



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

Title: Husayn B. ‘Ali: Life and Significance in Shi‘ism

Author: Wilferd Madelung

Source: *Encyclopedia Iranica* on December 15, 2004

Publication: This is an edited version of an article originally published in the *Encyclopedia Iranica* on December 15, 2004 available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org>; print Vol. XII, Fasc. 5, p. 493-498

Copyright permission has been sought from the aforementioned publisher.

The use of materials published on the Institute of Ismaili Studies website indicates an acceptance of the Institute of Ismaili Studies' Conditions of Use. Each copy of the article must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed by each transmission. For all published work, it is best to assume you should ask both the original authors and the publishers for permission to (re)use information and always credit the authors and source of the information.

This is an edited version of an article originally published in the *Encyclopedia Iranica* on December 15, 2004 available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org>; print Vol. XII, Fasc. 5, p. 493-498

Table of Contents:

- Hasan and Husayn in the Prophet's household
- During the Caliphate of 'Ali b. Abi Talib
- Relations between Banu Ummaya and Banu Hasham
- Ascension of Yazid b. Mu'awiya to the Caliphate
- The Shia uprising against Yazid b. Mu'awiya
- Yazid's orders to deter Husayn and his supporters
- Withdrawal of the Kufan Shia
- The Event of Karbala
- Encounter between Husayn and Yazid's Commander Omar b. Sa'd
- Orders for Commander 'Omar b. Sa'd to fight Husayn
- The night before the battle of Karbala'
- The battle of Karbala'
- Survivors of the battle of Karbala'
- The impact of the Event of Karbala'
- The family of Husayn
- Bibliography

Hasan and Husayn in the Prophet's household

According to most reports Husayn b. 'Ali was born on 5 Sha'ban 4/10 January 626 CE; another report mentions the middle of Jomada al-awwal 6/beginning of October 627 CE as his date of birth. Jointly with his brother, he was at first brought up in the household of Muhammad. Many of the accounts about Prophet Muhammad's treatment of his grandsons and his great love for them deal with them together and at times confuse them. As the elder grandson, Hasan seems to have attracted more attention, and he later remembered more of his grandfather. Husayn is described as looking like Muhammad, but less so than Hasan did.

During the Caliphate of 'Ali b. Abi Talib

During 'Ali's caliphate, the brothers Hasan, Husayn, Muhammad b. Hanafiya, and their cousin 'Abd-Allah b. Ja'far appear as his closest assistants within his household. Husayn was included in the public curses of 'Ali and his major supporters that had been ordered by Mu'awiya (Tabari, I, p. 3360).

At the time of the siege of the caliph Uthman's residence in Medina by rebels from Egypt, Hasan joined the sons of other prominent companions to defend the caliph. When 'Uthman asked 'Ali to join, 'Ali sent Husayn. When 'Uthman asked Husayn if he thought he would be able to defend himself against the rebels, Husayn demurred, and 'Uthman sent him away. 'Uthman's cousin

Marwan b. Hakam is reported to have told him: "Leave us, your father incites the people against us, and you are here with us!" (Baladhuri, V, pp. 78, 94).

Husayn was initially opposed to the surrender of Hasan to Mu'awiya in 41 AH/661 CE and to the peace treaty recognising Mu'awiya's caliphate but, pressed by his brother, accepted it. When several Kufan Shi'a leaders proposed to undertake a surprise attack on Mu'awiya in his camp outside Kufa, he objected and insisted that he must observe the treaty as long as Mu'awiya was alive, but he would reconsider his position after Mu'awiya's death. He then left Kufa for Medina jointly with Hasan and 'Abd-Allah b. Ja'far. It was probably at this time that he married Layla, daughter of Abu Morra b. 'Orwa b. Mas'ud Thaqafi, who bore him his son 'Ali (commonly known as 'Ali Akbar).

Relations between Banu Ummaya and Banu Hasham

Layla's mother Maymuna bt. Abu Sofyan was a paternal sister of Mu'awiya, and her father belonged to the aristocracy of Thaqif, who were closely allied to the house of Umayyad. These marriage ties may have benefited Husayn materially. According to one report (Ibn Sa'd, p. 32), Mu'awiya used to give him 300,000 dirhams when he met him. The marriage probably did not last long, however, and could not permanently improve his relations with Mu'awiya because of the continued public denigration of 'Ali and persecution of his followers.

