

‘ĀSHŪRĀ’ IN SUNNITE MIRRORS
CONFUSED BORDERS BETWEEN JOY AND SADNESS

SUMMARY: This article analyzes the Sunnite views of ‘Āshūrā’ and the assassination/martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn, the grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad. It is not an exhaustive work; it is rather selective, searching for meaningful examples to demonstrate the diversity of opinions among Sunnite Muslims in the past and modern times, in moving borders between the two communities. The three main texts analyzed are those of Abū Bakr Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 1148), Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) and Mawdūdī (d. 1979). A variety of opinions vacillates from the compassion with al-Ḥusayn’s tragedy to a more cautious position. The core of the question is the moral evaluation of the first generations of Islam, from whom Muslims received the Message. The credibility of the Prophet’s Companions remains a crucial doctrine in the Sunnite mind, the scandal of Karbalā’ was not the only challenge but perhaps the most eloquent.

Recent facts and memories

In my childhood memory, ‘Āshūrā’, the 10th of Muḥarram, represented an occasion of mourning, the commemoration of al-Ḥusayn’s martyrdom in 61/680, as a member of my own family. My family, or rather my tribe – the Mokranis – are considered to be descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad through his grandson al-Ḥasan, the elder brother of al-Ḥusayn, through the line of the Idrisids¹. There were no public or collective rituals like those found among the Shiites, the expression was rather quite discreet and silent, the most visible signs were the black Kohl² in the eyes and women’s stories, the true custodians of this tradition. It is also prohibited to show signs of joy; you could not put henna³ or celebrate a wedding, for instance. We find traces of similar popular practices throughout the Maghreb and not only by the families of Ashrāf⁴ until the 1970s. The veneration of al-Ḥusayn’s Mausoleum, officially the Ḥusayn Mosque in Cairo, with his presumed relics, is a very eloquent example of the “love” of al-Ḥusayn in some Sunni environments. We can see around the “grave” Egyptian peasants with their luggage coming directly from Cairo Railway Station after a long and hard journey; they prefer to greet al-Ḥusayn before doing anything else in the city.

In modern Egyptian literature, the most significant work about the Egyptian devotion toward the Prophet’s Family is Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī’s novella (1939) “The Lamp of Umm Hāshim”⁵, *Qindīl Umm Hāshim*, which inspired a famous movie directed by Kamāl ‘Aṭīyya (1968). Umm Hāshim is no other than Zaynab, sister of al-Ḥusayn, whose presumed Mausoleum and Mosque is not far from the Ḥusayn Mosque. Many people come to al-Sayyida Zaynab Mosque to ask for oil from the lamp hanging over the sanctuary; the oil of Umm Hāshim is famous for healing eye-diseases for those who have faith in it. The historicity and authenticity of these Fatimid Mausoleums are doubtful but the attachment of people to them is not.

In fact, the geography and frontiers of Sunnite and Shiite worlds are changing ones. In the time when al-Mahdiyya, in Tunisia, and then Cairo, in Egypt, were the capitals of the Fatimid Empire, Iran was mostly Sunnite and the major Persian poets and mystics like ‘Attār, Rūmī, Sa’dī, Ḥāfiẓ, (eleventh–fourteenth centuries) were Sunnites.

Perhaps it is not fair to consider some surviving unconscious Shiite practices in some majoritarian Sunnite societies as a Catacombal religiosity comparable with the case of Muslim and Jewish *Conversos* in Spain after the

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¹ The Idrisids, *al-adārīsa*, were a Zaydi Shiite dynasty that reigned in the present Morocco and Western Algeria from 172/789 to 375/985. The founder of the dynasty was Idrīs b. ‘Abd Allāh, he survived the massacre of the Battle of Fakh near Mecca committed by the Abbasids in 169/786 and fled to the Maghreb, where he was protected by the Berbers, then killed by the Abbasids by poison in 174/791.

² *Kukhl* is a black powder used for eye makeup to darken the eyelids.

³ Henna, *ḥinnā*, is a flowering plant used to dye skin, hair, hands and fingernails, especially in ceremonies of weddings and religious feasts.

⁴ About the folkloric celebration of ‘Āshūrā’ in Southern Tunisia see: ‘Abd Allāh Jannūf, “Al-iḥtifāl bi-‘āshūrā’ fī al-janūb al-sharqī al-tūnīsī”, in *IBLA* 193 (1/2004) 3–23. One of the rituals of this day in the Maghreb is jumping on a fire called the fire of ‘Āshūrā’, *nār ‘Āshūrā*, and saying: “O fire! Take away our yellow color and give us your red color”; this means we want the fire to take away our paleness, sickness, and problems and in turn give us its redness, warmth, and energy. In Iran, there is the same ritual with the same sayings but in a different occasion, *tshahārshambe sūri*, Wednesday Feast, the last Wednesday before the Iranian New Year, in other words the last Tuesday night of the year; it is most probably of a Zoroastrian origin.

⁵ The English translation: *The Saint’s Lamp and Other Stories*, tr. M. M. Badawi, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1973. See: Muhammad Siddiq, Deconstructing “The Saint’s Lamp”, in *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 17 (1986) 126–145.

Reconquista. However, it is historically documented, that, sometimes in some areas and periods, it was more difficult to be Shiite than Christian for instance, as was the case for Shiites under the rule of Sunnite Mamluks in Monte-Lebanon and Jabal ‘Āmil, the present Lebanon, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It could be the only country where we can meet Christian Sayyids, *i.e.* descendents of al-Ḥusayn. It is also common to find in Lebanon mixed villages and cities with Christian and Muslim inhabitants, but we never find a single village where Shiites and Sunnites live together⁶.

