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Rites of Remembrance for al-Husayn

I. Funeral And Remembrance Rites For Al-Husayn Held By The Family And Spontaneously By The People

1. Introduction

There is no doubt that the atrocities committed at Karbala' reached their brutal climax with the death of al-Husayn as a martyr in the afternoon of 10th Muharram in the year 61. It led to the performance of funeral and remembrance rites by the surviving family at Karbala' and in the houses of the Hashimites in Medina and elsewhere.

The savage execution of vengeance, as represented by taking the families of the martyrs into captivity, among them were the 'Alid women, by driving the column of prisoners from Karbala' to Kufa, and then from Kufa to Syria, and by accompanying them with the heads of the martyrs, carried on spears and hung round the necks of horse, including the head of Imam al-Husayn ... this savage execution of vengeance led to spontaneous funeral and remembrance rites being performed in the towns and among other groups of people, through which the procession of prisoners and heads passed, as the inhabitants gathered, whether drawn to find out about it by curiosity or drawn to meet it by earlier information about the nature of the procession which was coming.

When the people met the procession of prisoners, words would be exchanged and some of the Holy Family would make speeches which would arouse great sorrow and cause much weeping.

2. The Funeral And Remembrance Rites Of The Family

a) At Karbala

There is no doubt that Karbala' witnessed the first funeral and remembrance for al-Husayn which took place immediately after his martyrdom. These must have been rites which were predominantly of a

family nature, made up of the women and young girls from the family of 'Ali, wives, daughters and sisters of Imam al-Husayn and the Hashimites from the Talibid part of the family, who had been martyred with him.

In the nature of the situation, they would also have been joined by the wives of the martyrs who were not Hashimites. However, the latter's numbers appear small in proportion to the number of 'Alid women.^{[1](#)}

We consider that these funeral and remembrance rites lasted a relatively long time. As far as we can estimate, they began after the death of al-Husayn as a martyr after mid-day on 10th Muharram, continued throughout the night and ended in a distressing way in the afternoon of 11th Muharram. That was when the leaders of the Umayyad army gave the orders for the long sad journey to Syria and prepared the camels to carry the prisoners.

The hearts of those grief-stricken women and girls must have been torn asunder with torment and distress. They were being told to depart and leave behind the bodies of their beloved and blessed dead which had been thrown on the sand without being buried.

'Umar ibn Sa'd had buried his own dead but he showed no concern about burying the martyrs. On the contrary, he ordered that the body of al-Husayn should be trampled on by horses' hooves.

For this reason, we are inclined to accept the reports which tell of some of the soldiers and leaders in the Umayyad army using violence to separate some of the women from the bodies of their dead. Among these is the report about Sakina, daughter of Imam al-Husayn.

She had embraced the body of her father and would not leave it until a number of bedouin Arabs gathered round her and pulled her away from it.^{[2](#)} Indeed we are inclined to accept the general evidence for these kinds of reports because the nature of things seems to require the reality of what they tell.

We consider that these funeral and remembrance rites were held, for the most part, in the open air on the field of battle (after the burning of the tents?)^{[3](#)} under the sun as it shone over them for the rest of 10th Muharram, then under the frail light of the stars of that night which was weighed down by the grief of those women whose hearts were overflowing with torment and distress.

The Hashimite women and the others must have been tormented with worry about the begrimed bodies of the martyrs in the sand as they mourned and wept for them. We think that the greatest mourning must have taken place around the body of al-Husayn.

These were certainly funeral and remembrance rites which took place in the most dreadful and distressing situation, from which rose the quivering keening of these women, far from home with their children. They were thirsty, hungry and terrified at the sight of their husbands, sons, fathers and brothers lying dead.

b) In Damascus

The halls of the palace of al-Khadra' in Syria witnessed the second occasion for the family's rites of remembrance. It would have been appropriate if Syria had witnessed general spontaneous rites of remembrance as occurred in Kufa when the party of prisoners arrived there.

However, we only consider what took place in Syria to have been private family rites of remembrance. As we see it, there were no general rites of remembrance in Syria because of the difference in the relationship with the Holy Family between the Kufans and the Syrians.

The Kufans had lived side by side with Imam 'Ali and his sons for several years during the period when Imam 'Ali was the caliph in Kufa which was the capital of the state during his period in office. Later the leaders of Kufa had sent to Imam al-Husayn asking him to come and promising to give him support.

On the other hand, the Syrians had no direct contact with the Holy Family. Perhaps, they were not aware of their existence as a result of the policy of isolation which Mu'awiya had imposed on them so that they should not be influenced by the culture of the Iraqis or anyone else in this matter.[4](#)

It seems that, at that time, the coming of the prisoners did not arouse any sadness in the hearts of the Syrian people, nor did the Syrians show any concern. Some of the sources, even, say that the occasion was made into a festival in Damascus, perhaps under the slogan that some of the enemies of the state from the Kharijites had been killed.

Yet even though the coming of the column of prisoners and the heads to Syria did not arouse any rites of remembrance to fill the streets and public squares as had happened in Kufa, great rites of remembrance were held in the halls of the palaces of the caliphate in Damascus which were made up of women from the family of 'Ali and women of the Umayyad family.

c) In Medina

Shaykh al-Mufid has reported in *Irshad* that Yazid ibn Mu'awiya dispatched 'Abd al-Malik ibn Abi al-Harith al-Sulami to Medina to take the news of the death of al-Husayn to his governor there. 'Abd al-Malik reported: 'When I went to 'Amr b. Sa'id b. al-'As, he asked, "What is your news?" "Something which will please the governor," I replied. "Al-Husayn ibn 'Ali has been killed."

He ordered me to go out and announce the news of his death. I announced it and I have never heard such wailing of the Hashimites in the houses for al-Husayn ibn 'Ali when they heard the announcement of his death.'

There is no doubt that when the men and women of the Talibid family learnt of the end of al-Husayn and his family at Karbala ', they held rites of remembrance in their houses, in the streets and in the public squares as the reports suggest.

Umm Luqman Zaynab bint 'Aqil ibn Abi Talib came out with her sister when she heard the news of the death of al-Husayn to weep for their dead on the Bank of the Euphrates. She was reciting:

'What will you say if the Prophet asks you: "What have you, the last umma, done

With my offspring and my family after I left them? Some of them are prisoners and some of them lie killed, stained with blood.

What sort of reward to me is this after I had advised you, that you should oppose me by doing evil to my family?'

After the arrival of the news of the dreadful event in Medina, the Talibids began rites of remembrance which continued and reached their climax with the arrival of the sad party in Medina.

There were rites of remembrance which were carried out by the men and there were rites of remembrance which were carried out by the women.

The men and women of Medina must also have attended these rites of remembrance, consoling, indignant and showing how they shared with the Talibids in their painful tragedy.

We consider that the rites of remembrance held by the men used to begin with expressions of condolence. After that the stories of the battle and its circumstances would be told. These stories would be full of cries for vengeance against the Umayyads and their followers. History has preserved for us a picture of rites of remembrance held by men. These were the rites of remembrance for 'Abd Allah ibn Ja'far.

The rites of remembrance of the women would have been more heated and emotional as is the nature of the case. Some of them would have been held in the houses and some would have been held in the cemetery of al-Baqi'. The Medinan women would have attended these rites of remembrances. Perhaps, even some of the men attended them as well, as may be deduced from some reports.

In our view the rites of remembrance of the Talibid women would have included an account of the battle in emotional language and an explanation of the great virtues of the martyrs. That would be permeated with a wailing kind of poetry. It may also have been accompanied by the beating of face and breasts.

We believe that the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn carried out by women have preserved their basic characteristics through the ages. No change worth mentioning has been introduced into them other than the language of the wailing kind of poetry and of the story of the battle. Certainly this language has changed insofar as it was classical and it has become colloquial or almost colloquial.

History has preserved a picture of some of these family rites of remembrance held by the women:

'Umm Banin –and she is Fatima bint Hizam al-Kilabiyya, the mother of al-'Abbas and his brothers, Abd

Allah, Ja'far and 'Uthman, who were killed with their brother, al-Husayn on the Day of 'Ashura' –used to go every day to the cemetery of al-Baqi', carrying ' Ubayd Allah, the child of her son, al-'Abbas.

She would mourn for her four sons with the deepest and most tormented grief. The people would gather and listen to her grieving. Marwan ibn al-Hakam used to come with those who came for that purpose and he would continue to listen to her grief as he wept.⁵

Then there were the rites of remembrance of al-Rabab, the wife of al-Husayn. However the greatest of the family rites of remembrance held by the women was undoubtedly the rites which Zaynab, daughter of 'Ali, held. They were solemn rites under the leadership of Zaynab.

These rites and the anti-Umayyad reactions they generated in Medina prompted the governor of Medina, 'Amr ibn Sa'id ibn al-'As to write to Yazid ibn Mu'awiya: 'The presence of Zaynab among the people of Medina is inflammatory. She is eloquent, clever, intelligent. She and those with her are determined to take vengeance for the death of al-Husayn.'

This led to her being taken away from Medina and sent to Egypt where she died on 14th Rajab in the year 62.

3. The General Rites Of Remembrance Which Occurred Spontaneously

We mean by the rites of remembrance which occurred spontaneously, those gatherings which took place as the column of prisoners and heads passed through the towns and scattered groups of people on its journey from Karbala ' to Kufa, then to Syria, and from there to Medina where the greatest of the spontaneous rites of remembrance was held.

In our view, these rites of remembrance took place in many of the places inhabited by people who recognised the position of the Holy Family in Islam and had been able to get to know something of what had taken place at Karbala'. We will mention here two outstanding examples of these rites of remembrance.

They were the rites of remembrance which took place in Kufa while the prisoners were about to set out for Syria and those which took place in Medina at the end of the journey of the revolution after the return of the rest of the Prophet's family from Karbala'.

a) In Kufa

When the column of prisoners with the heads of the martyrs arrived in Kufa they were met by what could now be termed 'a popular reception'.

Throughout the weeks of tribulation Kufa had been living on its nerves. The beginning had been represented by Muslim ibn' Aqil with his extraordinary success and then his dreadful end. It had watched the army being despatched to Karbala'.

It had suffered the pains and oppression of the martial law which dominated it during the weeks of tribulation. Now it had to come to see the result of the treachery by its leaders, the desertion by its inhabitants and the tyranny of its rulers.

Kufa met the women of the Prophet's family who expressed their bitterness and their misfortune in speeches which they addressed to the groups of people who had come to meet them. Imam Zayn al-'Abidin 'Ali ibn al-Husayn spoke to them in a similar way.

The historians have described the effect which these speeches had on the people. They have mentioned the effect of the speech of Imam 'Ali ibn al-Husayn: '... The voices of the people were raised in weeping from every side. Some were saying to others "You have been destroyed while you did not understand."

As for the effect of the speech of Zaynab, they have reported: 'Someone who heard it said: "By God, I have never seen a diffident lady speak more eloquently than her. It was as if she had borrowed the tongue of the Commander of the faithful, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib.

By God, she had not finished speaking before the people were in a turmoil of weeping. They became utterly distracted with grief and dropped whatever they were holding at the horror of this black tribulation."

The historians report about the effect of Umm Kulthum's speech with the words: 'The people were in a turmoil of weeping and lamentation. The women loosened their hair and covered their faces with dust. They scratched their faces and struck their cheeks. They prayed for woe and destruction. The men wept. I have never seen more men and women weeping than I saw on that day.'

Of the effect of the speech of the young Fatima, they said, '... A little before the end of her speech, the Kufans raised their voices in weeping and lamentation. They said: "Enough, O Daughter of the best of men. Our hearts have become enflamed and our bodies have been set on fire." So she fell silent.'

b) In Medina

When the sad party of the Holy Family were approaching the hills of Medina, Imam Zayn al-'Abidin asked Bashir to go ahead into Medina to announce al-Husayn's death and tell the people of the arrival of the Holy Family. Bashir reported: 'I mounted my horse and galloped into Medina. When I reached the Mosque of the Prophet, I raised my voice and recited: "People of Medina, you have no replacement there now that al-Husayn has been killed.

So weep profusely. His body was dyed red with blood at Karbala ' and his head was swung around on the shaft of a spear. Here is coming 'Ali ibn al-Husayn with his aunts and sisters. They have reached your suburbs and have stopped there. I am his messenger to you to tell you where he is."

Medina already knew about what had happened at Karbala' after 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad's messenger brought the news. The family rites of remembrance had been going on in the houses of the Talibid family

which were full of people bringing their condolences and discussing the news of Karbala'. Here was what was left of the slaughter of Karbala' by the Umayyad sword, returning to their home draped in the cloth of sadness, with bleeding hearts and tearful eyes.

Bashir ibn Jadhlan described the scene:

'There was not a woman who normally stayed in seclusion nor a woman who kept herself veiled who did not show her face as they were all calling for woe and affliction. Everybody in Medina came out making a great turmoil of weeping. I have never seen more people weeping than I saw on that day. Nor have I seen a more bitter day for the Muslims than it except for the death of the Apostle of God.'

Bashir ibn Jadhlan continued:

'I whipped my horses and began to return. I found that the people were already taking to the roads and streets ... 'Ali ibn al-Husayn was entering ... He had come holding a cloth with which he wiped away his tears. Behind him, his servant had a chair which he put down for him. He sat down upon it while still not being able to control his tears. On all sides the voices of the people were raised in weeping as they tried to console him. The place was in a great turmoil. He made a sign with his hand for them to be quiet and their uproar subsided. Then he made an emotional speech to them. Then he went into Medina ...'

In this way the whole of Medina was transformed, after the arrival of the Holy Family from Karbala', into one great rite of remembrance which was nourished with emotional agitation by the very centre of sadness and tragedy, the houses of the Talibid family, with the family of Imam al-Husayn at their fore. This transformed their family rites of remembrance into the greatest lamentations.

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These spontaneous and overflowing rites of remembrance, which were held in Kufa and Medina and at the stopping-places along the route in the journey of return from Karbala', carry within them the seeds of the public rites of remembrance as an institution.

This is so because those who participated in them only did so as people involved in the matter who claimed that the cause of al-Husayn was Islamic, not something which only belonged especially to one family, that is the Hashimites and the Talibids. Perhaps, even the family rites of remembrance performed at Karbala', Damascus and Medina also participated, in some way, in preparing the atmosphere appropriate for the growth of the foundation of the concept of the public rites of remembrance.

II. The Public Rites of Remembrance for Al-Husayn

The revolution of al-Husayn was a tremendous event which sent a convulsion through the whole of Islamic society, breaking down the false calmness and the silence which had wrapped itself around it. It made Islamic society think again about its view of many of its political conventions and it gave rise to a

movement of self-criticism which was awakened in men's consciences.

The soldiers returned to their towns and their tribes with the news of the horror, which they had seen and helped to commit, and of the terrible end that came to revolutionaries. Along the roads from Karbala' to Kufa, Syria and Medina, the people saw the column of prisoners and the heads of the martyrs. They were affected emotionally by the spontaneous rites of remembrance and those of the family which took place at different places.

The spontaneous effect of the revolution, together with the profound grief and extreme distress which it aroused, must have given the people, who knew about what happened, an excuse for gathering together, a subject of conversation, and an incentive to re-examine their attitudes and opinions and to review their position with regard to the whole system.

What had happened was on such a great scale and of such importance that it was impossible to ignore it. What had happened was an Islamic revolution, in which many of the men, who led it and were martyred in it, were at the very peak of Islamic society, the foremost of them being Imam al-Husayn.

The gatherings of people, which the emotional effect of the tragedy and the effect of the rites of remembrance, whether of the family or spontaneous, brought about, are, in our view, the core from which the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn as an institution began and developed during the course of history.

The remembrance rites for al-Husayn began immediately after the end of the revolution and news of it had spread in Islamic society. They began, however, in a spontaneous and simple way.

Small groups of indignant Muslims, both followers of the Holy Family and others, used to hold meetings in a house of one of them, in a mosque, in a street, or in an open square. They would speak about al-Husayn, his followers and his family and what had happened to them; they would criticise the authorities who had attacked him and their legal extension as represented by the governor in the area; they would renounce them; and sometimes they would recite some poetry of lament which had been composed about the revolution, its hero and its dead.

Through the ages, these rites of remembrance developed and passed through various stages until they reached the present form in which they are held today. We will examine these stages later. For the present, we want to explain the factors which led to these spontaneous gatherings being transformed into a cultural and sociological institution which has incomparable influence, namely the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn.

