clothes for the rest of the day. They bear visible traces of mourning. The traces are bodily: the pain fades, but the cut of the forehead remains for a while. The young men also make impressions on others. *Tatbir* influences observers: it can agitate them or make them think.

As most *tatbir* processions take place just after sunrise, few non-Shi'a critics and cynics come to see the flagellants. Most come in the afternoon, when two or three South Asian groups of men perform *zanjir* flagellations (wherein they use chains with attached blades). Nevertheless, on the morning of 'Ashura (in January 2009), a group of young Palestinian Sunni men showed up along the eastern wall outside the shrine of Sayyidah Zaynab – mainly in order to make fun of the Shi'a men performing *tatbir*. A young Iraqi Shi'a man was slowly passing in front of them and felt personally offended by the Palestinian youth's comments. The Iraqi took his ceremonial sword, not the sharp one used for actually cutting the top-front of the head, and mockingly pretended to hit one of them on the head. The Palestinian youth jerked back, inadvertently admitting fear and defeat. The Shi'a man continued with the procession, while the Sunni recovered as his friends made fun of him. The scene was carnivalesque and playful.⁴³ At first, the Sunni boys felt compelled to react to the bloody procession. Then the flagellant felt stirred up, ignited, and maybe even a little bit irritated. In the background, the drummers continued their slow rhythm and mournful chant. Overall, the scene could be described as leaning towards *thara* rather than *athara*. By contrast, women's weekly mourning gatherings at the Zaynabiyyah can be predominantly thought of in terms of *athara*. Yet, in some cases, *athara* and *thara* coincide.

Consider the following example: in Sayyidah Zaynab, there is a resident group of South Asian Shi'a seminary-students and merchants that had been following Ayatollah Khamene'i, who is opposed to *tatbir*, as their *marja' al-taqlid*. After the 2009 Iranian election, when Khamene'i supported Ahmadinejad's re-election, the South Asian men were so disgruntled with the Iranian leaders that they chose to participate in *tatbir* processions.⁴⁴ Through *tatbir*, by cutting themselves with swords on the top-front of their heads, these men ritually inscribed their bodies. As opposed to the revolutionary transformation of a society through political mobilization, they were instead reclaiming their bodies in protest. Their protest may not have led to political change, but their performance of *tatbir* became a method for liberating themselves from Khamene'i's authority. Their performance combined *athara* and *thara*. What was this, if not revolutionary and salvific at the same time?⁴⁵

In his booklet entitled *al-sha‘a‘ir al-busayniyyah* (which the English preface translates as ‘Husayni demonstrations’), Hasan al-Shirazi, the founder of the Zaynabiyyah seminary, explains that the nine mourning rituals he describes are an ‘extension of Hussein’s revolution’.⁴⁶ The Arabic text promises merit, intercession, and healing as rewards for participating in crying (*buka‘*), *tabaki*, *ma‘atim* (another name for *majalis ‘aza*), wearing black clothing, tearing one’s clothing at the neck, *latm*, flagellation with chains, theatrical representation, and *tatbir*. The English text pays no attention to salvation and healing. Instead, it begins with the scandal of dissent in the early community, the loyalty of ‘Ali, the betrayal after Ghadir Khumm, and the martyrdom and sacrifice of Husayn for the sake of Islam. The implied meaning is that internal enemies, as well as colonial powers (which the second half of the preface describes), seek to obliterate Shi‘ism and that only ‘Husayni demonstrations’ can preserve it. In this short account, the heavy story, which leaves traces (*athar*), precedes the call to ritual performance/revolution (*thawrah*), but is also a necessary prerequisite. In other words, they cannot be separated even if references to merit and salvation as such are omitted.

Conclusion

In the 1970s, bloody clashes erupted between Iraqi government forces and men marching in ‘Ashura processions, including *tatbir* processions, in the southern Iraqi shrine-city of Karbala. Consequently, Saddam Hussein banned all Shi‘a mourning processions, fearing their ability to mobilize crowds. In 1979 in Iran, mourning processions became demonstrations and led to the Iranian Revolution. Like other processions, ‘Ashura processions can remain politically quietist. They can either fail or succeed in overthrowing regimes. As we have recently witnessed in Tunisia and Egypt, demonstrations alone can make regimes fall. However, as we have seen in Bahrain and Syria, this is not always the case. In other words, political change and revolutionary efficacy are not predictable and because of that, ‘revolution’ cannot be an inherent aspect of either Muharram processions or other forms of demonstrations. Therefore, I have argued that instead of focusing on political outcomes, it is more analytically productive to pay closer attention to affect, as it can help us re-think the ‘revolutionary’ mode of the Karbala Paradigm in broader terms.

Table of Key Transliterated Terms

Term Appearing in Text	Arabic/Persian	Term With Diacritics
Athara	أثر	athara
Latm	لطم	laṭm
Majalis 'aza	مجالس عزاء	majālis 'azā'
Mullayah	ملاية	mullāyah
Na'i	نعي	na'ī
Thara	ثار	thāra
Tatbir	تطبير	taṭbīr

Notes

¹ Augustus Richard Norton, 'Ritual, Blood, and Shiite Identity Ashura in Nabatiyya, Lebanon', in *The Drama Review*, vol. 49, no. 4 (2005), 147.

² Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 132; Wathiq al-Shammari, *Ikkbar al-Faqir fi Itbbat Hurmat al-Tatbir (The Information Guide of the Poor Man [or average Muslim] in the Assertion of the Prohibition of Tatbir)* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Naba', 2010), 53-54.

³ Kamran Aghaie. *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004); Deeb, *Enchanted Modern*.

⁴ Currently, the main oppressor for Hezbollah is the state of Israel.

⁵ Lara Jakes, 'Iraqi refugees flee Syria to avoid sectarian revenge', Times of Israel, 31 July 2012 <<http://www.timesofisrael.com/iraqi-refugees-flee-syria-to-avoid-sectarian-revenge/>> (accessed 24 August 2012); Ryan Villarreal, 'Refugees, Twice: Iraqis in Syria Displaced Again by Conflict', International Business Times, 26 July 2012 <<http://www.ibtimes.com/articles/367226/20120726/syria-iraq-refugee-un-conflict-unhcr-civil.htm>> (accessed 24 August 2012).

⁶ The Iranian pilgrims were later released.

'Fate of 18 Iranian citizens abducted in Syria remains unknown', Press TV <<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/229787.html>> (accessed 21 March, 2011); Babak Dehghanpisheh, 'Iranian pilgrims kidnapped in Syrian capital as fighting flares anew', Washington Post, 4 August 2012 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/iranian-pilgrims-kidnapped-in-syrian-capital-as-fighting-flares-anew/2012/08/04/8a2ed31e-de61-11e1-9ff9-1dcd8858ado2_story.html> (accessed 24 August 2012).

⁷ 'Head of Hawza e Zainabia Martyred By Target Killing in Syria', Jafria News, 15 April 2012 <<http://jafrianews.com/2012/04/16/head-of-hawza-e-zainabia-martyred-by-target-killing-in-syria/>> (accessed 20 April 2012). The *hawzah* was founded by Sadiq's brother Sayyid Hasan Shirazi in 1973. Sabrina Mervin, 'Sayyida Zaynab, Banlieue de Damas ou nouvelle ville sainte chiite? (Sayyida Zaynab, a suburb of Damascus or a new Shiite holy city?)' in *Cahiers d'Etudes sur la Méditerranée Orientale et le Monde Turco-Iranien: Arabes et Iraniens*, vol. 22 (1996), 149-162. Electronic document, <<http://cemoti.revues.org/document138.html>>, accessed 23 March 2009.

⁸ 'Bomb attack targeting Syrian holy shrine leaves 14 people wounded', Press TV, 14 June 2012 <<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/06/14/246193/car-bomb-hits-holy-shrine-in-damascus/>> (accessed 24 August 2012).

⁹ Field notes, Summer 2007.

¹⁰ Deeb, *Enchanted Modern*, 131-133.

¹¹ Notably, neither party promotes rationalism per se.

¹² Cf. Peter Chelkowski, ed., *Ta'ziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1979); see also Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of 'Ashura' in Twelver Shi'ism* (New York: Mouton, 1978).

¹³ Michael Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 21.

¹⁴ Mary Elaine Hegland, 'Two Images of Husain: Accommodation and Revolution in an Iranian Village', in *Religion and Politics in Iran: Shi'ism from Quietism to Revolution*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 218-236.

¹⁵ Michael Gilsean, *Recognizing Islam: Religion and Society in the Modern Middle East* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000 [1982]), 61.

¹⁶ Cf. Aghaie, *Martyrs of Karbala*; Deeb, *Enchanted Modern*; Sophia Pandya, 'Women's Shi'i Ma'atim in Bahrain', in *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2010), 31-58.

¹⁷ Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala*, 100-103.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 110.

²² See Sherine Hafez for a fascinating discussion on the problems with binaries: Sherine Hafez, *An Islam of Her Own: Reconsidering Religion and Secularism in Women's Islamic Movements* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

²³ Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Arabic*, ed. J. Milton Cowan (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), 3-4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

²⁵ Mourning laments leave traces, and make listeners reflective. According to Um Zahra, words leave traces on 'soft' hearts. Fieldnotes, Monday, 14 December 2009.

²⁶ Werner Ende, 'The Flagellations of Muharram and the Shi'ite Ulama', in *Der Islam*, vol. 55, no. 1 (1978), 19-36.

²⁷ Patrick Seal, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 173.

Twelver Shi'a were especially crucial for Hafiz al-Asad in the 1970s and 1980s because of the growing opposition by the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood, which accused Hafiz of being a non-Muslim and considered his rule illegitimate. Unlike his father, Bashar al-Asad has not associated himself closely with Twelver Shi'a symbols, rituals, and authorities. At the same time, Bashar continues to have strong links with Twelver Shi'a forces and authorities in Lebanon and Iran.

