

The Theme of Blood in Adab al-Maqātil (Shi'ite¹ Literature on the Killing of Ḥusayn b. 'Alī)

KHALID SINDAWI

Al-Qasimi Academic College, Baqa El-Gharbia

ABSTRACT: This article explores the theme of blood in Shi'ite literature dealing with the killing of Ḥusayn b. 'Alī (referred to hereinafter as adab al-maqātil). The article begins with a historical introduction to the Battle of Karbala, including its causes and outcomes. Of its outcomes, the most historically impactful was the death of Ḥusayn b. 'Alī and his companions, an event which went on to figure prominently in the development of Shi'ite literature and its use of religious images and symbols. The research makes clear that the theme of blood in adab al-maqātil is of central importance, suggesting that the purposes behind its ubiquitous recurrence are to evoke an emotional response among the Shi'ite sect's adherents, to point to the symbolism of blood as an element of redemption and sacrifice, and to emphasise that the blood shed by Ḥusayn b. 'Alī resulted in a martyrdom that offers life to generations to come.

KEYWORDS: Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, blood, sacrifice, redemption, Karbala, martyrdom, adab al-maqātil, Twelver Shi'ite, Imami Shi'ite, Islamic ritual.

General introduction

In the second century AH, following the tragic slaying of Ḥusayn b. 'Alī in the Battle of Karbala in 61 AH/680 CE at the hands of the Umayyads, Shi'ite authors began chronicling the event of Ḥusayn's death in works which later became known as adab al-maqātil (literally, the literature of slayings). Despite the passage of over 1,300 years since Ḥusayn's death, the literature chronicling his death continues to be written to this day at the behest of Shi'ite imams in order to keep the event present and alive in Shi'ites' hearts and minds.² The Shi'ites have hundreds of writings on this subject in Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, Pashto, Turkish, Albanian and other languages of the world.

The killing of Ḥusayn b. 'Alī at Karbala

Ḥusayn b. 'Alī was the third Imam after his father 'Alī and his brother Ḥasan, and by virtue of his position as imam, he soon found himself at loggerheads with Umayyad rule. When Mu'āwiya b. Abū Sufyān appointed his son Yazīd as his successor, Ḥusayn refused to pledge allegiance to him despite the many pressures to which he was subjected. Thus, when Yazīd assumed the caliphate in 60 AH/680 CE, he resolved to extract pledges of allegiance by force from those of the nation's leaders who had not pledged allegiance to him. In response to an accumulation of factors, Ḥusayn decided to leave the Hijāz for Kufa in southern Iraq, where he gave leadership to those who were hostile to the Umayyads. He also led a massive revolution which had two main goals: to restore the caliphate to the family of the Prophet, and to organise governance in accordance with the law of the new religion.

The Umayyads had been tracking Ḥusayn's movements in order to abort any rebellion against them, and 'Ubayd Allāh b. Ziyād, Governor of Kufa (d. 67 AH/ 686 CE), took swift and decisive measures to eliminate any such movement. 'Ubayd Allāh b. Ziyād then killed Muslim b. 'Aqīl (d. 61 AH/ 680 CE), Ḥusayn's messenger to the

people of Kufa, and punished those who cooperated with him while enticing many away from allegiance to Ḥusayn with offers of money. In this way, ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Ziyād radically altered the promising circumstances on which Ḥusayn had been counting when he decided to leave for Kufa into a scenario rife with evil portents.

As Ḥusayn approached Kufa, he learned that Muslim b. ‘Aqīl had been killed, and that although the hearts of the people of Kufa were with him, their swords would be turned against him. Unable to return to the Hijaz, Ḥusayn kept going, and on 10 Muḥarram, 61 AH, he and his company were confronted by ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Ziyād’s army, which lured them to a location outside the city. The ensuing unequal battle, which took place at a spot known as Karbala, resulted in the deaths of Ḥusayn and a number of those who were with him. The dead were buried there in Karbala, which quickly became a holy site.

The slaying of Ḥusayn on the Day of ‘Āshūrā in 61 AH/680 CE at the hands of the Umayyads had a major impact on the Shi‘ites’ development as a political and religious party. In view of the tragic circumstances surrounding his death, his determination to cling to his principled stances, and the courage with which he faced his enemies, Ḥusayn came to be viewed as the martyr for faith par excellence. Similarly, Ḥusayn’s killing profoundly influenced the development of Shi‘ite literature and culture, as elegies to him and descriptions of his death in poetry and prose, commemorative celebrations in his honour, books about his death, and dramatic enactments of his killing and the cruelty to which he and his followers were subjected have all become well-established elements of the Shi‘ite heritage in Arabic, Persian or other languages.³

Over time, the figure of Ḥusayn took on a new dimension that elevated him to a super-human level. No longer was his death merely the result of certain historical events. Rather, it was a destiny which God had foreordained for him. The Prophet was informed of this by the angel Gabriel, after which Fāṭima and ‘Alī learned of it from the Prophet, as did Ḥusayn himself long before his death. If the event was preordained, then there was no way to change it. And if torment was a means of purification, then the cup must be drunk to the dregs in order to attain immortality. On this basis, Ḥusayn became the chief of the martyrs: he had known his destiny and had faced it with valour despite the grief and anguish it entailed.⁴

The story of the slaying of Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī as a literary genre⁵

After Ḥusayn’s death, Shi‘ite authors began writing the story of his slaying, and these accounts became a literary genre known as *adab al-maqātil*. The first individual to compose such a report was al-Aṣḥab b. Nubāta al-Mujāshi‘ī, and such accounts, of which there are scores and even hundreds, continue to be written to this day with the encouragement of Shi‘ite imams.⁶ Although *adab al-maqātil* was originally written in Arabic, it also began appearing in other languages such as Persian, Urdu, Pashto, Turkish, Albanian, and Azeri, and has been translated into languages such as English, French, and other languages of the world. The best known of these include:

- *Kitāb waq‘at al-Ṭaff, al-ma‘rūf bi Maqṭal Abī Mikhnaf Lūt b. Yaḥyā al-Azdī* [The Book of the Battle of Karbala, known as the Maqṭal of Abī Mikhnaf Lūt b. Yaḥyā al-Azdī (d. 170AH/787 CE)], the oldest extant work chronicling the events of the Battle of Karbala.
- *Al-Lahūf ‘alā qatl al-ṭufūf* [Those in anguish over those slain at Karbala] by Ibn Ṭāwūs Raḍī al-Dīn ‘Alī b. Mūsā (d. 664 AH/ 1266 CE).
- *Maqṭal Ḥusayn aw Qiṣṣat Karbalā* [The killing of Ḥusayn, or the story of Karbala] by al-Sayyid ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Muqarram al-Mūsawī (d. 1971 CE).

Research Questions

I will attempt in what follows to answer the two following questions. First: How is the topic of blood manifested in the story of the killing of Ḥusayn b. 'Alī in *adab al-maqātil*? Second: What are the symbolic significations of blood in *adab al-maqātil*?

Research methodology

This study relies on the descriptive-analytical approach, whereby it identifies the terms used for blood in *adab al-maqātil* and discusses what they meant to Shi'ite authors writing about the killing of Ḥusayn b. 'Alī.

Principle sources consulted

The current study relies on several Shi'ite works, most notably:

Maqtal Ḥusayn, attributed to Abī Mikhnaḥ (Lūṭ b. Yaḥyā al-Azdī) (d. 157 AH/787 CE)

Kāmil al-ziyārāt by Ibn Qūlawayh Ja'far b. Muḥammad (d. 368 AH/978 CE)

Al-Lahūf (or al-Malhūf) 'alā qatlā al-ṭufūf by Ibn Ṭāwūs Raḍī al-Dīn 'Alī b. Mūsā (d. 664 AH/1266 CE)

Maqtal al-Ḥusayn by al-Muwaffaq b. Aḥmad al-Makkī Akḥṭab Khawārizm (d. 568 AH/1172 CE).