In our opinion, the Imams of the Holy Family are the ones who induced these spontaneous gatherings to go in this direction and change into an institution with customs and traditional practices.

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The earliest sources, which we believe prompted these groupings to become the cultural institution of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn, refer to a very early period after the revolution, I mean after the month of Muharram in the year 61.

These texts have been reported from Imam 'Ali ibn al-Husayn Zayn al-'Abidin (38-95). He had been present in the revolution with his father, Imam al-Husayn, from its beginning until its terrible end and he had tasted the bitterness of being taken prisoner with his aunts and sisters and the other women of the Holy Family.

In these texts Imam Zayn al-'Abidin explains the reward to be gained by anyone who wept for the tragic fate of al-Husayn. One such text is the following:

Whatever believer's eyes shed tears for the death of al-Husayn until they flow over his cheeks, will be provided by God, as a consequence, with rooms in Paradise which he will inhabit for a long time. Whatever believers eyes shed tears until they flow over his cheeks because of the grievous harm inflicted upon us by our enemies in this world, will be provided by God, as a consequence, with a true abode in Paradise.[6](#)

We consider that this explanation, and others like it, gave a specific direction to these spontaneous gatherings which were being held after the end of the revolution. This direction was based on the following idea: A constant reason for these gatherings would be easily achieved when there was a special meeting to discuss and study a tragedy which was overflowing with reasons for weeping.[7](#)

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In the time of Imam Abu Ja'far Muhammad al-Baqir, the son of Imam Zayn al-'Abidin (57-114 or 117), who was present at Karbala' with his father when he was four years old, he issued a directive which gave a definite form to keeping the memory of al-Husayn alive at an appointed time each year, 10th Muharram, the first month in the Islamic lunar calendar.

This form consisted of two practices: (a) The pilgrimage (*ziyara*) should be made to al-Husayn on the day of 'Ashura' for those whose houses were near the grave of al-Husayn; otherwise pilgrimage rites should be held at home for those who lived 'so far away that they could not make the journey there on that day.' (b) People should gather together and weep.

Imam al-Baqir said in connection with the man who is too far away to make the pilgrimage:

Then let him mourn and weep for al-Husayn. Let him order those in his house to weep for him. Let him celebrate the tragedy in his house by showing anguish for him. Let people meet together to weep in their houses for al-Husayn. Let them console each other for what befell al-Husayn ibn 'Ali.

Malik al-Juhni asked him, 'How should they console each other?' He answered:

Let them say:

May God increase our rewards as a result of what has befallen us through al-Husayn's sufferings. May God make both you and us men who seek vengeance for him together with His great saint (wali), the Imam, the Mahdi from the family of Muhammad.[8](#)

We are here faced with a clear directive for a gathering which was aimed at a defined objective, namely to keep the memory of al-Husayn alive. It has also been given a personal dimension with the words ... 'May God increase our rewards.' Thus the tragedy of al-Husayn is not just the special concern of his family. It is something of general concern which is connected with everyone who loves the Holy Family.

Here, we should draw attention to the directive made about what the man who is far away from Karbala ' on the Day of 'Ashura ' should do. It indicates he should provide himself with a substitute ritual for what was taking place at the grave of al-Husayn on the Day of 'Ashura'.

In the time of Imam al-Baqir, the great rites of remembrance were held at the grave of al-Husayn in the way which has been recorded in the directive. Those who were unable to come to Karbala' held their own rites of remembrance in their houses and in their quarters.

Since this directive was specially concerned with what the Shi'ite should do on the Day of 'Ashura', there is also another report which has come from Imam al-Baqir in which there is a general directive about gathering and remembering the situation of the Holy Family, which is not limited to a specific time:

May God have mercy on a man who meets with another in order to remember our situation. There will be a third person with them who will be an angel who will seek forgiveness for them. Two people shall never meet to remember us without God making them sincerely proud through the presence of an angel.

If you gather together and occupy yourselves in remembering us, then our memory will be kept alive in your meetings and in your remembrances. The best of people after us are those who remember our situation and urge others to remember us.

This text illustrates that the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn in the time of Imam al-Baqir had begun to take on the form of an institution with a purpose, whose activity was not subject to any specific limitation concerned with time. Rather, it was spreading both in time and place and developing, through being performed, its own customs and techniques.

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From the sources, it appears that by the time of Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad al-Sadiq (80 or 83–148), the gatherings devoted to the memory of the Holy Family and their tragedies, and the foremost of them, the tragedy of Imam al-Husayn, had become well-known in Shi'ite circles.

It is reported that Imam al-Sadiq said to al-Fudayl ibn Yasar, 'Al-Fudayl, do you sit together and talk?'

'Yes,' replied al-Fudayl.' The Imam then commented, 'Al-Fudayl, I love these gatherings. Keep the memory of our situation alive. God will have mercy on a man who keeps the memory of our situation alive.'⁹

We have already seen many texts which have been reported from Imam al-Sadiq urging the composition of poetry about al-Husayn and explaining the great reward that will come to anyone who makes fifty or ten or five ... people weep through his recitation of such poetry. Such texts contributed greatly to the motivation of people gathering for this purpose. This kind of recitation required people to gather. Whenever the gatherings increased in size, the impulses to weep increased.

It seems that the recitation of poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn had developed during this period and a special style arose in it which was rather like wailing, or was even wailing itself. It was not merely the chanting or recitation of poetry. Elements of voice-production had begun to be introduced which increased its emotional and psychological effect. The words of Imam al-Sadiq to Abu Harun al-Makfuf, when the latter recited him one of the poems of lament for al-Husayn, illustrate this point.

Abu Harun reported: Imam al-Sadiq said to me, 'Abu Harun, recite to me about al-Husayn.' I recited and he wept. Then he said, 'Recite as you were reciting.' He meant with emotion. So I recited:

Pass the grave of al-Husayn and speak of his great purity.

He wept ...¹⁰

Furthermore, it seems that in this period the development of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn had acquired another characteristic, that is, it made men and women devote themselves to composing poetry of lament for al-Husayn and they made the style of wailing a special feature of this kind of poetry. Such a person was Abu Harun whom we have just mentioned. Another of them was Abu ' Umara, the reciter.¹¹

Alongside the reciters of poetry, who used to use the special form of wailing, we find another group of men who participated in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn at this period. They are the story-tellers.

Story-tellers had existed since the time of ' Uthman ibn 'Affan. It appears that their function was in the gatherings in the mosque after the *salat*. There they would tell stories about the wars of conquest, the life of the Prophet and the virtues of the Companions of the Prophet and they would give sermons of encouragement and warning. Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan employed this group to spread his propaganda among the ordinary people.¹²

After becoming a growing institution which attracted increasing numbers of people, the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn seemed to have come within the interest of the story-tellers, or they created special story-tellers of their own.

An indication of this comes in an account reported from Imam al-Sadiq which describes the state of the people at the grave of al-Husayn during the night of 15th Sha'ban. It shows that by this period there had developed story-tellers who were introducing the life of al-Husayn into their stories, or even limited their stories to it.

Imam al-Sadiq says: 'I have learnt that people are going to the tomb of al-Husayn from the regions around Kufa as well as other people and women who mourn for him. This is on 15th Sha'ban. Among them are reciters who recite, story-tellers who tell his story, mourners who mourn'¹³

These reciters, mourners and story-tellers seem to be the early predecessors of the preachers from the pulpit of al-Husayn who have made their vocation preaching on the occasions of rites of remembrance for al-Husayn throughout the year.

We will return to the discussion of this subject later in this chapter when we deal with the stages of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn.

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During the time of Ja'far al-Sadiq, the Shi'a derived some benefit from the fall of the Umayyad regime and the founding of the 'Abbasid state insofar as the Umayyads were occupied in fighting the wars which the 'Abbasids and their propagandists instigated against them.

The 'Abbasids, in turn, had taken control of the government using the slogan that they were members of the Prophet's family (*ahl al-bayt*). Therefore it would not have been regarded as natural by the people for them to harrass Imam al-Sadiq, the most illustrious member of the Prophet's family (*ahl al-bayt*) in the eyes of the Muslims.

In addition to this, the 'Abbasids were distracted from close observations of Imam al-Sadiq and the Shi'a of the Holy Family by trying to set up their state, on the one hand, and by fighting the Umayyads and destroying their bases, on the other hand.

Imam al-Sadiq and the Shi'a enjoyed a great deal of freedom during this period. There were numerous directives and instructions issued by the Imam so that he would complete the structure of Shi'ism. There were also many gatherings of the Shi'a, and they developed their cultural institutions, in particular the institutions of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn and the pilgrimage (*ziyara*).

However, Abu Ja'far Mansur brought this activity to an end when he pursued the Shi'a and the members of the 'Alid family with death and banishment. This was one of the reasons which compelled them to restrict their activities and keep them secret.

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The Imams of the Holy Family continued their concern for the institution of the rites of remembrance

which they showed concern for by support and directives. They personally used to meet the poets and reciters and used to hold special gatherings to listen to their poetry and recitations. Their womenfolk and their special followers would attend these gatherings.

The Imams had showed their great concern for these meetings with the poets at an early period, the time of Imam Muhammad al-Baqir, and then after that at the time of his son, Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq.

Among the outstanding people at these meetings was al-Kumayt ibn Zayd al-Asadi (60–120). He had gone to see Imam al-Baqir and meet him in Medina. He recited to him an ode about his love for the Hashimites.

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq met the poet Ja'far ibn 'Affan al-Ta'i and asked him to recite a poem of lamentation for al-Husayn.

Al-Sayyid al-Himyari, Isma'il ibn Muhammad (105–173 or 178), was another poet who met Imam al-Sadiq and recited him his ode which begins:

Pass the grave of al-Husayn and speak of his great purity[14](#).

Di'bil ibn 'Ali al-Khuzai was a poet whom Imam 'Ali ibn Musa al-Rida met in Khurasan. He recited one of his odes to the Imam:

Schools of verses of the Qur'an are without recitation and the place of revelation is like courtyards empty of people. [15](#)

There were many others besides these.

Alongside this direct activity of meeting poets and performing the rites of remembrance in their houses, the Imams of the Holy Family persevered in their efforts to direct the Shi'a to hold gatherings and meetings in order to keep alive the memory of the Holy Family and especially of al-Husayn.

However, the Shi'a did not enjoy for long the relative freedom which had been afforded to them during the period of Imam al-Sadiq, as we alluded to earlier. The period of his son, the seventh Imam Musa al-Kazim, was a much blacker period for the Shi'a.

During it they were treated dreadfully by the 'Abbasid authorities as their organisations strove to combat the activities of the Shi'a and to suppress violently their cultural movements, among which, naturally, were the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn.

So violent was the terrorisation which the Shi'a faced from the authorities and their organisations in this period that the Shi'a were compelled to use *taqiyya* (precautionary dissimulation) on a wide scale in their public lives, in some circumstances even in their private lives, in order to preserve their physical safety.

Imam Musa spent a long period of his life in 'Abbasid prisons, and he died a martyr in one of the prisons

of Baghdad in the year 183, during the reign of Harun al-Rashid.

However, the Shi'a regained some freedom of movement during the periods of the eighth and ninth Imams, Imam 'Ali ibn Musa al-Rida (148 or 153-203) and his son, Imam Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Jawad (195-220). The reign of the 'Abbasid Caliph, al-Ma'mun, was characterised by the relative moderation in the treatment of the Shi'a. The atmosphere of tolerance continued in the reign of his successor, al-Mu'tasim.

Imam al-Rida became heir apparent to al-Ma'mun in 201 and his son-in-law through marrying al-Ma'mun's daughter, Umm Habiba. Similarly Imam al-Jawad became al-Ma'mun's son-in-law by marrying his daughter, Umm al-Fadl.

Among the directives of al-Rida concerning the performance of the rites of remembrance is the following:

Whoever remembers our sufferings and weeps for the crimes which have been committed against us, will be within our rank on the Day of Resurrection. Whoever remembers our suffering and weeps and makes others weep, his eyes will not weep on the Day when many eyes will weep. Whoever attends gatherings where our situation is kept alive, his heart will not die on the day when many hearts will die. [16](#)

* * *

During the periods of the next three Imams, 'Ali ibn Muhammad al-Hadi (b. Medina, 212, d. Samarra', 254), al-Hasan ibn 'Ali al-'Askari (b. Medina 231 or 232, d. Samarra' 260) and the twelfth Imam, the awaited Mahdi (b. Samarra' 255), the attitude of the authorities changed.

The reign of the 'Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil and those who came after him were times of harshness and tyranny in the treatment of the Shi'a and the Imams of the Holy Family. The stage saw only some slight relaxations which had little value for the course of events until the Buwayhids gained control over the government in Baghdad in the first half of the fourth century of the hijra.

However the harshness of the rulers like the fanaticism of the general populace which we will examine later could not impede the growth of the institution of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn and its continuation in men's consciousness.

The rites of remembrance for al-Husayn were held secretly during the periods of harshness and persecution. The danger did not affect the enthusiasm of the Shi'a to hold these rites constantly, and especially on the Day of 'Ashura'.

* * *

We consider that the correct explanation for the attitude of the Imams of the Holy Family to the problem of keeping alive the memory of al-Husayn through poetry and gatherings of remembrance and urging

the people to do that, is found in the fact that keeping alive this memory constantly shows the people the policy which the Imams of the Holy Family laid down to safeguard and defend Islam.

It shows the *umma* the great sacrifices which they have made for the sake of that. Similarly it reveals the nature, enmity and distance from Islam of the forces which confronted and combatted them. It explains the essence of the struggle between them and their opponents.

It is not personal nor self-interested; it only goes back, in one respect, to the concern of the Imams of the Holy Family to make every ruler adhere to trust and truth through the application of the principles of Islam in his policies; and, in another respect, it goes back to the contradiction of the personal and family interests of the rulers with the aims of the Imams of the Holy Family in defence of Islam from exploitation and in defence of the Islamic way of life (*shari'a*) from distortion.

Keeping the memory of the revolution of al-Husayn alive, recalling the incidents involved in it, reviewing its slogans and the slogans of its opponents and examining their behaviour in their lives and their policies towards the *umma* ... all of this ensures that the corrupt government which exists in any period and in any time will be found guilty because it is the illegal continuation of the government whose distorted conduct led to the revolution and death of al-Husayn.

The texts that we have presented in this section clearly indicate the nature of the objectives and the important issues that the Holy Family wanted to realise through the creation of this institution.

This, in our view, is the real content of the call by the Imams of the Holy Family to keep alive this memory in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn and others. As for the emotional content of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn, we shall deal with that in another chapter devoted to the discussion of the phenomenon of weeping.

* * *

The Imams of the Holy Family, thus, created the institution of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn. During the earliest Islamic eras, this institution began its activity in a limited form. Some contributory factors strengthened its existence, and these factors gave it additional causes for growth. Its subject matter was enriched with new contents, all of which helped to serve the basic aim of its creation. In the same way, new techniques of expression and practice were introduced.

We will mention, in what follows, three matters which we consider to be among the contributory factors for rooting the institution of the rite of remembrance for al-Husayn firmly in popular consciousness, for enriching it and for giving variety to its content.

1. There were the revolutions which broke out against the existing government as a result of the revival of the spirit of struggle which the revolution of al-Husayn kept alive.

These revolutions raised the slogans of vengeance for al-Husayn in order to arouse and mobilise the

people to support them. They made the revolution of al-Husayn a beacon and a slogan. This was an important factor in providing the revolution of al-Husayn with new reasons to live in the hearts and minds of men.

This factor was not just limited to the Umayyad period. It also occurred in the 'Abbasid period in the revolutions of the descendants of al-Hasan and others. It used to appear to the people that it was as if the spirit of Karbala' was the thing which was motivating the revolutionaries.

2. By virtue of its power to arouse the emotions, by virtue of its ensuring and publicly declaring the guiltiness of the corrupt government, and by virtue of its direction by the Imams of the Holy Family along this course, the memory of al-Husayn became in many periods one of the means of secret opposition to the existing government.

Under the yoke of a corrupt government, the Shi'ite used to suffer in two ways: (i) He was persecuted and hunted because of his beliefs and his historical attitude. (ii) He learnt from the programme of the Imams of the Holy Family that Islam was an integrated belief and way of life. For this reason he would never accept any falsification of its truths.

The situation in which the Shi'ite lived and his intellectual policy, put him at the centre of opposition. Therefore he needed to express himself and his attitude as an opponent with the caution necessary to provide a minimum of security for himself and his economic interests.

The memory of al-Husayn provided him with the opportunity of carrying out his opposition to the existing government in secret within a relatively safe compass. It also attained for him a psychological ease which grew out of the ideals of the Holy Family. These shining ideals were guaranteed by the memory of al-Husayn.

