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[Imamah](#) [8]

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The Death Of Al-Husayn B. 'Ali And Early Shi'i Views On The Imamate

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This is an expanded version of a paper given at the Conference to mark the 1,400th anniversary of the birth of the Imam Husayn (London, July 6–9, 1984), held under the patronage of the Muhammadi Trust (see Al-Serat, XI/2 [Autumn 1984], 24–29). I am indebted to the kindness of Dr Mehdi Mohaghhegh of Tehran for making available materials essential for the completion of this study.

The death of the Imam al-Husayn b. 'Ali (4–61/626–680) has traditionally been seen by Muslims of all

persuasions as perhaps the greatest single calamity that befell the community in its early history. Certainly, among that portion of the Muslim community whose axis and very reason-for-being are the rights of the Family of the Prophet, the slaying of Muhammad's younger grandson has continuously served to galvanize and replenish the self-identity and world-view of Shi'i Islam.

The clay of Karbala' unceasingly leaves its impress on the face of the Shia, from the moment that Husayn uttered his final prayer on its sands until now. For the Shi'a, all of history is stained by the blood spilt at Karbala', yet they have also understood the killing of Husayn as the dramatic climax of an even greater tragedy, that of the sabotage of Muhammad's prophetic mission itself. Mulla Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi, a leading savant of the Safavid era, alludes to this by his remark that Husayn was killed already on the day of al-Saqifa';¹ and in our times Imam Khomeini has expressed a similar view:²

The greatest disaster that befell Islam was the usurpation of rule by Mu'awiya from 'Ali.... This disaster was even worse than the tragedy of Karbala and the misfortunes that befell the Lord of the Martyrs (upon whom be peace), and indeed it led to the tragedy of Karbala. The disaster that did not permit Islam to be correctly presented to the world was the greatest disaster of all.

Such views may reflect the circumstances of Shi'i polity since the era of the political ascendancy of Ithna-'Ashari (Twelver) Shi'ism. Yet in a much earlier period of their history the Shia had debated and discussed the significance of Husayn's death in a manner that clearly reflected their particular circumstances in the first few centuries following the Imam's death.

The debate which the death of Husayn provoked within succeeding generations of the Shi'i community centered around the meaning and implications of the sufferings of the Imams, and eventually contributed to the crystallization of certain fundamental tenets of the doctrine of the Imamate (*imama*). This process appears to owe much to the guidance of the fifth and sixth Twelver Imams, Muhammad al-Baqir (57–ca. 114/676–ca. 733) and Ja'far al-Sadiq (83–148/702–765).

Since the active careers of these two leaders and theoreticians of the Shi'i movement span over fifty years from the waning and collapse of the Umayyad dynasty till the early years of 'Abbasid rule, the centrality of that period for the elaboration of the teaching on the impeccability (*'isma*) of the imam, his humanity, his participation in the celestial realm of existence beyond death, and of how to reconcile God's justice with the oppression and wrong done to the Family of the Prophet, must be stressed.³

Such notions arose out of a definite messianic tension whereby the formation of the doctrine of the Imamate enshrined an understanding of the *imam* in terms akin to an eschatological prophet figure.⁴ Al-Husayn's death functioned as one basic point of clarification for the roles of suffering, intercession, and apocalyptic retribution peculiar to the imam.

The Early Shi'a

An appreciation of the main currents within the Shia during the century following the martyrdom of Husayn (10 Muharram, 61/10 October, 680) is necessary. His death had a shock impact on the historical manifestations of the Shia under the Umayyads. Two immediate consequences of his death were the Tawwabun, or movement of the Penitents (61–65), which was a completely Arab phenomenon,⁵ and the Kaysaniyya movement sparked by the revolt of al-Mukhtar b. Abi 'Ubayd al-Thaqafi, 'who first mobilized the Persian *mawali* in active participation, thus giving the Shi'i movement a wider appeal.'⁶

Al-Mukhtar, whose revolt in Kufa was catapulted into success by the passions generated by the Penitents, was apparently one of the first leaders to capitalize on the notion of the 'God-guided One', *al-Mahdi*, and from a particular group among his followers (the *ghulat al-Kaysaniyya*, i.e., the remnants of the old Saba'iyya living in Kufa during the days of al-Mukhtar⁷) derived a number of early *ghuluww* movements—i.e., radical Shi'i groups who held an 'exaggerated' view of the *imam*.

These groupings traced the Imamate through Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyya (d. 84 A.H.), the third son of 'Ali b. Abi Talib. The Kaysaniyya impetus became canalized into the various groupings tinged by Mazdaean and Mazdakite milieus (e.g., the Harbiyya, Janahiyya, and Khurramiyya), the various groupings of the 'Abbasid Shi'a such as the Rawandiyya, and absorption into the rising tide of Ithna-'Ashari Shi'ism in Iraq.

The key ideas of the Mahdi, *bada'*, *ghayba*, *raj'a*, as well as *nass* (the explicit designation of an *Imam*) and other important aspects of the radical religious theory of the Imamate first make widespread appearance with the Kaysaniyya and its cognate groupings.⁸ The peculiar eschatological ideology of neo-Kaysani messianism was marked by its revolutionary orientation and tendency towards a type of mystical anarchy (e.g., the motif of revenge and the concrete political expectations which were both enveloped within the Mahdi dogma), and made an explosive combination with 'Alid legitimism, thus insuring the widespread and permanent appeal of chiliastic political expectations in Islam.

It was this combination of a messianic ideology and legitimist Arab aristocratic elements which lay behind the 'Alid revolts of the Talibite 'Abd Allah b. Mu'awiya and the Hasanids Muhammad and Ibrahim ibn 'Abd Allah. The 'Abbasid party harnessed the energy of neo-Kaysani millenarianism more efficiently than did the 'Alids, particularly in their exploitation of *mawali* expectations. Two other major attitudes during the century following Husayn's death must be mentioned: the party of Zayd b. 'Ali with his stress on 'Alid legitimism balanced by moderating overtures to the traditionalist and juridical circles, and the radical religious wing of the Shia represented by various extremist circles and revolts, and often led by men who had some sort of link with the Husaynids Muhammad al-Baqir and Ja'far al-Sadiq (e.g., Bayan b. San'an, al-Mughira b. Sa'id, Abu Mansur al-'Ijli, and Abu al-Khattab).⁹

Curiously, the line of Husayn from his son 'Ali al-Sajjad onwards did not participate in any overtly political movement. These leaders neither promoted apocalyptic revolt, nor did they accept the generally

held conceptions of authority, guidance and knowledge which were being elaborated and spread by the traditionist-juridical circles of the Hijaz and Iraq, preferring instead to enunciate their own particular viewpoint and body of traditions on virtually all aspects of the burgeoning Islamic disciplines. Al-Baqir and al-Sadiq were primarily responsible for formulating a coherent doctrine of the Imamate which was to provide the foundation of the Twelver school until our day.

The Husaynid 'Alids were faced with a difficult situation in this task, even viewed from within the competing Shi'i currents of their time. On the one hand, al-Baqir and al-Sadiq had to consolidate and extend their own circles of followers who were being drawn to the activist revolutionary movements, by defining and defending their own family's claims to inherited legitimacy and authority against the competing claims of others.

On the other hand, they had to offset the repeated ascriptions of the enthusiasts and adventurers who sought validation for their activities by appropriating certain key features of Husaynid 'Alid teaching; this was accomplished through disciplining misguided followers, as well as attacking the pretensions and ideologies of closely related figures who had raised troubling questions in the minds of these two Imams genuine following. [10](#)

The importance of this double challenge for the elaboration of al-Baqir's and al-Sadiq's theory of the Imamate still remains to be more fully explored, but certain features can be readily appreciated as familiar issues endemic to the early Shi'a as a whole. One of the earliest and most influential issues was the real nature of the death of an Imam, or of a prophet, and his continued existence after his death or disappearance.

Ibn Al-Hanafiya, Jesus, And The Qur'an

The view of the early Kaysaniyya that Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyya disappeared from view and was subsisting miraculously in a semi-paradisial condition on Mt. Radwa sustained by water and honey, and would make his reappearance as the Mahdi (the doctrines of *ghayba* and *raj'a*), [11](#) propagated by their spokesmen-poets, was of course denied by the later Twelver school. [12](#) One report relates a discussion between a certain Kaysani, Hayyan al-Sarraj, and Ja'far al-Sadiq, who questioned Hayyan about what his companions were saying concerning Ibn al-Hanafiyya: [13](#)

Hayyan: They say he is alive and is sustained (hay yun yurzaq).

Sadiq: My father informed me that he was among those who attended on him during his final illness and who closed his eyes [at his death], who put him in his grave, and who married his women off and divided his inheritance.

H: O Abu 'Abd Allah! Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyya is like Jesus, son of Mary, in this community; his affair was made to appear [like one who died] to people (*shubbiha amruhu li-l-nas*).

S: Was his affair made to appear [like one who died] to his friends, or to his enemies (shubbiha amruhu 'ala awliya'hi aw 'ala a'da'thi)?

H: Rather to his enemies.

S: Are you claiming that Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Baqir is the enemy of his paternal uncle Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyya?

H: No.

S: Hayyan, you [and your companions] are shunning the Signs of God! Has not God, Blessed and Exalted, said: ***“We will recompense those who turn away from Our Signs with an evil punishment because of their turning away” (6: 157)?***

Whether this report be viewed as a later polemical argument, as al-Qadi implies,[14](#) or whether it indeed reflects features of Kaysani ideology of the first part of the second hijra century, the fact that Ibn al-Hanafiyya is likened to Jesus, and the Qur'anic verse 6:157 is evoked, is significant.

Such an association apparently lived on in neo-Kaysani circles until they were subsumed into the early Qaramita: under the events for the year 278, the historian al-Tabari mentions a book of the Qaramita ascribed to al-Faraj b. 'Uthman, in which a certain Ahmad b. Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyya was referred to as being 'the Messiah, and he is Jesus and the Word (*al-kalima*) and the Mahdi... and Gabriel'.[15](#)

Here are the Qur'anic verses which mention the death of Jesus: And for their saying,

“We did slay the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary. the Messenger of God;’ whereas they slew him not, nor did they bring about his death on the cross, but he was made to appear to them [like one crucified) (shubbiha la-hum); and those who differ therein are certainly in a state of doubt about it; they have no certain knowledge thereof, but only pursue a conjecture; though they did not slay him for a certainty” (4: 157).

“On the contrary, God raised him to Himself (rafa'ahu). And God is Mighty, Wise” (4: 158).

“And there is none among the People of the Book but must believe in him before his death (yu'minanna bihi gabla mawtahi); and on the Resurrection Day he [Jesus) shall be a witness against them” (4: 159).

These verses have evoked varying interpretations among Muslims, the central question being whether the Qur'an here categorically denies that Jesus was crucified or killed by the Jews, despite appearances, and was taken up to God. G. Parrinder asserts '... that the Qur'an itself does not say that Jesus suffered in a false body (in the Docetic fashion), nor does it say that a substitute was made so that somebody else suffered in his place.... the cumulative effect of the Qur'anic verses is strongly in favour of a real death, and a complete self-surrender of Jesus.'[16](#)

Yet the consensus of early Muslim exegesis was that Jesus was never crucified, that his likeness or image (*shabah*) was cast on one of his disciples who was then mistakenly crucified in his place, and that Jesus then accomplished a bodily ascension to heaven.¹⁷ The phrase in 4: 157, ***shubbiha la-hum*** ('he was made to appear to them [like one crucified]', or 'he was counterfeited for them'), was traditionally understood to refer to Jesus' enemies among the Jews who boasted of having killed him on the cross, thereby disproving his claim to be a divinely sent prophet.

The point of al-Saiq's question: 'Was his [Ibn al-Hanafiyya's] affair made to appear [like one who died] to his friends, or to his enemies?', and Hayyan's unequivocal reply: 'Rather to his enemies, reflects this Qur'anic context. Apparently al-Sadiq implied by this question that the friends of Jesus (i.e., his disciples) were not led to believe in his death on the cross, as his enemies the Jews had been, but may themselves have denied that Jesus died on the cross.¹⁸

The next verse (4: 158) contains the phrase ***rafa'hu***, which has been interpreted to mean either that Jesus died yet was spiritually exalted in the sense of being honoured by God, or simply that Jesus was taken up to God and lives bodily in heaven, from whence he shall return at the end of time to help consummate the final eschatological drama alongside the *Mahdi*.

The following verse (4: 159) has also been variously interpreted, depending on how the pronoun "his" in the expression ***qabla mawtihi*** was understood: either the pronoun "his" refers to every one of the People of the Book, who shall grasp the truth about Jesus and believe in him before their death; or, if the pronoun "his" refers to Jesus, who did not die on the cross, then he is still living in the body and will appear before the Last Day, when there will be a final death of Jesus, and all will have believed in him before that.

This latter view is ascribed to al-Baqir: 'Jesus will descend to the world [from heaven] before the Resurrection Day, and the remaining confessors of Judaism or Christianity will all believe in him before his [Jesus'] death, and he will pray behind the Mahdi.'¹⁹ There was also another interpretation current among Muslims in the first few centuries of Islam which gave a novel twist to the former view, namely that the pronoun "his" in verse 4: 159 referred to the Prophet Muhammad himself, who was to make a 'return' at the end of time, when all the Jews and Christians would finally believe in him.²⁰

The Qur'an's description of the death of Jesus appears to refer to the differences that split Eastern Christianity in the time of Muhammad, when the majority of the Semitic Christians were either Monophysite or Nestorian. Many scholars have maintained that the Qur'anic verses in question show that Muhammad was certainly aware of the opposing conceptions of the crucifixion held by the different Christian communities in his environment and their disputes about the nature of Jesus' humanity and divinity.²¹

Zaehner, for example, sees the Qur'anic position with regard to the two natures of Christ as being close to the Nestorian one.²² Grégoire saw 4: 156ff as aimed at conciliating the Christian community of

Najran, who were Monophysites of the Julianist persuasion, and that the Qur'an thus adopts their position 'of an apparent (the so-called 'phantasiast') crucifixion.'[23](#)

Julian of Halicarnassus led the extreme Monophysites of the mid-sixth century C.E. and upheld the Aparthodocetist position that Christ was so glorified that his body was insensible to fleshly weakness and incorruptible,[24](#) denying any likeness in nature between the humanity of Christ and that of man. For Julian, since Christ's 'humanity' was sinless, imperishable and impassible (above suffering), then if he suffered at all, it was only by a conscious exertion of will.[25](#)

While the Severians or moderate Monophysites accused them of upholding old heretical gnostic ideas of a docetic nature, it is more correct to call the Julianists 'Incorruptibilists' rather than 'Phantasiasts', since the Julianist version of Monophysitism asserted that Christ did not suffer and did not die on the cross, save by a voluntary act of will freely consented.