Numerous other Shi'ite sources, such as Biḥār al-anwār by Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1699 CE), and others.

Blood in *Adab al-Maqātil*

Fresh blood

We have accounts of wondrous signs which appeared on earth and in the heavens after the slaying of Imam Ḥusayn in the afternoon of the tenth day of Muḥarram, some of which lasted for a period of time. One of these signs was that of fresh blood. We read in the accounts that have come down to us that whenever they lifted a stone or a clod of earth in Jerusalem, they found fresh blood beneath it.⁷ In addition, the sky rained blood for three days.⁸ The raining of blood from the sky, in addition to the emanation of blood from the rocks, were expressions of the earth's and sky's lament over Ḥusayn's martyrdom. Abū Sa'īd is reported to have said, "No stone was lifted anywhere but that fresh blood was found beneath it. Moreover, the sky rained blood, traces of which remained on clothing for a period of time before fading." Umm Salama is said to have seen the Prophet in a dream in which he said to her, "Look inside the flask of soil in your house. When the soil turns to fresh blood, know that Ḥusayn has been killed."⁹

Weeping blood

In addition to the redness of the twilight and the presence of fresh blood under rocks and boulders in the Levant region, *adab al-maqātil* mentions other abnormal and supernatural events that occurred after the killing of Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, one of which was that the sky rained blood.¹⁰ Imam al-Ṣādiq is reported to have said, "The sky wept blood over Ḥusayn for forty days." And Umm Sulaym declared, "When Ḥusayn, peace be upon him, was killed, the sky poured down blood-like rain that turned the houses and the walls red."

The sky weeps for those who benefit others, foremost among them being prophets, scholars and the God-fearing, since they bequeath useful knowledge to others. Thus, the sky weeps for people of greatness and importance such as Ḥusayn b. 'Alī. The association of blood with tears further deepens its symbolic significance.

We read in *adab al-maqātil* that the killing of Ḥusayn b. 'Alī was followed by bizarre, supernatural phenomena. The Earth quaked; the mountains nearly collapsed;

the sky grew dark; there were eclipses of the sun and the moon; stars appeared in the daylight hours; and the sky rained down blood. After pulling out an arrow that had penetrated his chest, Ḥusayn collected his blood and the blood of his infant son ‘Abd Allāh in his palms and cast it into the sky. Soon thereafter, the sky began raining blood, whereupon not a stone nor a clod of dirt was turned but that fresh blood was found beneath it. The blood that rained down covered entire cities and rural areas, as though the angels were weeping blood.¹¹

The writers of *adab al-maqātil* explain this by saying that the angels had known in advance of Ḥusayn’s slaying, and that their failure to participate in the battle on his behalf caused them such grievous distress that they wept blood over what had befallen him. In his commentary on Kor 44, 29, which reads, “And the heaven and the earth wept not for them, nor were they reprieved,”¹² Ibn Kathīr tells us that the sky wept blood and took on a red hue for forty days when Yaḥyā b. Zakariyyā was slain.¹³ It seems that the Shi‘ite writers’ aim in drawing a parallel between the deaths of Yaḥyā b. Zakariyyā and Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī was to elevate Ḥusayn to the level of the Prophet Yaḥyā b. Zakariyyā.¹⁴ For the Twelver Shi‘ites, the imams rank as highly as the prophets and messengers, sharing numerous commonalities with them. Thus, when they are killed, the heavens weep over them and rain down blood.¹⁵

Accordingly, so great was the calamity unleashed by the slaying of the grandson of the Prophet, Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī, that God’s wrath was poured out through nature, whereupon the heavens wept blood, fresh blood appeared beneath the stones in Jerusalem, and the horizon turned crimson.

The flask of soil that turned to blood

Blood also serves as a prediction of the fate that awaits Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī. The Prophet declares, “Ḥusayn’s blood will be shed in the sacred month of Muḥarram.”¹⁶ Similarly, blood becomes a sign by which Ḥusayn’s family can know whether the fate allotted to him has befallen him, in that the transformation of dirt into blood will mean that he has been slain.¹⁷ In an account narrated by the wife of the Prophet, Umm Salama (Hind bint Suhail, d. 61 AH/680 CE), she said, “I saw the Messenger of God stroking Ḥusayn’s head and weeping. ‘Why do you weep?’ I asked. He replied, ‘Gabriel has told me that this son of mine will be killed in a land called Karbala.’ Then he gave me a handful of red soil and said, ‘This is from the land where he will be killed, so when it turns into blood, know that this has come to pass.’”¹⁸

Narratives such as this point to a deeply symbolic connection between soil and blood. According to some beliefs, life was given to human beings by mingling Divine blood with soil. It is also believed that blood is the source of fertility and life, and for this reason, “blood is considered the most precious thing in the human body. It is blood that can truly be called the elixir of life, because through it a person is nourished and renewed, and without it one cannot live. Thus, it is the essence of life.”¹⁹ In addition to the aforementioned functions, blood serves as the transmitter of life. Thus, it is sometimes referred to as “a soul, because when it exits the body, so does the soul. It is here that we see the double meaning of this precious liquid: if it is hidden, it is the basis of life, and if it is poured out, it means death.”²⁰

Some hold that the transformation of soil into blood suggests a new creation or cosmic transformation, as when Adam was created from clay and then turned into flesh and blood, heralding the beginning of creation. The transformation of soil into the blood of Ḥusayn, although it was associated with death, also suggested a new beginning for humanity, placing them at a crossroads, where they would become either angels or demons. Ḥusayn represents the centre of the universe and the secret of existence, and

those who joined his cause were with him as the angels had been with Adam. As for Yazīd, he was the demon who refused to obey the master. This time, however, Satan was unable to expel God's vicegerent from his paradise, and to this very day, throngs of devoted worshipers prostrate before God on that sacred soil, the soil which was once transformed from a solid to a liquid. For blood is a liquid that flows and, in so doing, suggests constant movement infused with warmth. For when Ḥusayn's heart stopped beating, the heart of humanity began throbbing with the pulse of Islam. Moreover, Ḥusayn won not only life, but immortality, after having wrestled with Satan and death.²¹ It is also said that upon Ḥusayn's death, a palm tree beat the ground with its branches, shuddering as though blood were flowing through its veins.²²

The miracle of a handwriting a verse of poetry in blood

We are told in *adab al-maqātil* that after Ḥusayn b. 'Alī was killed, his head was sent to the caliph Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya in Damascus. On their way, the bearers of Ḥusayn's head came to some water, where they began drinking, delighted with the head in their possession. Then out of the wall came a disembodied hand holding an iron pen, and wrote the following line of poetry in blood:

Can a nation that has killed Ḥusayn hope to enjoy
his grandfather's intercession on the Day of Judgment?²³

This account presents us with a cosmic miracle in which a bodiless hand wielding an iron pen writes a verse of poetry in blood on a wall in which it addresses those in possession of Ḥusayn's head, saying, "How can you hope to receive intercession from the Prophet on the Day of Resurrection when you have killed his grandson Ḥusayn?" The blood reminds them that they are murderers who unjustly took Ḥusayn's life, and who should not expect mercy from the Prophet on the Day of Resurrection.

Use of the element of blood here achieves symbolic purposes, the most important of which is to communicate that immortality and ongoing action in the world are possible despite physical death and the incapacity it appears to bring.

