FROM BODY TO SHRINE: THE CONSTRUCTION OF SACRED SPACE AT THE GRAVE OF `ALI IBN ABI TALIB IN NAJAF

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Religious Studies.

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ABSTRACT

Rose S. Aslan: From Body To Shrine: The Construction Of Sacred Space At The Grave Of `Ali Ibn Abi Talib In Najaf
(Under the direction of Carl W. Ernst)

This dissertation analyzes medieval Muslim constructs and perceptions of sacred space from the ninth to fourteenth centuries using `Ali's grave as point of departure. It delves into three themes—sacred body, sacred space, and sacred ritual—all of which shed light on ways in which Shi`i scholars helped mold communal memory and identity, as well as how Sunni scholars contested Shi`i claims to legitimacy based on their distinct memories of the past. This dissertation seeks to understand how and why scholarly representations of `Ali's body, grave, and connected pilgrimage rituals impacted the development of normative Shi`ism.

This dissertation makes three main arguments. First, by establishing `Ali's *walaya*, Shi`i scholars could elevate the status of Najaf through contact with the *praesentia* of `Ali's sanctified body contained within it. Second, by examining often conflicting Shi`i and Sunni narratives of `Ali's burial and location of his grave as found in geographical, historical, and hagiographical texts. By claiming the legitimacy of `Ali's grave, Shi`is could uphold Najaf's reputation as a pilgrimage destination, as well as retain control over the city, despite being persecuted minorities in a majority Sunni environment. Some Sunni scholars saw Shi`i-controlled Najaf as a threat in addition to their general distrust of Shi`i scholarship and doctrine.

Third, the ritual practices and supplications recommended by scholars in their pilgrimage manuals guided pilgrims through a reenactment of pilgrimages scholars claimed were performed by the Imams when `Ali's grave was hidden. I suggest that scholars contributed to the growing genre of pilgrimage manuals in order to bolster the communal Shi`i identity and create a setting where Shi`is could express their religious devotion in a sacred space away from the domination of the Sunni majority. I argue that for Muslims, the grave of a sanctified figure such as `Ali could function as a symbolic site allowing for the reenactment of rituals of piety, the persistence of historical memory, and the strengthening of communal identity.

To my son IssHaq Habib: although you came late in the writing process, you gave me the motivation to get a job and finish writing so I could spend more time with you. You have brought so much joy into my life!

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Wa-Allahu a`lam.

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

This dissertation utilizes a simplified transliteration system for Arabic. I do not make use of diacritics apart from (`) for the *`ayn* such as in "`Ali," and (') for the *hamza*, as in "*sama'*." I leave out the "*ta' marbuta*," which I only render into English when it is in an *idafa* construct, as in *ma`rifat al-a'imma*." When quoting from another author, I retain their spelling of a name, although I have removed the diacritics for ease of reading and formatting.

INTRODUCTION
SACRED BODY, SPACE, AND RITUAL IN MEDIEVAL ISLAM

We are surrounded by constructed space whose meanings differ for those who construct it and those who perceive it. Recent scholarship on space and place complicates notions of spatial practice to better understand how space is constructed, conceived, and perceived. Most important is the recognition that space is socially constructed and is a "medium, not merely a container."[1] Scholars from numerous disciplines, such as religious studies, geography, sociology, art history, and architecture, study how communities of people actively lay claims to and define space in their lives. They attempt to move beyond an analysis of the material components that make up spaces and examine spatial imagination and practice—that is, the way people understand multivalent spaces and places, and create, reproduce, or contest cultural meaning through space.

Geographers in particular have contributed to this discussion by problematizing the discussion on space. They explore how humans interact with spaces in their lives and have long debated the implications of the use of the terms *space* and *place*. Edward Soja argues that "place emerges as a particular form of space, one that is created through acts of naming as well as the distinctive activities and imaginings associating with particular social spaces."[2] Tim Creswell proposes that "place is not just a thing in the world but a

[1] Ann Marie Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces in the Late Antique Mediterranean: Architecture, Cult, and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 10; Among the numerous scholars who investigate this theme, notable ones include: Henri Lefebvre, *The production of space* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996); Christopher Y Tilley, *A phenomenology of landscape: places, paths, and monuments* (Oxford, UK; Providence, R.I.: Berg, 1994); Michel de Certeau, *The practice of everyday life* (Berkeley:

[2] Phil Hubbard and Rob Kitchin, *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* (London: Sage, 2004), 5.

way of understanding the world," in that it offers a way of understanding how people interact with material culture.[3]

In the context of religious studies, earlier scholars such as Mircea Eliade proposed that sacred space existed in another realm set apart from the quotidian.[4] In his view, the sacred cannot overlap with the profane. The Eliadian spatial paradigm sets apart sacred space from its specific culture context; sacred space offers a direct opening to the Divine. Jonathan Z. Smith builds upon Emile Durkheim's argument that the separation between the sacred and profane was arbitrary but unavoidable as a result of the social order and structure.[5] Contradicting Eliade, Smith proposes that place is a construction of the sacred: something that is created and maintained by humans is not innately sacred or profane.[6] Chidester and Linenthal have called this disagreement over definition and analysis "the poetics and the politics of sacred place" between substantial and situational scholarly approaches. Recently, scholars such as Chidester and Linenthal have looked at the poetics of sacred with a focus on the "politics of its construction and contestation" in order to tease out the subtle process course of sacralization and sanctification of spaces in contrast to the simplified essentialist methods of explaining the sacred.[7]

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[3] Tim Creswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub. 2004), 11.

[4] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1959).

[5] Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, A Study in Religious Sociology* (LaVergne, Tenn: Bibliolife, 2010), passim.

[6] Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 104.

[7] David Chidester and Edward Tabor Linenthal, *American Sacred Space* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 6.

The nature of sacred space is made particularly contentious by the high value placed on it by those who perceive its sanctity, and its potential to be possessed, controlled, and interpreted by those who have the authority to claim the legitimacy of the space. Tweed's concept of placing space on an individual's "cognitive map" elucidates the complex construction of sacred space. As he explains, geographers distinguish between different types of spaces in the English language, by using the terms *space* and *place*.[8] In this context, *space* is a more general construct, whereas *place* is a "type of space that is defined by … the lived experiences of people."[9] Instead of using *space* and *place*, Tweed proposes that it is more practical to identify a spectrum of "spaces" from *differentiated* to *undifferentiated*. In this context, *differentiated* refers to "imaginatively figured and/or sensually encountered locales that are deemed more or less 'special,' 'singular,' or 'set apart.'"[10] This approach to *space* is based on a devotee's "cognitive map," wherein differentiated space would include everything within their world, including "multisensorial encounters colored by affective attachments."[11] Undifferentiated space would include "generic locales farthest from the devotee's sensorial range" outside the sphere in which a devotee lives and interacts.[12]

Taking Tweed's approach into consideration, I seek to delineate the location and implication of `Ali's grave on the cognitive map of medieval Shi`i and Sunni scholars. I

[8] Thomas A. Tweed, "Space," *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief* 7, no. 1 (March 1, 2011): 118.

[9] Hubbard, Kitchin, *Key Thinkers,* 5, quoted in Tweed, "Space," 118.

[10] Ibid., 119.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

argue that spatial and ritual constructions and understandings of `Ali's shrine differed according to sectarian affiliations and was partly molded by relevant scholars' writings. Based on narratives from the Imams and early Shi`i scholars, Shi`is assert that `Ali's body has been present in his grave in Najaf since his death in 661 CE; `Ali's tomb is differentiated space for Shi`i scholars, and undifferentiated space, or off the cognitive map, for Sunni scholars. While Shi`is have passed on knowledge and collectively agree on the location of `Ali's grave since his death, I argue that the space of his grave was dynamic, kinetic, and subject to constant change.[13] Shi`i scholars added to the kinetic nature of the grave by developing canonized rituals that altered the ways pilgrims experienced and moved through the shrine. As Engseng Ho contends, a grave can be "a particularly dense semiotic object" around which an entire pilgrimage and ritual tradition is built around for others to participate.[14]

With an eye to the diverse ways that scholars write about Najaf and perceive its sanctity, I wish to address three main questions based on my study of Arabic sources from the ninth through fourteenth centuries, namely (1) how medieval Shi`i and Sunni scholars conceptualized body, place, and ritual through their writing about `Ali and his grave; (2) what was at stake for Sunni and Shi`i scholars through their claims about the *potentia* (spiritual power) of `Ali's body and burial location; and (3) how Shi`i scholars' canonization of the pilgrimage rituals to `Ali's shrine affected Shi`i identity and practice. In order to answer these questions, I argue that for Muslims, the grave of a sanctified figure such as `Ali could function as a symbolic site that allowed for the reenactment of

[13] Ibid., 120.

[14] Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2006), 24.

rituals of piety, the persistence of historical memory, and the strengthening of communal identity. While `Ali's grave was a point of solidarity for Shi`is, it was also a site of contestation that illustrated contrasting positions of Sunni and Shi`i scholars on conceptions of sacred place and the ambiguity of historical narratives.

`Ali's grave represents what Tweed calls a confluence of political, social, and economic "streams" that "mark religious spaces, and, therefore, they are sites where power is negotiated as meaning is made."[15] Sacred spaces both make and are made, they generate and are generative.[16] In this way, while the material structure of `Ali's shrine was constructed by architects and builders, scholars provided a ritual model for pilgrims and their narratives, and constructed a ritual map of the site. Sacred spaces contain agency and can inspire awe in those who visit them.[17] At the same time, people create the spaces through their movement and activities within the spaces; they also write stories, pass on folklore, and leave their material and immaterial memories within the spaces. `Ali's shrine is "translocative" and "transtemporal" by transporting pilgrims to the past. The shrine also opens up the possibilities of miracles and communion with `Ali to pilgrims who seek them out. Similar to Tweed, Thomas Bremer, a scholar of religious studies, would call Sunni-Shi`i historical disputes over the location of `Ali's grave a "rhetorical battle." Bremer argues that the "construction of identity is involved with construction of places that binds together people and places and notes that the "rhetorical power" of a space is dynamic and constantly shifting depending on the individuals or

[15] Tweed, "Space," 120.

[16] Ibid., 121.

[17] Ibid., 122.

communities that define it.[18]

Among scholars of Islam, many focus on texts that elaborate on Muslim thought and practices, but few apply the same rigorous level of study to Muslim sacred spaces, especially in the pre-modern context. As scholars of Islamic studies begin to reconcile their Orientalist heritage and transition into the post-Orientalist phase, it is important to fill in the gaps and apply to Islam the same methods and theories used by religious studies scholars of other traditions. Thus, by using `Ali's grave as a focal point for this dissertation, I tease out critical issues surrounding both the grave and the process of construction of spatiality, and subsequent development of ritual and identity at the medieval shrine of `Ali ibn Abi Talib, a Muslim sacred site located in Najaf, Iraq.

My research engages in dialogue not only with scholars of Islamic studies, but also with geographers, historians, art historians, and others across the disciplines interested in spatial practice, taking into account three major goals. First, I examine the power of sanctified bodies and how narratives about the body help to sanctify the land within which a body is interred, and thus help create *place*. Second, this dissertation contributes to the conversation about the construction of sacred space and ritual, addressing Euro-American theoretical approaches while also taking into consideration the spatial imagination of medieval Muslim scholars. Third, I consider how rituals are developed and are intimately connected with place and identity. My dissertation adds to the current discourse on sacred space and place by providing a case study of how medieval Muslim scholars participated in the construction of place, and the development of rituals and sectarian identity in medieval Iraq.

[18] Thomas Bremer, "Sacred Spaces and Tourist Places," in *Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys,* ed. Dallen J. Timothy and Daniel H. Olsen (London: Routledge, 2006), 27.

Why `Ali's shrine? Why Najaf?

The importance of Islamic shrines can be seen in the pilgrimages they inspire. For Shi`is (as well as some other Muslims), the shrines of the Prophet Muhammad's family in Iran, Iraq, and Syria are nearly equivalent in sanctity with the sacred sites in Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem. Despite the importance of these shrines, many scholars and lay people—both Muslim and non-Muslim—usually associate pilgrimage in Islam with the Hajj to Mecca, neglecting the many transnational and local shrines Muslims around the world visit regularly. While work has been done on local Sufi shrines, Shi`i shrines, especially in Iraq, have received little attention. To rectify this omission, I focus on the relationship between body, space, and ritual at the grave of `Ali to provide a more comprehensive view of the making of Islamic sacred place. I identify and analyze the role and meaning of the grave of `Ali in the broader context of Islamic history, and its multivalent significance for understanding the construction and development of sacred space in Islam.

To understand the formation and implications of `Ali's shrine, it is necessary to take the figure of `Ali along with the history of Najaf into account. The contestation of `Ali's shrine has never been about `Ali's legitimacy as a centrally important figure in early Islam, since all Muslims agree that `Ali was a figure of religious and political authority as one of the most respected Companions of the Prophet Muhammad. Many Sunnis, especially Sufis, consider `Ali Muhammad's spiritual heir, although they respect the decision that early Muslims made to decree `Ali as the fourth caliph after Muhammad's death.[19] Political concerns aside, the main conflict between Sunnis and

[19] Maria Massi Dakake, *The Charismatic Community: Shi`ite Identity in Early Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).

Shi`i was who claimed control over `Ali's body and grave, and who held the authority to interpret and make use of `Ali's charisma. Being the first in the line of the twelve Imams recognized by Twelver Shi`is, `Ali ibn Abi Talib ranks as the most prominent figure in Shi`i Islam, rivaled only by his beloved son, al-Husayn, who is buried in Karbala, around fifty miles north of Najaf.[20]

`Ali's burial site can be understood as a microcosm of larger issues at play in Iraq. The grave caught the attention of many of the ruling elite, who exploited its prestige and position as a source of popular piety for their own interests. It became the object of religious polemics between Sunni and Shi`i scholars, and was also the source and inspiration for rituals designed to be carried out in its surroundings.

A Brief History of Najaf

The ancient city of Kufa lies along the banks of the Euphrates River, a few miles from Najaf, and was founded by the conquering Muslim army in 638 CE as a garrison city next to and on the ruins of the legendary Lakhmid Arab Christian city of al-Hira.[21] Al-Hira had been one of the great centers of Christianity and monasticism in pre-Islamic Iraq. The city was abandoned after the establishment of Kufa, but although some Muslim historians, such as al-Mas`udi (d. 956), referred to both al-Hira and Kufa as the same place with different names, al-Hira did not completely disappear until after the ninth

[20] The Arabic term *imam* merely means leader, and in the Sunni tradition, it usually refers to a prayer leader. In the Shi`i tradition, the term *Imam* has theological connotations and refers to the twelve spiritual leaders starting with `Ali. They are considered by most Shi`is to be infallible and to be divinely ordained by God.

[21] Al-Al-Hira was ruled by the Lakhmid dynasty (as a vassal of the Persian Sassanian Empire) during the fifth and sixth centuries, see C. Edmund Bosworth, "Lakhmids," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, n.d., http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/lakhmids.

century.[22] The histories of nearby Kufa and al-Hira are essential to understanding the history of Najaf; when Muslims settled in the area of Kufa and locals converted to Islam, many of the pre-Islamic customs and traditions were absorbed into Kufan and later Najafi expressions of Islam.

The present-day city of Najaf sits on a raised plain overlooking a valley called the "Sea of Najaf," a fertile agrarian region that used to contain a lake. The Arabic term *najaf* can be translated as "a place where water cannot reach," referring to the city's geographic situation on top of an elevated plateau. The city has been the site of contention between internal warring factions and foreign rulers for centuries. Najaf's origins begin with the 661 assassination of `Ali in Kufa by the Kharjiite Ibn Muljam, and `Ali's subsequent secret burial in Najaf, then known as al-Ghari. Before becoming the burial place of `Ali, Muslim historians narrate that Najaf had originally been a quiet area home to Christian monasteries and small tribal-based settlements.[23] In recent archaeological digs by local Iraqi teams, numerous monasteries have been found in and around the modern city of Najaf, including next to the runway of the recently built Najaf airport.[24]

Although `Ali's grave was not known to the general public after his death, the Imams and close companions were known to have performed pilgrimage to the grave. After its location became public, it became the focus of generous patronage from elite rulers. Shi`i hadiths narrate that many of the Imams visited his grave over the years to perform pilgrimage and pay their respects to their forefather. We know from Shi`i

[22] J.M. Fiey, *Assyrie chretienne* (Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique,1968), 205.

[23] For more on the Christian history of Najaf and its environs, see Muhammad Sa`id al-Turayhi, *Al-diyarat wa al-amakina al-nasraniyya* (Beirut: Matba`at al-Matani, 1982).

[24] See http://www.aina.org/news/20101118212957.htm

accounts that by the ninth century, `Ali's grave was covered by a rudimentary domed structure and was frequented by pilgrims. The dome was erected by the famous `Abbasid caliph, Harun al-Rashid; Shi`i hagiographical traditions narrate that al-Rashid was hunting for deer in the desert a couple of days' travel south of Baghdad when he discovered `Ali's hidden grave.[25] It is noteworthy that historians consider al-Rashid to have been a Sunni and `Alid supporter, more well known for his suppression of Shi`i rebels and destruction of al-Husayn's shrine in Karbala, than for his tomb building ventures in Najaf.[26]

After Harun al-Rashid allegedly built the first structure over `Ali's grave, several rulers added to the building over several centuries and also adorned it with rich furnishings and decorations out of their devotion to `Ali. Around 924, Abu al-Hayja, the Hamdanid ruler of Mosul, paid to erect a simple structure with a dome over `Ali's grave. He also purchased valuable furnishings for the interior with and built a citadel nearby to protect the tomb.[27] In 949, Fana Khusraw, also known as `Adud al-Dawla (d. 983), the Amir of Persia and Iraq under the Buwayhids, built the first proper shrine over `Ali's

[25] Jafar al-Mahbuba, *Madi al-Najaf wa Hadiruha [The Past and Present of Najaf]* (Beirut: Dar al-Adwa, 2009), 41.

[26] `Alid is an Anglicized Arabic term that refers to the descendants of `Ali; for more on the life and rule of Harun al-Rashid and the history of the `Abbasids, see Amira K. Bennison, *The Great Caliphs: The Golden Age of the 'Abbasid Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Hugh Kennedy, *The Court of the Caliphs: The Rise and Fall of Islam's Greatest Dynasty* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004); Tayeb El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic historiography Harun al-Rashid and the Narrative of the Abbasid Caliphate* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Eric J Hanne, *Putting the Caliph in His Place: Power, Authority, and the Late Abbasid Caliphate* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007).

[27] Ibn-Ḥawqal, Abu-'l-Qāsim Ibn-'Alī, and Johannes H. Kramers. *Opus geographicum auctore Ibn Haukal* (Leiden: Brill, 1939), 163.

grave and was buried there along with his sons.[28] A minister of Iraq, al-Hasan ibn Fadl (d. 1023/4), built the first walls around the shrine in order to protect it from outside invaders.[29] The walls did little to stop a mob of Sunnis who traveled from Baghdad around 1051 to destroy the shrine, one of the numerous times the tomb was attacked over the centuries.

Literature on pilgrimage, the merits of `Ali's grave, and the city of Najaf emerge during the early period, and highlight the growing significance of Najaf for Shi`is in Iraq and nearby lands.[30] By the eleventh century, Najaf was an established pilgrimage destination and also developed into a center for Shi`i scholarship. Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Tusi, one of the most renowned Shi`i scholars of his time, fled Baghdad in 1055, seeking refuge from a Sunni mob which had set fire to his house and library. Al-Tusi arrived in Najaf and built the first Islamic seminary there, and henceforth, Najaf gained prominence and scholars began to encourage Muslims to visit `Ali's grave.[31] All of the major rulers in the region made a point of visiting both Najaf and Karbala during their time in power and many of them patronized the shrine and city to make it more attractive to pilgrims and provide clean drinking water.

Many famous explorers, poets, Sufis and scholars—including Sunnis—also

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[28] Historians report that this structure lasted until 1352, when it was burnt down, see Jafar Mahbuba, *Madi al-Najaf wa Hadiruha,* 44; E. Honigmann, "al-Nadjaf `Alī, or Mashhad Ali" *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, (Brill Online).

[29] Honigmann, "al-Nadjaf.

[30] Al-Mahbuba, *Madi al-Najaf.*

[31] Meir Litvak, *Shi'i Scholars of Nineteenth-Century Iraq: The 'ulama" of Najaf and Karbala'* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 16; See the following book for an extensive discussion of scholarly activities in Najaf before and after al-Tusi's residence there: Jafar Dujayli and Abd Allah Khaqani, *Mawsu'at al-Najaf al-Ashraf* [Encyclopedia of Najaf] (Beirut: Dar al-Adwa, 1995).

passed through Najaf on their travels. Devout Shi`is from across the Islamicate world, including the religious and ruling elite, also aimed to be buried in the Wadi al-Salam Cemetery in Najaf, and the bodies of dead Shi`is arrived on a daily basis to be put to rest in the vicinity of `Ali's body. Although Litvak asserts that the cities of Hilla (Iraq) and Aleppo (Syria) overshadowed Najaf during the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, Najaf-based scholars continued to produce important scholarship during this time, and Najaf also enjoyed a influx of pilgrims to the shrine of `Ali.[32]

In 1263, the Mongol governor of Baghdad constructed a canal to Najaf from the nearby Euphrates River to help combat the water shortage in the city.[33] In 1354, the shrine burnt down, presumably due to an accident, and it was rebuilt in 1358.[34] During the time of the Safavids and Ottomans, all of the shrine cities in Iraq, including Najaf, received generous patronage from the rulers and were developed into full-fledged shrine complexes, complete with gilded domes and minarets. Shah `Abbas I (1629), the Safavid shah of Iran, later rebuilt the entire shrine complex, including the interior shrine, courtyard, and dome. His son Shah Safi (d. 1642) expanded the complex even further.[35]

With the rise of the Ottomans and their rule of Iraq from 1534 through 1920, a different dynamic began to take place in Najaf. The Ottomans represented a strict form of Sunni Orthodox Islam and viewed Shi`i Islam as heterodox, and at times, sought to repress the Shi`i populations of Iraq. At the same time, they held `Ali in reverence and also patronized his shrine out of respect for him. The Ottoman Sultan Suleiman the

[32] Litvak, *Shi'i Scholars,* 16.

[33] Honigmann, E., "al-Nadjaf."

[34] Al-Mahbuba, *Madi al-Najaf,* 46.

[35] Al-Mahbuba, *Madi al-najaf,* 46.

Magnificent (d. 1566) visited the shrine in 1534/5.[36] Despite renovations, the city also suffered, and a Portuguese traveler Pedro Texeira (d. 1641)—who passed by Najaf in 1604—offered his impression of the reduced state of Najaf:

> They commonly call him Mortz Aly; and his sectaries (mortal enemies of the Sunis, who are of the Turks' persuasion) relate of him, his victories and valour, many feats and miracles, fit subject for laughter, or rather for tears … here is a tomb for the corpse. This, with time, and the devotion and frequentation of his worshippers and sectaries, was so enriched with gifts, that there grew up a temple and alcoran very rich, and fairly wrought enough. But now, with the decline of that sect and doctrine, the attendance and offerings fail; and the building has suffered not a little in appearance and condition [sic].[37]

Texeira's records of his travels through Najaf reveal that the city also went through difficult times in between periods of patronage from the Safavids and Ottomans. Nader Shah (d. 1747), the Sunni-leaning shah of Persia, restored the shrine by commissioning the gilding of the dome, minarets, and a complete renovation.[38]

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, both Bedouin raiders and Wahhabis attacked Najaf on numerous occasions.[39] In 1801, militant Wahhabi forces attacked Najaf and kept it under siege for more than a year, and attacked the city again in 1806 and 1810. The Wahhabis looted the treasure vault of the shrine and destroyed the dome.[40] At the same time, internal hostility between opposing groups in Najaf vying to

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Pedro Teixeira, *The Travels of Pedro Teixeira: With His "Kings of Harmuz" and Extracts from His 'Kings of Persia'*, trans. William F. Sinclair (London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1902), 47-48.

[38] See the following article for a discussion of Nadir Shah's ambiguous sectarian orientation and political negotiations, Ernest Tucker, "Nadir Shah and the Ja'fari Madhhab Reconsidered," *Iranian Studies.* 27, no. 4 (1994); Al-Mahbiba*, Madi al-Najaf*, 178.

[39] E. Honigmann, "al-Nadjaf."

[40] Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 28.

gain control over the city caused further unrest.[41] While the religious scholars of Najaf and guardians of the shrine were able to keep their autonomy during the Ottoman rule of Iraq, the Ottomans took harsh measures against revolts against their rule in the mid-nineteenth century.[42] At the same time, the Ottomans also patronized the shrine, donating expensive gifts to compete with Persian influence in the shrine cities of Iraq.[43] Every major ruler from India to the Ottoman Empire is said to have passed through Najaf to pay their respects to `Ali. Rulers used `Ali's shrine as a strategic meeting place for religious and political leaders during the Ottoman era.[44]

In recent history, Najaf hit the headlines of American newspapers during the height of the war in Iraq in 2004. Coalition forces were battling the Shi`i militia, who were hiding out in and around the shrine of `Ali ibn Abi Talib and the nearby cemetery in the city of Najaf, south of Baghdad.[45] Americans back home struggled to understand the significance of the sites and why the military presence in the sacred city was so offensive for Muslims.[46] Despite the frequent media coverage of the battle for Najaf during the Iraq war, few Americans have ever heard of the city or are aware that it contains one of the most sacred sites for Muslims in the world and receives up to two million pilgrims

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[41] E. Honigmann, "al-Nadjaf."

[42] Ibid.

[43] Hamid Algar, "Atabat [Shrines]," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/atabat.

[44] See Tucker, "Nadir Shah."

[45] See "Scene at Shrine in Najaf Is Confused; U.S. Holds Back": http://www.nytimes.com/2004/08/20/international/middleeast/20CND-IRAQ.html?scp=62&sq=najaf&st=cse.

[46] To quench people's curiosity, a 2004 article entitled "Why Is Najaf So Holy?" from Slate.com explicated why the conflict around the shrine in the city was so sensitive for the Shi`i population in particular, see: http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/explainer/2004/04/why_is_najaf_so_holy.html.

annually.[47] The height of clashes in Najaf occurred in 2004 between coalition forces and Iraqi insurgents led by Muqtada al-Sadr and took place dangerously close to the sacred sites of Najaf. The shrine was the target of attacks by "unknown" sources, as it is said that the insurgents stored their weapons in the shrine and in the nearby cemetery.

Aware that an important tomb was located in Najaf, the US military went to great lengths to carefully tread around sacred sites in Iraq in order to avoid causing further anti-American revolt among Shi`is.[48] Most politicians in Washington D.C. who shared in the decision-making during the war had little idea of the difference between Sunnis and Shi`is, who had previously coexisted side-by-side for centuries in relative peace.[49] In addition to the general ignorance in the American military and political spheres about Islam and in particular the dynamics of Muslim sacred space, few academics in the Euro-American context have looked closely at the shrines in Iraq and how they were formed into sacred spaces.[50]

Sacred Body, Space, and Ritual

This study is centrally concerned with the themes of sacred body, space, and ritual. These three themes all tie into the process of the sanctification of space and the role of sacred space in reinforcing communal memory and identity. It is necessary to

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[47] See http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-03-18/world/37809026_1_shiite-provinces-shiite-neighborhoods-iraq.

[48] See 2004 New York Times article, "The Struggle for Iraq: Shrine in Najaf Damaged Again as clashes Continue": **http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/26/world/struggle-for-iraq-military-shrine-najaf-damaged-again-clashes-continue.html?src=pm.**

[49] See 2006 New York Times article, "Can You Tell a Sunni From a Shiite?": http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/17/opinion/17stein.html.

[50] The first comprehensive historical study of Shi`i architecture is James W. Allan, *The Art and Architecture of Twelver Shi`ism: Iraq, Iran and the Indian Sub-Continent* (London: Azimuth Editions, 2012).

address the issue of terminology, by examining Euro-American understandings of terms such as 'sacred,' 'space,' 'place,' 'ritual,' 'shrine,' 'grave,' and 'tomb,' and comparing them with the corresponding medieval Arabo-Islamic understandings.

With the goal of mapping out the historical imagination of medieval scholars, I pay close attention to terminology used to describe the figure of `Ali and his grave. I am limited in my exploration of sacred space by my use of English to discuss texts written in classical Arabic. To address this issue, I take Tom Tweed's advice to be exegetically fussy and take a locative approach that "begins with the assumption that all interpreters are situated and all interpretations emerge from within categorical schemes and social contexts."[51] I cannot attempt to definitively offer a unified medieval Muslim understanding of sacred space and ritual, but I can explore ways in which certain scholars imagined and constructed understandings of sacred space and ritual through their writings**.** To begin, we must first understand the nature and background of the terms we use in English, and then parse out the equivalent meanings in Arabic, as well as terms unique to Arabic.

In the Oxford English Dictionary, there are various definitions of *space*, that include, "a period of time, duration, time … expanse of the air or sky, temporal extent, duration, intervening period of time, interval … space available for a purpose, room."[52] Space originally seemed to refer to a period of time, and then developed to denote a physical place that can be located. The Arabic equivalent to space would be *makan*,

[51] Thomas A Tweed, "Marking Religion's Boundaries: Constitutive Terms, Orienting Tropes, and Exegetical Fussiness," *History of Religions* 44, no. 3 (2005), 256.