The Julianists saw redemption as occurring at the moment of crucifixion when Christ made the supreme choice which imposed the suffering and death on the cross which his 'humanity' never implied; whereas the moderate Monophysite position held that redemption was already foreseen by Christ's incarnation in a mortal, suffering body.[26](#)

J. Jarry has criticized Grégoire's thesis on the basis that if the Qur'anic verses discussed above do actually indicate a 'docetic' view of Jesus, then how could this be an adoption from Julianism when Muhammad knew the Najranite community directly, not imply from the calumny directed against them by their opponents who charged them with being Phantasiasts believing in an apparent (or counterfeit) crucifixion in which Jesus did not really suffer on the cross?[27](#)

Jarry is led, therefore, to suggest that either the Najran Christians may have been penetrated by a particular wing of extremist Monophysites adhering to the teaching of Gaianus, who taught a transmutation of the humanity into the divinity in Christ; or that certain currents in Syro-Mesopotamian monasticism of the sixth and seventh centuries C.E. may have harboured elements of the Messalians, or the semi-heresy of the Audians, or of Manichaeism, whose doctrines approach in certain points gnostic views of an apparent crucifixion.[28](#)

Jarry argues further that Gaianism itself was partly a dissimulated Messalianism which saw in the Julianist teaching on the incorruptibility of the body of Jesus their own conception of the spirituality of Christ's incarnation and thus of the glorification of the body.[29](#) There are problems involved in Jarry's thesis, such as interpreting 4: 157–159 as expressive of a docetic view of the death of Jesus, the assumption of a Gaianite diffusion into Najran (or later into Iraq), or even the presence of gnostic trends in Christian Arabia.[30](#)

All of these issues may well have less bearing on the Qur'an itself than they do on the Kaysani interpretation of these verses. The radical Shi'a attitude which drew an explicit parallel between Jesus and the *imam* or the Mahdi, and which throws light on the first major expression of the notions of *ghayba*

and *raj'a*, points to an exaggerated understanding of the figure of the *imam*.

While the contribution of old Arab ideals and glorification of the hero to these themes should not be lost sight of, nor the real events which shaped the self-awareness of the early Shi'a in the development of these notions be neglected, there remains an undeniable impact of religious ideas connected with earlier prophetic eschatological figures, particularly concerning the key notions of sinlessness and bodily incorruptibility.³¹

Al-Husayn: What Kind Of Death?

One incident in the drama of Karbala' ties the ideas of death and punishment for sin together in a striking way. The scene is variously reported as a confrontation between the only surviving son of Husayn, 'Ali al-Sajjad, and the Umayyad governor of Kufa, Ibn Ziyad or with the caliph Yazid himself—in Damascus,³² upon the entrance of the surviving members of Husayn's family.

Yazid questions 'Ali b. Husayn as to who he is, and then asks:³³

Yazid: Did God not kill 'Ali b. Husayn?

'Ali: I have a brother who is also called 'Ali. The people killed him.

Y: Rather God killed him.

A: ***“God receives the souls at the time of their death” (39:42).***

Y: ***“And whatever misfortune befalls you is the consequence of what your own hands have wrought” (42:30).***

A: ***“There befalls not any misfortune either in the earth or in your own persons, but it is recorded in a Book before We bring it into being” (57:22).***

“Surely that is easy for God—that you may not grieve over what is lost to you nor exult because of that which He has bestowed upon you. And God loves not any conceited boaster” (57:23).

The theological implications of these quotations from the Qur'an take up at least two themes central to the Shi'a: the sinlessness of the Imam, and the fact that the misfortunes suffered by the Prophet's family are pre-ordained for them by God as a mark of election. The attribution to Yazid of his employing ***“And whatever misfortune befalls you is the consequence of what your own hands have wrought” (42:30)*** as proof that Husayn's death came as a punishment from God for his crime of rebelling against the caliph. was a powerful argument which had to be countered. The replies attributed to al-Sajjad contain the seed of the later, fully-fledged rebuttals put forth by the Imams.

When several of al-Sadiq's companions questioned him precisely concerning this verse (42:30), they

asked:[34](#)

Do you consider what befell 'Ali and the members of his family to be the consequence of what their own hands have wrought, yet they are a Pure Household free of sin? To which al-Sadiq responded:

The Messenger of God used to turn in repentance to God, the Mighty, the Sublime, and seek His forgiveness a hundred times in every day and night, without any sin. For God, the Mighty the Sublime, favours His friends by conferring misfortunes, in order to reward them for the tribulations, without there being any sin on their part.

Al-Sadiq's reply makes clear that the afflictions of the prophets and Imams come to them from God, not as punishment for sin, but as a divine favour due to their sinlessness. Furthermore, the trials of the Prophet's Family are foreseen and willed by God as part of His salvational plan for creation, as can be seen from the reply al-Baqir gave to Hamran b. A'yan:[35](#)

Hamran: Tell me about the matter of the undertaking of 'Ali b. Abi Talib and al-Hasan and al-Husayn, and their going forth [into battle] and their carrying out God's religion, and of what befell them of the tyrants' fighting them and defeating them, until they were slain or vanquished?

Baqir: O Hamran, God, the Blessed and Exalted, had foreordained that for them, and had determined it and decreed it, and enjoined it; then He put it into effect. So by a prior knowledge of this from the Messenger of God to them, 'Ali and al-Hasan and Husayn, God's blessing be upon them, rose up, and by a [certain] knowledge he who is silent from among Us remained silent (*bi-ilmin samata man samata minna*). And if they, O Hamran, when there befell them what came down of God's command and (His) granting victory to the tyrants over them if they had asked God to ward that off from them, and if they had beseeched God to seek the elimination of the dominion of the tyrants, then God would have responded to them and would have warded that off from them. Then would the era of the tyrants have expired, and their dominion have vanished quicker than a tuned string which when severed is flung away! What occurred to them of defeat, O Hamran, was not on account of a sin they committed, nor as a punishment for an act of disobedience by which they opposed God. Rather, [these things occurred to them] as 'stations' (*li-manazil*), and as a mark of honour from God which He desired that they attain.

Here can be discerned an elaboration of the proof texts invoked by 'Ali b. Husayn before Yazid (and/or Ibn Ziyad). The death of Husayn was foreseen and was the result of God's will, pointing to the deeper mystery of the status of the imam, who accepts oppression and injustice from the tyrants as a divine favour, thereby transforming his suffering into a higher meaning and purpose.[36](#)

Nevertheless, the Shi'a were constantly reminded of this dilemma posed by Husayn's death, of how to understand the outward failure of their cause when it was the true one, sanctioned by God who also willed the defeat and sufferings of their Imams. They could not fail to seek a satisfactory resolution of this dilemma, since the Umayyads and their supporters made of the day Husayn was killed an event celebrated in sacred history and observed as a day of blessing.

It appears that the Umayyads had traditions invented claiming that the day on which Husayn was killed was the same day on which Adam repented, on which God had accepted David's penance, on which Jonah exited from the whale, on which Noah's ark came to rest on Mt. Judi, and on which the Israelites crossed the Red Sea.³⁷ In a long report, given here in full, one of the Banu Hashim, a descendant of al-Harth b. 'Abd al-Muttalib named 'Abd Allah b. al-Fadl b. Babbah al-Hashimi, questioned al-Sadiq about this:³⁸

O son of the Messenger of God, how did the day of 'Ashura' become a day of calamity and grief, of anguish and lamentation, more than the day on which the Messenger of God passed away, and the day on which Fatima died, and the day on which the Prince of Believers ['Ali] was killed? And the day on which al-Hasan was murdered by poison?

Sadiq: The day of al-Husayn's murder is a greater calamity than all the rest of those days, for the reason that the Companions of the Cloak (*ashah al-kisa'*), who were the most cherished creatures in God's eye, were five. When the Prophet departed from them, there remained the Prince of Believers and Fatima and al-Hasan and al-Husayn, and they were a consolation and comfort for people. When Fatima passed away, there was a consolation and comfort for people in the persons of the Prince of Believers, al-Hasan, and al-Husayn; then when the Prince of Believers passed away from them, there was a consolation and comfort for the people in al-Hasan and al-Husayn; and when al-Hasan passed away there was in al-Husayn a comfort and a consolation for people. So, when al-Husayn, may God whelm him in glory, was killed, not one of the Companions of the Cloak remained to be a consolation and comfort for people after him. Thus, his passing was like the disappearance of all of them, just as his abiding had been like the continuation of them all. For that reason, his day became the greatest day of calamity.

Hashimi: O son of the Messenger of God, then why was there no consolation and comfort for people in 'Ali b. al-Husayn [al-Sajjad], similar to what they had had in his forefathers?

S: Certainly 'Ali b. al-Husayn was the 'Master of the Worshippers', and an Imam, and an Exemplary Witness (*hujja*) for creatures after his deceased fathers. However, he did not meet the Messenger of God, nor did he hear him directly. His knowledge was a legacy from his father, from his grandfather, from the Prophet. The Prince of Believers and Fatima and al-Hasan and al-Husayn had been observed by the people with the Messenger of God in continuous and successive situations. When they looked at any one of them, they used to remember his position with the Prophet, and the statement of the Messenger of God to him and about him. So, when they passed away, people missed seeing the cherished ones of God. Only in the loss of al-Husayn was there also the loss of them all, because he passed away last of all. For that reason, his day became the greatest day of calamity.

H: O son of the Messenger of God, then why have the masses (al-'ammah) named the Day of Ashura' as a Day of Blessing (*yawm al-haraka*)?

S wept and said: When Husayn was killed, the people in Damascus curried favour with Yazid, and they invented reports for him [about who had been the killer of Husayn and how he had been killed] (*wada'u la-hu al-akhbar*), and they took rewards of money for so doing. Amongst what they invented for him was the affair of this day, and that it was a Day of Blessing, in order to turn the people away from mourning and weeping, misfortune and grief, towards joy and gaiety, delight and an inclination for it. May God be the judge between Us and them!

O son of my paternal uncle, verily that is less injurious for Islam and for its Family, than what a group has forged who arrogate to themselves our friendship (*mawaddatana*) and claim that they owe allegiance to our patronage (*muwalatina*), and profess Our Imamate. They allege that al-Husayn was not killed and that his affair was made to appear to people as one who was killed (*shubbiha li-l-nas*) like Jesus, son of Mary. In that case, there is no wickedness upon the Umayyads, and no censure for their claim [that 'Ashura is a day of blessing].

O cousin, whoever claims that al-Husayn was not killed, he has made a liar of the Messenger of God, and of 'Ali, and has accused the Imams after him of lying in their reports about his murder! And whoever has accused them of lying, he is an unbeliever in God the Sublime, and his blood is lawful [to shed] for everyone who has heard that from him.

H: O son of the Messenger of God, then what do you say about a group of your *shi'a* who are advocating that al-Husayn was killed [and is no longer alive]?[39](#)

S: These are not my *shi'a*; I wash my hands of them!

H: Then what about the saying of God:

“And surely, you have known the end of those amongst you, who transgressed in the matter of the Sabbath. So, We said to them, “Be ye apes, despised!” (2:65)?

S: Those ones were transformed (*masakhu*) into apes for three days, then they died, and did not beget offspring. The apes of today bear a resemblance to those, likewise swine and the rest of the *musukh* (transformed creatures), what is found of them today in a thing is its likeness; it is not permitted to eat its flesh.

May God damn the *ghulat* and the *mufawwida*, for they have made light of disobedience to God, and have disbelieved in Him, and have associated partners with Him. They have gone astray and led others astray, deserting from the performance of ritual obligations and the fulfilment of legal ordinances.

This report, whose *isnad* includes persons who are either unknown or tinged with *ghuluww*,[40](#) emphasizes the magnitude of the disaster for Islam of Husayn's death. It is consistent with the fact that al-Baqir and al-Sadiq encouraged and promoted the observance of the day of 'Ashura' both as an occasion for solidarity among their followers and as a means to advance the rights of their family.[41](#)

'Ashura' was seen to be 'the greatest day of calamity' in the face of its celebration as a 'day of blessing' by the Umayyads. Yet al-Sadiq specifies that certain Shi'is who held radical views concerning the nature of Husayn's death posed a greater danger to Islam and to the Family of the Prophet than even this lamentable practice of the Umayyads, namely those who likened Husayn to Jesus by denying the reality of his death. Such views undermined the moral and ideological strength of the Shia by removing the onus of Husayn's murder from the Umayyads, as well as attacking the credibility of the Imams who upheld the reality of Husayn's sufferings and death.

It is clear that al-Sadiq refers to some of his own partisans as the people who held this erroneous view of Husayn; they are not followers of another claimant for Imamate but are among those who wished to be considered as his own followers. Furthermore, he condemns another group of shi'a who also claimed to be supporters of the cause of the Prophet's Family, yet who advocated that Husayn was indeed killed and therefore is no longer alive.

Such a view probably refers to the neo-Kaysani groupings who believed that after the death of Husayn, the Imamate was transferred to Ibn al-Hanafiyya. The gravity of these views as a distortion of the real nature and function of the Imam is behind the severity of al-Sadiq's condemnation, namely, that those who entertained these ideas could be lawfully killed.

Then the question of *maskh* is connected in some way with the problem of Husayn's death, and al-Sadiq is made to condemn the extremists who hold these views. Perhaps a glance at some of the legends and beliefs associated with the death of Husayn or the Imams will help clarify the obscurity of these early radical views.