The coupling of Ḥusayn's blood with the heavenly light

Numerous accounts describe Ḥusayn's face after his beheading as "radiating light, even though it was spattered with his blood."²⁴ In a statement filled with symbolic significance, al-Ṭabarī wrote, "Parched with thirst, Ḥusayn approached the water to drink, whereupon Ḥusayn b. Tamīm shot him with an arrow, which struck him in the mouth. Thus, he began collecting the blood from his mouth and casting it heavenward. Then, praising God, he joined his hands and cried, 'O God, count them one by one and slay them to the last man, leaving not one of them on earth!'"²⁵

The symbolic significance of blood is intensified here by its association with the luminous heavenly element. This association is present in certain ancient beliefs, according to which blood will not soak into the ground. The Caliph 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb is reported to have addressed Abū Maryam al-Ḥanafī, who had killed 'Umar's brother in the battle of al-Yamāma, saying, "I loathe you more than the earth loathes blood,"²⁶ in an allusion to this belief.²⁷

The red twilight and the reddening of the horizon

Works of *adab al-maqātil* mention that when Ḥusayn was slain, the horizon turned red in grief over his death.²⁸ It appears that this redness was the evening twilight which is seen at sunset due to the refraction of sunlight in the upper layer of the earth's

atmosphere.²⁹ According to Ibn Sa‘d, this redness is a well-known natural phenomenon which had nothing to do with the killing of Ḥusayn.³⁰ To this, researcher Hikmat al-Rahma responds that Ibn Sa‘d was a sectarian extremist, asking how, if this account is false, it could have been transmitted by fourteen narrators with reliable chains of transmission?³¹ The authors of *adab al-maqātil* have interpreted the well-known redness of the twilight in a manner that corresponds to their purpose, which is to portray it as the heavens weeping over Ḥusayn so as to stir up people’s emotions when they read this report. In other words, the writers of *maqātil* are saying here that the exceptional phenomena occurred after Ḥusayn’s death, including the redness of the sky and the horizon, were a reflection of Ḥusayn’s blood.³²

Some sources mention that the redness of the sky lasted for an entire year.³³ In this context, it was narrated on the authority of ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abbās (d. 68 AH/ 687 CE) that the redness of the twilight appeared only after Ḥusayn’s death: “The day Ḥusayn, peace be upon him, was killed, the sky rained blood. This redness in the sky appeared on the day he was killed and had not been seen before.”³⁴ It is as though the red twilight was caused by Ḥusayn’s blood. Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him, said, “When my grandfather Ḥusayn, peace be upon him, was killed, the sky rained blood and red dust.”³⁵ Similarly, Muḥammad b. Sīrīn reported that this redness was seen after the killing of Ḥusayn. The redness that appeared in the sky was one of a number of remarkable signs which were reported to have been seen after the battle of Karbala and the slaying of Imam Ḥusayn. Imam al-Bāqir (d. 114 AH/732 CE), likewise stated, “The sky turned red when Yaḥyā and Imam Ḥusayn, peace be upon him, were killed.”³⁶

This association between the sky and the blood of Ḥusayn may be viewed as a reflection of cosmic wrath, echoes of which we find among peoples who believe that fire originated on earth when a sacred tree died, scattering its blood as it began to fall, and the blood that spilled on the ground was the first manifestation of fire.³⁷ The connection between blood and light is present in universal beliefs, wherein blood symbolises values surrounding fire, heat and life, all of which are related to the sun. The significance of blood is integrated with the significance of light, as blood symbolises vital bodily heat, and is complemented by light, which symbolises soul and spirit.³⁸

Shedding the blood of Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī’s murderers in this world

Maqātil writings speak of various types of punishments and torments that will be suffered by Ḥusayn’s murderers in this world and the next. In this world, some will be afflicted with diseases, disabilities and madness; their coins will turn to earthenware; some will die of thirst, and others be transmuted into freaks and monsters. And in the world to come, they will be tormented in the *barzakh*, that is, the realm between this world and the next; and at the end of time, when the *Mahdī* appears, he himself will exact revenge on Ḥusayn’s murderers with the help of ‘Alī and Fāṭima.³⁹

The blood of Ḥusayn and his companions in dreams

Works dealing with revenge for the killing of Ḥusayn often feature dreams, two of which mention the blood of Ḥusayn.

The first dream: ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abbās b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, the Prophet’s paternal cousin (d. 68 AH/ 687 CE), had a dream in Medina in which he saw the Prophet at midday, his hair dishevelled and dusty, his face covered with dirt, and in his hands a flask of blood. When Ibn ‘Abbās asked him about the flask of blood, the Prophet replied, “This is the blood of Ḥusayn, which I have been gathering since that day.”

When Ibn 'Abbas awoke from the dream, he calculated the day Ḥusayn had left the Hijaz for Kufa, and it became clear to him this was the day on which Ḥusayn had been slain.⁴⁰

In this brief but vivid dream, the Prophet appears and tells the story of the flask of Ḥusayn's blood. (Whoever sees the Prophet in a dream is said to have actually seen him.⁴¹) In this dream, the Prophet demonstrates prior knowledge of the place and time of his grandson Ḥusayn's death. Thus, he collected Ḥusayn's immaculate blood in a flask years before his death in order to protect it from being contaminated with dirt. In this dream, we see how precious Ḥusayn's blood was. And how could it have been otherwise? Shi'ites believe that the angel Gabriel descended with Ḥusayn's blood prior to his death and that when Ḥusayn was killed, he flung the blood into the sky, where it settled.⁴²

The second dream: 'Abd 'Allāh Ibn Rabāḥ al-Qaṣībī spoke of seeing a man who had witnessed the killing of Ḥusayn, but who had since lost his sight. People would come to him and ask him why he had gone blind, to which he replied, "I was among the ten who took part in killing Ḥusayn, even though I neither struck him, nor stabbed him, nor shot him with an arrow. After Ḥusayn had been killed, I went home and prayed the final evening prayer. Then I went to sleep and dreamed that I saw a man coming towards me and saying, 'Answer the Messenger of God! He is calling you!' So, I went and saw the Prophet sitting in the desert, his arms bare. He held a spear in one hand, and in both hands, a leather mat [of the type once used in executions]. Beside him stood an angel holding a sword of fire and killing my companions. Whenever he struck one of them, his soul would burst into flames. So, I approached the Prophet and knelt before him, saying, 'Peace be upon you, O Messenger of God!' He made no reply, and stood there with his head bowed for a long time. At last, he looked up and said, 'O 'Abd Allāh! You have violated my sanctity, killed a member of my family, and failed to respect my rights by what you did.' I said to him, 'O Messenger of God! By God, I did not strike with a sword, nor stab with a spear, nor shoot with a bow.' He said: "You are right, but you increased the blackness. Come here.' So, I approached him, and I saw a basin filled with blood. He said, 'This is the blood of my son Ḥusayn.' He then applied it to my eyes, and when I woke up, I could not see. Nor have I seen anything since that moment."⁴³

In this dream, we see that the blood of Ḥusayn has the miraculous power to blind those who took part in his murder. Thus, the Prophet punishes this man by applying Ḥusayn's blood to his eyes, thereby striking him with blindness both in the dream and in reality, the reason being that he had witnessed the killing of Ḥusayn with his own eyes without doing anything to prevent it. We also see that the Prophet had personally gone to Karbala and collected his grandson's blood in a basin, then used it to take revenge on those who had participated in his murder by applying the blood to their eyes. The murderers would then waken from sleep only to find themselves blinded.