[52] "space, n.1". OED Online. December 2012. Oxford University Press, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/185414?isAdvanced=false&result=1&rskey=kYvM31&.

although its etymology is very different. According to Edward Lane, the root verb means to "assign or give someone a place." *Mukna* can connote power, ability, and strength, whereas *makana* can be translated as "greatness or high rank or standing" or an honorable place (in the estimation of a king).[53] The verb form can also mean "to be influential (with the king)," or to be powerful, firm, and solidly established.[54] The second form of the verb (*makkana*) can indicate "to give power, strength, capacity … let one take root in a land and become powerful." Further, the fifth form of the verbal noun (*tamakkun*) is translated as to "have authority and influence … have the power of, take possession of."[55] The various forms of the root verb have numerous connotations, but the most noteworthy one reflects the root's connection to power and strength.

Power is space, and the Arabic connotations certainly reflect the idea that the two are intimately connected. To construct and create a space is to have power over it and to own it, revealing the process in which space is made. From the critical lens of religious studies, J.Z. Smith contends that place is the construction of the sacred itself and not a reaction to the sacred. He asserts that it is a ritual response to the presence of the sacred in time and space.[56] As Smith sees it, "human beings are not placed, they bring place into being; the experience of the sacred is not derived from the place itself, but rather from the

[53] Lane supplement, 42

[54] Francis Joseph Steingass, *English-Arabic dictionary : for the use of both travellers and students* (London: W.H. Allen, 1882) 1049.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Smith, *To Take Place,* 45.

social signs that give the place meaning."[57] Space exists all around but it is humans who create place out of space by focusing their attention and claiming possession over a place.

The term *sacred* has a decidedly Christian context, the first meaning referring to consecration in the Eucharist, although it also contains some intriguing connotations, such as:

> Set apart for or dedicated to some religious purpose, and hence entitled to veneration or religious respect; made holy by association with a god or other object of worship; consecrated, hallowed … of a deity: Venerable, holy … Secured by religious sentiment, reverence, sense of justice, or the like, against violation, infringement, or encroachment … Of a person (hence of his office): Having a religiously secured immunity from violence or attachment; sacrosanct, inviolable.[58]

Based on these definitions, a sacred space or object would be something that is held above all other places and objects for a special purpose. Places and objects can also gain sacredness through contact or association with a deity or God, becoming inviolable. The society in which sacred space is located would thus generally consider it a great sin to violate or desecrate it:

> The concept of sacredness, therefore, is often applied to objects, places or spaces as material manifestations of the elsewhere uncertain transcendence of divine forces. Therefore, sacred space is distinguished from the topography of the non-sacred, the everyday and mundane.[59]

Generally, in the classical understanding of sacred space, it is set apart from the rest of society.

Other scholars, such as Claude Levi-Strauss, stressed that the sacred has a much

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[57] Ibid., 28.

[58] "sacred, adj. and n.". OED Online. December 2012. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/169556?redirectedFrom=sacred&.

[59] Patrick Desplat, "Introduction: Representations of Space, Place-making and Urban Life in Muslim Societies," in *Prayer in the city: the making of Muslim sacred places and urban life*, ed by. Dorothea Elisabeth Schulz (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2012), 24.

broader meaning and can receive any meanings that people impose upon it."[60] Chidester and Linenthal, in their study of American sacred spaces, attempt to go beyond the often-simplistic notion of spaces as being innately sacred. Instead, they recognize the bearing that human agency has on the process of sanctification of spaces and objects.[61] Chidester and Linenthal suggest that the construction of space relies "not only upon a symbolic conquest or construction of place, but also upon the temporal processes of ritual and practice, memory and narrative, and the ongoing engagement with historical factors and change."[62] Sacred space is intimately associated with physical practices as well as intangible communal memories. Chidester and Linenthal suggest that, inherently contested, the *sacred* is "a sign of difference that can be assigned to virtually anything through the human labor of consecration.[63] Sacred space is significant and helps people orient themselves in the world; as the geographer Neil Smith noted, "the production of space also implies the production of meaning, concepts and consciousness of space which are inseparably linked to its physical production." [64] In this way, sacred space helps people form their perspective on the world and thus plays an important role in people's lives.

J.Z. Smith posits that humans impose sacrality upon objects and places, and

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[60] Levi-Strauss, quoted in Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. Robert Brain (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), 5.

[61] David Chidester and Edward Tabor Linenthal, *American Sacred Space* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 25.

[62] Ibid..

[63] Ibid., 6.

[64] Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (New York, NY: Blackwell, 1984), 77.

Jackson and Henri further this claim, pointing out that "sacred space does not exist naturally, but is assigned sanctity as man defines, limits and characterizes it though his culture, experience and goals."[65] Sacred space is not abstract; rather it is a human construct set apart from other spaces used by people. Sacred space is powerful in that it could be possessed and owned and therefore give the owners power. The possibility of ownership and power is implicit in the production of sacred space.[66]

The equivalent term for *sacred* in Arabic comes from the root letters *q-d-s*, which means to go far away from, or to become holy or pure. The English and Arabic terms would appear to have much in common, the most important connection being that the *sacred* is something that is set apart from everyday life for a specific purpose. This makes sense, as the Latin root *sacer* and other related terms were directly translated into vernacular languages out of Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Catalan, and from Arabic via Latin.[67] Carsten Colpe, a German historian of religion, asserts that the connotations of *sacred* in the aforementioned languages were primarily the result of the work in Middle Latin of Christian scholars.[68]

The Arabic root verb takes on various forms as nouns and adjectives. Some of the forms used by contemporary Muslim scholars include *taqdis* (sacredness) and *al-qadasa* (the sacred). *Al-quds* can be translated as the sacred or a blessing, and is also the Arabic

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[65] Smith, *To Take Place*, passim.; Richard H. Jackson and Roger Henrie, "Perception of Sacred Space," *Journal of Cultural Geography* 3, no. 2 (1983): 94.

[66] Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans by. J.E. Turner (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 210.

[67] Carsten Colpe, "Sacred and the Profane," ed. Lindsay Jones, *Encyclopedia of Religion* (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2005).

[68] Ibid.

name for Jerusalem. *Al-Quddus*, a name of God, means all-holy, all-pure, or all-perfect, he who is far removed from every imperfection or impurity, while *al-muqaddas*, an adjective, also refers to God and can be translated as hallowed, sanctified, consecrated, or the sacred.[69] *Muqaddas* can be used to connote a land or place that is pure from imperfections and purifies humans from their sins, or a blessed land. It can also be designated as the land that people are obligated to respect out of deference to a pure person who is buried in it.[70] Colpe considers the Arabic term *haram* to be closest to *sacer*, related to the Hebrew *q-d-sh,* while *q-d-s* retains a general meaning of *holy.*[71] Medieval Arabic scholars used *haram* to refer to a place, time, or state that is sacred, inviolable, and offers security and safety. The term was originally used to designate the sacred territory of Mecca and Medina, which is marked by a clear boundary.[72] During Hajj, pilgrims must enter the state of *ihram,* or prohibition, during which they are forbidden from hunting, killing any living beings, and must wear two unsewn white garments.[73]

In the English language, people often toss around the terms *shrine*, *grave*, and *tomb* interchangeably, without realizing the subtle differences in meaning. Most often, English-language speakers use *shrine* to refer to a place that is built or constructed in memory of the deceased, be it a relative, a pop star, or a saint. People construct shrines in

[69] Lane, 7, 24-5.

[70] Haydar al-Sahlani, *Fiqh al-atabat al-muqaddisa* (Najaf: Holy Shrine of Ali Publications, 2008), 20.

[71] Carsten Colpe, "Sacred and the Profane."

[72] Lane, Vol. 2, 190.

[73] Al-Sahlani, *Fiqh, 16.*

their houses, along the side of roads, and in places of worship. In the Oxford English Dictionary, a shrine is

> a box, coffer; a cabinet, chest … The box, casket, or other repository in which the relics of a saint are preserved … A case or casket for a dead body; A receptacle containing an object of religious veneration; An object of veneration … The part of a church in which a shrine stands … A place where worship is offered or devotions are paid to a saint or deity; a temple, church.[74]

Shrine comes from the Latin *scrinium*, which gives the term its basic meaning of a box or receptacle. A shrine encloses a religious presence amidst the "everyday world."[75] A shrine has a wide array of connotations, including the casket that contains human remains, the monument built above a grave, and even the entire structure built around a grave in honor of a holy person. A shrine is a place where abstract religious concepts materialize into physical existence. In the context of religion, a shrine usually contains the remains or relics of a holy person or is built on a site connected to miraculous events.[76]

More specific and not necessarily linked to holy people or miraculous events, a *tomb* is "a place of burial; an excavation in earth or rock for the reception of a dead body, a grave," or a resting place for the dead.[77] While its original meaning connotes the underground vault for human remains or the mound above it, it was later used to also

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[74] "Shrine, n.", OED Online. December 2012. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/178891?rskey=mAIBtQ&result=1&isAdvanced=false.

[75] Paul B. Courtright, "Shrines," ed. Lindsay Jones, *Encyclopedia of Religion* (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2005).

[76] Ibid..

[77] "Tomb, n.". OED Online. December 2012, Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/203084?rskey=xvaulT&result=1&isAdvanced=false.

refer to any monument or structure built above the grave.[78] A *grave* is simply "a place of burial" or the mound above the grave, as well as a resting place for human remains. Most importantly, a grave is simply the hole in the ground where a body is laid to rest.[79]

The Arabic term *`ataba*, the most commonly used term by modern Shi`is, is present in the official name of `Ali's shrine: *al-`ataba al-`alawiyya al-muqaddisa* (The Sacred `Alid Shrine). *`Ataba* is one of many seemingly interchangeable terms used by medieval scholars. In the Arabic language, *`ataba* refers to the threshold of a door, in particular, the raised wooden doorsill that marks the entrance into a house. Haydar Sahlani, a modern Iraqi Shi`i scholar, explains that *`ataba* was used to refer to the gates of places of royalty or the homes of leaders of tribes, where people could make requests from their rulers. Rulers would dispense help from their reception rooms and offer forgiveness. Some of their impoverished subjects would throw themselves to the ground and kiss the threshold of the entrance in hope that their humility would evoke a positive response.

People would also perform the same actions at the tombs of prophets and saints, and the term *`ataba* became widely used by Shi`is to refer to the tombs of the twelve Imams.[80] Shi`i scholars also use *`ataba* in a legal context to refer to the boundary of the shrine, to demarcate where the sacred space begins. In one instance, a scholar referring to purity issues writes that a menstruating woman is not permitted to cross into the *`ataba*,

[78] Ibid.

[79] "Grave, n.1" OED Online. December 2012, Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/80989?rskey=GiKPVz&result=1&isAdvanced=false

[80] Al-Sahlani, *Fiqh*, 14.

referring both to the boundary of the sacred space and the entire shrine complex at once.[81] While the original meaning of *`ataba* did not have any connotations that could be used to refers to graves or sacred sites, it quickly evolved to indicate a doorway to an important place, and in the context of Shi`i Islam, it marks the beginning of the sacred and is used similarly to *shrine* in English.

Other terms that both Shi`i and Sunni scholars have used to refer to the shrine of `Ali and the other Imams includes: *darih, mashhad, rawda, hadra, mazar, marqad, qabr, and mudaji`a. Mashhad* refers to a "place where people are assembled … a place of assembly." It can also refer to a place where a martyr has died or is buried.[82] *Mashhad* is specifically used to refer to the shrine during festivities and designated times for pilgrimage, at which the term is used to designate the entire city of Najaf, and *mashhad `Ali* has often been used to refer to the city of Najaf, along with the city of Tus in Iran, better known as Mashhad, as it contains the shrine of the eighth Shi`i Imam `Ali al-Rida.[83]

Marqad suggests a resting or sleeping place and also is used to refer to the location of grave.[84] A *hadra* was originally used to refer to a presence, but later came to mean a place of presence and is also an exalted title used to refer to kings, saints, and prophets, including `Ali. *Hadra* can also be used to indicate proximity, and in the case of a shrine, could refer to the proximity pilgrims experience to the blessed body of the holy

[81] Ibid., 15.

[82] Lane, 335.

[83] Al-Sahlani, *Fiqh,* 18.

[84] Lane, vol. 3, 301; Al-Sahlani, *Fiqh*, 15.

person.[85] A *mazar* is also a popular term for a shrine and indicates a place or time for visiting and comes from the Arabic root verb *z-w-r*, meaning to visit.[86] It is mainly used to refer to shrines and other sites of pilgrimage that people visit. The term *darih* comes from the verb to split something asunder or open anything and scholars offer several meanings, including an opening in a grave, an entire grave, or the part of the grave where the corpse is placed.[87]

A *rawda* denotes a verdant land, a meadow full of flowers, a garden, and a place where animals graze. The Prophet Muhammad is narrated as having said, "Between my grave, or between my house, is a *rawda*, of Paradise," and Muslims often refer to this area in the Prophet's Mosque in Medina as the *rawda*.[88] The term was adopted by Shi`i Muslims to refer to the shrines of the Imams in an effort to draw a connection between the tomb of the Prophet and his descendants, the Imams. *Qabr* comes from the verb, "to bury a corpse," a can be translated as a grave, tomb, sepulcher, or any place of burial of human being.[89] A *mudaji`a* is not very commonly used, but in the contexts it arises, it refers to a resting place," primarily a grave.[90]

Both Shi`i and Sunni scholars appear to have used many of the aforementioned terms interchangeably to refer to `Ali's tomb. I assert that *`ataba* and *mashhad*—both which can be translated as *shrine*—are the broadest terms that refer to the entire shrine

[85] Lane, Vol. 2, 225.

[86] Lane, Vol. 3, 436.

[87] Lane, Vol. 5, 69; al- Sahlani, 16.

[88] Lane, Vol. 3, 353.

[89] Lane, Vol. 7, 8.

[90] Lane, Vol. 5, 54.

complex, including the outer walls and gate and mark the separation between the profane world and the sacred.[91] *Marqad, qabr, and mudaji`a*—which are best translated as *grave*—all signify the actual grave of a person instead of the entire structure that surrounds it, and are often used when discussing the specific location of `Ali's body. A *darih* can be best translated as *tomb* as it can refer to both the grave and the surrounding structure. In my translations of these numerous terms, I use *grave* to refer to the location where `Ali is buried, *tomb* to refer to the grave marker above `Ali's grave, and *shrine* to refer to the larger structure built around `Ali's grave.

Having established definitions for terminology referring to spaces and locations of sacred spaces, I provide an overview of activities that take place within these spaces. The most significant activity that occurs in the context of sacred space is rituals, particularly pilgrimage rituals carried out by pilgrims. In the Oxford English dictionary, ritual can be defined as a "prescribed form or order of religious or ceremonial rites … A ritual act or ceremonial observance." In later usage, ritual came to be known as " an action or series of actions regularly or habitually repeated."[92] Ritual studies scholars such as Ronald L. Grimes and Catherine Bell debate the essence and nature of rituals and examine ritual activities in historical and modern contexts.[93] J.Z. Smith explores the place of rituals in religion, and argues "ritual is, first and foremost, a mode of paying attention. It is a process for marking interest."[94] Moreover, ritual is connected to place; Smith proposes

[91] Al-Sahlani, *Fiqh,* 20.

[92] "Ritual, adj. and n.". OED Online. December 2012. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/166369?redirectedFrom=ritual&.

[93] See Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Ronald L. Grimes, *Readings in Ritual Studies* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1996).

[94] Smith, *To Take Place*, 103.

that "place directs attention" and therefore plays a role in creating ritual.[95] Ritual develops at places, in the case of `Ali's shrine, pilgrims presence at the shrine created a need for a canonized ritual that would regulate their movements and patterns of visitation.

While not used as much as commonly as *ritual* in English, the Arabic equivalent of ritual is *sha`ira* (pl. *sha`a'ir*), which refers to a sign or mark, and most relevantly is defined as "a place [of the performance] of religious rites and ceremonies of pilgrimage … and the signs thereof," often in the context of the Hajj pilgrimage.[96] Basically, *sha`ira* is the external manifestation of a pilgrimage or other ritual activity, it involves physical acts that that an outsider can observe. Another term used in Arabic that refers to ritual is *n-s-k,* which contains the meanings of acts of worship, sacrifice, devotion, and rituals. The term is often used in the context of Hajj rituals but can also be used to refer to rituals performed in other forms of devotion.[97] In this way, the Arabic terms are quite similar to the English definition, in that they indicate the action or practice of a religious or ceremonial ritual, although the Arabic does not contain the later English meaning of a repetitive action. By returning to the origins of commonly used terms and reflecting on their connotations, scholars can be "exegetically fussy" and seek out connections and multivalent meanings of terminology that impact the contexts in which terms are used.

Muslims often refer to narratives going back to sanctified figures in Islam, such as the Prophet Muhammad, pre-Islamic prophets, and the Imams, to legitimize the

[95] Ibid.

[96] Lane, Vol. 4, 285.

[97] J. G Hava, *Arabic English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2001), 759.

sacredness of these places.[98] From the perspective of Muslims, a space is made sacred through references made to it in the Qur'an and the sunna, or through connections to a sacred event or person. Haider al-Sahlani, a modern Shi`i Iraqi scholar, refers to the Qur'anic verse that describes God-bestowed rituals to explain the nature of sacred spaces:

> And whoever venerates the symbols and rituals set up by God, surely it is because of the true piety and God-consciousness of their hearts … For every believing community, We have laid down sacrifice as an act of worship to be performed at a certain time and place.[99]

Al-Sahlani argues that based on the interpretations of Qur'anic exegetes, these rituals were intended by God to be practiced in sacred spaces.[100]

Furthermore, al-Sahlani divides sacred spaces in Islam into four different categories: 1) those spaces referred to in the Qur'an, such as Mecca; 2) those spaces mentioned by the Prophet Muhammad or the Imams, such as the black stone in the Ka`ba, Najaf, and Kufa; 3) those spaces where a significant event in Islam occurred, such as Medina, battle sites of the Prophet, locations where the Prophet received revelations, and where the Prophet and the Imams performed miracles, and where they prayed; and 4) those spaces that contain the bodies of sanctified figures in Islam, such as Mashhad, Samarra, and graves of prophets and saints not mentioned in the Qur'an or hadiths.[101] In the first two categories, sacred spaces can be designated by God, prophets, and saints, and therefore existed before humans built a structure on top of them. Because these spaces are specifically referred to in canonical Islamic literature, Muslims believed that they were

[98] Desplat, "Representations of Space," 25.

[99] Qur'an 22:32, 34.

[100] Al-Sahlani, *Fiqh,* 42.

[101] Ibid., 42-56.

imbued with sanctity. Sacred spaces can also be created as a result of their connections to saintly figures or events, which left their traces of *baraka*. Therefore these places were considered sacred due to outside forces that imposed the sacred onto them.

Sacred spaces in Islam are physically set apart from the rest of society and there are "specific, temporal, restricted, ritual practices that demarcate the mosque as a sacred place."[102] At the same time, sacred spaces are also home to mundane activities; people socialize, buy and sell, and discuss politics, and children play with each other. In the modern shrine of `Ali in Najaf, many of the rooms that line the courtyard contain offices of the shrine administration, a gift and bookshop, various workshops of craftsmen and repairmen, and other spaces. As Desplat claims, sacred space is multivalent for Muslims, and its meanings are in constant fluctuation and include both "mundane and sacred imaginations."[103] Other scholars, such as sociologist Meredith McGuire (2008), argue that in the context of Muslim societies, the sacred often arises out of the mundane according to their use and interpretation of cultural resources in their daily lives, and the division between the sacred and mundane is ambiguous at best.[104] This apparent dichotomy of the mundane versus the sacred conveys the ambiguous and multivalent nature of sacred space, which will become more clear by teasing out the poetics and the politics of `Ali's grave.

[102] Ibid., 27.

[103] Ibid..

[104] Meredith McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*, quoted in Desplat, "Introduction: Representations of Space," 28.

Sectarian Identity in Medieval Iraq

Apart from the issues of the body, sacred space, and ritual, this dissertation largely addresses the topic of identity, specifically the sectarian identity of medieval Muslim scholars. Studying sectarian identity formation in the pre-modern period is a challenge in and of itself due to minimal sources available and the need to make conjectures based on extant writings from scholars. Sectarian identity was one of many identities that scholars claimed, including: 1) geographic identity based on their origins and place of residence; 2) gendered identity, as they were all men; 3) class identity; 4) religious identity as Muslims; 5) ethnic identity; 6) linguistic identity; and many other forms of identity that medieval scholars might have related to. Delineating the sectarian identity of scholars through their writings, which offer little access to their personal and religious lives and practice, is a messy process. To even claim to study identity demands a definition of what this term means. *Identity* is a slippery word that is often used by scholars and the media in a careless manner without attention to its connotations. Its definition has often been disputed and its use has often been called a "cliché" by scholars, and empty of meaning due to overuse.[105] Charles Tilly proposed that identities should be treated as a set of relationships that can be separated into four distinct components: 1) a boundary separating me from you or us from them, 2) a set of relations within the boundary, 3) a set of relations across the boundary, and 4) a set of stories about the boundary and the relations[106] If we apply this to the context of sectarian identity in medieval Islam, these components illustrate the complex and dynamic set of relationships

[105] Patricia M Thornton, "Introduction: Identity Matters," in *Identity Matters: Ethnic and Sectarian Conflict*, ed by. James L Peacock and Patrick B Inman (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 2-3.

[106] Charles Tilly, *Identities, boundaries, and social ties* (Boulder, Colo.: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 209.

and interactions that took place among scholars. Medieval scholars claimed sectarian identities in contrast to those with differing views, created an imagined and actual community of co-sectarianists who shared similar theological beliefs, interacted with those from different sectarian communities, and composed texts that outlined their beliefs and contrasted them with those from outside of their community.

The period of this dissertation covers the ninth to fourteenth centuries, an era that witnessed dramatic change and consolidation of Muslim sectarian identities and affiliations. Numerous studies have examined this topic from different perspectives through the lens of scholars in different regions of the Middle East.[107] Al-Jamil stresses that there have been few case studies of Shi`i-Sunni scholarly exchanges that have been carried out on specific historical periods or regions, and that most of the studies focus on issues of succession to the Prophet Muhammad and the crystallization of a distinct Shi`i community.[108] My dissertation will help fill this gap in available scholarship by offering a case study of Sunni-Shi`i exchanges about the grave of `Ali over the course of several centuries as well as the consolidation of Shi`i identity through the memory of `Ali and practice of relevant rituals.

It took many centuries for normative Twelver Shi`i identity to form its current shape, although the community did begin to coalesce into a recognizable sect by the mid-eighth century.[109] Najam Haider acknowledges that most scholars are in consensus that

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[107] Tariq al-Jamil, "Cooperation and Contestation in Medieval Baghdad (656/1258--786/1384): Relationships Between Shi'i and Sunni Scholars in the Madinat Al-Salam" (PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 2004), note: published version of manuscript will be out later in 2014 from I.B. Tauris; Najam Iftikhar Haider, *The Origins of the Shī'a: Identity, Ritual, and Sacred Space in Eighth-Century Kūfa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[108] Al-Jamil, Ibid., 9.

[109] I specifically focus on Twelver Shi`i Islam in order to narrow my focus.

by Ja`far al-Sadiq's lifetime (d. 765), "the outlines of a distinct Imami communal identity were in place."[110] This period marks the "point at which a particular group of Muslims began to perceive themselves as 'unique' or 'different'" from other Muslims."[111] The work of al-Jamil, Daphna Ephrat, and Devin Stewart demonstrate the fluidity of interactions between Sunni and Shi`i scholars in medieval Iraq.[112] While scholars' writing often seem to indicate that there was hostility between Sunni and Shi`i scholars, research into their relations actually shows that Sunni and Shi`i scholars in Baghdad taught students across sectarian affiliations.[113] Moreover, both Sunnism and Shi`ism were still developing. While Ja`far al-Sadiq and later Shi`i scholars were responsible for contributing to the formation of the Ja`fari Shi`i school of law, Sunnis formed full-fledged legal schools in the tenth century, when notions of Sunni orthodoxy began to take root. Sunnis were primarily affiliated with Sunnism through their adherence to a legal school of law and not necessarily their dogmatic principles.[114]

Many of the scholars of my study were also based in Baghdad and nearby cities, such as Karbala, Hilla, and Najaf, which had similar educational environments. Thus, one must be aware of the discrepancy between practice and theory, keeping in mind that the texts examined in this study present an intellectual and theoretical exchange and can be

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[110] Najam Haider, "Prayer, Mosque, and Pilgrimage: Mapping Shi'i Sectarian Identity in 2nd/8th Century Kufa," *Islamic Law and Society* 16, no. 2 (2009): 153.

[111] Najam Haider, "Prayer, Mosque, and Pilgrimage," 153ff.

[112] Daphna Ephrat, *A Learned Society in a Period of Transition: The Sunni Ulama of Eleventh-Century Baghdad,* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000); Devin J Stewart, *Islamic legal orthodoxy: twelver Shiite responses to the Sunni legal system* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998).

[113] Ibid., 7.

[114] Tamima Bayhom-Daou, *Shaykh Mufid* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 24.

understood to embody scholars' attempts at defining their respective theological limits. They represent attempts to formulate sectarian understandings of history and theology in order to establish authority and proper practice and beliefs among their students and followers. These texts cannot always be taken literally to indicate hostility between scholars, despite the harsh language they use at times.

Scholars in art history, religion, anthropology, and history who study shrines in the Middle East indicate that Sunnis and Shi`is—both elite and commoners—patronized and performed pilgrimage to what are now considered Shi`i shrines, including the Iraqi cities of Najaf, Karbala, Samarra, Mashhad, and Qom, as well as `Alid shrines in Syria. Many of these shared practices continue up until the modern day.[115] Despite what actually happened on the ground, the realm of the intellectual was removed from everyday life and did not always reflect practice. Without social history, one would assume that Shi`is and Sunnis only interacted during times of conflict and that the shrines of Ahl al-Bayt were only visited by Shi`i pilgrims.

Sectarian identity, affiliation, and sympathies were often fluid, as some scholars had ambiguous identities and have been referred to by contemporary scholars as hybrid

[115]Although numerous studies have been carried out at the shrines of the family of the Prophet in neighboring countries, particularly Iran, no major studies have been carried out on shrines in Iraq. For studies of medieval and contemporary Shi`i shrines, see Josef W Meri, *The cult of saints among Muslims and Jews in medieval Syria* (Oxford [England]; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Stephennie Mulder, *Shrines of the 'Alids in Medieval Syria* (Edinburgh Univ Pr, 2012); James W Allan, *The art and architecture of Twelver Shi`ism: Iraq, Iran and the Indian sub-continent* (London: Azimuth Editions, 2012); Edith Szanto, "Following Sayyida Zaynab: Twelver Shi'ism in Contemporary Syria" (PhD Diss., University of Toronto, 2012); Paulo Pinto, "Pilgrimage, Commodities, and Religious Objectification: The Making of Transnational Shi`ism between Iran and Syria," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East.* 27, no. 1 (2007); and Michelle Zimney, "History in the Making: The Sayyida Zaynab Shrine in Damascus," ARAM 18-19, no. 1-2 (2006): 695-704; Studies of shrines in in Iran include Diana Glazebrook and Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi, "Being Neighbors to Imam Reza: Pilgrimage Practices and Return Intentions of Hazara Afghans Living in Mashhad, Iran," *Iranian Studies.* 40, no. 2 (2007); and Anne H. Betteridge, "Ziarat: Pilgrimage to the Shrines of Shiraz" (PhD Diss., University of Chicago, 1985); May Farhat, "Islamic Piety and Dynastic Legitimacy: The Case of the Shrine of 'Ali b. Musa Al-Rida in Mashhad (10th-17th Century)" (Ph.D. Diss., Harvard University, 2002).

scholars.[116] Among the hybrid scholars examined, most came from Sunni families and their biographies often reveal that they followed one of the four Sunni schools of law. Their writings, however, divulge their affiliations or sympathies for Ahl al-Bayt and the `Alids. Many Sunnis also held great love and piety for Ahl al-Bayt in a devotional context and it was not uncommon for religious affiliation to be blended between Sunnism and Shi`ism, especially among Sufis.[117] Devin Stewart's study on interactions between Sunni and Shi`i legal scholars illustrates the large impact Sunni jurisprudence had on Shi`i scholars by promoting the formation of the Ja`fari *madhhab* as a response to the Sunni *madhhabs*. What is more is that some Shi`i scholars actually strategically followed several Sunni *madhhabs,* albeit*,* mainly for reasons of self-preservation.[118]

At the same time, there were also staunch Sunnis who were antagonistic to Shi`is, especially Sunnis who followed the Hanbali school of law such as Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1200), Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), and Ibn Kathir (d. 1373). Hanbali scholars actively spoke out against Shi`is, their claim of `Ali's superiority over the other caliphs, and their rejection of traditions transmitted by certain companions of the Prophet.[119] Although it is challenging to make assumptions about scholars' sectarian affiliations and sympathies based on their extant writings, much can be extrapolated from their reading of the tradition. In Asma Afsaruddin's study of the treatment of Abu Bakr and `Ali in the genre of *manaqib* and *fada'il*, forms of praise literature, she argues that the literature "reveals

[116] For an overview of hybrid scholars in the 13th century, see Mohammad Ahmad Masad, "The Medieval Islamic Apocalyptic Tradition: Divination, Prophecy and the End of Time in the 13th Century Eastern Mediterranean" (PhD Dissertation, Washington University in Saint Louis, 2008).

[117] Masad, "The Medieval Islamic Apocalyptic Tradition, 98, 160.

[118] Stewart*, Islamic Legal Orthodoxy,* passim.

[119] Tamima Bayhom-Daou, *Shaykh Mufid* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 24.

certain ideological thrusts behind their formulations that help us better understand the trajectory of the early history of the disputes over leadership of the Muslim polity."[120] Similarly, through my reading of a variety of genres, including history, geographical, travel, biography, and hagiography, I argue that, on a whole, they offer insight into the ideological and sectarian leanings of scholars and, specifically, they present an intriguing perspective into the ongoing debates around the nature of `Ali in medieval intellectual circles.