In Medina, Marwan b. Hakam in particular was determined to forestall any reconciliation between the Banu Umayya and Banu Hasham. When Hasan proposed to marry 'Uthman's daughter 'Ayesha, who had previously been married to Marwan's brother Hareth, Marwan intervened to marry her to 'Abd-Allah b. Zubayr. This slight to the Prophet's family appears to have enraged Husayn more than Hasan. When Mu'awiya later, after Hasan's death, instructed Marwan to arrange the marriage of Umm Kulthum, daughter of his cousin 'Abd-Allah b. Ja'far b. Abi Taleb, to the caliph's son Yazid, Husayn expressly retaliated by marrying her to Qasim b. Muhammad b. Abi Bakr (Ibn Sa'd, pp. 40-41). Husayn, in contrast to Hasan, responded sharply to the regular cursing of 'Ali by Marwan during his first governorship of Medina (41-48 H/661-68 CE) by cursing Marwan and his father Hakam, who had been banished by Muhammad (Ibn Sa'd, pp. 33-36, 38).

The death of Hasan in 50 H/670 CE, apparently by poisoning, strained the relationship with Mu'awiya further. Hasan refused to name his suspect, probably Mu'awiya, to his brother since he did not wish to obligate him to retaliate. He asked to be buried with his grandfather Muhammad. If this demand were to provoke a danger of blood-shed, however, he wished to be buried next to his mother Fatima. When Marwan b. Hakam opposed Hasan's burial near Muhammad on the grounds that 'Uthman had not been buried there, Husayn appealed to the *helf al-fozul*, a solidarity pact of several clans of Quraysh, to back the right of the Prophet's family against the Banu Umayyad.

His brother Muhammad b. Hanafiya and others, however, prevailed upon him to heed Hasan's wish to avoid bloodshed and to bury him next to his mother. At the same time the Kufan Shi'a shifted their allegiance to him. Their leaders met with the sons of Ja'da b. Hubayra b. Abi'l-Wahb Makhzumi, grandsons of 'Ali's sister Umm Hane', in the house of Sulayman b. Sorad oza'i and wrote Husayn a letter of condolence on the death of his brother in which they assured him of their loyalty. The Banu Ja'da informed him of the high esteem of the Kufans for him, their longing that he would join them, their loathing of Mu'awiya, and their dissociation from him. Husayn wrote them that he was still

bound to keep the peace concluded by Hasan as long as Mu'awiya was alive and asked them to conceal their feelings. If he were still alive at Mu'awiya's death he would inform them of his views.

His supporters from Iraq, however, kept visiting him in Medina in large numbers, and 'Amr, the son of the caliph 'Uthman, warned the governor Marwan. The latter informed Mu'awia, who instructed him to leave Husayn alone as long as he would not display any hostility to him but also to withhold any sign of friendship from him. Marwan wrote Husayn a menacing letter, warning him against sowing renewed discord in the community. Husayn answered him scornfully, enumerating Mu'awiya's offences, such as his recognition of Ziad as his brother in violation of Islamic law and his execution of Hojr b. 'Adi, and rejected his threats. Mu'awiya complained to his entourage about Husayn, but refrained from further threats and continued to send his regular subsidy and gifts (Baladhuri, II, pp. 458-60). Jointly with the sons of several other prominent Companions of Muhammad, Husayn resisted Mu'awiya's demands that they pledge allegiance to his son Yazid, whom he had appointed as his successor in breach of both his treaty with Hasan and 'Omar's principle of election by the consultation (*shura*).

Ascension of Yazid b. Mu'awiya to the Caliphate

After Mu'awiya's death on 15 Rajab 60 AH / 22 April 680 CE, Yazid immediately instructed the governor of Medina, 'Otba b. Abi Sufyan, to compel Husayn, 'Abd-Allah b. 'Omar, and 'Abd-Allah b. Zubayr to pledge their allegiance. 'Abd Allah b. Zubayr and Husayn left separately for Mecca to seek asylum. The account of Waqedi (apud Tabari, II, pp. 222-23; tr., XIX, pp. 9-10; Ibn Sa'd, p. 56) that the two left together is unreliable. Husayn was accompanied by his household, his sons, brothers, and the sons of Hasan. Muhammad b. Hanafiya did not join him and urged him not to move to Iraq before receiving the oath of allegiance there. Husayn should rather stay in Mecca or hide in the desert and mountains until the sentiments of the people became clear. Husayn travelled the main road to Mecca, refusing to avoid being pursued by taking a side road. 'Utba b. Abi Sofyan, in spite of Marwan's prodding, did not wish to use violence against the grandson of the Prophet, and Yazid replaced him for his inaction. In Mecca Husayn stayed in the house of 'Abbas b. 'Abd-al-Muttalib (Ibn Sa'd, p. 56) and remained there for four months.