In the 1980s, with the rise of Sunni fundamentalism, especially in its wahhābī–salafī version, I remember the first time I heard that ‘Āshūrā’ is a feast to celebrate with joy as a memory of a glorious event, and not a scandal in Muslim history. This “joyful” interpretation of ‘Āshūrā’ was presented as the true one and the most faithful to the Sunna, in both senses: Prophetic Tradition and mainstream Orthodoxy. This view is based on some *ḥadīths*, the most *authentic* in Sunnite criteria indicate two possible origins of ‘Āshūrā’: first from an Arabic Pre-Islamic origin; second from Jewish origin as memory of Passover, Pesach, suggesting that the Hijra, the Prophet’s migration from Mecca to Yathrib (Medina), could coincide with it⁷. It was the first Islamic fasting period before its substitution by the month of Ramaḍān, so fasting on the day of ‘Āshūrā’ became optional, *sunna*. See for instance these two *ḥadīths*:

‘Ā’isha [the Prophet’s wife] reported that the Quraysh [the Prophet’s tribe] used to fast on the day of ‘Āshūrā’ in the pre-Islamic days and the Messenger of God also observed it. When he migrated to Medina, he himself observed this fast and commanded [others] to observe it. But when fasting during the month of Ramaḍān was made obligatory he said: He who wishes to observe this fast may do so, and he who wishes to abandon it may do so. [Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim⁸]

Narrated by Ibn ‘Abbās [a Companion]: When the Prophet arrived at Medina he found that the Jews observed fast on the day of ‘Āshūrā’. They were asked the reason for the fast. They replied: “This is the day when God caused Moses and the Children of Israel to have victory over Pharaoh, so we fast on this day as a sign of glorifying it”. God’s Apostle said: “We are closer to Moses than you”. Then he ordered that fasting on this day should be observed. [Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī⁹]

These *ḥadīths* are still used to discredit the Shiite way of celebrating ‘Āshūrā’, considered as a *bid’a*, a bad innovation or a deviation, adding foreign elements to religion. On December 15th 2010, one day before ‘Āshūrā’ 1432 AH, Ibrahīm Gabriele Iungo, an Italian Muslim, wrote to the members of a Facebook’s group called “Il Muslim – La Rivista Islamica Italiana”, to explain the significance of ‘Āshūrā’ from the Sunni point of view:

In Shiite milieu,Yawm [the Day of] ‘Āshūrā’ is celebrated as the anniversary of the martyrdom of Sayyidunā, [our lord] Ḥusayn in the battle of Karbalā’. However, it is clear that the holiness of this day can not in any way be linked to this event, one of the most tragic of our Islamic history, since – as we have seen [he mentioned above similar *ḥadīths*] – it was established since the time of the Prophet, and therefore even long before the birth of Sayyidunā Ḥusayn.

Moreover, the rituals of self-flagellation and public dirge, commonly associated with the celebration of the Day of ‘Āshūrā’ within Shiite milieu, are totally opposed to the authentic Sunna of the Prophet, which says: “He is not one of us who slaps cheeks, tears his clothes and cries in the manner of the people of jāhiliyya (the era of ignorance, before the Islamic Revelation)”, (Bukhārī). Sayyidunā Ḥusayn himself, shortly before his death on the battlefield, clearly recommended to his sister, Sayyida [lady] Zaynab: “My dear sister! I swear to you [sic. I ask you to swear] that if I die you will not tear your clothes, or scratch your face, nor curse someone because of me or pray for your death”¹⁰.

In some Sunnite sources and milieus, the meaning of ‘Āshūrā’ is amplified to include almost everything except al-Ḥusayn’s martyrdom, so it is the day in which:

- God accepted the repentance of Adam after his exile from Paradise;
- God saved Noah and his companions in the ark¹¹;
- Job was restored to health;
- Jonah was taken out from the belly of the whale;
- The sea was divided as the Children of Israel were delivered from captivity and Pharaoh’s army was destroyed, as we saw in the *ḥadīth* above;

⁶ The cohabitation is usually between Greek-Orthodoxes and Sunnites in the cities (like Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon), and between Maronites and Shiites in the villages.

⁷ According to the calculations, the first ‘Āshūrā’, Muḥarram, 10th year zero, coincided with August, 6th 621, in mid-summer, but historically and according to the Tradition, the migration of the Prophet Muḥammad did not coincide with the first of Muḥarram, it was more than one year later in September 622, exactly on 12 Rabī’ al-awwal year 1/24 September 622, in the beginning of autumn. So it is obvious that the two dates did not coincide with the vernal Jewish Pesach. Perhaps the lunar month Rabī’ al-awwal, literally the First Spring, could suggest the coincidence with Pesach time! To note that the Islamic calendar was established by ‘Umar, the second Caliph, in 17/ 638.

⁸ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Book 6, Fasting (Kitāb al-Ṣawm), Chapter 19, Fasting on the Day of ‘Āshūrā’, *ḥadīth* 2499.

⁹ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, vol. 6, Book 60, Tafsīr of the Prophet, *ḥadīth* 5279.

¹⁰ The translation is mine. See: <http://www.facebook.com/#!/?sk=messages&tid=1361060766334>

¹¹ It is based on a *ḥadīth* transmitted by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal in his Musnad.

- God spoke directly to Moses and gave him the Commandments;
- Jesus was raised to Heaven.

In Turkish culture, ‘Āshūrā is another name for “Noah’s Pudding”, its compound and rich ingredients¹² reflect the diversity of the species saved by Noah’s ark. Some Turkish associations recently use the so-called “Noah Feast” as an interfaith occasion.

Demonstrating joy or sadness in a border area between Sunnites and Shiites is often an occasion of tensions if not bloodshed, considering the attitude of the other as provocative, in a world where the rituals are also signs of identity, power and exclusion. In Pakistan, incidents between Sunnites and Shiites are almost inevitable, especially with the provocations of terrorist groups like Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi¹³.

The totally opposite case comes from Turkey, where Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for the first time, even since before the Republic, personally went to a ceremony in Istanbul planned to commemorate the mourning of ‘Āshūrā’ 1432 (December 16th 2010). He gave a speech in front of thousands of black dressed people, saying: “We have been feeling the pain of Karbalā’ for 1370 years. We have to feel that pain in our hearts. We remember Ḥusayn whenever an innocent person is killed”. Recalling some past incidents in which Turkey’s Alevi and Shiite communities clashed with Sunnites, Erdoğan referred to such incidents as provocations: “This country is ours, these lands are all ours, this history, this civilization is ours. Nobody can claim superiority to any other. We are equal to each other and we are all brothers in these lands. We are all first-class citizens of this country. The problems of all religious groups in my country are mine”¹⁴.

From the Shiite point of view, the *ḥadīths* mentioned above and other contradictory justifications to celebrate ‘Āshūrā’ as a joyful “feast”, are a Sunni “invention” to contrast the sad memory of al-Ḥusayn’s martyrdom¹⁵. In fact, the contradictory versions of ‘Āshūrā’s origin could be a sign of weakness; but even so, in my opinion, being a day of feast makes the murder of al-Ḥusayn and his fellows more dramatic, in the image of Jesus’ Crucifixion on the main Jewish feastday, Pesach.