Ḥusayn's blood punishes his murderers

When Ḥusayn's severed head was brought from Karbala to 'Ubayd Allāh b. Ziyād, Governor of Kufa, a drop of blood fell from Ḥusayn's head onto 'Ubayd Allāh's thigh, causing it to ulcerate and rot, after which he met his end fighting against the army of al-Mukhtār b. Abī 'Ubayd.⁴⁴ Ḥusayn's blood is seen here to have the power to punish those who killed him.

Blood is associated with other elements which further deepen its symbolic significance. One such element is that of water, which appears either directly as water,

or in the form of tears. For example, al-Isfarāyīnī writes about Muslim b. ‘Aqīl, who, after being captured by ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Ziyād, Governor of Kufa, is wounded in the face by the governor’s men. Thus, when he is given water to drink, his blood mingles with the water, turning it red.⁴⁵ In another example, al-Majlisī narrates a report in which the tears shed for Ḥusayn turn to blood.⁴⁶ Both blood and water connote life, each in a different way. Thus, it might be said that these two elements are evoked together as a means of summoning life where one would expect to find death. In this way, the element of blood opens onto the concept of eternity in the cosmic imagination as embodied, for example, in Christians’ belief that the blood of Christ mingled with water confers immortality.⁴⁷

Umm Ma‘bad’s tree and the flow of blood from its trunk on the day Ḥusayn was slain

Shi‘ite sources relate an account on the authority of Hind bint al-Jawn al-Khuzā‘iyya, who said,

The Messenger of God once stayed with some companions of his in the tent of my maternal aunt, Umm Ma‘bad al-Khuzā‘iyya. He and his companions took an afternoon nap in the tent, as it was a very hot day. Upon waking, he called for water, after which he performed the ablution for the ritual prayer and spat out some water at the foot of a dry boxthorn tree that stood next to the tent. His companions did likewise. Then he rose and performed two cycles of prayer. The next day, we woke to find that the boxthorn had grown into a splendid shade tree. God had removed its thorns, its roots had sunk deep into the ground, it had sprouted abundant branches, and its leaves were lush and verdant. After this it bore fruit that ripened and mellowed, its colour that of powdered turmeric, its scent like that of amber, and its flavour that of honeycomb. By God, no hungry person ate of it but that he was satisfied, no thirsty person partook of it but that his thirst was quenched, no sick person ate of it but that he was cured, and no poor or needy person but that he was enriched. Similarly, no camel or ewe ate of its leaves but that it was fattened, and its teats were gorged with milk.

From the day the Prophet stayed with us, we saw our wealth grow and multiply, and our lands became fertile and productive, so we named it “the blessed tree.” People would come to us from the surrounding deserts to enjoy its shade, and stock up on its leaves for their journeys, carrying them with them when they went to barren regions, where they would take the place of food and drink. Things continued thus until one day, we woke to find that the tree’s fruits had begun falling and its leaves had yellowed, which grieved us. Not long after this, we learned of the death of the Messenger of God (may God’s prayers and peace be upon him and his family), for his soul had been taken that day. After this, the fruit it bore was less abundant, less tasty and less fragrant.

The tree remained this way for thirty years until, one day, we woke to find that it had become thorny from top to bottom, its branches were no longer succulent, and all its fruits had fallen. It wasn’t long before we received news that the Commander of the Faithful, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, had been killed. Thereafter, the tree bore no fruit at all. Nevertheless, we and those around us continued to pick its leaves and use them to treat the sick and ailing among us. This situation continued for quite some

time until one day, we woke to find that fresh blood was flowing from its trunk, and that its leaves had withered and were dripping with blood. So, we knew that something terrible had occurred. We spent that night frightened and troubled, expecting catastrophe. When darkness had fallen, we heard weeping and wailing from beneath it, and a loud clamour and shudder. We also heard a woman weeping and saying, "O son of the Prophet, O son of the trustee, offspring of our most gracious masters!"

Then we heard the sounds of ringing and more voices, but we understood little of what they were saying. After this we received news of the slaying of Ḥusayn, peace be upon him. The tree withered and dried up entirely, and it was broken by the winds and rains till not a trace of it remained.⁴⁸

Thus, the boxthorn tree dripped fresh blood in sorrow over the death of Ḥusayn b. 'Alī. God, Creator of the cosmos, had again harnessed Nature to mourn his loss.

The story of the birds that wallowed in Ḥusayn's blood⁴⁹

In *Bihār al-Anwār*, al-Majlisī narrates an account which reads:

When Ḥusayn, peace be upon him, was martyred, he lay prostrate in Karbala, his blood spilled on the ground. There then came a white bird, which bathed in his blood, and flew away dripping with blood. Seeing some other birds playing on the branches of shade trees, the bird that was spattered with blood cried, "Woe to you! Do you busy yourselves with amusements, remembering nothing but this world and its forbidden pleasures while Ḥusayn lies dead in Karbala in the scorching sands: parched, slaughtered, his blood spilled out?"

So, every one of them flew back to Karbala, where they saw our master Ḥusayn lying on the ground. Crying out, they burst into loud laments, then flung themselves into his blood and rolled around in it. Then each of them flew in a different direction to inform its people that Ḥusayn had been slain. One of these birds betook itself to the city of the Apostle. When it arrived, its wings dripping with blood, it circled around the tomb of the Prophet Muḥammad, announcing, "Ḥusayn has been slain in Karbala! Ḥusayn has been slain in Karbala!"⁵⁰

Another account, passed down on the authority of the fifth Imam, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, tells us that when Ḥusayn b. 'Alī was killed, a raven came and rolled around in his blood. It then flew to Medina, where it landed on the wall surrounding the house of Ḥusayn's youngest daughter, Fāṭima. The raven crowed, causing her to look up. Seeing that the raven was spattered with blood, she wept bitterly, and chanted an ode to her father.⁵¹

According to these narratives, these birds were harnessed by God to weep over Ḥusayn, and to announce his death to the Prophet and the people of Medina. Moreover, the flock of birds and the raven link the two cities of Karbala and Medina, conveying the news of Ḥusayn's slaying at the same time. They join these two places in the same tragedy, as though the flock of birds and the raven are witnesses to the second most heinous crime in the history of humanity after that of Cain's murder of his brother Abel. Karbala takes us back to the beginning of creation, as the cause of this crime was a struggle between truth and falsehood, good and evil, and over the right to be vicegerent of God's earth. God had commanded Adam to appoint Abel as his trustee. When Cain

learned of this, he objected to the appointment, whereupon Adam told him that the command had come not from him, but from God. He instructed both sons to bring an offering to God, whereupon Abel offered a fat ram, while Cain offered spoiled ears of corn.⁵²

Ḥusayn flings handfuls of his blood into the sky

The works of adab al-maqātil tell us that having been weakened by the fighting during the battle of Karbala, Ḥusayn paused to rest. As he stood there, he was struck by a rock on his forehead, so he took his robe to wipe the blood off his face. Then he was struck in the chest by a sharp, poisoned arrow with three prongs. He pulled the arrow out through the back of his neck, and the blood gushed out in torrents. He placed his hand on the wound, then cast a handful of blood into the sky,⁵³ and not a drop of it came back down, nor was the sky red until that moment. Then he placed his hand on the wound a second time, and when it was full of blood, he spattered it on his head and his beard, saying, “This is how I will remain—stained with my own blood—until I meet my grandfather, the Messenger of God.”⁵⁴

Some researchers believe that the Umayyad army targeted Ḥusayn’s forehead because it is the part of the body on which one prostrates, as if the target were prayer itself. Then they struck his heart, the site of certainty and faith.⁵⁵ When Ḥusayn cast his blood into the air, it did not respond to earth’s gravity. Instead, it responded to an opposing gravity, namely, the gravity of the heavens. We find this theme in numerous texts, where, like the blood shed by slain members of his household, Ḥusayn’s blood was subject to his own actions. By not falling back to earth but, instead, ascending miraculously upwards, his blood formed a space connecting the worlds of earth and heaven. Thus, Shi‘ites appear to believe that Gabriel first descended with Ḥusayn’s immaculate blood, and when he was killed, he cast it upward again, whereupon it took its sacred place in the sky.⁵⁶ This idea is repeated three times in the account of Ḥusayn’s slaying. As for the sky, it responds to this action after Ḥusayn’s death by raining fresh blood. In this text, the space between heaven and earth is charged with the divine wrath over this heinous crime. For God sided with Ḥusayn, while the nation that fought against him sided with Satan.