[Al-Husayn's Death: What Kind Of Life?](#)

Many legends evolved out of the recounting of the events of Karbala',⁴² such as those surrounding the severed head of Husayn. One legend makes it to be a talking head, with Zayd b. Arqam hearing it recite: ***"Do you think that the Companions of the Cave and al-Raqim were a wonder among Our Signs?"*** (18:9) as it was paraded through the streets of Kufa.⁴³

Hagiographical embellishments of this kind are striking for reliance on Christian motifs, in particular the explicit parallel between Husayn and John the Baptist.⁴⁴ Of course, the 'Uthmaniyya, or opponents of 'Ali's family, had likened the blood of 'Uthman, the third successor to Muhammad, to that of John the Baptist, capitalizing on the theme of the vengeance demanded by the spilt blood of one dear to God.⁴⁵

Another theme relevant here is that the flesh of the prophets and Imams does not decay or decompose in the earth after their death. Statements to this effect are found attributed to the Prophet, Muhammad: ... Truly God has made our flesh inviolable [from decay] in the earth, so that it does not consume any of it, and amplified by al-Sadiq:⁴⁶

There is no prophet nor any viceregent of a prophet who remains in the earth more than three days;⁴⁷ then his spirit and his bones and flesh are raised to heaven; yet [people] come to the sites of their traces (*mawadi atharahum*), and salutations reach them from afar, and [the prophets and their vicegerents the Imams] hear them before long at the sites of their traces.

The incorruptibility of the bodies of the saints is a theme familiar to the Orthodox Church and to medieval Christian legend and is usually taken to be a sign of the purity or sinless conduct of the saint; it is rarely found in Jewish tradition.⁴⁸ The report from al-Sadiq just quoted specifies a spiritual and physical ascension; it preserves the notion of visitation to the graves of prophets and their viceregents, the Imams, by stipulating that prayers for intercession made at their graves do reach them, since they are alive in heaven.

This point is made again in another report from 'Abd Allah b. Bakr al-Arraj'ani,⁴⁹ who accompanied al-Sadiq on the pilgrimage to Makka. On their way, near the village of 'Usfan, al-Sadiq points out to him a desolate black mountain called al-Kamad, beneath which lies a wadi of Hell that contains the murderers of Husayn, and where they suffer terrible punishments. Al-Sadiq informs al-Arraj'ani that every tyrant and miscreant also suffers there along with Husayn's killers.⁵⁰

Finally, al-Arraj'ani asks al-Sadiq:⁵¹ Tell me about al-Husayn, if he was disinterred, would they find anything in his grave?

Sadiq: O Ibn Bakr, what a tremendous question you have asked! Al-Husayn is with his father and mother, and his brother al-Hasan in the house of the Messenger of God; they are being kept alive (*yuhayyuna*⁵²) just as he is kept alive, and they are sustained (*yrzaquna*) like he is sustained. If he had been disinterred in his [own] day, he would have been found [in his grave]; as for today, he is now alive with his Lord and is sustained [by Him].

He is looking at his camp (*mu'askarahu*) and he looks at the Throne to see when he will be ordered to carry it. He is suspended on the right-hand side of the Throne and is saying: 'O Lord! Grant me what you promised me!' He looks to see his visitors [who visit his grave], and he knows them and the names of their fathers, their degrees and stations with God, better than any of you knows his own son and what is in his saddlebag. He sees the one who weeps for him [at his grave], and so he seeks God's forgiveness for him out of compassion, and asks his fathers ['Ali and Muhammad] to seek pardon for his sins...

Thus, Husayn is alive in heaven, from where he and the other members of the Prophet's Family intercede on behalf of their followers who make visitation to his grave. He is being 'sustained' or provided for by God in the Throne realm, for without his presence there, the efficacy of visitation to the site of his grave would be lost, and there would be no power of intercession on his part.

At the same time, he is sinless, and his death came to him, not as punishment for any shortcoming, but as a special mark of election and honour from God, preordained as part of salvational history. Thus, al-

Sadiq's condemnation of those Shi'a who claimed that Husayn was killed and no longer alive, takes on more significance.

Yet the radical Shi'a held, as a concomitant to the idea of *ghayba* implied in the phrase *shubbiha lahum*, the belief in the return of the Imam or the Mahdi as the climax of the eschatological drama, i.e., the notion of *raj'a* implied in the phrase *rafa'ahu*. It was a widespread belief among the early Shi'a that Husayn would 'return' in the Last Days, before or with the Mahdi, in order to exact the vengeance against his enemies so long denied him and as an integral part of God's Justice.⁵³ Sachedina has pointed out that the Twelver traditions on *raj'a* reveal a number of differing views including the question of the *raj'a* of Imams other than the Twelfth Imam:⁵⁴

Raj'a in the Imamite creed means the return of a group of believers to this world before the final resurrection occurs, during the days of the Qa'im's rule, or before or after that period. The *raj'a* will take place in order to show the believers the rule of the righteous Imam and to exact revenge from the enemies of the *ahl al-bayt*.

The *raj'a*, then, can be interpreted as a prelude to the final resurrection. While the function of al-Mahdi is to commence the *zuhur* and launch the revolution in the final days, it is 'Ali and, more particularly, Husayn, who will establish the Islamic rule after returning to life, following the *zuhur*. The traditions of this aspect of *raj'a* are unanimous in according Husayn, the martyr *par excellence* of Shi'ism, the honour of initiating the rule of justice and equity, in collaboration with 'Ali and the Qa'im.

Various early Shi'i literary compilations contain quite a few interesting reports which shed light on the different aspects of these beliefs about the *raj'a* of certain Imams. Perhaps the most valuable collection of such materials survives in a work by the eighth *hijri* century scholar Hasan b. Sulayman al-Hilli entitled *Muntakhab Basa'ir al-Daraj'at*. Al-Hillis book is ostensibly an abridgement or series of extracts from the work of Sa'd b. 'Abd Allah b. Abi Khalaf al-Ashari al-Qummi (d. 299 or 301), *Muntakhab Basa'ir al-Daraj'at*, although he included extracts from other early sources as well.

Sa'd's book itself may have been an abridgement of his older contemporary, Muhammad b. al-Hasan b. Farrukh al-Saffar al-Qummi (d. 290) who authored an important collection of traditions entitled *Basa'ir al-Daraj'at*.⁵⁵ Al-Hilli devotes a chapter to the subject of *raj'a* called *bah al-karrat*, chapter on 'Recurrences' or 'Returns',⁵⁶ whose reports employ the term *karra* as an archaic synonym for *raj'a* based on a number of Qur'anic proof texts.

Without entering into the complexities of these materials, it will nevertheless be essential to mention here one of the key points around which the entire discussion of death and 'return' revolves, namely the difference between *mawt* (dying a natural death) and *qatl* (dying by being killed).

Several verses are invoked by al-Baqir, for example, to show that dying and being killed are two entirely different things (**3: 144 and 3: 158**), and when he is asked about "**Every soul shall taste death (al-mawt)**" (**3: 185**), al-Baqir specifies that 'every believer has both a death-by-slaying and a death-by-

dying, so that he who is slain is brought back to life until he dies, and he who dies is brought back to life until he is slain'.[57](#)

It is precisely this eschatological context which lies behind the mystery of Husayn's death, for it is possible to see why some of the Shi'a understood that Husayn was killed, but that he did not die.

'God's Days are three,' declared al-Sadiq, 'the day the Qa'im shall arise, and the day of the "Return" (*yawm al-karra*), and the Resurrection Day.'[58](#) Jamil b. Darraj asked al-Sadiq about ***"Surely We help Our Messengers and those who believe, both in the present life and on the day when the witnesses will arise (*yawm yaqumu al-ashhad*)" (40:51)***, and the Imam specifies that it refers to the return of prophets and Imams who did not attain victory and were killed, but who will be victorious at their return.[59](#)

Another report has al-Sadiq say that 'the first one for whom the earth will split open and return to the world is Husayn b. 'Ali (a.s.), and the return (*al-raj'a*) is not for all but is limited; only the pure believers or the total idolaters will return'.[60](#) While some reports make Muhammad and/or 'Ali return to defeat their enemies, many others describe the return of Husayn who shall rule for a long time and who shall pass judgement on people before and after the Resurrection day, after having avenged himself on his enemies.[61](#)

Such reports heavily invoke the motif of the unrequited vengeance for the killing of 'Ali and Husayn as a central feature of Shi'i eschatology and provide Husayn with a parallel function to the Mahdi in the events preceding the End Time. It is as if Husayn has taken on the role of precursor of the Qa'im, with both of them at last accomplishing and fulfilling what the former was not able to do.

The parallel between Husayn and John the Baptist in this regard may be relevant.[62](#) The ultimate victory of the Imams, the promised success and vindication of the rights of the Prophet's Family, was to be consummated in the terrible battles of the eschaton, even while their heavenly dominion was assured; according to al-Sadiq, the Imams are given 'the sovereignty of paradise and the sovereignty of the Return (*mulk al-Karra*)'.[63](#)

The belief in *raj'a* was a sore point for many of the followers of al-Baqir and al-Sadiq, who were accused of holding heretical views concerning bodily resurrection. Several reports make clear the predicament of some of their leading disciples in the face of debates with opponents who raised doubts in their minds about this belief.[64](#)

Al-Baqir maintained that the faithful would be returned to bodily life in this world until those who had died would be killed and those who had been killed would die, and that this was part of God's omnipotence (*al-qudra*); furthermore, he attacked the 'Qadariyya' for denying this.[65](#)

Yet the early Shi'i belief in a this-worldly bodily return before the Judgement Day, central to the execution of God's Justice as vengeance against the enemies of the Family of the Prophet, was rivalled

by another, more extreme view, which held the transmigration of the soul in different bodies (*tanasukh*).⁶⁶ This view was widespread enough to elicit al-Sadiq's emphatic condemnation of the *ghulat* and the *mufawwida* quoted above.

One report in the *Tafsir* ascribed to the Imam al-Askari connects this doctrine of *maskh* (transmigration of the souls of men into the bodies of animals as punishment for sin) with both the Imams Ali b. Husayn al-Sajjad and al-Baqir.⁶⁷ According to it, al-Sajjad used to relate the tale of the transgressors of the Sabbath who went fishing (7: 163–166) and were punished by transformation or deformation into apes for their insolent rebellion; then the Imam would compare their punishment to what is in store for the killers of his father Husayn.⁶⁸

Another report attributed to al-Sadiq, from the *Kitab al-Tasalli* of Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Husayn b. Dul al-Qummi (d. 350),⁶⁹ describes how the *kafir* will be interrogated at his death by Muhammad, 'Ali, and the Angel of Death, and if he is found to hate the Prophet's family by denying the *walaya* of 'Ali, he is then punished in Hell where his spirit suffers tortures in the mountain of *Barahut*.⁷⁰

After being subjected to every loathsome filth and deformed into various 'vehicles' (*murakkibat*, i.e., bodily transformations), the *kafir* is finally resurrected upon the arising of the Qa'im, who shall cut off his head. Al-Sadiq adds that this is the meaning of **“Our Lord. You have caused us to die twice, and You have given us life twice” (40: 11)**, and he declares that 'time will not end before our enemies are metamorphosized outwardly (*maskhan zahiran*), when the man from them shall be deformed in his lifetime into an ape or swine, and a harsh punishment is behind them'.⁷¹

Numerous other reports from both al-Baqir and al-Sadiq underline the fact that the Qa'im will slay in revenge for Husayn all the descendants of the killers of Husayn, without any mercy, on account of what their ancestors had perpetrated.⁷²

These notions of bodily resurrection for the purpose of vengeance and punishment in this world are thus central to the early Shi'i doctrine of *raj'a* or *karra*. This is illustrated in a query addressed to al-Sadiq by a certain 'Abd Allah b. Husayn:⁷³

What do you say concerning *al-karra*?

Sadiq: I say about it what God, Mighty and Majestic, said: **“...then that, indeed, would be a losing return” (79: 12)**, if they returned to this world [after having died] and were not able to accomplish their blood revenge [i.e., the pagan Arabs scoffed at the claim of the resurrection of bodies, since if they were truly resurrected to their former state, then so would those whom they had killed in revenge, thus obviating their vengeance].

'Abd Allah: God says: **“It will only be a single cry” (79: 13)**, **“And behold! They will all remain awake at night (idba hum bi-l-sahira) (79: 14)?**

S: When [God] takes revenge on [those who scoff at the resurrection of bodies], and the bodies die, then the spirits remain awake watching at night, they do not sleep nor die (*baqiyat al-arwahu sahiratan la tanamu wa la tamut*).

Thus, underlying the notion of *al-karra* is a body of beliefs dealing with the relation of the spirit to the body which served to justify the conviction in a spiritual subsistence after death, a bodily resurrection in this world, a distinction between *mawt* and *qatl*, and for some, a belief in transmigration as a punishment for sin. These notions spring out of an understanding of man which involves the concept of *hulul*, a hallmark of extremist Shi'i groups, and which has often been linked with incarnationist teachings,⁷⁴ but this would take us far from the limits of the present study.

The Doctrinal Impact Of Husayn's Death

Forcing the Imams to rebut divergent views among certain wings of the early Shi'i movements concerning the nature of the Imam facilitated the resolution of a pressing ideological and theological dilemma. How were the Shi'a to understand the function and role of the Imam as the oppressed, the wronged, the unjustly afflicted—if all this came to him at God's hands and through God's will, being preordained from before history?

If the rights of the Family of the Prophet were divinely sanctioned, and the Imamate a divinely appointed office requiring obligatory obedience and dependent on God's aid and approval, then how could their outward failure, be countenanced? Two factors must be borne in mind in order to appreciate the answers to this dilemma provided by the Husaynid 'Alids.

First, their opponents had attacked their claim to divinely sanctioned authority by arguing that Husayn's death was merely punishment for sin (i.e., the crime of disobedience to the ruler), going as far as marking the event as a 'day of blessing'. Secondly, an influential view had taken root within the Shi'a which attempted to provide an answer to this dilemma by adopting an exaggerated view of the Imam, seeing him as beyond suffering, even beyond death, thus embracing the myth of his *ghayba* in this world and hoping for its realization upon his return in the near future.

The attraction of this radical vision was powerful during the century following Husayn's death, largely thanks to the forces unleashed by the Kaysani movement and the prophetic parallels employed to substantiate this myth. The radical viewpoint consistently re-appeared even within Twelver circles, where the *waqif* tendency emerged to await the return of one or another Imam. Ultimately it was this radical attitude which was formally adopted in the case of the twelfth, or hidden, Imam by the Twelver school.

In death, Husayn came to loom larger than life in the consciousness of the Shi'a. In fact, it can be argued that Husayn came to serve as a paradigm for the later Imams in his role as heavenly intercessor to whom the prayers and elegies offered at his grave would unfailingly be heard and a response evoked.

