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Anyone approaching Baghdad from the north or the west will be impressed by the sight of the four golden minarets at Kadhmayn, the Shrine of the Two Imams, Imam Musa Al-Kadhim and Imam Muhammad Taqi Al-Jawad, peace be upon them. They are respectively the Seventh and the Ninth of the Twelve Imams, at whose tombs we are accustomed to seek healing and to invoke their intercession for the forgiveness of our sins and the fulfillment of our needs.

The present building dates back only to the beginning of the sixteenth century and has been kept in excellent repair. This building represents the restoration of Shah Ismail I (1502 – 24), though when the Turkish Sultan, Suleman the Great, captured Baghdad and remained there for four months in 1534, he visited this sacred place, and is said to have contributed to the further ornamentation of the Shrine at Kadhmayn.

The tiles for the double cupola, however, were provided in 1796 by Shah Agha Muhammad Khan, who was the first of the Persian Kadjar dynasty. In 1870, Nasr-al-Din Shah had these golden tiles repaired on one of the domes and on the minarets. It is interesting that the dates of all these alterations are clearly indicated by inscriptions.

If we bear in mind that the Two Imams who are buried here died in the beginning of the eighth century, it will be evident that there are seven hundred years of the history of their tomb to account for, previous to the comparatively modern restoration of Shah Ismail I. The Imams lived in the early days of Baghdad, while the walls of Mansur's round city on the western side of the Tigris were still standing. There were cemeteries to the north-west that went by various names – that at the Syrian Gate, that of the Abbasids, and that of the Straw Gate.^{[1](#)}

The Two Imams were buried immediately to the west of this latter cemetery, but by the time Yakubi wrote, the whole northern district was designated in a general way as the cemetery of the Kuraish.^{[2](#)} Both of these Imams were poisoned at the instigation of the reigning Caliphs, but it is significant that in the

case of Imam Muhammad Taqi, the funeral service was read by a representative of the royal family,³ which undoubtedly distinguished the Imam as an important person, at whose grave some sort of a mausoleum would be built.

But as to the importance attached in the early times to the visit to this tomb, the only information available is on the authority of traditions that have been attributed to the Eighth and Tenth Imams. These traditions are answers they are said to have given when they were asked by their followers concerning the merit of pilgrimage to Kadhmayn. It is related that the Imam Ali Reza, whose life in Baghdad was during the caliphate of Haroon al-Rashid, told his Shia followers to say their prayers of salutation to his father, the Imam Musa Al-Kadhim, "Outside the walls of the Shrine, or in the nearby mosques," if the Sunni authority and prejudice in Baghdad was too great for them to do so at the tomb itself.

From this we infer that a building of some sort was recognised at that early date as marking the tomb of the Imam Musa and that it was surrounded by a wall. Further statements are said to have been made a few years later by the Imam Ali Naqi, whose period in the Imamatus began during the later part of the Caliphate of Mu'tasim, and who enjoyed greater indulgence that was shown to the Shias until the period of reaction against them and the Mu'tazalites under the Caliph Mutawakkil. The following particular instructions for visiting this Shrine have been given by Majlisi.

When you wish to visit the tomb of Musa ibn Jafar and the tomb of Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Musa, first you must bathe and make yourself clean, then anoint yourself with perfume and put on two clean garments, after which you are to say at the tomb of the Imam Musa: –

Peace be upon thee, O Friend of God!

Peace be upon thee, O Proof of God!

Peace be upon thee, O Light of God!

O Light in the dark place of the earth!

Peace be upon him whom God advances in thy regard,

Behold I come as a pilgrim, who acknowledges your right,

Who hates your enemies and befriends your friends,

So intercede for me therefore with your Lord.

"You are then free," said the Imam Ali Naqi, "to ask for your personal needs, after which you should offer a prayer in salutation to the Imam Muhammad Taqi, using these same words."

Majlisi, who has included these traditions in his instructions for modern pilgrims to this Shrine, makes the observation in explanation of the unusual – brevity of the prescribed prayer, "that it was necessary in

those times to take great care in dissimulation (taqiya) that the Shias should not suffer injury.”[4](#)

Another tradition that dates from the same century in which these two Imams died is attributed to a certain Hasan ibn Jamhur, who said:

“In the year 296 A.H., when Ali ibn Ahmad al-Frat was Vizier, I saw Ahmad ibn Rabi”, who was one of the Caliph's writers, when his hand had gotten infected so that it had bad odour and turned black.