The question is not the re-discovery of these *ḥadīths* and the “real” and “original” meaning of ‘Āshūrā’ by some Sunnis, but why it happened just in this moment: after the 1979 Iranian revolution, a historical event that enhanced the Islamist movements worldwide, seen as the realization of the fundamentalist “dream” of an Islamic State. This aroused the fear of some Sunnite areas, like Saudi Arabia in the first place, of losing their leadership in the Islamic world. Afghanistan and Pakistan, in particular, were battlefields of this new war, and so the Afghani Mujahidin became the “heroes” of the “Sunnite” revolution, even better, “freedom fighters”¹⁶, and Saddam Hussein became the defender of the Sunni frontiers against the Shiite danger coming from Iran.

In the same period, *i.e.* the 1980s, we noticed the publication and republication of many Arabic books and booklets, classical and modern, sometimes translated into English and other languages. In the last decade, especially after the invasion of Iraq, the fall of Saddam’s dictatorship and the last events linked to Hezbollah and “the Special Tribunal for Lebanon”¹⁷, there is a new wave of religious propaganda and anti-Shiite literature, and vice-versa, particularly in Iraq and Lebanon. Facebook, YouTube and many other websites are now a virtual battlefield.

Classical views

After this rapid survey of Sunnite-Shiite relations in the last decades, let us examine the typically Sunnite and the most religious dimension in the Sunnite attitudes towards al-Ḥusayn’s martyrdom in Karbalā’ in the day of ‘Āshūrā’, through some significant classical texts.

a) Abū Bakr Ibn al-‘Arabī

¹² Wheat, white beans, chickpeas, raisins, almonds, peanuts, dried apricots, sugar, walnuts, cinnamon ...

¹³ [Anjuman] Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), [Association of] the Army of the Prophet’s Companions, is a Sunnite Deobandi militant organization, established in 1985 in Jhang by Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi and others primarily to deter major Shia influence in Pakistan in the wake of the Iranian Revolution. After the assassination of Jhangvi in a retaliatory bomb attack by Shiite militants in 1990, Riaz Basra broke away from the SSP to found “Lashkar-e-[Haq Nawaz] Jhangvi, the Army of [Haq Nawaz] Jhangvi (LJ), which was formed in 1996. The two organizations were banned by President Pervez Musharraf in 2001–2002.

¹⁴ http://www.worldbulletin.net/news_detail.php?id=67483. This historical visit is part of a large political orientation of reconciliation towards Turkish religious and ethnical minorities.

¹⁵ See: al-Shaykh ‘Abbās al-Qummī, *Mafāṭīḥ al-jinān*, Dār wa Maktabat al-Rasūl al-Akram, Dār al-Maḥajja al-Bayḍā’, Bayrūt, al-ṭab’a al-ūlā, 1418/1997, pp. 390–392.

¹⁶ This term was used by the U.S. President Ronald Reagan in 1983.

¹⁷ The Special Tribunal for Lebanon is an international criminal tribunal for the prosecution, under international law, of criminal acts relating to the assassination of the Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri on February 14, 2005.

The first text is from: Al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr Ibn al-‘Arabī¹⁸, *Al-‘awāsim min al-qawāsim fī taḥqīq mawāqif al-Ṣaḥāba ba‘da wafāt al-Nabī ṣallā Allāh ‘alayh wa sallam*, Ḥaqqāqahu wa ‘allaqa ḥawāshīh: Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb, al-Maṭba‘a al-Salafiyya, (4 ed.), 1396 [1976], pp. 227–233¹⁹. The English translation: *Defence against disaster by accurately determining the position of the Companions after the death of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace*, Edited by Shaykh Abdalqadir al-Murabit (Ian Neil Dallas) & Aisha Abdarrahman Bewley, Madinah Press (Spain?) 1996, 247 pp.²⁰.

[...] The rule of the less excellent is valid even if there is someone who is better than him when he assumes power. To remove him or seek the better man is to allow what is not permitted. That splits unity and divides the Community.

If it is said that Yazīd was a drunkard, we said: “That is only admissible by two witnesses. Who then testified to that against him?” Rather the just men testified to his integrity. Yahyā b. Bukayr related from al-Layth b. Sa‘d²¹: “The *Amīr al-Mu‘minīn* [Commander of the Faithful] Yazīd died on such and such a day [64/683].” Al-Layth called him the “*Amīr al-Mu‘minīn*”, after their kingdom had departed and their state had ended. If he had not been an Amir in his opinion, he would only have said: “Yazīd died.”

If it is said: “And if Yazīd had not done anything else except murder al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī”, we said: “Alas for afflictions once and alas for the catastrophe of al-Ḥusayn a thousand times. His urine spilled on the breast of the Prophet and his blood was shed on the dust and it was not spared”. Oh God, Oh Muslims! The best of what is related about him is that Yazīd wrote to al-Walīd b. ‘Uqba to tell him about Mu‘āwīya’s death and he ordered him to take the allegiance (*bay‘a*) for him from the people of Medina although it had already taken place. He summoned Marwān and told him. He said to him: “Send to al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī and Ibn al-Zubayr. See if they give allegiance. If they do not, smite their necks”. He said: “Glory be to God! You will kill al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī and Ibn al-Zubayr?” He said: “Do what I tell you!” He sent for them. Ibn al-Zubayr came to him and he told him about Mu‘āwīya’s death and asked him for allegiance. He said: “Someone like me gives allegiance here? Mount the pulpit [in the mosque] and I will give allegiance openly with the people”. Marwān leapt up and said: “Strike his neck! He is full of sedition and evil!” Ibn al-Zubayr said: “You are there, O Ibn al-Zarqā’ (son of a blue-black woman)!” They insulted each other. Al-Walīd said: “Take them out!” He sent to al-Ḥusayn and he did not say a word to him about anything. They left him. Al-Walīd sent spies to observe them. When morning was near, they left in haste for Mecca and reached it. Ibn al-Zubayr said to him: “What keeps you from your party and the party of your father? By God, if I had the like of them I would go to them”. This is a sound [transmission].

The historians mentioned that the letters of the people of Kūfa reached al-Ḥusayn, and he sent Muslim b. ‘Aqīl, his cousin, to them to take allegiance from them and to investigate his followers. Ibn ‘Abbās forbade him and told him that they had disappointed his father and his brother. Ibn al-Zubayr indicated to him that he should go out, so he went out. When he reached Kūfa, Muslim b. ‘Aqīl had been slain and those who had invited him surrendered him. It is enough for you in this to have the warning of the one who is warned. He persisted and continued out of anger for the religion and to establish the truth. But he, may God be pleased with him, did not accept the good advice of the man with the most knowledge among the people of his time, that was Ibn ‘Abbās, he turned away from the opinion of the elder (*shaykh*) of the Companions, Ibn ‘Umar. He sought the beginning in the end and the straight in the crooked and the freshness of youth in the frailty of oldness. There was around no one like him, nor did he have any helpers who guarded his right or who expended themselves for him. We wanted to purify the earth of the wine of Yazīd, so we shed the blood of al-Ḥusayn. A calamity came to us which the happiness of time cannot heal.

