

Review of *Al-Maqtal al-Husayni al-Ma'thur* (The Hadith-Based Martyrdom Account of Imam al-Husayn (A.S))

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Review of: *Al-Maqtal al-Husayni al-Ma'thur* [The Hadith-Based Martyrdom Account of Imam al-Husayn], 2nd ed. by **Muhammad-Jawad al-Tabasi**. Tehran: Daral-Sami', 2007. 303 pp.
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The Ashura tragedy happened on the plain of Karbala, southern Iraq on Ashura, 10th Muharram 61 AH/ 10 October 680 CE. Ashura has since inspired Muslim historians and ulema to produce accounts (maqtals) of this tragedy. Whether complete or partial, these maqtals meant to record the treatments of the Umayyads with Imam al-Husayn and his companions. It seems that there have been two hadith-based maqtals drawing entirely on the hadiths related from the Infallible Imams, for the Infallible Imams related just the truth, without any exaggeration. The first such maqtal was authored in Arabic by Muhammad b. Ali b. Babwayh al-Qummi alias Sheikh al-Saduq (d. 381 AH/ ca. 958 CE), as mentioned in his volume al-Khisal. This book has no longer been available, however. Another book, again in Arabic, is the volume under review.

The maqtal under review starts with the Infallible Imams' stand point regarding the afflictions Imam al-Husayn endured. It is indicated how the Infallible Imams tried to revive the Ashura tragedy in the historical memory of Muslims. They encouraged Muslims to express grief and lamentation over the Ashura tragedy, coupled with encouraging poets to compose poems on this tragedy. In the pressing and hard times of the Umayyad, Marwanid, and Abbasid rulers, these poems served as an effective means of reporting the Ashura tragedy to the posterity as well as manifesting a public protest in defiance to the tyrant rulers. Backed by the supports of such Infallible Imams as Ja'far al-Sadiq and Ali al-Rida, these Ashura-oriented poems formed the beginning of a new genre, that is, "Ashura literature". Moreover, the Infallible Imams informed Muslims of the lofty rewards of shedding tears over the afflictions of Imam al-Husayn. Another modus operandi for reviving Ashura was the practice and recommendation of the Infallible Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq to invoke the Divine curse for and on the enemies and slayers of Imam al-Husayn after each instance of drinking water, for the Ashura martyrs were martyred thirsty (in defiance to the religio-cultural mis-transformation done by the Umayyads), although their encampment was near the river Euphrates. In addition to the above, the Infallible

Imams encouraged the Shiites to keep on visiting the tomb of Imam al-Husayn (as a symbol of noble human values), a highly-recommended ritual for which some fifty awe-inspiring rewards are recorded.

One of the questions which some scholars may raise is whether Imam al-Husayn had been informed of his martyrdom. The book delves in to this issue in the form of numerous reports and hadiths, all indicative of the fact that he was indeed aware of his martyrdom fate. Not only did the Prophet Muhammad fore tell Imam al-Husayn's martyrdom a few minutes after he was born (for which the former shed tears), the prophets and apostles before Islam (e.g., Abraham, Noah, Moses, and Jesus Christ) were reportedly informed of and mourned this tragedy much ahead of its taking place. Moreover, Imam al-Husayn received the news of his tragic fate from both his father, Imam Ali, and his elder brother Imam al-Hasan. In addition to the above, Imam al-Husayn repeatedly prophesied his martyrdom and informed his associates and entourage of this fate right from the beginning of his movement – his refusal to pledge allegiance to the Umayyad ruler Yazid b. Muawiyah –in Medina, and especially when he and his entourage reached the plain of Karbala, Iraq. More importantly, he did inform his companions on various occasions and particularly on the eve of Ashura that all the combatants would be martyred in the Battle of Ashura. The book portrays that the significance and beauty of Imam al-Husayn's act lies, inter alia, in his brave and volitional acceptance of martyrdom to revive and restore true Islam.