Everyone who saw him had no doubt but that he would die. In a dream, however, he saw Hazrat Ali, and said to him: “O Amiru'l Momineen, will you not ask God to give me my hand?” Hazrat Ali answered, ‘go to Musa ibn Jafar and he will ask this for you from God.’ In the morning they got a litter and carpeted it, gave him a bath and anointed him with perfume. They had him lie down in the litter and covered him with a robe.

Then they carried him to the tomb of Imam Musa, whose intercession he sought in prayer. The afflicted man took some of the earth from the tomb and rubbed it on his arm up to the shoulder and then bound the arm up again. The next day, when he opened the bandage, he saw that all the skin and flesh of the arm had fallen off, and that only the bones and veins and ligaments remained, and the bad odour had also ceased. When the vizier heard of this he took the men to testify as what had happened. In a short time the healthy flesh and skin grew back again, and he was able to resume his work of writing.”.

Majlisi adds the comment that “in every period there have been so many miracles (mu’jizaat) and demonstrations of power (karamat) at the tomb of these two saints that there is no need to describe cases of the past. In our own times there are so many instances occurring and recurring that to recount them would be a lengthy process.”[5](#)

After the Abbasid caliphs had fallen more under the authority of the commanders of their armies of Turkish mercenaries, there was a rising of the Buyids (or Buwaihids) in Persia; and in A.D. 946 the Caliph Mustakfi was blinded by the Buyid Prince, Mu’izzu'd Dawla, who set up the blinded Caliph's son, al-Muktaddir, as a nominal ruler while he exercised the actual authority himself. Ibn Athir has related that “the Buyids were fanatical adherents of Ali and firmly convinced that the Abbasids were usurpers of a throne that rightfully belonged to others.”[6](#)

They did not take over the Caliphate, but in addition to retaining for themselves the authority and perquisites of the government of the provinces, they proclaimed the first ten days of the month of Muharram as a period of public mourning for Husayn,[7](#) and they frequently enriched the sanctuary at Kadhmayn with their gifts. The Caliph Tai' is reported to have led the Friday prayers in the Kadhmayn mosque,[8](#) so that in the period of the revival of the Shia influence under the protection of the Buyids, we are certain that the Kadhmayn Shrine was regularly visited by pilgrims and served as “the rallying place of the Shia party.”

It was during this period that the four great works of the Shia tradition were compiled. Kulaini died in

Baghdad in A.D. 939, after completing his monumental work, the Compendium of the Science of Religion (al-Kafi fi Ilm ad-din), which is perhaps the most highly esteemed of all the Shia source books. Ibn Babuwaihi had come to Baghdad from Khorasan in 966 A.D., where he devoted himself to teaching and writing.

His 'Every Man His Own Lawyer' (Kitab man la yadhuruhu l-Faqih), is also one of the four most authoritative books on Shia law and tradition. And sixteen years after the death of Ibn Babuwaihi, Al-Tusi also came from Khorasan to teach in Baghdad, where he wrote the remaining two of the four great books of traditions that lie at the basis of Shia theology and jurisprudence, 'The Correcting of judgments' (Tahzib al-Ahkam) and the 'Examination of Differences in Traditions' (Al-Istibsar).

At this time of greater boldness on the part of the Shias, riots with the Sunnis were not infrequent in Baghdad. In one of these disturbances in 1051 A.D. the Sunni leader was killed in a fight that had ensued when the Shias ventured to put an inscription laudatory of Ali above one of the city gates. The indignation of the Sunnis was so great that in the tension of the situation after their leader's funeral, they went as a mob into the Shrine of Kadhmayn and plundered the tombs of the two Imams.

After carrying off the gold and silver lamps and the curtains which adorned these sanctuaries, the rioters on the following day completed their work by setting fire to the buildings. The great teak-wood domes above the shrines of the Imams Musa and Muhammad were entirely burnt.⁹ This fact that the domes were at first of teak-wood has something to do doubtless with the number of times they were burned.

It was shortly after the burning of the Shrine in 1051 A.D. that the Seljuk Sultans displaced the Buwaihids as military dictators in Persia and "Protectors" of the Caliphs in Baghdad. They learned what they knew of Islam in the distinctively Sunni atmosphere of Bukhara. Nevertheless, when they came to Baghdad, no injury was done to the Shrine at Kadhmayn. And when Sultan Malik Shah visited it in 1086, it had apparently been repaired from the damages of the fire of thirty-five years before.¹⁰

Ibn Jubayr, who gives a detailed description of Baghdad in 1184, A.D. in his Travels,¹¹ mentions the tomb of Musa ibn Jafar, but he does not speak of it as Kadhmayn, and he makes no reference to the tomb of the Imam Muhammad Taqi, which would suggest that Shia influence was at that time at such low ebb that this shrine, so close to the city of Baghdad had, been abandoned as a place of regular pilgrimage.