No one came out to him except by using interpretation. They all fought him with what they had heard from his grandfather, the master of the Messengers, who mentioned the corruption of the situation and warned about getting involved in seditions. He said a lot about that, including his words, may God bless him and grant him peace: “There will be defects and flaws. Whoever wants to divide the business of this Community when it is united should be struck with the sword, whoever he is”²². People came out only because of this and things like it. It would better if the great [of the Community] and the son of its great, its noble the son of its noble, al-Ḥusayn remained in his house, his estate or his camels, and when people, including Ibn ‘Abbās and Ibn ‘Umar, came to him to establish the truth, he did not listen to them, he should remember what the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, warned about and what he said about his brother [al-Ḥasan]²³. He saw that [the Caliphate] escaped from his brother while the armies of the land and the great men were seeking him. How then could it return to him by the dregs of Kūfa while the great Companions forbade him and held aloof from him? I do not think that this is anything other than submission to the decree of God and sorrow for the grandson of the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, forever. If it had not been for the fact that the Shaykhs of the Companions and notables of the Community recognized that it was a matter which God had taken away from the People of the House (Ahl al-Bayt) and a state of sedition which no one should become involved in, they would never have surrendered him.

Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal [d. 241/855], known for his abstinence, immense position in faith and fear of God (*wara’*), attributed to Yazīd b. Mu‘āwīya, in *Kitāb al-Zuhd* (the Book of Asceticism), that he used to say in his sermons: “When one of you falls ill, is proved [by God] and then recovered, he should look to the best action he has and cling to it. He should look to the worst thing he has done and

¹⁸ He was born in Seville in 468/1076 and died in Fez in 542/1148, an Andalusian Mālikī judge and scholar.

¹⁹ In the beginning of the book, there is a letter of appreciation written by the President of *Hay‘at al-amr bi’l-ma‘rūf wa’l-nahy ‘an al-munkar* (Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice) in Ḥijāz (Saudi Arabia). There is a broader and more complete critical edition: Al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-‘awāsim min al-qawāsim, al-naṣṣ al-kāmil*, Taḥqīq: ‘Ammār Ṭālibī, al-Qāhira, Maktabat Dār al-Turāth [1974?], pp. 336–339.

²⁰ The following translation is corrected because the original mentioned above is full of mistakes.

²¹ Al-Layth (d. 175/791) is a great Egyptian jurist and traditionist contemporary to Mālik b. Anas.

²² From the *ḥadīth* of ‘Arfāja in ‘The Book of the Emirate’ in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim: The chapter of ‘The Judgments of the One who Divides the Muslims when they are United’ (book 33, *ḥadīth* 59).

²³ The *ḥadīth*: “This son of mine is a master. Perhaps God will use him to make peace between two large groups of Muslims”.

leave it". This indicates his immense position with Ibn Ḥanbal since he included him among the ascetics (*al-zuhhād*) of the Companions and the Successors (*al-tābi'ūn*; i.e. the second generation of Muslims after the Companions) whose words were followed and whose predictions are cause of abstaining [from evil]. Indeed, he included him among the Companions before mentioning the Successors. Where is this in relation to what the historians said about [his drinking] wine and [committing] types of debauchery? Are you not ashamed? If God stripped them of virtue and modesty, why do you not desist and hold back and follow the example of the rabbis and the monks among the nobles of the Community, and reject the Deniers, *al-malāhida*, and impudent people among the affiliated to the Nation. This is a clarification for people, guidance and warning for the fearfully aware. Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds.

Let us analyse and criticize the content:

In the beginning, Ibn al-‘Arabī, affirms a political Sunnite principle that “the rule of the less excellent is valid even if there is someone who is better than him”, in order to preserve the Umma’s unity and to avoid bloodshed. The political theory of Sunni orthodoxy is in fact based on the factual legitimacy and the strength of the *status quo*, to avoid wars and social disorder, which means practically the absolute priority of unity over justice. This theory lasted for centuries, elevated to the rank of an article of faith by al-Ṭahāwī (d. 321/933) in his Creed²⁴, and well represented later by al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058)²⁵.

Then Ibn al-‘Arabī tried, several times, to defend Yazīd, saying as a jurist that Yazīd cannot be accused of being a drunkard, for instance, without testimonies. On the contrary, he offered counter-testimonies that confirm Yazīd’s righteousness and integrity. He quoted: (1) firstly al-Layṭ b. Sa‘d who called Yazīd “*Amīr al-Mu‘minīn*”, Commander of the Believers; (2) and then Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal who mentioned Yazīd among the Ascetics of Islam from the first generation (the Companions). The problem with the second quotation is not only that Yazīd was from the “second” generation, *tābi‘ī*, and we do not find the quotation in the published book, but also that we find counter-testimonies, for instance when Abū al-Dardā’, a Companion, refused the request of Yazīd to marry his daughter, preferring to give her to a poor Muslim, justifying his choice saying: “I regarded to al-Dardā’ [his daughter], what do you think about her when she will find the eunuchs in her service and see fascinating houses where could be her faith in that moment!”²⁶.

The strong apology of Yazīd by Ibn al-‘Arabī could be understood as an enlargement of the line of defense to include the Successors (the second generation); in order to better guarantee the credibility of the Companions (the first generation). In Yazīd’s time, some Companions were alive and some of them were present and testified in the Damascene Court. It is a kind of *sadd al-dharā‘i‘*, the prevention of harm²⁷, in the Islamic juridical terminology.

One of the characteristics of this narrative is its expression of sadness and mourning for the dramatic end of al-Ḥusayn without quoting any details about Karbalā’s massacre like the Shiite narratives do. We find here a “murder”, not a “massacre”, of a single person, though principal and important, and not of a group of civil and innocent people including babies. A complete silence about the imprisonment of women from the Prophet’s Family, among them Zaynab, al-Ḥusayn’s sister and Muḥammad’s granddaughter, perhaps in order to minimize the impact of the tragedy.

The Andalusian Judge blamed al-Ḥusayn for his naivety and stubbornness because he did not learn from the experience of failure of his brother al-Ḥasan, nor did he listen to the counsels of the eldest Companions of his Grandfather. We find the same question of the political naivety of al-Ḥusayn in the second text, but Ibn al-‘Arabī went farther here defending Yazīd and his supporters who did, in his opinion, what they must do according to Sharī‘a in order to preserve unity and civil peace. Consequently, the only one to be blamed in this case is al-Ḥusayn. It is the extremist Sunni interpretation of the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn, which was strongly criticized by other Sunni scholars, as we will see in the second text.