No other Imam of the Twelver line seems to have become the focus of ritual mourning visitation as early as Husayn, if the Prophet himself is discounted,⁷⁵ and allowance made for the relatively late fixing of 'Ali's grave at al-Ghariy in Najaf during al-Sadiq's later years.⁷⁶

Al-Shaykh al-Mufid Muhammad b. al-Nu'man (d. 413) has authoritatively summarized the later Twelver school doctrine concerning the condition of the Imams after their death:⁷⁷

I say that the Messengers of God, the Exalted, are men, and His Prophets and the Imams among His successors are created and fashioned; sufferings affect them, and enjoyments occur to them; their bodies grow with nourishment and diminish with the passage of time; death undoes them and dissolution overtakes them. The consensus of the people of God's unity [i.e., the Twelver school] agrees on this belief. Yet the ones affiliated with [the doctrine of] *tafwid* (delegation of authority from God to Muhammad to the Imam, to a pretender) and the classes of the *ghulat* have disagreed with us about it.

As for their state after death, [we hold that] they are transferred from beneath the earth and then inhabit the Garden of Allah in their bodies and their spirits. Thus, they exist in [paradise] alive and live a life of ease and comfort until the Day of Reckoning...

Al-Mufid goes on to affirm that the Prophet and the Imams are fully cognizant of what their community does and reward the pious with miracles; they hear the prayers of their *shi'a* in this world recited at their graves, no matter how distant. And he refers to **3: 169** as a proof text for their continued existence after death.⁷⁸ Even as al-Mufid attacks the *ghulat* for denying that the Imams undergo bodily dissolution and death, he upholds their paradisiacal subsistence and celestial presence as necessary for their intercessory role.

The manner of the spiritual subsistence of the Imams after death implicated in their transference to paradise both in body and spirit, approaches the notion of ascension as seen previously in the case of Jesus. The radical Shi'a indulged in speculations about this celestial realm of existence, viewing it as a resumption of a mode of existence enjoyed by the prophets and Imams previous to their earthly existence—in the form of light bodies, or phantoms of light,⁷⁹ and variously termed *zill*, *ashbah* (pl. of *shabah*), or simply *ajsad nuraniyya*.

The notion that the Day of the *Karra* marks a dissolution, or refining, of things back to their original image, is found in a report taken from a *Kitab al-Karra* of apparently unknown authorship;⁸⁰ al-Sadiq comments on "***The day when they [the unbelievers] will be tormented with the torment of the Fire***" (51: 13):

They will be fragmentized (*yukassiruna*) in the Return (*al-Karra*) just as gold is refined so that everything may be returned to its likeness (*hatta yarji'a kulla shay'in ila shabahihi*). [And the *rawi* adds:] 'That is to say, to its true essence (*ila haqiqatih*).

Furthermore, the view that Husayn did not physically suffer, despite his terrible injuries, occurs in

conjunction with the notion of his eschatological return. Al-Baqir related how Husayn informed his companions at Karbala' of the Prophet's prediction concerning his death there, as well as of his return and his future battles where he wields the sword of the Prophet succoured by angelic armies; Muhammad is depicted as telling Husayn:[81](#)

'...You shall be martyred in [Iraq], and a group of your companions shall be martyred with you. They will not experience the pain of the touch of iron. And then he recited: "**O Fire, be [a means of coolness and safety for Abraham] (21:69)**" – 'the combat shall be a means of coolness and safety for you and for [your companions].'

This assertion is not in harmony with al-Mufid's statement that the Imams do indeed experience suffering, a doctrine that is relevant to the notion of *'isma*.[82](#) More commonly met with, however, are descriptions of the self-possession and fearlessness displayed by Husayn during the events of Karbala'.[83](#)

The radical notion of Husayn being above physical suffering should be viewed in the context of the purported ascension of Husayn, either bodily or as a light-body, and the substitution of someone else to suffer in his place. The name of Hanzala b. As'ad al-Hamadani al-Shabami is mentioned as the companion upon whom the likeness or image (*shabah*) of Husayn came to rest at Karbala while Husayn himself ascended to heaven.[84](#)

This view was held by certain radical circles in the Sawad of Kufa and was reputedly condemned by the eighth Imam 'Ali al-Rida (d. 203/818); again, the parallel with the ascension of Jesus was invoked. Other statements condemning the belief that Husayn did not die or was not killed (i.e., did not suffer and was raised to heaven) stem from the period of the minor *ghayba* of the twelfth Imam (260–ca.329/874–941), and are given below in Appendix I.

This later era was marked by a different, more rationalistic type of discourse, as can be seen in the report from Husayn b. Ruh al-Nawbakhti given in Appendix Ic. The fact that this formative period of doctrinal crystallization within the Twelver school witnessed the repeated condemnation of such views may lead one to question whether al-Rida's statement (Appendix Ia) is a later back projection. Yet we know too little about the circles of the Kufan *ghulat* during the late 2nd–late 3rd/8th–9th centuries to be entitled to an opinion.

The question of how an emerging 'orthodoxy' gained a consensus within Imamiyya circles during this period is obscure; at the very least, the fact that al-Baqir and al-Sadiq were forced to deal with these issues surrounding Husayn's death testifies to their antiquity and to the vitality of the radical Shi'a legacy.

The significance of the parallel between John the Baptist and Husayn has been touched upon;[85](#) in later tradition, this was magnified, particularly concerning the magnitude of the cosmic and heavenly reactions to Husayn's death, and the gravity of the judgement on the community which even the beasts and birds of the air comprehended.

One widespread theme in this connection is that of the troop of four thousand angels who had originally intended to come to his aid at Karbala' but arrived too late; they look forward to Husayn's return when they shall finally render their assistance in battle, or to the appearance of the Qa'im by whom revenge for Husayn will be accomplished.⁸⁶ One such report has al-Sadiq state that when Husayn was killed, the angels raised a din around God, crying:⁸⁷

'O Lord, is Husayn, your bosom friend and the son of your Prophet, to be thus treated?!'... So God raised the 'shadow' (*zill*, the phantom-body) of the Qa'im, and He said: 'By this one shall I take vengeance for him from his oppressors.'

This report concludes with a description of the four thousand angels who preside at Husayn's grave, raising a commotion of lamentations until the Resurrection Day.

All these themes relating to the death of Husayn: his and his family's pre-ordained role to submit to suffering as a mark of election, his unflinching upholding of truth in the face of injustice and misfortune, his 'presence' alive and aware in heaven from where he intercedes for his shi'a and punishes his enemies, and his function as the pretext and precursor of the Qa'im, who shall arise to execute vengeance on Husayn's behalf; all are brought together in a striking hadith found in Ibn Qawlawayhi's *Kamil al-Ziyarat*,⁸⁸ which is given below in Appendix II.

The scene is Muhammad's nocturnal journey to heaven, where God informs the Prophet that he shall be tested for steadfastness through three afflictions:

- (i) hunger;
- (ii) denial and fear in combatting the unbelievers, and pain and injury in battle; and
- (iii) the repudiation, injustice, and murder which the family of Muhammad shall meet with.

The Prophet is apprised of all the pain and misfortunes predestined to occur to the members of his immediate family, and in turn, he consents, signalling his compliance with God's decree. Finally, Muhammad is shown the likeness (*shabah*) of the Qa'im, who will bring about the promised victory which the Prophet's forbearance can no longer refrain from demanding.

The scene closes with the Family of the Prophet passing sentence on their enemies, and excruciating punishment being inflicted mercilessly, since the intercession of the Intercessors is of no avail for them.⁸⁹ Here can be glimpsed the depth of the love and the hate which has been a driving force for Shi'a ideology.

It is a commonplace in occidental studies of Husayn's martyrdom, and of the Muharram ceremonies of *Ta'ziye* in general, to draw a comparison with the passion of Jesus. The crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus may be a natural parallel for a Christian to approach the issue of voluntary suffering and the mystery of life after death. Yet the parallel with the passion of Jesus was explicitly

drawn by some of the Shi'a from the late 1st century onwards.

The early Muslims found it natural to draw an analogy between the death of a prophetic figure and the death and ascension of earlier prophets such as Moses and Jesus. While the radical Shi'a appear to have made much of the precedent of Jesus in relation to Husayn's death, it is interesting to note that the predominant trend among the Husaynid 'Alids was to relate Husayn with John the Baptist, as well as other prophets noteworthy for their exemplifying deliberate acceptance of suffering or outward humiliation as a mark of grace and inner exaltation, such as the prophet Job.

Al-Baqir upheld Job as a model of the impeccable prophet who, though sinless, suffered degradation and trials in order to gain divine reward and privilege.⁹⁰ One reason for Job's affliction, according to al-Baqir, was: 'Lest they impute *rububiyya* (=lordship) to him, if they perceived what God willed should be bestowed on him from the prodigious things of His blessings....'⁹¹

Clearly, the danger which al-Sadiq perceived in the Jesus/Husayn parallel, and which lay behind his emphatic condemnation of the *mufawwida*, reveals the deeper issue at stake and its importance for his teaching on the Imamate. For the *ghulat* were accused of *tafwid*, that is, the heretical notion of prophetism which held that God had delegated authority in religious matters to Muhammad, who in turn had delegated 'Ali, and after him the Imams, and that this prophetic status had then been allegedly bestowed on various enthusiasts from the Imams; this was often accompanied by the claim that the Imams were divine (the notion of Two Gods; a God in heaven, and a God on earth).

Al-Sadiq also drew an analogy between the prophet Isma'il the son of Abraham, and Husayn, as an argument for the transfer of the Imamate from al-Hasan to the progeny of Husayn.⁹² This analogy must have served to counter both Zaydi and Hasanid claims to the Imamate in preference to the Husaynid line.

For al-Sadiq and his father, the Imam must suffer in order to affirm his humanity and the humanity of the prophets as well as to fulfil what God has previously ordained concerning them. In fact, the prophets and their legatees experience the greatest burden of sufferings over all other men. But their suffering is intentional, not passive, and takes place despite their impeccability: it is a confirmation of the purity of the Imam, the burden of his position, and comprises a grace bestowed by God.

For al-Baqir and al-Sadiq, Husayn suffered martyrdom at the hands of evil men, and is not 'in hiding' (thus unapproachable) or incommunicado. Rather, while Husayn was killed, he is alive in heaven, where alongside the other members of his family, he hears and responds to the prayers of his *shi'a* and mediates remission of sin. He sees and hears the visitors to his camp at Karbala'. Through his violent death, Husayn exemplifies suffering consciously accepted; by his being alive in heaven, Husayn embodies a spiritual presence and the possibility for divine forgiveness, and at the same time the certainty of vengeance.

The Husaynid 'Alids saw the death of Husayn, and his life-in-death, to be directly connected with the

ultimate reversal of the fortunes of the Imams, through his eventual return and triumphant victory heralding the appearance of the Qa'im. Justice demands that Husayn himself, as well as 'Ali, or even Muhammad, would finally punish their oppressors. But al-Sadiq may have discouraged the notion that such punishment entailed a bodily transformation in this life (*maskh*), for this latter view tended to diminish the stress on a this-worldly bodily resurrection as occasion for punishment (*raj'a*) by placing the brunt of God's revenge on bodily transformation into animal forms.

The heavy emphasis on the eschatological retribution by Husayn in the *karra* stems perhaps from the need felt by the Husaynid Imams to consolidate and promote solidarity among their followers in the face of government-sponsored persecution and defeat, arising from what has been termed in another context 'cognitive dissonance'. This may well be a factor in all strongly eschatological expectations and could be seen as part of the tension between the teaching of the Husaynid 'Alids, with their pronounced aloofness towards overtly chiliastic expressions, and the pre-occupations of the wider Shi'i movement with which they had to define their relation.

In this process, the Husaynids from al-Sajjad onwards attempted to temper the cruder ideological components of influential Shi'i currents and inject a distinctly spiritual valuation into religious discourse. In the case of the Imam's humanity and suffering, and the roles of intercession and eschatological vengeance, the figure of Husayn served a fundamental role.

Finally, a word of caution is necessary. The doctrine of the Imamate involves much more than what has been touched on in this study. To understand the intent of the Husaynids and better appreciate how their teaching contrasts in distinctive ways with those of parallel Shi'i groupings, much more would need to be examined.

For example, the intercession and grace granted the shi'a as opposed to the unrelenting torments envisioned for their enemies reflects only one aspect of their teaching about Love and Hate for God's sake, and needs to be related to a dualistic vision of history and of man (e.g., two races of men at eternal enmity, two opposed principles within the individual, etc.).

Again, the motives behind their concern to combat the exaggerated notions about the Imam were not solely their keen sense of personal risk at being worshipped as demi-gods, but their commitment to safeguarding the proper role which they desired to fulfil. Al-Baqir is reported to have bitterly complained to his own companions about those Shi'a who, in allying themselves to his cause, actually harmed what he believed to be his true purpose:[93](#)

I am astonished by people who undertake our friendship (*yatawallununa*) and take us as Imams, and who portray obedience to us as obligatory upon themselves like obedience to God, who then break their testimony and defeat themselves through the feebleness of their hearts. Thus, they diminish our rights and by so doing, the ones whom God has granted the proof of the truth of knowing us and assenting to our cause are thereby led to find fault with us on account of [what those others say concerning us]

(*ya'ibuna bi-dhalika 'alayna man 'a'tahu Allahu burhana haqqi ma'rifatina...*).

Do you think that God, Blessed and Exalted, enjoined obedience to His Friends upon His servants, and would then conceal from [the Imams] news of the heavens and earth; and so deprive them of the substance of knowledge (*mawadd al-'ilm*) concerning what is referred to them [for their authoritative religious ruling], and which contains the sustaining basis of [His servants'] religion?