²⁸ Whose control it will fall under after the Syrian uprising remains to be seen.

²⁹ Mervin, 'Sayyida Zaynab.'

³⁰ They are, of course, also concerned with the mobilizing effect such rituals can have on Shi'a masses. The Iranian Revolution was, after all, born out of Muharram processions which turned into demonstrations.

³¹ Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, 122-124.

³² Edith Szanto, 'Contesting Fragile Sainthood: Miraculous Healing among Twelver Shi'is in Contemporary Syria', in *Sainthood in Fragile States*, eds. Andreas Bandak and Mikkel Bille (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

³³ Cf. Edith Szanto, 'Sayyida Zaynab in the State of Exception: Shi'i Sainthood as 'Qualified Life' in Contemporary Syria', in *International Journal for Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2012), 287-289.

³⁴ Cf. 'Abbas al-Qumi, *Mafatih al-Jinan* (Beirut: Dar al-Murtadha, 2004).

³⁵ E.g., may a menstruating woman visit the shrine? Field notes, Thursday, 12 February 2009.

³⁶ In a sense, 'authenticated and modern' mourning gatherings are simply gatherings where the talk has become central and the other parts have been reduced to a minimum.

³⁷ Field notes, Wednesday, 30 July 2008.

³⁸ There is a common story about poetry and improvisation: there was once a young man who wanted to become a poet, so he went to a famous poet who told him to go and memorize 10,000 lines of poetry. This took the young apprentice a decade after which he returned to the poet who then told him to forget the poetry. That would make him into a poet capable of improvisation.

³⁹ Deeb, *Enchanted Modern*, 144-146.

⁴⁰ Field notes, Thursday, 1 January 2009 and Saturday, 14 November 2009.

⁴¹ Field notes, Monday, 14 December 2009.

⁴² In Sayyidah Zaynab, women usually do not participate in public performances of *tabir*. However, there was a small group of women who performed *tabir* in private. Field notes, Sunday, 27 December 2009.

⁴³ It is carnivalesque in Bakhtin's sense: it is grotesque and gluttonous. Cf. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

⁴⁴ Field notes, Monday, 28 December 2009.

⁴⁵ Szanto, 'Sayyida Zaynab in the State of Exception', 291-292.

⁴⁶ Muhammad Shirazi, *Al-Sha'a'ir al-Husayniyyah (Husayni Affects)* (Beirut: Dar al-Sadiq, 1998), ix.



Book Reviews

A Code of Conduct: A Treatise on the Etiquette of the Fatimid Ismaili Mission. A critical edition of the Arabic text and English translation of Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Naysāburī's al-Risāla al-mūjaza al-kāfiya fī ādāb al-du'āt ed. and trans. by Verena Klemm and Paul Walker, 2011. (Ismaili Texts and Translations Series, vol. 10.) London, I.B. Tauris in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, xii + 84 (English) + 74 (Arabic) pp., £29.50. ISBN: 978-1-78076-126-8 (hbk).

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This is the fifteenth volume in the Ismaili Texts and Translations Series by the Institute of Ismaili Studies. This series has made classics of Isma'ili Shi'ism available to scholars and students of Shi'ism as well those investigating Isma'ili contributions to the development of Islam itself. With the exception of two volumes on the Fatimid dynasty by Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī, the fifteenth century Sunni Mamluk historian, and one by Nasir al-Dīn al-Tūsī, the thirteenth century author who is associated with Twelver Shi'ism, the remaining texts in this series span Isma'ili contributions to philosophy, history, and manners or *adab* literature, as well as political treatises. This latest edited text and translation is a manual intended for instruction of the *da'wah*, or missionary organization of the Isma'ili Shi'a, produced during the Fatimid period (909-1171) by one of its leading luminaries.

Its author, Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Naysaburi (active in the early eleventh century), was a *da'i* or missionary of the Shi'a Fatimid state and its Isma'ili branch during the reign of two Fatimid *imam*-caliphs: al-'Aziz bi-Allah (d. 996), and al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (d. 1021). It was during al-Hakim's reign in particular that al-Naysaburi was active in defence of this *imam*-caliph, for whom he wrote three seminal treatises: two on *imamah*, and the *Risalah al-Mujazah* on and for the *da'wah*. Al-Hakim became infamous of course as the Fatimid *imam*-caliph whose reign was marked by seemingly erratic policies affecting minorities, women, and others among his subjects (his alleged animosity toward

Christians for example, led to the destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, then under Fatimid control, which presumably instigated the Crusades). Al-Hakim was also known for his relationship with what became the Druze offshoot of Isma'ili Shi'ism. Clearly the Fatimid dynasty, the state it established in Egypt, and the Isma'ili community it led as *imams*, were all undergoing a crisis during his time, and thus Naysaburi's works played a critical role in the attempt to set the record straight, as it were, for the Isma'ili community of this period.

Klemm and Walker's edition and translation of the *Risalah* represents yet another solid achievement in this series of texts and translations. As Klemm notes in her Acknowledgements and the Introduction, her interest in al-Naysaburi's *Risalah* arose from its relation to her doctoral work on another later *da'is* works (xi). A few manuscript copies of Naysaburi's *Risalah* existed in anthologies of Yemeni origin available at the American University of Beirut, and now at the Institute of Isma'ili Studies (16-22). It is from some of these manuscript copies that Klemm prepared her edition of the text. Paul Walker contributes to this edition not only a wonderfully lucid translation, but also information on the dating of the text itself (23-31).

As Klemm notes, the importance of the *Risalah* has as much to do with form as with content. In other words, Naysaburi's *Risalah* is arguably the earliest work devoted to instruction of *da'is* on their role and desired qualities as servants of the Fatimid *imam* and missionaries for his cause within and beyond the Fatimid realm. It should be noted that the Fatimid empire at its height in the tenth and eleventh centuries was vast, extending from North Africa through Egypt, to the Hijaz and Syria. It also boasted supervision, through its *da'wah*, of communities of Isma'ilis as far-flung as India, Central Asia, Iran, and Yemen. As such, the Fatimids represented a remarkable achievement – an empire ruled by a living Shi'a *imam* that rivalled Sunni Muslim empires like those of the Umayyads and Abbasids in territorial extent, and whose influence extended even further beyond. The Fatimid *da'wah* then, as an organization representing the cause of the Fatimid *imams* and Isma'ili Shi'ism, had a considerable presence in the intellectual, spiritual, political, and social life of the global Muslim community in the classical period of Islam.

With regard to form, Klemm aptly situates this manual in the broader tradition of both *adab* literature as well as 'mirrors for princes', given that it addressed the esprit de corps, desired credentials, and

comportment of *da'is* much as *adab* literature addressed the same for its audiences of courtiers and other social groups during Islam's classical period. Because it also addressed the *da'wah's* administrative duties, she argues that it also partakes of the literary tradition of 'mirrors of princes' which addressed the responsibilities of rulers toward their subjects (7-13). Paul Walker further notes that, based on internal references, this work was probably produced during the reign of al-Hakim, and more specifically was likely authored between 1013-1015 (23-31).

The Arabic edition (74 pp.) prepared by Klemm (with the assistance of Susanne Karam), reflects her specialization in Arabic language and literature in the careful annotation of its critical apparatus, which cross-references the manuscripts she used as well as other texts like the Qur'an. The English translation (84 pp.) is based on the final Arabic text produced by Klemm. In terms of content, what is striking (as Paul Walker notes in his comments in the Introduction) is the rationale Naysaburi provides for this work in his opening remarks, all of which indicate a crisis in the *da'wah*, both in terms of its message and the behaviour of its messengers. That is, Naysaburi complains of the *da'wah's* having become an organization preoccupied with its own power and privilege rather than loyalty to the *imam*, the doctrines and knowledge of Isma'ili Shi'ism, and the proper performance of its spiritual and administrative duties (35-38). The *Risalah* then proceeds to remind its readers of the necessity of a *da'wah* on the basis of Qur'anic verses referring to God's desire that people be properly guided (36-39), followed by remarks on the general qualities expected of *da'is* (knowledge, piety, and administrative ability) (42-47), and then proceeds to enumerate more specifically how those qualities are to be applied by the *da'is* (47-60). The *Risalah* also addresses the recruitment and personal behaviour of the *da'is* (60-68), and the proper discharge of their religious and administrative responsibilities (68-76).

In all, the *Risalah* clearly represents a gem of *adab* as well as 'mirrors' literature, as Klemm notes. But its significance is arguably broader than the literary innovation that characterizes it. As Walker notes, it served a purpose in its time (the reign of al-Hakim) in shoring up the defence of the *imam* and addressing the failures of the *da'wah* to unite the Isma'ili community under him. But Walker and Klemm miss the opportunity to likewise address the significance of this text as a reflection of the professionalization of Isma'ili *da'is* or ulema. Much like in other branches of Islam, informal and personal networks of transmission of knowledge that produced ulema eventually became more formal and

professional, usually as a consequence of a state's desire for legitimacy from them, as well as its need for them in administration. Thus, with regard to Sunni Islam, the formation of *madhabib* presumably led to their professionalization through *madrasahs* and the attendant *tabaqat* literature that established a protocol of archetypical qualities, qualifications, and duties of this social group. While in Sunni Islam this process extended well into the twelfth century and beyond, it would appear from the *Risalah* to have been achieved much earlier (in the eleventh century) by the Isma'ilis. Of course the relationship between a living and ruling *imam* and his *da'wah* was on some level different, but the exigencies of rule required of the Fatimid *da'wah* that it address the professionalization of its members in much the same way. Hence the *Risalah* articulates a program for Isma'ili ulema, and as such should be read not only as a text produced by the particular circumstance of al-Hakim's reign, but also of the larger phenomenon of the *da'wah*'s emergence as a distinct professional group. In other words, this text could arguably constitute a first instance or early evidence of the professionalization of knowledge in Islam generally.