The Shia uprising against Yazid b. Mu'awiya

In Kufa, the leaders of the Shi'a on learning of Mu'awiya's death, assembled again in the house of Sulayman b. Sorad. They wrote to Husayn praising God for having destroyed the obstinate tyrant Mu'awiya, who had seized the rule of the Muslim community without its consent, appropriated its *fay*' (immovable properties acquired by conquest) and made it pass into the hands of the wealthy and powerful, who had killed their best men and retained the most evil among them.

They urged Husayn to join them, since they had no imam. They informed him that they did not attend the Friday prayer with Mu'awia's governor No'man b. Bashir Ansari and would drive him out of the town as soon as Husayn agreed to come to them. They sent him in short order seven messages with bags of letters of support by Kufan warriors and tribal leaders. The first two of them arrived in Mecca on 10 Ramadhan 60 AH / 13 June 680 CE. Husayn wrote to Kufans that he understood from their letters that they had no imam and they wished him to come to unite them by right guidance. He informed them that he was sending his cousin Muslim b. 'Aqil b. Abi Talib to report to him on the situation. If he found them united as their letters indicated he would speedily join them, for it was the

duty of the imam to act in accordance with the Qur'an, to uphold justice, to proclaim the truth, and to dedicate himself to the cause of God.

Husayn was also visited by a Shi'a supporter with two of his sons from Basra, where Shi'a sentiment was otherwise limited. He then sent identical letters to the chiefs of the five divisions into which the Basran tribes were divided for administrative purposes. He wrote to them that God had preferred Prophet Muhammad above all His creatures and that his family were his legatees (*awsia*) and heirs of his position. Their people (Qureysh) had illegitimately claimed the right which belonged exclusively to the Prophet's family. The family had consented to their action for the sake of the unity of the community. Those who had seized the right of the Prophet's family had set many things straight and had sought the truth. He, Husayn, prayed to God for mercy on them and on the Prophet's family. He was now summoning them to the Book of God and the tradition (*sunna*) of His Prophet.

The tradition had indeed been destroyed while innovation had been spread. Husayn promised to guide them on the path of righteousness if they would obey and follow him. The contents of the letter closely reflected the guideline set by 'Ali, who had strongly upheld the sole right of the family of the Prophet to leadership of the Muslim community but had also praised the conduct of the first caliphs Abu Bakr and 'Omar. While most of the recipients of the letter kept it secret, one of them suspected that it was a ploy of the governor 'Obayd-Allah b. Ziad to test their loyalty and turned it over to him. 'Obayd-Allah seized and beheaded Husayn's messenger and addressed a stern warning to the people of Basra (Tabari, II, pp. 235-36, 240-41).

Yazid's orders to deter Husayn and his supporters

The mission of Muslim b. 'Aqil was initially successful. The Kufan Shi'as visited him freely, and 18,000 men are said to have enlisted with him in support of Husayn. He wrote to Husayn, encouraging him to come swiftly to Kufa. The situation changed radically when Yazid replaced Nu'man b. Bashir by 'Obayd-Allah b. Ziad, ordering the latter to deal severely with Muslim b. 'Aqil. 'Obayd-Allah succeeded in intimidating the tribal chiefs. A revolt collapsed when the rebels failed to capture the governor's palace. Muslim b. 'Aqil was found and delivered to 'Obayd-Allah, who had him beheaded on the top of the palace and his body thrown down to the crowd. Hane' b. 'Orwa, chief of the tribe of Morad, was also crucified for having sheltered him. Yazid wrote to 'Obayd-Allah, commending him highly for his decisive action and ordering him to set up watches for Husayn and his supporters and to arrest them but to kill only those who would fight him.

Before news of the adverse turn of events arrived in Mecca, Husayn set out for Kufa on 8 or 10 Dhu'l-Hijja 60 AH / 10 or 12 September 680 CE, breaking off his *hajj* for the '*omra* (the lesser pilgrimage). He was accompanied by some fifty members of his family, close kin, and a few supporters. He had been advised by 'Abd-Allah b. 'Omar and other prominent men of Quraysh against his move. According to most accounts, 'Abd-Allah b. Zubayr, seeing him as a rival in his own bid for popular support, urged him to join his partisans in Kufa (see esp. Ibn Sa'd, p. 56), but this is contradicted by other reports, according to which he offered to support him if he would rise in Mecca (Baladhuri, II, p. 467).