The rite of taṭbīr, or bloodying one’s head on the Day of Āshūrā

The term taṭbīr,⁵⁷ which refers to the act of striking the head with a sword or other sharp instrument in order to draw blood, is one of the Twelver Shi‘ites’ so-called Ḥusayni rituals.⁵⁸ Male Shi‘ites of all ages engage in this ritual, from the elderly to the very young,⁵⁹ most often on the Day of Āshūrā (10 Muḥarram), in an expression of grief over the slaying of Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī. Taṭbīr may also involve beating oneself on the shoulders or back with chains.⁶⁰ Once the head has been slashed with swords, knives, or stones, the participant might continue striking the wound with the palm of his hand in order to ensure that it continues to bleed.⁶¹

The Shi‘ites see the blood which is spilled during the ritual of taṭbīr on the Day of Āshūrā as a ransom for Ḥusayn. They are prepared to offer themselves as redemptive sacrifices on Ḥusayn’s behalf, and they bemoan his tragic death, wishing they had been at his side waging war against the Umayyad tyrants. They also believe that the shedding of their blood through the taṭbīr ritual purges their souls of guilt and sin and ensures their forgiveness.

Al-Nuqṭa Mosque, so-named in honour of the drop (nuqṭa) of blood that fell from Ḥusayn's head onto a stone in the city of Aleppo

This mosque is located at the foot of Syria's Mount Jawshan, and is now considered the main Shi'ite centre of Aleppo. The mosque consists of a huge building with annexes which serve as venues for lectures and seminars promoting Shi'ism. Shi'ites believe that as Ḥusayn b. 'Alī's severed head was being transported from Karbala to Damascus, a drop of blood from his head fell onto a stone on which the head had been placed. They also believe that traces of this drop of blood remain to this day, which inspired the construction of the mosque atop the rock where the drop of blood fell. From the time it was constructed by Sayf al-Dawla al-Ḥamadānī in 333 AH/944 CE, the site became a Shi'ite shrine. The Ja'fari Islamic Reconstruction and Iḥsān Association, formed in 1959, rebuilt the shrine, and constructed the Imam Ḥusayn Institute for Islamic Studies next to it. An additional courtyard was later added, along with an orphanage, a factory, a visitors' parking lot, and a charitable hospital.⁶²

A single drop of Ḥusayn's immaculate blood was thus sufficient to make the spot where it fell sacred to Shi'ites, who come in the thousands to visit it every year from all over the world.⁶³ Given its revered status, numerous virtues have been attributed to this sacred site which further increase its value. In this context, it is said that the blood of Ḥusayn once healed a young Jewish girl, a miracle that led her and her whole people to embrace Islam. Indeed, the blood of Ḥusayn is a holy substance with healing power, and every place it touches is rendered sacred.⁶⁴

Summary

Authors of *adab al-maqātil*, both ancient and contemporary, have made systematic use of the theme of blood in recounting the story of Ḥusayn's death, their aim being to elicit an emotional response from their Shi'ite readers. The image of blood is repeated in numerous contexts and with different symbolic and indicative meanings. Thus, for example, references to Ḥusayn's blood have been used to point to his slaying, as in the account of the flask of red soil that the angel Gabriel brought to the Prophet from Karbala, informing him that when Ḥusayn was killed, the soil would turn to blood. And in fact, when Ḥusayn was killed, the soil in the flask turned to blood by a Divine miracle, whereupon the Prophet's wife, Umm Salama, knew for certain that the Prophet's grandson Ḥusayn had died.

The blood of Ḥusayn was also used in dreams, as when a man who had taken part in killing Ḥusayn saw the Prophet in a dream in which the Prophet placed a basin filled with Ḥusayn's blood before him. He then applied the blood to the man's eyes, and when the man woke up, he had lost his sight. Thus, through the instrumentality of the Prophet, Ḥusayn's blood acquired the miraculous power to blind whoever had participated in his murder. In another miraculous occurrence, a disembodied hand emerged from a wall and wrote a verse of poetry in Ḥusayn's blood containing a warning to his murderers. Upon Ḥusayn's death, the twilight turned blood-red, and the sky rained blood for forty days. Hence, it appears that the authors of *adab al-maqātil* wanted to emphasise that Ḥusayn b. 'Alī's murder had incited the Divine wrath, which was manifested through natural phenomena. Indeed, not a stone could be turned in Jerusalem thereafter but that fresh blood—the blood of Ḥusayn—was found beneath it,⁶⁵ thereby imbuing the holy city of Jerusalem with even greater holiness.

Through such accounts, Shi'ite authors suggest that the shedding of Ḥusayn's blood at Karbala offered redemption and life to the adherents of his sect, much as the

shedding of the blood of Christ offers redemption and life to his followers.⁶⁶ As such, it symbolises immortality despite physical death. Moreover, being sacred, Ḥusayn's death possesses a miraculous ability to punish his murderers despite the impotence one would expect due to his having died, while his blood sanctifies any place it touches. After it was spilled in Karbala, that land was rendered sacred. Indeed, a mere drop is sufficient to sanctify a place, such as al-Nuqta Mosque in Aleppo.

The theme of blood is also evident in the rituals associated with Āshūrā, where some Shi'ite men slash their heads with swords and slap their chests until they draw blood, thus expressing their willingness to sacrifice their lives for the sake of Ḥusayn, and to purify themselves of their guilt and sins. In view of the tragic nature of Ḥusayn's death, Shi'ites have set out to immortalise the story of his slaying, keeping it ever alive in the hearts and minds of their community members more than 1,300 years after his death.

Lastly, a word should be said about the issue of the historical accuracy of some of the statements, ḥadīths, accounts, and poems on which we have relied in this research. There are, in fact, doubts about the accuracy of some of the sources I have cited, not only texts dating back to the first century AH, but even those from the fourth century AH. However, I have not addressed this thorny issue here for the simple reason that a critique of the historicity of the accounts quoted would do nothing to change the outcome of this study, since the materials we have cited are widely accepted by Shi'ite authors and readers alike, having been circulated and passed down from one generation to another to the point where they form an inseparable part of generally accepted Shi'ite belief.

Notes

¹ The word "Shi'ite" will refer throughout this article to the Twelver, or Imami, Shi'ites.