Ibn al-‘Arabī’s approach is well situated in his historical and political context, the rivalry between the Andalusian Umayyads and the Shiite states on the other shore of the Mediterranean: the Idrissids (Zaydī Shiites) in the Maghreb then the Fatimids (Ismā‘īlī Shiites) firstly in the Maghreb and then in Egypt and the Mashrek. This

²⁴ Imam Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭahāwī, an Egyptian scholar, very close in his Creed to the Traditionist school *ahl al-ḥadīth*. He said in his Creed: “We do not accept any rebellion against our leaders [*a‘immatinā*] or the administrators of our public affairs [*wullāt umūrinā*], even if they are oppressive [unjust, *jārū*]... Ḥajj and jihād are perpetual obligations that are carried out under the administrators of our public affairs among the leaders of Muslim people – the just and the unjust of them [*i.e.* irrespective of their personal probity] – until the End of Time”. The Creed of Imam al-Ṭahāwī, *al-‘Aqīda al-ṭahāwīyya*, Tr. Hamza Yusuf, Zaytuna Institute, 2007, pp. 70–71. The translation is modified.

²⁵ See his main book: *The Ordinances of Government: al-Aḥkām al-sultāniyya w’al-wilāyāt al-dīniyya*, Tr. Wafaa Wahba, Garnet Publishing, 2000.

²⁶ Many editions, Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Zuhd*, Waḍ‘a ḥawāshīh Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Salām Shāhīn, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, Bayrūt 1420/1999, pp. 116–117 (khabar 761).

²⁷ Literally means “the blocking of the means or the pretexts”.

neo-Umayyadism is very clear in the thought of generations of Andalusian jurists and theologians like Ibn Ḥazm of Cordova (d. 456/1064)²⁸.

The most Sunnite of doctrinal aspects in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s text, and actually in the whole book, is the question of the integrity and the credibility, ‘*adāla*, of the Prophet’s Companions; we find the formula *kull al-Ṣaḥāba ‘udūl*, all the Companions are credible, in many Sunnite references²⁹. It is one of the main themes in Shiite–Sunnite polemics, in history and still today: the credibility of the Companions against the infallibility of the Imams and vice versa. The Shiites do not consider credible the Companions who fought against Imam Ali and his sons and were allied or had relationships with the Umayyads. So integrity and credibility are conditioned by the good relationship with the Imam of the time. The Imams (and their companions and disciples), in this case, are the unique guarantors of the transmission of the *true* religion. For this, they developed the doctrine of the Imams’ infallibility, ‘*iṣma*. In Sunnism, on the other hand, infallibility is attributed only to the Prophets, but we soon realize that the Companions’ credibility is practically a kind of infallibility; we cannot criticize them, any possible mistake is interpreted and justified. Sometimes, as in the case of Ibn al-‘Arabī, this judgment is extended to include the second generation of Islam, the Successors, *al-tābi‘ūn*, the companions of the Companions. It is rather a question of Sacred History, religion’s credibility and infallibility of faith’s transmission, as to say: we received our faith from them, so doubting them means doubting our faith, defending them is a matter of theological apology. So it is not a mere question of defending the Umayyads, Mu‘āwiya or Yazīd.

In this way, we could better understand the anti-Shiite attitude of the recent salafism, which literally means the veneration and the imitation of the model of the first generations of Islam, the *salaf*, the Predecessors. In this optic, Shī‘ism is the most dangerous heresy, which challenges the religion’s bases.

Another typically Sunni political–theological doctrine indicated implicitly in the text is *al-a‘imma min Quraysh*, the Imams, or the leaders, [must be] from [the tribe of] Quraysh, that means that they must be not only Arabs but Arabs from the Prophet’s tribe. However, this ethnic condition excludes totally and paradoxically the family of the Prophet. In the words of Ibn al-‘Arabī: “the Shaykhs of the Companions and notables of the Community recognized that it was a matter which God had taken away from the People of the House [*Ahl al-Bayt*]”.

b) Ibn Khaldūn

The second noteworthy Sunnite text is from Ibn Khaldūn³⁰, from *al-Muqaddima*, known also in English as the Prolegomena, the introductory volume of his History: *Kitāb al-‘ibar wa al-dīwān al-mubtada’ wa al-khabar fī ayyām al-‘arab wa al-‘ajam wa al-barbar wa man ‘āṣarahum min dhawī al-ṣultān al-akbar*³¹, known concisely as *Kitāb al-‘ibar*. This text is based on the English translation: Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah, an Introduction to History*, tr. Franz Rosenthal, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 2nd ed., 1967, vol. I, pp. 443–446, with some modifications and compared with the French translation: *Discours sur l’Histoire universelle, Al-Muqaddima*, tr. Vincent Monteil, Sindbad, 2^{ème} ed., 1968, t.1, pp. 428–431³².

In [the case of] al-Ḥusayn, when the majority of Yazīd’s contemporaries saw his wickedness (*fiṣq*), the Shī‘a in al-Kūfa invited al-Ḥusayn to come to them, saying that they would take his side. Al-Ḥusayn was of the opinion that a revolt against Yazīd was clearly indicated as a duty, because of his wickedness. (That duty, he felt,) was especially incumbent upon those who had the power to execute it. He felt that he had (that power) in view of his qualifications and strength. His qualifications were as good as he thought, and better. But, regrettably enough, he was mistaken with regard to his strength. The group feeling (‘*aṣabiyya*) of the Muḍar was in the Quraysh, that of the Quraysh in ‘Abd-Manāf, and that of ‘Abd-Manāf in the Umayyads. The Quraysh and all the others conceded this fact and were not ignorant of it. At the beginning of Islam, it had been forgotten. People were diverted by astonishing wonders and by the Revelation, and by frequent visitations of angels in aid of the Muslims. Thus, they had neglected

²⁸ See: Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal fī al-mīlāl wa al-ahwā’ wa al-nīḥāl*, Taḥqīq: Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Naṣr, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ‘Umayra, Dār al-Jīl, Bayrūt, 2nd ed., 1416/1996, vol. 4, pp. 233–244; vol. 5, pp. 35–50. See the interesting doctorate thesis of the Moroccan: Sālim Yafūt, *Ibn Ḥazm wa al-fīkr al-falsafī bi al-maghrib wa al-andalus*, al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-‘Arabī, al-Dār al-Bayḍā’, al-ṭab‘a al-ūlā, 1986.