His uncle 'Abd-Allah b. 'Abbas in particular warned him not to trust the Kufans, who had betrayed his father and his brother and pleaded with him not to take his women and children along if he insisted on accepting their invitation. Husayn regularly thanked his advisers for their concern but replied that he must leave the outcome to the decision of God. After Husayn's departure, his cousin

‘Abd-Allah b. Ja‘far sent him a letter with his sons ‘Awn and Muhammad, in which he implored him once more not to proceed. He further induced the governor of Mecca, ‘Amr b. Sa‘id Ashdaq, to write a guarantee of safety and protection for him if he would return to Mecca. The governor sent his brother Yahya b. Sa‘id with a group of men and ‘Abd-Allah b. Ja‘far to persuade Husayn, but he told them that he had seen a vision of the Prophet, who had ordered him to proceed, whatever the outcome.

As he continued on his way, there was a minor scuffle between his supporters and the messengers of the governor, who then returned to Mecca. The two sons of ‘Abd-Allah b. Ja‘far accompanied Husayn and were killed with him. At Tan‘im Husayn seized a caravan carrying clothes and dye plants sent by the governor of Yemen to the caliph, Yazid. He gave the camel owners the choice between accompanying him to Iraq and being paid in full there or being paid immediately for the distance they had already travelled.

Withdrawal of the Kufan Shia

‘Obayd-Allah b. Ziad sent his police chief Husayn b. Tamim to Qadesiya with the order to block the roads from Hejaz to Iraq. Husayn learned of this from some bedouins he met, who stated that they were cut off from Kufa, but he continued on his way. In Tha‘labiya he first received news of the abortive Kufan rising and the execution of Muslim b. ‘Aqil and Hane’ b. ‘Orwa. The reliability of reports that he considered turning back at this stage and changed his mind only because of the resolve of Muslim’s brothers to seek revenge or death is to be doubted. In Zobala he was informed that a messenger he had sent to Kufa to announce his imminent arrival had been intercepted and killed by ‘Obayd-Allah b. Ziad by having him thrown from the roof of his palace. In a written statement he broke the news to his supporters, acknowledging that the Kufan Shi‘as had deserted him, and encouraged anyone who so wished, to leave freely without guilt. Most of those who had joined him at various stages on the way from Mecca now left him.

The Event of Karbala

Soon after leaving Saraf his supporters sighted a troop of 1,000 Kufan mounted men under the command of Hurr b. Yazid Riahi Tamimi. He turned off the road towards the left and alighted at Dhu Husum near Karbala’, where he was joined by the Kufan troop. Husayn ordered the call to prayer to be made and addressed the Kufans, reminding them that they had invited him to come because they were without an imam. He told them that he intended to proceed to Kufa with their support, but if they were now opposed to his coming, he would return to where he had come from. The Kufans did not respond, but performed the midday prayer under his leadership. After the afternoon prayer he addressed them again. He stressed the prior right of the Prophet’s family to govern them and mentioned the letters he had received from them.

When Hurr claimed that they knew nothing of these letters, he had the saddle-bags with them brought forward and scattered the letters before them. Hurr averred that they were not of those who had written them and that they were under order to bring him to ‘Obayd-Allah b. Ziad. When Husayn set out to move, Hurr blocked his way. After a heated exchange, Hurr explained that he had not been ordered to fight Husayn but to bring him to Kufa. If Husayn would not follow him, Hurr would not allow him to take the route to either Kufa or Medina. He would write to ‘Obayd-Allah for further instructions and also suggested that Husayn should write to Yazid or ‘Obayd-Allah. Husayn did not accept the advice and turned left in the direction of ‘Odayb and Qadesiya.

Hurr kept following him and warned him against a fight in which he would inevitably perish, but he was unable to prevent four Kufan Shi'a from joining him. When they reached the district of Ninawa, a village near Karbala', a messenger arrived from Kufa with instructions for Hurr to force Husayn to camp in the open desert in a place without fortification and water. 'Obayd-Allah's aim evidently was to force Husayn to start fighting. As Hurr prevented him from alighting either in Ninawa or Ghazeriya (a village to the northeast of Karbala'), on 2 Moharram 61 AH / 2 October 680 CE, he set his camp in the desert land of Karbala' at a location that was without water.