² For details, see Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār al-jāmi'a li durar akhbār al-a'imma al-aṭḥār*, Second Printing, Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Wafā', 1983, 44, p. 287-288; Ġa'far b. Muḥammad b. Namā al-Ḥillī, *Muthīr al-aḥzān wa munīr subul al-ashjān* [Fount of sorrows and illuminator of the paths of grief], Qom: Madrasat al-Imām al-Mahdī, 1406 AH/1985 CE, p. 14, 22; Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ḥurr al-Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-shī'a ilā taḥṣīl al-sharī'a* [Shi'ite means of applying the Sharia], ed. Mu'assasat Āl al-Bayt li-Iḥyā' al-Turāth, Qom: Mu'assasat Āl al-Bayt li-Iḥyā' al-Turāth, 1409 AH/1988 CE, 14, p. 593-594, 596; Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Bābawayh al-Qummī al-Ṣadūq, *Thawāb al-a'māl* [Rewards and punishments], Qom: Dār al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, 1406 AH/1985 CE, p. 21, 83-84; Ja'far b. Muḥammad al-Qummī b. Qūlawayh, *Kāmil al-ziyārāt* [a major hadith collection], ed. Jawād al-Qayyūmī, n.p.: Mu'assasat Nashr al-Faqāha, 1417 AH/1996 CE, p. 6, 104-106.

³ George Kanazi, "*Karbalā' fī al-adab al-shī'i* [Karbala in Shi'ite Literature]", *El-Karmel*, 13, 1992, p. 182.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ For details on the slaying of Ḥusayn as a literary genre, see Khalid Sindawi, *al-Maqātil fī al-adab al-shī'i* [al-Maqātil in Shi'ite Literature], Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, Department of Arabic Studies, unpublished doctoral dissertation, 2000 (in Hebrew); Aḥmad 'Abbūd Shanshūl, *al-Maqāt al-Ḥusaynī: dirāsa ta'ṣīliyya tajnīsiyya* [The death of Ḥusayn: a study of origins and classification], unpublished master's thesis, Department of Arabic Language, Ferdowsi University, Mashhad, 2020.

⁶ For details, see Sindawi, *al-Maqātil fī al-adab al-shī'ī*, p. 133ff.; Agha Bozorg Tehrani, *al-Dharī'a ilā taṣānīf al-shī'a* [A guide to Shi'ite writings], Tehran: Kitābkhane Islāmiyya, 1968-1978, 22, p. 22; 'Abd al-Razzāq b. Aḥmad b. al-Fūṭī, *al-Ḥawādith al-Jāmi'a wa-l-tajārib al-nāfi'a* [Comprehensive incidents and beneficial experiences], ed. Maḥdī Najm, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, 2003, p. 143; Dākhil al-Sayyid Ḥasan, *Mu'jam al-Khuṭabā'* [Lexicon of Preachers], Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'Ālamiyya al-Thaqāfiyya wa-l-I'lām, 1416 AH/1996 CE, p. 230.

⁷ Al-Muwaffaq b. Aḥmad al-Makkī Akḥṭab Khawārizm, *Maqtal al-Ḥusayn li-l-Khawārizm* [al-Khawārizm's, 'The slaying of Ḥusayn'], ed. Shaykh Muḥammad al-Samāwī, Qom: Anwār al-Hudā, 1418 AH/1997 CE, 2, p. 102, Hadith No. 18; Jawād Muḥaddithī, *Mawsū'at 'Ashūrā'* [Encyclopedia of Ashura], translated from the Persian into Arabic by Khalīl Zāmil al-'Iṣāmī, Beirut: Dār al-Rasūl al-Akram, 1997, p. 73; Aḥmad 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyya, *Minḥāj al-sunna al-nabawiyya fī naqd kalām al-shī'a al-qadariyya* [The method of the Sunnah of the Prophet for refuting the words of the Qadari Shi'ites], ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim, Beirut: Mu'assasat Qurṭuba, 1406 AH/1985 CE, 4, p. 560; al-Majlisi, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, 45, p. 89, 205, 213, 216, 315; al-Faḍl b. Ḥasan Jadīd al-Ṭabarsī, *I'lām al-warā bi a'lām al-hudā* [Instructing humanity concerning the luminaries of guidance], Third Printing, Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, 1390 AH/1970 CE), p. 220; Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Bābawayh al-Qummī al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, Qom: al-Maktaba al-Islāmiyya, 1404 AH/1983 CE, p. 167; al-Ṣaykh al-Mufīd, Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Nu'mān, *al-Ikhtisāṣ*, ed. 'Alī Akbar al-Ghifārī, Qom: al-Mu'tamar li-l-Shaykh al-Mufīd, 1413 AH/1992 CE, p. 144; Sa'īd b. Hibat Allāh al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharā'ij wa-l-jarā'ih* [on the miracles of the Prophet and the imams], Qom: Mu'assasat al-Imām al-Maḥdī, 1409 AH/1988 CE, 1, p. 254; Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Rustum al-Ṭabarsī, *Dalā'il al-Imāma* [Evidence for the Imamate], Qom: Dār al-Dhakha'ir li-l-Maṭbu'āt, 1383 AH/1963 CE), 72; Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Fattāl, *Rawḍat al-wā'izīn wa baṣīrat al-mutawa'izīn* [Garden of preachers and the insight of those who pay them heed] (Qom: Dār al-Raḍī, 1386 AH/1966 CE, 1, p. 191; 'Alī b. 'Isā al-Irbīlī, *Kashf al-ghumma fī ma'rifat al-a'imma* [Relieving sorrow through the knowledge of the imams], ed. Hāshim al-Rasūlī, Tabriz: Maktabat Banī Hāshim, 1381 AH/1961 CE, 1, p. 433, 2, p. 56; Ġa'far b. Muḥammad b. Namā al-Ḥillī, *Muthīr al-aḥzān wa munīr subul al-ashjān* [Fount of sorrows and illuminator of the paths of grief], Qom: Madrasat al-Imām al-Maḥdī, 1406 AH/1985 CE, p. 82; Raṣīd al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Māzandarānī b. Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib* [Virtues of the family of Abu Talib], Qom: Mu'assasat al-'Allāma li-l-Nashr, 1397 AH/1976 CE, 2, p. 346.

⁸ Al-Majlisi, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 45, p. 215; Ibn Qūlawayh, *Kāmil al-ziyārāt*, p. 93, No. 20.

⁹ Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Nu'mān al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād fī ma'rifat ḥujaj allāh 'alā al-ibād* [Guidance to the knowledge of God's arguments against humanity], ed. Mu'assasat Āl al-Bayt li-Iḥyā' al-Turāth, Qom: al-Mu'tamar li-l-Shaykh al-Mufīd, 1413 AH/1992 CE, p. 130-131; al-Ṭabarsī, *I'lām al-warā*, p. 218; al-Irbīlī, *Kashf al-ghumma*, 2, p. 8.

¹⁰ Ibn Namā al-Ḥillī, *Muthīr al-aḥzān*, p. 82.

¹¹ Ghāzī al-Farayjī, Muḥammad al-Sīlāwī and Ḥusām al-Rubay'ī, "*al-Ishāra al-sīmiyā'iyya wa ab'āduhā fī lughat al-dam al-Ḥusaynī* [Semiotic signs and their dimensions in the language of blood in writings on the death of Ḥusayn b. 'Alī]", The

Annual Conference of the Department of Linguistic Studies: Between Linguistics and Sociology, 2017, at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication>.

¹² Kor 44, 29.

¹³ 'Imād al-Dīn Ismā'īl Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* [Commentary on the Glorious Koran], Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, n.d., 4, p. 142-143.

¹⁴ See Khalid Sindawi, "al-Husayn b. 'Alī and Yahyā b. Zakariyyā in Shi'ite Sources: A Comparative Study", *Islamic Culture*, 78 (3), p. 37-54.

¹⁵ Sindawi, *al-Maqātil fī al-adab al-shī'ī*, p. 205-206.

¹⁶ Ibrahim b. Muḥammad al-Isfarāyīnī, *Nūr al-'ayn fī mashhad Ḥusayn*, followed by *Qurrat al-'ayn fī akhdh tha'r al-Ḥusayn* [a work on Ḥusayn's death and a call to avenge it], Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-Ḥamīdiyya al-Miṣriyya, 1317 AH/1899 CE, p. 12.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13, 65; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 44, p. 91, 118.