3. These were the reactions against the attitude of the tyrannical rulers towards the memory and rites of al-Husayn.

From the Umayyad period until the present, tyrannical rulers have realised the implications involved in the holding of gatherings to remember al-Husayn in terms of the condemnation of their excesses and injustice. Therefore they have attempted to stop them and suppress them.

We find this in the Umayyad period, and we find it in the 'Abbasid period. We find it in the political dynasties which followed the 'Abbasids, where the Shi'a lived.

In previous studies we have given much evidence for government suppression of the Shi'a when they practise, in any way, the rites to keep alive the memory of al-Husayn. Further evidence will be given in future studies.

The memory of al-Husayn, in the pilgrimage and the rites of remembrance, has faced, in most political periods, suppression prohibition and persecution for those who tried to practise them. In the periods of

some rulers there have been feeble relaxations in which the Shi'a enjoyed only a limited amount of freedom.

Soon a new period or a new ruler plundered this from them, sometimes preventing them from holding the rites or at other times restricting the rites to keep his memory alive with numerous heavy restrictions. This was done in order to try to empty them of any content critical of the existing regime.

Yet all these acts of repression failed to wipe out the rituals associated with this remembrance. The rites of remembrance and other ceremonies were held secretly on their appropriate occasions even in the most harsh and unjust periods.

One of the things which may be of great evidence in this connection is the fact that stopping rites of remembrance, preventing them from being held or putting restrictions on the freedom to carry them out in terms of them representing opposition to the government is a policy which even Shi'ite rulers as well as others have followed. In Iraq, Iran and other Islamic countries, when the chief responsibility in the state came into the hands of a Shi'ite ruler, it used to happen that, on some occasions, he would follow the policy of prohibition or restriction.

In this way the situation does not differ from what pertains when the person in chief responsibility in the state is a non-Shi'ite. This confirms that the memory of al-Husayn is essentially non-sectarian.

This attitude by the authorities against the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn has remained constant and still generates a reaction which prompts the Shi'ite to hold on to them and care for them.

The feelings of the Shi'ite with regard to this may have been that the authorities wanted to deprive him of the only refuge, in which he could relieve his emotions of fear and anger and his psychological repression, and during which he could express his views of the government's attitude and behaviour.

* * *

These, in our view, are the contributory factors which helped to strengthen the position of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn in popular consciousness and gave it the power to remain firm and continue despite the hostile attitude towards it throughout the centuries. They, also, provided it with the possibilities of development and renewal generation after generation.

These were in addition to the basic reason for its existence and growth, namely the fact that the Imams of the Holy Family had directed their Shi'a to develop this great cultural institution.

III. The Stages of the Rites of Remembrance for Al-Husayn

In the nature of the case, when the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn were founded, they did not exist in any already completed way. They were not fixed in a single form in the centuries which followed. They

developed and changed during different historical periods and elements were introduced into them which had not existed in them before.

We consider that, from their institution to the present, the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn have passed through three major stages, represented by the historical and cultural epochs through which the Muslims, in general, and the Shi'ites, in particular, lived.

These left their mark on their institutions, including the rites of remembrance. Each of these three major stages, which we will classify, also had changes within so that the researcher could divide each of these stages into many more stages.

The three stages, which we consider the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn to have gone through from the time they began up to the present, are the following: (i) the first stage began shortly after the revolution, i.e. a year after 61, and it continued until the fall of Baghdad at the hands of Hulagu, or shortly before that; (ii) the second stage began at the time of the fall of Baghdad, or shortly before that, and continued through the dark ages of the history of the Muslims until the modern period; and (iii) the third stage was from the beginnings of the modern period until the present.

These are the stages which we consider that the rites of remembrance have passed through from their institution until now.

We do not have the sources for an exhaustive investigation of the stages, development, fixed content and changing content of the rites of remembrance throughout its history.

In the preface of this book we explained that this study of the revolution of al-Husayn in popular consciousness was a pioneering work insofar as we do not know of any study on the subject before this one. As a result our study suffers from a paucity of sources which would make it easier.

With God's guidance we come to what we consider as the basic source for this study and what we consider as a contributory source to the basic source, in addition to the general sources of history, civilisation and intellectual development.

In our view the basic source is the books about the death of al-Husayn (*maqatal*). For this reason we will rely on these books in our analysis of the stages, through which the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn passed, and of the content of the rites in each of those stages.

The contributory source is the poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn in the different Islamic periods insofar as, in some cases, it reflects the state of the rites of remembrance during that time, even though it lacks relative exactness in portraying the actual situation of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn because the personal and subjective element in it dominates the objective factor, which we assume to be the mark of prose writing in the books about the death of al-Husayn.

What made us consider the books about the death of al-Husayn to be a basic source for this study was

our knowledge that the writers, both Shi'ite and non-Shi'ite who were closely attached to the Imams of the Holy Family, had written much about the death of al-Husayn. Although some of them had written about this subject in response to a purely scientific motive, we consider that group of writers to be small and rare.

There is no doubt that most writers on this subject wrote in response to two integrated motives. One of these was the motive of religious piety and emotional loyalty to the Holy Family. The second was in response to the people's demand for written material which set out the account of the death of al-Husayn for use in gatherings and meetings held to keep the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn alive.

In view of this, these latter books reflect, with objective truth, the situation of the rites of remembrance during the periods in which they were written, since they are, without any doubt, a mirror of the general view of the rites of remembrance, their cultural content and the elements which formed this content.

In what follows, we will put forward some of the texts from some of the books about the death of al-Husayn which demonstrates that these books were written in order to be read at the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn.

In the introduction to his book, *Muthir al-Ahzan*, Ibn Nama al-Hilli (d. 645) says:

O man of insight and understanding, O man of reason and dreams, behold the watchword of grief. Let grief clothe men of faith. Imitate the Apostle in love for the children of Fatima the fair and pure. O you who love the family of the Apostle, wail like the women bereft of her children wails. Weep with flowing tears for the Imams of Islam.

Perhaps you may give them solace for the tragedy by showing grief and dejection and by declaring your yearning and your lamentation. Make me happy through your wailing and keening. Mourn for him whose death shook the throne of Heaven. Shed tears for the man who was killed in a distant land ...

I was told by my father, may God have mercy upon him, that Imam al-Sadiq said: 'Whoever refers to us at a gathering with the slightest word or whose eyes overflow with a tear, even the amount of the wing of a mosquito, because of compassion towards us and sympathy for our tragedy, will have his sins forgiven ...'

I have written this account of the death of al-Husayn as one which is intermediate between the other accounts Hearts should delight in the sweetness of its expression. The sleeper will wake from his sleep and dozing. The man who ignores this tragedy and the man who is forgetful of grief and distress will pay attention O listeners, if you missed the honour of giving support and were deprived of fighting against that cavalry, you have not missed the opportunity of letting your tears flow for the noble lords of the family and putting on the watchword of grief for the family [17](#)

Ibn al-Ghuti, in his book, *al-Hawadith al-Jami'a*, has reported some of the incidents which indicate that

the books about the death of al-Husayn were compiled to be read out at the gatherings for the rites of remembrance, from which it can be assumed that it was a common phenomenon and a firm element in the practices of keeping the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn alive. It supports our view for considering the books about the death of al-Husayn as a basic source for our study. He says:

“In the year 641, al-Mu’tasim sent to Jamal al-Din ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn al-Jawzi, the inspector of public order (*muhtasib*), to stop the people from reading aloud the account on the death of al-Husayn on the Day of ‘Ashura’ and reciting it in the rest of the areas beside Baghdad, except at the grave of Musa ibn Ja’far¹⁸

“In Muharram in the year 648, al-Mu’tasim prohibited the people of Kufa and al-Mukhtara from wailing, reciting and reading aloud the account of the death of al-Husayn, out of fear that it would go beyond that into something which would lead to disorder.”¹⁹

As a result of this, in our study of the stages, cultural content and the differing elements of each stage of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn, we will examine the books about the death of al-Husayn in terms of them being representative of the periods in which they were written and therefore representative of the revolution of al-Husayn in popular consciousness in each of those periods. We will also seek the help of the poetry of lamentation for this purpose, alongside the general sources for the history of civilisation and intellectual development.

* * *

In these three stages the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn always included a fixed element just as changing elements were found in them.

This fixed element in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn has been, from its inception right up to the present time, the story of the revolution of al-Husayn with a concentration on the tragic aspect of it: the treachery and betrayal of the Kufans; the extreme oppression of the Umayyads and their rejection of true values; the prevention of water reaching al-Husayn's camp; the thirst of the women, children, fighters and horses which that led to; the conversations between the women and children and al-Husayn and others about the problem of water and thirst; the conversations of al-Husayn with his followers, or his brothers, or his sisters, or the Umayyad army; the insistence of Ibn Ziyad in humiliating al-Husayn and the refusal by the latter and those with him to accept injustice; al-Husayn's call to his family and followers to leave him and save themselves and their refusal to do that with declarations of their determination to support him until death in very moving words; the martyrdom of his followers and the members of his family and the killing of youths and children; and the rites of remembrance reach their climax with death of al-Husayn together with exact details about the place of his death and about every place of death at Karbala '.

In addition to the story of al-Husayn's revolution, there is within the fixed element criticism of the authorities when reasons for that criticism exist.

In Umayyad and 'Abbasid times, that criticism was often clearly stated because these rites of remembrance were held in secret at that time. The criticism may be through allusions and indirect indications when there are men of the authorities who are associated with the Shi'a who may cause fear of indicating this attitude openly.

After the criticism, it was inevitable that the guilt of the authorities would be declared through cursing. The cursing of the Umayyads and those who followed their policy has become a fixed characteristic in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn.

This is what we understand to have happened during the Umayyad and the 'Abbasid periods. Later, in times of freedom, the rites of remembrance were held in public. The criticism and cursing of the Umayyads and 'Abbasids took place openly without arising any opposition from the actual authorities. That was because it had become criticism which was devoid of any political content, even though criticism of people in the past may on many occasions be an indirect criticism of the existing authorities.

The First Stage

The rites of remembrance for al-Husayn began in this stage in a simple form, as we mentioned in the introduction of this chapter. However, throughout this stage, they developed in form and in mode.

The formal aspect, we believe, provided the rites of remembrance with fixed times, i.e. they entered into a framework of time and became a cultural activity which was programmed in terms of times.

This programme of times consisted of:

1. Occasions connected by time with memory of al-Husayn's revolution. They were the first ten days of the lunar month of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic year. After the 10th Muharram (the day of the battle) was made a special day of memorial, the first days of Muharram (1st-10th) became, in the later period of this stage, special days of memorial. This means that the temporal span for carrying out the rites of remembrance and showing grief was extended from what it had been at the beginning of the institution of rites of remembrance.
3. Days of memorial which had become times to make the pilgrimage (*ziyara*) to al-Husayn's grave.

The most important of these is, in our estimation, the night and day of 15th Sha'ban. Some early texts issued by Imam Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Baqir give evidence for that. In them the Imam urges that the pilgrimage be made to the grave of al-Husayn on the middle day in the month of Sha'aban. More were issued by Imam al-Sadiq with regard to that matter. [20](#)

It appears from a text, mentioned earlier, which 'Abd Allah ibn Haminad al-Basri reported from Imam al-Sadiq that the 15th Sha'ban was a very important occasion for the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn.

Next in importance to the night and day of the 15th Sha'ban, in terms of performing the rites of

remembrance for al-Husayn, are the other days in the year on which the Imams have urged the pilgrimage to al-Husayn to be made. For example, there is the Day of 'Arafat, which is 9th Dhu al-Hijja, the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar; the evening of the festival at the end of the fast (*'id al-fitr*), which is the 1st Shawwal, the tenth month of the Islamic calendar; 1st Rajab, the seventh month of the Islamic calendar; and there are other occasions.[21](#)

These days were days of memorial for people to gather together where a great number of people would meet to perform the pilgrimage of al-Husayn. If we are allowed to consider the picture which comes in the report given by 'Abd Allah ibn Hammad al-Basri as a model, we could hold the view that these days of memorial were also great seasons for the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn as well as being days of memorial for the pilgrimage.

Circles and gatherings were held at which poems in praise of the Holy Family and in lament for al-Husayn, his family and his followers were recited, and the events of the Battle of Karbala' were discussed.

We can hold the view that the rites of remembrance on these occasions were not limited to the shrine of al-Husayn at Karbala' but took place in many of the countries where the Shi'a lived on those days on which the pilgrimage took place. The Shi'a, who were unable to get to Karbala', used to perform the rituals of the pilgrimage away from it.

This kind of ritual of pilgrimage would be appropriate for the performance of the rites of remembrance by those of the Shi'a who were far away from Karbala' as the evidence of the report from Imam Muhammad al-Baqir, which we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, suggests. In it there is a direction to the Shi'a who are far away from Karbala' on the Day of 'Ashura' to perform rites of remembrance.

A clear text has been reported by al-Sayyid Muhsin which gives evidence for and expresses the idea that the days of memorial for the pilgrimage were days of memorial for the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn. It says:

'It is reported in *Kitab al-Muhadara wa-Akhbar al-Mudhakara* by al-Tannukhi that there was at the Ha'ir in Karbala' a man called Ibn Asdaq who used to recite poetry about al-Husayn in the wailing style. Abu al-Hasan, the scribe, sent Abu al-Qasim al-Tannukhi 'Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Dawud, the father of the author of *al-Nashwar*, to this reciter so that he should recite in the wailing style for al-Husayn a poem to some of the Kufan poets. The poem begins:

O eyes flow with tears and let them fall unceasingly.

Abu al-Qasim commented:

'This was 15th Sha'ban and the people at that time were put under great pressure by the Hanbalites when they wanted to go out to the Ha'ir. I continued to be polite with them until I got out and I was in the

Ha'ir on the evening of 15th Sha'ban.'[22](#)

This probably took place between the end of the third century of the hijra and the beginning of the fourth, as Abu al-Qasim al-Tannukhi was born in 278 and died in 342.

These days of memorial, which were repeated in every year, brought together classes of people from different directions, from various countries and from a variety of cultural levels. This led to a unified view of the revolution of al-Husayn and to the enrichment of popular consciousness with new outpourings of the emotional and psychological influence which rooted the history and slogans of the revolution firmly in this consciousness, together with the spreading of the idea of the rites of remembrance in areas where it had not yet become established. Thus the rites of remembrance were instituted in new areas of the Islamic world every year.

The institution of the pilgrimage did the institution of the rites of remembrance a great service at the level of rooting the feeling for the cause of al-Husayn in the rites of remembrance in new lands year after year.

* * *

There was another formal element which entered the practice of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn.

That was that there began to arise men and women who specialised in reciting the life of al-Husayn and others who specialised in composing poetry of lament with the styles of wailing.

The life story of al-Husayn, after being a dialogue between those gathered together, became a text which was recited while the others listened. Those who did the recitation were 'the story-tellers'. We have already discussed the allusion to them in one of the accounts of the pilgrimage which tells of what happened at Karbala' on 15th Sha'ban, namely the account of 'Abd Allah ibn Hammad al-Basri.

The texts which these story-tellers recited were the books about the death of al-Husayn. An indication of that is given in the historical accounts, some of which we have mentioned with regard to what happened during the reign of the 'Abbasid Caliph, al-Musta'sim. Similarly we have mentioned a clearly-stated text on the subject which came within the books about the death of al-Husayn.

After it having been the poet who recited his own poem or the special reciter of the poet reciting the poem of his poet in a gathering which was brought together by chance or hurriedly, there came men and women who specialised in memorising much of the poetry which was composed in lament for al-Husayn and in praise of the Holy Family.

Then deliberate gatherings were held, which were for the purpose of keeping the memory of al-Husayn alive. The man or woman who specialised in the wailing technique would be invited to recite poetry in this special style in which the effects of voice-production served to help bring about weeping which was

one of the aims of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn.

The sources sometimes incidentally mention the names of some of the men and women who specialised in this special style of wailing recitation.

1. Abu al-Hasan, the scribe, sent Abu al-Qasim 'Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Dawud al-Tannukhi to a reciter called 'Ali ibn Asdaq al-Ha'iri so that he should recite poetry in the wailing style for al-Husayn at Karbala' on the evening of the middle day of Sha'ban to some Kufans.

Abu al-Qasim was born in the year 278 and died in the year 342. Therefore at the end of the third century of the hijra or the beginning of the fourth century there existed specialist reciters of the wailing technique who enjoyed reputations which went beyond their own towns.