The following day a Kufan army of 4,000 men arrived under the command of 'Omar b. Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas. 'Omar b. Sa'd had been appointed by 'Obayd-Allah governor of Rayy and been sent off to fight the Deylamites, but was recalled to lead the army against Husayn. As the son of one of the most eminent early Companions of Muhammad, he was loathe to use force against the Prophet's grandson and asked to be excused from the mission. 'Obayd-Allah demanded that he return the letter of appointment for the governorship of Rayy if he refused to lead the campaign against Husayn. After some delay, 'Omar accepted the command, evidently still hoping that he could avoid a battle. He first sent a messenger to Husayn to inquire about the purpose of his coming to Iraq. Husayn answered again that he had responded to the invitation of the people of Kufa but was ready to leave if they now disliked his presence. When 'Omar b. Sa'd reported back to 'Obayd-Allah, the governor instructed him to offer Husayn and his supporters the opportunity to swear allegiance to Yazid. If they were to do so, he would judge the matter further. Shortly afterwards, he ordered 'Omar b. Sa'd to cut off Husayn and his followers from access to the water of the Euphrates. 'Omar stationed 500 men along the river, but was unable to prevent Husayn's brother 'Abbas with fifty men from filling their water-skins in a night sortie.

Encounter between Husayn and Yazid's Commander Omar b. Sa'd

While the formal standoff continued, Husayn sent a messenger to 'Omar b. Sa'd, suggesting that they meet privately at night between the camps. They met and are said to have talked for much of the night. No one was present to hear their conversation, but there were rumours that Husayn proposed that they both leave their armies and together go to see Yazid. 'Omar b. Sa'd, however, refused to do so, afraid of being punished by 'Obayd-Allah. The majority of the transmitters, rather, maintained that Husayn offered 'Omar three choices: Either he would return to where he had come from, or he would go to Syria to submit to Yazid personally, or he could be sent to one of the border stations to fight the infidels. 'Omar is reported to have transmitted these proposals to 'Obayd-Allah. This offer ascribed to Husayn was, however, emphatically denied by 'Oqba b. Sem'an, a client of Husayn's wife Rabab, who survived the battle of Karbala'. He testified that Husayn never offered anything but to depart and travel the land until the affairs of the people would clarify (Tabari, II, p. 314; tr., pp. 108-9). An offer by Husayn to submit to Yazid at this stage must appear unlikely in view of his religious convictions, and the reports are in line with the tendency of the early tradition to accent the primary guilt of 'Obayd-Allah in Husayn's death.

Orders for Commander 'Omar b. Sa'd to fight Husayn

Whatever proposals 'Omar b. Sa'd submitted to 'Obayd-Allah, they were evidently designed to avoid fighting or the surrender of Husayn to the governor in Kufa. 'Obayd-Allah is reported to have at first been ready to accept them. Shamer b. Dhi'l-Jawshan advised him, however, not to allow Husayn to escape from his territory without having submitted to his authority, since this would be a sign of weakness on his part and an acknowledgment of the power of Husayn's position; but if Husayn and

his followers submitted, the governor could either punish or forgive them. ‘Obayd-Allah now changed his mind and wrote to ‘Omar b. Sa‘d that he had not sent him to hold him off from fighting Husayn and to intercede on his behalf.

If Husayn and his supporters submitted to his authority, ‘Omar could send them to Kufa in peace. Otherwise, he should fight, kill, and disfigure them, as they deserved that. If Husayn was killed, he should make the horses trample on his chest and back since he was a disobedient rebel, an evil wrongdoer who split the community, since he, ‘Obayd-Allah, had made a vow to do that to Husayn in case he was killed. If ‘Omar refused to comply with these instructions, he should surrender the command to Shamer b. Dhi’l-Jawshan, with whom ‘Obayd-Allah sent the letter. On reading it, ‘Omar b. Sa‘d cursed Shamer but agreed to carry out the orders himself.

‘Omar b. Sa‘d now prepared for immediate battle in the evening of 9 Moharram / 9 October. Husayn was sitting in front of his tent when his brother ‘Abbas informed him that the enemy was advancing towards them. He asked ‘Abbas to enquire about the cause of the change of their attitude. They told him that an order of the governor had arrived to attack unless Husayn and his followers submitted to his authority. Husayn asked for a delay until next morning so they would have time to decide on the option. The account stresses that he did so only in order to arrange his affairs and give counsel to his family.