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1. Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar (Beirut, 1983, repr. of the Tehran ed.), XLV, 328.
 2. Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley, 1981), p. 200.
 3. Syed H. M. Jafri, The Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam (London, 1979); online at: <https://al-islam.org/origins-and-early-development-shia-islam-sayyid-hus...> [11]
 - E. Kohlberg: 'Some Imami Shi'i Interpretations of Umayyad History', in Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society, ed. G. H. A. Juynboll (Urbana. 1982), pp. 145–59.
 4. The term 'eschatological prophet' is used here from the perspective of history of religions. The figure of the Shi'i imam represents an important development in the religious history of the Middle East, and its distinctive features in relation to, as well as in contrast with, earlier prophetic, saviour, and gnostic figures have yet to be delineated. For orientation, see the series of G. Widengren, King and Saviour (Uppsala, 1945–1955), and Tor Andrae. Die Person Muhammads in lehre und glauben seiner gemeinde (Stockholm, 1918), pp. 291–313.
 5. Jafri, Origins, §. 232.
 6. Jafri, Origins; W. Madelung, 'Kaysaniyya', E, I, IV, 836–38.
 7. W. al-Qadi, Al-Kaysaniyya fi Ta'rikh wa-I-Adab (Beirut, 1974), pp. 120–121.
 8. Madelung. 'Kaysaniyya', p. 838; S. Moscati, 'Per Una Storia Dell'Antica Shi'a, Rivista degli Studi Orientali, 29 (1954), 262–265.
 9. W. F. Tucker, 'Revolutionary Chiasm in Umayyad Iraq: A Study of the Bayaniyyah, Mughiriyyah, Mansuriyyah, and Janahiyyah Sects of the Extreme Shia', Ph.D. dissert., Indiana University, 1971; B. Lewis, 'Abu al-Khattab'. E.I.II I, 134; W. Madelung, 'Khattabiyya', E.I.II IV, 1132–33.
 10. I hope to provide documentation for these assertions in a forthcoming work on the teachings of the Husaynid 'Alids. See M. G. S. Hodgson, 'How did the Early Shi'a become Sectarian?', JAOS, 75/1 (1955), 1–13.
 11. Al-Qadi, Al-Kaysaniyya, pp. 170–96; Fr. Buhl, 'Muhammad h. al-Hanafiyyah, E.I., III, 671. I shall not discuss here the archaic belief that Muhammad and/or 'Ali did not die and will return like Jesus. For this, and the problem of the early Saba'iyya, see: 1. Friedländer, 'Abdallah b. Saba, der Begründer der Si'a, und sein jüdischer Ursprung', Zeitschrift für Assyriologie 23 (1909), 296–327 and 24 (1910), 1–46; 'Abdallah Fayyad, Tarikh al-Imamiyya wa Aslafihim min al-Shi'a (Beirut, 1975), pp. 92–110; al-Qadi. Al-Kaysaniyya, pp. 119ff; and also compare Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-Saffar, Basa'ir al-Daraj'at, ed. Muhsin Küche Baghi (Qumm?, 1380, repr. Tehran, 1404), pp. 428–30.
 12. Al-Qadi, Al-Kaysaniyya, pp. 271–88. She points out that the Ithna-'Ashari insistence on the death of Ibn al-Hanafiyya was really aimed at rebutting the view that he, rather than the twelfth Imam, is the hidden Imam whose return as the Mahdi was awaited; loc. cit., pp. 284–85. Whether al-Qadi's view that all such reports are to be considered as later polemical fabrications should be adopted unhesitatingly, depends on one's understanding of the development of the Imama doctrine itself.
 13. For the meagre information available on Hayyan al-Sarraj, see al-Mamaqani. Tanqih al-Maqal (Najaf, 1350), 1, 383, §3680, who points out that he should not be confused with Hannan al-Sarraj, wakil for Musa al-Kazim in Kufa and a leading Waqifi. The report is found in Ibn Babawayhi al-Qummi, al-Shaykh al-Saduq. Kamal al-Din wa Tamam al-Ni'ma, ed, al-Ghaffari (Tehran, 1390), p. 36. The same report, with slight variants and omissions, is found in al-Kashshi, Ikhtiyar Ma'rifat al-Rijal, in the recension of Shaykh al-Ta'ifa al-Tusi, ed. Hasan al-Mustafawi (Mashhad, 1348sh.), pp. 315–16, §570. Kashshi provides a double isnad for his version, both going back to Hammad b. Isa al-Juhani (d. 209) through Sa'd b 'Abdallah b. Abi Khalaf al-Qummi (d. 299 or 301), the well-known author of one of the earliest surviving heresiographical

works, al-Maqalat wa-l-Firaq. Ibn Babawayhi gives one isnad, going back through Muhammad b. Ya'qub al-Kulayni to Hammad, and then al-Husayn b. al-Mukhtar al-Qalanasi. All the links in the isنادs of both al-Kashshi and Ibn Babawayhi are deemed trustworthy; both Hammad and Ibn al-Mukhtar are reported to have relayed from al-Sadiq and to have authored books; see al-Mamaqani, Tanqih, 1, 343, §3063, and 366, §3317.

[14.](#) Al-Qadi, Al-Kaysaniyya, p. 285. One indication that this report could represent a later era than that of al-Sadiq might be the equation of the 'Signs of God' in 6: 157 with the Imams, assuming that this reflects later Twelver doctrinal developments. Yet there are numerous reports from al-Baqir and al-Sadiq which make this identification; are they also fabrications?

[15.](#) Al-Tabari, Ta'rikh, ed. De Goeje (Leiden, 1879-1901), III, 2128, Al-Faraj also claimed that Christ appeared to him in the form of a human body (al-masih tasawwara la-hu fr jismi bisan). Another indication of the input of Kaysani legacy into early Qarmati circles is Abu Sa'id Hasan b. Bahran al-Jannabi (murdered 301). the founder of Qarmatian power in East Arabia, who 'won followers rapidly. perhaps among a group formerly attached to the line of Ibn al-Hanafiyya'; Carra de Vaux and M. G. S. Hodgson, E.I.II, II, 452.

[16.](#) G. Parrinder, Jesus in the Qur'an (New York, 1965), pp. 112, 121.

[17.](#) Benjamin T. Lawson, 'The Crucifixion of Jesus in the Qur'an and Qur'anic Commentary; an historical survey.' Master's thesis, The Institute of Islamic Studies. McGill University, 1980.

[18.](#) Sufi tradition yields the following interpretation attributed to al-Sadiq concerning 6:157, where he restricts himself to the notion of the killing of Jesus, and distinguishes three types of killing: 'One is the killing of the world by abandoning it to one's enemies; one is the killing of sins, he is a lover, and the killing of wayward cravings, he is a knower ('arif), and he has an exaltation in his killing just as God raised up His prophets (lahu fi qailihi rif'atun kama rafa'a Allahu anbiya'ih). See Tafsir al-Sadiq, MS Chester Beatty 5253, f. 33b (my translation differs from Lawson), op. cit., pp. 51-53.

[19.](#) 'Ali b. Ibrahim al-Qummi, Tafsir, ed. Tayyib al-Musawi al-Jaza'in (Najaf 1386-87), I, 158.

[20.](#) 'Ali b. Ibrahim al-Qummi, Tafsir, ed. Tayyib al-Musawi al-Jaza'in (Najaf 1386-87), I, 158.; and Muhammad b. Mas'ud al-Ayyashi Tafsir, ed. Hashim al-Rasuli al-Mahullati (Qumm, 1370), I, 283-84, where reports from al-Baqir and al-Sadiq are found to this effect. One report has al-Sadiq give the following ta'wil of this verse: the ahl al-kitab refers to the 'Alid descendants from Fatima, who would not die without accepting the imamate of the real imam (i.e., of al-Sadiq himself).

[21.](#) These included Chalcedonian on the confines of the Byzantine empire, Severian or moderate Monophysite in Abyssinia. Nestorian in Persian Iraq and recently introduced into Yemen by the Persian conquest there, and Julianist or extreme Monophysite in the important community of Najran, not to mention certain gnostic and heretical circles.

[22.](#) R. C. Zaehner, The Comparison of Religions (Boston, 1958), appendix 'The Qur'an and Christ', pp. 195-217, 203.

[23.](#) H. Grégoire, 'Mahomet et le Monophysisme', in Mélanges Charles Diehl (Paris, 1930), pp. 107-119, 112ff.

[24.](#) See Acts 2:31 and 13:35 for the incorruptibility of the body of Christ.

[25.](#) Julian said of Jesus: 'Death is the portion of sinners. Then obviously He who was sinless could not really die'; W. A. Wigram, The Separation of the Monophysites (London, 1923), p. 155. The Julianists viewed Christ's body as uncreated, a sort of materialized godhead, from a soteriological perspective, and stressed the exaltation of the 'humanity' of Christ by assumption into the divine. In his controversy with Severus in Alexandria, Julian upheld the view that the body of Christ was incorruptible, while Severus, in turn, accused Julian of teaching Manichaean doctrines that the Passion was a 'fantasy'.

[26.](#) J. Jarry, Hérésies et Factions dans l'Empire Byzantin du IVe au VIIe Siècle (Cairo, 1968), pp. 74-81.

[27.](#) J. Jarry, 'La Sourate IV et les soi-disant origins Julianistes de l'Islam,' Annales Islamologiques IX (Cairo, 1970), pp. 1-7; and Jarry, Heresies, pp. 85-88.

[28.](#) Jarry, 'La Sourate IV,' pp. 4-7.

[29.](#) J. Jarry, 'Le Gaïanisme, un ramassis d'hérésies', BIFAO 63 (1965), 121-130, 126ff. Apparently certain Gaianites held the notion of a heavenly or glorified body of Christ simultaneous to his earthly appearance and negated the reality of the crucifixion; Gaianus was considered a prophet and in some measure equivalent to Christ, an attitude recalling the prophetism of the Messalians. Concerning the vexed problem of Messalianism, see the references provided in N. Garsoian, 'Nersés Le Grand, Basile De Césarée et Eustathe de Sébaste', Revue des Etudes Arméniennes, n.s. XVII (1983), 147, n. 11.

[30.](#) Jarry, Hérésies, pp. 86ff., where he admits that 'The allusion in Sura IV is much too brief and too restricted for us to be

able to say with certainty whether it is an allusion to a degenerate Julianism, to Manichaeism, to Messalianism or to a survival of Marcionism.'

[31.](#) Besides the figure of Jesus, the prophet Moses also served as a model of the eschatological-prophet. The Messiah was often likened to 'a prophet like Moses' who would appear in the End Time for Judaism and Samaritanism. Certain strands of Judaic tradition held that Moses' burial place was not known, since he had actually ascended to heaven, from whence he would return as the second Moses; see W. A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (Leiden, 1967), pp. 209–211. Josephus, for example, wrote of Moses: 'while, after having taken leave of the people, he was going to embrace Eleazar and Joshua on Mount Nebo, a cloud suddenly stood over him, and he disappeared, though he wrote in Scripture that he died, which was done from fear that people might say that because of his extraordinary virtue he had been turned into a divinity.' (loc. cit.) Legends of this kind, popularized in writings like the *Assumption of Moses* and the *Testament of Moses*, were apparently combatted by the Rabbis. See the statement attributed to al-Hasan al-Basri: 'If the Children of Israel knew where [Moses'] tomb was, they would have taken [Moses and Aaron] as two gods alongside of God;' 'Umāra b. Wathima al-Farisi, *Kitab Bad al-Khalq wa Qisas al-Anbiya'*, ed. R. G. Khoury (Wiesbaden, 1978), 51. For 'Umar's initial reaction to Muhammad's death, that he would return like Moses, see P. Casanova, *Mohammed et la Fin du Monde* (Paris, 1911–1921), p. 57.

[32.](#) Al-Tabari, *Ta'rikh*, II, 372–73, 376–77; and al-Shaykh al-Mufid, *Al-Irshad*, ed. al-Miyamiwi (Tehran, 1377), pp. 228, 230. Both report two separate exchanges, the first in Kufa between Ibn Ziyad and 'Ali b. al-Husayn, the second in Damascus between the caliph Yazid and 'Ali; al-Tabari's source for both is Abu Mikhnaf. In the first exchange, after Ibn Ziyad asserts that God, not the people, had killed al-Husayn, 'Ali responds:

"God receives the souls at the time of their death" (39:42).

"And no soul can die except by God's leave, a decree with a fixed term (3:145).

The second exchange has Yazid upbraid 'Ali b. al-Husayn for his father having sought to wrest the caliphal authority from him, which thus brought God's punishment upon him for his crime. Then 'Ali replies:

"There befalls not any misfortune either in the earth or in your own persons, but it is recorded in a Book before We bring it into being" (57:22).

Then Yazid asks his son Khalid to make reply, and when Khalid is unable to, Yazid tells him to say:

"And whatever misfortune befalls you is the consequence of what your own hands have wrought, and He forgives many [of your sins]" (42:30).

The version found in Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani, *Maqatil al-Talibiyin*, ed. Ahmad Saqr (Cairo, 1368), p. 120, apparently conflates these two incidents into one between Yazid and 'Ali in Damascus, and thus makes 'Ali have the last word.

[33.](#) The combined version found in al-Isfahani, *Maqatil*, p. 120, is given here since it is more revealing of the ideological dilemma posed by al-Husayn's death for the Shi'a doctrine of Imama.

[34.](#) Ibn Babawayhi al-Qummi, al-Shaykh al-Saduq, *Ma'ani al-Akhbar*, ed. al-Ghaffari (Tehran, 1379), pp. 383–84; and 'Abdallah b. Ja'far al-Himyari, *Qurb al-Isnad*, ed. 'Abd al-Mawla al-Tarihi (Najaf, 1369), p. 103. See also Abu l-Fadl 'Ali al-Tabarsi, *Mishkat al-Anwar fi Ghurar al-Akhbar* (Najaf, 1385), p. 295: Hamran questions al-Baqir on the same verse.

[35.](#) Al-Saffar, *Basa'ir al-Daraj'at*, quoted in al-Majlisi, *Bihar*, XLIV, 276–77.

[36.](#) See *Al-Serat X/2* (1984), 24–29, where I discuss the significance of al-Husayn's death as conscious and active suffering.

[37.](#) Al-Shaykh al-Saduq, *Al-Amali*, ed. Fadl Allah al-Tabataba'i (Qumm, 1373), pp. 77–78, majlis 27; this report is from Maytham al-Tammar, a companion of 'Ali b. Abi Talib who lived until the era of al-Baqir.

[38.](#) Al-Shaykh al-Saduq, *'Ilal al-Shara'i'*, ed. Muhammad Sadiq Bahr al-'Ulum (Najaf, 1382) I, 225–27, bab 162; quoted in *Bihar*, XLIV, 269–71. On 'Abdallah b. al-Fadl al-Hashimi, see Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Ardabili, *Jami' al-Ruwat* (Qumm, 1331) I, 499.