²⁹ Al-Ṭaḥāwī said in his Creed: “We love the Companions of God’s Messenger. We are not, however, extreme in our love for any one of them [in the Arabic text, we find *nufarriṭ* and not *nofriṭ* as the translator understood, so the correct translation is: ‘We do not neglect the love of any one of them’]. Nor do we dissociate from any one of them. We loathe those who loathe them, and we only mention their merits. Loving them is religion, faith and spiritual excellence (*iḥsān*), and hating them is unbelief, hypocrisy and extremism”. *al-Aqīda al-ṭaḥāwīyya*, op. cit., pp. 76. The translation is corrected and modified.

³⁰ Abū Zayd ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Khaldūn al-Ḥaḍramī (d. 808/1406), born in Tunis and died in Cairo, considered a forerunner of sociology. See about him: Allen Fromherz, *Ibn Khaldun: Life and Times*, Edinburgh University Press, 2010. Fuad Baali, *The Science of Human Social Organization: Conflicting views on Ibn Khaldun’s (1332–1406) Ilm al-umran*, Mellen Studies in Sociology, Lewiston–New York, Edwin Mellen Press, 2005. Muhammad Mahmoud Rabi’, *The Political Theory of Ibn Khaldun*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967.

³¹ Several Arabic editions, for example: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, Bayrūt, 1983, vol. 1, pp. 382–385.

³² This text does not exist in the first Oriental version written in the beginning of Ibn Khaldūn’s residence in Egypt, see: Mbarek Redjala (ed.), *al-Muqaddima, première version orientale*, Aix–En–Provence 1981.

their customary affairs, and the group feeling and aspirations of pre-Islamic times had disappeared and were forgotten. Only the natural group feeling, serving the purpose of military protection and defense, had remained and was used to advantage in establishment of Islam and the fight against the polytheists. The religion became well established in (this situation). The customary course of affairs was inoperative, until prophecy and the terrifying wonders stopped. Then, the customary course of affairs resumed to some degree. Group feeling reverted to its former status and came back to those to whom it had formerly belonged. In consequence of their previous state of obedience, the Muḍar became more obedient to the Umayyads than the others.

Thus, al-Ḥusayn's error has become clear. It was, however, an error with respect to worldly matter, where an error does not do any harm. From the point of view of the religious law, he did not err, because here everything depended on what he thought, which was that he had the power to (revolt against Yazīd). Ibn 'Abbās, Ibn al-Zubayr, Ibn 'Umar, (al-Ḥusayn's) brother Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya, and others, criticized (al-Ḥusayn) because of his trip to al-Kūfa. They realized his mistake, but he did not desist from the enterprise he had begun, because God wanted it to be so.

The Companions [of the Prophet Muḥammad] other than al-Ḥusayn, in the Ḥijāz and with Yazīd in Syria and in the 'Irāq, and their followers, were of the opinion that a revolt against Yazīd, even though he was wicked, would not be permissible, because such a revolt would result in trouble and bloodshed. They refrained from it and did not follow al-Ḥusayn (in his opinion), but they also did not disapprove of him and did not consider him at fault. For he had independent judgment (*ijtihād*), being the model of all who ever had independent judgment. One should not fall into the error of declaring these people to be at fault because they opposed al-Ḥusayn and did not come to his aid. They constituted the majority or the Companions. They were with Yazīd, and they were of the opinion that they should not revolt against him. Al-Ḥusayn, fighting at Karbalā', asked them to attest to his excellence and the correctness of his position. He said: "Ask Jābir b. 'Abd Allāh, Abū Sa'īd (al-Khudrī), Anas b. Mālik, Sahl b. Sa'd, Zayd b. Arqam, and others". Thus, he did not disapprove of their not coming to his help. He did not interfere in this matter, because he knew that they were acting according to their own independent judgment. For his part, he also acted according to independent judgment.

Likewise, one should not fall into the error of declaring that his murder was justified because (it also) was the result of independent judgment, even if (one grants that) he (on his part) exercised (the correct) independent judgment. This, then, would be a situation comparable to that of Shāfi'ites and Mālikites applying their legal punishment for drinking date liquor (*nabīth*) to Ḥanafites. It should be known that the matter is not so. The independent judgment of those men did not involve fighting against al-Ḥusayn, even if it involved opposition to his revolt. Yazīd and the men around him were the only ones who (actually) fought against (al-Ḥusayn). It should not be said that if Yazīd was wicked and yet these [Companions] did not consider it permissible to revolt against him, his actions were in their opinion binding and right. It should be known that only those actions of the wicked are binding that are legal. The (authorities) consider it a condition of fighting evildoers that any such fighting be undertaken with a just ('*ādil*) imam. This does not apply to the question under consideration. Thus, it was not permissible to fight against al-Ḥusayn with Yazīd or on Yazīd's behalf. In matter of fact, (Yazīd's fight against al-Ḥusayn) was one of the actions that confirmed his wickedness. Al-Ḥusayn, therefore, was a martyr who will receive his reward. He was right, and he exercised independent judgment. The Companions who were with Yazīd were also right, and they exercised independent judgment. Judge Abū Bakr b. al-'Arabī al-Mālikī erred when he made the following statement in his book al-Qawāṣim wa-l-'Awāṣim: "al-Ḥusayn was killed according to the law of his grandfather [Muḥammad]." Ibn al-'Arabī fell into that error because he overlooked the condition of the "just ('*ādil*) imam" which governs the fighting against sectarians.

Ibn al-Zubayr felt about his revolt as al-Ḥusayn had (about his). He was under the same impression (as al-Ḥusayn regarding his qualifications). But his error with regard to his power was greater (than that of al-Ḥusayn). The Banū Asad cannot compete with the Umayyads in either pre-Islamic or Islamic times.

Ibn Khaldūn tried to analyze the question with a certain "scientific coolness", remaining coherent and faithful to his theory of history, considering "the group feeling", *al-ʿaṣabiyya*, the main if not the unique historical engine. Indeed, the assassination of al-Ḥusayn became new "proof" for the theory's veracity; al-Ḥusayn could not go against the "law" of history. The era of the Prophet, in this view, was only an exception; afterward the path of history returned to its normal track. The error of al-Ḥusayn lies in not taking account of this epochal change, this return to normality after a brief exception, so the death of al-Ḥusayn could be represented somehow as the "revenge" of history. What moves history, according to Ibn Khaldūn, is an irrational and subconscious feeling, namely the *al-ʿaṣabiyya*, and not the prophetic ideals, they must obey the "logic" of history too, they are under a super-law discovered by Ibn Khaldūn.