The night before the battle of Karbala’

‘Omar b. Sa‘d was consulted and, on the advice of some of the army leaders, agreed to the postponement. Husayn once more encouraged all his supporters to leave and scatter in the desert under cover of the night, releasing them from their oath of allegiance. They might also take the members of his family along. He suggested that the enemy was looking only for him and would not search for them once they found him. Nearly all his followers, however, decided to stay and fight and to protect him. They spent the night in prayer and preparation for the battle.

The battle of Karbala’

On the next morning, as ‘Omar b. Sa‘d arranged the Kufan army in battle order, Hurr b. Yazid challenged him and went over to Husayn. He vainly addressed the Kufans, rebuking them for their treachery to the grandson of the Prophet, and was killed in the battle. The battle of Karbala’ lasted from morning till sunset on 10 Moharram 61 AH / 10 October 680 CE. ‘Omar b. Sa‘d, evidently hoping to isolate Husayn and force him to surrender, did not order a general attack that would inevitably have resulted in a quick massacre. The reports rather describe numerous incidents of single combat, skirmishes, assaults, and retreat.

Husayn ordered heaps of wood and reeds to be burnt in a ditch behind the tents to prevent an attack from the rear. From the front he was protected by his men, and he was not involved in actual fighting until close to the end. As the Kufans also suffered losses because of the self-sacrificing bravery of Husayn’s followers, the fighting gradually became more brutal. In one attack the enemy set the tents on fire, but the flames at first hindered their own advance. Shamer (Shemr) b. Dhi’l-Jawshan is mostly described as the moving spirit, viciously driving on the assault.

Husayn was first wounded by an arrow hitting his mouth or throat as he was trying to reach the Euphrates to drink. After receiving further wounds, he eventually was stabbed with a spear by Senan

b. Anas Nakha'i. As he fell, Senan and Khawali b. Yazid Asbahi joined to cut his head off. In accordance with 'Obayd-Allah b. Ziad's instructions, 'Omar ordered his body to be trampled by horses. Later he was buried by the Banu Asad of the nearby village of Ghazeriya in the spot where the sanctuary of Husayn arose. His head was carried to 'Obayd-Allah b. Ziad in Kufa and then to Yazid in Damascus. Later there were claims in regard to several locations to be its burial place.

The dead on the side of Husayn are said to have numbered seventy or seventy-two. At least twenty descendants of Abu Talib were among them. The first one of these to be killed was Husayn's own son 'Ali Akbar. As a nephew of the caliph Yazid he was offered a safe-conduct, but he refused it, proudly proclaiming that he valued his descent from the Prophet more highly (Ibn Sa'd, p. 73; Zobayri, p. 58). Husayn's son 'Abd-Allah was still a child and is described as having been killed by an arrow while placed on his father's knees. He could, however, hardly have been a baby as claimed in some accounts. Six of Husayn's paternal brothers, sons of 'Ali, fell. Four of them were sons of Umm Banin bt. Hezam of the Banu Kelab. Her brother's son, 'Abd-Allah b. Abi Mohell b. Hezam, obtained a letter of safety for them from 'Obayd-Allah b. Ziad, but they rejected it. Three sons of Hasan and three sons of 'Abd-Allah b. Ja'far were killed, as well as three sons and three grandsons of 'Aqil b. Abi Taleb. Ibn Sa'd (p. 77) lists among the dead two other Hashemites, a descendent of Abu Lahab, and a descendent of Abu Sofyan b. Haret b. 'Abd-al-Mottalib.

Survivors of the battle of Karbala'

Among the survivors of the Prophet's family, being led off as captives, he mentions two sons of Hasan, a son of 'Abd-Allah b. Ja'far, a son of 'Aqil, and five women. According to Abu'l-Faraj Esfahani (*Maqatel*, p. 119), three sons of Hasan survived, among them Hasan b. Hasan, who was severely wounded. Husayn's other son named 'Ali survived because he was sick and unable to fight on the battle day. He was brought as a captive before 'Obayd-Allah b. Ziad and then before Yazid in Damascus. The latter treated him well and sent him with the women to Medina. He thus became recognized as the next Imam of the Shi'a.

The impact of the Event of Karbala'

The impact of the tragedy of Karbala' on the religious conscience of Muslims has ever been deep and goes beyond its consecration of the passion and penitence motives in Shi'ism. The motivations of the major actors in it have often been debated. It is evident that Husayn cannot be viewed as simply a reckless rebel risking his and his family's lives for his personal ambition. He refused to break his oath of allegiance to Mu'awiya despite his severe reproof of his conduct. He did not pledge allegiance to Yazid, who had been appointed successor by Mu'awiya in violation of his treaty with Hasan, and most likely never agreed to do so. Yet he also did not actively seek martyrdom. He offered to leave Iraq as soon as it became clear that he no longer had any support in Kufa.

