

Maʿwṣuʿat al-Imam al-Husayn fi al-Kitab wa al-Sunnah wa al-Tarikh by Muhammad Muhammadi Rayshahri, Sayyid Mahmud Tabatabaʿi Nizhad, and Sayyid Ruhullah Sayyid Tabaʿi, 2009. Qum: Dar al-Hadith, 14 vols., 6662 pp., maps, ill., \$65.00. ISBN: 978-964-462-9 (hbk). [AA]

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Maʿwṣuʿat al-Imam al-Husayn in Arabic, or *Danishnamih Imam Husayn* in Persian, is a bilingual encyclopaedia centred on Imam Husayn. It is the outcome of a ten-year scholarly collaboration and follows a similar publication in 2000 which centred on Imam ʿAli, namely, *Maʿwṣuʿat al-Imam ʿAli ibn Abi Talib*. The fourteen volumes consist of fifteen chapters and 138 sections.

The contents of *Maʿwṣuʿat al-Imam al-Husayn* can be divided into six major parts, which I will deal with in turn. Firstly, the personal features of Imam Husayn are described from available accounts and details of his life during the lifetime of the Holy Prophet (4-11 AH) are presented. This part covers the biography of Imam and his household, his virtues and qualities including those common with other Imams and those peculiar to him such as being the beauty of the earth and heavens, the prophet's kissing his forehead and lips, and the special prayer of the Holy Prophet for the sincere followers of Imam Husayn. The second part deals with the events which occurred during Imam Husayn's life after the demise of the Holy Prophet to the end of Uthman's caliphate (11-35 AH) and Imam Husayn's participation in the battles of Ifriqiyyah (Tunisia) and Tabaristan as well as his defence of Uthman as the then caliph. The third part deals with the events of Imam ʿAli's caliphate (35-40 AH) and Imam Husayn's participation in the battles of Siffin, Jamal, and Nahrawan. The fourth part deals with what happened to Imam Husayn from the martyrdom of his father to the death of Muʿawiyah and Yazid's accession to power (40-60 AH). The positions of Imam Husayn towards Muʿawiyah and the ground for his own rising against Yazid after the death of Muʿawiyah are covered in this part. Readers may find the historical accounts enriched by traditions of the Holy Prophet, Imam ʿAli, Imam Hasan, and Imam Husayn foreseeing the

latter's martyrdom in this part.

The fifth part deserves a little more attention. In the fifth part the rising of Imam Husayn against Yazid's rule (60-61 AH) is covered. This part discusses the departure of Imam Husayn from Medina, grounds and causes of the rising, deputation of Muslim ibn 'Aqil to Kufa, and advices given to Imam by different people against setting out for Kufa. It further deals with the arrival of Imam Husayn in Karbala up to the time of his martyrdom including the courageous resistance of his companions against Yazid's army, the congregational prayer of Imam Husayn in the midst of the battle, praying of some of the influential people of Kufa for the Imam instead of helping him by participation in battle, the quality of his martyrdom, and the last prayers of Imam prior to his martyrdom.

The sixth part can also be described in more detail; it covers the events subsequent to the martyrdom of Imam Husayn. These include the method of burying the martyrs, the departure of the family of Imam Husayn for Kufa and Syria and their return to Medina, the fiery epic speeches of the survivors of 'Ashura such as those by Imam Sajjad and Lady Zaynab, the political and social influence of the presence of the *ahl al-bayt* in Syria on Yazid's caliphate, the social effect of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, and the fate of those playing any role in his martyrdom. This part enables us to read about the rationality and wisdom behind the mourning ceremonies for Imam Husayn as well as their blessings and the way they are conducted. Those interested in religious poetry can study the development and criticism of the poetry and elegies concerning 'Ashura. The rituals, virtues, and ways of visiting the shrine of Imam Husayn, the history of the shrine as a garden of Paradise, its particular virtues, and the acceptance of prayers in the shrine are also dealt with here. This part of the encyclopaedia is concluded with words of wisdom from Imam Husayn which reflect the scholarly and spiritual heritage of the Holy Prophet. These maxims are in the form of prose or poetry on doctrinal, political, devotional, ethical, and practical issues.

The special contribution of this encyclopaedia is its offering a comprehensive and thorough study of the life of Imam Husayn who is presented as an educational and spiritual role model for the individual and for the society. So, unlike other works which deal with just one or more aspects of Imam Husayn's life, such as the event of 'Ashura, *Mawsu'at al-Imam al-Husayn* gives a complete picture of Imam Husayn as a perfect example and as a 'speaking Qur'an'.

Furthermore, relying on authoritative sources, this encyclopaedia seeks to eliminate certain superstitious material having been incorporated into the history of Imam Husayn in numerous books on the same topic. This work also offers a critical analysis of certain reports included in commonly considered authentic sources such as the participation of Imam in the battles of Ifriqiyah (Tunisia) and Tabaristan.

Ma'wasu'at al-Imam al-Husayn contains a number of admirable features. Unlike other books on the same topic, this encyclopaedia is the outcome of the cooperation of researchers and scholars with different specializations and experiences. The elimination of weak reports and analyses from the history of 'Ashura and presenting the pure and unaltered history of Karbala, study of the life of Imam from Qur'anic, exegetical, theological, jurisprudential, and social perspectives in addition to the historical one are other peculiar qualities of this encyclopaedia. Not only does this work take an analytical and critical look at earlier sources and chains of transmission of reports, but it gives textual criticism of certain historical reports. To facilitate the reading and appreciating of the book, the editors have conveniently provided us with a good arrangement and organization of materials, concise and precise reports, and some useful diagrams and maps. I should not forget to remind the readers of the legible print and the professional layout of this work. All these merits have made this scholarly achievement helpful to the social and academic life of contemporary students of Islam in the modern world.

The authors have also tried to make this encyclopaedia useful for those who wish to have a brief acquaintance with references and sources of the history of Imam Husayn. They give a brief bibliographical explanation of thirty-three sources on the history of Imam Husayn commonly considered to be authoritative, and of ten weak or non-authentic sources which were frequently referred to by earlier scholars. Volume 1 also sheds some light on twenty-four books on the history of Karbala which have not survived.

It is interesting that the materials of this work are supported by over 500 historical, jurisprudential, exegetical, theological, and Hadith sources from both Shi'a and Sunni scholars. The authors have relied as far as possible on authoritative sources written not later than the fifth century AH. The exact bibliographical details of references appear in the footnotes. We may find in the footnotes further material such as supplementary and supporting evidence for traditions or arguments

mentioned in the main text, differences in pronunciation of certain names, short explanations of some geographical or historical places, and the meaning of certain difficult terms appearing in old historical or Hadith sources.

Mawsu'at al-Imam al-Husayn commends itself to researchers in the history of Islam, the history and culture of Shi'as, as well as to Muslim preachers, scriptwriters, and students. The unprecedented interest in the Shi'a school in the Muslim world as well as in the West, especially after the Islamic revolution of Iran, together with the attraction of Imam Husayn and the 'Ashura tradition will make this work quite useful and appealing.

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