Moreover, it was precisely for this reason it continued to be transmitted by that post-Fatimid offshoot of the Isma'ilis, the Tayyibi Isma'ilis of Yemen, for whom loyalty to the *imam* al-Tayyib, presumed to have gone into *ghaybah* or occultation after 1130, devolved far more responsibility on the *da'wah* representing his cause. The Tayyibi Isma'ili *da'wah* in Yemen was founded and patronized by the Sulayhid queen Arwa (d. 1138), and it was this later *da'wah* that preserved Naysaburi's *Risalah* in anthologies from which it was extracted for publication here. The *Risalah*'s having been embedded in this Yemeni *da'wah* literature provides it with significance other than as a source on al-Hakim's reign, as Abbas Hamdani notes in his edition and translation of one of these anthologies, the *da'i* Hatim ibn Ibrahim al-Hamidi's (d. 1199) *Tuhfat al-Qulub* (forthcoming in this same series from the Institute of Ismaili Studies). Serving as *da'i* not long after the Tayyibi *da'wah* had been established, Hatim ibn Ibrahim al-Hamidi helped it assume control over the Isma'ilis of Yemen and India as they emerged as an important trans-regional community involved in the lucrative and globally significant Indian Ocean trade. And so it was that a Persian *da'i* of a defunct empire came to provide the foundation for the administration and leadership of an Indian Ocean community which to this day continues to be led by the *da'wah* he provided a constitution for (the *Risalah* was in fact and incidentally submitted as evidence in two court

cases of the early twentieth century on the issue of the parameters of the *da'wah's* leadership of the Tayyibi Isma'ili community in India).

For scholars and students of the Fatimid period, then, this edition and translation of the *Risalah al-Mujazah* will prove another important source on the dynasty and the empire it ruled; it could also provide one for those interested in the role of the *Risalah* in articulating a rationale for leadership of the *da'wah* in later periods as well. All in all it serves as another example of the pioneering importance of Isma'ili Shi'ism to the development of Islam, for which the Institute of Ismaili Studies is to be thanked in making it available.

The Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam: Essays in Honour of Harald Motzki ed. Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, Kees Versteegh, and Joas Wagemakers, 2011. (Islamic History and Civilization, vol. 89.) Leiden & Boston: Brill, xvi +496 pp., ill., €161.00, \$221.00. ISBN: 978-9-00420-389-1 (hbk).

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Harald Motzki is renowned for his studies concerning the transmission of early Islamic texts (especially *hadith*) and for grappling with issues related to the historical origins of such writings. His approach, one that he has termed *isnad-cum-matn* analysis, focuses on tracing *isnad* patterns and textual variations in order to determine the mode of the earliest transmission of the material. The essays gathered in this volume honouring him reflect the themes of his own work, and many of the contributors develop his insights by employing his approach. Divided into four sections – ‘Production’, ‘Transmission’, ‘Interpretation’, and ‘Reception’ – nineteen scholars have contributed essays that treat a diverse range of subjects. Among the authors in the first section are Gregor Schoeler (49-61) commenting on *Kitab al-Maghazi* of Musa ibn ‘Uqbas (d. 141/758), Maribel Fierro (63-89) writing on *hadith* in al-Andalus, Fred Leemhuis (91-103) discussing a Qur’anic manuscript in Groningen likely written in the sixteenth century as a ‘not very careful imitation of a part of an old Qur’ān manuscript’, and Claude Gilliot (105-33) meticulously tracing traditions on the collection of the Qur’an. In Section Two we find Michael Lecker (181-96) discussing the death of Jewish merchant Ibn Sunaynah during the lifetime of Muhammad, Maher Jarrar (197-227) writing on Ibn Abi Yahya who was a scholar of traditions in the second/eighth century, and Gerard Wiegars (229-47) documenting the reception of the ‘prophecies’ of the fourteenth century friar, Jean de Roquetaillade. The third section provides us with Uri Rubin (251-78) working on the interpretation of Qur’an 44:10-11, Joas Wagemaker (301-27) discussing modern Salafi conceptions of ‘ignorance’ (*jabl*) as an obstacle to making the accusation of disbelief (*takfir*), and Herbert Berg (329-53) exploring Elijah Muhammad’s interpretation of the Qur’an. Finally, Section Four sees Abdulkader

Tayob (357-74) discuss human rights in the modern Islamic discourse, Roel Meijer (375-99) document 'the transnational battle for religious authority' as illustrated by the Saudi quietist-Salafi Rabi' ibn Hadi al-Madkhali (b. 1931), Martijn de Koning (401-19) explore the experience of the Qur'an among Muslim youth in the Netherlands, Carmen Becker (421-41) outline ideas related to computer-mediated use of the Qur'an in the Salafi view, and Ulkire Mitter (443-73) analyse modern discussions of the *hadith* that states 'The majority of the dwellers of hell-fire are women.'

It is in the nature of such volumes that some essays will be of greater interest to individual readers than others; I am highlighting here four essays from the volume (not mentioned in the above summary) that particularly drew my attention and which also illustrate the overall themes of the volume (and much of Motzki's work).

It is true that a number of the essays in the volume display the problems that emerge when scholars try to establish the historical validity of their sources on the basis of attributions to early authorities. Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort in her essay entitled 'The *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* of 'Abd al-Razzāq ibn Hammām al-Ṣan'ānī: Searching for earlier source material' (27-47) tries to determine the historical reliability of traditions ascribed to al-Zuhri (that is, she wishes to establish that such traditions can be asserted to have been circulating at the time of al-Zuhri, d. 124/742) as they are found in later works, specifically in the transmissions of Ma'mar (as transmitted by 'Abd al-Razzaq) and Ibn Ishaq (as transmitted by Ibn Hisham). Significant differences are seen between three similar reports ascribed to al-Zuhri; various explanations are proffered for those differences. Yet, very quickly, Boekhoff-van der Voort asserts that, despite these differences, 'the conclusion can be drawn that all three texts come from one source'. What is at best a possible conjecture is transformed into an asserted fact upon which further conclusions may then be drawn about how to reconstruct early sources. This is highly speculative historical writing, but it seems not to be recognized as such and the certainty of the results is asserted very strongly.

Andreas Görke sets himself the task of finding the historical kernel of truth in his essay 'Prospects and limits in the study of the historical Muḥammad' (137-51). He sees his approach as standing in contrast to other methods, including Motzki's *isnad-cum-matn* method, which he feels is too limited and too focused on minute detail when it comes to the goal of establishing a broad picture of the life of Muhammad. By

examining all the reports ascribed to a single authority as found in a variety of sources and using supplemental *isnad-cum-matn* analysis to 'eliminate later additions and false ascriptions' (144), Görke hopes to establish that long-sought-after genuine 'kernel'. He illustrates this briefly by reference to the traditions of 'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr (d. c. 93/712). But the process may still be observed to rely on intuition and supposition about how things 'must have been' in establishing that likely 'kernel' of truth.

Jens Scheiner certainly recognizes that a common problem in historical reconstruction of events is the arbitrary and intuitive methods by which contemporary historians decide which account to trust and which not. He calls attention to this in his essay 'The Conquest of Damascus according to the oldest datable sources' (153-80). Pointing out that the popular understanding of the conquest of Damascus in 13 AH is generally presented on the basis of the version that appears in al-Tabari (one that produces a 'highly consistent and vivid account', 154), Scheiner calls for narrative and source criticism using the principles of *isnad-cum-matn* analysis to compare the various accounts of this conquest (which, he says, total about 1,000). The goal is to determine the elements in the narrative that are the oldest and thus, it is suggested, the most reliable (those being 'eyewitness' reports, 174). Of course, that in itself is a debatable historical principle, although Scheiner seems not to wish to discuss that issue and rather just assume that to be the case. Still, Scheiner is able to show quite convincingly the way in which historical 'knowledge' grows over time.

Finally, Kees Versteegh provides an analysis of the exegetical comments ascribed to al-Dahhaq (d. 105/723) as collected in a recently printed work called *Tafsir al-Dahhaq*, a book that has been compiled from a number of later collections of traditions and works of *tafsir* by a modern editor. His essay is entitled 'The name of the ant and the call to holy war: al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim's commentary on the Qur'ān' (279-99). Versteegh's approach is much like the method that Görke suggests for historical data; Versteegh has the distinct advantage that someone else has already done the rote work of gathering the ascribed material together. Versteegh's task is limited to sorting through and 'making sense' of the data. In order to do this he organizes the reports into categories common to the exegetical and grammatical traditions. In the end, though, he is hard pressed to make any conclusions and he excuses that on the grounds of the possible 'partial transmission' (297) of al-Dahhaq's material; the incomplete nature of the transmission, it is

suggested, is to be accounted for by the exegete's fame residing only in his more provocative statement about the first verses of Surat al-Bara'ah abolishing all peace treaties during the lifetime of the Muhammad. But the real problem here is the absence of an author of a coherent book. Al-Dahhak did not author the work that is being subjected to analysis; rather, that work is composed of traditions ascribed to him by later authors. The question must remain regarding the extent to which such ascriptions can be trusted. It comes as no surprise (to me, at least) that there is no consistent perspective to be extracted from an arbitrary collection of reports that are ascribed to one name.

The variety of essays in this volume means that virtually every Islamic studies specialist will find something of interest. That many of the essays elaborate the distinctive contribution that Harald Motzki has made to the field mark this as a volume that truly honours its dedicatee. A bibliography of Motzki's own work is found on pages 13-24.

Fabaris al-Shi'ah by Mahdi Khuddamiyan al-Arani, 1431 AH/2010. Qum: Mu'assasat Turath al-Shi'ah, 1,389 pp., 21,000 riyals. (English title: *Shiite Hadith Bibliography: An Introduction* by Mahdi Khod'amiyan Arani. Qom: Shiite Bio-Bibliographical Institute.) ISBN: 978-600-90641-6-8, 978-600-90641-4-4 (two volumes).