Some contemporary scholars of Islamic studies have gone so far as to assert that "doctrinal thrust may also serve as a chronological marker," which would allow one to trace the evolution and trends in ideologies.[121] At the same time, it is important to be aware of the possible shortcomings and obstacles in pursuing this line of inquiry, as Stefan Leder warned, for "even in the case of a narration which is obviously biased, it often remains difficult to relate the underlying tendency to the evolution of dogmatic thought."[122] All of my claims remain conjectures and represent an attempt to peek into the medieval scholarly understandings of `Ali and his grave according to presumed sectarian differences.

Constructing Historical Narratives in Medieval Islam

[120]Asma Afsaruddin, "In Praise Of The Caliphs: Re-Creating History From The Manaqib Literature," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31 (1999): 329; also see Asma Afsaruddin, *Excellence and precedence: medieval Islamic discourse on legitimate leadership*, Islamic history and civilization v. 36 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2002).

[121] Jacob Lassner, *Islamic revolution and historical memory: an inquiry into the art of 'Abbāsid apologetics*, American oriental series v. 66 (New Haven, Conn: American Oriental Society, 1986), 31.

[122] Stefan Leder, "The Literary Use of the Khabar," in *The Byzantine and early Islamic Near East: papers of the First Workshop on Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, ed by. Averil Cameron and Lawrence I. Conrad, Studies in late antiquity and early Islam 1- (Princeton, N.J: Darwin Press, 1992), 282.

Historians and religious scholars depicted the shrine in their writings in such a way as to create a collective memory around it, and political rulers likewise attempted to control access to the shrine and its legitimacy. It is the spatial practice of scholars that I examine in order to comprehend how space was understood in medieval Islam, and how it was imbued with the sacred through narratives. In their writings, Shi`i scholars emphasized the sanctity of `Ali's shrine, and developed pilgrimage rituals that encouraged Shi`is to adopt a distinct identity. The collections of medieval texts I examine in this project offer insight into how medieval scholars formulated modes in which pilgrims imagined `Ali's shrine from afar and how they guided pilgrims to experience it during their pilgrimage.

My approach is thematic and illustrative rather than exhaustive, and does not attempt to cover the vast swath of medieval history in Najaf, nor to catalog every single extant text that discusses `Ali's grave and shrine. I constellate genres of texts to explore the development and contestation of the shrine of `Ali as a sacred space over the *longue durée* of five centuries, and trace developments and changes in scholars attitudes towards `Ali's grave-turned-shrine. I begin my examination in the ninth century, which produced a critical mass of scholarship. Soon after in the tenth century was the "Shi`i century" under the Buyids—who were sympathetic to the Shi`is—which witnessed the formative period of Shi`i scholarship.[123] It is also during this time that numerous scholars began to

[123] The Shi`i century usually refers to the period between 940 and 1055 CE and was coined by Marshall G. S. Hodgson in *The Venture of Islam 2, The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods* (Chicago, Ill: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1974), 36; I.K.A. Howard, "Shi'i Theological Literature," in *Religion, Learning, and Science in the 'Abbasid Period*, Ed. Young, M. J. L., J. D. Latham, and R. B. Serjeant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 27.

produce studies on the representation of land and place, which Antrim identifies as marking the beginning of the production of the discourse of place.[124]

Notably, it was through their writings that Shi`i scholars began to claim authority in the absence of the Imams. After assuming the Imamate in 874 upon his father's death, the twelfth Imam, Imam al-Mahdi, went into the lesser occultation for 72 years until 941, which lead to a period of leaders who claimed to be the only people with direct access to the Imam. When al-Mahdi entered the great occultation and stopped all communication with his followers, scholars such as al-Kulayni (d. 941) in *Usul min al-kafi* sought to fill the vacuum left by the absence of Imams. Without a living Imam to follow, scholars compiled hadith collections and used them to impose their own authority over lay people. These collections became sources of authority for Shi`is and formed the foundation of Shi`i theology.[125]

After the Buyids lost control of Baghdad to the Seljuks in 1055, Shi`is once again suffered harsh persecution by the rulers. Shi`i theologians composed very little during this time and focused their efforts on preserving the use of hadith instead of reason to formulate law.[126] There is much more material from the twelfth century, at which time the discourse of place reached a critical mass, and the Sunni-Shi`i debate around `Ali's tomb peaked in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This period corresponds to the renewal of Shi`i theology at the end of the `Abbasid period under the impact of scholars

[124] Zayde Antrim, *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5.

[125] Howard, "Shi'i Theological Literature." 23.

[126] Howard, "Shi'i Theological Literature," 31-2.

such as Nasir al-Din al-Tusi and Muttahar al-Hilli.[127] Furthermore, Shi`i pilgrimage manuals developed from books of supplications into complex and full-fledged guides during this period.

In my research, I utilize a variety of genres of literature, including: 1) hadith; 2) history and geography; 3) biography and hagiography; 4) *fada'il*, or praise literature; and 5) pilgrimage manuals. All of these genres began as oral traditions that were recorded by later scholars. By employing these genres of literature, I trace the genealogy of narratives around Ali's grave in Najaf and explore notions of sectarian identity and claims of legitimacy connected to `Ali's grave.[128] I specifically engage with texts written by scholars that appear to continue the same conversation over many centuries around the authenticity and institutionalization of `Ali's grave in Najaf. Contemporary scholars face a major challenge when using this genre of literature to assess historical events, as Leor Halevi aptly explains:

> The sources are prescriptive in nature, making it difficult to measure the distance between religious ideal and mundane reality; they tend, furthermore, to defy the historicist goal of determining time and place of origin … Most often, however, it is impossible to localize traditions with precision in time and space.[129]

With this in mind, I seek not to reconstruct the events leading up to `Ali's burial after his death or to establish which historical figures actually visited his grave, but rather to understand how both Sunni and Shi`i Muslims interpreted these sources as reflected in their later writings. Islamic studies scholars have often prioritized Sunni over Shi`i

[127] Howard, "Shi'i Theological Literature," 32.

[128] Khalek, *Damascus*, 164.

[129] Leor Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 7.

sources, but in my project, I examine Shi`i texts in particular to understand their specific *Weltanschauung*, and juxtapose opposing narratives about the same place to draw out possible interests and motives of the scholars. In addition, I consider Shi`i hadiths and religious texts on their own grounds—as opposed to contrasting them with Sunni hadiths—which has allowed me to trace the development of Shi`i ritual at `Ali's shrine.

All of the sources I have consulted for this dissertation are available in printed critical editions rather than manuscripts. When relying on printed editions, which are available to us thanks to centuries of scribes who have kept the texts in circulation, and later scholars who edited and annotated the manuscripts in print form, it is important to keep in mind what Zayde Antrim calls the "mediating function" of published editions. While critical published editions are accessible and often note textual variants, they also are known to "efface traces of the serendipitous, collaborative, and nonlinear process by which manuscripts were handed down over the centuries."[130] Over time, unnamed scholars have both added and deleted selections from texts and what remains extant to us today is only a version of the original author's text. And of course, society was evolving as well concurrently with scholarly texts, so the goal here is to "reach an understanding of the social function of this memory within a society experiencing rapid change."[131] I used the sources currently available to consider issues surrounding the implications of foundational narratives, the contestation of place, and the construction of sacred place, ritual and identity.

[130] Antrim, *Routes,* 5.

[131] Halevi, 10.

Historical texts offer us a window into the mindset and attitudes of scholars about their contemporary environment as well as the past. Scholars who wrote history were "active interpreters of their society" and can offer us insight into their thought process and method of writing the past.[132] I adopt a genealogical approach, informed by Hayden White's theory that views historical narratives as a form of historical imagination based on historians' subjective process of constructing meaning through their writings.[133] White's theory of narrativization has been especially helpful in my analysis of the foundational myths of Najaf, and historical narratives on the history of `Ali's grave. White proposes that historical writing is a form of fiction just like other genres of literature, and is "a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse."[134] Notably, White suggests that the most productive method in approaching historical writings is to recognize their function as literary narratives that give substance to historical occurrences.[135] At the same time, Hirschler warns that scholars cannot assume that medieval scholars had complete autonomy over the content of their writings, and numerous factors limited the extent of their authorial voices.[136]

Studies from Western scholars on early Najaf and `Ali's shrine are few and far between. Those that do go into some depth are nearly all based solely on Sunni narratives, which inevitably deny the presence of `Ali's grave in Najaf. Arab scholars

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[132] Konrad Hirschler, *Medieval Arabic Historiography: Authors as Actors* (London: Routledge, 2011), 3.

[133] Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation,* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 7.

[134] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 24.

[135] Ibid., 26.

[136] Hirschler, *Medieval Arabic Historiography,* 5.

who write about this formative history of Najaf often brush over the contested nature of the historical narratives, and take a side clearly reflective of their sectarian affiliation. This issue is further complicated by the fact that Western scholars often prefer basing their history on well-known histories and geographies written by Sunni scholars, and dismiss Shi`i historical narratives. Thus the history of Najaf is often dismissed as is the beginnings of `Ali's shrine.

An example of this is the entry on Najaf in the Encyclopedia Islamica: C.E. Bosworth quotes the North African Sunni traveler, Ibn Battuta, who was skeptical about the location of `Ali's tomb. Bosworth adopts Ibn Battuta's attitudes as his own, stating "Perhaps, then, the sanctuary of al-Nadjaf is not the real burial-place but a tomb held in reverence in the pre-Islamic period, especially as the graves of Adam and Noah were also shown there."[137] While Orientalist scholars often attempted to prove the historicity of events and the actual burial locations of important Muslim figures, their preference for Sunni sources hindered their ability to reflect on the wide array of sources on the subject.

In light of the fact that it would be an impossible to piece together a neutral and factual history of `Ali's shrine and Najaf, what remains to be done instead is to read narratives as forms of historical imagination of the authors in their specific socio-historical contexts. As Hirschler contends, "an understanding of these texts' meaning demands a simultaneous and detailed consideration of their narrative structures and the social and intellectual contexts of their production.[138] While respecting the integrity of medieval historical scholarship, I seek to understand how narratives are constructed and

[137] Bosworth, "Al-Nadjaf," *EOI*.

[138] Hirschler, *Medieval Arabic Historiography,* 122.

how these constructs projected a sense of the sacred onto `Ali's grave. Despite the fact that most medieval Islamic narratives "appear repetitive and formulaic, authors composing and compiling these anecdotes exercised a kind of authorial agency in the way they 'maneuvered' through and with these narratives in order to make their pedagogical or didactic messages clear."[139] They did not merely compile traditions, but carefully sifted through thousands of them in order to present their own "thematic agendas."[140]

As Khalek convincingly argues, narrativity can be an "asset" and not just a "liability" through its ability to elucidate further on the memory and identity of scholars.[141] Their selective use of reports and historical accounts allowed scholars to interpret these sources to offer "particularized interpretations" colored by their own socio-political and religious background. Moreover, historical narratives were *reflective* of scholars' interpretations of history, and also *generative* in that they helped forge the identities of those who read or listened to them.[142] Narratives, therefore, are the product of the scholars who mold and present them in their writings, and consist of "layers of meaning through which individual authors could exercise their own agency."[143]

Although scholars' work may not always have been obvious in their writings,

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[139] Khalek, *Damascus after the Muslim conquest : text and image in early Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 18; Khalek, quoting Steven Judd, "Narratives and Character Development: Al-Tabari and al-Baladhurı on Late Umayyad History," in Ideas, Images and Methods of Portrayal: Insights into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 209–26.

[140] Ibid..

[141] Khalek, *Damascus,* 22.

[142] Ibid., 19.

[143] Ibid., 20.

they still managed to hold onto a "kind of creative autonomy" as seen in their selective presentation of historical reports and accounts, which often could provide evidence of the author's identity and contribute to the identity-making of the author's self-identified community. Embellishments and extraordinary accounts of events and supernatural historical figures should not be grounds for immediately disregarding sources as fictional; rather they could "persuade and encourage, edify and teach."[144] If we take seriously that historical experience is "mediated through narrative modes," then we can understand medieval historical narratives as a narrow window into the *Weltanschauung* of scholars and their communities, as well as information about historical events.

Consequently, this study takes medieval historical narratives from a variety of genres to see how Sunni, Shi`i, and hybrid scholars viewed the body and historical figure of `Ali as well as the city of Najaf and its sanctity, and modes in which Shi`i scholars formulated the canonical rituals to `Ali's shrine. This study takes specific figures and events and proceeds to examine the multivocality of historical sources and how scholars produced distinct perspectives. It is difficult, if not impossible, to attempt to construct a factual history of `Ali's merits and what happened to his grave, but what I *can* do is consider the diverse opinions and perspectives without holding one source's authority above another, and recognize these differences and what they can tell us about religious traditions and the narrative process.

Taking into consideration the issue of narrativity and the construction of historical narratives, I analyze Sunni and Shi`i historical narratives of Najaf and the shrine of `Ali and how these narratives contributed to the formation of Najaf as a pilgrimage center for

[144] Ibid., 21.

Shi`i Muslims.[145] By scrutinizing the conflicting historical narratives of Najaf, I probe how the construction, distribution, and consumption of meaning transformed over the period of my study.

Literature Review

My major theoretical focus is communal memory, sacred space, and ritual, and although there are many studies that use these theoretical anchors in their work, few scholars have concentrated on examples from the Islamicate regions, specially in the pre-modern period. Studies on Shi`ism have primarily covered issues of theology, mysticism, and Qur'an and Hadith, but rarely deal with Shi`i pilgrimage, devotion, and ritual in the Arab world. As for studies on Najaf, `Ali's grave, and other shrines in Iraq, surprisingly little has been written in Western languages. Studies on pre-modern Iraq have focused on political history and theological debates, but neglected religious practices and ritual. Despite the dearth of relevant literature in Western languages, there are a large number of secondary sources written in both Arabic and Persian that narrate the history of Najaf, albeit from a primarily a confessional perspective. These sources have provided a beneficial historical perspective on Najaf despite their lack of critical approach to the topic.[146]

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[145] White, *The Content of the Form*, 7.

[146] A number of the most well-known Arabic histories of Najaf include: Jafar Khaqani Dujayli, *Mawsu`at al-Najaf al-Ashraf* [Encyclopedia of Najaf] (Beirut: Dar al-Adwa', 1993); Ja`far Baqir Mahbubah and Muhammad Sa`id Mahbubah, *Madi al-Najaf wa-hadiruha* [The Past and Present of Najaf] (Al-Najaf: Matbu`at al-Adab, 1955); Ibrahim Husayn Baghdadi and Muhammad Sanad, *'Imarat qubur al-nabi wa-Ahl al-Bayt [The Architecture of the Tombs of the Prophet and His Family]* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-`Alami lil-Maṭbu`at, 2010); Fa'iq 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Shammari, *Wa-tattabi`uhu dafinan: nazrah fi al-ahdath wa-al-zalamat allati irtabatat bi-al-qabr al-sharif lil-Imam `Ali ibn Abi Talib `abra al-tarikh* ["And Follow Him to His Burial": A View of the Events and Injustice Connected to the Sacred Grave of `Ali in History] (Al-Najaf: al-'Atabah al-'Alawiyah al-Muqaddasah, Qism al-Shu'ūn al-Fikriyah wa-al-Thaqafiyah, 2009); Muḥammad Fakhr al-Din, *Tarikh al-Najaf: hatta nihayat al-asr al-`Abbasi* [The History of Najaf Until the End of the Abbasid Dynasty] (Beirut: Dar al-Rafidayn, 2005); Muhammad ibn `Abbud Kufi, *Nuzhat al-*

Contemporary scholarship on Shi`i shrines in Iraq is scattered. James Allan is one of the few scholars who have considered the implications of sacred space in Iraq, most importantly the connection between architectural history, royal patronage, and political power.[147] His work is a broad survey covering a large geographical region and time span, and does little to theorize the issue of sacred space at the shrines. A handful of scholars have studied early expressions of Shi`ism in texts and space. Najam Haider examines legal debates and sacred space in Kufa and concludes that a distinct Shi`i religious and social identity emerged alongside ritual practices compiled by Shi`i scholars.[148]

Tariq al-Jamil's dissertation on scholarly exchanges between Sunni and Shi`i scholars in Baghdad between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries provides a methodical and informative study of the relationship between sectarian identity and scholarship.[149] Identifying "social uses of identity in the context of Shi`i-Sunni discursive exchanges" instead of attempting to definitively label scholars by sectarian affiliations complements his argument that "oppositional discourses directed toward each other's legal and theological positions served dual functions as strategies in the competition for religious authority and patronage, as well as mechanisms for the construction of distinct and differentiated community identities."[150] Al-Jamil's work serves as a reminder that both Sunni and Shi`i authors straddled various sectarian affiliations and identities

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Ghari fi tarikh al-Najaf [A Journey into al-Ghari in View of the History of Najaf] (Al-Najaf: Maṭba'at al-Gharī, 1952).

[147] Allan, *The Art and Architecture of Twelver Shi`ism*.

[148] Haider. *The Origins of the Shi`a*.

[149] Al-Jamil, "Cooperation and Contestation in Medieval Baghdad."

[150] Ibid., 3.

depending on the audience they were addressing. His work stresses the presence of direct written intellectual exchanges between Sunni and Shi`i scholars rather than a one-sided Sunni attack on Shi`is as numerous scholars have proposed.

Other historians focus on the more easily accessible and recent periods of Iraq's history, specifically the Ottoman and British colonial period. Yitzhak Nakash provides a historical narrative of pilgrimage practices to Najaf and Karbala, focusing on the economics and politics of pilgrimage in the early twentieth century.[151] Meir Litvak presents a historical overview of the socio-economic and political factors at play in Najaf and Karbala during the nineteenth century through the confluence of space, power, pilgrimage, and ritual.[152]

Khalid Sindawi has written several descriptive articles that discuss aspects of `Ali's shrine, including stories of visitors' dreams to the shrine, a comparison of `Ali's and the Prophet Salih's shrine, and an overview of the dispute over the location of `Ali's shrine in both English and Arabic versions.[153] His article on dreaming presents depictions of dreaming rituals at `Ali's shrine, suggesting that the pilgrimage rituals propagated by scholars took on a life of their own as pilgrims created new rituals to meet their needs. Sindawi's two articles on the location of `Ali's grave compile narratives from medieval

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[151] Yitzhak Nakash, "The Visitation of the Shrines of the Imams and the Shi`i Mujtahids in the Early Twentieth Century," *Studia Islamica* 81 (1995): 153-164.

[152] Litvak, *Shi`i Scholars of Nineteenth-Century Iraq.*

[153] Khalid Sindawi, "Image of `Ali b. Abī Ṭālib in the dreams of visitors to his tomb" in *Dreaming across boundaries: the interpretation of dreams in Islamic lands, ed.* Louise Marlow (Boston: Ilex Foundation, 2008); "The Grave of `Ali b. Abi Talib: Different Views About its Specific Location and the Locations of the Graves of Some Other Prophets Buried," International Journal of Shi`i Studies 1(2) 37-74; "Bayn Ghariy al-Kufa wa qabr `Ali ibn Abi Talib fi al-adab al-Shi`i," *Karmel,* 23-24, 2002-3, 111-151; "The Prophet Salih and `Ali B. Abi Talib," *ANES* 49 (2012): 202–21; "The Cult of the Euphrates and Its Significance among the Imami Shi'a," *Islam-Berlin* 81, no. 2 (2004): 249–69.

scholars, and he attempts to determine the actual location of the grave. He sides conclusively with the Shi`i sources, claiming that they offer more "logical and more reasonable" evidence that `Ali was buried in Najaf.[154]

I also make use of modern Arabic-language studies of the history of Najaf's and `Ali's shrine, the most important being *Tarikh al-Najaf: hatta nihayat al-`asr al-`Abbasi* (*The History of Najaf until the End of the `Abbasid Era*), written by Muhamamd Fakhr al-Din, a historian from Najaf. Fakhr al-Din provides a useful overview of the important historical sources on Najaf's history, although he does not provide an objective overview of the sources. Fakhr al-Din has an obvious agenda to criticize Sunni perspectives on Najaf, and perpetuate sectarian contestations from the period of his study.[155] Su`ad Maher, an Egyptian scholar, visited Najaf in the 1960s and wrote a study on the decorations and treasures in `Ali's shrine, although she also repeats the traditional narrative of Najaf's history in her overview of the shrine's history.[156]

Scholars who study sacred space, pilgrimage, and ritual in Islam provide a multitude of approaches to theorizing about how Muslims interact with and construct sacred space. Kishwar Rizvi shows how Muslim rulers in Iran built shrines to symbolize their power and authority and concludes that the most important role of commemorative architecture was to define the society that interacted with that memory.[157] Rizvi contends

[154] Sindawi, "The Grave of `Ali b. Abi Talib," 71.

[155] Muhamamd Fakhr al-Din, *Tarikh al-Najaf hatta nihayat al-`asr al-`Abbasi* (Beirut: Dar al-Rafidayn, 2005).

[156] Suad Maher, *Mashhad al-Imam Ali fi al-Najaf wa ma bihi min al-hadaya wa al-tuhuf* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma`arif, 1969).

[157] Kishwir Rizvi, *The Safavid Dynastic Shrine: Architecture, Religion and Power in Early Modern Iran* (London: IB Tauris, 2011), 7.

that architectural space and ideology are represented in relation to the intentions of those who built and patronized the shrine, and she argues that the rituals carried out at the shrine reflected social mores.

Similarly, setting out to study performance and reception of architectural form and space, Aliaa El Sandouby examines the nature of shrines of the family of the Prophet Muhammad in Cairo and Damascus. She concludes that the narratives of the shrines must be studied alongside ritual, patronage, and public piety to come to a deeper understanding of the dynamic of meaning-making in sacred spaces.[158] Another beneficial way to approach the study of shrines is illustrated by May Farhat, who studies the *longue durée* evolution of the shrine of `Ali al-Rida, the eighth Imam, in Mashhad, Iran. Farhat posits that the shrine is a shared yet contested space that reflected the ethnic and sectarian identity of the elite patrons.[159]

Thomas Munt's forthcoming book on the early history of Medina looks at the construction of sanctity in Medina by the Prophet Muhammad, `Abbasid caliphs, and scholars. Significantly, Munt draws attention to ways in which Medina gained prominence and came to be perceived and sacred by Muslims over time. The city did not become sacred merely as a result of being associated with the Prophet Muhammad, and its perceptions changed as a result of a complex process and its contestation.[160] Munt's work provides a model for my own project through his effort to trace ways in which

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[158] Aliaa El Sandouby, "The Ahl Al-Bayt in Cairo and Damascus: The Dynamics of Making Shrines for the Family of the Prophet" (Ph.D. Diss., UCLA, 2008).

[159] May Farhat, "Islamic Piety and Dynastic Legitimacy: The Case of the Shrine of 'Ali b. Musa Al-Rida in Mashhad (10th-17th Century)," (Ph.D. Diss., Harvard University, 2002).

[160] The book will be published in July 2014, the author was kind enough to send me proofs of several chapters of his book before its publication, Harry Munt, *The Holy City of Medina: Sacred Space in Early Islamic Arabia* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

members of the ruling and scholarly elite were largely responsible for turning the city of Medina into a sacred space.

Another scholar who looks at sacred space and pilgrimage—in the context of medieval Syria—is Josef Meri.[161] Meri provides a fresh look at the role of the elite, in addition to the general public, in public piety and devotion at shrines, as well as sacred spaces shared between Jews, Muslims, and Christians. His uncritical use of Eliade to analyze sacred space limits the scope of his work, but his overview of materials proves valuable and he briefly describes basic beliefs about non-Hajj pilgrimage in Shi`ism and mentions some of the most important Shi`i pilgrimage manuals.

Studies on the function of graves offer insight into ways in which rituals developed in Muslim society. From a contemporary perspective, Anna Bigelow proposes that scholars must take into consideration the important socio-political dimensions that go into forming a multivalent sacred space. She writes that sacred space is a combination of the mundane and divine experienced through shared imaginaries of its visitors onto which they project their specific religious beliefs and identities.[162] Leor Halevi bases his research on both texts and material culture of early Muslim graves and examines the role of death rites, alleging that they helped form Islamic society and attitudes of Muslims towards the body, society, and gender in the context of funeral practices.[163] Another way of approaching rituals in Islam is exemplified by Brannon Wheeler, who uses the case

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[161] Josef W. Meri, *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[162] Anna Bigelow, *Sharing the Sacred: Practicing Pluralism in Muslim North India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 21.

[163] Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave.*

example of early Muslim scholars' development of rituals around sacred space and relics to locate Islamic rituals within the greater field of ritual studies.[164]

In order to study medieval conceptions of sacred space, it is necessary to assess the medieval Islamicate conceptions of place and geography. In *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World*, Zayde Antrim offers one of the first studies on the medieval discourse of place and representation of territory from the numerous genres, including geography, literature, history, religious treatises, and travelogues.[165] Antrim argues that for geographers, land and territory were powerful tools for establishing belonging and claiming authority and power over a place. By mining a vast collection of material, Antrim has been able to discern variants of the medieval Muslim geographical imagination, and how it developed between the ninth and eleventh centuries. Antrim considers her sources as "acts of creativity" that should be studied closely to best understand the production of territoriality.[166] She suggests that scholars tend to overestimate the roles played by kinship and religion in forming notions of community and political organization, and instead places a central focus on the role of land and how it reflected the power of place in political, religious, and intellectual claims of authority.

The sacred can be experienced through the dynamic interaction of space and people. The production of works on sacred space in Islamicate contexts indicates a new direction in the study of Islam. In the context of early Islamic Damascus, Nancy Khalek

[164] Brannon Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden: Ritual, Relics, and Territory in Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

[165] Antrim, *Routes and Realms.*

[166] Ibid., 3.

offers an examination of how the militarily dominant Muslims appropriated Christian sacred sites into new mosques and shrines along with pilgrimage traditions. She argues that Muslims maintained a continuity of religious practice and spatial layout in the city.[167] Khalek outlines the development of literary genres around Islamic places, which she calls "emplaced narratives," and labels literature that verbally describes places as "iconic texts," proposing that they offer insight into how Muslims imagined the sacred and remembered Islamic history.[168] I make use of Khalek's method to ascertain the ways in which scholars, through their writings, imagined place as a source of power and use it to propagate their agendas. All of these works serve to problematize the concept of memory, sacred space, body, and ritual and offer critical ways to think through these concepts.

Chapter Organization

In the first chapter, entitled "Sacred Body and Memory: Praising `Ali and Establishing Authenticity," I introduce the reader to the historical context of `Ali's role in Kufa and how he became intimately connected to the region. The relationship between Kufa and Najaf is explored to understand how Najaf developed from an empty plateau outside of Kufa that contained an unmarked grave, into a major city, center of scholarship, and pilgrimage center. The significance of the presence of `Ali's body is explored via a look at the medieval Muslim imagination, in which bodies of certain holy men contain blessings and spiritual power or *potentia*. When the body was inserted into a grave, it could transmit the *baraka*, or blessings, it contained to its immediate surroundings and eventually to the region around it. By taking examples from Shi`i

[167] Khalek, *Damascus.*

[168] Ibid., 139.

hagiographies concerning `Ali's bodily miracles, as well as accounts of connections between his grave and those of pre-Islamic prophets and the Prophet Muhammad, this chapter clarifies how focus on the physical body of `Ali helped sanctify his grave and the city of Najaf.

`Alids and Shi`is expressed their devotion and piety to `Ali primarily by performing pilgrimage his grave. Following Maria Massi-Dakake's argument that allegiance, or *walaya,* to `Ali was at the center of Shi`i communal spiritual and religious identity, we can better deconstruct the medieval Shi`i perspective of `Ali's body and memory.[169] Shi`is demonstrated a "profound spiritual connection and ontological affinity" to the Imams, `Ali in particular. They were heavily invested in consolidating their claim to his grave, which would have granted them unfettered access to `Ali's charisma. The location of `Ali's body would be at the center of the "charismatic community" of Shi`is and there were high stakes for claiming control over `Ali's body.[170]

In the second chapter, "Sacred Space: Contesting the Location of Ali's Grave," I examine the modes of sacralization of the grave of `Ali. This chapter continues the study of `Ali's body, this time looking at its contested burial location and the implications of its location based on contrasting sectarian narratives. I analyze a large number of Sunni and Shi`i historical, geographical, and biographical narratives of `Ali's burial and location of his grave, and address how these narratives contributed to the formation of Najaf as a pilgrimage center.[171] Furthermore, scholars clearly take sectarian sides when it comes to

[169] Dakake, *The Charismatic Community,* passim.

[170] Ibid., 7.

[171] White, *The Content of the Form,* 7.

where they claim `Ali is buried. All Shi`i scholars definitively assert that `Ali was buried in Najaf based on their faith in strong chains of Shi`i hadiths narrated by the Imams. Sunni scholars differ in their opinion: some accuse Shi`is of fabricating traditions and propose several possible other locations for `Ali's body, and others, who could be considered to be hybrid scholars, supported the Shi`i view that `Ali was buried in Najaf.

Shi`i scholars conceived of Najaf as sacred place, some Sunni scholars disregarded the site altogether, and other Sunni hybrid scholars saw value in Shi`i sources. I examine what was at stake in locating `Ali's grave for both groups. I consider why Sunni scholars were set on disproving Shi`is' claim locating `Ali's grave in Najaf, as well as what social and political motives might have been behind the polemical claims of both Sunnis and Shi`is. By taking into consideration both Shi`i and Sunni narratives around the location of `Ali's grave, I hold that competing claims for legitimacy and power in relation to the figure of `Ali and his grave shed light on the larger issue of the potential power that lies in sacred space.