[39.](#) This is how I understand the sentence... fa-ma taqulu qawmin shi'atika yaquluna bi-hi? [i.e., yaquluna bi-qaili al-Husayn] following the reading of al-Majlisi, *Bihar*, XLIV, 270. The text in *'Ilal*, p. 227, l. 9–10, has, following al-Sadiq's condemnation of this group, the phrase: khadha wa khadha wa khadha wa khadha, ibtal al-Qur'an wa-l-jannat wa-l-nar, which appears to indicate some corruption of the text, where some words have been lost, or an interpolation by one of the rawis or the compiler.

[40.](#) The isnad connects the compiler Ibn Babawayhi to al-Hashimi by a chain of five links. The first two, Muhammad b. 'Ali b. Bashshar and al-Muzaffar b. Ahmad. were both from Qazwin, and the latter relayed it from Muhammad b. Ja'far al-Asadi (d. 312), one of the babs for the hidden Imam during the minor ghayba; Mamaqani, Tanqih, IIb, 92, §10488. Al-Asadi relayed it from Sahl b. Ziyad al-Adami, a companion of the ninth, tenth and eleventh Imams, who authored books entitled al-Tawhid and Nawudir; Sahl was excommunicated from Qumm by Ahmad b. Muhammad h. Isa al-Ashari, and went to Ray, being accused of extremism and taken to be weak in his traditions by the jurists, although this judgement was not always accepted by later authorities; Tanqih, IIb, 75, §5396. The next link before al-Hashimi is one Sulayman b. 'Abdallah, who appears to be unknown, for there are at least six companions of al-Sadiq with this name, all of them majhal; see al-Ardabili, Jami, I, 382. Perhaps he is to be identified with Abu Muhammad Sulayman b. 'Abdallah al-Daylami, a Kufan of Bajila who dealt in slave boys from Khurasan, was a companion of al-Sadiq, authored a book entitled Yawm wa Layla, and was labelled a liar and extremist by Najashi; Tanqih, IIa, 60, §5202. His son Muhammad b. Sulayman was also labelled extremely weak; Jami', II, 122.

[41.](#) In general, consult Ja'far b. Muhammad b. Qawlawayhi, Kamil al-Ziyarat, ed. 'Abd al-Husayn al-Amini al-Tabrizi (Najaf, 1356), passim, and, e.g., pp. 330ff, bab 108; for a description of the commemorative activities held at al-Husayn's grave by Kufans in al-Sadiq's time, see loc. cit., p. 326: Qur'anic recitation, qas relating tales, women mourners, and reciters of marathi.

[42.](#) Ja'far b. Muhammad b. Qawlawayhi, Kamil al-Ziyarat, ed. 'Abd al-Husayn al-Amini al-Tabrizi (Najaf, 1356), passim; M. Ayoub, Redemptive Suffering in Islam (The Hague, 1978) chap. 4, 'The Wronged Martyr', pp. 120-139.

[43.](#) Al-Mufid, al-Irshad, p. 229; Ayoub, Suffering, p. 133. This reference to the ashab al-kahf whom God raised up to life again after 309 years (18:9-26) takes on an added significance in light of the bodily resurrection of al-Husayn in the return discussed below. It is as if al-Husayn's head was hinting at an even more wonderous resurrection than that of the Companions of the Cave. For other legends associated with the head, see Ayoub, Suffering, pp. 132-34, and 276, n. 161; al-Majlisi, Bihar, XLV, 304.

[44.](#) Ibn Qawlawayhi, Kamil, bab 68, 89-93; and al-Majlisi, Bihar, XLV, 201-219 passim; 'Ali b. 'Isa al-Irbili, Kashf al-Ghumma fi Ma'rifat al-A'Imma, ed. Ibrahim Miyunaji (Tabriz, 1381), II, pp. 179, 246. The resemblances between John and al-Husayn in these reports include the fact that both of their killers were bastards and that only for them did the sky weep and turn blood red. While al-Husayn, as the Prince of Martyrs, is dubbed shabih Yahya b. Zakariya, other reports link al-Husayn with the deaths of other prophets: Radi al-Din Ibn Ta'us, Kitab al-Luhuf 'ala Qatla al-Tufuf (Sidon, 1347/1929), p. 10; al-Husayn is to be killed like Abel slain by Cain, and his revenge will be the revenge of Abel over Cain, Ibn Qawlawayhi, Kamil, pp. 75ff and 93: al-Baqir tells Hisham b. 'Abd al-Malik that on the night 'Ali was killed, blood was found under every stone, and the same signs were manifested for the deaths of Joshua, Aaron, Simon, 'Ali, and al-Husayn, as well as when Jesus was raised to heaven, while another report has it that blood was found under the stones in the Temple of Jerusalem upon al-Husayn's death.

This detail about the Temple is pertinent, since Muslim legend tells of the blood of John the Baptist which boiled and would not subside till seventy thousand lives were slain to avenge him (Bihar, XLV, 299, from Ibn Shahrashub, Manaqib Al Abi Talib); in Shi'i tradition, this is linked with the rise of the Mahdi who shall slay twice as many to avenge al-Husayn. even killing the descendants of the killers of al-Husayn on account of what their ancestors had done (Bihar, XLV, 295-98; and below p. xx). Early Muslim tales of the prophets contain reports on the purity and sinlessness of John, son of Zachariah. relayed from Muhammad; Ibn Wathima, Qisas, p. 311; and see Ni'mat Allah al-Jaza'iri, Al-Nur al-Mubin fi Qisas al-Anbiya' wa-l-Mursalin (Beirut, 1978), pp. 396-401.

[45.](#) Jahiz takes up this parallel between 'Uthman and John in his Risalat al-Nahita, ed. H. Sandubi (Rasa'il al-Jahiz; [Cairo, 1352/1933, p. 293]). It appears that this parallel was part of the polemical arsenal of the 'Uthmaniyya party; see Ch. Pellat, Le Milieu basrien et le formation de Gahiz (Paris, 1953), pp. 192, and 193, n. 1.

[46.](#) For the report on Muhammad, see al-Saffar, Basa'ir al-Daraj'at, pp. 443-44. For the report on al-Sadiq, al-Saffar, Basa'ir al-Daraj'at., p. 445, bab 13 of part 9; and Kamil, pp. 329-30; both al-Saffar and Ibn Qawlawayhi provide the same isnad, going back to al-Sadiq via Ahmad b. Muhammad b. 'Isa 'Ali b. al-Hakam, to Ziyad b. Abi al-Ilalil, a Kufan companion of al-Sadiq, author of a book, and considered trustworthy (Tanqih, I, 453, §4293).

[47.](#) The belief that the dead will resurrect after three days is met with in both Jewish and Christian tradition as well. Jesus'

ascension or resurrection occurred on the third day after his crucifixion. As for Mazdacan tradition, the soul, upon leaving the body, must wait three days for the divine decision; only then it crosses the Cinvat bridge.

[48.](#) P. Saintyves (= Emile Nourry), *En Marge de la Légende Dorée* (Paris, 1930), pp. 293, 315, who points out that ecclesiastical legend has it that the body of the prophet Zachariah was found wholly conserved long after his death. On the few Jewish traditions about the incorruptibility of the body of saints, e.g., Baba Bathra 17a: "There are seven persons upon whose body the decay of the tomb had no power over: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Miryam and Benjamin", see B. Heller's review of Nourry's book in *Revue des Etudes Juives* 98 (1934), 130, who adds that some authorities held that David was also given this grace. Heller treats the legend of the embalming of Joseph's body and provides references and corrections to L. Ginzberg's discussion of this text (*Legends of the Jews* [Philadelphia, 1925, 11, 150]). Physical incorruptibility is taken to be a mark of spiritual impeccability. A famous example of the perfect preservation of a corpse was the legend of St. Catherine of Alexandria, whose body was reputedly discovered at the end of the 8th century AD on Mt Sina in Arabia, lending her name to the well-known monastery in the vicinity: Nourry, *Légende*, pp. 319–323. The Eastern Orthodox and Russian Church has always firmly maintained the incorruptibility of the bodies of saints (loc. cit., pp. 529–32).

[49.](#) Kamil, pp. 326–29, bab 108; the last part of this report dealing with the bodily remains of al-Husayn is also to be found on loc. cit., pp. 103, bab 62 (whence Bihar, XLIV, 292). 'Abdallah b. Bakr al-Araj'ani [al-Arjani, al-Barjani] came from the region of Ahwaz and is considered weak by some authorities. He is tinged with ghuluww for having expressed sympathy for Abu al-Khattab; Tanqih, IIa, 170, §6766. The next link in the isnad, 'Abdallah b. 'Abd al-Rahman al-Asammi al-Masma'i, a Basran who compiled a book on Ziyarat, was branded as an extremist; Tanqih IIa, 196, §6927, where Mamaqani expresses reservations on these judgements. Ibn Qawlawayhi relates this report from his teacher Ja'far b. 'Abdallah al-Himyari, on Muhammad b. Khalid al-Barqi, two of the most respected 3rd century traditionists and compilers.

[50.](#) These include Paul, Nestorius ('who taught the Christians that Jesus, the Messiah, is the son of God, and that He is three'; Kamil, p. 327), Pharaoh, Nimrod, 'Ali's murderer, the killer of Fatima and her still-born infant Muhsin, as well as the killers of al-Hasan and al-Husayn.

[51.](#) Kamil, p. 329; the version on p. 103 is slightly shortened, with minor variants.

[52.](#) The correct reading of this phrase should be yuhayyuna kama yuhayy rather than yuhbaruna (Kamil, p. 103, and Bihar, XLIV, 292): 'they are gladdened'. The reference is clearly to the Qur'anic verse concerning the martyrs of Uhud: "Think not of those who have been slain in the cause of God, as dead; Rather are they living ones in the presence of their Lord and are sustained (bal abya'un 'inda rabbihim yurzaquna)" (3:169).

Also compare:

"And those who leave their home, for the cause of God, and are then slain or die, God will provide for them a goodly provision" (22:58).

The view that al-Husayn is alive and sustained makes explicit the implications behind these verses, and, as with the Kaysani view of Ibn al-Hanafiyya, involves a particular understanding of the relation of spirit to body. See the discussion of mawt and qail below.

[53.](#) A. A. Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of the Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism* (Albany N.Y., 1981), pp. 166–73.

[54.](#) A. A. Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of the Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism* (Albany N.Y., 1981), pp. 167–68, 171.

[55.](#) Hasan b. Sulayman b. Khalid al-Hilli, *Mukhtasar* [sic.] *Basa'ir al-Daraj'at*, ed. Muhammad 'Ali al-Uradabadi al-Ghurawi (Najaf, 1370). There is some confusion whether al-Hilli's abridgement is based on Sa'd b. 'Abd Allah's book alone, and whether Sa'd's work was a separate composition apart from al-Saffar's *Basa'ir al-Daraj'at*. Agha Buzurg Tihriani, *Al-Dhari'a ila Tasanif al-Shia* (Najaf, 1355 et seq.), III, 124, and I, 91, maintained that Sa'd authored a separate work, also entitled *Basa'ir al-Daraj'at*, which al-Hilli abridged in his *Mukhtasar*. The correct state of affairs is that Sa'd abridged al-Saffar's work in his compilation, which should rightly be called *Mukhtasar Basa'ir al-Daraj'at*; and that al-Hilli later made a selection from Sa'd's abridgement, adding materials from other early sources, in his *Muntakhab al-Basa'ir*. See Muhammad Taqi Danish Pazuh, *Fihrist Kitabkhane Muhammad Mishakas be Danishgah Tihiran* 3, III (Tehran, 1335), pp. 1573–79. §1320, where this view is substantiated. It seems likely that (i) Sa'd's book *Mukhtasar al-Basa'ir* is not extant, since the existing copies of a work under this title (F. Sezgin, *GAS*, I, 538, §30.2) are really copies of al-Hilli's compilation *Muntakhab*; and (ii) that al-Hilli's compilation *Muntakhab al-Basa'ir* is identical to the work *Kitab al-Raj'a wa-l-Radd 'ala ahl al-hid'a* ascribed to him [see Danish Pazuh, loc. cit., p. 1577; also referred to as *lthbat al-Raj'a* in *Dhari'a*, I, 91, §439), and in which he amassed

reports from al-Saffar's *Basa'ir* through Sa'd's *Mukhtasar*, along with other ancient sources that dealt with *raj'a* and its related themes. Note that al-Saffar's original *Basa'ir* contains very little material on *raj'a*. Al-Hilli exhibited a strong interest in eschatological themes, as another work of his attests, al-Muhtadir fi *Ithbat Hudur al-Nabi wa-l-A'imma 'inda-l-Muhtadar*. Al-Majlisi relies mainly on al-Hilli's *Muntakhab* in his *hab al-raj'a* of the Bihar, LIII, 39–121.

[56.](#) Al-Hilli, *Muntakhab*, pp. 17–29; also pp. 36–38, 41–43, 45–51, and 211.

[57.](#) Al-Hilli, *Muntakhab*, pp. 17, 18, and see pp. 19, 21, 25 (al-Sadiq on 27:83); also see al-Ayyashi, *Tafsir*, I, 202, for parallel reports, where Zurara b. A'yan, wishing to question al-Baqir about *raj'a* yet disliking direct mention of it, then asked whether one who was killed was really dead. Again, when asked about “Every soul shall taste death (al-mawt)” (3:185), al-Baqir responded to Zurara: ‘Would you not kill a man if he slew your brother?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘If he should die a [natural] death, would you then kill anyone on his account?... Don't you see how God has distinguished between the two?’ (loc. cit.)

[58.](#) Al-Hilli, *Muntakhab*, p. 18

[59.](#) Al-Hilli, *Muntakhab*, pp. 18–19; see below, n. 72.

[60.](#) Al-Hilli, *Muntakhab*, pp. 24; see Sachedina. *Messianism*, p. 168. This report is related by Muhammad b. Muslim from Hamran b. A'yan and Abu al-Khattab together, on al-Sadiq. Another report, *Muntakhab*, p. 21, on al-Baqir, has it that the interrogation of the souls in their graves applies only to the pure in faith or total idolaters; see also loc. cit., pp. 50, 211.

[61.](#) On al-Husayn's rule after his return, see *Muntakhab*, pp. 18, 22. Also loc. cit., pp. 17–18, 26–27 (Muhammad and 'Ali), 45–49 (*raj'a* of 'Ali and al-Husayn, then the *Qa'im*, 29 (multiple returns for 'Ali, termed *sahib al-karrat*), and 50–51 (al-Baqir reports that al-Husayn said he would be the first to be drawn out of the earth and go forth to battle, angelic armies would descend to aid him, then Muhammad and 'Ali and al-Hasan would descend from heaven to aid him, 'Ali handing over the sword of the Prophet to al-Husayn, who will conquer the world).