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The extant early biographic and bibliographic works of the Imami Shi'a are essential tools for understanding the transmission and compilation of their written corpus of narrations elaborating spiritual, ethical, intellectual, legal, and doctrinal teachings. Mahdi Khuddamiyan al-Arani performs a signal service in these two volumes by substantiating the contents of eight bibliographic writings produced by Imami authors during the second half of the third/ninth century through the late fourth/tenth – writings which probably formed the basis for the two major fifth century *fibris* works of Shaykh al-Ta'ifah al-Tusi¹ (385-460 AH) and Ahmad ibn 'Ali al-Najashi (372-450 AH).² The richness and variety of early Shi'a literature is displayed in their two valuable bibliographies as well as in the great collection accomplished during the twentieth century by the tireless labour of Agha Buzurg al-Tihrani (1876-1970) in his *al-Dhari'ah ila Tasanif al-Shi'ah*. Agha Buzurg (a pupil of the text connoisseur Mirza Husayn Nuri) drew on manuscript collections both institutional and private, and remains an outstanding authority on extant copies of Shi'a works. Yet previously unattested manuscripts continue to be uncovered and published, and one might hope for surprises in the future. The great collection amassed by Ayatollah Shihab al-Din Muhammad Husayn al-Mar'ashi al-Najafi (1897-1990) and housed at the Grand Library of Mar'ashi in Qum, reputedly the third largest collection of Islamic handwritten texts in the world, is a visible reminder of this wealth of Shi'a literary activity stretching over thirteen centuries.³

What al-Arani offers us appears to be the fruit of our digital age with many texts now available on CD-ROM and search engines capable of

gathering defined bodies of data. He has assembled from the data recorded by Shaykh al-Tusi and al-Najashi the presumed contents of the following *fihrist* (bibliographic) works by:

1. Sa'd ibn 'Abd Allah al-Ash'ari (d. 301 or 299 AH).
2. 'Abd Allah ibn Ja'far al-Himyari (d. 305 AH). 'Abd Allah ibn Ja'far al-Himyari and Sa'd ibn 'Abd Allah al-Ash'ari were very important Imami scholars who flourished in Qum in the second half of the third century, and who both knew the eleventh Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (d. 260 AH), with 'Abd Allah al-Himyari visiting Kufa in 297 AH for teaching purposes.
3. Humayd ibn Ziyad al-Ninawa'i (d. 310 AH). He was a prolific Kufan Waqifi Imami living in Sura with wide contacts who then moved to Nineveh, transmitting many of the (four hundred) *kutub al-usul*, and who compiled many works including one entitled *Man Rawwa 'an al-Sadiq* (also referred to as *kitabuhu al-rijal*). Three generations separated al-Tusi and al-Najashi from these first three third century authors.
4. Muhammad ibn Ja'far ibn Buttah (d. 330 AH). Ibn Buttah, known as al-Mu'addib, worked in Qum and then Baghdad where he resided in al-Nawbakhtiyah. He was blamed for poor transmission methodology and errors.
5. Muhammad ibn al-Hasan ibn Ahmad ibn al-Walid (d. 343 AH). Ibn al-Walid was one of the most prominent jurists in Qum in his day enforcing the emerging 'orthodoxy', who compiled *al-Fihrist fi al-Rijal*.
6. Ja'far ibn Muhammad ibn Qulawayh (d. 368 AH). Ibn Qulawayh was an outstanding tradent-jurist in Qum transmitting much (via his father and brother) from Sa'd ibn 'Abd Allah al-Ash'ari, and whose published *Kamil al-Ziyarat* preserves early information about pilgrimage practice to the tombs of the Imams.
7. Ibn Babawayh (Babuyah), or al-Shaykh al-Saduq (d. 381 AH). Ibn Babawayh of Qum, widely travelled and prolific, compiled one of the four authoritative Imami legal texts *Man La Yahduruhu al-Faqih* as well as a lost multi-sectioned *rijal* work *al-Masabih*; he resided in Khurasan and was buried in Ray (today a suburb of Tehran).
8. Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Wahid ibn 'Ubdun (b. 330 AH - d. 423 AH). Ahmad ibn 'Ubdun was a long lived teacher specializing in *adab* who taught Tusi and Najashi in Baghdad.

Each one of these eight is given a detailed introduction on his life and work treating specific features of his legacy, including his writings, teachers, and pupils. This is followed by an alphabetic listing of the names of those Imami authors with the titles of their writings cited by

Shaykh al-Tusi and al-Najashi in their own bibliographic works – whose line-of-transmission for such data explicitly mentions one of these eight bibliographic authors. Al-Arani meticulously sifts the names and titles which are reported on *isnads* through one or another of these eight authors, as listed in our two extant fifth century AH *fihrist*s, re-arranging these names into their recognizably more primary sources by separately collecting those names included by each one of these eight authors within his own original *fihrist*. Thereby, at least three generations of lost bibliographic activity prior to the works by Tusi and Najashi in the first half of the fifth century is partially recovered. This is a significant extension of our knowledge about the literary activity of Imami tradents and jurists during the one-and-a-half centuries before Tusi and Najashi. Of course, questions surrounding aural-literary transmission of Shi'a narrations during the one-and-a-half centuries from the era of Imam al-Baqir and Imam al-Sadiq (the first half of the second century AH) until the death of the eleventh Imam al-'Askari (260 AH) still remain.

The listing of names/titles within the section devoted to each one of these eight authors is further subdivided into three sections: (a) names jointly cited by Tusi and Najashi which they evidently derived from the *fihrist* compiled by that particular author; (b) names cited only by Tusi through that author; and (c) names cited only by Najashi through that author. Al-Arani presumes (with evident justification) that Tusi and Najashi had both accessed the *fihrist* compiled by that particular author; and that the combined listing of those names with titles of their works (specified as reported through that particular author) may well represent the bulk of the text of that author's *fihrist*. This is not an unreasonable presumption, although he recognizes that the contents of these original *fabaris* might have contained other names/titles which Tusi and Najashi may not have listed in their own bibliographic productions (for instance, possibly non-Shi'a scholars whom these authors studied under).

Take for example the first two authors. For Sa'd ibn 'Abd Allah he determines that (a) eighteen names are shared in common by Tusi and Najashi; (b) seventy-two names are mentioned only by Tusi; while (c) thirty-one names are mentioned only by Najashi; (for a total of one hundred twenty-one authors whose books were known to and transmitted by Sa'd). Whereas for 'Abd Allah ibn Ja'far: (a) twenty-seven names are shared in common by Tusi and Najashi; (b) sixty-two names are mentioned only by Tusi; and (c) fifty-nine names are listed solely by

Najashi (for a total of one hundred forty-eight authors whose books were known to and transmitted by al-Himyari). The implications flowing from those names from one *fibrist* being shared in common, yet simultaneously Tusi and Najashi each separately citing different names from that same *fibrist*, are thought-provoking. In his general Introduction (21-112), al-Arani provides a combined listing of a total of eight hundred eighty-eight names of authors mentioned in all eight *fibrists* and occurring in the two bibliographic works of Tusi and Najashi.

Furthermore, in his reconstruction of the probable contents of each of these eight *faharis*, within the above-mentioned three sub-sections listing these individual names/titles, al-Arani references their occurrences in Tusi's *Fibrist* and Najashi's *Rijal* as well as to other early *rijal* works (such as al-Barqi,⁴ al-Kashshi, the *Khulasah* of 'Allamah Hilli, and Ibn Dawud). He also performs a beneficial service in his extensive notes devoted to individual names, by referencing the representative parallel *riwayat* of every *rawi*-compiler in standard early Imami texts (*al-Kafi*, *Basa'ir al-Darajat*, *al-Faqih*, *al-Tahdhib*, *al-Istibsar*, and multiple works by al-Shaykh al-Saduq), thus facilitating the assessment and delimiting of the generation (*tabaqah*) of that individual *rawi*. In this way, he provides added clarity and insight into the living streams of transmission within Imami circles, and through whom and within which circles important texts were received. Such insight is productive for evaluating the probity of their narrations, and for gaining a better appreciation of the intense literary and scholarly activities of Imami centres in Iraq, Iran and Khurasan stretching back to the early third century, if not before. An important feature of this literary activity was the prevalence of 'licensed written-transmission' (*ijazah*) whereby texts were copied and recopied without necessarily being subjected to live oral-aural reception (*sama'*); thus the importance attached to licences for *ijazah* granted for specific works by their compilers and transmitters.

The production of these two volumes meets the high standards of care and accuracy which one now comes to expect from the proliferating research and publication centres radiating from Qum devoted to perpetuating the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt. There are very few minor errors which I could detect (remarkable given the difficulty of proper vocalization of names), and the quality of the printing and layout is a pleasure to hold in one's hand.