In the third chapter, entitled "Sacred Ritual: Canonizing the Pilgrimage to Najaf," I analyze the process through which Shi`i scholars canonized the pilgrimage and its accompanying rituals and supplications. Based on hadiths going back to the Imams, Shi`i scholars began composing pilgrimage manuals in the tenth century to provide instructions for Muslims going on pilgrimage to the graves of the Prophet Muhammad, his family, the Imams, and other saintly figures in the Shi`i tradition. I examine and trace the emergence of these pilgrimage manuals that contributed to the legitimization of `Ali's grave and performance of pilgrimage rituals. Shi`i authors of pilgrimage manuals, such as al-Mufid and al-Mashhadi, created elaborate rituals that pilgrims were obliged to perform at `Ali's

shrine to gain the full rewards of the journey. These rituals, inextricably tied to the body of `Ali and the sacred space of the shrine, helped contribute to a sense of Shi`i communal and sectarian identity distinct from that of Sunni Muslims.

In the conclusion, entitled "Creating the Sacred in Najaf," I sum up my study with reflections on the ways in which sacred body, space, and ritual were constructed by medieval Muslim scholars with regards to the figure of `Ali and his grave. I draw attention to the larger themes and arguments in the project, highlighting their key claims. I also briefly consider ways in which medieval constructions of the sacred in Najaf inform modern perceptions and contestations in the city. Finally, I highlight a number of future research projects that could come out of this study.

CHAPTER ONE
SACRED BODY: PRAISING `ALI AND ESTABLISHING AUTHENTICITY

Located along the fertile banks of the Euphrates River, the city of Kufa was prone to flood on a seasonal basis, inundating the land with water and threatening inhabitants' livelihood. One year during the mid-seventh century, the flooding was especially dangerous and threatened to destroy Kufa. The people of Kufa beseeched `Ali to find a solution. They brought him to the riverbank where he proceeded to perform his ablutions in the river. He then prayed alone, and after taking a stick and striking the water with it, he shouted to the river, "May the level of your water drop, with God's permission and will." The water immediately dropped until people could see the fish at the bottom of the river. Many of the pure fish then greeted `Ali with his title 'Commander of the Faithful,' whereas the impure fish, such as eels and mudfish, were unable to speak to him based on God's command.[172] This miracle was narrated in *Kitab al-irshad* (*The Book of Guidance*) by al-Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 1022), one of the most prominent Shi`i scholars of his era, whose scholarship paved the path for developing normative Imami theology.

Drawing on early sources about `Ali's life that were transmitted by `Ali's companions, al-Mufid sought to present `Ali from a reverent perspective. Throughout his work, he strove to clarify the Shi`i position on `Ali in contrast to the one established in

[172] Muhammad al-Mufid, *The Book of Guidance into the Lives of the Twelve Imams (Kitab Al-Irshad)*, trans. I. K. A. Howard (Elmhurst, N.Y.: Balagha Books, 1981), 183, 263; this miracle was also mentioned by several other scholars, including Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Fattal, *Rawdat al-wa`izin*, ed. al-Sayyid Muhammad al-Khurasan (Qum: Manshurrat al-Sharif al-Radi, 1989), 118.

Sunni scholarship, as well as establish an authoritative understanding of the rest of the Imams within Shi`i scholarship, which experienced a lot of conflict and differences in doctrine.[173] Al-Mufid and other medieval Shi`i scholars often combined stories of the miraculous with more mundane biographical information. His section on `Ali's miracles reflected the emerging dominant Twelver Shi`i view about the supernatural abilities and essence of the Imams.

In this chapter, I lay the groundwork for understanding how `Ali's body, and subsequently his grave and the city of Najaf, came to be perceived as sacred according to Shi`i doctrine, through the perpetuation of his memory as a sanctified Imam. By providing an illustrative survey of some of `Ali's miracles in medieval Shi`i texts, we can begin to understand how belief in these miracles sustained focus on `Ali's body after his death. Numerous Shi`i scholars, such as al-Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 1022) and al-Sharif al-Radi (d. 977), emphasized `Ali's miracles, which gave him a venerated and divinely appointed status. Accounts of `Ali's bodily miracles that he performed during his life offer insight into how Shi`is viewed his role in history. These accounts portrayed as `Ali as having the ability to foresee the future, uncover secrets in people's hearts and read their minds, travel large distances in an instant, possess superhuman strength, understand the language of animals, transform people into animals, and interact with the unseen (*ghayb*) world. I call the miracles I focus on here embodied miracles in that they involve either the body of `Ali to realize the miracle or else affect another person's body.

Most important, Shi`i hagiographical accounts of `Ali—derived from hadiths, which the scholars attributed to the Imams—played an important role in ensuring the

[173] Al-Mufid, *The Book of Guidance*, xxvii.

perpetuation of Shi`i historical memory of `Ali. Scholars mentioned many aspects of `Ali's life, heroic feats, and sayings in their hagiographies of his life, and descriptions of `Ali's embodied miracles ensured that `Ali's memory as a miracle worker would endure in popular narratives over the centuries. Furthermore, Shi`i scholars composed narratives that connected `Ali's spiritual rank and ability to perform miracles to stories of pre-Islamic prophets as well as the Prophet Muhammad. Shi`i belief in `Ali's *walaya* defined early Shi`i doctrine, and could be defined as charismatic spiritual and political leadership and authority, as well as spiritual power.[174] Scholars' emphasis on `Ali's *walaya* gave him authority and powers equal to that of the prophets. The sanctified nature of `Ali's body was also present in the grave and the entire region surrounding the grave. These accounts of `Ali's embodied miracles provided one among several incentives for pilgrims journeying to his grave to seek miraculous solutions to their problems from him.[175]

Embodied Islam

Islam is an embodied religion that requires a practitioner's physical movement to carry out prescribed rituals. For many Muslims, life does not end after death, and the living continue to interact with the dead long after they are interred in the ground. The bodies of prophets, saints, and other sanctified humans retain the *baraka*—which can be translated as "blessings"—that they generated or was bestowed on them during their lives.

[174] For a comprehensive overview of the concept of `Ali's *walaya* in early Islam, see Dakake, *The Charismatic Community*; Mohammad Amir-Moezzi, "Notes on Imāmī-Shī'ī Walāya," *Israq: Islamic Philosophy Yearbook* 2 (2011), 513.

[175] In chapter three, I go into detail of the merits and rewards pilgrims receive for visiting `Ali's grave.

Overall, the way dead bodies are treated and viewed can have powerful effects on society. Katherine Verdery, an anthropologist who studies the symbolic power of bodies in post-socialist Eastern Europe, emphasizes that "dead bodies … have properties that make them particularly effective political symbols … They are … excellent means for accumulating something essential to political transformation: symbolic capital."[176] This capital can be exploited and taken advantage of to help support a community's doctrines and power claims. It is the very materiality of the body that allows it to be such a powerful symbol, as "a body's materiality can be critical to its symbolic efficacy … for instance, a corpse can be moved around, displayed, and strategically located in specific places."[177] Laying claim to ownership of the body provided tangible proof and gave authority to the group that possessed the body. Accordingly, a dead body can be manipulated by those who control it to carry out their political agenda; claims to authority are ephemeral, but a body represents a palpable representation of that authority. Shi`is experienced intense persecution and suspicion under Umayyad and `Abbasid rule, so their declaration of the location of `Ali's body and its purported ability to perform miracles would have offered them a semblance of control in a hostile environment.

Significantly, a dead body is both ambiguous as well as multivocal. Despite its physical presence, people from different communities interpret and view the body from diverse perspectives. The body's meaning is also dynamic, changing as well within a single community.[178] A body only has meaning for those who value the body during its

[176] Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 33.

[177] Ibid., 27.

[178] Ibid., 28.

life, because "[a] dead body is meaningful not in itself but through culturally established relations to death and through the way a specific dead person's importance is (variously) construed."[179] Despite differing views of `Ali's body among Shi`is and Sunnis, the possession of his body was consequential as was its interpretation. Exploring the multitude of meanings of a dead body sheds light on why there are so many conflicting narratives about what happened to `Ali's body after his death.[180]

According to Sunni and Shi`i beliefs, the bodies of sanctified Muslim men and women remain present and aware in their graves and help to "secure the foundation of our human social world, acting as pivot points in time and space that establish a sacred order."[181] In his study of the impact of Sufi bodies in their graves on their surroundings, Scott Kugle stresses the significance of following Qur'anic verse, "He warns you, when you have died and become dust and bones that you will emerge once again."[182] Kugle argues that this verse points to the potency of human bones even after the body decomposes. Bodies of saints in most of the world's religions are often connected to political power, patronage, and authority. Furthermore, in the Islamic context, followers build permanent structures above bodies to preserve order against the destruction that they anticipated would come on the inevitable Day of Judgment and to draw on the potent *baraka* that remains in bones.[183] Formal tombs and shrines enclose the bodies of

[179] Ibid., 28.

[180] Ibid., 29.

[181] Scott Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, and Sacred Power in Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 46-7.

[182] Qur'an, 23:33-37.

[183] Kugle, *Sufis and Saints,* 46.

saints to create a "permeable boundary" between the material and unseen world, and they "mark a sacred time in the calendar and a sacred place in geography." The bodies of saints are housed in shrines that welcome visitors who seek out their *baraka* and offer the possibility of petition and proximity to the sacred realm.[184] Just as in the case of Sufi saints, the shrines of Imams provide a connection to a chain of lineage that can be traced back to the Prophet Muhammad.[185]

The concept of *baraka* is prevalent throughout the majority of Islamic sects and doctrines, although Shi`ism is distinct within the numerous Islamic traditions in its institutionalization of the belief as a matter of dogma. In addition to its meaning as blessings, *baraka* can also be understood to be a form of spiritual charisma or a "beneficent force, of divine origin, which causes superabundance in the physical sphere, prosperity and happiness in the psychic order."[186] *Baraka* is present in sanctified humans who are recognized by many Muslims for their elevated status above normal people.

Typically, the clear signs of sainthood required that the saint possess *baraka*, have the power to intercede with God for his followers, and to work miracles.[187] Saints' *baraka* could only exist in the presence of both an agent that holds it, such as a personal, ritual object, or monument, and a recipient, or followers, who sought out the *baraka* and believed in its powers.[188] Josef Meri clarifies this concept further, elaborating that "it [*baraka*] can be regarded as a spiritual affinity or strong moral and spiritual force or

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[184] Ibid..

[185] Kugle, *Sufis and Saints,* 47.

[186] G.S. Colin, "Baraka," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online).

[187] Meri, *The Cult of Saints,* 79.

[188] Ibid., 102.

charisma, such as embodied in the relationship between a shaykh and his disciple, or a ruler and a holy person."[189] The saints' bodies and their *baraka*, especially those of Ahl al-Bayt, became even more potent after their death, and their graves became places of great devotion and piety for their followers.[190] Pilgrims' beliefs in the healing powers of the shrines, and the saint's ability to pass on their requests to God more quickly than average human beings, helped the shrines of saints gain popularity and patronage.

Once interred in the earth, a saints' body would pass on its *baraka* to its surroundings, including manmade architectural structures, such as tombs, shrines, and mosques, as well as natural settings, such as wells, rocks, and trees. *Baraka* consisted of the emanation of holiness in the interred body of a saint and could only be perceived by devotees.[191] According to Meri, *baraka* could be acquired in four different ways by the devotees, including: 1) through contact with the living saint or his or her grave; 2) by obtaining knowledge through the transmission of teachings; 3) through the transmission of relics that had been in the possession of or were touched by the saint, as well as body relics, such as hair and nail clippings; and 4) by having a vision or dream of the saint wherein the saint transmits his or her *baraka* to the follower.[192] The concept of *baraka* was not usually a point of contention among medieval scholars, but the issue of who possessed *baraka* based on ample evidence was often an issue of dispute.[193]

One unique factor of saints in Islamic traditions was their ability to perform

[189] Ibid., 102

[190] Ibid., 80.

[191] Ibid., 103.

[192] Ibid., 103.

[193] Ibid., 104.

karamat, or miracles. Whereas the prophets enjoyed the God-given gift of *mu`jizat,* or divinely endowed miracles, saints earned the miracles they could perform through their high spiritual status. These *karamat* could be defined as "an act of God that breaks the habitual course of nature and is displayed through the agency of a saint in his lifetime or posthumously."[194] An entire literary genre of hagiography developed around the miracles of Sufi saints in medieval Islam. In the context of Shi`ism, scholars dedicated much time and energy to categorizing and recording `Ali's miracles in order to establish his legitimacy as the first Imam and to set the precedence for the authority of the eleven other Imams. A quote attributed to `Ali elaborates on the qualities of the Imams: "They see what others cannot see and they hear what others do not hear. They have access to divine secrets."[195] While the term *mu`jizat* was used in the Sunni context to only refer to miracles performed by prophets and *karamat* was used to refer to the miracles of saints, Shi`i scholars often interchanged the terms *mu`jizat, karamat, and `aja'ib* (wonders) to refer to the miracles of the Imams. Their use of the term *mu`jizat* to refer to miracles of the Imams indicates their heightened reverence for the Imams and belief that they held almost equal spiritual ranks to that of the prophets.[196] The prophets were still considered by Shi`is to be superior to Imams as they received a divine law and revelation from God, whereas the Imams were appointed by God to lead the Muslims community that was founded by the Prophet Muhammad.

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[194] Meri, *The Cult of Saints,* 73.

[195] *Nahj al-Balagha*, (Karachi: Khorasan Islamic Centre, 1977), quoted in Takim, *Heirs of the Prophet*, 57.

[196] See Muhammad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Sharif al-Radi, *Khasa'is al-a'imma* (Mashhad: Majma al-buhuth al-islamiyya, 1986); Hussayn Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *`Uyun al-mu`jizat*, ed. al-Sayyid Fallah al-Sharifi (Mu'assisat bad`at al-Mustafa, 2000); Abu al-Hasan al-Irbili, *Kashf al-ghumma fi ma`rifat al-a'imma* (Beirut: Dar al-Adwa, 1985); Al-Mufid, *The Book of Guidance.*

Imams were recorded to have performed numerous miracles based on their knowledge of divine secrets. Imams could perform miracles that defied the limitations of human abilities. Many of the miracles performed by the Imams resemble those attributed to Qur'anic prophets, such as the ability to walk on water, revive the dead, speak from the cradle, give sight to the blind, heal the sick, and wield control over nature.[197] Shi`i traditions narrated that the Imams received divine knowledge from angels and other divine beings and would journey on a weekly basis to the divine throne in the heavens.[198] Shi`i hagiographical narratives were interjected with reminders of the absolute authority of the Imams and necessity of offering one's allegiance to them,[199] and through this literary medium, Shi`i scholars narrated a plethora of stories about the miracles of the Imams to legitimize the spiritual charisma bestowed to them from the Prophet.[200]

Emphasis on the sanctified nature of the Imams carried over to their bodies. The bodies of the Imams continue to contain immense *baraka*, and hagiographical literature was not limited to their lives, but continued to tell stories about the Imams' miraculous actions from beyond the grave. The Imams were often buried near the place of their death, and nine of the Imams were buried in Iraq.[201] The shrine cities of Najaf, Karbala, Kazimiya, and Samarra became centers of Shi`i pilgrimage, attracting multitudes of

[197] Ibid., 57.

[198] Ibid., 59.

[199] Ibid., 63.

[200] Ibid., 62.

[201] Al-Hasan, the second Imam and Zayn al-`Abdidin, the third Imam were both buried in Medina and `Ali al-Rida, the eighth Imam, was buried in Mashhad.

pilgrims seeking solutions to their problems and hoping to witness miracles.[202] While Sunni and other Muslims also visited and patronized the shrines, it was Shi`i scholars who actively encouraged and promoted mass pilgrimage to the graves of Imams. Drawing on hadiths, which they attributed to the Imams, scholars developed complex rituals to be carried out by pilgrims as early as the eighth century. Their writings enumerated the merits of performing pilgrimage, the promise of Paradise, and divine rewards for pilgrims who performed the arduous journeys to the graves of the Imams. [203] The graves of the Imams became epicenters of *baraka*, and the grave and surrounding shrine complexes were believed to contain the same spiritual power the Imams possessed during their lifetimes.

The potency of each Imam's body eventually turned entire cities surrounding the graves into a sacred space of huge proportions. Najaf, Karbala, Kazimiyya, and Samarra are all considered to be sacred pilgrimage cities in Iraq, and have received pilgrims for over a millennium. The location of the dead body holds much power, and "their corporeality makes them important means of localizing a claim" to the land.[204] It is the connection of the dead body to the land that is of importance here, in light of the way the city of Najaf developed with the alleged presence of `Ali's body in his disputed grave site. Without the presence of `Ali's body, it is probable that Najaf would not have developed into a major city and center of Shi`i scholarship; it is `Ali's body and its related *baraka* that attracted scholars and pilgrims in the thousands. The city of Najaf is

[202] Kazimiya is now a neighborhood of Baghdad but in the pre-modern period, it was a separate city across the river from Baghdad.

[203] Takim, *Heirs of the Prophet*, 57, I have examined this topic in detail in chapter three.

[204] Verdery, *Political Lives,* 27-8.

of particular significance in consideration of `Ali's status in Shi`i Islam. Shi`i faithful from around the world sought to be buried in Wadi al-Salam (Valley of Peace), located just outside the old city walls of Najaf. Shi`i narratives promised that those buried near the grave of `Ali would avoid encountering the angels who take account of people's deeds, that they would not be punished in the grave, and would go straight to Heaven.[205]

`Ali lived during a tense time and was killed by a Kharijite, whose marginal community had been massacred by `Ali's troops. Furthermore, `Ali was constantly under attack by Mu`awiya, the governor of Syria who aimed to de-legitimize `Ali's caliphate and claim it for his own family. There were numerous other factions of Muslims who sought `Ali's death, and therefore, after he did die, his body was understood to be at risk of being exhumed and desecrated by his enemies. These practices were common in the early Islamic context when `Ali lived, which is one of the reasons that the exact location of graves of a number of early significant historical figures are unknown to this day.[206] `Ali's sons and followers held his body in great reverence based on their belief in `Ali's *walaya*. To them and many others, `Ali's body was much more than a corpse; it contained *baraka* and much *potentia*, or spiritual power.[207]

The variance of narratives about what al-Hasan and al-Husayn did with `Ali's body opens up questions about *taqiyya*, or dissimulation practiced by Shi`is to protect their faith and the dead bodies of their leaders (which I explore in depth in chapter two).

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[205] Takim, *Heirs of the Prophet,* 67.

[206] For a detailed study of exhumation and crucifixion practices during the Umayyad period, see Sean Anthony, *Crucifixion and Death as Spectacle Umayyad Crucifixion in Its Late Antique Context* (Winona Lake, IN: American Oriental Society, 2014).

[207] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 41, 82.

Considering that Shi`is held that all of the Imams were either killed or died in mysterious and suspicious circumstances, what happened to their bodies and who controlled them after their deaths was of concern to the Shi`i community and their sense of community and religious authority. Bodies are the most tangible remnants that followers can retain after the death of their leaders; they "have the advantage of concreteness that nonetheless transcends time, making past immediately present."[208] Being in the presence of dead bodies allowed believers to reconnect with the past, remember the pain of the saint and their own worries, and draw on their spiritual power.

Leadership and Authority in Shi`ism

In the Islamic context, the body is often seen as a conduit for embodied practice of ethical norms. The Prophet Muhammad's ethical behavior was modeled through his physical actions and Muslims carefully recorded these as a way of preserving God's guidance.[209] Muhammad's wife `A'isha stated that "Muhammad was the Qur'an walking," signifying that his physical manifestation embodied the entirety of the teachings of the Qur'an.[210] As Shi`is considered the event of Ghadir Khumm, where the Prophet declared that all Muslims must also obey `Ali, to be a clear sign that `Ali was Muhammad's successor and heir. For Shi`is, his body was also considered to have been a walking embodiment of the Qur'an and evocative of the Prophet's powerful authority.

Sunni scholars interpreted Ghadir Khumm through a different lens than that of Shi`i scholars and did not view `Ali and his body any differently than those of the other

[208] Meri, *The Cult of Saints,* 104.

[209] Al-Mufid, *The Book of Guidance*, 2.

[210] Ibid.,

three caliphs, Abu Bakr, `Umar, and `Uthman. Abu Bakr and `Umar were buried next to the Prophet's grave in Medina, while `Uthman was buried further away in al-Baq`i cemetery after being assassinated by a Kharijite rebel.[211] Because of the political tensions rampant during `Uthman's life, his body was buried in secrecy by his wife and close friends, in circumstances similar to that of `Ali.[212] All four caliphs came to power in challenging and controversial circumstances, but were equally and highly revered by Sunnis, albeit in a different manner than Shi`is venerated `Ali and the rest of Ahl al-Bayt.

Soon after `Ali's death, `Ali's followers began to venerate `Ali, whom they believed "represented the unique and perfect reservoir of all religious knowledge as bequeathed to him by the Prophet."[213] After the death of the Prophet, `Ali's followers held that `Ali was the only person with a legitimate claim to rule the nascent Muslim community, as well as the only person who held the key to interpreting the Qur'an and hadith, and determining their correct application in society. His extraordinary knowledge of religion and the life of the Prophet made him the most appropriate successor, according to Shi`is, but `Ali was unjustly passed over three times for the office of caliph. In the Shi`i view, dismissing his candidacy was in direct contradiction of the Prophet's testimony. As a result, Shi`is believed that Sunnis had "cut themselves off from true guidance" with their denial of `Ali's superiority as well as that of his descendants,

[211] G. Levi Della Vida and M. Bonner, "Umar b. al-Khattab," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online); Watt, W. Montgomery, "Abu Bakr," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online).

[212] G. Levi Della Vida and R.G. Khoury, "Uthman b. `Affan," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online).

[213] Maria Dakake, "Hiding in Plain Sight: The Practical and Doctrinal Significance of Secrecy in Shi'ite Islam," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74, no. 2 (2006): 327.

particularly the eleven Imams.[214]

The concept of *walaya* and the Imamate changed over the centuries, and different Shi`i groups formulated their own understandings of the institution. Following the early caliphate in the Umayyad period, many Muslims, including Sunnis, held the view that the `Alid Imams should have been the rightful caliphs instead of the Umayyads.[215] During the Umayyad and early Abbasid eras, which witnessed intense persecution of the Shi`i minority, a large number of Shi`is were waiting in anticipation for a descendant of Ahl al-Bayt, specifically an Imam, to rebel against the caliphate, which had usurped their rightful position as caliph-Imam. The followers of both Muhammad al-Baqir (d. 733) and Ja`far al-Sadiq (d. 765) expected their leaders to take the reins for the revolution against the Umayyads, but both Imams remained passive and avoided an armed confrontation with the caliphate.

Instead of fomenting rebellion, Ja`far al-Sadiq instead developed the concept of *taqiyya*, or dissimulation and concealment to avoid persecution of his followers. He explicitly forbade his followers from taking arms, joining political movements, spreading Shi`i propaganda, or converting people to Shi`ism.[216] Disillusioned by the Imams' unwillingness to engage the Umayyad caliphate, some Shi`is lost hope that Shi`ism would prevail and the Imams would return to their rightful position as caliphs.[217] Others began to rethink their allegiance to the Imams, with some arguing that it was

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[214] Ibid..

[215] Hossein Modarressi Tabataba'i, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi`ite Islam: Abu Ja`far ibn Qiba al-Razi and His Contribution to Imamite Shi`ite Thought* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1993), 6.

[216] Ibid., 8.

[217] Ibid., 6-7.

impermissible for the Imams to not encourage a rebellion. Al-Sadiq's decision even led some Shi`is to follow other leaders such as Muhammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, who led a failed revolt against the Abbasid caliph in Medina in 762.[218]

There were a number of different movements among Shi`is, including a subgroup that held that the Imam was primarily a spiritual and religious, but not political, leader. They viewed the Imam as a:

> Learned man from among the descendants of the Prophet who was to teach people what was lawful and what was not and to exhort them to turn toward God. He was the one to distinguish truth from falsity, to protect the religion from being distorted and corrupted by the ignorant and misguided, and to reestablish whatever truth suffered distortion or corruption at their hands."[219]

Because of what many saw as a failure on al-Sadiq's part to actively engage in reclaiming his rightful place as caliph, many Shi`is changed their view of the Imamate and the institution went from being a primarily political one to a purely a religious one.

Hisham ibn al-Hakim (d. 795/6), an early Shi`i theologian, developed the theory of *`isma*, or infallibility, of the Imams. *`Isma* helped provide an explanation for the Imams' actions and decisions with which some followers had difficulty reconciling themselves. Ibn al-Hakim asserted that the Imams were divinely protected from committing sin and error, not as prophets, but merely as vessels of traditions from the Prophet Muhammad who did not receive *al-`ilm al-laduni*, or divine knowledge. All Muslims viewed the Imams as erudite scholars, and for many, their religious authority was absolute, going back to the divine revelation of the Prophet.[220] Other more extreme

[218] Ibid., 8.

[219] Ibid., 8-9.

[220] Ibid., 9.

Shi`i groups emerged in the late seventh century, including the zealot Kaysanis, who held the view that the Imamate was a necessity for the continuation of the world. They believed that the Imams had supernatural, divine qualities, although their roles were spiritual rather than political.

By al-Sadiq's time, there were two main theological approaches to the institution of the Imamate: 1) the Imams are supernatural, infallible humans who received *al-`ilm al-laduni* from the Prophet and God, and 2) the Imams are *al-`ulama' al-abrar*, or scholars of piety. Both of these views existed among Shi`is in the first five centuries after `Ali's death, but by the twelfth century, if not earlier, the second approach dominated mainstream Shi`i views of the Imams. All of the early Shi`i scholars examined in this study, though, adopted the first approach.[221]

With the appointment of al-Sadiq's son, Musa al-Kazim (d. 799), expectations arose once again that the Imam would rebel against the Abbasid caliphate and become a just ruler of the Islamic empire. Al-Kazim was known to have spoken out against the Abbasids and was bold enough to challenge the caliph in person. Most Shi`is, and even some Sunnis at a later point, supported al-Kazim's claim to the caliphate, despite the disagreement of then-caliph Harun al-Rashid, who ordered his arrest and eventually, his death.[222]

Similar cycles of hope and potential rebellions arose during the Imamate of `Ali al-Rida (d. 818), who had been designated by the `Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun as his heir

[221] For a comprehensive overview of the development of these two early perspectives, see Mohsen Kadivar, "Al-imama al-sayrura al-tarikhiya kafy taghyar mafhum al-Imam `ind al-Shi`a bi-murur al-zaman," trans. Manal Baqir, *Nusus mu`asira* 10 (2007): 203–218.

[222] Modarressi, *Crisis,* 10.

but then mysteriously died or was assassinated. Following al-Rida were Muhammad al-Jawad (d. 835) and `Ali al-Hadi (d. 868), both of whom were appointed as Imams while they were still children. Shi`is debated whether children were qualified to take on the Imamate, and this discussion led to the development of the concept of the Imamate as divinely appointed, and the conclusion that knowledge and political status were products of this divine grace. By the mid-ninth century, as we will see in this study, Shi`is had formed into a distinct and cohesive theological community, and scholars had compiled collections of hadiths from the Imams, which they mainly attributed to Muhammad al-Baqir, Ja`far al-Sadiq, and Musa al-Kazim.[223]

Shi`i belief in `Ali's *walaya* defined early Shi`i doctrine, and could be defined as charismatic spiritual and political leadership, as well as sacred power.[224] It could also be considered to be form of sacredness that can be ascribed to humans whereas the term *q-d-s* is used to refer to spaces and objects. Apart from authority and power, `Ali's *walaya* also implied that he had an intimate relationship with God.[225] It was an essential Shi`i belief considered the sixth and sometimes most primary pillar of Islam, whereas Sunni Islam lacked this concept.[226] The importance of this pillar has been stressed over and over again by medieval scholars, who considered those who disregarded `Ali as outside the folds of Islam. As early as the ninth century, scholars were already forming a clear doctrine on `Ali's *walaya*. In *Kitab al-mahasin* (*The Book of Merits*), Abu Ja`far al-Barqi

[223] Ibid., 11.

[224] For a comprehensive overview of the concept of `Ali's *walaya* in early Islam, see Dakake, *The Charismatic Community*; Mohammad Amir-Moezzi, "Notes on Imāmī-Shī'ī Walāya," *Israq: Islamic Philosophy Yearbook* 2 (2011), 513.

[225] Desplat, "Representations of Space," 25.

[226] Amir-Moezzi, "Imāmī-Shī'ī Walāya," 508.

(d. 887 or 893), a traditionist from Qum, clearly delineated the requirements for belief:

> God established `Ali as a point of reference (`*alam*) between Himself and His creation and there are none others. He who follows `Ali is a believer; he who rejects him is an unbeliever and he who doubts him, an associationist [*sic*]."
>
> (God says to the Prophet): 'I created the seven heavens and what they contain; I created the seven earths and what they contain. If one of My followers invoked Me from the beginning of creation (to the Resurrection) or if I were to encounter him while he rejects the *walaya* of `Ali, I would swiftly rush him to hell.[227]

Shi`is saw Ali as the rightful heir to Muhammad's legacy and believed that the "religious and political authorities were fused in the figure of the Imam."[228]

For Shi`is, if Muhammad was the archetype of prophethood and most preferred of all prophets, then the archetype for *walaya* was `Ali, who symbolized and represented all of the Imams.[229] From the Shi`i perspective, through his birthright and marriage, `Ali received not only the political power that the Prophet held, but also spiritual charisma. It was this charisma that helped spread Islam around the Near East so rapidly and made the city of Medina the secondmost sacred city according Islamic belief. Shi`i scholars argued that the charisma of the Prophet could not be passed on by electing a leader; it was something that only God could decide and would be transmitted through hereditary succession.[230]

Membership in the "orthodox" Twelver Shi`i community was determined by an individual's loyalty to `Ali and recognition of the other eleven Imams.[231] In the Islamic

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[227] Quoted in Ibid., 510.