See also op. cit., pp. 41–43 (taken from al-Qummi. *Tafsir*, II, 130–131), on “And [remind them] of the day when We shall assemble from every people a party from among those who rejected Our Signs, and they shall be formed into [separate] groups” (27:83) (the Qur'anic context is the sentencing of the unbelievers for the wrong they committed against God's Signs) which al-Sadiq interprets as referring to the *yawm al-raj'a*, not the *yawm al-qiyama*.

Furthermore, 'Ali is explicitly identified in some reports with the beast drawn out of the earth (*dabbatan min al-ard*, 27:82) who will mark his enemies with a branding iron and the believers with a sign; see *Muntakhab*, p. 43, and al-Qummi, *Tafsir*, II, 130: al-Sadiq reads *taklimuhum* (he will wound them) rather than *tukallimuhum* (he will speak to them). For this identification of 'Ali with the apocalyptic beast who executes God's wrath, and the alternative reading of *taklimuhum*, see Bihar, LIII, 100, 125–28. This is a reversal of roles from the older Judaeo-Christian image of the beast who 'seals' the believers and unbelievers; see Revelation 13: 16ff, and consult W. Bousset, *The Antichrist Legend*, trans. A. H. Keane (London, 1896), pp. 200–202. Also see the reports via Jabir h. Yazid al-Ju'fi on al-Baqir to the effect that al-Husayn (termed al-Muntasir) will rule for 309 years (see above n. 44, on the Companions of the Cave) after the rising of the *Qa'im*, then he will be followed by 'Ali b. Abi Talib (termed al-Saffak), both of whom shall execute vengeance; Bihar, LIII, 100–101, 103–104; reports from al-Hilli, *Muntakhab*, and from Shaykh al-Ta'ifa al-Tusi, al-Ghayba (Qumm, 1385), p. 286, and al-Shaykh al-Mufid, al-Ikhtisas, ed. 'Ali Akbar al-Ghaffari (Tehran, 1379), pp. 257–58. It was probably due to beliefs of this kind among revolutionary Kaysani circles, that the first 'Abbasid ruler dubbed himself al-Saffah'.

[62.](#) Early Jewish-Christian tradition saw John the Baptist as Elijah in the role of precursor to Jesus (Matt. 11/13–15, Mark 9/11–13. Luke 1/7). For the return of Elijah, associated with the resurrection of the dead, and John/the new Elijah as a suffering servant, or Jesus as John brought back to life, see Jean Steinmann, *Saint John the Baptist and the Desert Tradition*, trans. M. Boyes (New York, 1958), pp. 98–99, 106–108; and J. Bowman, *The Gospel of Mark* (Leiden, 1965), pp. 15–16, 152–54, 195–98, 341–56. The explicit comparison between John and al-Husayn would make al-Husayn return to play the role as precursor of the *Qa'im*, like Elijah/John to the Messiah; but this role is assigned to Muhammad and 'Ali as well in some archaic reports. See also the salutations pronounced upon John and Jesus in the Qur'an (19:15 and 19:33), which include the day of their resurrection. Another dimension of the John/al-Husayn parallel is the paradigm of the suffering servant, evoked by al-Sadiq in this way (Abu al-Fadl 'Ali al-Tabarsi, *Mishkat al-Anwar*, p. 286): ‘When God loves a servant, he instigates people to say of him that for which He shall reward him and by which He shall make them err. And when He hates a servant, He sows love in the hearts of the servants so that they say of him what is not in him, and thus He causes both them and him to err. Who was more beloved of God than John, son of Zachariah? Then He incited against him

everyone you saw. until they did to him what they did to him. And who was more beloved of God than al-Husayn b. 'Ali? Then He incited against him some of the people until they slew him. It is not as they said [i.e., God did not punish al-Husayn for a sin by causing him to be killed].'

[63.](#) Al-Hilli. Muntakhab, p. 28.

[64.](#) Al-Hilli. Muntakhab, pp. 20–24 passim. The followers of these two Imam who are known to have been condemned for belief in raj'a included Jabir b. Yazid al-Ju'fi (see W. Madelung, E.I.II, suppl. 3/4, 1981, 232), Harith b. Hasira al-Azdi al-Kuft, and Mu'min al-Taq.

[65.](#) When questioned about al-karra, al-Baqir stated: '...that is [God's] omnipotence (al-qudra), so do not disavow it'; and he rebuked the Qadariyya for rejecting raj'a (Muntakhab, 20, 22, 135–37: the qadari will be resurrected as an ape or swine). Other reports on al-Baqir and al-Sadiq have them caution their followers against discussing or propounding views on raj'a on polemical occasions, even counselling them to admit that they used to hold the belief in it but now no longer do so; loc. cit., p. 24.

[66.](#) B. Carra de Vaux, Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam (Leiden, 1961), p. 572; Sachedina, Messianism, p. 167 (summarizing al-Ash'ari, Magalat, I, 114); and I. Friedlander, 'The Heterodoxies of the Shi'a in the presentation of Ibn Hazm', JAOS 29 (1908), 23–30. The early Ghulat or radical Shi'a speculated on hulul (the descent or indwelling of the divine in certain men) and held the doctrine of maskh (the passage of the soul into the bodies of animals), which is a more limited application of the notion of metempsychosis.

[67.](#) Bihar, XLV, 295–96 (taken from the Tafsir of the Imam al-'Askari); also found in Tabarsi, al-Ihtijaj, II, 40–41. It must be borne in mind that belief in maskh was widespread in the first few centuries of Islam, as the reports in Muslim, al-Bukhari, and others attest, which make transformation into apes and swine to be punishment for a variety of sins; see 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Sharani, Mukhtasar Tadhkirat al-Qurtubi (Halab, 1395), pp. 184–85, 189; and Ibn Wathima. Qisas, pp. 276–79, for the tale of the seven-year ordeal of maskh endured by Bukht Nasar as punishment for his destroying the Temple at Jerusalem, during which he was transformed into the form of every kind of living creature. Similar notions are found today, e.g., the belief among many lower-class Americans '... that cripples and the deformed are really 'reincarns', being punished this time around for misdemeanors committed in a previous life' (P. Fussell, Class [New York, 1983], p. 172).

[68.](#) The Qur'anic tale of 'men into apes' invoked by al-Sajjad apparently reaches back to an old Jewish legend, only traces of which can be detected in Jewish lore; see Ginzberg, Legends I, 180, and V, 203, I, 123, and VI, 85, §452 (legend that Moses transformed the Sabbath breakers into apes). For the Shi'i versions of this tale, see al-Jaza'iri, al-Nur al-Mubin, pp. 355–58.

[69.](#) Quoted in Bihar, XLV, 312–13, On the Kitab al-Tasalli and its author, see Dhari'a, IV, 177; Abu-l-'Abbas Ahmad b. 'Ali al-Najashi, Rijal (Qumm, 1398), pp. 65–66; and Marnaqani, Tanqih, I, 82, §475.

[70.](#) For the eschatological mountain, or wadi, of Barahut, see also al-Saffar, Basa'ir, p. 424. It is the place in hell where the enemies of the Prophet's Family suffer exquisite tortures, Compare the vale of hell beneath Mt. Kamad (above, p. xx), and see al-Sharani, Mukhtasar, pp. 105–107, for the topography of hell, its various pits, furnaces, valleys, etc. The stress upon the certain punishment awaiting their enemies found in Shi'i literature is very marked, and there are a number of code-words employed to refer to certain key figures, e.g., Qunfudh (hedgehog) for Abu Bakr (see Appendix II, end). The point is that there is no divine forgiveness or intercession shown to the killers of al-Husayn, or the implacable enemies of the Prophet's Family. These terrible scenes are matched only by the fantastic beatitudes promised to the faithful followers of the Imams. See below, n. 89.

[71.](#) Bihar, XLIV, 312–13. Here the final emphasis is on a this-worldly punishment, probably in the days of the karra or al-Hussayn and the return of the Qa'im. The maskh of their enemies would thus be both other-worldly ('in the spirit' in hell) and this-worldly ('in the body' upon their resurrection in the raj'a). Al-Majlisi notes at the conclusion of this report that al-Sayyid al-Murtada (one of the links in its isnad) did not object to this report, despite its strangeness, only commenting that the Imamiyya school denies that the ruh can adhere to another body (i.e., hudul), not that one's body can change its material form (i.e., maskh). See Sachedina, Messianism, pp. 167–71, for the views of Twelver school thinkers on the subject of raj'a. That the notions of maskh and raj'a were complementary can be seen in a reputed exchange between Mu'min al-Taq (=Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. 'Ali b. al-Nu'man, a Kufan money-changer and companion of al-Sadiq) and Abu Hanifa: Abu Hanifa mocked Mu'min al-Taq about his belief in raj'a, suggesting that he lend him 500 dinars, and that he

would reimburse him when they both were returned to life again. Mu'min al-Taḡ had the last word by replying that he required a guarantee that Abu Hanifa would be returned in the form of a man, since he could not collect his debt from an ape; Najashi, Rijal, p. 228, and Tabarsi, al-Ihtijaj, II, 148.

[72.](#) Bihar, XLV, 295–99; Kamil, p. 64; 'Ayyashi, Tafsir, I, 86–87 on "... no unbending hostility (is allowed) except against the wrongdoers" (2: 193). This position naturally led to theological difficulties with other schools of thought (see Sachedina, Messianism, pp. 170–71), Among Sunni thinkers views also differed as to whether al-Husayn's killers might find forgiveness, e.g., al-Sha'rani, Mukhtasar, p. 158.

[73.](#) Al-Hilli, Muntakhab, p. 28. The rawi, Muhammad b. 'Abdallah b. al-Husayn, who relays the conversation between his father and the Imam, seems to be unknown.

[74.](#) See nn. 67, 72 above; and the discussion of the term shaba below. For a listing of radical Shia groups that held this doctrine, see G. C. Anawati and L. Massignon, *ḡ.ḡ.*II, III, 571.

[75.](#) See Kamil, p. 321, §9, for the ziyara to al-Husayn in the context of visiting the Prophet's tomb in Medina.

[76.](#) Muhammad al-Husayn al-Muzaffari, Al-Imam al-Sadiq (Najaf. 1369), I, 139–44. Ja'far also saw to the construction of a cenotaph in the cave where 'Ali's body was said to lie.

[77.](#) Al-Shaykh al-Mufid, Awa'il al-Maqalat, ed. Fadl Allah al-Zanjani, 2nd ed. (Tabriz, 1371), p. 45; also quoted in Bihar, XXVII, 301–302.

[78.](#) See n. 55 above.

[79.](#) Sec H. Halm, Die Islamische Gnosis. Die Extreme Shia und die 'Alawiten (Zurich and Munich, 1982), pp. 240–74, 284–356 (on the Kufan ghudat tradition and the Nusayriyya); U. Rubin, 'Pre-Existence and Light, Aspects of the concept of Nur Muhammad', in Israel Oriental Studies V (1975), 62–119; and Ayoub, Suffering, pp. 245–49 (on al-Husayn's ascension to heaven in the Kufan ghulat tradition).

[80.](#) Al-Hilli, Muntakhab, p. 28; I have not found mention the rawis Abu 'Abd Allah Ahmad h. Muhammad al-Sayari and 'Abd Allah b. Qabisa (Qubaysa) al-Muhallabi in the Twelver bio-bibliographic works.

[81.](#) Al-Hilli, Muntakhab, pp. 50–51; see pp. 36–38, where the same report is given via Sa'd b. Hibbat Allah al-Rawandi, Al-Kharaj wa-l-Jara'ih.

[82.](#) See Al-Sirat X/2 (1984), 27ff.

[83.](#) E.g., al-Shaykh al-Saduq, Ma'ani al-Akhbar, p. 288, where al-Sajjad relates how al-Husayn encouraged his companions, saying: 'Be steadfast...What is death but a bridge that carries you over suffering and adversity to the spacious garden and everlasting felicity? Which of you is averse to be transferred from a prison to a palace? And for your enemies, death is only like one who is transported from a palace to a prison and punishment.'

[84.](#) Al-Shaykh al-Saduq, 'Uyun Akhbar al-Rida, ed. Mahdi al-Husayni al-Ajwardi (Qumm, 1377) II, 203, bab 46, §5; found in Bihar, LXIV, 271–72. On Hanzala, see al-Sayyid Ibrahim al-Musawi a-Zanjani, Wasilat al-Darayn fi Ansar al-Husayn (Beirut, 1395), pp. 134–36; Mamaqani, Tanqih, I, 382, §3446; as well as Ayoub, Suffering, pp. 116, 135–36. The text of this report on al-Rida is given in Appendix I, A.

[85.](#) See above, nn. 45, 63.

[86.](#) See e.g., Kamil, p. 74 (al-Husayn's ruh provokes 70,000 angels in each of the heavens, who impatiently await the End Time for vengeance); al-Shaykh al-Saduq. Ilal al-Shara'i I, 154; al-Kulayni, al-Usul min al-Kafi, ed. al-Ghaffari (Tehran, 1374). I. 534 (the angels are shown the Imams, all of whom are qa'ims, and who shall execute vengeance); and al-Kulayni, loc. cit., I, 283; Kamil, pp. 115, 192.

[87.](#) Shaykh al-Ta'ifa al-Tusi, Amali, quoted in Bihar, XLV, 221. In later popular tradition, al-Husayn is idealized as the tender young sprout (farkh) from the progeny of Fatima and Muhammad, who was destined to be killed and whose death forms the climax of human transgression, since the slaying of Abel by Cain; see Bihar, XLV, 314–16, for these legends.

[88.](#) Kamil, 332–35, bab al-Nawadir, §II. The isnad reaches back to al-Sadiq through Muhammad b., Khalid al-Barqi and 'Abdallah b. Ja'far al-Himyari. This report is summarized in Appendix II.