In this way Ibn Khaldūn attempted to respond to a historical scandal: how can one explain that three decades after the Prophet's death, the sons of Abū Sufyān, his enemy number one, have seized power by killing members of the Prophet's Family?! Ibn Khaldūn says that everything was normal, even "natural", it was a return to normality after an extraordinary period, and those who defied this "law" paid with their blood, including al-Ḥusayn, the grandson of the Prophet. The naturalness of this matter is understood as a "divine law", a *sunna*, God's way to move history. It is true that Ibn Khaldūn denies that al-Ḥusayn violated the moral norms or Sharī'a, in the sense that he had no moral sin, but without knowing he "broke" a "law" of God in History.

In this framework, we can understand the criticism of Ibn Khaldūn to Ibn al-'Arabī, the first preferred to transfer the question from the moral realm to the natural realm, in religious terms, from the moral will of God to His Cosmic will. In this way, Ibn Khaldūn saved two important things: his historical theory and the honor of al-Ḥusayn. Indeed, with Ibn Khaldūn, we see that from a Sunni point of view, it is not necessary to justify the acts of Yazīd because he was not a Companion, so he was totally outside the fundamental and the foundational circle of Islamic mission and religious transmission. It is unjust also, according to Ibn Khaldūn, to put the attitudes of al-Ḥusayn and Yazīd on the same level as two *ijtihād* or two moral and legitimate opinions, as if the only difference

between the two attitudes is rather a technical mistake (for al-Ḥusayn) with good intentions (for both of them). This historical evaluation empties the concept of *ijtihād* from its meaning, so it could mean anything, including contradictory choices and criminal acts against civilians and innocent people. Nonetheless, Yazīd's immorality and al-Ḥusayn's correctness, the rules of success and defeat were beyond moral and Sharī'a, they simply are the a-moral, or rather ethically neutral laws.

Modern Views

In Modern times, Ibn al-‘Arabī's hardline is still alive. As mentioned above, Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb (1886–1969) in his comment on al-‘Awāṣim, Ibn al-‘Arabī's book, continued to defend Yazīd with new arguments³³. He wrote a concise anti-Shiite pamphlet with a very long and eloquent title: *Al-Khuṭūṭ al-‘arīḍa lil-usus allatī qāma ‘alayhā dīn al-shī‘a al-imāmiyya al-ithnay ‘ashariyya wa istihālat al-taqrīb baynahum wa bayna uṣūl al-islām ft jamī‘ madhāhibih wa firaqih* [The outlines of the foundations upon which the religion of Twelver Imami Shiites is based, and the impossibility of rapprochement between them and the origins of Islam in all its schools and the denominations]. The book is well known as *al-Khuṭūṭ al-‘arīḍa* [the Outlines or the Guidelines]³⁴.

As we note in the title, Twelver Shiism is considered a totally “other religion”, with which it is impossible to establish a dialogue or attempt reconciliation.

Another famous author from the same radical line is the Pakistani Ehsan Ilahi Zaheer [Iḥṣān Ilāhī Zahūr], who wrote several polemical books and pamphlets against the Shiites, initially in Urdu or Arabic, published by Idāra Turjumān al-Sunna, then translated into English and other languages. For instance: *al-Shī‘a wa al-tashayyu‘ firaq wa tārikh*, first edition in Lahore 1984³⁵. The English translation: *Shia's and Shiaism [sic.], their Genesis and Evolution*³⁶. In these writings, we find a recurrent use of the legend of ‘Abd Allāh b. Saba’ and the Saba’iyya³⁷ as a Jewish origin of Shiism and a conspiracy against the true Sunnite Islam.

On the other hand, there are attempts at moderation to consider, like:

‘Abbās Maḥmūd al-‘Aqqād (1889–1964), *al-Ḥusayn abū al-shuhadā’* (al-Ḥusayn, the Martyrs’ Father), in: al-‘Aqqād’s Complete Oeuvre (al-A‘māl al-Kāmila), the second volume al-‘Abqariyyāt al-islāmiyya (the Islamic Geniuses), dedicated to the Prophet’s Family: ‘Abqariyyat al-Imām ‘Aliyy (the Genius of Imam Ali) and Fāṭima al-Zahrā’ wa al-Faṭimiyyūn (Fāṭima al-Zahrā’ and the Fatimids), Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, Bayrūt, (1st ed.) 1974, pp. 157–288. The first separate edition of al-Ḥusayn was in 1945.

Ṭaha Ḥusayn (1889–1973), *al-Fitna al-kubrā* (the Great Sedition), (vol. 2), *‘Alī wa banūh* (Ali and His Children), Dār al-Ma‘ārif, al-Qāhira, (1st ed. 1947). The first volume was entitled: *‘Uthmān*.

Ṭaha Ḥusayn in his description of the tragedy of Karbalā’, tried to keep his academic distance and historian neutrality, but we can read his compassion for al-Ḥusayn between the lines³⁸. But among the two Egyptian authors, al-‘Aqqād was more explicit in his Ḥusayni passion and compassion, he presented al-Ḥusayn as a message to the human conscience, confirming that “no survival for humanity without martyrdom”, and that “the major problem of life has not changed since a thousand and three hundred years, was still the arduous war among the servants of themselves and the servants beliefs and ideals”³⁹. It is a very similar discourse to the later revolutionary interpretation of al-Ḥusayn’s martyrdom among Shiites, especially in the writings of ‘Alī Sharī‘atī (1933–1977).

³³ See: *al-‘Awāṣim*, op. cit., footnote, pp. 227–228.

³⁴ Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb or Muḥibb-ud-Deen al-Khatib, born in Damascus and died in Cairo. He was radically against the attempts of dialogue and rapprochement, *taqrīb*, between Sunnites and Shiites. In 1947 a Iranian Shiite scholar Muḥammad al-Qummī founded Dār al-Taqrīb in Cairo and the magazine *Risālat al-Islām*, in this context, al-Khaṭīb wrote his book *al-Khuṭūṭ al-‘Arīḍa*, calling Dār al-Taqrīb (the House of the Rapprochement) Dār al-Takhrīb (the House of Destruction). An English translation of *al-Khuṭūṭ al-‘Arīḍa*: Muḥibb-ud-Deen al-Khatib, *al-Khutoot al-‘Areedah, An Exposition and Refutation of the Sources Upon Which the Shiite Religion is Based*, tr. Mahmoud Murad, revised and edited with an introduction by Abu Bilal Mustafa Al Kanadi [*i.e.* the Canadian!], published by www.calltoislam.com, the website of Masjid al-Ghurabaa’, Luton (UK). See also: http://realitymediapk.com/books/Al-Khutoot_Al-Areedah.pdf

³⁵ Ehsan Ilahi Zaheer, leader of the Ahl-e Hadeeth Islamic Movement, salafī (wahhabi), known for his extremist and polemical writings against Shiites, Sufis, Aḥmadiyya (Qādyāniyya) ... he was born on 31 May 1945 in Sialkot, Pakistan and died from an assassin’s bomb blast on 30 March 1987 in Lahore. Zaheer initially survived the blast, and then transferred for further medical treatment in Riyadh where he died. His funeral was considered one of “the most historical” funerals ever celebrated in the Saudi capital, guided by Abd-al-Aziz Ibn Baaz, his ex-professor at the Islamic University of Medina. General Zia ul-Haq, the Pakistani President in that time, was also present, Zaheer was his special religious councilor for a while. His body was buried in the Baqī’ graveyard in Medina. It was a very special honor for a Salafī leader.