[228] Liyakat Takim, *The Heirs of the Prophet: Charisma and Religious Authority in Shi'ite Islam* (State Univ of New York Press, 2006), 24.

[229] Amir-Moezzi, "Imāmī-Shī'ī Walāya," 514.

[230] Takim, *The Heirs of the Prophet*, 25.

[231] Ibid., 125.

tradition, most Muslims acknowledged the primordial covenant (*mithaq*) between God and the prophets, and God and humankind.[232] Sunni scholars usually interpreted these verses to refer to a pact made between God and the prophets to obtain their loyalty and honesty.[233] The Shi`i tradition venerated Muhammad, but also inserted conditions into the primordial pact that included acknowledgement of `Ali's *walaya*. A narration from the Prophet Muhammad described a light, which `Ali and Muhammad both received in equal parts:

> `Ali and I were a light on the forehead of Adam. We were passed along from the pure loins to the chaste pure wombs until we reached the loins of `Abd al-Muttalib. The light was then separated into two parts. One part came to `Abd Allah and the other part to Abu Talib. I came forth from `Abd Allah and `Ali came forth from Abu Talib.[234]

Not only did `Ali and the Imams receive the primordial covenant from God, but he also received part of the divine light bestowed onto Muhammad by God. This light was bestowed first onto Adam, then onto the succession of Prophets, ending with Muhammad, and finally to `Ali and the Imams.

This divine light connected `Ali and the Imams to all of the previous prophets and established a spiritual lineage that would have raised `Ali's status and confirmed his

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[232] Ibid., 145; The covenant is elaborated in two places in the Qur'an 33:7–8: "And lo! We did accept a solemn pledge from all the prophets - from thee, [O Muhammad,] as well as from Noah, and Abraham, and Moses, and Jesus the son of Mary -: for We accepted a most weighty, solemn pledge from [all of] them, so that [at the end of time] He might ask those men of truth as to [what response] their truthfulness [had received on earth]. And grievous suffering has He readied for all who deny the truth!"

[233] Ibid.; The prophets assumed to have taken part in this covenant are Muhammad, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus and both Sunni and Shi`i scholars hold Muhammad to be the most important of the prophets.

[234] `Ali b. al-Husayn al-Mas`udi, *Ithbat al-wasiya lil-Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib* (Qum: Ansarian, 2005), 113, quoted and translated in Matthew O. Pierce, "Remembering the Infallible Imams: Narrative and Memory in Medieval Twelver Shi'ism" (PhD Dissertation, Boston University, 2013), 109.

walaya.[235] Through their rereading and interpretation of the Qur'an and hadith based on their specific doctrines, Shi`i scholars were able to construct a unique theology around the concept of *walaya*, as elucidated by Muhammad al-Baqir and `Ali al-Rida in the late eighth and early ninth centuries:

> Our *walaya* is the *walaya* of God. Every prophet was only ever sent (by God) for/by it.
>
> The *walaya* of `Ali is inscribed in all books of the prophets; a messenger was only ever sent to proclaim the prophethood of Muhammad and the *walaya* of `Ali."[236]

Shi`i scholars, especially those on the extreme end of the spectrum, included `Ali in the primordial pact of God to affirm `Ali's role as the inheritor and successor of the Prophet. They emphasized that one of the terms in the pacts between God and the prophets and God and humankind was recognition of `Ali's *walaya* for all of creation. Despite the fact that Shi`i scholars continued to debate the nature of `Ali's *walaya* for centuries, it played an important role in popular devotional aspects of Shi`ism as well as in mystics' spiritual quests.[237]

The concept of the primordial covenant furthers the notion of some Shi`i scholars that `Ali was higher ranking than the pre-Islamic prophets based on the fact that they took a pact recognizing his authority. [238] These theological assertions, which developed over the centuries, illustrate that Shi`i scholars attempted to showcase `Ali's authority in relation to that of Muhammad and the pre-Islamic prophets, and that Shi`is were

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[235] Pierce, "Remembering the Infallible Imams," 109.

[236] Quoted in Mohammad Amir-Moezzi, "Imāmī-Shī'ī Walāya," 521.

[237] Ibid., 531.

[238] Dakake, *The Charismatic Community,* 146.

connected to the Imams via their belief in their *walaya*, their loyalty, and love.[239] Intrinsically, three interconnected meanings evolved from the original meaning of *walaya*, as described by the fourteenth-century Shi`i scholar, philosopher, and mystic Haydar `Amuli, namely: 1) the Imamate, or the institution of the Imams; 2) love of the Imams; and 3) the concept of the metaphysical Imam.[240] With this conception of `Ali's power in mind, it makes sense that multiple narratives would abound about `Ali's grave, and that Shi`i scholars would insist on the potency of his grave in Najaf.

The Role of the Imams

Shi`i doctrine emphasizes the position of the twelve Imams as sources of both spiritual and political authority. Normative Twelver Shi`ism held that the Imams were divinely appointed, infallible beings who guided the community under oppressive circumstances manipulated by the Umayyad and later Abbasid rulers. They also performed miracles and had amazing intellectual and spiritual faculties. After their deaths, their bodies remained pure and whole in their graves and Shi`i believers could visit their graves and address them directly. The Imams could hear petitions of their followers and intercede with God in order to speedily grant the requests. Narratives abound that promise multitudes of spiritual and worldly rewards to those who would risk their lives to visit the graves of the Imams and would recite proscribed supplications to commemorate the lives and wisdom of the Imams. The Imams possessed an unlimited supply of *baraka* that their followers could absorb via proximity to them.

Shi`i and Sunni theology developed in parallel, and Shi`i scholars developed three

[239] Amir-Moezzi, "Notes on Imāmī-Shī'ī Walāya," 524.

[240] Ibid., 529.

principles that differentiated the charismatic authority of the Imams, namely, divine appointment (*nass*), divinely inspired knowledge (*`ilm*), and infallibility (*`isma*).[241] In the mid-eighth century, Ja`far al-Sadiq first worked to define these concepts as the formal components of the Imamate in order to distinguish normative from extremist Shi`i theology.[242] The concept of *nass* canonized the belief that `Ali was the Prophet's rightful heir who had received all of the Prophet's charisma. *Nass* also established a chain of authority that connected all of the Imams back to the Prophet, and instituted the idea of hereditary charismatic authority.[243] The concept of *`ilm* limited divine knowledge only to the divinely appointed Imams, who although lacking political power, were able to settle disputes of succession by resorting to their divinely bestowed knowledge.

Nass and *`ilm* naturally complement each other and are inextricable through their mutual safeguarding of the divine chain of authority and the divine message passed down from the Prophet. In the Shi`i context, believers were mandated to acknowledge and accept the Imams, just as all Muslims followed the Prophet.[244] Likewise, the rejection of the Imams was a rejection of the Prophet and put one out of the fold of Islam, or at least the elite community of Shi`is. Complementing both *nass* and *`ilm, `isma* denotes the nature of the Prophet being infallible, or free from sins, and posits that this quality was passed down to `Ali and all of the other Imams. Similarly to the Prophet, the Imams were held up as exemplary models, and this reverence confirmed their authority as passed

[241] Wilfred Madelung and E. Tyan, "`Isma," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online); Husain M. Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* (London; New York: Longman, 1979), 199-202.

[242] Jafri, *Origins,* 199.

[243] Dakake, *The Charismatic Community,* 26-7; 47.

[244] Ibid., 27.

down in Shi`i hadith collections, some of which were of suspect authenticity. Like the Sunnis, the Shi`is held the Qur'an to be the first source of Islamic law, but differed with their inclusion of the Imams' narratives side by side with those of the Prophet in their hadith collections.[245] These three crucial concepts formed the basis of Shi`i theology and created a clear distinction between Sunni and Shi`i theology.

As the pro-`Alid community developed over first two Islamic centuries, the Shi`i community solidified. By the late eighth and early ninth centuries, the community divided into Muslims with `Alid sentiments and Shi`is who adhered to the doctrines of *nass*, *ilm*, and `*isma*. A hierarchy soon followed, with the Imams at the top, their descendants following closely behind, succeeded by scholars who could claim their authority on behalf of the Imams. Shi`is continued to view themselves as part of the Islamic *umma,* or community, but distinguished themselves as elite members who possessed special knowledge and authority.[246] While Shi`is freely interacted with non-Shi`is, some scholars urged their followers to refrain from social interactions with non-Shi`is unless absolutely necessary, although most scholars allowed everyday relations with friendly non-Shi`is.[247]

Disagreements about the nature of the Imams and caliphs laid the path for intra-Muslim polemical debates, many of which continue until the modern period. The Sunnis placed emphasis on certain Companions and wives of the Prophet Muhammad, while the Shi`is drew on narratives from a different selection of Companions and also included

[245] Ibid., 28-9.

[246] Ibid., 237.

[247] Ibid., 238.

narratives from all of the twelve Imams in their scholarship. In light of the fact that Sunnis and Shi`i based their scholarship on different traditions of narration, it is easy to see how these disagreements would also lead to disparate narratives around the location of `Ali's grave and the sacred nature of `Ali's body.

`Ali's Life and Death

Scholars, such as I. K. Poonawala, have divided `Ali's life into three distinct periods: 1) from the time he was born in around 600 until the Prophet Muhammad died in 632, 2) up until the assassination of `Uthman in 656, and 3) from when he became the fourth caliph up until his death 661. `Ali was close to the Prophet Muhammad and was one of the first people to become a Muslim; some scholars claim that he was the first male to embrace Islam.[248] `Ali was beloved to the Prophet Muhammad and on numerous occasions risked his life for the Prophet's sake. During the hijra, the Prophet's migration from Mecca to Medina, `Ali hid in the Prophet's bed to trick the Quraysh tribe members who had planned on killing the Prophet in his sleep. `Ali soon after followed the Prophet to Medina, where he married the Prophet's daughter Fatima and helped to construct the first Muslim society. The literate `Ali acted as one of the Prophet's scribes and led important missions on his behalf. `Ali was particularly renowned for his military prowess and courage; legends abound about his ability to charge enemy forces and take out huge numbers of the enemy.[249]

Sunnis and Shi`is agree on the fact of most of the events describing `Ali's life, but they differ when it comes to interpretation. While Sunnis viewed `Ali as one of many

[248] I. K. Poonawala, "`Ali b. Abi Taleb I. Life," Encyclopaedia Iranica, Online Edition, 1982, available at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ali-b-abi-taleb#pt1.

[249] Ibid..

beloved and commendable companions of the Prophet, Shi`is singled out `Ali as the Prophet's clear successor. Shi`is interpret `Ali's life as a series of signs that verify his infallibility and divinely appointed heirship. One event that illustrates differing sectarian views is the Prophet's declaration at Ghadir Khumm on the way back from the farewell pilgrimage in Mecca.[250] At Ghadir Khumm, the Prophet Muhammad called `Ali by his side and raised up his hand, declaring, "For whomever I am their lord, `Ali is their lord; O God, befriend the one who befriends him and be the enemy of the one who is his enemy."[251] Shi`i scholars assert that the tradition conclusively signified `Ali's leadership and the spiritual and political significance of Ahl al-Bayt. Sunni scholars claim that this declaration merely confirmed the elevated status of `Ali and his family, but it did not indicate that the Prophet confirmed `Ali as his successor. Furthermore, Sunnis held that the Prophet died without declaring a successor, which is why they chose to elect the Abu Bakr, one of the Prophet's closest friends, as the first caliph.[252]

Despite his close relationship to the Prophet and his large circle of followers, `Ali was not chosen as the caliph until Abu Bakr, `Umar, and `Uthman had ruled over the Islamic empire as caliphs. `Ali had numerous disagreements with the three caliphs as well as the Prophet's wives, especially `A'isha, and was often marginalized from important decision-making processes. `Ali finally became the fourth caliph in 656, although not without opposition from powerful opponents. Supporters of the previous caliph, `Uthman, accused `Ali of protecting his murderers and `Ali encountered hostility from

[250] Ibid..

[251] Dakake, *The Charismatic Community*, 34.

[252] Ibid., 34.

numerous factions of Muslims.[253] And Mu`awiya, the Umayyad leader and governor of Syria, maintained that `Ali's election to the caliphate was invalid.

As such, `Ali governed primarily from his base in Kufa, and was eventually forced to enter into battle with `A'isha and Mu`awiya, who threatened his caliphate. During the Battle of Siffin with Mu`awiya's troops over the death of `Uthman, it was declared that a group of arbitrators would decide whether `Ali was guilty of involvement or not. While they did not declare the results, it became clear that the arbitrators decided upon `Ali's guilt, despite his protests. Mu`awiya threatened `Ali's caliphate by gaining the loyalty of Syrians and taking over Egypt, and eventually increasing his incursions into Iraq, Arabia, and Yemen.

Towards the end of his rule, Sunni historians describe `Ali's position as weak and volatile; Shi`is, however, see this time as a period of rebellion against a just leader. `Ali had problematic relations with the rebel Kharijite groups, who were upset about his agreement to arbitration with Mu`awiya which undermined his legitimate authority as caliph. The Kharijites rebelled and in resposse, Ali commanded his troops to launch an attack on them, which ended with a massacre of the Kharijites.[254] Despite having a large following, especially in Kufa, `Ali was assassinated in 661 by the Kharijite Ibn Muljam al-Muradi in revenge for the massacre of his fellow Kharijites, and `Ali's unwillingness to bring `Uthman's murderer to justice. Ibn Muljam struck `Ali on his head with a poisoned sword and `Ali died several days later.[255]

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[253] L. Veccia Vaglieri, "Ali B. Abi Talib," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online).

[254] Ibid..

[255] Ibid.,

Sunnis and Shi`is both shared and disagreed in their memory of `Ali. `Ali was remembered by Sunnis for his strength, courage, wisdom, loyalty to the Prophet, and most importantly, as one of the Rightly Guided Caliphs.[256] Shi`is considered `Ali's death an instance of martyrdom, which further elevated his spiritual status. They also made claim to numerous transmissions from `Ali that indicate that through his divine knowledge as the Imam, he was aware of his impending death and was actively preparing to be killed by Ibn Muljam. The accounts narrated that he even assisted Ibn Muljam in his own killing and submitted to Ibn Muljam's sword during the attack.[257] This motif of foreshadowing one's death can be seen in the narratives of the Prophet Muhammad about his own death and later Imams also claimed to have prescience about their death. Having knowledge of one's death was powerful, as it signaled one's complete submission to God's will and access to Divine knowledge, and followed the tradition of the Prophet. After his death, a community of intensely devoted followers distinct from the greater Muslim community rallied around their loyalty to `Ali during the reign of Mu`awiya (661-680), and experienced intense persecution under the Umayyad government.[258]

Accounts of `Ali's Miracles in Shi`i Narratives

As the founder of the Shi`i tradition, `Ali was portrayed by medieval Shi`i scholars as a strong leader, miracle worker, and focus of piety and devotion. Loyalty to and love of `Ali was directly connected to being a good Muslim and a believer. Al-Mufid refers to numerous hadiths that report that `Ali proclaimed that God sent a message to the

[256] Ibid.,

[257] Al-Mufid, *The Book of Guidance,* 6-10.

[258] Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation,* 3.

believers through the Prophet that only believers could love `Ali, and only hypocrites could hate him.[259] Hagiographical works on `Ali's life covered many aspects of his life and held much in common with Sunni sources on the same topic.

But when we begin to consider accounts of `Ali's miracles, Shi`i narratives diverged greatly from Sunni narratives, which viewed `Ali as an important political leader, but not a sanctified miracle worker. The miracle narratives of `Ali are unique to Shi`i accounts, although parallels can be found in the multitude of hagiographies of Sufi saints from the same period. Scholars recorded numerous types of miracles supposedly performed by `Ali, including knowledge of the unseen, miraculous strength, relations with the Jinn, power to reverse the sun, and the ability to speak with animals. Bodily, or embodied, miracles stand out due to their reflection of `Ali's internal spiritual state that is externalized through the physical body. The miracles also indicate the potential of `Ali's corpse to perform similar feats in the grave, working as a religious form of advertising of the miraculous occurrences that pilgrims could potentially witness during their visit in Najaf.

In *Kitab al-irshad* (*The Book of Guidance*), al-Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 1022) spends most of his text discussing `Ali's life, qualities and character, military exploits, role in the life of the Prophet, legal decisions, speeches and sayings, and miracles, before briefly covering the lives of the other Imams. Shaykh al-Mufid was a prominent Imami scholar who studied and taught in Baghdad. He learned from numerous scholars, including the hadith scholars and traditionists, Ibn Babawayh, known as Shaykh al-Saduq (d. 991) and Ibn Qulaway (d. 978/9). Al-Mufid wrote *Kitab al-irshad* in answer to a student who

[259] Al-Mufid, *The Book of Guidance,* 25.

requested further details on the lives of the Twelve Imams according to Imami doctrine. The first half of the book covers the life, death, and miracles of `Ali, while the second half covers the rest of the Imams.

Al-Mufid methodically laid out his material with the aim of presenting normative Shi`i beliefs around `Ali and his high spiritual state. Throughout his work, he strove to establish the Shi`i position on `Ali in contrast to the one appearing in Sunni scholarship. He also strove to establish an authoritative understanding of the rest of the Imams within Shi`i scholarship, as there was much disagreement among contemporary scholars around this doctrine.[260] Throughout his book, al-Mufid continually warned his readers that if they were to deny his reports about `Ali, then they would be "obstinate liars who have no shame."[261] At numerous points in the text, al-Mufid made assertions that the hadiths about `Ali's character were so well known and authoritative that it was not even necessary to list the chains of transmission.[262] Additionally, al-Mufid cited narratives about ``Ali, attributing sayings to the Prophet, which claimed that `Ali and his followers would be successful in their lives.[263] He further argued that guidance comes from loving `Ali and those who held hate towards him would be considered in error.[264]

The family of `Ali and their followers are a special community, set aside from the rest of Muslims, he wrote. Al-Mufid recorded a saying attributed to the Prophet stating, "God, the Most High, has a cane made of ruby which none will obtain except us and our

[260] Ibid., xxvii.

[261] Ibid., 44.

[262] Ibid., 29.

[263] Ibid., 25.

[264] Ibid., 27.

Shi`a. The rest of the people are excluded from it','' and another that reads, "Seventy thousand of my community will enter Heaven without any reckoning and punishment against them." After reciting these words, the Prophet turned to `Ali and said: "They are your Shi`a and you are their Imam."[265] Moreover, in another conversation attributed by al-Mufid to `Ali and the Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet explained to him that the Shi`i were set aside from the rest of humanity because they follow Muhammad,

> Both myself [Prophet Muhammad], and you [`Ali] have been created from one (piece of) clay. Part of it was left over and from that God created our Shi`a. On the Day of Resurrection (all) the people will be summoned by the names of their mothers except our Shi`a. They will be summoned by the names of their fathers because of their good birth.[266]

Al-Mufid used both threats and promises of rewards to encourage Shi`is to adopt the doctrine in his treatise. Al-Mufid challenged his readers, warning "whoever continues to find fault with [`Ali's miracles] is one who can only find the doubts about it in what the denigrators depend upon."[267] He left no room for doubt and immediately judged those who had doubt about the narratives as denigrators and unbelievers. He also warned that those who do not adhere to the doctrine and who deny the validity of his assertions are "liars" of uncertain salvation. Moreover, he asserted that those who consider themselves Shi`i are guaranteed salvation and that God has a special place for them in Heaven. This dualistic rhetoric addressed both the antagonistic audience of Sunni scholars as well as supportive fellow Shi`i scholars, and reveals a common strategy scholars used to establish their position and authority.

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[265] Ibid., 26.

[266] Ibid., 27.

[267] Ibid., 263.

The plentiful hagiographical literature about `Ali's life recorded his superhuman strength in battle, divine knowledge and wisdom, and miraculous acts. `Ali's recorded actions and miracles were more akin to those of prophets rather than those of a saint or Imam. In Shi`i hagiographical literature, `Ali's *`aja'ib* (extraordinary actions, miracles) appeared to be equivalent to the Prophet Muhammad's *mu`jizat* (miracles performed by prophets) and substantially raised his spiritual status in the Shi`i framework. These accounts most often can only be found in Shi`i sources. Al-Shaykh al-Mufid stated that his compilation of `Ali's miracles offered:

> Clear proof of the Commander of the Faithful, which indicates his position with regard to God and his special endowment with miracles by which he was set apart from everyone else through the call for obedience to him to remain steadfast in respecting his authority and closeness to God (*walaya*), to recognize his rights and the certainty of His Imamate, and to be aware of his protection (from error), perfection and the demonstration of the proof of him.[268]

According to al-Mufid, the hagiographic material provided indisputable evidence of `Ali's *walaya* and his right to loyalty from all Muslims. By providing proof after proof of `Ali's miracles, al-Mufid further established `Ali's authority, and ultimately made `Ali's body and grave a sought-after pilgrimage site among pious Shi`is. By investing `Ali's body with miraculous power during his life, it is only logical that scholars such as al-Mufid would also attribute these powers to `Ali's grave after his death.

Throughout his book, al-Mufid engaged in polemical and hostile attacks against unnamed non-Shi`is. Al-Mufid attacked certain groups of people, calling them heretics (*zanadiqa*) and enemies of Islam:

> They show surprise at all of these and laugh when they hear the account of them, dispute their authenticity, mock and talk nonsense in a slanderous

[268] Ibid., 229.

> way in which they conduct themselves against Islam and its followers, regarding as stupid those who believe in it and support it, accusing the followers of Islam of deficiency and ignorance, and forging false stories. Let the people examine the crime which they have committed against Islam by their hostility to the Commander of the Faithful, peace be on him, and their relying on removing his virtues, noble actions and signs by which they resemble the classes of the atheists (*zanidiqa*) and unbelievers through their departure from the roads of (true) proofs into the gates of deviation and ignorance.[269]

From al-Mufid's discussion of the non-Shi`i scholars who attacked reports about `Ali, we can see that there were ongoing debates and disagreements between Sunni, Shi`i, and Mutazilite scholars around the nature of `Ali and his ability to perform miracles.

Throughout his narrations of many of the miracles of `Ali, al-Mufid included a warning to those who denied the truth of `Ali's *walaya* during his lifetime. One example is the story of a man named al-Ghayzar, whom `Ali suspected was a spy for Mu`awiya. When `Ali confronted him, al-Ghayzar denied the accusation and `Ali cursed him, swearing, "If you are a liar, God will blind you." Some days later, the man was spotted being led by someone as he had lost his sight and could not find his way.[270] Another similar incident occurred in an account al-Mufid narrated wherein `Ali reminded his followers of the Prophet's words, "To whomsoever I am his master, `Ali is his master," and asked the men present to testify to the truth of the statement. All of the men testified, except for Anas ibn Malik, one of the beloved Companions of the Prophet Muhammad in the Sunni tradition and a reliable hadith transmitter in Sunni collections. When `Ali asked ibn Malik why he had refrained from testifying to the statement, Ibn Malik claimed that because of his old age and forgetfulness, he was prevented from testifying. `Ali cursed

[269] Ibid., 260-261.

[270] Ibid., 265.

him, asking God to strike Ibn Malik with leprosy if he was lying. One witness reported that soon after this exchange, signs of leprosy appeared on Ibn Malik, which showed the miraculous nature and power of `Ali's proclamations. A similar account from al-Mufid depicted `Ali making the same proclamation as before in front of men in the mosque, but one man refrained from testifying to `Ali's *walaya* and lost his sight, and subsequently spent his time in seeking forgiveness from God.[271] These examples serve as admonitions to create a culture of obedience to `Ali that was protected by his powers.

One account demonstrates `Ali's superhuman strength, ability to discern the unseen, and his possession of secret knowledge. Al-Mufid narrated that when `Ali was heading towards Siffin to engage in battle with Mu`awiya, `Ali's troops had run out of water and were overcome by thirst. `Ali left the main road and came across a hermitage, where they received confirmation from a hermit that there was no source of water in the entire area. In response, `Ali turned his mule towards the direction of Mecca and led his followers towards a location right by the hermitage and commanded them to dig in the ground. His followers uncovered a large rock but were unable to dig any further. `Ali told them that there was water under the rock, but the men were unable to move the rock. `Ali got down from his mule, rolled up his sleeves, slipped his fingers under the rock, and easily tossed it to the side. Under the rock, `Ali's followers found fresh water, which they claimed was the sweetest, coldest, and purest water they had ever drunk in their lives.

`Ali then commanded the men to cover the water and hide the traces of their digging. The hermit had been watching the whole event and spoke with `Ali after witnessing the miracles, asking about his identity. Upon learning that `Ali was the

[271] Ibid., 265-266.

representative of the Prophet on Earth, the hermit immediately prostrated to `Ali and declared his allegiance and conversion to Islam. It turned out that the hermit had previously received inspiration that he was ordered to wait for a saintly figure who would uncover the spring; many hermits before him had also waited for the same sign without any results. According to al-Mufid, this account contained three different types of miracles: 1) knowledge of the unseen, wherein `Ali knew the location of the spring; 2) superhuman strength, which allowed `Ali to remove the rock above the spring; and 3) `Ali's elevated status as iterated in the Qur'an, illustrated through this miraculous story.[272] His seemingly logical explanation of `Ali's miracles worked to argue that `Ali was not like other men and confirmed the Shi`i doctrine of *walaya*.

`Ali was also involved in numerous interactions with the unseen world and the supernatural. One fantastical account from al-Mufid demonstrated `Ali's exalted rank and ability to control the unseen, including the powerful jinn. The account goes back to the time of the Prophet, who was on a journey to engage in a battle against a rebellious tribe. The angel Gabriel had informed the Prophet that a group of non-Muslim jinn were plotting against him and his Companions, and that he needed to confront them and subdue them through the power of God.[273] The Prophet decided to send `Ali as his representative, who called on God to assist him in the fight against the jinn. Despite being attacked by the jinn who took the form of a hurricane and fireballs, `Ali kept on advancing towards the jinn while he recited the Qur'an and shouted out the names of God. `Ali eventually defeated the jinn, who were transformed into black smoke and the

[272] Ibid., 252-5.

[273] Ibid., 256.

entire valley turned yellow.[274] At the end of the account, al-Mufid mentioned that while non-Shi`is acknowledged `Ali's role in the story, the Mu`tazilites did not. Without mentioning names, al-Mufid noted that despite the fact that non-Shi`is acknowledged the report, some of the more "ignorant" and "stubborn" among them mocked the report. He went on to mention that these people claimed that this story was nonsense, insinuating that the Shi`is had fabricated the story in order to defend their beliefs regarding `Ali.[275] It is particularly interesting that al-Mufid interspersed his narrations of `Ali's miracles with polemical accusations against opponents of the Shi`is. In this way, it appears that al-Mufid used the accounts of `Ali's miracles to prove his opponents wrong and to confirm `Ali's *walaya*.

Al-Mufid included many other reports of `Ali's miracles, including one that demonstrated the power of his prayers and strict adherence to Islamic practices. One account narrated `Ali's ability to stop time by reversing the direction of the sun to extend the day, which he did on two separate occasions. One incident occurred when `Ali was visiting the Prophet when the angel Gabriel was transmitting a revelation to the Prophet. While in conversation with Gabriel, the Prophet rested his head on `Ali's thigh for several hours, until sunset. `Ali prayed the mid-afternoon prayers in his position sitting on the floor, unable to stand for his prayers as he did not want to disrupt the Prophet's revelation. The Prophet suggested that `Ali ask God to send the sun back so he could redo his prayers standing up.[276] `Ali did as the Prophet recommended, and the sun went back

[274] Ibid., 257.

[275] Ibid., 259-60.

[276] Ibid., 261.

in the sky to the proper mid-afternoon location. `Ali then made up his prayers and then the sun immediately set. Those who witnessed this mentioned that they heard a loud noise when the sun set, similar to that of someone cutting wood with a saw.[277]

Al-Mufid narrated another occasion when `Ali once again sent the sun back while he was traveling with a group of followers who had missed their prayers while struggling to cross the Euphrates River. Although `Ali managed to pray on time, some people had missed the prayers. `Ali asked God to send the sun back again so everyone could pray the noon time prayers at the appointed time, and the sun immediately returned to its zenith in the sky. As soon as his followers completed their prayers, they reported that the sun had disappeared from the sky completely and a frightening noise came from where it had disappeared. Out of fear of the miracle they had just witnessed, `Ali's followers sat on the ground, where they sought forgiveness from God and engaged in profuse worship and praise of God.[278] Al-Mufid stated that reports of this miracle spread far, and one poet, al-Sayyid Muhammad al-Himyari, composed a poem to commemorate the miraculous event:

> The sun was sent back for him [`Ali] when he missed the time of the afternoon prayer and sunset had drawn near.
>
> So that its light shone (the same as) at its time for the afternoon. Then it fell like a shooting star.
>
> For him [`Ali] it was sent back another time at Babylon. It has not been sent back for any Arab creature,
>
> Only so that his [`Ali] first (view of it) may be mixed with his later (view of it) and so that it being reversed may be an explanation of a wondrous matter.[279]

[277] Ibid., 261-262.

[278] Ibid., 262.

[279] Ibid., 262.