It was 'Obayd-Allah who vainly sought to provoke him to start the fighting. His initial determination to follow the invitation of the Kufan Shi'as in spite of the numerous warnings he received, and his visions of the Prophet reflect a religious conviction of a mission, whatever the outcome, left him no choice. Like his father, he was firmly convinced that the family of the Prophet was divinely chosen to lead the community founded by Muhammad, as the latter had been chosen, and had both an inalienable right and an obligation to seek this leadership.

The accounts of the early sources tend to put the responsibility for the death of Husayn mostly on ‘Obayd-Allah b. Ziad and to exonerate the caliph Yazid, who is described as cursing his governor and stating that if he had been present he would have spared Husayn. ‘Obayd-Allah certainly was eager to humiliate and kill Husayn, as is evident from his vow to have his body trampled by horses. His hatred ultimately sprang from the denunciation of Mu‘awiya’s recognition of Ziad as his brother by the grandsons of the Prophet in the name of Islam. The prime responsibility for the death of Husayn, however, lay with Yazid, who knew that the grandson of the Prophet would constitute a menace to his reign as long as he was alive, even if temporarily forced to submission. Yazid wanted him dead but, as a caliph of Islam, could not afford to be seen as having ordered his death. He was aware of ‘Obayd-Allah’s hatred of Husayn when he appointed him governor of Kufa and hinted in a letter to him that Husayn would reduce him to slave status again (Baladhuri, II, p. 464).

He commended ‘Obayd-Allah highly for the execution of Muslim b. ‘Aqil, and the governor could not be in any doubt as to what was expected of him. When the caliph sought in public, however, to place the onus for the slaughter of the Prophet’s grandson on him, ‘Obayd-Allah reacted with resentment and declined Yazid’s wish that he next lead the assault on ‘Abd-Allah b. Zubayr in the Ka‘ba (Tabari, II, p. 408, tr. p. 204).

The family of Husayn

Husayn’s first marriage was with Rabab, daughter of Emra’-al-Qays b. ‘Adi, a chief of the Banu Kalb. Her father came to Medina early during the caliphate of ‘Omar and was appointed by him amir over all tribesmen of Qoza‘a who would convert to Islam. ‘Ali proposed to him to establish marriage ties, and he agreed to give three of his daughters to ‘Ali, Hasan, and Husayn in marriage. Hasan and Husayn, and no doubt the daughters of Emra’-al-Qays, were too young for the wedding to take place immediately, and Hasan may never actually have married the girl chosen for him. Husayn later married Rabab, and in the later years of ‘Ali’s caliphate, Emra’-al-Qays and his kin were referred to as his in-laws (*ashar*; Thaqafi, p. 426). Rabab remained Husayn’s favorite wife, even though she was childless for many years. Probably after ‘Ali’s death, she bore him a daughter Amena (Amina, Omayma), commonly known as Sokayna. According to Sokayna, Hasan reproached Husayn for his excessive favors to Rabab, but in response Husayn declared his great love for her and Sokayna in three lines of poetry (Abu’l-Faraj Esfahani, *Aghani* XIV pp. 163-64). Later Rabab bore him his son ‘Abd-Allah, who was still a child when he was killed at Karbala’. He presumably had saved his own patronymic (*konya*), Abu ‘Abd-Allah, for a son by her. In some late Shi‘i sources ‘Abd-Allah is called ‘Ali Asghar, but this is without historical foundation.

After Husayn’s death, Rabab is said to have spent a year in grief at his grave and to have refused to remarry. No details are known about Husayn’s marriage to Solafa, a woman of the tribe Bali of Qoza‘a. She bore him a son named Ja‘far, who died during Husayn’s lifetime. Of Husayn’s two sons named ‘Ali, the one who survived him, known as Zayn al-‘Abedin, the Imam of the Shi‘a after Husayn, was the elder and probably his first-born son. He was twenty-three at the time of the battle of Karbala’ and thus was born during the caliphate of ‘Ali. His mother was a slave woman, probably from Sind. She was later married to a client of Husayn and had a son with him, ‘Abd-Allah b. Zobayd, who was thus a maternal brother of ‘Ali Zayn-al-‘Abedin.