2. The name of Dharra, the wailing woman, is reported by al-Nisaburi according to what Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 413) mentioned in his *al-Amali*.

3. Ahmad ibn al-Muzaddiq, the reciter with the wailing technique, was alive in 346 and he enjoyed a considerable reputation in Baghdad.[23](#)

4. There was a professional reciter with the wailing technique in Baghdad whose name was Abu al-Qasim 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Shatranji, who used to recite wailing poetry about al-Husayn at Karbala'. He must have been alive between the end of the third century of the hijra and the beginning of the fourth because he is mentioned for his wailing recitation of his poem to al-Nashi' al-Saghir, 'Ali ibn 'Abd Allah ibn al-Wasif (271–365).[24](#)

5. There was in Baghdad a famous accomplished woman wailing reciter called Khallab. She gave a wailing recitation of a poem by al-Nashi'. She was alive in 323. Al-Barbahari (d. 329) ordered her to be killed.[25](#)

6. In Fatimid Egypt in the fourth century there was a group of people who specialised in wailing and recitation. We can assume that the same practice was taking place in Syria and Iraq. The following text illustrates the situation in Egypt.

“On the Day of 'Ashura' in the year 396, it happened, as it did every year, that the markets were closed. The reciters came out to the mosque of Cairo and stopped there as they gathered for wailing a recitation. After that day, the chief judge (*qadi*) gathered the rest of the reciters who earned their living from wailing and recitation and said to them: 'You would not pester the people to take something from them if you stayed at your shops. Do not earn a living by wailing and reciting. Whoever wants to do that can do it in the desert.'”[26](#)

This formal development in the practice of the rites of remembrance is one of the changes which occurred during the first of the stages of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn. There is no doubt neither reciters nor story-tellers could recite from written texts when this stage began in the first century

of the hijra.

This development was introduced later when the remembrance rites took on the character of an institution with special dates and customs and when this institution, as a result of that, began to create its own time schedule, its own devices and its own human apparatus.

We will see that the story-teller, who used to undertake the task of giving the historical information about the revolution and would speak to the mind and the emotions through his stories, and the reciter, who used to arouse the emotions of his listeners with the poetry of lamentation we will see that both of these men became united in the following period in the second stage into the preacher of the pulpit for al-Husayn who brought together the function of the story-teller and the function of the reciter.

* * *

In the middle of this period the geographical area where the performance of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn was held spread in the climate of relative freedom which was provided by Shi'ite political forces gaining power in many of the Islamic countries.

From the year 333 the Hamdanids began to extend their domination over Syria and Mosul. Under the protection of their government Shi'ism flourished. Naturally, as a result of that, Shi'ite thought and Shi'ite institutions flourished. Aleppo became a centre for Shi'ite jurisprudence just as it became a destination for Shi'ite men of culture, scholars and poets.

There is no doubt that the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn gained a share of this relaxation which gave an opportunity for those who cared for it to practise it and develop it in form and mode.

The poetry of lament for al-Husayn flourished in this climate. The lamentation poetry which was composed under the Hamdanids reflected the people's increasing concern for the institution of the pilgrimage, as we mentioned earlier when we gave evidence for it in the discussion of the pilgrimage (*ziyara*) in the poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn.

This leads to the belief that the rites of remembrance gained a great share in that especially after the Fatimids gained control over Egypt which influenced, and was influenced by, the Syrian region.

Muhammad Kurd 'Ali in his book *Khitat al-Sham*, mentions this in a discussion of the group called 'Mutawalis', i.e. the Shi'a, when he refers to the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn: 'During the Days of 'Ashura' the Shi'a gather and perform rites of remembrance for al-Husayn ibn 'Ali, the martyr of Karbala'.

Their observance of that goes back a long way to the period of the tragedy.... It appears from the life of Dik al-Jinn al-Humsi in *Kitab al-Aghani* that these gatherings to perform rites of remembrance for al-Husayn were well-known at this time.²⁷

At the time when the Hamdanids became masters of Syria, the Buwayhids, who were also of the Shi'a, took control of Iraq and Iran, gradually depriving the 'Abbasid Caliph of all effective authority. This provided the land which gave birth to the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn the opportunity to enjoy a freedom, which it had frequently lost, to perform the rituals of the rites associated with al-Husayn. In this way the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn developed greatly in form and mode.

It seems that at first the Buwayhid did not publicly and clearly proclaim their Shi'ite position. They did not make the state a party to the practices of the rites of remembrance. They only allowed the people freedom to practise them. However, some two decades later they did make the rites of remembrance a state affair.

Ibn al-Athir has reported in the events of the year 352:

In this year the state ordered the people to shut their shops on the 10th of Muharram and to suspend the markets and all buying and selling. The people did that, and the Sunnis had no power to prevent that because of the great number of the Shi' a and the fact that the authorities were from them.[28](#)

It is well-known that the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn did not begin in Iraq at this time. They go back to the earliest Islamic times as we mentioned previously. In this period they became much more widespread and during the rule of the Buwayhids they became an official ceremony.

The Buwayhids may have delayed the announcement of the rites of remembrance as an official institution out of their concern at the beginning of their establishment of their state, for the feelings of a group of their subjects who were not Shi'ites.

On the eve of the Buwayhids assumption of power, the Hanbalites had become fanatically hostile towards these rites of remembrance. They had used violence in their opposition to Shi' ite activity in this field. There are many historical texts which provide evidence for that. Among these is the following report in *Bughyat al-Nubala* ':

“There was in Baghdad a famous accomplished woman wailing reciter who was known as Khallab. She gave a wailing recitation of a poem by al-Nashi' and we heard her in the houses of some of the leaders, because at that time the people were not able to perform wailing recitation except with support from men in authority or secretly because of the Hanbalites.”[29](#)

This incident took place in 232, i.e. ten years before the Buwayhids came to power.

We have already referred to the text which explains that 'the people were put under great pressure by the Hanbalites when they wanted to go out to the Ha'ir.' We commented that this took place between the end of the third century of the hijra and the beginning of the fourth.

The Hanbalites then, were using violence in their opposition to the rituals of al-Husayn as represented by the rites of remembrance and the pilgrimage. Ibn al-Athir's statement, '... the Sunnis had no power to prevent that because of the great number of the Shi'a,' is not correct. The Sunnis in Iraq even participated in the rites of remembrance. Those among the Sunnis who opposed these rituals were a small group, the Hanbalite sect.

These sectarian clashes because of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn seem to have begun at an early time in respect to this period. That was when the Shi'a in the 'Abbasid era tried to perform the rituals associated with al-Husayn publicly and especially in the month of Muharram. Ibn Taghri Burdi has reported in the events for the year 174:

“Then partisanship rose and there were disturbances between the Sunnis and the Rafidites (Shi'a).”³⁰

He does not give the reason for that but it seems likely to be the one which we have suggested.

Egypt had known the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn from a very early time. The Umayyad administration in the Hijaz was afraid of the consequences of the activity which Zaynab had been striving to carry out in Medina after her return from Karbala', where, through the family rites of remembrance, she was enflaming the Hijaz with the spirit of the revolution in a society which was ready for it.

'Amr ibn Said ibn al-'As the governor of Medina wrote to Yazid ibn Mu'awiya to tell him of his fear of the consequences of the movement of Zaynab if she continued her activities. He said: 'The presence of Zaynab among the people of Medina is inflammatory. She is eloquent, clever and intelligent. She and those with her are determined to take vengeance for the death of al-Husayn.'

An order appears to have issued that Zaynab should be sent outside the Hijaz. This point in the history of Zaynab is unclear. How was the order for her to travel issued? Why was Egypt rather than any other country chosen? The sources do not provide us with an explanation of the real situation.

What we do know from the sources is that Zaynab arrived in Egypt in the month of Sha'ban in the year 61, i.e. approximately eight months after the Battle of Karbala'. Maslama ibn Mukhallad al-Ansari, the governor of Egypt, met her in Bilbis with the leaders of the Muslims amid weeping and condolences. Maslama went with her and she resided with him. She lived there for about a year after her arrival and then she died on 14th Rajab in the year 62.

The Umayyad choice of Egypt as the place of exile for Zaynab may have arisen out of the belief that any propaganda activity she undertook there would have only limited effect on the stability of the Umayyad government, as Egypt was far away from events in Iraq and the people who knew about what was going on in Iraq was a very limited number of those in government and those associated with them.

The ordinary people knew nothing about the true situations, in contrast to the people in Iraq, Syria and the Arabian peninsula where there was an active and busy exchange of ideas, news and people among

them.

We believe that Zaynab, during the short period which she spent in Egypt, was able to influence the Egyptians, who came into contact with her, to varying degrees because she must have spoken to them about what had happened at Karbala'.

However, we have to admit that this influence was so limited that its effects were not shown in any wavering of the people's allegiance to the Umayyad government in Damascus, although this influence was a nucleus whose importance for the future could not be ignored.

* * *

While the Hamdanids in Syria and Mosul and the Buwayhids in Iraq and Iran were planting their authority firmly and while the rites of remembrance and the other rituals associated with al-Husayn were flourishing under these Shi'ite governments, the Fatimids were extending their control over Egypt which they entered in 358. In this way the area, in which the rites of al-Husayn and the other rituals flourished, was increased far beyond what it had been in the past.

The Fatimids, when they took control of Egypt, did not introduce rituals to an area where the rites of remembrance had not existed. They had existed there during the weak rule of the Ikshidids whom the Fatimids overthrew. Al-Maqrizi in *al-Khitat* has explained that the call for grief for al-Husayn took place during the time of the Ikshidids and its scope was broadened during the time of the Fatimids.

Yet the situation of the rituals of the rites of remembrance in Egypt before the Fatimids was the same as their situation on Iraq before the Buwayhids. They existed but they aroused opposition against them from some fanatical sectarian elements. An example of this is what happened on 'Ashura' in the year 350 when a disturbance occurred between the soldiers and a group of citizens at the tomb of Umm Kulthum. It appears that this was because of the rites of remembrance that had been held on that day.

However, we should notice that the situation was not always like this during the 'Abbasid period. There was a long period of time for the Shi' a in Egypt when they were exposed to persecution. An example of that is what happened to them when Yazid ibn 'Abd Allah ibn Dinar was appointed governor of Egypt by the 'Abbasid Caliph, al-Muntasar, in the month of Rajab in the year 242.

'He searched for all the Rawafid (Shi' a) in Egypt, destroyed them or punished them and afflicted them. Their important members were suppressed and groups of them taken to Iraq in the worst possible way.'

[31](#) These measures seem to have been taken in the year 245.

After the coming of the Fatimids, the rituals on 'Ashura ' became official ceremonies of state, and the rites of remembrance became one of the cultural institutions of the state.

* * *

The favourable political situation in Iraq, Iran, Egypt and North Africa gave the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn a golden opportunity to become widespread. They became public under the protection of the state on most occasions. This did not stop them from arousing the opposition of fanatical groups, especially the Hanbalites in Iraq.

In the atmosphere of freedom and security which political development provided over a vast geographical area, the rites of remembrance were able to attain for themselves developments in form which were of great importance, the most outstanding of which we have discussed in the first part of this section. Similarly they achieved for themselves changes in the mode of their content, which we will discuss in what follows.

* * *

The developments of mode in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn during the first stage occurred in the following ways:

1. There was a widening of the exposition of the details of the events and the ancient causes which had preceded them, including matters associated with the succession to the Apostle of God, the policies which were followed during the reign of 'Uthman and the Umayyad policy in a comprehensive manner.

We find manifestations of this development in the poetry of the second century of the hijra and after, insofar as in the second half of the second century there begins to appear what we could describe as 'lamentation poetry with a historical and theological tendency.' The poetry comes to use the events of history with the rationality of theologians in order to give an explanation to the subject of al-Husayn.

Sufyan ibn Mus'ab al-'Abdi (d. 120 or 178) and al-Kumayt ibn Zayd al-Asadi (d. 120) were possibly the first who used this technique in lamentation poetry, even though al-Kumayt's poetry of praise and of the virtues of the Holy Family shows more of this style than his lamentation poetry.

When we come to the third century of the hijra and what follows it, we find this kind of lamentation poetry widely among the poets of lament for al-Husayn. Such poets include 'Abd al-Salam ibn Raghban (known as Dik al-Jinn), Di'bil al-Khuza'i, al-Qasim ibn Yusuf, the secretary, al-Sharif al-Radi and al-Sharif al-Murtada. This kind of poetic mode continued to grow and spread until by the end of the fifth century lamentation poetry came to be like a record of history and virtues.

We judge that this phenomenon in lamentation poetry would be reflected in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn during this period.

3. There was a growth in the extent of the mentioning of virtues in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn. The rites of remembrance began to include the mentioning of the virtues and the outstanding position in the history of Islam of the Imams of the Holy Family, the testamentary designations (*wasaya*) by the Apostle of God of the Imams and the opposition of some of the *umma* to these testamentary

designations. In addition to that special forms of honour were expressed about Imam al-Husayn.

We became acquainted with this new phenomenon in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn through the lamentation poetry which was composed in the second century and afterwards. Similarly we learn of it through the books about the death of al-Husayn which were compiled after the second century insofar as these books became concerned with the recording of Traditions about virtues of the Holy Family and al-Husayn and expressions of honour as well as the historical account. The poetry of lament which was composed in this period is full of evidence of this phenomenon.

5. Poetry and prose become integrated. We believe that the rites of remembrance began in the form of conversations. Then there came a story which was reported or a poem which was recited. Then there arose a written text (an account of the death of al-Husayn). At the end of this stage a form began to emerge in which poetry and prose were integrated. The rites of remembrance became a mixture of the two together. Prose tells the story of the tragedy in the spirit of giving an account of history and virtues and with only a limited amount of emotional expressions. Poetry colours the story and endows it with a sad tragic artistic quality.

We are not saying that the preacher for al-Husayn, whom we know today, could be found at the end of this stage. We are only saying that the predecessor of this preacher had begun to be formed at the end of this stage as represented by a story-teller who embellished his stories with pieces of poetry, or by a reciter who followed his recitation by giving account of the stories and the virtues or prepared for it in that way.

7. Other Imams and other revolutions were included. Since the Battle of Karbala¹, the deaths had been caused by the sword or poisoning of a great number of 'Alid revolutionaries against the Umayyads or the 'Abbasids or whose loyalty the authorities doubted or whom they suspected of specific political aspirations. Similarly some of the Imams of the Holy Family had been killed by poisoning or had died as they were being oppressed and persecuted by the governments of their time.

The Shi'a used to grieve for what had happened. They would add these griefs of theirs to their great grief for Imam al-Husayn. They would add the horrible events and tragedies, which filled the lives of these later Imams and revolutionary 'Alids, to their tragic inheritance which was linked to the lives of the Holy Family, in general, and to the Imams of the Holy Family, in particular.

We know that this material of revival of memories was reflected in lamentation poetry. One of its outstanding features had become the mentioning of the hardships and misfortunes of the Holy Family at different times.

We think it likely that this material of revival of memories, which was reflected in lamentation poetry, was also reflected in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn and had become more indispensable within the story-telling, poetic and critical element.

We think it likely that the story-teller, or the wailing reciter, used to discuss in his stories, or his wailing recitation, what had happened to the Imams after al-Husayn, or what had happened to certain of the martyrs of 'Alid revolutions after al-Husayn.

He would do this in order to honour them, to tell of their fate and to recite what had been composed in lament for them. All that would be sealed with the mentioning of the tragedy of Imam al-Husayn as being the prototype and most painful to men's hearts of the tragedies which had befallen the Holy Family.

Sometimes towards the end of this stage there was even the growth of 'Alid rites of remembrance in a general form. A report from the emir Tala' i' ibn Zurayk (495–556) suggests this. On the night of 19th Ramadan in the year 556, which was the night he was killed a little before morning, he said: 'This is a night like that on which Imam 'Ali, the Commander of the faithful, was killed.' He ordered the reading of the account of his death.[32](#)

Among the things which point to the correctness of our suggestion that the sufferings of the rest of the Holy Family had been introduced into the content of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn is the growth in the compilations about the subject of the Holy Family.

During this stage books were compiled which included the life story of each one of the Imams or of the 'Alids who had been killed by the sword or by poisoning. Outstanding examples of such compilations are *Maqatil al-Talibiyyin* (The Killings of the Talibids) by Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani (d. 356) and *Kitab al-Irshad* (The Book of Guidance into the Lives of the Twelve Imams) by Shaykh al-Mufid.