Al-Mufid's miraculous accounts and praise of `Ali are extremely similar to that of the Prophet Muhammad and his miracles and a recurring "thematic linking" can be found throughout his numerous hagiographies.[280]

Although al-Mufid's reports were consistent with mainstream Shi`i narrations of the story of reversing the sun, Sunni hadiths had a very different memory of this miraculous event. While the Shi`i narratives attributed the miracle to `Ali, the Sunni narrative attributed it to the Prophet Muhammad. Ibn Kathir (d. 1373), the well-known disciple of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), was a historian as well as a hadith and Qur'an scholar. He was active in anti-Shi`i pursuits and was part of a council that condemned a Shi`i to death for insulting the first three Umayyad caliphs at the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus.[281] In his work on the attributes, life, and miracles of the Prophet, *Shama'il al-Rasul* (*Qualities of the Messenger*), Ibn Kathir discussed the miracle of reversing the sun, and attributed the miracle to the Prophet Muhammad, albeit with the disclosure that the tradition was weak and transmitted by disreputable transmitters. Ibn Kathir also reported that the Prophet reversed the sun on another occasion after returning from his ascension to Heaven.[282] Ibn Kathir specifically brought up the alternative account reported by al-Mufid, categorically denying that the miracle could have been performed by `Ali. He noted that Shi`i scholars had verified the authenticity of this account, while Sunni scholars had asserted that it was a fabricated hadith. Furthermore, Ibn Kathir goes as far

[280] Tayeb El-Hibri, *Parable and Politics in Early Islamic History the Rashidun Caliphs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 212.

[281] H. Laoust, "Ibn Kathir," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online).

[282] Abu al-Fada' Ibn Kathir, *Shama'il al-rasul* (Alexandria: Dar Ibn Khaldun, n.d.), 484.

to deny reports of the Prophet's miracle of reversing the sun. He concludes this section by criticizing Shi`i scholars who reported the two miracles of `Ali reversing the sun, calling their accounts "strange" and unfounded.[283]

Moreover, miraculous events in `Ali's life, such as the miracle of reversing the sun, parallel those of pre-Islamic prophets.[284] In the Bible, both Isaiah and Joshua were able to exert control over the sun; Isaiah made the sun go back and Joshua made time stand still by making the sun and moon both stop so that his people could defeat their enemies.[285] Tayeb al-Hibri suggests that scholars made a conscious effort to form clear ties between `Ali and prophets:

> Both stylistic and thematic points were reworked to show the ways in which 'Ali's behavior was reminiscent of prophetic experiences and to illustrate an occasion with a similar challenge of moral temperance and legal knowledge.[286]

These narratives offer insight into Shi`i understandings of `Ali's role in history, as well as his spiritual station. Many other Shi`i authors from the medieval period offer different accounts of `Ali's bodily miracles, but certain tropes were reused in the story of `Ali's life in order to legitimize his *walaya*. These hagiographies are reflective of `Ali's close relationship with God, serve to give further evidence of `Ali's *walaya*, and provide a strong argument to indicate he was equal to the Prophet Muhammad.

Another account of `Ali's miracles comes to us from the eminent Baghdadi `Alid scholar and poet al-Sharif al-Radi (d. 1016). Al-Radi who traced his ancestry to al-Husayn via Musa al-Kazim, as well as to al-Hasan through his mother, was a student of

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[283] Ibn Kathir, *Shama'il*, 485.

[284] El-Hibri, *Parable,* 213.

[285] Isaiah 38:8; Joshua 10:12-13.

[286] El-Hibri, *Parable,* 215.

al-Shaykh al-Mufid. Al-Radi was a moderate Shi`i who also appeared to have sympathies towards the Shafi`i *madhdhab* and Mu`tazilism and could be considered a hybrid scholar.[287] In *Khasa'is al-a'imma* (*Special Characteristics of the Imams*), al-Radi provided a mainly factual overview of `Ali's deeds and actions, although he provided at least one account of one of `Ali's miracles: during `Ali's reign as caliph, two men, one of whom was a Kharijite, came to him in the mosque. `Ali condemned the Kharijite, who then complained to `Ali that he was unjust in his ruling. The man suddenly turned into a black dog. A person who was present at the event narrated the story:

> "I swear by God, we saw his clothes fly off and he wagged his tail at the Commander of the Faithful, tears were running down his face. We saw the Commander of the Faithful take pity and look at the sky and he moved his lips, saying something we could not hear. I swear by God that we saw the [Kharijite] turn back into a human and his clothes materialized out of thin air and fell onto his shoulders. I saw him leaving the mosque and his legs were injured."
>
> We looked at the Commander of the Faithful in astonishment and he said to us: "What is making you look in amazement?"
>
> We said to him: "Commander of the Faithful, how can we not be astonished when you did what you just did."
>
> He said: "Do you not know that Asif ibn Barkhiya[288] and Solomon ibn Dawud did something similar when God took retaliation when he mentioned [them in the Qur'an].[289]

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[287] Moktar Djebli, "Al-Sharif Al-Radi," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online).

[288] Asif bin Barkhiya was the maternal cousin of Solomon and was responsible for bringing Bilqis' (Queen of Sheba) throne from Yemen to Jerusalem in "a twinkling of the eye," see Abu al-Fada' Ibn Kathir, *Stories of the Qur'an*, trans. `Ali As-Sayed al-Halawani (El-Mansoura, Egypt: Dar al-Manarah, 2001). 23-4, 99.

[289] al-Radi, *Khasa'is,* 46; Quran 27: 38-40: "Said a bold one of the invisible being [subject to Solomon]: "I shall bring it to thee ere thou rise from thy council-seat – for, behold, I am powerful enough to do it, [and] worthy of trust!" [When Solomon learned that the Queen of Sheba was coming,] he said [to his council]: "O you nobles! Which of you can bring me her throne ere she and her followers come unto me in willing surrender to God? "Said a bold one of the invisible beings [subject to Solomon]: "I shall bring it to thee ere thou rise from thy council-seat - for, behold, I am powerful enough to do it, [and] worthy of trust!" Answered he who was illumined by revelation: "[Nay] as for me - I shall bring it to thee ere the twinkling of thy eye ceases! "And when he saw it truly before him, he exclaimed: "This is [an outcome] of my Sustainer's bounty, to test me as to whether I am grateful or ungrateful! However, he who is grateful [to God] is but grateful for his own good; and he who is ungrateful [should know that], verily, my Sustainer is

Presumably the Kharijite was transformed into a dog by God and because of `Ali's pity on the man, he chose to practice a miracle and to return the man to his human form.

For many Shi`is, this account not only demonstrates `Ali's mercy and the fairness of his rulings, but also his miraculous ability to reverse an action done by God and transform a human figure. In this account, `Ali compared himself to the Prophet Solomon,[290] who was known for his abilities in magic and divination, his control over the jinn and the natural elements, as well as his ability to mete out justice as a ruler.[291] This miracle helped to established `Ali's status to that of another pre-Islamic Qur'anic prophet, giving him supernatural powers that rivaled that of the Prophet Muhammad.

A contemporary of al-Sharif al-Radi and al-Shaykh al-Tusi, little is known about al-Shaykh Husayn Ibn `Abdul Wahhab except that he lived in Baghdad during the end of the tenth and beginning of the eleventh centuries and authored a number of important books. The editor of *`Uyun al-mu`jizat* (*Sources of Miracles*) states that he could not locate the biography of Ibn `Abdul Wahhab in any biographical dictionary, and he was seldom cited by other scholars.[292] Nevertheless, Ibn `Abdul Wahhab's book offers a comprehensive compilation of miracles of Fatima and the twelve Imams. Among the numerous miracles narrated by Ibn `Abdul Wahhab was the story of how `Ali brought

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self-sufficient, most generous in giving!"; it is interesting to note that Islamic legends hold that jinn can appear in the form of black dogs and that black dogs were the most despised of all dogs, see P. Voorhoeve, "Djinn," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online) and F. Vire, "Kalb," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online).

[290] In the Jewish and Christian tradition, Solomon was considered to be a great king with supernatural powers, but in the Islamic tradition, he was considered to be a prophet, see J. Walker and P. Fenton, "Sulayman b. Dawud," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online).

[291] Walker and Fenton, "Sulayman."

[292] Abd al-Wahhab, *`Uyun,* 51.

rain to Kufa after a five-year drought. The people of Kufa asked `Ali to make it rain, and in response, `Ali gestured with his hands under the sky. The sky immediately started rumbling, and ran water down in torrents.[293] This miracle illustrates the power of `Ali's prayers accompanied by physical gestures that ended an intense drought. Similar to the miracle of lowering the flooded Euphrates River, this miracle illustrates `Ali's ability to control nature through his simple, yet potent act of prayer.

Al-Fattal al-Nisaburi (d. 1114-5) was a respectable scholar and preacher from Khurasan who compiled his Friday sermons into *Rawdat al-wa`izin* (*The Garden for Preachers*).[294] In his book, al-Fattal provided clear explanations of Shi`i theology, often through the lens of hagiographies of the Imams and parables. He recounted numerous miracles, including one that occurred during Friday prayers. While `Ali was delivering the Friday sermon in the Grand Mosque of Kufa, a snake appeared next to the pulpit and went up the stairs to `Ali. It got so close to `Ali that it began to chew on his ear and hiss. All of a sudden, the snake fell silent and appeared to focus when `Ali began to move his lips. When `Ali finished, the snake went back down, where it was swallowed by the ground and `Ali resumed his sermon. After he finished, everyone gathered around him and asked him about the miraculous thing that happened with the snake. `Ali responded, stating:

> It was not what you thought it was, rather, he was one of the rulers of the jinn. He was having trouble with a case so he came to seek my legal opinion about it. I gave him the solution and he prayed for me and then left. For the Prophet Muhammad said, "I am the city of wisdom, which is Heaven, and you, `Ali, are its gate. So how are the righteous people guided to Heaven unless they enter

[293] Ibid., 83.

[294] Al-Fattal, *Rawdat.*

through its gate?"[295]

Once again, in this miracle narrative, we can see a connection between `Ali and Solomon, based on `Ali's relationship with the jinn. He not only could transform humans, as in the case of the Kharijite who turned into a black dog, but the jinn also respected his wisdom and judgments. This account demonstrates that Shi`is believed that `Ali had supernatural powers akin to that of Solomon and could communicate with jinn in the guise of animals. The account also indicates that his ability to be a fair judge was so highly regarded that even the jinn sought his advice. These accounts elevate `Ali's status through the performance of miracles and compare him to various prophets in an effort to provide what they considered to be strong evidence of his *walaya*.

Many of the miracles attributed to `Ali are reminiscent of those performed by the Prophet Muhammad and pre-Islamic prophets in both Sunni and Shi`i narratives. `Ali's miracles physically manifested in front of numerous witnesses and helped to perpetuate his spiritual status and rank similar to that of the Prophet. The works of al-Mufid, Ibn `Abdul Wahhab, and al-Radi were written for elite audiences of scholars, who presumably would transmit the content to the lay Shi`i population. Al-Fattal's collection of sermons is particularly helpful as it represents the actual text of sermons that lay Shi`is would have heard during their attendance at Friday prayers. Al-Fattal's collection reflects the fact that the miracle stories of `Ali were not merely material compiled and read by elite scholars, but that scholars transmitted these accounts to a wider audience. These accounts of `Ali would have been prevalent in the minds of medieval Shi`is and served to maintain Shi`i communal memory and belief in `Ali's *walaya*.

[295] Al-Fattal, *Rawdat,* 118.

We should take into account the fact that accounts of `Ali's miracles were first circulated orally, were then recorded by scholars, and finally were reintroduced to the general public by preachers, such as al-Fattal, and other religious leaders. Themes of the body were an extremely common topic in medieval sermons in order to emphasize the necessary duality of the body and soul, and the vital role of the body in religious practice.[296] In her study of medieval Islamic sermons from the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa, Linda G. Jones asserts that the theme of the body and bodily practice demonstrates ways in which the "construction of Muslim personhood … communal identity … and spiritual dispositions" were, in essence, "imagined as embodied."[297] The emphasis on the body allowed Muslims to relate to complex ideas and theologies, and bodily actions could signify the inner state of practitioners as well as religious and moral identity.[298] If we take the connections between the rhetorical use of the body in sermons and the stress on `Ali's embodied miracles in Shi`i narratives seriously, then we can discern the magnitude of these accounts in building up pilgrims' perceptions of `Ali's grave, where, as Peter Brown describes of holy peoples' shrines, "Earth and Heaven met."[299] Accounts of miracles were effective ways for scholars to convey the concept of *walaya* to the general population by presenting `Ali's body as possessing *potentia*, or spiritual power.[300] The *praesentia*, or physical presence of the holy (and in this case, of

[296] Linda G. Jones, "Bodily Performance and Body Talk in Medieval Islamic Preaching," in *The Ends of the Body: Identity and Community in Medieval Culture*, ed. Jill Ross and Suzanne Conklin Akbari (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 211.

[297] Ibid., 211-2.

[298] Ibid., 213.

[299] Brown, *The Cult of the Saints,* 10.

[300] Ibid., 41, 82.

`Ali's body), bolstered by stories of miracles, ensured the pilgrims would take arduous journeys through the desert to visit the grave.[301]

A Prophetic *Praesentia* at `Ali's Grave

Shi`i scholars constructed complex narratives that established Najaf as the pre-destined location of `Ali's grave and portrayed it as a sacred city that was also connected to the Prophet Muhammad and pre-Islamic prophets. Shi`i narratives offer many accounts of `Ali's time in the city, as well as foreshadowing `Ali's burial in Najaf.. One way that Shi`i scholars could legitimize and further sanctify `Ali's grave was by establishing narratives that pre-Islamic prophets were buried in the same location and had prepared a place for `Ali next to them. The earliest Shi`i narratives, such as Ibn Qulaway's pilgrimage manual *Kamil al-ziyarat,* mentioned that the prophets Adam and Noah were buried next to `Ali, and are replete with legends of how they ended up in Najaf.[302]

Numerous scholars have studied the Christian heritage of the region of Najaf and Kufa, but scholars have not found any evidence that suggests that `Ali's shrine was built on a Christian or even earlier shrine dedicated to the pre-Islamic prophets Adam and Noah.[303] Etan Kohlberg argues that many of the narratives that tie `Ali to the flood of

[301] Ibid., 88, 118.

[302] Jafar Ibn Qulaway, *Kamil al-ziyarat* (Qum: Nashr al-Faqaha, 1996); In modern-day Najaf, the tombs of the Qur'anic prophets Hud and Salih are located just outside the city walls at the beginning of the massive Wadi al-Salam cemetery. In the case of the joint tomb of Hud and Salih, it appeared later on and the early narratives between the ninth and fourteenth centuries do not make mention of the tombs, therefore this section will focus on the presence of Adam and Noah in Najaf. Most Islamic narratives point to the burial location of Hud and Salih to be in the Arabian Peninsula, but they also have numerous tombs, often of gigantic proportions, throughout the Middle East, including Yemen, Egypt, Syria, and more, see Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden.*

[303] This topic could easily be the focus on another separate research project, especially in light of the fact that tombs of several pre-Islamic and Qur'anic prophets are located in the same area: Hud and Saleh are alleged to be buried in tombs in Wadi al-Salam cemetery, just outside old Najaf, and Jonah is alleged to be buried along the Euphrates in nearby Kufa. I have consulted with some of the leading scholars of Christianity in pre-Islamic Iraq (including Isabel Toral-Niehoff, Philip Wood, Erica Hunter, Elizabeth

Noah could have been absorbed by Shi`i authors from Jewish and Christian narratives, and were subsequently integrated into mainstream Shi`i sources.[304] It is also quite possible that the claims of Shi`i scholars that pre-Islamic and Qur'anic prophets were buried in this location were projected after the fact, in order to offer more legitimacy to a burial site that otherwise had little significance before `Ali's burial. Not only does the Qur'an offer different perspectives on the lives of prophets found in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, but Shi`i scholars further developed a local imaginary of Najaf and Kufa's pre-Islamic past that differed from normative Sunni stories of the prophets.[305] This act of imaginative re-interment sought not only to establish the tradition firmly within the monotheistic tradition, but also to highlight Shi`ism within that narrative.

Najaf was held up by Shi`i scholars as the center of the Shi`i cognitive map, providing a multitude of accounts to prove Najaf's place among the sacred cities of Islam. Some contemporary Shi`i scholars, such as al-Sayyid Sami al-Badri, a scholar who teaches in the Hawza system in Najaf, hold that after Noah founded Kufa, it became the most important city in world.[306] A tradition related from Daylami stated that "al-Ghari is part of a mountain where God spoke to Moses and where Jesus was sanctified, and where Abraham was made a friend of God, and where Muhammad was made a prophet, and

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Stone, and Donald Whitcomb), but none have been able to identity Christian texts that connect Adam or Noah to the region or suggest that the area of Najaf was a pilgrimage site; for a comprehensive a modern Arabic-language study of Kufa's monasteries and other Christian sites, see al-Turayhi, *Al-diyarat*.

[304] Etan Kohlberg, "Some Shī'ī Views of the Antediluvian World" (Studia Islamica, 1980, no. 52): 41-66.

[305] For example, most medieval Muslim scholars believed that Noah's ark landed on Mt. Judi, whereas Iraqi Shi`i scholars believed that Mt. Judi was actually the plateau of Najaf.

[306] For a detailed modern study by a Najafi clergyman in which he attempts to prove that Najaf was indeed the landing place of Noah's ark, see Al-Sayyid Sami al-Badri, "Mursa safinat Nuh," *Turath al-Najaf* 1, no. 1 (2008): 6–90.

God made [al-Ghari] a dwelling place for prophets."[307] Apart from Adam and Noah, Shi`i traditions also narrated that the Prophet Idris spent time in the Sahla Mosque in Kufa.[308] Another Shi`i account brought the twelfth Imam into the story, claiming that the Mahdi would return to Earth on a horse at Najaf, and that when he flies the standard of the Prophet, he will be accompanied by the angels who were with Noah on the ark.[309] As it developed into a town and pilgrimage center, Najaf became a Shi`i stronghold and it was there that Shi`is formed their own historical narratives that established the city as a sacred territory.

Numerous Shi`i narratives affirm that `Ali was not only buried in Najaf, but that his grave was located next to the graves of the prophets Adam and Noah. `Ali's proximity to these two prominent pre-Islamic prophets would make sense in view of the Shi`i belief in the inclusion of `Ali in the primordial covenant. Noah and Adam had numerous graves and shrines scattered throughout the Near East, controlled primarily by Sunni Muslims.[310] Certain groups of Shi`is viewed Adam as the primordial human being, who was modeled out of clay. Traditions attributed to to al-Husayn by al-Mufid confirmed the graves of Adam and Noah in Najaf. Al-Mufid reported a conversation between al-Husayn and a companion during which al-Husayn elaborated on the importance of Adam and Noah in the context of Najaf:

> He [al-Husayn] said: "When you visited the Commander of the Faithful, know that you were also visiting the bones of Adam, and the body of Noah, and the

[307] Al-Hasan ibn Muhammad Daylami, *Irshad al-qulub: al-munji man `amil bi-hi min alim al-'iqab*, vol 2, ed. Hashim Milani (Tehran: Dar al-Uswah lil-Ṭiba`ah wa-al-Nashr, 1996), 439.

[308] Kohlberg, "Shī'ī Views," 57.

[309] Ibid., 59.

[310] For a thorough overview of these shrines of pre-Islamic prophets, see Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden.*

body of `Ali ibn Abi Talib."

I said, "Adam descended [from heaven] to Sarnadib [modern-day Sri Lanka] at sunrise, and they claimed that his bones were buried in the Sacred House of God [the Ka`aba in Mecca], so how could his bones have ended up in Kufa?"

He [al-Husayn] said: God sent a revelation to Noah when he was circling the Ka`aba for a week in the ark [during the flood] … then he entered the water up to his knees and took out a coffin containing the bones of Adam and carried it in the ark and continued to circle the Ka`aba. Then he came to the gate of Kufa in the middle of the mosque and said to the earth: "drain your water,"[311] and then the water drained from the mosque of Kufa in the same place where it came out. And everyone who was in the ark with Noah left the ark. Noah took the coffin [of Adam] and buried it in al-Ghari, which is a piece of the mountain where God spoke to Moses and where Jesus was made holy, and where he took Abraham as a friend, and where he took Muhammad as a beloved, and made him the head of the prophets … So when you visit next to Najaf, you must visit the bones of Adam, the body of Noah, and the body of `Ali ibn Abi Talib, for you are visiting the forefathers, and Muhammad is the seal of the Prophets and `Ali is the master of the successors. Pilgrimage to him opens doors to the heavens for the pilgrim when he prayers, so do not neglect this goodness. [312]

This account illustrates the connections between the Ahl al-Bayt and Adam and Noah, and the prestige of Najaf in both the pre-Islamic and Islamic contexts.

Over the centuries, further miraculous occurrences were attributed to Najaf, and Shi`i scholars described other graves of pre-Islamic and Islamic prophets that were discovered nearby `Ali's grave. The presence of Adam and Noah at `Ali's grave are especially significant due to their role in Shi`i explanations of the transmission of divine, hereditary knowledge of prophets and Imams. This knowledge was passed on from angels and these prophets also had secret knowledge about earlier scriptures. Suggestively, the narratives are connected with the antediluvian period of ancient history, tracing back to both Adam and Noah.

[311] Taken from the Qur'an 11:44.

[312] Muhammad al-Mufid, *Kitab al-mazar*, ed. Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Abtahi (Qum: Mahr, 1992), 21-22.

According to Shi`i narratives, Adam and his descendants received divine knowledge directly from the angels, as well as from pages or manuscripts (*suhuf*) that contained secret knowledge.[313] Narratives also recount how Adam passed on an ark to his son Seth that contained divine knowledge, and also passed on the knowledge through a divine light that had existed two thousand years before the creation of humanity. An early Shi`i hadith recorded by al-Kulayni (d. 941) describes how the divine knowledge was transmitted to Adam and onto his offspring: "The knowledge that descended to earth with Adam was not raised back to heaven; a man of knowledge never died taking his knowledge with him."[314] Adam was intimately connected to the city of Kufa, as various Shi`i narratives recounted that this was the location where God ordered the angels to prostrate to Adam.[315] Shi`i scholars also drew parallels between `Ali and Seth: while Seth was considered by Muslims to be the first inheritor of a prophet, his father Adam, `Ali was considered to be the only inheritor of the last Prophet, Muhammad. Both Seth and `Ali were referred to in Islamic literature as *hibat Allah*, or gift of God. Shi`i accounts of Adam fundamentally confirmed and added further evidence to the legitimacy of Shi`i doctrine.

The life of Noah was often juxtaposed with that of `Ali. Noah is also alleged to have received some divine texts from the angels both before and after the great flood. The existence and transmission of these manuscripts are crucial to the Shi`i theory of the Imamate, and intimately connects the authority and knowledge of Adam and Noah to the

[313] Kohlberg, "Shī'ī Views," 41.

[314] Muhammad Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, ed by. Ali Akbar al-Ghaffari, vol. 1 (Tehran: Maktabat al-Suduq, 1957), 222.

[315] Kohlberg, "Shī'ī Views," 57.

Imams.[316] Scholars such as Abu al-Hasan al-Mas`udi (d. 896), Muhammad al-Nu`mani (d. 971), and Ibn Babawayh (d. 991) pointed out that, similar to Noah, `Ali was respected and followed by a minority of his people, and that both of their parties of supporters were primarily poor, weak, and failed to show their loyalty at times of difficulty.[317] Shi`i narratives of Noah implied that the Ahl al-Bayt played a role in building Noah's ark and in surviving the flood.[318]

In the Iraqi Shi`i interpretation of the Qur'anic story of Noah, Noah began and ended his journey from Kufa during the great flood. While Sunni narratives pointed to the resting location of Noah's ark as Mount Judi, which is said to be in modern-day eastern Turkey or northern Iraq, Shi`i scholars claimed that Mount Judi was actually located just outside of Kufa. Shi`i scholars held that after landing in Kufa at the end of the great flood, Noah was ordered by God to bury Adam in al-Ghari. Noah then dug out his own grave for himself at the same location and also readied a grave for `Ali.[319] They also held that Noah survived the great flood and eventually landed in Najaf, that Kufa was the first city established by Noah after the flood, and that his ark is buried underneath the Grand Kufa Mosque. Moreover, the narratives also stated that Noah lived in the city of Kufa or

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[316] Ibid., 41-2.

[317] Ibid., 49.

[318] Ibid., 53-4; this parallel between Noah and the Imams is still prevalent among many Shi`i scholars today, see Ja'far Sobhani, *Doctrines of Shi'i Islam: A Compendium of Imami Beliefs and Practices*, trans. Reza Shah-Kazemi (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001), 112.

[319] Ibid., 57-8; See chapter two of dissertation for narratives of `Ali's burial, several scholars such as al-Shaykh al-Mufid, who transmitted traditions that Noah was buried in Najaf: al-Mufid, *The Book of Guidance*15 as well as Tabrisi, al-Fadl ibn al-Hasan Tabrisi, *I`lam al-wara bi-a`lam al-huda* (Qum: Muassasat Al al-Bayt li-ihya al-turath, 1996), 394-5. See chapter three of dissertation for references to Adam and Noah being buried next to `Ali in pilgrimage manuals, such as Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Jafar al-Mashhadi, *Al-Mazar al-Kabir* [The Big Tomb] (Nashr al-Qiyum, Tehran, 1998), 214, as well as numerous mentions of Adam and Noah in supplications to be recited at `Ali's grave.

a nearby village with his people, and he prayed in a place of worship built by Adam, which also marked the place where Noah constructed his ark.[320]In addition to connecting pre-Islamic prophets to Najaf to establish its sanctity, Shi`i narratives also provide evidence from the Prophet Muhammad and `Ali, foreshadowing the blessed nature of Najaf. In *Farhat al-Ghari*, Ibn Tawus provided a report that narrated that `Ali had purchased a large parcel of land for 40,000 dirhams between Khawrnaq and Hira, all the way to Kufa, which would cover the area of present-day Najaf. When asked about why he had purchased the desolate piece of land, `Ali replied:

> O Kufa, where people gather in all corners, and 70,000 people gather at its back [Najaf] and they enter Paradise without account. I desired for the people to gather on my property.[321]

Moreover, the narrative of a conversation reported by al-Mufid between the Prophet and `Ali foresaw that `Ali would be buried in the land of Kufa:

> The Prophet said: "[God] honored the Hijaz with the Holy Sanctuary, then the lands of Syria with Jerusalem, then honored the pure land with my grave, and then honored the land of Kufa with your grave, O `Ali."[322]
>
> `Ali then replied to the Prophet, saying, "O Prophet of God, how could I be buried in Kufa of Iraq?"
>
> The Prophet replied, "Yes, O `Ali, you will be buried at the back of it [Kufa], between al-Ghariyyayn and Dhakawat al-Bayd. `Abd al-Rahman ibn Muljam, a wretched member of the Ummah, will kill you … O `Ali, 100,00 swords will gain victory for you from Iraq.[323]

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[320] Kohlberg, "Shī'ī Views," 57.

[321] Ghiyath al-Din 'Abd al-Karim ibn Ahmad Ibn Tawus, *Farhat Al-Ghari Fi Ta`in Qabr Amir Al-Mu'minin `Ali Ibn Abi Talib fi al-Najaf* (Al-Najaf: al-Matba`ah al-Haydariyah wa-maktabatuha, 2010), 16, 109-10, 115.

[322] Ibid., 107.

[323] Al-Ghariayayn refers to two monasteries located near `Ali's grave, Ibid., 107.

This conversation between the Prophet and `Ali would have added further validation to the legitimacy of `Ali's grave, as the Prophet himself foresaw its location. For Shi`i scholars, using the Prophet as a witness of `Ali's death and the location of his grave provided ample proof that Najaf was destined to become a sacred city.

A number of hadiths used by Ibn Tawus indicated that `Ali had planned on being buried in Najaf, which further helped establish the legitimacy of his grave. One provided an account of `Ali in Kufa. While he was facing towards the "back" of Kufa, `Ali observed, "What a beautiful view, and a lovely depth, O God, make my grave here."[324] Another hadith was narrated by a companion of `Ali, who described `Ali as looking towards Najaf, exclaiming to the land, "What could be better than your back, what could be finer than your outskirts, O God, please make my grave in [this place]."[325] Moreover, Ibn Tawus included narrations attributed to `Ali about Najaf and its merits as a burial place, "The Commander of the Faithful used to come to Najaf and say it was, 'the Valley of Peace [Najaf], a gathering of spirits of the believers, and a blessed grave for believers of this place.'"[326] These narratives about Najaf only exist in Shi`i scholarship and hadiths and indicate the extent to which the city was present on the cognitive map of solely the Shi`i community. They reveal attempts by Shi`i scholars to connect `Ali to the land in Najaf during his lifetime, which would insinuate that Najaf was the pre-destined place for `Ali's interment long before his death, thus adding to the narratives from the Prophet about the subject.

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[324] Ibid., 115.

[325] Ibid., 16.

[326] Ibid., 17.

In medieval Shi`i theology, it was a very common theme to seek out reflections of prophethood in `Ali and to connect `Ali with the prophet legacy. Tayeb El-Hibri examines the approach to `Ali in Shi`i literature as well as his role in politics and concludes that "the image of 'Ali in the sources rests on a complex web of intersection with imagery drawn from the lives of the prophets.[327] El-Hibri suggests that this motif might have emerged from a hadith wherein the Prophet told `Ali, "You are to me like Aaron was to Moses, except that there is no prophet after me."[328] Even within the Sunni context, El-Hibri suggests that `Ali was more than just a companion of the Prophet and that many of aspects of his biography mirrored that of the Prophet Muhammad.[329] There are numerous other accounts of `Ali's life that parallel stories of other pre-Islamic prophets, such as Moses and David.[330] These intersections of events from `Ali's life with those of pre-Islamic prophets exist in both Sunni and Shi`i sources. In the Shi`i context, many of these narratives served to bolster claims of the legitimacy of the Imams in terms of both theological claims and the authenticity of Najaf.