¹⁸ Raḍī al-Dīn 'Alī b. Mūsā Ibn Ṭāwūs, *al-Lahūf 'alā qatlā al-ṭufūf*, Tehran: Dār al-'Ālam – Jihan - 1348 AH/1929 CE), p. 15-17, 27; Murtaḍā al-Ḥusayni al-Fayrūzabādī, *Faḍā'il al-khamsa min al-ṣiḥāḥ al-sitta* [Virtues of five of the six Sihahs], Najaf: Maṭba'at al-Najaf, 1383 AH/1963 CE, 3, p. 285-286; Muḥsin Amīn al-'Āmilī, *Iqnā' al-lā'im 'alā iqāmat al-ma'ātim* [a work dealing with mourning rituals for Ḥusayn], Sidon: Maṭba'at al-'Irfān, 1344 AH/1925 CE), p. 31-41; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 44, p. 253, 254, 264; Kanazi, "*Karbalā' fī al-adab al-shī'ī*", p. 182-183.

¹⁹ Ṣafiyya al-Suhayrī Ibn Ḥatīra, *al-Jasad wa-l-mujtama': dirāsa anthrūbūlūjiyya li ba'd al-i'tiqādāt wa-l-taṣawwurat ḥawl al-jasad* [The body and society: An anthropological study of some beliefs about and perceptions of the body], Tunis: Dār al-Intishār al-'Arabī, 2008, p. 164.

²⁰ Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *Dictionnaire des symboles*, ed. Robert Laffont, Paris: Seghers, 1978, entry for "sang."

²¹ Ru'ā al-'Abbādī and Fāṭima al-Sa'ūd, "*al-Faḍā' al-'ajā'ibī fī maqtal al-imām al-Ḥusayn* [Miraculous space in the death of Imam Ḥusayn]", *Majallat Ādāb Dhī Qār*, No. 34, 2021, p. 128; Ibrāhīm al-Miyanjī, *al-'Uyūn al-'abrā fī maqtal sayyid al-shuhadā'* [Eyes filled with tears over the slaying of the master of martyrs], Tehran: al-Maktaba al-Murtaḍawiyya, 1959, p. 121.

²² al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharā'ij wa-l-jarā'ih*, 3, p. 1144-1145, Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Bābawayh al-Qummī al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-ni'ma* [The perfection of religion and the completion of grace], Second Printing, Qom: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, 1395 AH/1975 CE, 2, p. 532; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, 58, p. 170.

²³ Khawārizm, *Maqtal al-Ḥusayn*, 2, p. 105-106, Hadīth No. 28; Sulaymān b. Aḥmad, *al-Mu'jam al-kabīr* [The major lexicon], ed. Hamdi 'Abd al-Majīd al-Salafī, Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth, 1399 AH/1987 CE, 3, p. 123.

²⁴ Al-Isfarāyīnī, *Nūr al-'ayn fī mashhad Ḥusayn*, p. 44.

²⁵ Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-umam wa-l-mulūk* [History of nations and kings], Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lamī, n.d., 2, p. 216.

²⁶ 'Abd Allāh b. Muslim Ibn Qutayba, *Gharīb al-ḥadīth* [Unique hadiths], ed. Na'im Zarzūr, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1988, 1, p. 296; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, entry for *dam* ("blood").

²⁷ Ibn Ḥatīra, *al-Jasad wa-l-mujtama'*, p. 167.

²⁸ Ibn Qūlawayh, *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt*, p. 76; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 45, p. 310.

²⁹ For details on the evening twilight, see T. Van Flandern and K. Pulkkinen, "Low precision formulae for planetary positions", *Astrophysical Journal Supplement Series*, 31, vol. 41 (1979), p. 391-411.

³⁰ Muḥammad b. Manī' al-Baṣrī Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* [Major classes], ed. Ziyād Muḥammad Maṣṣūr, Medina: Maktabat al-'Ulūm wa-l-Ḥikma, 1408 AH/1986 CE, 1, p. 507.

³¹ Ḥikmat al-Raḥmah, *al-Ḥawādith al-kawniyya wal-l-karāmāt al-wāqī'a ba'd maqtal al-imām Ḥusayn 'alayhi al-salām: dirāsa tawthīqiyya* [The cosmic events and miracles which occurred after the killing of Imam Ḥusayn, peace be upon him: a documentary study], Najaf: Mu'assasat Wārith al-Anbiyā' li-l-Dirāsāt al-Takhaṣṣuṣiyya fī al-Nahḍa al-Ḥusayniyya, 2017, p. 338.

³² Ibn Qūlawayh, *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt*, p. 90; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 45, p. 23.

³³ Ibn Qūlawayh, *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt*, p. 93.

³⁴ Khawārizm, *Maqtal al-Ḥusayn li-l-Khawārizm*, 2, p. 102, Hadith No. 15; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, 45, p. 53.

³⁵ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, 44, p. 285; 45, p. 211, 215.

³⁶ Ibn Qūlawayh, *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt*, p. 182.

³⁷ *Dictionnaire des symboles*, "sang."

³⁸ 'Āmir Jihān, *Ṣūrat Ḥusayn b. 'Alī fī al-mutakhayyal al-islāmī* [The image of Ḥusayn b. 'Alī in the Islamic imagination], Tunis: al-Aṭlasiyya li-l-Nashr, 2015, p. 93.

³⁹ For details on these penalties, see, for example, Hāshim al-Nāji al-Mūsawī al-Jazā'iri, *Jazā' a'dā' wa qatalat sayyid al-ṣuhadā' fī dār al-dunyā* [Punishment for the enemies and murderers of the Master of Martyrs in this earthly abode], Tehran: Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī, n.d.).

⁴⁰ Khawārizm, *Maqtal al-Ḥusayn*, 2, p. 107, Hadith No. 32; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, 45, p. 232, No. 3.

⁴¹ See Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Bāz, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1991, Hadith No. 6993, 8, 92.

⁴² This was confirmed by Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, who declared, "The blood of Ḥusayn dwells in eternity...", Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb, *al-Kāfī*, Fourth Printing, Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, 1365 AH/1945 CE, 4, p. 575, No. 2.

⁴³ Khawārizm, *Maqtal al-Ḥusayn*, 2, p. 117-118, Hadith No. 52; 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Wāsiṭī b. al-Maghāzili, *Manāqib 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib* [The virtues of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib], ed. Muḥammad Bāqir al-Bihbūdī, Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwā', 1424 AH/2000 CE, p. 320, No. 460; 'Alī b. Ḥusayn b. 'Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnat dimashq* [The history of the city of Damascus], ed. 'Alī Shīrī, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1415 AH/1994 CE, 14, p. 259; 'Umar b. Aḥmad b. al-'Adīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab fī tārikh Ḥalab* [All one would seek to know about the history of Aleppo], ed. Suhayl Zakkār, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1988, 6, p. 2643; Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥajar al-Haythamī, *al-Ṣawā'iq al-muhriqa* [Searing lightning bolts], ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Abd Allāh al-Turkī and Kāmil Muḥammad al-Kharrāt, Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1997, 2, p. 572-573; Ibn Ṭāwūs, *al-Lahūf 'alā qatlā al-Ṭufūf*, p. 135.

⁴⁴ See the website of Dia' al-Khabbaz at aldiaa.net.

⁴⁵ al-Isfarāyīnī, *Nūr al-'Ayn*, p. 25.

⁴⁶ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, 45, p. 142.

⁴⁷ *Dictionnaire des symboles*, "sang."