The descendants of ‘Abd-Allah b. Zobayd later lived in Yanbo‘ (Ibn Sa‘d, p. 17). Whereas Zayn-al-‘Abedin is called ‘Ali al-Asghar in the early Sunnite sources, Muhammad Mofid (pp. 236-37) and other Shi‘i authors are probably correct in calling him ‘Ali Akbar. The second ‘Ali, called ‘Ali Akbar

in the Sunnite sources but ‘Ali Asghar by Shaikh Mofid, was nineteen when he was killed at Karbala’. His mother was Layla, daughter of Morra b. ‘Orwa Thaqafi and Maymuna bt. Abi Sofyan, sister of the caliph Mu‘awiya. The marriage must have taken place soon after Hasan’s surrender to Mu‘awia, as it would not have been possible during the lifetime of ‘Ali. Husayn evidently named his son by Layla also ‘Ali since he, because of his aristocratic Arab mother, had precedence over his elder son by a non-Arab slave woman to become his primary heir. Mu‘awiya is even quoted as observing that ‘Ali b. Husayn was the one most suited for the caliphate, since he combined the bravery of the Banu Hashem, the munificence of the Banu Omayya, and the pride of Thaqif (Abu’l-Faraj Esfahani, *Maqatel*, p. 80).

After the death of Hasan, Husayn married Umm Ishaq, daughter of the prominent Companion Talha. She bore Husayn’s daughter Fatima. Contrary to some reports, Fatima must have been younger than Sokayna. At the time of her father’s death, she was probably engaged, but not yet married, to Hasan b. Hasan, the primary heir of Hasan b. ‘Ali.

Bibliography:

Abu’l-Faraj Esfahani, *Maqatel al-Talebiyin*, ed. Ahmad Saqr, Cairo, 1949, pp. 78-122.

Idem, *al-Aghani*, ed. Nasr Hurini, 20 vols., Bulaq, 1869, XLV, pp. 163-65.

Abu Hanifa Dinavari, *Akhbar al-tewal*, ed. ‘Abd-al-Mo’men ‘Amer and Jamal-al-Din Shayyal, Cairo, 1960, pp. 220-21, 224 ff.

Mohsen Amin, *A ‘yan al-Shi‘a* IV, 2nd ed., Beirut, 1960, pp. 49 ff.

Ahmad b. Yahya Baladhuri, *Ansab al-ashraf* II, ed. Mahmud Fardus ‘Azm, Damascus, 1996, pp. 449-519; V, ed. Solomon D. Fritz Goitein, Jerusalem, 1936, index, s.v.

Ibn ‘Asaker, *Tarjamat rayhanat Rasul Allah . . . men Ta’rikh Demashq*, ed. Muhammad-Baqer Mahmudi, Beirut, 1978.

Ibn Sa‘d, *Tarjamat al-Emam al-Husayn*, ed. ‘Abd-al-‘Aziz Tabataba’i, Qom, 1995.

Ibn Shahrashub, *Manaqeb Al Abi Taleb*, ed. Muhammad-Kazem Kotobi, 3 vols., Najaf, 1956, III, pp. 206-72.

Henri Lammens, *Le califat de Yazid Ier: extrait des Mélanges de la Faculté orientale de l’Université St. Joseph de Beyrouth*, pp. 131-82.

Muhammad b. Muhammad Mofid, *Ershad*, ed. Kazem Miamavi, Tehran, 1958, pp. 139-237.

Tabari, index. Ebrahim b. Muhammad Thaqafi, *Gharat*, ed. Jal-al-al-Din Mohaddet, Tehran, 1975, p. 426.

Fahmi ‘Oways, *Shahid Karbala’ al-Imam al-Husayn b. ‘Ali . . .*, Cairo, 1948.

L. Veccia Vaglieri, “Husayn b. ‘Ali b. Abi Talib,” in *EI2* III, pp. 607-15.

Julius Wellhausen, *Die religiös-politischen Oppositionsparteien im alten Islam*, Berlin, 1901, esp. pp. 61-71; tr. R. C. Ostle and S. M. Walzer as *The Religious-Political Factions in Early Islam*, Amsterdam, 1975, pp. 105-20.

Ahmad b. Ya‘qub Ya‘qubi, *Ta’rikh*, ed. M. Th. Houtsma as *Historiae*, 2 vols., Leiden, 1883; repr., Leiden, 1969, II, pp. 266-67, 286 ff.

Mos‘ab b. ‘Abd-Allah Zobayri, *Ketab nasab Qoraysh*, ed. E‘variste Lévi-Provençal, Cairo, 1953, pp. 57-59.