From Sacred Body to Sacred Space

This chapter demonstrates the power of the body in the medieval Islamic tradition and how the sacralization of `Ali's body remains at the center of the contestation of sacred space. How did Shi`i scholars use hagiography to authenticate `Ali's grave in Najaf? In what ways did Shi`i hagiographical narratives work to affirm `Ali's *walaya*? A stronghold of the burgeoning Shi`i community, Kufa, and later Najaf, thrived from claims

[327] -Hibri, *Parable*, 211.

[328] Tabari, cited in Ibid., *211.*

[329] Ibid.,, 211-12.

[330] Ibid., 214.

of the body of `Ali's being buried in their ground. For Shi`is, it was the authenticated presence of `Ali's body in the ground of Najaf that lent the aura of sanctity and piety to the grave, the shrine, and eventually the entire city. This sentiment is also reflected in a poem by the poet Muhammad ibn Sa`d al-Kanani, who composed a praise poem specifically to `Ali's grave:

> O grave of our master who is buried within you
> God prayed on you, O grave
> No harm shall come to your grave
> the rain will descend on the grave [where you are buried]
> Small drops will fall from your palm onto the ground,
> the rock next to you will grow leaves
> If you did not exist, I would rather be dead,
> I had no opportunity to take revenge [on your murderer].[331]

The abundance of hagiographical narratives about `Ali's life served to provide further proof of the sanctity of `Ali's body and his *walaya*. The miracle narratives, especially the bodily miracles, established his ability to perform miracles, even from beyond the grave, according to common beliefs about the posthumous state of the friends of God.

The presence of `Ali's body gave his grave heightened significance, and in turn his grave physically manifested and symbolized `Ali's legacy to many of his followers. Ali's grave contained potent power that drew flocks of people seeking intercession through `Ali and solace from their worries. Control over `Ali's body was vital to controlling his memory and grave. Scholars not only wrote numerous hagiographical collections on the life of `Ali and the other Imams, but they also compiled hadiths from the Prophet and the Imams on the place of their burials.

As saints were considered to be "present" in their graves, their graves could act as conduits to Heaven.[332] Numerous accounts from Shi`i narratives confirm this belief and

[331] Abu Faraj al-Isfahani, *Maqatil al-talibin* (Qum: Intisharat al-Sharif al-Radi, 1995), 56-7.

assert that not only was `Ali present in his grave, but that due to his spiritual status, his grave was perceived to be highly potent. A hadith attributed to the Prophet Muhammad by Ibn Tawus promised `Ali that his grave would be a piece of Heaven on Earth. Those who visited `Ali's grave would have their sins forgiven and would receive intercession from God:

> God has made your tomb and your son's tomb as one of the sites of Heaven … many people will visit your grave in the hope of becoming closer to God and to send prayers on the Prophet. [Those who visit your grave] are set aside for my intercession and they will enter the pool [of the Prophet on the day of resurrection], and they will visit me tomorrow in Heaven. Whoever visits your grave will receive the equivalent of 70 testimonies after the testimony of Islam and all of his sins are forgiven so that he returns home from visiting you like day his mother gave birth to him.[333]

Shi`is who either read or heard about the virtues of `Ali's body and grave would have been motivated to visit Najaf to enter the presence of his body. In this way, `Ali's body acted as a mediator with God for pilgrims, who could anticipate miraculous occurrences during their visit.

Following Maria Massi-Dakake's argument that allegiance, or *walaya*, to `Ali was at the center of Shi`i communal spiritual and religious identity, we can better understand the emphasis placed on `Ali's body and memory.[334] Shi`is demonstrated a "profound spiritual connection and ontological affinity" to the Imams, with an emphasis on `Ali as the successor to the Prophet Muhammad. They were heavily invested in consolidating their claim to his grave, which would have granted them unfettered access to the charisma of `Ali. The location of `Ali's body would be at the center of the "charismatic

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[332] Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 3.

[333] Ibn Tawus, *Farhat al-Ghari*, 203.

[334] Dakake, *The Charismatic Community.* passim.

community" of Shi`is and there were high stakes for claiming control over `Ali's body.[335] Shi`is expressed their devotion and piety to the Imams primarily by performing pilgrimage to the tombs of the Imams as well as martyrs, and thus they had to retain control and access over the graves, including that of `Ali.[336]

Hagiographies of `Ali could ensure the perpetuation of belief in `Ali's *walaya* and lend significance to his body; it was the presence of his body in Najaf that brought together Shi`is from around the world to pray at his grave. As Verdery argues, it is the materiality of corpses and their multivalent meanings that give them their power. The body materializes, or "localizes" communal values and beliefs in ways that abstract concepts cannot. For laypeople, their piety and devotion was centered on the Imams rather than the careful study of Shi`i theology. The Imams were a focal point for popular Shi`i piety and the bodies of the Imams had "the advantage of concreteness that nonetheless transcends time, making the past immediately present."[337] The importance placed on `Ali in his life was projected onto his corpse, giving meaning and sanctity to its vicinity. As L.D. Lybargar elaborates on the role of corpses in society:

> Corpses, however, are not by themselves significant. Rather, what matters is how individuals and groups construe death. Corpses acquire meaning only because they serve so well as mirrors of the diverse existential concerns and claims of a society. In the discourses and practices surrounding death, thus, lie clues to understanding how collectivities construe and contest identity and difference, authority and cohesion.[338]

Taking the understanding of both the significance and meanings projected onto `Ali's

[335] As defined by Dakake, Ibid., 7.

[336] Ibid., 223.

[337] Verdery, *Political Lives,* 27.

[338] L. D. Lybarger, "The Demise of Adam in the Qisas al-Anbiya: The Symbolic Politics of Death and Re-Burial in the Islamic 'Stories of the Prophets'," *Numen* 55, no. 5 (2008): 499.

body seriously, I contend that by emphasizing the material as well as spiritual natures of `Ali's body, Shi`i scholars who composed hagiographies of the Imams ultimately set up `Ali's corpse to become a physical focal point of Shi`i identity and spiritual authority. This hagiographical material on `Ali complemented Shi`i veneration of him.

In this chapter, I have examined ways in which hagiographies of `Ali, and in particular, accounts of his embodied miracles, provided rich narratives that prevailed in Shi`i perceptions of `Ali's life. As many scholars of the medieval period have argued, "the body was *the* preeminent symbol of community … [it] was most public and representative of the interlocked nature of the group."[339] Focus on `Ali's bodily miracles in hagiographies as well as the *praesentia* of prophets at his grave that boosted `Ali's own *praesentia* added to the attraction of Najaf. In the next two chapters, I will provide background and analysis for the beginnings of `Ali's grave and its contestation, and the development and canonization of pilgrimage rituals. Contact with the material *praesentia* of `Ali's body within his grave affirmed pilgrims' communal memory of `Ali and reaffirmed their faith.[340] By examining different ways in which `Ali's life was constructed and remembered as well as narratives of his burial, we can better understand how his grave became one of the most important pilgrimage destinations in the Shi`i tradition. By first establishing `Ali's spiritual status and sanctified body, and subsequently the presence of his body in Najaf, scholars could ensure that the city would

[339] Just to name a few: Josef Meri, Peter Brown, Caroline Bynum, and Miri Rubin; Jill Ross and Suzanne Conklin Akbari, "Introduction: Limits and Teeology: The Many Ends of the Body," in *The Ends of the Body: Identity and Community in Medieval Culture* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 3.

[340] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 200.

remain at the center of the Shi`i cognitive map and religious imagination.

CHAPTER TWO
SACRED SPACE: CONTESTING THE LOCATION OF `ALI'S GRAVE

The Politics of Sacred Space in Medieval Iraq

In 1326, the North African Sunni traveler Ibn Battuta (d. 1368/9) passed through Iraq on his way back from an exhilarating yet exhausting hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. Desiring to visit renowned sites on his way to see Basra and Baghdad, Ibn Battuta decided to rest for a few days at the shrine town of Mashhad `Ali,[341] in modern-day Najaf, after fourty-four days on the road. A Sunni jurist and judge who was fond of spending time with Sufis, Ibn Battuta offered a detailed description of `Ali's shrine and Najaf, despite his obvious distaste for Shi`a Muslims, or as he called them, *rafidiyah,* or turncoats.[342] He found free lodging in the hostel of a religious seminary next to the shrine and spent his time speaking with fellow travelers and observing pilgrims carry out rituals at the shrine.

Although Ibn Battuta diligently recorded everything he saw and complimented the lavish furnishings and architecture of the shrine, he expressed doubts about who was actually buried in the tomb:

> Then we entered the tomb which they [Shi`is] claim is the tomb of `Ali (peace be upon him) ... on top of the platform are three tombs that they claim contain the graves of Adam (peace be upon him), Noah (peace and blessings be upon him), and `Ali (may God be pleased with him) … All of the inhabitants of this city are

[341] The Place of Martyrdom of `Ali

[342] The Arabic term used by Ibn Battuta is *rafidiyah* is a derogatory term used by Sunnis to describe Shi`is as "rafidis" or rejecters.

> turncoats [*rafidiyah*]. They claim that the sanctuary is renowned for having been the site of many miracles because `Ali's grave is there.[343]

Ibn Battuta's skepticism came from a long line of Sunni scholars who had raised doubts about the location of `Ali's grave from as early as the ninth century. Some of the most well-known Sunni historians, geographers, and theologians took note of this debate in their discussions of `Ali's life and death or in descriptions of Kufa and its vicinities. The previous chapter examined the importance of `Ali's figure and his body in sanctifying Najaf. This chapter continues this direction of inquiry to trace the debate between Sunni and Shi`i scholars about the location of `Ali's tomb over five centuries. This chapter will argue that the debate over the location of `Ali's grave sheds light on the importance of locating and claiming graves of significant historical figures in Islam. It represents an ongoing polemic centered around sacred space, which caused further divides among Sunnis and Shi`is during the medieval period.

Shi`i traditions claimed that `Ali's grave was hidden in a quiet plateau outside of Kufa that later became known as Najaf, and they maintain that its location was known to descendants of `Ali. Opposing this claim, Sunni scholars asserted that `Ali was not buried in Najaf and proposed numerous other possible locations for his grave. This chapter investigates this micro-debate and explores possible motives behind the arguments of early Muslim historians, geographers, and theologians between the ninth and fourteenth centuries. By tracing this micro-debate over give centuries, I have been able to form a sense of how narratives are transformed with time through the medium of teacher-student transmission and sectarian tensions. In this chapter, I ask: what was at stake in emplacing `Ali's grave and how does locating a place contribute to its potential to hold power, both

[343] Ibn Battuta, *Rihlah*, Vol. I (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Tijariyah al-Kubra, 1958), 109-110.

in the spiritual and socio-political context? What does this say about the importance of place, and ways in which medieval Muslims perceived of and engaged in discourse about the sacred? How do scholarly conceptualizations of sacred space reflect their understanding of emplaced narratives?

The texts considered in this chapter are all concerned with the location of `Ali's burial and the implications of theories of his multiple burial locations as well as later rediscovery of the grave. The establishment of Najaf as an urban settlement is intimately connected to and reliant on the location of `Ali's tomb. Therefore, the story of `Ali's burial lends weight to the sacred nature of the entire city of Najaf. Formerly an empty plateau, Najaf might not have become known without the legendary discovery of `Ali's grave by Harun al-Rashid.

Although some scholars were staunch Sunnis or Shi`is, sectarian identity was certainly more fluid in the medieval period than it is today, and a number of the scholars mentioned in the chapter appear to have multiple affiliations or sympathies and can be considered to have been hybrid scholars. These scholars appeared to have blended Sunni and Shi`i beliefs and practices and their writing exhibited loyalty to the Ahl al-Bayt and the `Alids.[344] Mohammad Masad has argued that "being a member of a Sunni school of thought apparently didn't exclude the appreciation, contemplation or full embrace of ideas and influences that might have been construed as Shi'i in nature or sympathy."[345] Scholars were not only familiar with each other's sources but also, in many cases, studied and taught in the same intellectual circles. Despite the existence of this fluidity between

[344] Masad, "Medieval Islamic Apocalyptic Tradition," 159.

[345] Ibid.,160.

religious perspectives, I contend that in most cases, scholars' perceptions of `Ali's grave and their opinions of its location is based on their sectarian identity or `Alid sympathies.

By tracing the narratives written about the grave and following its literary transformation into a shrine and pilgrimage destination, one can ascertain that the location of `Ali's grave was hotly contested by Sunnis and Shi`is since at least the ninth century.[346] This contestation took place within large works of history, geography, and biography, and could be considered a micro-debate that took place amongside numerous other contestations between Sunni and Shi`i scholars concerning the nature of the Imamate, `Ali's rightful succession to the Prophet Muhammad, and the authenticity of hadiths based on their transmitters.

Rumors about the location of `Ali's grave were rampant, and both sides attempted to claim knowledge of his burial location based on their sources. When it came to the life and death of `Ali, Sunni and Shi`i scholars drew upon different scholarly lineages and chains of transmission of hadith, which could explain their contrasting accounts of the grave. Strict Sunni scholars rejected some of the sources that came through the `Alids, while Shi`is and Sunnis with `Alid sympathies drew upon the rich narrations from the twelve Imams and their disciples. The very existence of `Ali's shrine has been questioned throughout the centuries and Sunni scholars conjectured about various locations of `Ali's grave. There was a lot at stake in determining the location of `Ali's grave, reflecting the power that resides in shrines that are said to contain the bodies of important religious figures. As seen in chapter one, corpses of central figures held great power, and opposing groups of scholars would attempt to claim them for their own.

[346] As mentioned in the introduction, this polemical debate has actually lasted from the eighth century until the modern period, although I do not engage texts from after the fourteenth century.

Due to the Shi`i doctrine of *taqiyya*, or dissimulation and concealment, which was prevalent as a means for protecting one's life and religion, it is quite possible that it was Shi`is themselves who spread numerous accounts of `Ali's burial to confuse his enemies about the whereabouts of his body. *Taqiyya* was practiced widely by Shi`is in the formative period, especially while the Imams were still alive and active in their communities, but threatened by persecution under the Umayyads and `Abbasids.[347] Many Shi`is were executed and tortured under the Umayyad caliphs due to their beliefs and lived under hostile conditions. Although Sunnis would have viewed the multiple narratives as evidence that the accounts were unreliable, Shi`is would have viewed them as confirmation that the grave had been concealed for protection. To protect their interests, Imams and their followers kept the location of `Ali's grave secret for almost two centuries until it was alleged to have been miraculously re-discovered by the `Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid and turned into a place of pilgrimage.

Based on polemical writings as well as extant Shi`i narratives that confirm the veracity of the grave, one can infer that there was much power in emplacing `Ali's grave. For Traditionist Shi`i scholars, to claim knowledge of `Ali's grave was to hold up the authority of the Imams who verified his grave through their visits. To deny the grave in Najaf was to deny the authority and status of the Imams and the legitimacy of Shi`i doctrine. The grave-turned-shrine of `Ali is located at the geographic and spiritual center of the sacred landscape of Najaf. The variance in the narrative traditions of Muslim scholars around the historical figure of `Ali ibn Abi Talib constitutes the narrativization of the shrine. The discourse of place, as set forth by Zayde Antrim, posits that medieval

[347] Maria Dakake, "The Practical and Doctrinal Significance of Secrecy in Shi`ite Islam," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74.2 (2006): 326.

scholars' writings show that they were deeply concerned with land and territory, "Land mattered in these texts; it stimulated the geographical imagination and acted as a powerful vehicle for articulating desire, claiming authority, and establishing belonging."[348] Medieval Muslims scholars were clearly emphasizing their claim to sacred space, the most prized type of space in the medieval Islamicate world.

The contestation between Sunni and Shi`i scholars illustrates the complex and often haphazard process of place-making and the claim for orthodoxy and authority in Islam. The shrine was a sacred and potent space for Shi`i scholars that needed to be defended and lauded to maintain its rhetorical power and centrality on their religious landscape. According to Sunni scholars, the shrine had little meaning and was merely an empty space that existed but had no value or sanctity. In fact, Najaf was not only empty of meaning, but Shi`i's elevation of the grave and city helped them to refute Shi`i beliefs and to accentuate their erroneous doctrines and sources. Sunni scholars saw Najaf and its popularity as a threat to Sunni orthodoxy and rejected the shrine's authenticity in order to maintain the status quo of orthodox Sunni domination in Iraq. Considering the plethora of literature that Sunnis devoted to this topic, it appears that they considered the shrine to be a threat to the collective identity of Sunni orthodoxy. The presence of Shi`i-dominated shrines in places such as Najaf and Karbala could be seen as competition for Sunni claims to authority and sacred sites. This contestation around the constructed site of `Ali's shrine and Najaf reveals a "rhetorical battle" that can offer insight into medieval Muslim differing views of sacred space.[349]

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[348] Antrim, *Routes and Realms,* 1.

[349] For more on the concept of a "rhetorical battle," see Bremer, "Sacred Spaces and Tourist Places," 27.

Claims on space and place are intricately connected to identity, and in this context in particular, sectarian identity. Shi`i scholars considered `Ali's shrine to be a sacred place that acted as a nexus of Shi`i piety and devotion. The contestation around `Ali's shrine had never been about `Ali's legitimacy, since all Muslims agreed that `Ali was a figure of religious authority; rather, it was about control of the grave and the interpretation and elaboration of its history and memory. This sectarian dispute around the shrine reveals how sacred space could hold different meanings for people according to their sectarian identity in medieval Islam.

Sacred spaces held different meanings and offered different experiences to people depending on their backgrounds. Nancy Khalek has coined the term *emplaced narratives* to refer to literary genres that outline the development around Islamic places and trace the narrativization of historical identity through dynamic interaction of space and people.[350] To further describe this phenomenon, Khalek also coined the term *iconic texts* to denote texts that are full of descriptive and evocative prose and "along with their primary role as geographical, topographical, historical, or biographical, they have the additional dimension of being narratives of place."[351] In the context of early Islamic Najaf, it is possible to textualize the space of `Ali's shrine by tracing the development of textual narratives about the space. In these texts, we can witness the narrativization of space and place and parse the historical process of space formation, and subsequently, the formative development of `Ali's shrine. These iconic texts offer insight into how medieval Muslim

[350] As proposed by Khalek in *Damascus.*

[351] Ibid., 135.

scholars imagined sacred place and remembered Islamic history.[352] While emplaced narratives can help us understand the genealogy of place, iconic texts shed light on how place was constructed and most importantly, how Muslims emplaced meaning within a sacred site.[353]

In studies of Najaf, there has been little focus in Western scholarship on the formative period of history despite the large number of Arabic-language texts from the early Islamic centuries. Numerous contemporary Arab and Persian scholars have written histories of Najaf and compiled encyclopedias of the city and the shrines of the Imams, although they are primarily written from a Shi`i confessional perspective and seek to prove the authenticity of `Ali's grave based on narratives that go back to the Imams and early Shi`i scholars. These studies seek to corroborate the claims of their predecessors, continuing the debates from their medieval predecessors to prove their contemporary Sunni adversaries wrong.[354] That this ancient debate continues until today is interesting in and of itself and deserves further study.

Contesting the Origins of Najaf's History

The origins of Najaf are ambiguous and contested. This problem can be attributed

[352] Ibid.,139.

[353] It is challenging to reconstruct a detailed physical layout of `Ali's shrine as scholars have yet to locate illustrations or architectural plans from before the Ottoman and Safavid eras. There are numerous literary descriptions, but they provide only a brief description of the most prominent aspects of the shrines. The early medieval period leaves little in the way of *awqaf* (religious endowments) documents or pilgrimage narratives, and so we have to depend on the writings of the elite–religious scholars, geographers, and historians–to narrate the shrine's architectural history.

[354] For example, Ja'far Khalīlī, *Mawsū'at al-'atabāt al-muqaddasah* (Baghdād: Dār al-Ta'āruf, 1965); Ja`far Dujayli and `Abd Allah Khaqani, *Mawsu`at al-Najaf al-Ashraf* (Bayrut: Dar al-Adwa, 1993); Muhamamd Fakhr al-Din, *Tarikh al-Najaf: hatta nihayat al-`asr al-`Abbasi* (Beirut: Dar al-Rafidayn, 2005); Khalid Sindawi, "The Grave of 'Ali b. Abi Talib: Different Views About its Specific Location and the Locations of the Graves of Some Other Prophets Buried in it," *International Journal of Shi'i Studies* 1, no. 2 (2003): 37–74.

partly to the lack of material evidence, such as ruins of older religious structures in Najaf or epigraphs on gravestones. In view of the limitations in accessing reliable data about historical sites in Najaf, this project focuses on unpacking the complicated historiography of scholars who wrote and contested Najaf's history over the span of five centuries.[355] The history of Najaf begins not with Najaf, but rather with the ancient cities of al-Hira and Kufa. Along the banks of the Euphrates River a few miles from Najaf lies the city of Kufa, which was founded by the conquering Muslim army in 638 as a garrison city next to and on the ruins of the legendary Christian city of al-Hira.[356] Al-Hira had been one of the great centers of Christianity and monasticism in pre-Islamic Lakhmid Iraq. The city was abandoned, or built over, after the establishment of Kufa, although some Muslim historians, such as tenth century al-Masu`di, referred to both al-Hira and Kufa as the same place with different names. Al-Hira did not completely disappear from historical and geographical literature until after the tenth century although it retained a symbolic literary place in Arabic poetry.[357] Before Najaf became the burial place of `Ali, Muslim historians narrate that it had originally been a quiet area that was home to Christian monasteries, Christian monastics who lived in cave retreats, and small tribal-based settlements.[358]

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[355] Owing to the inability of Western archaeologists to access sites in Iraq for decades, we have few records about the thousands of archeological sites in Iraq including that of Najaf and the surrounding area. While there are Iraqi archaeologists who have been working diligently to excavate ruins across their country, they are up against countless obstacles, including: political corruption, looting and theft of ancient sites, violence, lack of proper equipment and up-to-date training, lack of regard for antiquities by government officials and locals, and haphazard urban development.

[356] Al-Hira was ruled by the Lakhmid dynasty (as a vassal of the Persian Sassanian Empire) during the fifth and sixth centuries

[357] JFiey, *Assyrie chretienne*, 205.

[358] See al-Ṭurayḥii, *al-Diyārāt.*

Due to the conflicting historical narratives, it is impossible to provide a single account of Najaf's early history. Therefore, a more interesting project is to compare and contrast these conflicting narratives in an attempt to analyze the historical memory and imagination of scholars in light of their sectarian affiliations. This issue is particularly contentious among scholars surveyed in my study despite the fact that the very same scholars often shared similar views on theological, hermeneutical, and legal issues.[359] I engage with different genres of literature to trace the ongoing debate over the location of `Ali's grave. Specifically, I examine the genres of history and geography in one group and biographical writings in the other. By categorizing the literature around this debate by literary genre, one can elucidate methods and approaches used by scholars based on their scholarly background. At the same time, this categorization must be considered to be loosely set as many of the works referred to here transcend a single genre, often combining history, geography biography, and hagiography.

Shi`i sources all conclude that `Ali was buried in Najaf. They narrated that after he died several days following the fatal attack by the Kharijite Ibn Muljam in the Kufa Mosque, `Ali's sons al-Hasan and al-Husayn tied his corpse to his camel in the dead of the night. The camel wandered until it stopped at the location of his present-day grave in Najaf, which was then called al-Ghari. Slight variances of the story iterate that al-Hasan and al-Husayn carried `Ali's body on a camel and chose to bury him in the quiet spot in a place called *al-Ghari*. After his burial, *al-Ghari* also became known as *Mashhad `Ali*, among its numerous names, and later became known as *al-Najaf al-Ashraf* (The Most

[359] See Tariq al-Jamil's forthcoming book, *Power and Knowledge in Medieval Islam: Shi'i and Sunni Encounters in Baghdad* and the 2013 UNC religious studies dissertation of Tehseen Thaver. Both studies deal with the problem of categorizing scholars in medieval Baghdad by the sectarian affiliation due to the cross-fertilization of ideas and shared intellectual communities.

Honorable Najaf). While the sources started out with the same basic premise of al-Hasan and al-Husayn being given the responsibility of washing `Ali's body and burying him, Shi`i scholars always agreed that `Ali's body was definitively buried in al-Ghari while Sunni scholars speculated about an array of possibilities where `Ali's body might have been buried.

According to most Shi`i narratives, the origins of the town of Najaf begin with the assassination of `Ali in Kufa in 661. Although `Ali's grave was not known to the general public, Shi`i hadiths narrate that many of the Imams visited his grave over the years to perform pilgrimage and pay their respects to their forefather. The grave was hidden from everyone but the Imams and their relatives and companions until the `Abbasids defeated the Umayyads and granted more freedom to the `Alids.[360] From the tenth century, historians began to mention Najaf by its various names as an established city and place of pilgrimage.

Devout Shi`is base their beliefs about `Ali's grave on the traditions from the Imams, leaving little doubt in their minds that `Ali is buried in the very place where the present-day tomb lies in modern-day Najaf. Hadiths that originate with the second and third Imams al-Husayn and al-Hasan assert the location of `Ali's grave. When al-Husayn was asked about the location of `Ali's grave, he stated that, "We left in the middle of the night from the Ash`ath Mosque and went to the back [of Kufa] to al-Ghariyyayn and we buried him there."[361] The fourth Imam Zayn al-`Abidin ibn al-Husayn was also said to have visited `Ali's grave, and his son Muhamamd al-Baqir reported,

[360] Fakhr al-Din, *Tarikh al-Najaf*, 186.

[361] Muhamad Baqir Majlisi, *BIhar Al-Anwar Al-Jami`ah Li-Durar Akhbar Al-A'imma Al-Athar* (Beirut: Dar al-ta`ruf lil-matbu`at, 2001), 240.

> My father, `Ali ibn al-Husayn, visited the Prince of the Believers in Majaz, which is next to Kufa, he stood at the grave and wept and said, "Peace be upon you, Prince of the Believers, peace be upon you the trustworthy one of God on his Earth, the God's proof to His servants. You struggled a struggle of truth in the path of God, you carried out his book and you followed his Prophet for years until he called you to His side."[362]

Out of fear that the Umayyads would catch him visiting the grave, Zayn al-`Abidin would visit `Ali's grave alone and would be careful that no one spotted the location of the grave.[363] Ibn Tawus also alleged that the fifth Imam Muhammad al-Baqir visited `Ali's grave, although there is no extant narrative, except that of al-`Abidin. Other reputable narrators mentioned in *Farhat al-Ghari* who visited the grave included Zayd ibn `Ali ibn al-Husayn, the grandson of al-Husayn, who brought a friend to visit the grave while spending time in Kufa before leading a rebellion against the Umayyads. Upon visiting the grave, he stated that it was "a garden (*rawda*) from one of the gardens of Paradise."[364]

While there are a number of chains of transmission from earlier Imams, there are numerous and strong chains of transmission from Ja`far al-Sadiq in the eighth century regarding his numerous visits to al-Ghari. One scholar reasons that al-Sadiq was able to visit the grave openly as he lived during the decline of the Umayyad dynasty and at the beginning of the `Abbasid revolution, when the rulers were involved in battles for power and had little time to regulate `Alid movements. Especially under the rule of the first `Abbasid caliph Abu al-`Abbas al-Saffah (d. 754), the `Alids experienced a time of greater freedom and tolerance.[365] Al-Sadiq is said to have visited `Ali's grave in present-

[362] Ibn Tawus, *Farhat al-Ghari*, 30-31.

[363] Ibid., 33.

[364] Ibid., 96.

[365] Fakhr al-Din, *Tarikh al-Najaf,* 201.

day Najaf and it is possible that he even lived for some time in neighboring al-Hira.[366] Shi`is frequently refer to the large number of early traditions about al-Sadiq's pilgrimage to the grave of `Ali to prove the authenticity of the location. Safwan al-Jamal, one of al-Sadiq's companions, narrates that al-Sadiq gave him specific directions on how to locate `Ali's grave from Kufa.[367] Another narration describes al-Sadiq's visit to the grave during the time of the caliph Abu Ja`far al-Mansur,

> It was narrated, "When he reached al-Ghari (Najaf) … then he walked to the side of the present grave. With his blessed hand, he hit the tombstone and then withdrew it quickly and then smelled its scent. The he cried out until I thought the world would split. When he came to, he said, "I swear by God, here is the tomb (mashhad) of the Prince of Believers (Ali)" … I said, "O son of the Prophet of God, what objection is there for the tombs of the righteous of the Ahl al-Bayt to be known?" He said, "This is due to fear that Bani Marwan [the Umayyads] and the Kharijites might attempt to harm it."

Al-Sadiq was aware of the rumors that were propagated in Sunni sources around the numerous locations of `Ali's grave, and he offered the explanation that `Ali had asked al-Hasan and al-Husayn to prepare four separate graves for him–including inside the Kufa Mosque, at al-Rahba, at al-Ghari, and at the home of Ibn Habira–so that his enemies could not find his body.[368] In light of the numerous narratives of al-Sadiq describing the location of the grave to his friends and companions, it is clear that he wanted to ensure that the grave was kept safe and accessible only to those who would properly respect it. Moreover, for Shi`is, to deny the claim of the sixth Imam in the Shi`i tradition is to deny the Prophet and his God, thus al-Sadiq's narrations were seen as factual evidence that directly pointed to the location of `Ali's grave.

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[366] Ibid., 203.

[367] Ibn Qulaway*, Kamil al-Ziyarat*, 35.

[368] Ibn Tawus, *Farhat al-Ghari*, 23.