Notwithstanding, before another hundred years had passed when the domes of the Shrines had again been destroyed by fire, we find that its repair was regarded as of sufficient importance to be the one and only enterprise that the short lived Caliph Zahir had been able to undertake. And Ibn Tiktaka who mentions this repair of the domes in his Kitab al-Fakhri,¹² is known to have succeeded his father as supervisor of the sacred towns of the Shias in the vicinity of Baghdad, so that it is possible that the minority community, while by no means free, may have enjoyed certain prescribed and restricted rights. Their headquarters however, were no longer in Baghdad but in Hilla, and greater importance was given

to Najaf and Kerbala as places of pilgrimage. When the Mongols came with their overwhelming force in 1258, they wrought almost complete devastation in and around Baghdad. There is said to have been an understanding, however, that the holy cities of the Shias should be spared, and in fact Kadhmayn was the only one of these shrines that suffered. This was perhaps to the destruction of the western part of the city first. It may have been during the subsequent siege of the fortress on the eastern side of the Tigris that the deputation of Shias from Hilla arrived and arranged with Khulagu Khan for the special protection of Najaf and Kerbala.

However that may be, we know that the city of Baghdad was utterly ruined by the Mongols, and that the tombs of Kadhmayn were burned. "Nearly all the inhabitants, to the number, according to Rashid ad-Din, of 800,000 (Makrizi says 2,000,000) perished, and thus passed away one of the noblest cities that had ever graced the East – the Cynocure of the Muhammadan world, where the luxury, wealth and culture of five centuries had been concentrated.

The booty captured, we are told, was so great that Georgians and Tartars succumbed under the load of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, rich stuffs, gold and silver vessels, etc., while as to the vases from China and Rashan (i.e., procelain), and those made in the country of iron and copper, they were deemed scarcely of any value, and were broken and thrown away. The soldiers were so rich that the saddles of their horses and mules and their most ordinary utensils were inlaid with stones, pearls and gold. Some of them broke off their swords at the hilt and filled up the scabbards with gold, while others emptied the body of a Baghdadian, refilled it with gold, precious stones and pearls, and carried it off from the city." [13](#)

The death of the last of the Abbasid Caliphs, Mustasim, has been so celebrated in literature that what actually happened is obscure.

There are numerous accounts of how Khulagu Khan was disgusted when he saw that in his avarice the Caliph had gathered gold which he had been unwilling to spend either in defence of the city or to effect favorable terms of capitulation. Marco Polo relates the story that when Khulagu Khan entered Baghdad he found to his astonishment a town that was filled with gold and silver, and in his indignation he gave orders that the avaricious Caliph should be "shut up in this same town, without sustenance; and there, in the midst of his wealth, he soon finished a miserable existence." [14](#)

This story is based on the narrative of Mirkhond, of joinville, and of Makakia, the Armenian historian, and as Howarth remarks it has provided "one of those grim episodes which Longfellow delighted to put into verse":–

I said to the Caliph, "Thou art old,

Thou hast no need of so much gold;

Thou should'st not have heaped and hidden it here,

*Till the breath of battle was hot and near,
But have sown through the land these useless hoards,
To spring into shining blades of swords,
And keep thine honour sweet and clear.”
Then into his dungeon I locked the drone,
And left him there to feed all alone,
In the honey cells of his golden hive;
Never a prayer, nor a cry, nor a groan,
Was heard from those massive walls of stone,
Nor again was the Caliph seen alive.*

One notable fact in this connection is that the life of the Caliph's vizier in Baghdad was spared. He was Muayid-ud-din Alkamiya who was known to have been favorable to the Shias, and who was also reported to have sent his submission to Khulagu, and had invited him to invade the country. However, this may be, the Caliph was put to death on the 21st February, 1258. Wassaf and Novairi say he was rolled up in carpets and, then trodden under by horses so that his blood should not be spilt. This was in accordance with the 'yasa' of Jingis Khan, which forbade the shedding of the blood of royal persons.