³⁶ See: <http://www.kr-hcy.com/shia/books/ehsanzaheer/index.shtml>

³⁷ For a critical study about the legend of Ibn Saba’, see: Ibrāhīm Bayḍūn, *‘Abd Allāh Ibn Saba’*, *ishkāliyyat al-naṣh wa al-dawr wa al-uṣṭūra*, Dār al-Mu‘arrikh al-‘Arabī, Bayrūt, al-ṭab‘a al-ūlā 1417/1997.

³⁸ *al-Fitna al-kubrā*, op. cit., vol.2, pp. 239–242.

³⁹ Al-‘Aqqād, *al-Ḥusayn*, op. cit., pp. 159–160.

The third important Sunnite contribution in this field is:

Abū al-A‘lā al-Mawdūdī (1903–1979), *al-Khilāfa wa al-mulk* (Caliphate and Kingdom), ta‘rīb (Arabic translation) Aḥmad Idrīs, Dār al-Qalam, al-Kuwayt, al-ṭab‘a al-ūlā (1st ed.) 1398/1978.

The opinions of Syed (Sayyid) Abū al-A‘lā al-Mawdūdī (Maududī, Maudoodi and Modudi), known as Molana (Maulana), the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami in 1941, the oldest religious party in Pakistan⁴⁰, are important in his geographical context in particular and for the Sunni Islamist Movements in general. The aim of his book is demonstrate how Muslims passed from the Well-Guided Caliphate based on the Qur’ānic principles, consultation (*shūrā*) and people’s choice to a hereditary and despotic kingdom. The assassination of al-Ḥusayn was a decisive step in this dramatic metamorphosis. The judgment of Mawdūdī was clear and severe:

If we look at what happened from Karbalā’s battlefield to Kūfa and Damascus [Royal] Courts, we will find that every fragment and detail was absolutely forbidden and that was a terrible injustice beyond any other injustice⁴¹.

If Yazīd had a minimum of humanity and nobility, he would remember how the Messenger – peace be upon him – treated kindly his family after the conquest of Mecca, and how his government treated the Family of the Messenger of God⁴².

These incidents indicated clearly that these rulers were paying attention to their power and its survival and continuity, preferring its protection and preservation to everything else. For that, they did not hesitate to infringe any limit, to sacrifice any law and violate any sanctity even if it was the greatest and the most impregnable⁴³.

At the end of the book, there is a long appendix entitled “the Objections to this Book”⁴⁴. The author mentions that after the publication of some chapters in his periodical “Turjumān al-Qur’ān”, he received letters of objection from the readers, then some people wrote “violent” articles in different newspapers and magazines, some of them even wrote books of refutation. That means that the book had touched sensitive points for the Pakistani Sunni public opinion, mainly the question of the image and the credibility of the Prophet’s Companions. To answer, Mawdūdī had to confirm his faith in the same “doctrine of the majority of the traditionists, jurists and the Umma’s scholars”⁴⁵ that all the Companions are credible and that “the doubt in their credibility – even for an atom – conduces to the doubt in the [Islamic] religion itself”⁴⁶. Nevertheless, this credibility, in Mawdūdī’s opinion, is limited only to the transmission of the Prophet’s Heritage, the Qur’ān and the Sunna (Ḥadīth), but this did not prevent single Ṣaḥābīs from committing mistakes which does not diminish their position.

This limited or partial – and not absolute – credibility could be a wise and moderate solution in Sunni traditional milieus, but it does not resolve radically the problem, on the contrary, it added a new moral problem: the separation between a “private” moral limited to the religious transmission and mission and public or common moral. How can we distinguish really between the two realms?

With Mawdūdī’s opinion, expressed before the Iranian revolution in 1979, we come back to the core of the Sunnite–Shiite dilemma that goes beyond a question of political and/or religious succession after the Prophet Muḥammad’s death. It is rather a question of “Sacred History”, how to evaluate morally the first generation of Islam from whom we received our religion, especially after great scandals and internal wars. The assassination of al-Ḥusayn remains a striking and emblematic sign in this bloody history.

A third way is theoretically possible: to overcome the question of the Companions’ credibility and the Imams’ infallibility, to re-think radically the question of *‘adāla* and *‘iṣma*, to “desacralize” history and to “humanize” our models of imitation. In other terms, we could practice radical and historical criticism on our “common” heritage, with all its contradictions and scandals. At this point, being Muslim could exceed being Shiite or Sunnite.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article analyse les points de vue sunnites sur ‘Āshūrā’ et l’assassinat / le martyre d’al-Ḥusayn, le petit-fils du Prophète Muḥammad. Ce n’est pas un travail exhaustif, mais plutôt sélectif. Il recherche des exemples pertinents pour démontrer la diversité des opinions parmi les musulmans sunnites dans le passé et aujourd’hui, à la charnière des frontières mouvantes entre les deux communautés. Les trois principaux textes analysés sont d’Abū Bakr Ibn al-‘Arabī (m. 1148), Ibn Khaldūn (m. 1406) et Mawdūdī (m. 1979). Une variété d’opinions qui vacille entre la compassion avec la tragédie d’al-Ḥusayn à une position plus ou moins prudente. Le noyau de la question est

⁴⁰ Jamaat-e-Islami was founded in Lahore before the separation between India and Pakistan.

⁴¹ al-Mawdūdī, *al-Khilāfa wa al-mulk*, op. cit., p. 118.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 203–239.

⁴⁵ ‘Aqīdat ‘āmmat al-muḥaddithīn wa al-fuqahā’ wa ‘ulamā’ al-umma. *Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

l'évaluation morale des premières générations de l'islam, dont les musulmans ont reçu le Message. La crédibilité des Compagnons du Prophète reste une doctrine essentielle pour la mentalité sunnite, le scandale de Karbalā' n'était pas son unique défi, mais peut-être le plus éloquent.