Finally, a word is in order concerning the larger context of early Imami bibliographic productions. It was long recognized that the

bibliographic works by Tusi and Najashi were built upon compilations by preceding generations, and al-Arani's book substantiates this in detail. The leading Imami scholars of the third and fourth centuries AH compiled catalogues of the writings they had received in transmission from their teachers. These earlier *fabaris* were never intended to be comprehensive or include the full breadth of writings linked to teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt. Rather, they were personal records of study and teaching activities of individual scholars, and attest to their impressive productivity and intellectual creativity.⁵ These likely included a listing of the particular author's own writings, and they often took care to record the section titles of lengthy productions, or the individual 'book' titles encompassed within a much larger book. That is why we have, for instance, the titles of Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Khalid al-Barqi's omnibus collection *al-Mahasin*,⁶ of which only eleven out of its approximately one hundred twenty (or more) books are extant (which may be even less than one-tenth of the original). This is regrettable, since *al-Mahasin* represented perhaps the earliest encyclopaedic-like publication to appear in Islamic civilisation, at least half a century before the *Rasa'il* of Ikhwan al-Safa'⁷ or the 'one hundred books' by Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Du'al al-Qummi (d. 350 AH).⁸

Shaykh al-Tusi and al-Najashi were therefore accomplishing an important task in Baghdad by undertaking to list the entirety of writings known to them. The impetus for a more comprehensive listing was already present in the model of Ibn al-Nadim's *Fibrist* (compiled 377 AH). Yet it was their elder contemporary Ahmad ibn al-Husayn ibn al-Ghada'iri (d. ca. 408 or earlier; he predeceased his father) who was said to first undertake to realize this ambition in two compilations covering the *musannafat* (written compilations and productions) and the *usul* (personal note-books recording narrations from the Imams and/or their immediate disciples) – works reportedly lost or ruined after his untimely death. Shaykh al-Tusi then took up the challenge by compiling first his *Fibrist*, then his *Rijal*, sometime after 408 AH and before 423 AH (pace Na'ini's introduction to *Rijal al-Najashi*)⁹ – before al-Najashi compiled his own *fahrasah* between 420 and 436 AH at the request of his teacher al-Sharif al-Murtada. Najashi, who was thirteen years older than Tusi, produced a more accurate work being particularly careful to record when he was reporting about writings he had not examined personally.

Changing political fortunes that witnessed the eclipse of the (Daylamite) Buyid polity and rise of (Turkic) Saljuq as well as Ghaznavid

powers also had a determining impact. When Sultan Mahmud of Ghaznah (Ghazni) conquered Khurasan, he occupied the flourishing cultural centre of Ray in 420/1029 and his troops sacked this city – many people were stoned as ‘heretics’ (*batini, qarmati*) while most of the books in its great library were burned on Mahmud’s order. In 448 AH Shaykh al-Tusi’s house in Baghdad along with his personal library was burnt down in one of the increasingly bitter inter-factional riots in the capital, and he relocated to Hillah in lower Iraq. Three years later in 451/1059 – with the entrance into Baghdad of the Saljuq war leader Tughrul Beg as ‘sultan’ accompanying the ‘Abbasid caliph al-Qa’im – a fresh round of Sunni-Shi’a burning and looting broke out in the Karkh quarter, causing the destruction of the illustrious *Dar al-‘Ilm* handsomely endowed seventy years earlier in 381 AH by Sabur ibn Ardashir – vizier of the Buyud *amir* Baha’ al-Dawlah (d. 403/1012). This famous Shi’a educational institute and scholar’s library par excellence was modelled after the caliph Ma’mun’s *Bayt al-Hikmah*, and recognized to be the most valuable collection of books in the capital. The flames consumed many original Imami autograph manuscripts; the preamble to its catalogue had described them as *kutub ahl al-bayt*.¹⁰ Although Najashi died the year before this event in 450 near Samarra, his efforts along with those of his colleague Tusi helped preserve at least the memory of numerous writings. The rise of Saljuq polity in central Islamic lands ushered in the vigorous Sunni revival of the second half of the fifth century, reflected in the vizierial endowment of the chain of Nizamiyyah colleges.

Moreover the full picture could be expanded to embrace the other *rijal* and *fihrist* works exploited by Tusi and Najashi, including biobibliographic works by the famous Jarudi Zaydi of Kufa, Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Sa’id ibn ‘Uqdah (249-333), used later by Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani in his *Tahdhib* and *Lisan*; the prolific Harun ibn Musa al-Tall‘ukbari (b. ca. 290-d. 385), the Basran Ahmad ibn Nuh al-Sirafi (d. ca. 420); and others. More work needs to be done along the meticulous lines demonstrated by Mahdi Khuddamiyan al-Arani in order to uncover Shi’a intellectual and literary achievements from the ashes of history.

Notes

¹ Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Tusi, *Fihrist Kutub al-Shi’ah wa Usulihim*, introduced by M. S. Bahr al-Ulum (Najaf: Haydariyah, 2nd ed. 1961; Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Wafa’, 3rd

Book Reviews

ed., 1983); this was the revised edition with 909 entries. A fresh edition of the Fihrist was prepared by Jawad al-Qayyumi (Iran: Mu'assasat Nashr al-Faqahah, 1996).

² al-Najashi, *Rijal al-Najashi (Fahrasah Asma' Musannafin al-Shi'ah)*, ed. M. J. al-Na'ini (Beirut: Dar al-Adwa', 1988). There is another edition of al-Najashi's Fahrasah (showing some variants) prepared by Musa al-Shubayri al-Zanjani (Qum: Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islami li-Jama'at al-Mudarrisin, 1986) which includes a valuable index listing all titles of writings.

³ More information on the library can be found at <<http://www.marashilibrary.com>>.

⁴ The *Rijal* or *Tabaqat* work commonly assigned to Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Khalid al-Barqi (d. 274 or 280) is most likely a compilation by his grandson Ahmad ibn 'Abd Allah [ibn bint] al-Barqi, a teacher of Ibn Babawayh; this escaped both Tusi and Najashi. See Mahdi al-Hadawi al-Tihrani, *Tabrir al-Maqal fi Kulliyat 'Ilm al-Rijal* (Qum: Mu'assasat Bayt al-Hikmah al-Thaqafiyah, 2005), 158-160.

⁵ The possibility that such *faharis* may also have been intended to serve as catalogues for purposes of *ijazah* should also be explored.

⁶ al-Barqi, *al-Mahasin*, ed. Jalal al-Din al-Husayni al-Muhaddith (Tehran: n.p., 1370/1950); also ed. M. S. Bahr al-'Ulum (Najaf: n.p., 1384/1964). See the fresh critical edition by Mahdi al-Raja'i (Qum: al-Majma' al-'Alami li-Ahl al-Bayt, 1413) in two volumes which include al-Barqi's prologue or khutbah (via Ibn Idris, *al-Sara'ir* III, 64); see volume I, pages 44-51 for listing of its book titles. Al-Hurr al-Amili possessed a manuscript of the Mahasin with twelve books (including *al-nawadir*).

⁷ See for example C. Pellat, 'al-Barki', *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd ed.), *Supplement*, 127a-128b.

⁸ See al-Najashi, *Rijal al-Najashi*, entry 221.

⁹ Najashi, *Rijal al-Najashi*, 15-21.

¹⁰ Youssef Eche, *Les Bibliothèques Arabes Publiques et Semi-publiques en Mesopotamie, en Syrie et en Egypte au Moyen Dge* (Damascus: Institut Francais de Damas, 1967), 102-117, 147-8. Note that al-Sharif al-Murtada (d. 436 ah) was appointed administrator of Sabur's library in 416, and it is quite plausible that Tusi and Najashi researched their bibliographic works there.

City of Knowledge in Twentieth Century Iran: Shiraz, history and poetry by Setrag Manoukian, 2012. (Iranian Studies 10, ed. Homa Katouzian and Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi.) Routledge: Oxford & New York, xi + 260 pp., £80.00. ISBN: 978-0-415-78328-6 (hbk).

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Setrag Manoukian's *City of Knowledge* is a genealogical ethnography of history and poetry in contemporary Iran that aims to explore the relationship between Iran's history, poetry, and politics through a study of Shiraz, its 'forms of knowledge', the 'techniques of power' that operate at the intersection of the latter two, and the process of self-formation in relation to these two elements. The attentive reader will have noticed the Foucaultian resonances of this terminology and in fact the author makes clear his methodological stance from the very outset – Manoukian's study is a journey through modern Shiraz's knowledge practices undertaken through Foucault's 'dislocations': *savoirs*, techniques of power, and subject formation.

The whole work is carried out with exceptional theoretical awareness and remarkable methodological consistency that is reflected in its overall structure. The book opens with an introduction that sets the basis for the whole reading by setting its methodological coordinates, explaining its main theoretical concerns, and outlining the structure of the book. *City of Knowledge* aims to analyse the relationship between sociality and knowledge in Iran by addressing those areas ('dislocations', in Manoukian's wording, borrowed from Foucault) whereby Iranians' understandings of their culture, history, and poetry are manifested more clearly. The introduction is followed by six chapters and a three-page conclusion.

In Chapter 1 the history of Shiraz as 'the city of knowledge' in the twentieth century is presented through an analysis of two works: Fursat-i Shirazi's *Asar-i Ajam*, and a comprehensive volume published in 1954 by the *Kanun-i Danish-i Pars*. The *Asar*, first published in 1896, is a 'local history' of the region that became a standard reference text in the twentieth century, while the publication by the *Kanun* is a collection of

articles and translations by a group of Shirazi scholars aimed at summarising the constitutive elements of Shiraz as a city of knowledge with the intent to revamp the city's once glorious past and re-launch it as an outstanding scholarly centre.