But the Caliph's vizier, whose life was spared, “retained his post as vizier, the reward doubtless of his dubious loyalty.” Various prominent Persians, as distinguished from Arabs or Turks were appointed to important positions in the new administration of affairs, and among the first buildings to be rebuilt was the Shrine of the two Imams, at Kadhmayn. [15](#)

After the fall of the last of the Abbasid Caliph, Baghdad was never rebuilt on its former scale of grandeur. The Il-Khans, Who were the descendants of Khulagu, held the city for 82 years, not as a capital, however, but merely as the chief town of the province of Iraq. It was near the close of their period of authority that the traveller Mustawfi visited Baghdad (1339) A.D., and at that time he mentioned seeing the Shrines of Al-Kadhim and of his grandson, Taqi, the seventh and ninth Imams. He observed that Kadhmayn was a suburb by itself, about six thousand paces in circumference. [16](#)

About that time the Mongol tribe of Julayr wrested the power from the Il-Khans, and their chief, Shaikh Hasan Buzurg, made his residence in Baghdad in 1340, as the town best suited for his tribal headquarters.

Fifty odd years later, in connection with his widespread conquests, Timur spent three months in

Baghdad.

It happened to be in the summer that he besieged and captured the city, and the Persian chronicler in the Zafar Nameh remarks that “the heat was so intense, that as for the fish in the water, the saliva boiled in their mounts: and as for the birds in the air, from the fever heat their livers were cooked and they fell senseless.” The horrors of the taking of the city are described in graphic detail. So thoroughly had all avenue of escape been closed that when the wind accelerated the flames that filled the air, there were many people who threw themselves into the water, to escape the fire or sword.

It was a time when the slave market was such that an old man of eighty and a child of twelve sold for the same price and the fire of hate waxed to such a heat that the garment of the wealthy merchant and the rags of the sick beggar burned the same way. Individual soldiers in bands of the troops had been each commissioned to each get a head, but some who were not content with one head got all they could tie to their belts. It is mentioned, however, that some of the men of learning and rank as were granted his protection and shared his bounty, but the general carnage was hideous. When the inhabitants had been thus almost annihilated, their habitations were dealt with. Only the mosques, the schools, and the dormitories were spared. Accordingly, we read that Timur left Baghdad on account of “vile odour of the carcasses of the dead.”¹⁷

Nevertheless, when Timur took his departure, we are told that he ordered that the city should be rebuilt. The shrine at Kadhmayn, however, was not restored. After the death of Timur, there was a brief reoccupation of Baghdad by the Julayrs, who were displaced by the “Black Sheep” Turkomans, who held the city from 1411–1469. They in turn were driven out by their rivals, the “White Sheep” Turkomans.

It was therefore after a long period of neglect, when the city had been held by successive generations of half savage tribes, that Shah Ismail I, of the Safawi dynasty captured Baghdad in 1508, and it was in 1519 that he completed the rebuilding of the Shrine at Kadhmayn much as it stands today. With the rise of Shah Ismail there is an interesting and significant story of the revival of Persian Shia Power, which belongs in the history of Ardebil in Azerbaijan rather than in a description of the Shrine of the “Two Kadhims” in Baghdad.

We are told that frequently from twenty-five, to thirty thousand pilgrims visit the Shrine in one day. If viewed from a point of vantage, this Shrine with its twin domes of gleaming gold is one of the most beautiful sights in Baghdad; and if studied in its historical associations throughout the last eleven hundred years, it affords a thrilling resume of the changing fortunes of the far-famed city of Arabian Nights.

¹ . Ibn Sa'd, Tabakat, VII, ii, pp. 68, I. 18; 99, I. 21; & 80, I. II.

² . Yakubi, Tarikh, edit, Houtsma, Vol. 11, P. 499.

³ . Kulaini, Usul al-Kafi P. 203.

⁴ . Majlisi, Toafatu's- Za'irin, pp. 308 fi.

⁵ . Majlisi, op. cit., p. 309.

⁶ . Ibn al-Athir, Kamil, viii, p. 177.

⁷ . Browne, Persian Literature in Modern Times, p. 31.

- [8.](#) . Le Strange, Baghdad during the Abbasid Caliphate, p. 162.
- [9.](#) . Le Strange, Op. cit., p. 164.
- [10.](#) . Le Strange, Op. cit., p. 163.
- [11.](#) . Ibn Jubayr, Travels, Wright's text revised by de Goeje, P. 226.
- [12.](#) . Ibn Tiktaka, Kitab al- Fakhri, p. 163.
- [13.](#) . Howarth, History of the Mongols, iii, pp. 126, 127.
- [14.](#) . Travels of Marco Polo the Venitian, ch. viii.
- [15.](#) . Howarth, Op. cit. pp. 127-131.
- [16.](#) . Mustawfi, Nuzhatu'l-Qulub, Eng. trans. Gibb Mem. series, vol. XXIII, ii, p. 42.
- [17.](#) . Zafar Nameh, by Sharifu'd-din Ali Yazdi, edt. Calcutta 1887-8, vol. II pp. 363-369.

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