Both these writers did not limit their books to reporting the killing of al-Husayn but their writings were extended to others. In *Maqatil al-Talibiyyin*, Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani has mentioned all the Talibids whom he knew to have been killed at the hands of the authorities in Umayyad and 'Abbasid times, even though he had devoted a large chapter of his book to the killing of Imam al-Husayn. Shaykh al-Mufid, in *Kitab al-Irshad*, gives an account of all the Imams after mentioning Imam 'Ali's life, particularly with the Apostle of God and with Fatima.

After this section by far the largest section of his book is specially devoted to Imam al-Husayn.

Among the best pieces of evidence for the entry of this development of mode into the rites of remembrance for Imam al-Husayn is a famous ode by the poet Di'bil al-Khuza'i (d. 246), which he recited before the eighth Imam, 'Ali ibn Musa al-Rida in the town of Merv. In it he mentions:

i. 'Ali as the Commander of the faithful, his place in Islam and how he was deprived of succession despite having the right to it;

His sadness for 'Abd Allah ibn Ja'far, his father, Ja'far al-Tayyar, Imam 'Ali, Imam al-Husayn, Hamza ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib, Imam Zayn al-'Abidin and other 'Alids;

He addresses the Lady Fatima, the fair, mentioning the graves of her descendants, two at Kufa, the graves at Medina, the grave at Fakh and in Gurgan and the graves in Baghdad.³³

Then he returns to speaking of al-Husayn, his revolution and the tragedy of Karbala' with fuller detail than he had given at the beginning of his ode.

This ode, at this period, shows the origin of this change of mode in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn by mentioning all the hardships of the Holy Family together. That is because it reflects the popular Shi'ite awareness of the nature of the oppressive relationship between the rulers and the Holy Family. The Shi'ite is made sad and angry by this relationship.

This element in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn has further developed in the second and third stages until its characteristics have become integrated through the growth which will be explained in the appropriate part of this chapter.

* * *

This picture of the development of mode in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn in this first stage which extends from 61 to just prior to the fall of Baghdad in the seventh century of the Hijra – this picture is best reflected in five texts, in addition to the poetry of lamentation in this period as we have alluded to it within the study as well as the general sources for history and civilisation. The five texts which we have just referred to are the following:

1. *Maqatal al-Husayn* by Abu Mikhnaf Lut ibn Yahya. This text is preserved in the *Ta'rikh* of Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari.³⁴

3. *Maqatil al-Talibiyyin* by Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani (d. 356).

5. *Kitab al-Futuh* by Ibn A'tham Abu Muhammad Ahmad (d. 314). This book is also extensively reported in the *Maqatal al-Husayn* by al-Khawarizmi.

7. *Kitab al-Irshad* by Shaykh al-Mufid Muhammad ibn Nu'man.

9. *Maqatal al-Husayn* by al-Khawarizmi

Among these texts we can see that Abu Mikhnaf's has brevity, historical accuracy and a sensitive portrayal with the emotional outbursts being very limited. The poetic element is rare except for the material organically related to the story of the battle. In the later texts we can see an increase in the presentation of the details, a concern to mention virtue and merit, a growth in the emotional expressions and a richness in extraneous poetic material which is not organically connected to the battle, whether in poetry of lamentation or poetry of virtues.

* * *

To summarise everything which we have mentioned, we can say that in its first stage the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn included a fixed element which was an exposition of the tragedy of al-Husayn together with criticism of the Umayyad and 'Abbasid government. This criticism was either explicitly stated or given in allusions depending on what was possible in the light of the circumstances of the rites of remembrance and the safety of the participants from attack by the authorities or by fanatical anti-Shi'ites.

The rites of remembrance developed during this stage in terms of form and content as we have mentioned earlier in this study. The development in mode was concentrated on the content in four ways: an expansion of the exposition of the details and historical background of the tragedy; the growth of the reports about virtues in the rites of remembrance; the integration of prose and poetry; and the inclusion in the rites of remembrance of the sufferings of the Imams of the Holy Family and other 'Alid revolutionaries.

The Second Stage

In this stage the rites of remembrance preserved the fixed element, namely the account of the tragedy and criticism of the authorities.

At this stage, however, the criticism of the Umayyads and 'Abbasids was direct as they no longer had any existence in the political life of Iraq, Iran and other Islamic countries, except in a formal way which had no value as a result of what took place in Mamluk Egypt. Yet this clear direct criticism was now merely words without any real content. It was a theoretical criticism of something which no longer existed.

Direct criticism of the contemporary authorities was a dangerous business which exposed the critics to the greatest dangers, sometimes death.

We doubt, whether the direct criticism of the Umayyads and the 'Abbasids in this stage contained any attitude towards the contemporary authorities, which might have arisen out of a clear understanding of the guidance possible through the memory of al-Husayn, in the way which we indicated took place on some occasions in the first stage where there was indirect criticism of contemporary authorities.

At this stage the memory of al-Husayn had lost its political and social guidance, in the understanding of the Shi'ite, towards the plight which he was suffering as a result of the policies of despotic rulers. It had become a ceremony which was merely related to the Hereafter except on very rare occasions which sometimes might occur. Shaykh al-Turayhi has reported what appears to be his view of the function of the rites of remembrance in his work, *al-Muntakhab*:

My brothers, weep and lament much for this great and noble man so that you may obtain a good reward from the great Lord. God has made our following them in the actions which he has made possible, our weeping for them with abundant tears and cursing their enemies, the people of error, take the place of

fighting alongside in the day of the battle. [35](#)

We doubt, however, whether he meant by 'their enemies, the people of error,' anyone except the Umayyads and the 'Abbasids and their governors who had persecuted the Holy Family. We think it very probable that he was not referring by this expression and others like it to every wrongdoer and oppressor of the people among the rulers and their supporters.

This is supported by the fact that the examples which he gave were the rulers and governors who have been directly oppressive to the Holy Family by killing, imprisonment, terrorisation, confiscation, the destruction of graves and the like, without extending it to include every wrongdoer and oppressor. The content of the first session which he gives in the book, *al-Muntakhab*, is evidence for that.

That was the position with regard to the fixed element. As far as changes were concerned, these occurred in the rites of remembrance in developments of form and mode which were of very great importance.

The developments in form appeared in the following two matters.

1. The days of memorial for celebrating the rites of remembrance became more fixed and more organised. Similarly the different human elements involved in the rites of remembrance, including wailing chanters, reciters and story-tellers became more numerous.

However, the rites of remembrance in this stage were subject to persecution and restrictions in nearly every part of the Islamic world.

The roots of Shi'ism in Egypt had been cruelly and savegely torn out after the fall of the Fatimids and the coming to power of the Ayyubids. The same was the case in Syria. In this stage, too, the Turks spread their authority to Iraq. Sectarian fanaticism against the Shi' a received protection which enabled it to persecute Shi' ite activities, and especially the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn.

This was among the reasons why these activities were restricted to traditional Shi'ite centres (the sacred shrines in Iraq) and to those other places where the rites of remembrance could be held in secret or almost in secret. The only area in this stage where the rites of remembrance flourished was Iran after the Safavids came to power. In Iran Shi'ism became strong and its activities in every field flourished. The chief of these was the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn, which thrived under the Safavids.

2. The Second Stage In this stage, striking oneself became a firm element in some of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn in Iraq and Iran.. This kind of striking oneself was one of the customs which the Buwayhids had introduced into the rites of remembrance. It was accepted by the emergence of a kind of rhythmic poetry in classical Arabic or in colloquial. The rites of remembrance used to begin or end with it and it was accompanied by striking the chest with the top half of the body being naked, or by striking the chest when still covered by clothes.

This used to happen in the rites of remembrance for men. In the women's rites the striking had been a basic element, as we have already indicated in this study, and it is still so today.

So much for the development in form. As for the development in the mode of content of the rites of remembrance, our evidence for that in this stage is the following books: (i) *Manaqib Al Abi Talib* (The Outstanding Qualities of the Family of Abu Talib) by Ibn Shahrashub al-Sarawi al-Mazandarani (d. 588); (ii) *Muthir al-Ahzan* (The Arousal of Grief) by Ibn Nama al-Hilli (d. 645); (iii) *Al-Luhuf fi Qatla al-Tufuf* (Sorrow for the Dead on the Banks) by Ibn Tawus al-Hilli (d. 664).

In addition to these, there are the poetic works which were composed in this period.

The development in mode appears in the following matters:

The Language of the Rites of Remembrance

The language of the rites of remembrance is quiet and objective at the beginning of the first stage. It preserves this character for a long period of time during this stage.

Then a change began to enter into this aspect towards the end of the stage so that it has become emotional in the second stage. The object of the language in the first stage was to portray the events of the revolution. In the second stage the object has come to be to arouse the mind and the emotions of the people attending the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn.

Just as rhyming-prose (*saj'*) became an established feature in the style of writing and oratory in that period, so it did in the language of the rites of remembrance when the matter was not concerned with reading an historical text word for word and only depended on the composition of the preacher or the writer.

Mostly this rhyming prose was weak, devoid of artistic grandeur. In what follows we will present two texts, one of which is by Ibn Nama and the other by Ibn Tawus in order to try and give a picture of the emotional language of the rites of remembrance.

Ibn Nama wrote:

“(Al-Husayn) said: 'Arise for death which is inevitable.' They rose and the two armies met, foot-soldiers and horsemen. The battle was fierce. Because of the dust that raised, courage was hidden. The hard strong spear whetted the black blood while the Yemeni sword was heard striking into heads. Al-Husayn, peace be with him, did not find anyone to listen to his warning amid those who fell in war.

They had disbelieved in the Apostle without preferring the cutting swords and spear-tips. There was nothing left between them except skulls and sliding swords. You could see the heads falling like down-pouring rain and burnt-out sparks. You could recite verses in describing the situation because you knew the battle would make them become decayed bones.”[36](#)

Ibn Tawus wrote about the return of Zayn al-'Abidin with the prisoners to Medina:

“Then he, the blessings of God be with him, journeyed to Medina with his family. He looked at the house of his people and his men. He saw those houses wailing in the name of their circumstances and wailing at the misfortunes of their tears as they flowed for the loss of their defenders and their men. They grieve for them with the grief of bereaved women. They ask the people at the halting place about them. Their grief was excited by the deaths of their killed ones.

The houses call out for their sake and for the bereaved among them. They say, 'People, forgive me wailing and lamenting. Help me in this noble tragedy. These people, at whose loss I grieve and for whose noble conduct I yearn, were the companions of my days and nights, the lights of my darkness and my dawns, the sinews of my honour and my pride, the causes of my strength and my victory, and what is left of my suns and my moons.'”

Rhyming-prose continued to be a permanent style in the language of the rites of remembrance until the end of this stage and the beginning of the third stage, insofar as Shaykh Fakhr al-Din al-Turayhi (d. 1075) was a representative of the second stage of the rites of remembrance through his book *al-Muntakhab*. This book represents a development in the manner of writing the account of the death of al-Husayn.

He divided it into sessions (*majalis*) and parts in accordance with the nights and days on which the rites of remembrance were held. I maintain that Shaykh al-Turayhi used emotional rhyming-prose in writing the sessions which he compiled in *al-Muntakhab*. In that way we know that the stage began with the language of the rites of remembrance in emotional rhyming-prose and ended in this form as well.

Historical Accuracy

In this stage the scope was extended to include embellishments in the narration of events and became particularly tolerant in accepting accounts connected with actions which would lead to exciting the emotions. Among the examples of that is the account of the marriage of al-Qasim ibn al-Hasan ibn 'Ali ibn 'Abi Talib to the daughter of al-Husayn.

Another is the report that the 'Abbasid Caliph, al-Mutawakkil, continued to plough up the grave of al-Husayn for twenty years.³⁷ Both of these reports were untrue. When al-Qasim ibn al-Hasan died as a martyr, he was still a youth who had not reached the age to marry, and there is no reliable historical text concerning this marriage.

Similarly the period of the caliphate of al-Mutawakkil, from the time he was given the pledge of allegiance to the time he was killed, was about fifteen years. (He was given the pledge of allegiance in 232 and he was killed in 247).

Other manifestations of this lack of historical accuracy are found in the acceptance of the suggestions of

some of the writers about the death of al-Husayn as if they were historical facts.

Poetry

In their first stage the rites of remembrance limited the poetry to what was organically connected with the Battle of Karbala¹, like the *rajaz* rhymes of the fighters and similar things. Then during the first stage the rites of remembrance developed and began to include poetry of lament and about virtues composed by later poets. It might even be the composition of the author of the particular account of the death of al-Husayn himself.

This is what we find in Ibn Nama al-Hilli's book, *Muthir al-Ahzan*, where most of the pieces of poetry appropriate to the situation which he is discussing in his account of the death of al-Husayn are his own compositions. He, even, introduced poetic material which was alien to the account of the death of al-Husayn, as though it might be appropriate for it. Thus he wrote: 'I have concluded this book of mine with the verses of Ibn Zaydun al-Maghribi which cut deep into the heart of the grief-stricken like a javelin.'³⁸

Then he quoted a long passage from a famous poem of Ibn Zaydun.

This development which occurred in the rites of remembrance towards the end of the first stage increased in a distinct and clear way in the second stage. Thus the poetry of lamentation about the martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn became, in the very late period, basic material in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn. Similarly the poetry about virtue which was composed in praise of the Holy Family also became basic material in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn.

Al-Turayhi's book, *al-Muntakhab*, is the best text to represent the development which took place in the rites of remembrance during this stage. It includes poetry of lamentation and of virtues composed about Imam al-Husayn or the other martyrs from the Hashimites so that frequently the session of the rites of remembrance begins with a piece of lamentation poetry or poetry about virtues and ends with a long poem by one of the later poets.

Similarly within the session there are included pieces of poetry connected with the rites of remembrance or the virtues of the Holy Family or some other poetry which seems appropriate to mention in the course of a story which has been introduced into the rites of remembrance in order to serve the purpose of emphasising the virtues or the tragedy.

The Virtues of the Holy Family

Among the developments which were introduced into the rites of remembrance during its first stage was their inclusion of accounts of the virtues which were reported from the Apostle concerning the Imams of the Holy Family or what was reported in praise and honour of them by other men of Islam.

This characteristic clearly increased in the rites of remembrance during their second stage. Special books about the great qualities of the Holy Family were compiled. The book, *Manaqib Al Abi' Talib*, by

Ibn Shahrashub exemplifies this in the second stage of the rites of remembrance.

The chapter devoted to Imam al-Husayn begins by giving general reports about his virtues from Imam al-Sadiq, from Abu Hurayra reporting from the Apostle of God, from al-Mufaddal ibn 'Umar reporting from Imam al-Sadiq, from al-Suddi, the exegete, from Imam Musa ibn Ja'far and others, together with poetry about his virtues by al-Zahi, al-Qadi ibn Qadus al-Basri, Kashajim and al-Bashnawi.

Then he devotes a section to the miracles of Imam al-Husayn which he concludes with some poetry about his virtues by al-Susi and al-Saruji. He follows this with a section which is about the miracles and signs from Imam al-Husayn after his death, which is permeated with poetry of lament.

After this comes a section about the noble moral qualities of Imam al-Husayn, which is full of poetry about his virtues. He, then, goes on to a section about the Prophet's love for Imam al-Husayn, which contains much poetry appropriate to that subject.

He follows this with a section about his noble accomplishments, which he concludes with a piece of poetry about his virtues. That is followed by a section giving his dates and different names, which is concluded with a poem in praise of his virtues which he attributes to Imam al-Husayn on the Day of 'Ashura'. A further section comes with expressions about his virtues and great qualities, which is also permeated with poetry about his virtues. Finally, there comes a section about his martyrdom.

Since we find that the extent of the concern with virtues has become deep and increased its roots in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn in their second stage in the way we have just described, we will also find that the extent of the concern with virtues in the rites of remembrance is, at the end of their second stage, interposing itself with the rites of remembrance themselves, and becoming part of its internal fabric.

The book, *al-Muntakhab*, by al-Turayhi gives us a picture of the growth of this extensive concern with virtues in the internal structure of the rites of remembrance. Here we find the virtues mentioned alongside the incidents of the tragedy in order to give a feeling of its grievousness and to form in the listener feelings of respect, love and disaster.

The first section of the third session, for example, is devoted to the second night of the first ten days of Muharram. It begins by mentioning some of the virtues of the Commander of the faithful, 'Ali ibn 'Abi Talib.