As the apex of the life of Imam al-Husayn, and as one of the most sorrowful days in the history of Islam, the Ashura tragedy receives the longest treatment. Pictures of the Ashura tragedy were made drawing heavily on the hadiths related mainly from (but not exclusively from) the Infallible Imams Ali al-Sajjad, Muhammad al-Baqir (both as eye-witnesses), Ja'far al-Sadiq, and Ali al-Rida, as the most trustworthy sources of information. As presented, the sequence of events and the discourses of Imam al-Husayn render a vivid picture. The events described start from the moment he received Yazid's message and continues up to his martyrdom. Among the scenes described, Imam al-Husayn in one of his letters informed the Hashimids, his close relatives, that whoever would join him would be martyred and those who refuse would not attain victory. This implies that the true victory was accessible only through martyrdom. According to a hadith quoted from Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, Imam al-Husayn never left his hajj unfinished to leave Mecca for Iraq ; he had arrived in Mecca in the state of performing the umrah in Dhu al-Hijjah, so he could ritually leave Mecca without any harm to his umrah a day before the day of al-Tarwiyah, the 8th of Dhu al-Hijjah. Moreover, the hadiths quoted clear some historical misconceptions regarding Ashura as a blessed day, a claim which has its roots

in the propaganda of the Umayyads. Scenes of joining al-Hurr b. Yazid al-Riyahi, earlier an enemy commander who caused interception and surrounded Imam al-Husayn's entourage, to Imam al-Husayn (and receiving the latter's warm welcome) yields a beautiful vista of how religious conviction coupled with a sense of veneration for Fatima al-Zahra, Imam al-Husayn's mother, directed this repentant convert to eternal felicity, that is, martyrdom. Drawing on authentic hadiths, the reader finds a list of the martyrs as well as their slayers. To document this information, a version of al-Nahiya ziarat-text is quoted verbatim.

The events of the Battle of Ashura are portrayed in detail. According to Imam al-Sadiq, his father Imam Muhammad al-Baqir related that in the middle of the clashes, God made victory so accessible to Imam al-Husayn and He made the choice at his disposal whether to choose victory or to meet God, viz., martyrdom; he chose the latter. Imam al-Husayn never initiated the battle on Ashura, nor did he let his companions shoot the first arrow. He introduced himself to the enemy forces and tried to guide them to the right path. Also reported is the heart-rending scene of the way his infant was martyred. According to Imam Muhammad al-Baqir, Imam al-Husayn received some 320 wounds after which he was decapitated. To revive the memory of Imam al-Husayn alive, the Infallible Imams instructed their companions how to pay pilgrimage (ziarat) to him. Some of moderate-size ziarat texts are quoted, too. The book provides lucid pictures of the enemies' brutalities after Imam al-Husayn's martyrdom. Although the Kufans, who made the enemy forces, had invited Imam al-Husayn to come to al-Kufa, they not only martyred him and his companions; rather, they attacked Imam al-Husayn's encampment and set the tents on fire. They decapitated most of the martyrs, took the survivors as prisoners of war first to al-Kufa and then to Damascus, then the capital of the Umayyad rulers. Contrary to an initial plan of Yazid, the survivors' short stay in Damascus awakened the people and made such an unexpected consequence against Yazid's will that he returned them back to Medina.

The return of the survivors to Medina made yet a greater revolution there in against the Umayyad governor.

The book has a wide readership. Thanks to drawing on authoritative sources, the book can benefit scholars and students of early Islamic history. It will prove helpful to Muslim preachers who intend to deliver lectures at the commemorative sessions held in Muharram. The book has useful indices at the end, followed by a comprehensive bibliography. The bibliography contains 73 books of which 18 works are volumes published almost in this century. The rest (taking in 10 authoritative Sunnite volumes) were authored between 3-11 centuries H/9-17 centuries CE. The indices are separately devoted to the hadiths quoted, names of people and places, and a subject index.

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