While Chapter 1 represents an extraordinary introduction to the subject of Shiraz as city of knowledge, Chapter 2 does not live up to the expectations set out. This chapter ('Time, space and culture') is predominantly theoretical and detached from the structure of the book, and its absence probably would not have been noticed. In it, Manoukian starts from the discussion of the dyad *iskilit/sutun*, taken, if I have duly understood the point, as symbolic yet contrasting elements of the material landscape of Shiraz. The *iskilits* are in fact the skeleton frames of steel columns and I-beams that, usually, due to lack of proper planning, rampant estate overdevelopment, and property speculation, stand lingering and unfinished for years in Iran as well as in any other country of the world where this problem exists. *Sutuns* are the columns that became fashionable in the architecture of the Pahlavi period, as an evocation of the 'glories' of pre-Islamic Iran, and that continue to be used in private building in Iran – in other words the Iranian counterparts of the capitalised columns used virtually everywhere in the world to conjure the air of a far and glorious past. A mark of bad planning and speculation the former, a display of tasteless affluence the latter – something universal and by no means specifically Iranian, let alone Shirazi. Moving from the dyad *iskilit/sutun* as exemplification of the regime of spatio-temporality of Shiraz (43), the author discusses the 'reversal of the order of things' that the Revolution brought about, touching upon architecture, toponymy, culture, and perception of time. The entire chapter does not add anything new to our knowledge and understanding of the Revolution, but rather comes across as a half-baked attempt to fit widely known facts into a theoretical framework in which *iskilits* and *sutuns* are taken for much more than they actually are: '[a]s temporal scaffoldings, *iskilits* sustain, in the present, the trajectory of modernization that played a crucial role in twentieth century Iran and still continues to exercise a discursive grip' (56). That revolutions – like wars, huge catastrophes, and dramatic historical events – constitute a break in the perception of time of the people that are involved in them, which produces a clear demarcation between a 'before' and an 'after', is a platitude that Manoukian fails to elaborate meaningfully with respect to Iran. The account offered in the chapter gives the impression that a number of promising inspirations were recorded as

notes during fieldwork, but a place for them was never found during the writing process. This is regrettable, because the rest of the book is robustly crafted and thoughtfully conceived.

Chapter 3 ('Editing culture') addresses the way the city of Shiraz and its knowledge practices underwent a massive editing process after the revolution. By 'editing', Manoukian means a 'modality of intervening on images, objects and texts in order to make them appropriate for public display' (64). By addressing editing, Manoukian aims at contributing to the discussions on the workings of the government in the Islamic Republic by proposing a reading different from both the culturally-oriented analyses of historians and sociologists and politically centred analyses by political scientists. Following Foucault, Manoukian argues that concentrating on the 'procedures and technologies of governmentality' that enable the management of people and things allows for a more full understanding of the Islamic Republic. Throughout the chapter, a diverse range of interventions are taken to task, from building restoration to city planning, from the administration of culture to the establishment of encyclopaedia institutes, the organisation of conferences and university policies, to mention but a few.

While Manoukian is quite at ease with the sources of his theoretical architecture, he is less so when he ventures into matters of religious history – which, it has to be said, are nonetheless marginal to his research. The approximation of the information he provides on this calls out for double checking if one is to avoid perpetuating inaccurate statements. In discussing the *Madrasah-yi Khan*, for example, he introduces Sadr al-Din Shirazi, for whom the *madrasah* was established in the sixteenth century. His definition of the work of Mulla Sadra as a 'synthesis of the mystic and rationalist schools of Islamic philosophy' (112) betrays a lack of frequentation and familiarity with the subject. In the same section, he credits 'Allamah Tabataba'i with having been a teacher of Ruhullah Khomeini, to whom he would have passed his interest in Sadra's theosophy (113). It goes without saying that Tabataba'i was not among Khomeini's teachers nor could he have passed on to him his interest in theosophy. Other inexact statements are found here and there in the author's treatment of Henry Corbin and Tabataba'i (113 ff.).

Manoukian addresses the main buildings of the area of Shiraz that he writes the history of: the *madrasah*, the *imamzadih*, the *khaniqah* and the bazaar, briefly depicting for each one the trajectories of the practices

of which the places are centres. The places, like the area in which they are situated, are selected through the person who turns out to be his main informant: a retired high school teacher, passionate about local history and somehow, we understand, acknowledged as a member of the local petty intelligentsia and who comes to represent also an example of a Shirazi *adib*. The description Manoukian gives of the buildings and their social instances is given on the background of what he, following Foucault, calls 'general history', in order to explore the circumscribed territory as 'the space of a dispersion' (127).

In pursuing his objective, in keeping with the high degree of self-reflexivity of post-1980s ethnographic practice, Manoukian takes on a narrative stance through which he describes the circumstances of his field research in detail. His sessions with 'the teacher' are squarely narrated in their full problematicity, and one can vividly grasp the gap between the intention of the ethnographer and the not fully accomplished self-awareness of the informant, along with the latter's ambiguous role (131). Sometimes (Chapter 5, for example) the author groups a series of accounts of heterogeneous nature: a sketch of three outstanding Shirazi ulema (Baha al-Din Mahallati, Sayyid Nur al-Din, and Sayyid 'Abd al-Husayn Dastghayb); a paragraph on pictures, related to the social and political activity of Nur al-Din; an analysis of a diagram of the Islamic Teachers Association drawn by the main informant; editing of history; and the communists of Shiraz. Manoukian seems at pains to eventually give the different pieces of his field notes a connective substance, although the accounts are interspersed with theoretical interpolations that appear to be mainly called out for by accidental resonances. The whole picture seems to lack direction. As a result, the chapter gives the impression of being the place where many of the notes that didn't find space elsewhere have been stacked. Not that the notes themselves lack significance – one gets a sense of some cultural and social trajectories in the recent history of the city of knowledge, such as the struggle within the clergy, the still vivid impression these tensions have left on 'the teacher', and the struggle for appropriation and domestication of Nur al-Din's legacy. But the theoretical and narrative cement, which would have provided the accounts with structural consistency, has not been thoroughly blended.

A huge and effective work of deconstruction crosses the whole book: of the works analysed, the words of the informant, and the entire cultural texture of the town. By locating the analysed tokens in their

historical context and reading them through the lens of the anthropologist, Manoukian unveils trajectories of the learned Shirazi universe that would otherwise have remained obscured. In discussing, for example, two 1950s local histories, the author examines the context in which they were produced, their fate in revolutionary Iran, their reception, and the local consumption of such historical works during the 1990s. The discussion of 'local histories' becomes here a chance to produce a local history of historical book consumption and readership.

In Chapter 6, Manoukian attempts to demonstrate how poetry is 'a crucial axis of self-formation and the site in which forms of knowledge, technologies of power and processes of subject formation find their pivotal point of encounter' (205). If the work of the anthropologist is, among others, to problematise what is taken for granted to give meaning and significance to what appears obvious, Manoukian is successful in problematising the widely recognised penchant of the Iranians for poetry. While the contention that 'poetry is the form in which Iranians experience themselves as subjects endowed with the power to act and live in the world' (205) may be slightly exaggerated in its lack of nuances and absoluteness (I personally know many Iranians who 'experience themselves as subjects' without the need to resort to poetry), Manoukian brings in an original handling of a topic that would otherwise incur the risk of being presented as a trite and perfunctory cliché.

A manifest sense of frustration surfaces here and there throughout the entire account, a sentiment well known to ethnographic literature and often noticed and accounted for by anthropologists. There seems to be, though, something specific to doing fieldwork in Iran-related environments in Manoukian's account, as I can easily relate it to the frustration I tried to make sense of in my recent work on the *harwzah*: imbalanced power dynamics; the sensitiveness of political circumstances; the cautious condescendence of informants; and the conflict between what has to be done, asked and researched, and what can in fact be done at any given circumstances. Anyone who has conducted ethnographical research in post-revolutionary Iran cannot but detect the joys and pains of their own fieldwork in the following words, where the author reconstructs the arrangement, made by 'the teacher', of his two meetings with an old local poet:

This strategy of deferred revelation was aimed both at keeping my attention tuned by raising the expectations [...] and also

[...] to make sure that [...] I could not explore too much some information that came up in those meetings. [...] The intended aim of the meeting [...] was to talk about the 1950s. However, the teacher thought that to overcome [the poet's] reticence, it would be better to tell him that my primary objective was to meet a great poet. I was introduced as someone working on local poets [...]. Poetry was the way into politics. This strategy effectively worked to produce the 1950s [...]. The displacement of interest, by subtracting attention from the intended aim of the meeting[,] diffused the tension which direct questions would have generated [...]. (196)

This is but one passage where this frustration is felt and overcome, and Manoukian succeeds in exposing the negotiation process and the self-reflection he had to go through in order to extract ethnographic substance from a relationship that, to some extent, was problematic: during his encounters, he is often, albeit always politely – the way an authoritative father would do with a son – told to ‘stop taking notes’, not to address this or that question, kept unaware of connections and away from given sources, and surreptitiously guided to directions different from the one he would otherwise venture towards. He has to literally negotiate his way through interdicts and caveats.

Despite a certain number of errors in the transliteration (for example, Gholam ‘Ali Hadad ‘Ādil for Ghulām ‘Alī Ḥaddād ‘Ādil (54); *tārikhī* for *tāriḫī* and *ārzish* for *arziṣh* (70); *bourj* for *burj* (117); *hawza* for *ḥawza* and *fatva* for *fatvā* (147); *islāmī* for *islāmī* (151), but any perfunctory survey would pick many others), the amount of which suggests a hasty editing process, and a few awkward statements betraying poor familiarity with religious studies, *City of Knowledge* is a fine piece of research which adds an important building block to the academic knowledge of Shiraz and Iran, and opens up further avenues of research for those interested in studying Iran from an anthropological angle.

Dirwan al-Shi'r al-Farsi (al-juz' al-awwal, al-qarn al-rabi' – al-tasi') by Muhammad Sadiq Muhammad (al-Karbasi), 2011. (*Da'irat al-Ma'arif al-Husayniyyah (The Hussaini Encyclopedia)*, vol. 77.) London: Hussaini Centre for Research, 448 pp. ISBN: 978-1-902490-89-2.

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Muhammad Sadiq Muhammad al-Karbasi is the Founding Director of the Hussaini Centre for Research, a registered charity in London and the author of this voluminous Arabic encyclopaedia dedicated to Imam al-Husayn, with seventy-seven volumes printed and over six hundred volumes anticipated in total. This assiduous compiler has dedicated his life to incorporating and categorising copious materials published in numerous works, all devoted the unparalleled personality of al-Husayn ibn 'Ali (A).