Within this it mentions the attitudes of those who reject them. Then the author turns his attention to the tragedy of Karbala'. He says: ' . . . Hold true to the truths of the tragedies to his offspring, his sons, his Shi'a and those who loved him. Only look at the dead on the ground, or the imprisoned one as he suffered throughout his journey, or the unveiled women on the humps of camels whose faces are scrutinised by me' Then he mentions the learning of Imam al-Husayn in the time of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab.

He goes on to say: 'How strange are people who know their noble virtue but still commit dreadful acts against them' ³⁹ Al-Turayhi continues in this session and others in this style of mixing virtues together with the tragic events.

The Other Imams

This development, which had occurred in the first stage of the rites of remembrance, increases in clearness and becomes more firmly-rooted in the second stage. The tendency to compile works about the tragedies of the Imam becomes widespread emanating from the reality that they represent one course and one tragedy which has many links.

This leads to the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn becoming an integrated whole from this aspect so that the discourse concerning it is not limited merely to referring to the life and martyrdom of al-Husayn. It is extended to include a discussion of the lives, virtues and tragedies of the other Imams. The elements pertaining to the virtues and tragedies of the other Imams become a basic part of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn.

In the same way this led to the evolution of rites of remembrance being held on the days when they died so that there are rites of remembrance for al-Husayn which are really devoted to the memory of Imams other than al-Husayn. Rites of remembrance have come to be held in memorial to the death of the Apostle of God, the death of Imam 'Ali, the death of Imam al-Hasan and the death of Imam Zayn al-'Abidin.

In these rites of remembrance, the life-story and virtues of the Imam, whose memorial it is, is told. The oppression and tyranny which he met from the rulers of his time is also discussed. The session of the rites of remembrance finishes by mentioning Imam al-Husayn. Poetry of lamentation and poetry of virtues permeates the whole of that.

The best example of work which intermingles the other memorials in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn during this stage is *al-Muntakhab* of al-Turayhi.

Acts of Renunciation of the World

The rites of remembrance for al-Husayn, like any cultural or social institution, were influenced by the changes and new factors which occurred in Islamic society during the period between the fall of Baghdad and the beginnings of the modern era, which is the time-span of the second stage of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn.

The rites of remembrance for al-Husayn were influenced by what befell the Muslims and his society in this period: Political disintegration, economic backwardness, civil wars, famines and plagues.

In this climate, full of the causes of misery for man and society, there grew a cultural current which provided a philosophy for this misery. It was the Sufism of resignation, which gave the Muslim a

philosophy which was able to extend the power of its influence and activity through the claim that it was a religious movement which concentrated on the Book, the Sunna and the practices of the great representative of Islam.

It was a claim which had absolutely no basis in truth. It arose out of ignorance of the general spirit of Islam and the influence of non-Islamic Sufi tendencies.

This philosophy made the misery of the existing situation a fixed fate created by God and it made resignation and acceptance of this misery a necessary fate for man. It regarded any activity by man and society to change this miserable situation for the better as vain effort. It regarded the purpose of man, in his work and toil in the life of the world, as death and the grave.

As a result of this logic, this philosophy made the memory of al-Husayn into an activity concerned with death rather than activity concerned with life. It made it into ritual which would bring benefit to man in the grave rather than an incentive to make him change the situation of his miserable degrading life. The revolution of al-Husayn came to be considered as if it had been an action which al-Husayn undertook in order to enable people, through repeating and telling his story in words, to enter Paradise by this kind of verbal activity.

The end of the first stage of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn had witnessed the appearance of this attitude towards the purpose of remembering al-Husayn. However, during the second stage, this attitude became increasingly apparent. *Al-Muntakhab* of al-Turayhi gives a perfect illustration of this attitude towards remembering al-Husayn. It is weighed down with expressions which demonstrate that, like the following:

“My brothers, you desire the noble mansion of Paradise and great reward. Then perpetuate your grief, your sadness and your sorrow for them. You should know that God will accept such actions from you and the result will be favourable for you in His eyes.

Yet God will not accept excuses for abandoning the rites of remembrance for the pure Holy Family because His practice is to impose obligations about men after He has inspired them with guidance in order that He may pour goodness upon them so that they may arrive at perfection.

By my life, nothing is more efficacious to attain great reward and remove dread punishment than the performance of the ritual of griefs and making tears flow because of the treachery and desertion done to the Holy Family at that time.”

The Shi'ite man began to perform the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn, or to attend them, for the sake of storing up acts of piety for the Hereafter which would benefit him after death and gain great reward from God.

Apart from that, his attendance did not help him to understand them as being an activity which would

benefit him in his life and change some of the evil and misery in it. Thus cursing the Umayyads became purely an activity concerned with the Hereafter and it was not a renunciation of Umayyad policy in its political implications.

In the second stage of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn, the memory of al-Husayn lost its political and social implications concerned with adhering to an attitude of life and existence in face of the challenges of the miserable situation.

The call to renounce the world and the negative preaching which urged men to leave actions involved with living, by rejecting the world as a basic factor of life came into the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn at this stage, alongside the story of the tragedy.

The following line of verse portrays for us how deeply this spirit of renunciation had penetrated into the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn so that the negative attitude towards life had become intermingled with the tragedy of al-Husayn:

Do you hope for good from a world which had despised al-Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet, and chosen Yazid.

The author of *al-Muntakhab* gives us a picture in a great many passages of this negative attitude of renunciation of the world as it appears in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn during this stage, and how this attitude has become incorporated, in the understanding of the ordinary Shi'ite, with the tragedy of al-Husayn. The following quotation is a good illustration of the way *al-Muntakhab* approaches this matter:

“The base world prompted you to kill the Prophet's offspring. It has been reported by great men: Love for the world is one of the greatest dangers which will cause the wrath of God and throw men into Hell-fire.

In a Tradition which gives the words of God, He says: If My servant prays the prayer of the people of Heaven and earth, fasts the fast of the people of Heaven and earth, makes the pilgrimage of the pilgrims of the people of Heaven and earth, does without food like the angels who are close to God, then I see in his heart an atom of love for the world, or for its reputation, or for its leadership, or for its praise, or for its finery, or for its decoration, or even less than an atom, such a man will not be with Me in My noble abode.

Indeed I will root out of his heart love for Me and I will oppress his heart until he forgets any memory of Me so that I will not bedeck him with My mercy on the Day of Resurrection.

In a Tradition from Imam al-Sadiq, the latter said: . . . The Apostle of God said: By God Who sent me as a prophet with the truth, if there was an atom of love for the world in the hearts of Gabriel and Michael, God would hurl them on their faces into Hell-fire.

Brothers, keep yourselves away from all trust in the world. Beware of seeking leadership and high

position in it, for it is an abode in which all blessings cease and none of its evil people will be safe. How can an intelligent man be satisfied with the world as an abode after the family of the Apostle and the offspring of Fatima. This, by God, is a place which betrays its friends.

There is, by God, no good in it except for those who take their provisions in it for the Day of Resurrection. By my life, no action in it is better than loyalty to the Holy Family which prompts terror towards the Day of Judgement and its consequences.” [40](#)

This attitude of renunciation by the Muslims was formed at an early period and began to express itself in the Shi'ite in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn towards the end of the first stage of those rites. This sad atmosphere of the rites of remembrance, full as it was of tragic memories and terrifying pictures of tyrannical acts of oppression against man, was intensely suitable for the growth of ideas of negative renunciation which was provided with life and strength by the misery of existing life and ignorance of the spirit of Islam.

It continued to grow in the consciousness of the ordinary Shi'ite as an expression of himself in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn during their second stage until it reached its apex at the end of this stage.

This negative attitude of renunciation continued throughout the period of the dark ages of Islam and it even stretched into the modern era in some areas.

The Ottoman government, through its oppression and persecution of the Shi'ite, was one of the factors for the continuation of this negative attitude of renunciation insofar as the Ottomans had power over Shi'ites.

The Third Stage

As we mentioned earlier, the third stage of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn began at the beginning of the modern period, and they have continued in this stage up to the present time.

Here we should notice that the books about the death of al-Husayn during this period are only of a very limited use as a source for observing the changes in form and mode which have occurred in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn.

The changes of mode which have been introduced into the rites of remembrance have a nature which differs fundamentally from the nature of the books about the death of al-Husayn, for these books are devoted to telling the story of the actual event. We shall see that the changes have made the rites of remembrance go beyond the story of the actual event to other aims and contents.

Indeed, it is possible that some of the books about the death of al-Husayn have participated in tracing the modern direction in some respects, (e.g. the books of al-Amin in terms of historical accuracy). Some of this was in response to the demand for a new picture.

In this stage the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn have witnessed developments in form and mode of very great importance.

In terms of form, the security and freedom which the Shi'ite community has enjoyed in most places have enabled the rites of remembrance for Imam al-Husayn to be performed publicly at every time in the year without fear of prohibition by the authorities or the populace. However, in areas where the Shi'a do not enjoy religious freedom, limitations on the performance of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn have continued to be imposed by the authorities in those areas, some of which are in the Arab world and some outside it.

The occasions for performing the rites of remembrance have become more numerous. In Iraq and Iran and some other countries, the rites of remembrance are performed during the two lunar months of Muharram and Safar, throughout the night and at the beginning and end of the day, by various craft and cultural groups, as well as by individuals.

This is done in every place which is appropriate for such a meeting provided the weather is suitable. They occur in every Shi'ite town of any significance or in which there is a large number of the Shi'a.

Similarly rites of remembrance for al-Husayn are held on the day of the memorial of the Prophet's death, in memory of the death of each of the eleven Imams of the Holy Family, in memory of the death of the Lady Fatima, the fair, of the Lady Zaynab, daughter of Imam Ah and of Muslim ibn 'Aqil.

On the occurrence of the memorial day of the death of any one of these persons according to the lunar reckoning, rites of remembrance are held in which a preacher reviews his life, tells of the oppressions and tyranny carried out against him and recites some poetry composed in praise and lament for him. He finishes the rites of remembrance by mentioning Imam al-Husayn and some of what happened to him.

Similarly rites of remembrance for Imam al-Husayn are held in Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, other Gulf regions and some other countries on the evenings of the days of the month of Ramadan. The sessions of these rites of remembrance have acquired great favour with the ordinary people.

In the same way, many people have adopted the practice of holding rites of remembrance for al-Husayn in their houses or in small mosques in the quarters of cities during Friday, during the day or the night, each week or on other days in the week suitable for such rites to be held as far as work or free-time for people to come is concerned. The people who come to such rites are frequently neighbours, friends or relatives of the man who is holding these rites of remembrance.

The practice has arisen of holding a session of the rites of remembrance in order to celebrate a new house by blessing it through remembering God, the Prophet and the Imams of the Holy Family.

Sometimes, some people hold a session of the rites of remembrance when returning from the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*) and on other personal occasions. The custom has also arisen of the rites of

remembrance for al-Husayn being part of an opening session of a service for the dead or a gathering for commemoration.

We can designate these kinds of rites as 'private rites of remembrance' and the other we would term 'public rites of remembrance'.

Public rites of remembrance are held in public places: squares, large mosques, clubs and places dedicated to al-Husayn. A great number of people share in providing the finance for them. The money which they contribute is spent on the financial reward which is paid to the preacher and on the hospitality given to those who come to the rites of remembrance, in terms of sugar, coffee tea, etc. Money is also spent on hiring or buying cushions and the cost of the electricity.

These developments, which made the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn into occasions which were frequently held throughout the year and attracted a very great number of people, led to the setting up of special places for the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn called 'commemoration halls for al-Husayn' (*al-husayniyya*), 'clubs of al-Husayn' (*al-nadi al-husayni*).

They are big halls specially devoted to the performance of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn. In recent years they have come to be used for other religious, social and cultural occasions as well, such as farewell parties, parties in honour of people and other such things.

It seems that this institution is not a modern innovation but goes back to much earlier times. Amir 'Ali, in his *A Short History of the Saracens*, writes: 'One of the most imposing buildings in Cairo during the Fatimid period was the 'Husayniyya'. It was a building of vast size in which remembrance of the death of al-Husayn at the Battle of Karbala' was celebrated.^{[41](#)}

The words of Amir 'Ali suggest that this was an official institution and that the Fatimid Caliphs used to take part directly in holding ceremonies of mourning for al-Husayn.

In the third stage of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn, this institution has become a general phenomenon among Shi'ite Muslims. In every Shi'ite town, small or big, whatever its economic state may be, there will be a building for this purpose which will be called either 'Husayniyya' or the club of al-Husayn (*al-nadi al-husayni*).

Large towns are distinguished by the fact that they include a number of commemoration halls for al-Husayn. Sometimes also in a great Shi'ite quarter in the big cities there are a number of commemoration halls for al-Husayn.

Sayyid Muhsin al-Amin has discussed this Shi'ite institution in his book, *Khitat Jabal Amil*. He writes: 'The halls of commemoration for al-Husayn were built in order to perform rites of mourning for Imam al-Husayn, the martyred grandson of the Prophet. The origin of these halls of commemoration for al-Husayn came from the Indians and the Iranians who built them in their towns. They also built them in

Iraq.

They made religious endowments for them and provided overseers and superintendents for them. They consist of a building of stone with a courtyard and in them there is also a pulpit. A stranger may take refuge in them and the community provides him with accommodation. The poor also stay at them. Rites of mourning for the Lord of martyrs are performed in them on a certain day each week and on the first ten days of the month of Muharram.

They differ in size, quality and income according to who was responsible for them being built. They were not known of before the present period in Jabal 'Amil. The first hall of commemoration for al-Husayn built in Jabal 'Amil was at Nabatiyya. Then a number of other halls of commemoration for al-Husayn were built.⁴²

This institution has now become one of the established cultural phenomena in all Shi'ite lands as we have already mentioned.

These developments led to the growth of new religious endowments. Indeed these halls of commemoration for al-Husayn are endowed properties which bring public advantage. The chairs, cushions, chandeliers, electricity, lamps and equipment for making tea and coffee are all endowments. Similarly, endowments have been made for the banners and the black fabrics which are spread out and cover the walls of these halls of commemoration for al-Husayn and the mosques in which the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn are performed, although there are places which are not covered by black fabric when the rites of remembrance are performed in them.

At another level the number of men specifically concerned with this religious and cultural area has increased. One of these is called Arabic *khatib* (preacher or the preacher from the pulpit of al-Husayn). In Persian, Urdu and Turkish he is called *rawzakhwan*. This really should be *rawda-khwan* but Persian pronunciation has changed the 'd' in Arabic to 'z'.

Khwan is Persian and means 'reading'. The meaning of this phrase then is 'the reading of *al-Rawda*'. *Al-Rawda* refers to the book *Rawdat al-Shuhada* ' (The Garden of Martyrs) which was compiled by Mawla al-Husayn ibn 'Ali al-Kashifi who was known as al-Wa'iz al-Bayhaqi (d. 910).

It is one of the books about the death of al-Husayn which was compiled at the beginning of the Shi'ite Safavid dynasty in Iran. It became so widespread among the people that it came to be introduced as the name for the preacher who kept alive the memory of al-Husayn.

It is necessary for these preachers to memorise the story of the Battle of Karbala', a great deal of information about Islamic history, especially the history of the early days of Islam, some stories of literature, a greater or lesser degree of knowledge of the interpretation of the Qur'an and Traditions about the merits of the Imams of the Holy Family. In addition to these, he would have to know a great deal of the poetry of lamentation. It is desirable that some of this should be in the colloquial language.

When the preacher has great knowledge of these subjects and is able to blend them together in a way in which the element of desire and benefit abound, he will be more acceptable to the people.

The practice is observed of fixing a time for the rites of remembrance which is in accord with the daily times of work so that such rites are not held at working times. They are only usually ever held in the mornings very early before the work in the markets begins. However, these morning sessions are attended by very few workers.

When the rites of remembrance are held in the afternoon or evening there is a greater opportunity for all groups to take advantage of free time from work to attend them. As a result such public rites of remembrance held at those times are full of people. This is the case apart from what happens during the days of 'Ashura. As far as the latter are concerned, the rites of remembrance are held from the early morning until late in the night.

They are crowded with people attending because many of the people put off their work during these ten days in order to give themselves more time to devote to attending the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn and listening to a number of preachers.

Here we should observe that the books about the death of al-Husayn are no longer a useful source for observing the changes in form and mode which have been introduced into the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn.