⁴⁸ al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-ghumma*, 1, p. 25; al-Māzandarānī, *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*, 1, p. 12; Khawārizm, *Maqtal al-Ḥusayn*, 2, p. 98-100; Hāshim al-Baḥrānī, *Madīnat ma'ājiz al-a'immat al-ithnay 'ashar wa dalā'il al-ḥujaj 'alā al-bashar* [The city of the miracles of the twelve imams and proofs for the arguments against humankind], Qom: Mu'assasat al-Ma'ārif al-Islāmiyya, 1413 AH/1992 CE, 4, p. 189-191; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, 45, 133.

⁴⁹ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, 45, p. 191-192, No. 36; Muḥammad Mahdī al-Ḥā'irī, *Ma'ālī al-sibṭayn fī ahwāl al-ḥasan wa-l-ḥusayn* [Their excellencies the two grandsons, al-Ḥasan and Ḥusayn], Second Printing, Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Wafā', 1986, 2, 33; Labīb Bayḍūn, *Mawsū'at Karbalā'* [Encyclopedia of Karbala], Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lam, 1427 AH/2006 CE, 2, 209.

⁵⁰ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, 45, 192.

⁵¹ 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Muqarram al-Mūsawī, *Maqatal al-Ḥusayn aw Qiṣṣat Karbalā'* [The killing of Ḥusayn, or the story of Karbala], Tehran: Mu'assasat al-Ba'tha, n.d.), p. 294; Āghā b. 'Ābidīn al-Dardabandī, *Iksīr al-'ibādāt fī asrār al-shahādāt* [the elixir of worship in the secrets of martyrdom], ed. Muḥammad Jum'a Bādī and 'Abbās Mullā 'Aṭiyya al-Jamrī, Manama: Sharikat al-Mustafā li-l-Khidmāt al-Thaqāfiyya, 1994, p. 401; Bayḍūn, *Mawsū'at Karbalā'*, 2, p. 209; al-Ha'irī, *Ma'ālī al-sibṭayn*, 2, p. 3; Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimašq*, p. 286.

⁵² See al-'Abbadi, *et al.*, *al-Faḍā' al-'Ajā'ibī*, p. 128; al-Miyānjī, *al-'Uyūn al-'abrā*, p. 190.

⁵³ Khawārizm, *Maqatal al-Ḥusayn*, 2, p. 37.

⁵⁴ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 45, p. 53; Ibn Namā al-Ḥillī, *Muthīr al-aḥzān*, p. 71; Ibn Ṭāwūs, *al-Lahūf 'alā qatlā al-Ṭufūf*, 2, p. 39.

⁵⁵ Al-'Abbādī, *et al.*, p. 126.

⁵⁶ This was confirmed by Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, who stated, "The blood of Ḥusayn dwells in eternity...." For more detail, see Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb, *al-Kāfi*, Fourth Printing, Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islamiyya, 1365 AH/1945 CE), 4, p. 575, No. 2.

⁵⁷ This ritual takes place on the morning of 10 Muḥarram, the Day of Ashura, which commemorates the killing of Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, as well as forty days later, on 20 Ṣafar. By engaging in this ritual, Shi'ites express their grief over the tragedy that befell Ḥusayn and their willingness to pray and sacrifice as he did, as well as to offer their condolences to him and his family and express their love for them. Early in the morning of 10 Muḥarram, some Shi'ite men and boys don long white robes resembling a shroud. They then go out in a group, striking their heads with a short sword referred to traditionally as a *qāma*, slitting the tops of their foreheads so that blood flows from their heads onto their faces and white robes; and in some cases, striking their backs or shoulders with chains equipped with sharp blades that cut into their flesh. In the midst of large processions, they march down the streets crying, "O Haydar!" or "Haydar, Haydar!" (a reference to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib) to the beating of drums, the waving of banners spattered with red, and the playing of war flutes. These scenes take place in the presence of women and children, who seek to imitate their fathers. Some Shi'ites, if they have an unfulfilled wish or hope, go to al-Ḥusayn's grave and make supplication, accompanying their request with a vow to engage in the *taṭbīr* ritual on the Day of Ashura if their prayer is granted. Others carry out similar vows in relation to young children, cutting their heads with knives until blood flows. For details, see Muhaddithi, *Mawsū'at 'Āshūrā'*, 93-95.

⁵⁸ The Ḥusayni rituals are rites of mourning which Shi'ites perform in memory of the killing of Ḥusayn b. 'Alī during the first ten days of the month of Muḥarram. For more detail, see Haytham al-Kiswānī, "*Mawsū'at al-Shī'a*" [Encyclopedia of the Shi'a] (13), *al-Rāṣid*, No. 99, Ramadan 1433 AH/2011 CE, at: <http://www.alrased.net>.

⁵⁹ Aḥmad Faṭḥ Allāh, *Mu'jam alfāz al-fiqh al-Ja'farī* [A lexicon of Jafari jurisprudence, Beirut: Mu'assasat Āl al-Bayt li-l-Ḥyā' al-Turāth, 1995, p. 114.

⁶⁰ Mūsā al-Mūsawī, *al-Shī'a wa-l-taṣḥīḥ: al-sirā' bayn al-shī'a wa-l-tashayyu'* [Shi'ites and correction: the struggle between Shi'ites and Shi'ism], Amman: Dār 'Ammār li-l-Naṣr wa-l-Tawzī', 1988, p. 98; Muḥammad Jamīl Ḥammūd al-'Āmilī, *Radd al-hujūm*

'alā sha'ā'ir al-imām Ḥusayn al-mazlūm (al-bukā' wa-l-taṭbīr) [Refuting the attack on the rituals devoted to the oppressed Imam Ḥusayn (weeping and *taṭbīr*)], Beirut: Manshūrāt al-'Itra al-Ṭāhira li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Buḥūth, 2004, p. 121.

⁶¹ 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Rashīd, *'Āshūrā' 'ind al-imāmiyya al-ithnay 'ashariyya wa āthāruhā (arḍ wa naqd)* [Ashura among the Twelver Shi'ites and its traditions: Review and critique], PhD. Dissertation, Umm al-Qura University, 1434 AH/2014 CE, p. 565; Ralph Rizq Allāh, *Yawm al-dam* [Day of blood], translated from the French by Khalīl Aḥmad Khalīl, Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalī'a, 1997, p. 111-112.

⁶² For more detail, see Kāmil b. Ḥusayn al- Ghazī, *Nahr al-dhahab fī tārikh ḥalab* [The river of gold in the history of Aleppo], Aleppo: Dār al-Qalam al-'Arabī, 1991), 3, p. 23; and 'Abd al-Sīr Āl Ḥusayn, *Taḥdhīr al-barriyya min nashāt al-shī'a fī sūriyya* [Warning from the wilderness of Shi'ite activity in Syria], Cairo: Dār al-Muḥdathīn, 2007, p. 32-33.

⁶³ Symbolic dimensions such as these merge with the cosmic imagination, as some peoples believe that everyone who is touched by even so much as a drop of a revered hero's blood becomes holy. Additionally, some ancient peoples sanctified the blood of sacrificial offerings, and drank it as a means of seeking a blessing. See Ibn Ḥatīra, *al-Ġasad wa-l-muḡtama'*, p. 165.

⁶⁴ Jihān, *Sūrat Ḥusayn b. 'Alī fī al-mutakhayyal al-islāmī*, p. 94.

⁶⁵ Ibn Qūlawayh, *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt*, p. 77; Ibn Namā al-Hillī, *Muthīr al-Aḥzān*, p. 82.

⁶⁶ See Lev 17, 11; Eph 1, 7; I Peter 1, 19.

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