The *Hussaini Encyclopedia* is a historic, timely, and very ambitious project that exemplifies a movement; the study of al-Husayn is being recognized as a heritage owing to its impact on all events thereafter particularly in recent times, drawing many cultures together. Thus it has established itself as a trans-illuminative, trans-national, trans-historical and a trans-disciplinary study of the personality of al-Husayn. This encyclopaedia is not intended to be an academic approach to a dedicated theme with al-Karbasi as the editor-in-chief of a group of experts on a range of topics, but rather a dedicated endeavour of an individual with assistance from group of researchers, poets, men-of-letters, and journalists. However this immense project has resulted in not just a mere collection of summaries on various research areas useful for believers seeking re-affirmation but noticeably a significant tool for researchers particularly outside the Middle East working on this field.

The entries of this impressive collection represent an enormous amount of hard work and a significant contribution on a range of very important aspects of al-Husayn's life such as his biography, his

thought, his conduct, the social circle of personalities around him, various dimensions of his uprising, and countless other related subjects. Other volumes discuss topics including al-Husayn in the Qur'an, al-Husayn in the Sunnah, his biography, his prayers, al-Husayn and Islamic legislation, and this history of his shrine. Nevertheless the bulk of the *Hussaini Encyclopedia*, in fact over a third of its volumes, focuses on poetry and literature across a range of languages.

Prior to this volume, there is a volume providing an introduction to Persian poetry and the various stages of its development. That is devoted to the following: folk etymology of the term 'Farsi'; the Indo-European family of languages; the Old Persian alphabet; the Middle Persian (Pahlavi) alphabet; Dari/Modern Persian; the Modern Persian alphabet; Indian, Turkish, English, French, and Arabic loan words in Persian; Persian dialects; Persian inflection and derivation; Persian literature and poetry; examples from Old Persian and Avestan; Persian poetry and poets in the Islamic era (a chapter is devoted to each century); Persian blank verse and its features; religious poetry and the schools of Persian poetry (such as Khurasani, Iraqi and Hindi); Persian phonological developments; and the Persian prosody and metrical system. There are also indices. The introductory volume is a good companion to the *diwan* of Persian poetry, making a unique contribution particularly for Arabic readers unfamiliar with Persian and European languages. However no mention is made of the various poetic forms, such as the *qasidah*, *ghazal*, *qit'ab*, or *mathnavi*, and the contents seem to be essentially based on Dhabih Alllah Safa's *Tarikh-i Adabiyat dar Iran* (6 vols., 1332-1362 AH (solar)/1953-1983) and *Ganji Sukhan* (3 vols., 1339 AH (solar)/1960), Sa'id Nafisi's *Tarikh-i Nazm va Nathr* (2 vols., 1344 AH (solar)/1965), and also Parviz Asadi's *Farhang-i Danish va Hunar* (1377 AH (solar)/1998). A more comprehensive revision based on countless other sources available in Persian would be needed to cover the wide ranging aspects of Persian language in order to make this a worthy complement to the *Hussaini Encyclopedia*.

The encyclopaedia contains fifty-three volumes on Persian poetry together with an introductory volume and two volumes of biographies of Persian poets. It is an extraordinarily readable collection of volumes and a useful addition to any Persian literature reference collection. This volume, the *diwan* of Persian poetry, is the first volume in its section and spans the fourth/tenth to ninth/fifteenth centuries. It includes entries of over a hundred Persian poets of the period with detailed footnotes on their work devoted to

al-Husayn. Although not intended, nor to be used, as a primary reference for Persian poetry it aims and partially succeeds in challenging claims that Persian poetry about Imam al-Husayn largely began in the Safavid period (for example on pages 29, 50, 111, 128, 172, 264, and 303). There are important entries on poets of this early period including, but not limited to 'Am'aq Bukhara'i, 'Uthman Mukhtari, Qatran Daylami, Athir al-Din Akhsikati, Zahir al-Din Faryabi, Farrukhi Sistani as well as famous poets such as Sa'di, Hafiz, Khaqani, and Rumi. Selected vocalised Persian verses are followed by Arabic translations, annotations, prosodic metres, and references. Each entry points the way to for further research by those interested and makes this encyclopaedia an ideal tool for serious students of the field. Nevertheless this valuable work needs to be reviewed at some stage by a group of experts with an eye for detail; a *corrigendum* is a *desideratum*. Two instances of inaccuracies are:

1. On page 439, the title of *Tarikh Bal'ami* has been erroneously recorded as *Tarikh Tabari*. *Tarikh Bal'ami*, edited by Muhammad Taqi Bahar (1341 AH (solar)/1962) and Muhammad Parvin Gunabadi (1353 AH (solar)/1974, 1386 AH (solar)/2007), is an abridged translation of and supplement to Muhammad Ibn Jarir al-Tabari's *Tarikh al-Rasul wa al-Muluk*. Furthermore, reference has been made to volume five, whereas the first edition the work and its reprints have been published in one single volume.

2. On page 390, under Jamshid it reads: 'He bears the appellation "King of Hell" (*malik al-jahim*)'. It is worthy of note that, according to the Pahlavi *Rivayat* (31; 47:8) and *Dadistan-i Denig* (38:19-21), Jamshid was confined to hell for declining Ahura Mazda's offer to embrace the religion; to make things worse, he had proclaimed himself the creator of the world. Zoroaster (MP Zardusht) interceded with Ahura Mazda on Jamshid's behalf by mentioning the latter's good deeds, such as fighting the devils and impeding people from hurting useful animals. Jamshid accepted the offer (*Menog-i Khrad*, 26:37), repented of his sins, and his soul was sent to Purgatory (MP Hamestagan).¹ However, Herodotus (7:114) records that Persians believed that a certain god ruled the spirits of the deceased in hell, since Jamshid had failed to find his way to paradise. Boyce wrongly maintains that the god is Jamshid, as his counterpart in the Indian tradition (e.g. Rig Veda 10.13.4), Yama, is the god of death who exchanged immortality with offspring and following his being slain was sent to hell.²

Book Reviews

In spite of these minor inaccuracies and a few shortcomings, we found this volume refreshing and a pleasure to read and we believe the *Hussaini Encyclopaedia* to be remarkable in its conception and a valuable contribution to the study of al-Husayn.

Notes

¹ See Arthur Christensen, *Les types du premier homme et du premier roi dans l'histoire légendaire des Iraniens* (Stockholm: P.A. Norstedt & Söner, 1918-1934), 76.

² Mary Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism* 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 83-84.

Book Notes

Avicenna's Deliverance: Logic, trans. and notes by Asad Q. Ahmed, 2011. (Studies in Islamic Philosophy, ed. S. Nomanul Haq.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, xxxvi + 191 pp., £9.99. ISBN: 978-0-19547-950-8.

Asad Q. Ahmed gives us a full translation into English of the logical section of Ibn Sina's book *al-Najat (Deliverance)*, together with notes and a glossary of technical terms. In a preface he describes his use of the manuscripts. An introduction by Tony Street summarises the main points of Ibn Sina's logic and discusses its relation both to the earlier Aristotelian tradition and to post-Avicennan Arabic logic. The *Deliverance* was published after Ibn Sina's encyclopaedic *al-Shifa (Book of Healing)*, but for the logic section of the *Deliverance* Ibn Sina used an earlier work of his, known in English as the *Shorter Summary on Logic*. So this text represents a transitional phase of Ibn Sina's work, fully mature but before the great works of his later years. Ibn Sina is still using Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* and *Prior and Posterior Analytics* as a template. But he puts a strong emphasis on certain sentence forms that Aristotle had neglected – for example, 'Every B is an A as long as it is a B' – and he discusses where Aristotle's logical rules break down if we extend them to these forms. The later sections of the text introduce us to characteristic teachings of Ibn Sina on scientific method. For example repeated experience allows us to refine the definitions which we use as starting points for scientific deductions; in this way Ibn Sina gives a role to scientific progress through experiment. Ahmed's translation is a pioneering work; no other translations of the logic of the *Deliverance* are readily available in any Western language. It will certainly be a help and stimulus for further research.

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The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism by Patricia Crone, 2012. New York: Cambridge

Book Notes

University Press, xvii + 566 pp., maps, £65.00, \$99.00. ISBN: 978-1-107-01879-2 (hbk).

In *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran*, Patricia Crone attempts to demonstrate that significant elements of pre-Islamic beliefs – most notably, Zoroastrian and Gnostic beliefs – persisted after both the Arab conquests and the spread of Islam in Iran. These beliefs were integrated into a number of Persian Islamic sects, and influenced the entire country after the Safavids rose to power. In Part I, which is historical in nature, she explores her thesis through a study of revolts after the Arab conquests. She indicates that she is re-evaluating material which has been previously studied before via a new approach, while including some new Chinese sources and Central Asian archaeological findings in her discussion. In Part II, she focuses on the religious beliefs themselves, such as the nature of God as light (*nur*), dualistic and trinitarian divine cosmologies (both Christian and otherwise), reincarnation, and the transformation and manifestation (*mazhar*) of God. She dedicates significant attention to the relationship of these ideas with Shi'a *ghulwaww*, and calls special attention to her discussion of the Ahl-i Haqq sect, which she refers to as the living remnants of the Elchasai (viii). In Part III, she examines the marital and reproductive strategies of certain groups to explore allegations of wife-sharing. Finally, in the last part, she traces the continuity of these ideas from the early Islamic to the modern period. She recommends her book to Iranists and Islamists as well as specialists in early Christianity, Gnosticism, late antiquity, gender history, the comparative history of empires, and pre-modern communism (viii).

[AI]

Shiism and Politics in the Middle East by Laurence Louër, trans. John King, 2012. London: C. Hurst & Co., 176 pp., \$24.95. ISBN: 978-0-231-70328-4.

Translated from the original French, *Shiism and Politics in the Middle East* offers a layperson's introduction to the subject indicated in the title. While the bulk of the book provides an overview of Shi'a political history in the late twentieth century, the latter section delves into the newer subject of political developments after the fall of Saddam.