[89.](#) The visions or account of al-Husayn in heaven with the other members of the Prophet's Family, interceding for his 'visitors', and of the vales in Hell wherein his killers suffer, must be viewed within an apocalyptic context, and evoke time-honoured themes and images from well before Islam. John J. Collins observes that: '...apocalyptic language is commissive in character: it commits us to a view of the world for the sake of actions and attitudes that are entailed... Most of all it entails

an appreciation of the great resource that lies in the human imagination to construct a symbolic world where the integrity of values can be maintained in the face of social and political powerlessness and even of the threat of death' (The Apocalyptic Imagination, New York, 1984, p. 215). See P. Chelkowski, 'Popular Shi'i mourning rituals', pp. 207–26 of this volume, for depictions of apocalyptic scenes from popular religious art.

[90.](#) Al-Shaykh al-Saduq. Al-Khisal, ed. Muhammad Mahdi al-Sayyid Hasan al-Khurasani (Najaf, 1971), II. 399–400; Bihar, XLIV, 275–76; on account of his suffering despite being sinless, Job exhibited a state of bodily incorruptibility after death.

[91.](#) See al-Qadi al-Nu'man, Da'a'im al-Islam (Cairo, 1370), pp. 42ff (al-Sadiq's interpretation of 16:121), quoted in R. Dagorn, La Gexte D'Ismael (Paris and Geneva, 1981), p. 241; and Kitab al-Haft al-Sharif (Beirut, 1964), pp. 92–93, quoted in Ayoub, Suffering. p. 247.

[92.](#) Al-Saduq, al-Khisal, p. 42.

[93.](#) Al-Saffar, Basa'ir, quoted in Bihar, XLIV, 276–77.

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SHARES

Appendix I: Reports Condemning The View That Al-Husayn Was Not Killed

(a) Al-Shaykh al-Saduq, *'Uyun Akhbar al-Rida*, ed. Mahdi al-Husayni al-Ajwardi (Qumm 1377/1957), II, 203, *bab* 46, §5. Quoted in al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, IV, 271–272.

From Tamim al-Qurashi, from his father, from Ahmad b. 'Ali al-Ansari, that al-Harawi said: I said to al-Rida, peace be upon him:

In the Sawad of al-Kufa there is a group who teach that the Prophet did not experience distractedness (*sahw*) in his prayer.

R: They have lied; may God damn them! Indeed, the one who is not inattentive is God [alone], save Whom there is no God.

H: O son of the Messenger of God, among them is a group who maintain that al-Husayn b. 'Ali was not killed, and that his resemblance (*shibh* or *shabah*) was imposed on Hanzala b. As'ad al-Shami, and that he was raised to heaven, as Jesus, son of Mary was raised. They advance as an argument this verse:

“And God will not grant the disbelievers a way to prevail against the believers” (4: 141).

R: They have lied; upon them is God's wrath and His curse; and they have disbelieved due to their denial of the Prophet of God in his report that al-Husayn b. 'Ali will be murdered. By God, al-Husayn was killed, and those who were better than al-Husayn were also killed: the Prince of Believers (Ali) and al-Hasan b. Ali. There was no one of Us who was not martyred. I [myself], by God, am to be killed by

poison, by the slaying of one who shall assassinate me. I know that through a pact entrusted to me from the Messenger of God, and Gabriel informed him of it on behalf of the Lord of the Worlds.

As for the word of God, Mighty and Majestic **“And God will not grant the disbelievers a way to prevail against the believers” (4: 141)**. He is saying that God will not grant the *kafir* a proof (*hujja*) against the mu'min; and God has related concerning unbelievers who slew the prophets unjustly [c.f. **4: 155**], and God did not grant [the unbelievers] a way to prevail with a proof against His prophets by their killing of them.

(b) Al-Tabarsi, *Al-Ihtijaj*, II, 281–83; quoted in al-Majlisi *Bihar al-Anwar*, IV, 271.

From al-Kulayni, that Ishaq b. Yaqub said: I asked Muhammad b. 'Uthman al-'Amri,¹ may God have mercy on him, to expedite the sending of a letter on my behalf in which I had asked [the Imam] about questions that caused problems for me. Then there came the signed undertaking in the handwriting of our Lord, the Master of the End-Time, peace be upon him:²... ‘As for the doctrine of he who claims that al-Husayn did not die [or: was not killed], this is unbelief, and a denial [of received reports], and a straying from the truth.’

(c) Al-Shaykh al-Saduq, *'Ilal al-Shara'i'*, ed. Muhammad Sadiq Bahr al-'Ulum (Najaf, 1383/1963), I, 241–43, *bab* 177: ‘The reason that God did not make the Prophets and Imams victorious in all their circumstances.’ Quoted in al-Tabarsi, *al-Ihtijaj*, II, 285–88.

Muhammad b. Ibrahim b. Ishaq al-Taliqani said: I was with the Shaykh Abu Qasim al-Husayn b. Ruh,³ may God sanctify his spirit, with a group that included 'Ali b. 'Isa al-Qasri. A man went up and said to him: I wish to ask you about something.

T: Ask whatever seems proper to you.

Man: Tell me about al-Husayn b. 'Ali, peace be upon him, is he the friend of God?

T: Yes.

Man: And tell me about his murderer, may God curse him, is he the enemy of God?

T: Yes.

Man: Then is it possible that God should give mastery to His enemy over His friend?

T: Understand what I am going to say to you! Know that God, the Exalted, does not address people by means of an eye-witnessing, nor does He instil awe in them by speaking. Rather He, Mighty and Majestic, sent to them Messengers of their own species and kind, men like themselves. If He had sent to them Messenger Prophets not of their kind and their form, they would have shunned them and would not have obeyed them. So, when they came to them and were of their species, eating food and walking in

the markets, they said to them: 'You are like us, so we will not obey you until you perform something which we are incapable of performing the like of; then we shall know that you are chosen to the exclusion of us in what we are not capable of.'

Thus God, the Exalted, appointed for them the miracles which creatures are incapable of performing, and among them was he who brought the flood after the admonition and excuses, so all who tyrannized and were overbearing, drowned. And among them was he who was cast into the fire, and it was for him cool and safe.

And he who extracted from barren ground a female camel and made milk flow in her udder. And he for whom the sea split, and springs gushed from the rock, and the dry staff was turned into a snake that gobbled up their [falsehoods]. Among them was he who healed the blind and the leper and gave life to the dead by God's consent, and who informed them of what they were eating and stored away in their homes.

And among them was he for whom the moon was split and to whom the animals such as the camel and the wolf spoke, and others. So, when they performed such works and the people of their communities were incapable of performing similar things, it was part of the pre-ordainment of God, the Exalted, and His kindness towards His worshippers and His wisdom, to make His Prophets with these miracles victorious, in one situation, and in another, vanquished, and in one circumstance conquerors, and in another conquered.

If He, Mighty and Majestic, had appointed them victorious and conquerors in all of their circumstances, and did not try them and test them, the people would have taken them to be divinities beside God the Exalted, and [the people] would not have recognized the excellence of their forbearance and self-possession in the face of misfortune and tribulations and ordeals.

But He, Mighty and Majestic, appointed their circumstances with respect to that like the circumstances of others, in order that they might be forbearing in the condition of ordeal and affliction, and grateful in the condition of well-being and ascendancy over enemies, and to be humble not haughty in all their circumstances, not waxing strong. [God placed them in these circumstances] in order that humanity might know that [the prophets] have a God, and that He is their Creator and Director, so that [people] will worship Him and follow His Messengers.

And God's convincing argument is proven against whomever goes beyond the limit concerning them, who presumptuously claims Lordship (*rububiyya*) for them, or who obstinately resists and diverges, disobeys and repudiates what the Prophets and the Messengers offer. Let him perish who was destroyed by a clear proof and let him live who was made alive by a clear proof.... [Ibn Ruh adds that his words were not his own but came direct from the hidden Imam.]

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- [1.](#) The second of the four agents or representatives of the twelfth or Hidden Imam, who died in Baghdad in 304/917.
 - [2.](#) There follows a whole list of pronouncements from the twelfth Imam on diverse questions over which the Shi'a argued.
 - [3.](#) Al-Husayn b. Ruh al-Nawbakhti, the third agent of the Hidden Imam, d. 326/937-38.

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SHARES

Appendix II: An Apocalypse Concerning The Heavenly Status Of Al-Husayn And The Future Deliverer, The Qa'im

Ibn Qawlawayhi, *Kamil al-Ziyarat*, ed. 'Abd al-Husayn al-Amini al-Tabrizi (Najaf, 1356), pp. 332-35, *bab al-nawadir*. §11.

From Muhammad b. 'Abdallah b. Ja'far al-Himyari, from his father, from 'Ali b. Muhammad b. Salim, from Muhammad b. Khalid [al-Barqi], from 'Abdallah b. Hammad al-Basri, from 'Abdallah b. 'Abd al-Rahman al-Asammi [al-Masma'i], from Hammad b. 'Uthman, that Abu 'Abdallah [Ja'far b. Muhammad al-Sadiq] said:

When the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, made his nocturnal journey to heaven, it was said to him that God, Blessed and Exalted, was testing him through three things in order to see the state of his steadfastness. The Prophet said: 'I surrender to your decree O Lord; I have no power for self-possession except through You! What are they?'¹

'...As for the third, [it consists of] what your household and those after you shall meet with of killing. For your brother 'Ali, he shall meet with cursing and rebuke from your community, and reproaches, dispossession, repudiation, injustice, and finally murder.' [Muhammad accepted.]

'For your daughter [Fatima], she will suffer oppression and be dispossessed, her rights will be taken from her in anger at the one who gave them to her [i.e., out of hatred for the Prophet], and she will be beaten while she is pregnant. She and her home and womenfolk will be forcibly entered without leave, then disgrace and humiliation will hit her; she will not find a preserver, and will have a miscarriage resulting from the beating, and she will die from that.'² [Muhammad accepted.]

'She shall have two sons from your brother ['Ali], one of them [i.e., al-Hasan] will be slain treacherously, plundered and vilified; your community shall do that to him.' [Muhammad accepted.] 'As for her other son [i.e., al-Husayn], your community shall appeal to him for jihad, then they will slay him in captivity, and

slay his sons and those with him of his household. They shall plunder his womenfolk; then they will beseech My help. The decree has elapsed from Me concerning him for martyrdom, for him and for those with him. His slaying is to be a proof against whoever is between its two regions, the people of the heavens and the earths shall lament him, pitying him, as well as the angels who did not come to his assistance.

Then shall a male child be extracted from [al-Husayn's] loins; by him shall I make you victorious. Verily his *shabah* (figure, person; or *shabah*-likeness, image) is with me underneath the Throne.'

[The *rawi* notes a variant reading: 'Then shall I bring forth from his loins a male child who will come to his aid and by whom he shall be aided to victory, his *shabah* is with me beneath the Throne.'] 'He [i.e., the Mahdi] shall fill the earth with justice and cover it with equity. Alarm shall proceed before him; he shall slay until he is filled with misgivings about it.'

Muhammad: I said: "Truly we are from God... Then I was told: 'Thrust your head forward!' Then I looked at a man of the fairest form, the most pleasant scent, light radiating from before, above, and below him. So, I called to him, and he came up to me. Robes of light were upon him and the mark of every good, until he stood before me. I looked at the angels who had surrounded him; no one could have counted them save God, the Mighty, the Sublime. I said: 'O Lord, for whom is this one angry, and for whose sake have You multiplied those [angels]? You promised me victory by means of them, so I am expecting it from You. These are my family and my house, and You have informed me about what they shall meet with after I am gone. If You so desired, you would grant me victory by them [i.e., the Mahdi and the angelic army] against the one who wrongs [my family]. I have submitted and accepted and was content, and success and contentment and aid over steadfastness come from You!'

It was said to me: 'As for your brother, his reward with Me is the paradise of retreat as a resting place; due to his steadfastness, his proof (*hujja*) shall triumph over creatures on the Resurrection Day. I will entrust him with your Pool, from which he will give your friends to drink, and forbid it from your enemies. I make Hellfire cold and safe for him; he enters it and draws out whoever has the weight of a dust speck of love (*muwadda*) (for the Prophet's Family) in his heart, and I placed your resting place in one level of Paradise.

As for your son the forsaken, the martyred, and your son the betrayed, the slain captive, truly they both are among those by whom I adorn My Throne. They have a mark of honour the like of which has never been imagined by men, by virtue of what befell them of misfortune. So, it is incumbent upon Me [to give you the promised victory], so have trust.

There is a token of esteem for every creature who arrives at his [al-Husayn's] grave, because his guests are your [Muhammad's] guests, and your guests are My guests, and it is incumbent upon Me to honour My guests. I shall grant him what he asks and repay him with a reward such that whoever considers the magnitude of My gift and what I multiplied for him of My honours shall envy him.

As for your daughter. I shall have her halt at My Throne; then she will be told that God had pronounced a verdict in your favour against His creatures. Thus, whoever does you an injustice and wrongs your son, I will give an account concerning him according to your wish. In this way I shall make possible your ruling (*hukuma*) over them...' [p. 334]

[The narrative continues, depicting the sentence passed on the sinner, who is asked: '*Li-ma ittakhadha fulanan khalilan* (= Why did you take so-and-so as a friend [instead of 'Ali]?) The first one to pass judgement on the sinners is Muhsin b. 'Ali, who judges his killer ('Umar?); next Qunfudh and his master are judged and then whipped with lashes of fire. 'Ali then kneels before God to argue his case against the fourth sinner (Mu'awiya?); and the first three are made to enter a pit which is then covered.

Meanwhile, those who were obeying their authority (*kana fr walayatihim*) ask God to show them the ones who misled them so they can crush them underfoot; but God informs them that it is of no use for they will have to suffer their punishment as well. They moan lamenting their fate, surrounding the Pool, and pleading with 'Ali to pardon them and relieve their thirst; with them is *Hafza*.]

'... And it is said to them: "This is ['Ali] whom you used to call the Prince of the Believers, go back thirsty and parched to Hellfire! for your drink shall only be hot water and slops. And the intercession of the Intercessors is of no avail to you."

1. The first mentioned is hunger and preferring needy ones over himself and his family. Muhammad accepts. The second is denial and great fear in combatting unbelievers, and steadfastness during pain and injury. Again, the Prophet accepts: "I accept this, O Lord, and am content and surrender myself, for success and steadfastness are from You."

2. A reference to the claim of the Shi'a that 'Umar b. al-Khattab physically mistreated Fatima after the event of al-Saqifa, resulting in her miscarriage of an infant male, named in tradition Muhsin; see above, n. 51.

[1] [1]

SHARES

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