* * *

When we move from examining the changes in form which have occurred in the rites of remembrance such as them now being more openly held with a greater number of people attending, that they are now held at a great number of times and places with different equipment, with preachers and at fixed times – when we move from examining such changes in form to an examination of changes in mode– we will notice that very important changes have occurred in this area which have made the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn a very important force in the direction of society. We notice the following changes in mode:

1. The rites of remembrance preserve an established element in which the tragedy is portrayed and the authorities criticised. However, the tragedy no longer forms a final and exclusive element in the rites of remembrance, even though it is still the principal element in them, especially with accomplished preachers speaking from the pulpit of al-Husayn who enjoy very great popularity in educated and uneducated circles.

Criticism of the authorities has also continued. There is still criticism which is aimed at the Umayyads and the 'Abbasids and others who carried out unjust policies towards the Holy Family and their Shi' a. As for actual existing governments, these are sometimes criticised within the limits of the freedom granted to the preacher to speak and express his views.

In rare cases this criticism is unambiguous and direct. However, in most cases such criticism is indirect as was the case in all the stages of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn which could be carried out in public within earshot of the authorities and their organisations.

Among the forms of criticism which we could term political criticism is the criticism of imperialism. In the modern period the Islamic world has suffered the bitter experience of imperialism. It has awoken from the slumber of the dark ages which came over Muslims with the crash of the mortars of the imperialists and the lash of their whips.

The rites of remembrance for al-Husayn, as developed in this stage, were affected by this reality and reflected the anger and aspirations of the people suffering under imperialism. Some modern preachers have begun to deal with the problems of the people suffering under imperialism during the course of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn.

2. The language of the rites of remembrance in this stage has freed itself from the effects of the second stage in this area. It has got rid of rhyming prose and weak expressions. It has now become simple and easy to understand. Frequently the preacher uses colloquial in his speech from the pulpit for the benefit of the illiterate and their like who cannot understand difficult texts.

3. Often the rites of remembrance include a historical exposition which contains the historical factors involved in the revolution of al-Husayn within the limits of the competence and the depth of culture of the preacher. It would deal with the Umayyad era from the time of the domination by Mu'awiya ibn 'Abi Sufyan, and perhaps even from the time of the Caliph 'Uthman ibn 'Affan sometimes.

This historical aspect of the rites of remembrance concentrates the greatest extent of its concern on the following matters: (i) The transgressions by the Umayyads of the principles of Islam in their policies in terms of their associations with opposition to Islam, with their attitude towards Muslims, with the treatment of public wealth, their breaking of their undertakings, their hostility to human morality as well as the way the private lives of most of them were full of immorality and indecency; (ii) Their oppression of the Holy Family, in particular, and the 'Alids, in general; (iii) Their oppression and persecution of the Shi'a of the Holy Family.

'Abbasid history receives a great deal of attention when there is a session devoted to the memory of one of the Imams who lived during the 'Abbasid period. The speech of the preacher from the pulpit of al-Husayn will, on such an occasion, deal with the 'Abbasid Caliphs and their supporters in the same way as mentioned above but he will not neglect to mention the Umayyads on every occasion.

4. Historical Accuracy. Concern over historical accuracy has increased as a result of critical works that have been written by some distinguished scholars in recent years, and as a result of the awareness of what is fitting for the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn which has been propagated by some cultural institutions in Iraq and elsewhere. As a result of this, historically unreliable accounts have been kept away from and the preacher no longer mentions the speculations of some writers as if they were

historical facts.

Among the most outstanding men who have participated in making preachers from the pulpit of al-Husayn stay close to historical accuracy and who have worked to rid the account of the death of al-Husayn of fabricated embellishments was the late Sayyid Muhsin al-Amin. In the introduction to his book, *al-Majalis al-Saniyya*, he wrote:

“. . . However, many of those who mention their calamities, give different stories of their calamities.

They distort some true accounts and add or subtract from them because of the influence they think they might have on the minds of their ignorant audience with sound and weak reports until these become preserved on men's tongues, deposited where men meet and spread unchecked among the people. They are lies which bring anger upon them and open the door of disparagement to anyone who wishes to disparage. They should not be pleased to tell lies which do not please God and His Apostle, for they have told their Shi'a, "Be an ornament for us. Do not be a disgrace to us." They, and those like them before, have committed a clear sin. God is not obeyed when He is disobeyed. God will only accept the pious. Lying is one of the grave sins which bring damnation, especially if it is against the Prophet and his pure Holy Family.'⁴³

An example of the observation of historical accuracy in this stage is the comment of the late Sayyid Abd al-Razzaq al-Muqrim when he mentions al-Qasim ibn al-Hasan going out to fight where he contradicts the widespread story that the Imam al-Husayn had married him to one of his daughters on the Day of 'Ashura, with the words: 'Everything mentioned about the wedding of al-Qasim is absolutely untrue because al-Qasim had not yet reached the age to marry. In addition there is no sound report about it in any of the historical sources.'⁴⁴

5. Lessons in Islam and the call of Islam occupy a very important place in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn. They reject the specious arguments of the atheists about Islam and the attack made by atheistic and immoral claims. Similarly the rites of remembrance are concerned with Qur 'anic and exegetical studies.

It usually happens that the preacher begins his speech with a verse from the Book of God which he then explains. He goes on from there to an Islamic study of doctrine or the Islamic way of life (*shari'a*) or morals or to give a defence of Islam against specious arguments. Then he goes on to discuss some aspect of Islamic history. Then he turns from that to mention some of the things which happened to the Holy Family. Finally he mentions Imam al-Husayn.

In many countries and over wide areas of public opinion, these lessons in Islam have become a standard which the people use in coming to the rites of remembrance or staying away from them. This standard will depend on the choice of a good preacher about al-Husayn.

6. Perhaps it is appropriate here for us to point out a problem of procedure in the rites of remembrance

of al-Husayn which has occurred, as we believe, in recent times. It is what is called in Iraqi colloquial *al-kariz* (or *al-guriz*), which means 'leading up' to mentioning the tragedy of Imam al-Husayn. The rites of remembrance now finish with that after having ceased to deal with everything which was involved in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn.

What happens is that after the preacher finishes his talk about the religious, historical and social aspects together with the other elements which now constitute the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn, he begins to speak about Karbala¹.

In this stage of the rites of remembrance, the preacher tries to create psychological tension and produce an emotion laden atmosphere among those listening to him which will make them weep. With the arrival of the moment of psychological tension which the preacher has succeeded in producing in the minds of those listening to him, he does not move on to speak immediately about the tragedy.

He only moves on to that stage by means of *kariz* (leading up) while he is concentrating on some incident which contains some similarity to one of the aspects of the tragedy of al-Husayn, which will allow a comparison to be made between the tragedy and the aspect which was mentioned for the sake of the tragedy.

In this way the listeners are not aware of the change in the situation and the movement from one atmosphere to another. Thus the speech glides imperceptibly from the earlier subject into speaking about the predicament of al-Husayn.

After that, the preacher enters into a detailed account of the tragedy of al-Husayn by which he creates a psychological and emotional eruption. He finishes the session of the rites of remembrance by reciting a line or two of poetry in the wailing style.

* * *

The technique of 'leading up' has been well-known in Arabic poetry from earliest times. It is based on the idea previously mentioned. Whenever the listener feels that he is living in an intellectually and psychologically homogeneous atmosphere through the gradual movement from one subject to another that is regarded as evidence for the success and good quality of the poet. Examples of 'leading up' in Arabic poetry are too many to count. One such example is where Zuhayr ibn 'Abi Salma said:

The miser is blameworthy wherever he is but the generous man grows decrepit on his excuses.

It seems that the need for the 'leading up' in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn arose out of the variety of the content and the number of subjects which the preacher from the pulpit of al-Husayn dealt with in his speech. We consider that this happened in the third of the stages of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn.

In the second of the stages, there was no pressing need for 'leading up' because the content of the rites

of remembrance was usually homogeneous or almost homogeneous; it had not matured in its development as happened in the third stage.

Evidence for what we say can be seen in Shaykh Fakhr al-Din al-Turayhi's book, *al-Muntakhab*. No sign of 'leading up' can be found in any of his sessions. The only reason for this is that the rites of remembrance had only one subject; they had not yet witnessed the variety of subjects which happened in the third stage.

7. Social and educational problems. In their third stage the rites of remembrance began to deal with social and educational problems, sometimes directly and at other times indirectly. The preachers, who are outstanding in culture and endeavour, deal, in the speeches from the pulpit of al-Husayn, with the problems of social fragmentation arising out of domination by the residue of tribal and clan loyalties over society, with problems of social co-operation and economic solidarity and with problems of copying the West in its materialistic civilization and moral decline. In the same way they deal with some of the problems of educating children and the programme of education.

The preacher from the pulpit of al-Husayn deals with these problems by reporting clearly the ideas of Muslim and non-Muslim thinkers either mentioning the names of these thinkers or passing over them. Frequently the preacher's discussion of these problems will be an extension of his discussion about the doctrine and morality of Islam, or a refutation of the specious arguments which are raised against it, or a comparison between the present situation of Muslims and their glorious past.

* * *

These are the changes which have occurred in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn during their third stage. Some of them concern their form and some are concerned with the contents of the rites of remembrance.

During the third stage of the rites of remembrance they adopted a framework which now prevails with Muslim Shi'ites in most areas of the world, with only the existence of simple differences in some of the details between one area and another as the nature of things would require.

We think that the rites of remembrance in some Shi'ite areas may still preserve most of the characteristics of the second stage and have not yet gone completely beyond this stage. Perhaps this situation may be prevailing with the Shi'a in much of the Iranian countryside and in the country areas in India and Pakistan, together with some areas in Asia Minor.

IV. The Present and Thoughts on The Future

The rites of remembrance for al-Husayn are now in the most favourable situation. Competent men who specialise in them preach from the pulpit and not ignorant parasites as used to happen frequently. They are now one of the greatest Islamic cultural institutions in goodness and blessing through the active part

they undertake in awakening religious consciousness and spreading Islamic culture.

They help reveal the treasures of our intellectual achievement and our civilisation. They provide true Islamic guidance amid the profusion of foreign intellectual, religious and social pressures on our inheritance and on our civilisation. These pressures represent a real intellectual attack which the West and the East together with those seduced by them are carrying out against the Arab and Islamic world.

If it is true that we recognise that the social, political and civilisational developments which have taken place in the modern period, and especially in the last few decades, and which have participated in developing and directing the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn towards a positive response to the demands of this stage of confrontation which the Muslims now experience as a result of the challenges of imperialism and its intellectual on-slaught—if it is true that we recognise all that—then it is also true that we recognise the many noble efforts which have been made in order to give direction and bring harmony by those who act out of a conscious study of the needs of the age and of the way to respond to those needs.

If it had not been for these sincere efforts, the general changes in life would not have borne fruit in the improvement in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn.

No one who is concerned with studying this problem can ignore the efforts of the late Sayyid Muhsin al-Amin who, by his pen and his personal conduct, actively participated in development of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn in numerous ways.

No one who studies this subject can ignore the influence of his books, *al-Majalis al-Saniyya fi Manaqib wa Masa'ib al-'Itra al-Nabawiyya*, *Iqna' al-La'im*, *Lawa'ij al-Ashjan fi Maqtal al-Husayn* and *Risalat al-Tanzih fi A'mal al-Shabih*.

Because of his efforts for the sake of this, he was exposed to defamation and violent attacks by many circles who used to consider any attempt at change as a threat to the continuation of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn and the other rituals associated with al-Husayn. Some of these circles went far beyond the method of scholarly dialogue in their criticism and opposition.

However the changes have imposed themselves on everyone.

If the ideas of Sayyid Muhsin al-Amin and those who agreed with him had not succeeded in connection with some of these theatrical manifestations like striking swords against heads, theatrical processions of beating in the streets and public squares, beating the shoulders and backs with chains . . . However, they did in fact succeed in forming a critical attitude towards the situation in which the rites of remembrance then were.

They shared in developing them greatly in content. In the same way they encouraged men with ideas about the future among the Shi'a to direct their attention towards the negative aspects of the festive

manifestations and to suggest a framework to replace them.[45](#)

In addition to the efforts of the late Sayyid Muhsin al-Amin, cultural and learned societies and institutions in Iran and Iraq also shared in the success of the operation of new developments which we now witness.

The first in Iraq to call for new developments in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn in accordance with the spirit of the age was the Society of the Publishing Club at Najaf. Its leader was the late Shaykh Muhammad al-Rida al-Muzaffar and our brother Sayyid Muhammad Taqi al-Hakim. Both men and their colleagues among the scholars of religious science and literature had a clear vision of the problem and the means of solving it with what would be in accord with the new changes.

Among the aims of the Society of the Publishing Club was the foundation of a college to graduate preachers of the pulpit of al-Husayn who understood the changes, were aware of the circumstances of the times and were able to face them with a deep and unshakeable cultural basis, knowledge and objectivity, not with superstition and bewilderment as used to happen on many occasions.

However, in Najaf the call for changes was met by a ferocity of opposition which went beyond anything which could have been expected and raised sharp negative reactions in some circles. Yet those who made the call remained firm despite the fact that they were unable to realise their ambition to found a college to graduate preachers of the pulpit of al-Husayn.

They worked to spread the idea which met with acceptance and welcome in many quarters. One of the good results of this idea was the production of a number of outstanding preachers in the field of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn who have fortunately been well-received by the ordinary people and have achieved great benefit. Their number has much increased in recent years. Thanks be to God.

After that the Society for the Publishing Club founded the College of Jurisprudence and made this great aim as one of its aims which would bring scientific and cultural change. A group of preachers, who specialise in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn, who are conscious of the problems of the times and completely conversant with the tools and conditions of their work, have graduated from it.

It is something which makes me feel honoured and gives me great happiness that I –through the opportunities given to me– participated, with my colleagues on the teaching staff of the College of Jurisprudence, in a small part in that operation of bringing about new developments.

* * *

So much for the present . . .

As for the future with regard to the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn in particular and for the rituals associated with al-Husayn in general, we consider that, before mentioning some observations, we should turn our attention to one of the realities of history and civilisation with respect to all the institutions associated with civilisation and especially with respect to the social and cultural institutions among the

former.

This reality is the fact that the social and cultural institution does not have an aim in itself. It is not an objective. Rather it is a means which has been created to participate in enriching mankind, ennobling his inner world and helping him to be in harmony with his external situation which is bursting with changes, through preserving for him his spiritual and cultural personality.

Since these are the functions of the social and cultural institution, it does not operate alone in the context of mankind in this age, nor does it conduct itself alone with the man of its society. In every age, and in this age especially, this man is exposed to the influence of other social and cultural institutions, some external and some internal. The other social and cultural institutions have social and cultural visions, and from there visions of civilisation which are not Islamic.

These other institutions use the most modern means of information and influence and most efficacious techniques of persuasion to spread their attitudes and vision in the hearts and minds of people as a way of responding to the changes of the period by means of establishing their dreams of civilisation and by helping that through creating these changes.

For this reason a social and cultural institution which has an Islamic religious content must consciously understand the changes of its times. Through its consciousness, it must be flexible in order to respond to these changes by starting out from its own intellectual rules. This is because of the fact that, through its consciousness and its flexibility, it will have the ability to counteract what does not conform with its vision, namely the ideas and attitudes which other social and cultural institutions propagate.

In this way it will be able to correct them, to challenge them and to overcome them, or, at least, remain firm in the face of the challenges of those institutions. Then it will not lose its own people who will respond positively to the calls and requirements of the situation.

A social and cultural institution which has an Islamic religious content must use the developing means of its time in order to be more effective and influential among the people whom it is addressing and with whom it is working, in order to be equal in ability with the other institutions which are competing with it, and in order to enable its activities to cover the whole area of its people.

This is accomplished through preserving the quality of character in the circumstances of the response to the requirements of the new situation. The requirements of the new situation should not prevail over the quality of character so that the institution forsakes its true nature and its leaders abandon the essence of their mission.

However, when a social and cultural institution becomes too rigid in preserving its old structure and traditional shape without paying attention to the changes which are taking place around it in life and in the people, using the slogan that it is afraid of losing its supports and it is concerned about the quality of sanctity in them –when a social and cultural institution does that– it faces one of two fates: Either it will

gradually weaken until it dies because it has lost its own traditional people as they die without acquiring new people because the new generations will not put up with the vision and aspirations of the institution; or the institution will live on but will lose its quality of structure and mission and change into something under the name of 'folklore'.

At such a time it will lose the tools of intellectual structure and practical direction in relation to the people. It will only become a thing of amusement which attracts people in order to entertain them and it will never have any part in guiding and directing them.

Let us not think this odd. Many of the phenomena which are now termed 'folklore' in every nation are the remnants of cultural institutions which became moribund and did not interact with the changes during their times; they are the fragments of practices which, in the past, had a cultural significance which built and guided. When they lost their connection with life and aspirations of the people, they became something for the entertainment of life after having been something serious in it.