Primarily, Louër discusses the political role of Shi'a ulema and religious organizations in the Middle East, such as Hizbullah, the Da'wah party, and the most politically influential *marja's*. As might be expected, Iranian hegemony is a central topic of discussion. However, Louër argues that while the Arab Shi'a were ideologically influenced by the Iranian Revolution, in practice, local concerns had a greater practical impact on these regions than the exertion of Iranian political influence. It should be noted that, since the book was originally written in 2008, it does not cover some of the most ground-breaking events among Arab Shi'a in recent years, such as the uprisings in Sa'udi Arabia and Bahrain, although it does discuss the roots of these uprisings and events.

[AI]

Ṣūfī Commentaries on the Qur'an in Classical Islam by Kristin Zahra Sands, 2006. (Routledge Studies in the Quran.) London & New York: Routledge, 196 + viii pp., £110.00. ISBN: 978-0-415-36685-4 (hbk).

The author's ambition is to study the relationship of the Sufis with the Qur'an in a more comprehensive way than has been done before, elaborating on the debate started by Goldziher in the early twentieth century, continued by Massignon and Nwyia, and continuing on up to Corbin, Chittick, and Bowering. Sands gives a very useful and articulated introduction to the concepts of *zahir* and *batin* in the early interpretations of the Qur'an, which serves as an introduction to the whole work. Numerous translations of key passages of important authors – basically Sufi commentaries on the *hadith* of Ibn Mas'ud – are also provided. Then the author goes on to give detailed account of the *muhkam/mutashabih* debate in early exegesis. This also serves as a valuable introductory account which makes for an account of general Sufi understanding of the concept, preparing the way, through an assessment of the Sufi understanding of knowledge, to the treatment of the relationship between exegesis and spiritual realisation in Sufism in Chapter Three. The choice of the authors analysed looks at times slightly arbitrary. In Chapter Four, for example, Sands talks of the methods of interpretation in different Sufi authors (who include Sarraj, Ghazali, Ibn 'Arabi, Nishaburi, al-Kashani, and Simnani), although this selection does not result in a sampling of distinct

methods characterized by each author. Nevertheless, she succeeds in providing a glimpse of different articulations of the Sufis methods of interpretation. A chronological presentation of major Sufi *tafsirs* and their authors is also provided. This presentation gives an idea of the different approaches to and of the evolution of the genre over history, from al-Tustari to the *ta'wilat al-najmiyyah*, including Sulami, Qushayri, Ghazali, Maybudi, Ruzbihan Baqli, and Kashani. This presentation opens Part II of the book, where three chapters (7, 8 and 9) are devoted to the history of Sufi interpretations of three key Qur'anic passages: the story of Musa and Khidr, the verses on Maryam, and the Light Verse. The book closes with an appendix in which the author gives some basic notes on the non-Sufi commentators referred to in the work, plus a glossary, an index of *hadith*, and an index of names and terms.

[AC]

The Essentials of Ibādī Islam by Valerie J. Hoffman, 2012. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 344 + xii pp., \$39.95. ISBN: 978-0-815-63288-7 (hbk).

This book sheds light on the distinctive theology of the often overlooked Ibadi sect of Islam which emerged early in Islamic history and survives today primarily in areas of North Africa as well as Oman, where the majority of the research for this book was conducted. It is one of the few academic works in English to discuss Ibadi theology and thus fills a gap in the current literature. Additionally, the author states her intention to allow Ibadi scholars to speak for themselves rather than presenting Ibadism in the views of non-Ibadis, as often happens. And so, after offering a concise overview of Ibadi history and thought, the author presents annotated translations of two Ibadi doctrinal works. The first is *al-'Aqidah al-Wahbiyyah* by Nasir ibn Salim ibn 'Udayyam al-Rawahi; this takes the form of a catechismal dialogue between a teacher and student in which they 'discuss' topics such as the unity, attributes, and essence of God; the impossibility of seeing God; *wilayah* and *bara'ah* (which the author translates as 'affiliation' and 'dissociation'); knowledge and action; and the status of non-Muslims. Next, to provide insight into subjects not discussed in *al-'Aqidah al-Wahbiyyah*, the author includes translations of selections on God's power and human acts from *Kitab Ma'alim al-Din* by 'Abd al-'Aziz al-

Thamini al-Mus'abi. The book concludes with a brief biographical dictionary of both Ibadi and non-Ibadi scholarly figures which should prove helpful to the non-specialist.

[AI]

Islamic Insights: Writings and Reviews by John Andrew Morrow, 2012. Qum: Ansariyan, 478 pp. ISBN: 978-9-642-19259-5 (hbk).

Islamic Insights is a collection of academic writings by John Andrew Morrow, a professor and author specializing in Islamic studies, particularly Sufism and Shi'ism. While some of the articles discuss linguistic or literary topics, such as the word 'Allah' in Arabic and the significance and influence of the Arabic language, a number of the articles focus on issues of contemporary significance, such as conversion to Islam in America (including three articles on Malcolm X), anti-Islamism in France, al-Qa'idah, world politics pertaining to Iran, the nuclear threat, and the dearth of leadership among Muslims today. Of particular interest to specialists in Shi'ism may be an article on Shi'ism in Morocco and an article comparing *The Poem of the Cid* to *rawzih khani*. Other topics include but are not limited to early Islamic history and Islamic medicine. Although these articles were previously printed elsewhere, they are compiled here to make this research more readily available to the interested layperson who may not have easy access to academic publications. This collection demonstrates the span and depth of Morrow's writings, and, with the variety of topics, should provide something for everyone interested in studies of Islam, either historical or contemporary.

[AI]



Transliteration

For transliteration from languages which use Arabic script the use of diacritics has been avoided in order to present the text of the journal in a uniform and uncluttered manner. A table of transliterated key terms – complete with diacritics and native script – has been included at the end of an article where it is necessary to avoid confusion.

TRANSLITERATION KEY:

Arab./Pers./ Urdu Letter	Roman Equivalent	Arab./Pers./ Urdu Letter	Roman Equivalent
ء	'	ش	sh
ا	a	ص	ṣ
ب	b	ض	ḍ
پ	p	ط	ṭ
ت	t	ظ	ẓ
ٹ	ṭ	ع	'
ث	th	غ	gh
ج	j	ف	f
چ	ch	ق	q
ح	ḥ	ك	k
خ	kh	گ	g
د	d	ل	l
ڈ	ḍ	م	m
ذ	dh	ن	n
ر	r	ه	h
ڑ	ṛ	و	w
ز	z	ی	y
ژ	zh	ة	h or t
س	s		

Short Vowels	Long Vowels	Diphthongs
اَ a	آ or اِ ā	او aw
اُ u	او ū	ای ay
اِ i	ای ī	

Transliteration

NOTES:

The Definite Article: The Arabic definite article ‘*al*’ (always followed by a dash) is only capitalised at the beginning of a sentence, name, or heading, e.g. ‘Hasan al-Basri’ or ‘Al-Basri’. The definite article is never assimilated or abbreviated e.g. ‘*hujjatu-l islam*’, ‘*al-qur’an ul-karim*’, ‘*huruf ash-shamsiyyah*’, ‘*ar-rahmanir rahim*’, and ‘*bidayat l-bikmah*’ are all incorrect. When a noun (*mawsuf*) is followed by an adjective (*siffah*), include the definite article ‘*al*’ before both, e.g. ‘*al-harakat al-jawhariyyah*’ not ‘*harakat al-jawhariyyah*’.

Construct phrases: Only the second word of the Arabic *idafah* takes ‘*al*’ e.g. ‘*salat al-fajr*’ not ‘*al-salat al-fajr*’. For Persian, the final *kasrah* of the word in the construct state (*muzaf*) is transliterated as ‘-i’ unless the word ends in a ‘y’, e.g. ‘*Bank-i Markazi-yi Iran*’ and ‘*Hawzih-i Ilmiyyih-i Qum*’.

Patronymic particles: The patronymic particles ‘bint’ and ‘ibn’ should only be capitalised if at the beginning of a name i.e. ‘Ibn Sina’ is correct and so is ‘Ali ibn Sina’, but ‘Ali Ibn Sina’ is incorrect. *Kunyas* (e.g. Abu, Abi, Aba, Umm) are to be capitalized and never assimilated e.g. ‘Bintal Huda’ and ‘Abulqasim’ are incorrect. ‘Bin’ and ‘b.’ should not be used.

Naturalised words: Words that have been admitted into the English language should be transliterated according to their common spelling. For example, ‘Ayatollah’ not ‘*Ayat Allah*’ and ‘Shi’a’ not ‘*Shi’i*’.

Capitalisation: Transliterated words should be capitalised according to English convention, that is, at the beginning of sentences, in titles, and for names. However, when transliterating a sentence or phrase, capitalisation is not required.

Dashes: Where it is thought useful dashes may be used to indicate prefixes and suffixes, e.g. ‘*pish-namaz*’ and ‘*kitab-ha-yi dini*’ (in Persian) and ‘*li-takunu*’ and ‘*bi-buyutihim*’ (in Arabic).

Inflexion: The inflexion of the end letter of a word is not usually indicated, e.g. ‘*qawl wa fi’l*’ not ‘*qawlun wa fi’lun*’. On occasions it is warranted, e.g. ‘*sami’u al-adhan*’ not ‘*sami’t al-adhan*’ and ‘*hayya ala al-salah*’ not ‘*hayy ala al-salah*’.

Miscellaneous: In Farsi transliterate with ‘v’ rather than ‘w’, except for cases like ‘*khawajib*’. For Arabic when *ta marbutah* occurs in the middle of a phrase transliterate as ‘t’ rather than ‘h’, e.g. ‘*jazirat al-‘arab*’. Modern Turkish spellings should be used for Ottoman Turkish. For more information see our website.