* * *

Starting from this basic reality in the course of history and civilisation, we must face the challenges of the future with regard to the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn with aspirations which will respond positively to these challenges and overcome them.

We must adopt the attitude of careful consideration which we mentioned earlier, through the fact that adopting the logic of the new situation and responding positively to its requirements must be accompanied by a care for the quality of the character which preserves the religious sanctity and the spiritual and educational benefits of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn.

Within this understanding, we should observe the following matters:

1. The justification for the evidence of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn must be preserved in them. This is the history of the revolution of Imam al-Husayn. This history cannot be removed from the rites of remembrance under the slogan of a new situation and the need to deal with pressing social and cultural problems. Indeed the revolution of al-Husayn must enjoy an appropriate share of the time devoted to the rites of remembrance. In this connection, we should observe:

- a. That the revolution of al-Husayn comes within the scope of historical reality through mentioning its historical circumstances, causes and results without exaggerations, in an artistic language which is understandable to simple man, and far away from theatrical techniques, by putting it forward in terms of a psychological influence which arises as a result of an intellectual sympathy, not as the result of a fanatical emotionalism.

- b. That complete sessions be devoted to studying the circumstances of the supporters of al-Husayn. The neglect of these noble martyrs who are constantly put in the background is one of the strangest

phenomena in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn.

Mentioning them should not only come incidentally in order to complete the special characteristics of the picture surrounding the Imam. Moreover the history of their participation in the revolution of al-Husayn is rich in possibilities which could make the life story of every one of them or the life stories of every group of them a starting point for many educational and guidance ideas.

Among the books about the death of al-Husayn, in their profusion, *al-Muntakhab* of Shaykh Fakhr al-din al-Turayhi is alone in including some sessions devoted to the memory of these martyrs. We alluded to that in the last section on the *ziyara* and in our discussion of the second of the stages of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn.

c. That the role of women at Karbala' be shown in a clearer way than what happens at present. What happens now is characterised by two phenomena: (i) Attention is only focussed on some of the women—Zaynab, Sakina and al-Rabab; the others are completely ignored or are only mentioned incidentally. (ii) The presence of women at the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn is a purely emotional presence; the discussion of women at Karbala' is now directed to serve an emotional purpose, not an educational one.

What we hope for is that the discussion of the role of women at Karbala' will include every possibility of obtaining historical information about the women who lived through the battle, whether they were 'Alid women or not. Concern in the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn about the role of women at Karbala' would turn attention towards the educational factors involved in their attitudes and reactions towards the events and their acceptance of the tragic end in the martyrdom of their husbands, brothers, sons and fathers.

We realise that the material for this discussion of women at Karbala' will need far-reaching historical research, which it has not been given up to now, in order to collect all the reports connected with this subject and other aspects of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn.

It is a study which ought to have been done centuries ago in respect to an institution which has lasted for more than thirteen centuries. Since it was not done in the past, it must be done now by those scholars who are concerned with the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn. It would be possible for a select group of the preachers of the pulpit for al-Husayn, whom we know to be worthy of undertaking such research, to share in this task.

2. It is necessary to preserve the level of the people at the rites of remembrance as they develop in harmony with the changes in the times through the development of a kind of rites of remembrance which answers the aspirations of the educated.

It is to be feared that what happens now will lead to a kind of rites of remembrance which deals with intellectual, social and historical problems in a refined style which the illiterate and semi-illiterate, and even those who have mastered simple writing, will not be able to understand. This is one of the things

which may lead these people to stop attending the rites of remembrance or will keep the circle of the rites of remembrance in its second stage.

What leads to this fear is that gifted preachers who have been given good opportunities to become proficient in their profession may strive to attain a standard which would make their people among the cultured and educated group in terms of good education. This would cause them to neglect the vast majority of the people who attend the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn.

The ordinary preachers who have not been given the opportunities given to their colleagues will be limited to the kind of rites of remembrance which would still bear many of the characteristics of the second stage of the rites of remembrance.

This is something which would cause the educated not to attend their sessions and limit their people to the uneducated group which was exposed to the influences of the second stage of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn and deprive them of the benefits of the rites of remembrance in their third stage.

For this reason we hope for a framework which will answer the needs of the educated and serve the ordinary people who attend the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn as well.

3. What happens now, as in the past, is that the Shi'ite religious groups in Iraq, Iran and elsewhere put forward preachers to the pulpit of al-Husayn from among the men who prefer to follow that path rather than pursue academic attainment in the field of the studies of jurisprudence and the principles of religion.

This is what usually happens. There are rare cases when a preacher of the pulpit of al-Husayn who began his life in this field comes under the influence of a preacher of eminence in this connection.

At all events the group of men of religious guidance is growing in a random fashion without planning and without programmes which will respond to the needs and the nature of the people so that what we mentioned in the second section of these observations may happen.

It will be impossible to overcome present and future difficulties without relying on planning and a proper programme. That will not be achieved without setting up an academic institution with two stages, secondary and higher, which will lay down academic programme suitable for the needs of the people generally.

Then there should be special programme which will embrace the cultured groups in which one human environment is distinguished from another where those preachers specialise who practise their profession in a specific environment.

For example, there may be some general basic academic programme in which all students in the institution will participate and there may be special additional programme for preachers who are likely to practise their profession in the Gulf. Such a programme would involve the special characteristics of

Muslim culture in the Gulf. The same is the case with regard to Iraq, Iran, the Indian sub-continent and elsewhere.

Since the experiment of the Society of the Publishing Club met obstacles which prevented that experiment from seeing the light of day, perhaps circumstances are now more favourable in other countries to undertake this experiment.

Perhaps one of the things which will make it possible to get a clear view of the problems which face the pulpit of al-Husayn and its occupants, would be to summon the leading men in the field of preaching from the pulpit of al-Husayn in every country to a general conference. There they could study together the problems of their profession, the ways to solve them and the methods which would guarantee the development of new preaching techniques from the pulpit of al-Husayn.

Possibly that should be preceded by local conferences of the leading preachers from the pulpit of al-Husayn. There they could study together the problems of their own special environment. Some of them could prepare studies on these problems, suggestions which could deal with the subject and the methods of solution. Later all could be summoned to a general conference which would lay down a comprehensive plan

4. The rites of remembrance for al-Husayn held for women have remained in the same condition as they were in earliest times, as we observed at the beginning of our study of the stages of the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn. Perhaps they have even declined and fallen behind what they were like when they began, when we observe the language and the prevailing nature of slapping in these rites of remembrance.

At this time, this situation has led to the fact that educated women and girls have stopped coming to these women's rites of remembrance because they do not find any benefit or advantage in them. In some respects this is true. If we make the exception of the benefit derived from remembering the tragedies of the Holy Family and renewing our emotional relationship with them, they do not have any other benefits.

They do not offer any historical and cultural or Islamic religious advantages or anything else connected with religious culture. In the same way the fact that educated women have stopped coming to them because of their shallowness and the manner of their practices, has made them limited to illiterate women and their like.

This is what their people are losing continually and with speed in the countries where the education of girls is growing. If the position of the women's rites of remembrance remains like this, a time will come when they will die out and no longer have any existence among the other rituals associated with al-Husayn.

In order for the women's rites of remembrance to develop, we hope for two changes:

a. A group of educated women should be urged to embark on this task, that is, learning the appropriate poetry, the history of the revolution of al-Husayn and a suitable amount of general history together with Islamic and Qur'anic culture which will enable them to undertake the preaching from the women's pulpit of al-Husayn. In this way the women's rites of remembrance for al-Husayn will be made appropriate and capable of attracting educated women and their like.

b. Women should participate in attending the men's rites of remembrance for al-Husayn. The pulpit of al-Husayn should not keep its spiritual and guiding benefits exclusively for men alone. The participation of women in these rites of remembrance would extend the area of their influence and provide a large group of women with religious and cultural benefits which had not been available to them in their own special rites of remembrance.

It does not seem to us that there is anything to prevent the participation of women with men in unified rites of remembrance apart from the mixing of the sexes.

This is a matter which could be overcome by a simple change in the buildings of the commemoration halls for al-Husayn and the public halls in which the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn are held. Thereby the mixing of the sexes would be prevented and the participation of women in the rites of remembrance achieved. The means of broadcasting and the spread of modern electric power make something of this kind easy.

* * *

These are the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn in their growth and circumstances, in the stages which they have passed through during more than thirteen centuries from the second half of the Islamic era until the end of the fourteenth century of that era. They underwent changes during these stages until they settled in their last stage.

These are our observations about the future which we are confident that if these are achieved, they will make the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn one of the greatest religious and cultural institutions in effectiveness and power to build man and society through ideas and consciousness. Thanks be to God, Lord of the Universe. These are our observations about the future which we are confident that if these are achieved, they will make the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn one of the greatest religious and cultural institutions in effectiveness and power to build man and society through ideas and consciousness. Thanks be to God, Lord of the Universe. These are our observations about the future which we are confident that if these are achieved, they will make the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn one of the greatest religious and cultural institutions in effectiveness and power to build man and society through ideas and consciousness. Thanks be to God, Lord of the Universe. These are our observations about the future which we are confident that if these are achieved, they will make the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn one of the greatest religious and cultural institutions in effectiveness and power to build man and society through ideas and consciousness. Thanks be to God, Lord of the

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¹ Cf. Abbas al-Qummi, *Nafs al Mahmum*, where he mentioned that the number of women from the families of al Husayn and his followers was twenty. There is no early text with regards to this issue.

(hajj), to perform the ceremonies of Arafa in Egypt and make the solemn wait (wuquf) at Arafa with them in Egypt in the Day of Arafa. Abd al-Malik also built the Dome of the Rock and al Aqsa Mosque for the people so that he could keep them away from the pilgrimage (hajj) and the lesser pilgrimage (umra) to Mecca. They began to circumambulate the Dome of the Rock in the same way as the circumambulated the Kaba and to sacrifice their sacrificial animal on the day of sacrifice. Cf. Ibn Taghri Birdi, al-Nujum al-Zahira, I, 188. There is no doubt that Abd al-Malik intended by that to isolate the Syrians and the Egyptians from being exposed to the Shi'ites so that he could keep them away from any outsider who might effect their allegiance to the Umayyad State. Abd al-Malik by that action was carrying out an old policy of the state as represented by Mu'awiya's last advice to his son, Yazid, that he should bring the Syrians back to their land whenever he had to send them on an expedition, so that they would not be changed by other people's behaviour.

5. al Tabari, op cit, V

6. Ibn Qawlawayh, op cit, 103-4

7. These texts concern us here as being a justification and incentive for a meeting for the purpose of weeping. We will study them from another angle in the coming discussion of the phenomenon of weeping, itself.

8. Ibn Qawlawayh, op cit, 174-5. A similar tradition is given by al-Tusi in Misbah al-Mutahajjid with a chain of authorities (isnad) going back to Imam Muhammad al-Baqir.

9. Ibn Qawlawayh, op cit, 104-6

10. Ibid

11. Ibid, 105-6, Imam Jafar al Sadiq used to ask him to recite poetry of Sufyan ibn Mus'ab al-'Abdi (d. 120 or 178)

12. Cf. Thawrat al-Husayn: Zurufuha ... op cit, 90

13. Ibn Qawlawayh, op cit, 325-6. This reveals that the Shi'ite leadership was using the same means as the authorities had been using to spread their propaganda among the people.

14. Cf. Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani, al-Aghani.

15. Cf. Ibid; al-Saduq, al-Amali; al-Mufid, al-Irshad.

16. Cf. al-Saduq, 'Uyun Akhbar al-Rida.

17. Ibn Nama, Muthir al-Ahzan, 3-6. Similar expressions which show what we have mentioned are repeated in the introduction of the book Al-Luhuf fi Qatla al-Tufuf by 'Ali ibn Musa, who is known as Ibn Tawus (d.664), and other books about the death of al-Husayn.

18. Ibn Ghuti, al-Hawadith al-Jami'a, 183.

19. Ibid. 248.

20. Ibn Qawlawayh, op.cit., 179-180.

21. For 'Arafa cf. ibid., 169-173; the evening of the festival of the end of the fast, ibid Tradition nos. 6 and 182 where there is one Tradition in which Imam al-Sadiq mentions that 1st Rajab should be considered of secondary importance in relation to the Day of 'Arafah. There is also a Tradition from the eighth Imam 'Ali ibn Musa al-Rida.

22. Muhsin al Amin, A'yan al-Shia, op cit, XVII, 320.

23. Cf. Yaqut, Mu'jam al-Udaba'; Bughyat al-Nubala', 161

24. Yaqut, op cit, V, 335

25. Cf. Bughyat al-Nubala'. His name is Qutayba Abu Bahari. Al-Yafi'i described him as 'the shaykh of the Hanbalites'. However he claims that he died in 323. Mirat al-Jinan, II, 286-7

26. Cf. Al-Maqrizi, al-Khitat.

27. Muhammad Kurd Ali, Khitat al-Sham, 251

28. Cf. Ibn al-Athir, op cit, It is strange that he reports the Sunni reaction to the rites of remembrance in the year 389 A.H. He says 'In the same way, the Sunnis did on the 18th of Muharram the same as the Shi'ites did on the Day of Ashura'. They said that it was the day on which Mus'ab Ibn al Zubayr was killed.

29. Cf. Bughyat al-Nubala'.

30. Ibn Taghri Burdi, al-Nujum al-Zahira, II, 77 on the events of the year 174. He also mentions on the event of the year 171 (ibid, II, 68). In this year, 171, Harun al-Rashid expelled the Alids in Baghdad to Medina. This political measure seems to have aimed at preventing the influence of their presence spreading Shi'ism, tendencies of loyalty to the Alids and opposition to the Abbasid amidst the people of Iraq and Iran, whose actual leadership, both cultural and political was not

situated in Baghdad, in contrast to the situation in Medina which was no longer a political centre of the state.

[31.](#) Ibn Taghri Birdi, op.cit., 11, 308–309, on the events of the year 242. He also adds: 'Then he turned his attention to the 'Alids, imposed severe restrictions on them and expelled them from Egypt.'

[32.](#) Al-Maqrizi, al-Khitat, IV, 8.

[33.](#) Perhaps he means by the two graves in Kufa, the graves of Imam 'Ali and Muslim ibn 'Aqil. The graves in Medina are probably those of Imam al-Hasan ibn 'Ali, Imam Zayn al-'Abidin 'Ali ibn al-Husayn, Imam Muhammad al-Baqir and Imam Jafar al-Sadiq. The grave in Fakhkh refers to the grave of al-Husayn ibn 'Ali ibn al-Hasan ibn al-Husayn ibn 'Ali who revolted in 169 and was martyred at Fakhkh, which is near Mecca. The grave of Gurgan would be that of Yahya ibn Zayd ibn 'Ali ibn al-Husayn who was martyred in 125 when Nasr ibn Sayyar was governor of Khurasan. He was crucified after Abu Muslim took control of Khurasan. He took him down and buried him.

[34.](#) There is a book circulating among the ordinary people which has the title 'Maqtal al-Husayn by Abu Mikhnaf'. It is a forgery.

[35.](#) Al-Turayhi, al-Muntakhab, 29.

[36.](#) Ibn Nama, Muthir al-Ahzan, 41

[37.](#) Al-Turayhi, op cit, 273–5, 338–9.

[38.](#) Ibn Nama, op. cit., 94–5.

[39.](#) Al-Turayhi, op. cit., 42ff

[40.](#) Ibid., 155–6. Cf. also 167ff, 266ff, 356ff and elsewhere.

[41.](#) Amir 'Ali, A Short History of the Saracens.

[42.](#) Muhsin al-Amin, Khitat Jabal Amil.

[43.](#) Muhsin al-Amin, al-Majalis al-Sanniyya fi Manaqib wa-Masa'ib al-Itra al-Nabawiyya (5th Edition, Najaf) 1, 4. See also Muhsin al-Amin, Risalat al-Tanzih (2nd Edition), 14, 17–20.

[44.](#) 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Muqrim, Maqtal al-Husayn (1396 A.H./1972 A.D.), 320.

[45.](#) In lectures, radio and television interviews and newspaper articles, we suggested that there be a change in actions like striking heads with swords on the Day of 'Ashura in the month of Muharram. This takes place in Iraq and elsewhere. We suggested that this action should be replaced by founding blood banks in the name of al-Husayn where those desiring to shed their blood as an act of consolation could give it to the sick, the wounded and the needy.

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