Later Imams after al-Sadiq also report having visited `Ali's grave and made statements to verify the authenticity of the grave. Musa al-Kazim, al-Sadiq's son, wrote to a friend that he visited `Ali's grave in al-Ghari.[369] Al-Kazim's son `Ali al-Rida is reported to have commanded his friends to visit `Ali's grave at al-Ghariyyayn, at the back of Kufa.[370] Reports also claim that the Imams Muhammad al-Jawad, `Ali al-Hadi, and al-Hasan al-Askari also visited the grave and verified its location.[371] As knowledge of `Ali's grave was said to have been kept secret due to the necessity of *taqiyya* until al-Rashid's legendary rediscovery of it in the late eighth century, it was important that knowledge of the grave was preserved among `Ali's descendants. Therefore it was important for Shi`i scholars to be able to trace the transmissions from all of the Imams who visited `Ali's grave and therefore could lend their authority to knowledge of the grave's location.

Locating `Ali's Grave in Geographical and Historical Writings

Since the assassination of `Ali, Shi`is and some hybrid Sunni scholars have held the belief that `Ali was buried in Najaf, although they kept this knowledge secret for nearly two centuries due to fear of the Sunni-dominated government. Starting from as early as the ninth century, scholars began to discuss locations of `Ali's grave. Numerous Shi`i scholars, as well as Sunnis with Shi`i sympathies or crypto-Shi`is and Mu`tazilis, also affirmed `Ali burial site in Najaf. Despite Shi`i assertions and ample evidence for `Ali's grave, Sunni scholars disregarded their claims. Simply put, `Ali's grave was not on Sunnis' cognitive maps. Sunnis could not claim knowledge of a specific well-known

[369] Ibid., 86.

[370] Ibid., 88.

[371] Ibid., 94.

grave of `Ali, but tried their best to propose locations anywhere but Najaf in order to discount Shi`i claims to the grave. Najaf existed as a central sacred site in the Shi`i cognitive map and while it existed on the Sunni one, it was a marginal site that was seen as a threat to Sunni hegemony.

The work of geographers and historians offer a perspective on `Ali's grave that differs from that of theologians. Medieval geographers were concerned with mapping out large regions and cataloguing every town and city in a region. In their works, they listed natural and manmade landmarks and features. Many of the geographers were patronized by rulers who needed information about the lands and people under their authority for economic and military reasons and it is logical to assume that their work reflects the concerns and views of their patrons. The constantly growing Islamic empire became unwieldy to rule without specific records that offered insight into its lands. As early as the Umayyad Empire, there are extant texts written under the rule of Umar `Abdul `Aziz who asked the governor of Andalusia to send him a description of the territory. It was during the `Abbasid period when geographical literature took off and flourished. The rulers were concerned with creating maps of their territories. Geographers were influenced by Greek and Indian writings and translated them into Arabic; they were especially interested in astronomy and geodesy.[372] Scholars who were engaged in geography were sometimes armchair writers who based their writings on the workings of other scholars and narrations from travelers to compose descriptions of lands. Eventually geographical writings entered into the realm of literature and literary authors began to use their works to create works for pleasure and education. Out of this genre came the more

[372] J.F.P. Hopkins, "Geographical and Navigational Literature," in *Religion, Learning, and Science in the 'Abbasid Period*, 302.

specific genre of human geography that included descriptions of both the lands and its inhabitants to provide an edifying read for the literate interested in faraway lands.[373] In this way, the genres of historical and geographical writing often blend together and can be same in the same work.

Historical writings emerged out of collections of biographies and narratives of battles (*maghazi*) in early Islam. Hadiths were an important source for early historians, who were often hadith scholars as well, and they employed what is known as the traditionist method. Historians often relied on sources from within their own social-political groups and geographic regions, which explains why there are numerous discrepancies between writings about the same event. Historical texts, such as *akhbar* (reports), were not arranged in any specific chronological or other order and were common during the Umayyad and early `Abbasid eras.[374] The earliest works that were centered on a specific event or life of a ruler came in the form of Abu Yusuf's (d. 798) *Kitab al-kharaj* (*The Book of Taxation*) of during the eighth century and Wathima ibn Musa's (d. 851/2) *Kitab al-ridda* (*The Book of Apostates*) in the ninth century.[375] Almost all of the early writers were Arabs, specifically Iraqis, which might account for their interest in `Ali's grave. The important genre of biography emerged in the ninth century in works such as *Tabaqat* of Ibn Sa`d (d. 845). This genre provided an overview of the lives of illustrious figures from the first two centuries of Islam.[376] According to Claude

[373] Ibid., 308.

[374] Claude Cahen, "History and Historians," in *Religion, Learning, and Science in the ``Abbasid Period*, 190.

[375] Ibid., 192.

[376] Ibid., 194.

Cahen, Umayyad, `Abbasid, and Shi`i scholars relied on much the same sources of evidence, although their sources diverged with time and became more polemical and began to cater to readers from specific sectarian backgrounds.[377]

Patronized by the `Abbasids, the renowned Sunni historian al-Tabari's (d. 923) *Tarikh al-rasul wa-l-muluk* (*History of the Prophets and Kings*) set the stage for all future historical works and remained an authoritative work for centuries. Subsequent historians often picked up where al-Tabari ended his work and continued to follow the traditionist method.[378] Soon after al-Tabari came al-Mas`udi (d. 956), who was a voracious traveler and composed three prominent works of Islamic history that also included geographical sections based on his own travels. Al-Mas`udi uses many of the same sources as al-Tabari and he and many of his contemporaries wrote histories of the caliphs and viziers. Some, such as al-Isfahani, attempted to write universal histories that told the stories of people from a broad range of classes and backgrounds.[379] Of relevance to this study are histories of specific cities that emerged in the tenth century in addition to *fada'il* (merits) literature that iterated the merits of particular cities, including Najaf.

Historical writings were generally written in a clear and compact language, and historians were most often funded by local rulers or the caliph.[380] Most historians focused their writings on history directly connected to their own sectarian and ethnic identity and locale, which explains why the majority of scholars who wrote about Najaf were Iraqi, as

[377] Ibid., 196.

[378] Ibid., 201.

[379] Ibid., 204-5.

[380] Ibid., 206

well as some Persians.[381] Historians usually worked with primary source materials they obtained through copyists or accessed at the library of a member of the elite, as well as oral accounts they collected. They often depended heavily on the work and sources of their predecessors and it is very common to find verbatim sentences and quotations from earlier works without attribution. They would also rewrite earlier works and merely add notes and additional accounts to earlier texts.[382]

The earliest piece of writing that can be categorized as geographical writing is wrote *Kitab al-masalik wa-1-mamalik* (*The Book of Routes and Realms*) composed by Ibn Khurradadhbih (d. circa 885), who was active during the rule of al-Mu`tamid (reigned 870-92).[383] *Kitab al-masalik* was primarily concerned with listing regions and assessing their tax potential. Many geographers during the `Abbasid period were of Persian origin although they were primarily based in Baghdad, the capital of the Islamic empire. Being at the center of the Islamic empire, Baghdad and Iraq took the center stage in works on geography and geographers considered it to be "in the middle of the world and the navel of the earth."[384] Not all geographical texts include mention of Najaf and none of the early ones mention the existence of al-Ghari. Instead they mention Kufa and occasionally the grave of `Ali.

By proceeding chronologically through prominent historians and geographers between the ninth and fourteenth centuries, it is possible to identity a general trend of opinions among scholars about their opinion of the location of `Ali's grave. Among

[381] Ibid., 207.

[382] Ibid., 208.

[383] Hopkins, "Geographical Literature," 301.

[384] Ibid., 310.

historians who debated the location of `Ali's grave, many of them were traditionists who also collected traditions from the Prophet and his Companions. One of the earliest Sunni traditionists who mentioned `Ali's grave in his writing was Ibn Qutayba (d. 889), a Persian judge, historian, and Sunni hadith scholar who grew up in Kufa and composed *Kitab al-ma`arif*, a history of early Islam. He proposed that al-Hasan buried `Ali in the Umayyad governor's palace in Kufa out of fear that the Kharijites might exhume his body and desecrate it. He then goes on to explain that after the pact between al-Hasan and Mu`awiya, al-Hasan transported `Ali's body to Medina and buried him near Fatima's grave.[385] By the mid- to late eighth century, we can see that several different versions of Ali's burial were in circulation among Sunni scholars, who may or may not have been able to access each other's work. At this point, they primarily held that `Ali had been buried in Kufa or Medina.

One important early scholar who exhibited support for the `Alids in his work but whose sectarian identity has been debated by scholars was geographer and historian Ahmad al-Yaqubi (d. circa 905). Al-Yaqubi was of Egyptian descent but was based in Baghdad and he composed *Kitab al-buldan* (*The Book of Nations*) and *Tarikh* (*History*). Many of his writings were based on findings from his own travels, and he often included historical background on places in addition to inventories of their attributes and landmarks. His ample inclusion of historical information would classify him both as a geographer and historian.[386] Al-Yaqubi's writings revealed his Shi`i sympathies and support of the `Alids, and he held that `Ali was buried in al-Ghari, as he wrote: "He [`Ali]

[385] Fakhr al-Din, *Tarikh al-Najaf,* 188.

[386] Hopkins, "Geographical Literature," 309; Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "al-Yaʿḳūbī," *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online).

was buried in Kufa, in a place called al-Ghari." While al-Yaqubi acknowledged that `Ali was buried in al-Ghari, the same name used for the area of `Ali's grave as by the Imams and their followers, it is clear that the exact location—or perhaps the extent of Kufa's territory—was a bit ambiguous, and this could have been part of the problem of locating his grave.[387] Al-Ghari, or Najaf, was located outside of the city of Kufa, but it is possible that the entire region was known as Kufa. Otherwise, this account could offer one explanation as to why scholars were not in agreement about `Ali's grave. Quite simply, they could have gotten the geography wrong, especially if they were basing their writings on historical accounts and not on their travels.

Al-Tabari was one the most prominent historians of his time and established the standards for Sunni traditionist historical writings. He repeated the accounts narrated by Ibn Sa`d and his views were echoed in the works of many of the scholars who came after him. Al-Tabari briefly mentioned the assassination of `Ali in his volume on the first civil war and his funeral led by al-Hasan and al-Husayn. In his seminal *Tarikh* (*History*), al-Tabari wrote, "He was buried in the governor's palace next to the grand mosque and then his grave disappeared."[388] While Ibn Sa`d proposed that `Ali was buried in the Kufa Mosque, al-Tabari believed he was buried in the governor's palace, which was located right next to the palace. Either way, he concurs with Ibn Sa`d that `Ali's grave was in central Kufa, although it would appear that by the tenth century, Sunni scholars did not acknowledge that `Ali's grave was known and therefore denied the legitimacy of his

[387] Ahmad al-Yaqubi, *Tarikh*, Vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1960), 212.

[388] Abu Ja`far Tabari, *The First Civil War*, trans by. G. R Hawting (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 222; Abu Ja`far Tabari, Vol 3, *Tarikh* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 2003), 151.

shrine in Najaf, which was beginning to develop into a popular pilgrimage destination at this time.

A number of scholars who wrote about `Ali's burial had ambiguous sectarian affiliations and/or sympathies, although their opinions on `Ali's burial reveal their use of Shi`i accounts of the event. Ibn A`tham al-Kufi (d. 926) was an `Abbasid historian and traditionist author of *Kitab al-futuh* (*The Book of Conquests*), which traced the history of early Islam. His sectarian affiliation was debated by scholars, some of whom claimed he was Shi`i and other others who insisted he was a Shafi`i Sunni. In *al-Futuh*, he wrote, "[`Ali] was buried in the middle of the night in a place called al-Ghari."[389] Ibn A`tham did not indicate where al-Ghari was, but it is clear that he drew upon Shi`i accounts to compose his account of `Ali's burial—although he also mentioned a Sunni variant of the event, concluding that he heard some people say that "`Ali was buried in a place between his house and the Mosque" in Kufa.[390] It would appear that Ibn A`tham concurred with the Shi`i account of `Ali's burial and that he merely included the Sunni account, although he did not seem to be convinced; he relates that he heard people mentioning this version, but he strongly stated his view of `Ali's burial being in al-Ghari. Another scholar whose sectarian identity is debated by scholars—although much of his work exhibits Shi`i sympathies—was an adventurous traveller who was first and foremost a historian who also included writings on geography in his work.[391] Al-Mas`udi (d. 956), an eminent historian and extensive traveler, confirmed that `Ali was buried in al-Ghari, several miles

[389] Ahmad Ibn A`tham al-Kufi, Vol. 3, *Kitab al-Futuh* (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-ilmiyya, 1986), 153.

[390] Ibid., 282.

[391] See Ch. Pellat, "Al-Mas`udi," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, (Brill Online), Pellat mentions that Al-Mas`udi was born in Baghdad to a Kufan family, Shi`i scholars considered him to be an Imam Shi`i while Sunni scholars differ over whether he is Mutazilite or Shi`i; Hopkins, "Geographical Literature," 315.

from Kufa, which would indicate that in this context, he favored Shi`i over Sunni sources.

The earliest and one of the most reliable hadith transmitters was Muhammad ibn Ya`qub al-Kulayni (d. 940-1), a Persian scholar from Ray who came out of the Qum traditionist school and eventually settled in Baghdad. He composed *Kitab al-kafi* (*The Sufficient Book*), one of four canonical collections of Shi`i Hadith.[392] Al-Kulayni's work only became popular when al-Shaykh al-Tusi (d. 1068) praised it and referred to it extensively in his work. An important traditionist, al-Kulayni stressed the miraculous and divine qualities of the Imams and provided the core hadiths from the Imams regarding their nature and the importance of visiting their graves.[393] Under a chapter on `Ali's birth and life, al-Kulayni briefly ended the section by describing `Ali's burial. Offering one of the oldest narrations, Al-Kulayni offered up a simple explanation, stating that "When `Ali passed away, al-Hasan, al-Husayn, and two other men took his body outside of Kufa and walked left towards the elevated desert area until they came to al-Ghari, where they buried him, built a tomb, and then left."[394] Al-Kulayni's hadith collection was the source of most traditions used by later Shi`i scholars and provides the basis of Shi`i understandings of the life of the Imams, especially for traditionist scholars.

Contemporary to al-Isfahani was Ibn Hawqal (d. 969), an Ismaili Shi`i Upper Mesopotamian geographer and chronicler whose work shows he had sympathies for the

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[392] Wilfred Madelung, "al-Kulaynī (or al-Kulīnī), Abū Djaʿfar Muḥammad," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Brill Online.

[393] Howard, "Shi'i Theological Literature," 26.

[394] Muhammad Al-Kulayni, *Furu` Al-Kafi*, ed. Muhammad Shams al-Din, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-ta`aruf lul matbu`at, 1990), 530.

Fatimids.[395] Ibn Hawqal traveled widely and his book, *Masalik al-mamalik* (*Book on the Routes and Kingdoms*), shows he was also familiar with previous works in geography, drawing largely upon al-Istakhari's book by the same name.[396] In his book, Ibn Hawqal presented a typical Sunni perspective on the location of `Ali's grave although he also recognized that a local believed that the grave was outside of Kufa:

> The tomb of the Prince of Believer is in Kufa; it is said that he was buried in the corner of the [Kufa] Mosque out of fear from Umayyads. In this location, [a man] claims that [`Ali's] grave is located where his grave appeared, two farsangs [equivalent to around six miles] away from Kufa.[397]

Ibn Hawqal did not refer to either al-Ghari or Najaf in his text, rather he refers to it as the "place" (*al-makan*) where `Ali is buried and presented opposing perspectives on `Ali's burial location.

As indicated in the introductory chapter, Najaf was no more than a small settlement at this time and was not significant enough for Ibn Hawqal to refer to it as a town next to Kufa. Ibn Hawqal mentioned `Ali's shrine as the only landmark in the area around Kufa worth mentioning. If one examines the extant visual evidence of a geographer's perception of medieval Najaf, we can get an idea of which towns and cities were prominent in medieval Iraq. A map of Iraq drawn by Ibn Hawqal depicts Iraq as a circular land cut in parts by numerous rivers and marshlands. Najaf would have consisted of a small settlement with a tomb structure at the time and does not appear on Ibn Hawqal's map. Rather, while most town names appear in small print, Kufa dominates the

[395] Miquel, A.. "Ibn Ḥawḳal." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Brill Online, 2014.

[396] J.F.P. Hopkins, "Geographical Literature," 314.

[397] Muhammad Ibn Hawqal, *Kitab surat al-ard* (Beirut: Dar maktabat al-haya, 1992), 240.

landscape and its wording covers a large geographical region.

Ibn Hawqal, himself an Isma`ili Shi`i, does not highlight religious sites in Iraq and instead focuses on geographical features, such as land and water and the most important towns in Iraq in terms of political influence.[398] Ibn Hawqal's depiction of Iraq could indicate that Kufa referred to both the garrison city and the greater region around the city. In his accompanying written description of Kufa, Ibn Hawqal also focused more on the buildings, geographical landmarks, and people of Kufa than the religious sites. Furthermore, he lists several cities near Kufa, including al-Hira, which was almost completely abandoned by this time.[399] His inclusion of the Sunni account as well as the Shi`i one indicates that he might have recorded both versions that were narrated to him during his stay in Kufa. In any case, Ibn Hawqal's testimony indicates that Najaf was not a significant settlement at that time.

Early Sunni scholars who included an account of `Ali's burial stated the possible locations for the grave. With the rise of Sunni orthodoxy in the tenth century and building Sunni-Shi`i tensions, we see hostile rhetoric spread against Shi`is in the eleventh century. Shi`is concurrently developed their own form of orthodoxy and shrines of the Imams and their descendants attracted large numbers of pilgrims and patrons. As the shrines became prominent sacred spaces and Sunnis also visited them, it is possible that Sunni scholars saw this as a threat and saw the need to attack the authenticity of Najaf in order to discourage Sunnis from visiting `Ali's grave.

Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (d. 1071), wrote *Tarikh Baghdad* (*The History of*

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[398] Helaine Selin, *Encyclopaedia of the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine in Non-Western Cultures* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1997), 419.

[399] Ibn Hawqal, *Opus Geographicum*, 239.

Baghdad), and was a Shafi`i `Ashari traditionist and a historian; he traveled widely to collect hadiths; he even spent some time in Kufa. Al-Baghdadi's writing bears animosity towards a number of religious groups, including the Hanbalis and Shi`is; in fact, he was accused by later Sunni scholars of being a zealot and there are numerous works directed against the polemical nature of his writings. The time during which al-Baghdadi lived was fraught with turmoil; the `Abbasid caliphs were engaged in anti-Shi`i struggles and also had to contend with the Seljuk takeover of the capital.[400] In his work, al-Baghdadi referred to narrations from previous historians and resolutely denied the possibility of `Ali's shrine being located in Najaf, and writes,

> Out of ignorance of the Shi`is, a lot of people believe that [`Ali's] tomb is in Mashhad al-Najaf, but there is no evidence or origin for this. It is said that the grave contains the body of Mughira ibn Shu`ba … this is the person that they [Shi`is] venerate in Najaf, but they should be stoning him. This is the grave of Mughira ibn Shu`ba (d. circa 668-71).[401]

Mughira ibn Shu`ba was a servant of the Umayyads, a known adulterer, and enemy of the `Alids and entire Shi`i community; it would appear that al-Baghdadi chose one of the most hated personalities of Kufa to taunt the Shi`is about their claims to `Ali's grave. Instead of containing the tomb of venerated `Ali, the tomb contained his enemy; in this way, al-Baghdadi sought to delegitimize and insult the entire city of Najaf.[402]

At another point in his book, al-Baghdadi made a contrasting claim about `Ali's grave, stating, "He was buried in Kufa at the governor's palace or in al-Rahba, or in al-Baqi`a (Medina) with Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet, or Imam al-Hasan carried him

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[400] R. Sellheim, "Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. (Brill Online).

[401] Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Tarikh Baghdad*, Vol. I (Beirut: Dar al-kitab al-`arabi, 1966), 138.

[402] H. Lammens, "al-Mughira ibn Shu'ba," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online).

and buried him in Thawiya."[403] Thawiya was an area in between Najaf and Kufa where Mughira ibn Shu`ba was buried. One of the reasons al-Baghdadi showed such extreme antipathy towards the Shi`is in his work is because he lived during an era that witnessed much violence and antagonism between Sunnis and Shi`is on the political front; in fact he escaped from an execution ordered by the Fatimid governor of Damascus after getting into trouble with local Shi`is.[404] Al-Baghdadi's extreme views are reflected in the works of later scholars, such as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathir, who quoted and transmitted similar claims for many generations.

Abi Abdullah Al-Idrisi (d. 1165/6), the renowned twelfth century geographer and traveler, was presumably a Zaydi Shi`i based on his descendance from the North African Idrisid dynasty. Al-Idrisi was based in Sicily and was patronized by the Christian King Roger of Sicily and was considered to be a renegade by many Muslims due to his association with the Christian king.[405] In *Nuzhat al-mushtaq fi ikhtiraq al-afaq* (*A Diversion for the Man Longing to Travel to Far-Off Places*), which was also known as the *Book of Roger*, al-Idrisi provided a different perspective on `Ali's shrine, and apart from confirming its location outside of Kufa, he also offered a detailed description of the structure:

> Six miles from Kufa is a large dome with high walls and a locked door. The whole place is covered with fancy curtains and the floors are covered with Samanid [Persian] carpets and it was noted that the grave of `Ali ibn Abi Talib is located inside. Around the dome are buried relatives of `Alids. This dome was

[403] Al-Baghdadi, *Tarikh*, 417.

[404] Sellheim, "Al-Baghdadi."

[405] G. Oman, "al-Idrīsī." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. (Brill Online)

> built by Abu al-Hayja `Abdullah Ibn Hamdan during the `Abbasid dynasty, and before, during the Umayyad times, it was hidden for fear of desecration.[406]

In contrast to other scholars, al-Idrisi either visited Najaf in person or else received an account directly from someone who had been there. By this time, Najaf was a thriving pilgrimage site and obviously was the object of lavish patronage by the elite. Because of the presence of the shrine, al-Idrisi did not see the need to mention contested accounts of Najaf and simply accepted the narrative.

Another Sunni scholar who propagated similar theories to that of al-Baghdadi about `Ali's graves includes Syrian historian Ibn `Asakir (d. 1175). Ibn `Asakir named several locations in Kufa and Medina, in addition to a stranger proposal of `Ali being buried in the church in Kufa.[407] Ibn `Asakir's work echoes that of previous scholars apart from his curious addition that `Ali might have been buried in a church. This proposal did not seem to be very common as it does not appear in any other texts examined in this chapter.

The prominent Hanbali theologian, traditionist, and historian Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1200) penned *al-Muntazam* (*The Organized Book*), which provided a comprehensive overview of the history of the `Abbasid caliphate.[408] In his book, Ibn al-Jawzi offered up a different account of `Ali's grave:

> Our shaykh Abu Bakr ibn `Abd al-Baqi informed us that he heard Abu al-Ghana'im al-Qawsi say, "He [`Ali] died in Kufa, and from among 313 Companions of the Prophet, none of them are known except for the grave of `Ali." Then Ja`far ibn Muhammad and Muhammad ibn `Ali ibn al-Husayn went

[406] Abi Abdullah Al-Idrisi, *Nuzhat al-mushtaq fi ikhtiraq al-afaq*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Maktabat al-thaqafa al-diniyya, 2002), 281-2.

[407] Ali ibn al-Hasan Ibn Asakir, *Tarjimat al-Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib min madinat Dimashq*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dar al-Ta'aruf lil-Matbu'at, 1975), 311-313.

[408] H. Laoust, "Ibn al-Djawzi" *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. (Brill Online).

> and visited the place where the Prince of Believers was buried but he could not find the grave.[409]

According to this version, `Ali's grave had been located in a well-known location but it had disappeared at a later time; this narration closely follows that of al-Tabari, although it adds more embellishment. Ibn al-Jawzi's grandson, Sibt Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1256), was also a noted Sunni historian and traditionist from the Hanafi school who was accused by some scholars of being a Shi`i.[410] In *Tadhkurat al-khawwas* (*Memoir of the Elite*), Sibt Ibn al-Jawzi appeared to corroborate Shi`i claims to `Ali's grave, writing, "He is on the plateau (al-Najaf) in the famous place where people perform pilgrimage."[411] The debate around Sibt Ibn al-Jawzi's sectarian identity is intriguing considering his extremely orthodox Hanbali grandfather, yet his recognition of Najaf reveals that it is very possible he held Shi`i sympathies or at least recognized the validity of Shi`i sources.

By the thirteenth century, `Ali's shrine was a popular pilgrimage destination and geographers could not help but acknowledge its place of prominence in Najaf. The Sunni traveler al-Harawi (d. 1215), who was considered by some to be a crypto-Shi`i, was an Iraqi who settled in Syria and acted as an advisor to the `Abbasid caliph al-Nasir li-Din Allah. He was a Sufi and scholar and catalogued his travels in *Kitab al-isharat ila ma`rifat al-ziyarat* (*Guide to Pilgrimage Places*). During his travels, he passed through Najaf and acknowledged the presence of `Ali's grave in the city.[412] Despite recognizing `Ali's grave in Najaf, in other sections of his book, he mentioned several other *mashhads*

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[409] Abdulrahman Ibn al-Jawzi, vol. 9, *al-Muntazim* (Baghdad: al-dar al-wataniyya, 1990), 189.

[410] Among the scholars who accused Sibt Ibn al-Jawzi of being a Shi`i were Ibn `Imad al-Hanbali in vol. 5, *Shadharat al-dhahab* (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-ilmiyya, 1998), 260.

[411] Sibt Ibn al-Jawzi, *Tizkarat al-khawas* (Najaf: Manshurat al-matba`ah al-haydariyah, 1964), 178-9.

[412] J. Sourdel-Thomine, "al-Harawi al-Mawsuli," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online).

in Syria and Egypt where `Ali was alleged to be buried based on visions that people had or miracles of `Ali that appeared and led people to build a shrine where they had occurred.[413] He also noted that Ibn Qutayba claimed `Ali was buried in the governor's palace in Kufa and that some believed `Ali was buried in a village outside of Balkh, but claimed both proposals were correct.[414] Yaqut al-Hamawi al-Baghdadi (d. 1229), an `Alid supporter, geographer, and author of *Mu`jam al-buldan* (*Dictionary of Nations*), wrote that "Najaf … is at the back of Kufa like a dam, it prevents the water from overflowing Kufa and its cemeteries. Close to this location is the grave of the Prince of Believers `Ali ibn Abi Talib."[415]

By the thirteenth century, Sunni scholars were aware of the dominating presence of `Ali's shrine in Najaf, although many still denied that it actually contained the body of `Ali. Ibn Jubayr (d. 1217), a prominent Sunni traveler and geographer from Islamic Spain passed through Kufa during his travels and mentioned `Ali's shrine in his journal. Despite the fact that he admitted that he did not have time to visit the shrine due to his one-night stay in Kufa, Ibn Jubayr voiced his doubt about `Ali's body being located in Najaf. Ibn Jubayr wrote that:

> The *mashhad* attributed to `Ali ibn Abi Talib, where his camel had kneeled down while carrying `Ali's body, according to what is remembered [by people]. It is said, 'Surely his grave is inside,' and only God know about the correctness of this [statement]. At this shrine, it was reported that there is a large structure.[416]

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[413] `Ali ibn Abi Bakr al-Harawi, *Kitab al-isharat ila ma`rifat al-ziyarat,* Ed. Janin Murielle (Damascus: The Catholic Publishing House, 1952), 44, 61, 71.

[414] Ali ibn Abi Bakr al-Harawi, *A lonely wayfarer's guide to pilgrimage: 'Alī ibn Abī Bakr al-Harawī's Kitāb al-ishārāt ilā ma'rifat al-ziyārāt*, trans. Josef W. Meri (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 2004), 198.

[415] Yaqut al-Hamawi, *Mu`jim al-buldan*, vol. 5 (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1957), 313.

[416] Muhammad ibn Ahmad Ibn Jubayr, *Rihlat Ibn Jubayr (The Travels of Ibn Jubayr)* (Beirut: Dar Beirut, 1984), 189.

The odd thing about Ibn Jubayr's report is that on the previous page, while describing his trip to Kufa, Ibn Jubayr noted that he visited Najaf, located at the back of Kufa; he described the area as a large, empty plateau and nothing else.[417] His description of Najaf matches that of other travelers and scholars, except for one thing: `Ali's shrine and the burgeoning city that would have existed around it during Ibn Jubayr's time was nowhere to be seen. It is possible that Ibn Jubayr was given incorrect information about the name of the plateau they passed by and that he did not actually view Najaf.

Another thirteenth century Sunni scholar also attested to the presence of `Ali's grave in Najaf. Ibn al-Athir (d. 1233), a noted Ayyubid and Zangid Sunni historian who hailed from Upper Mesopotamia, composed *Al-Kamil fi al-tarikh* (*The Complete History*), a comprehensive survey of early Islamic history. He relied heavily on al-Tabari and other Iraqi historians and offered a typical response regarding `Ali's grave: "When he was killed, he was buried in the [Kufa] Mosque, and it was also said, in the palace, and it was also said, other than that, the most correct [statement] is that the grave is in the place that people visit and seek blessings from."[418] It is fascinating that Ibn Athir first presented the typical Sunni opinions and then offered up an opinion that indicated he held that `Ali's grave was presumably located in Najaf, "the place that people visit and seek blessings from," and recognized that it was a sacred site, which was unusual due to his Sunni background.

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[417] Ibid., 187.

[418] `Ali Ibn al-Athir, *Al-kamil fi al-tarikh*, Ed. Abi al-Fada' Abdullah al-Qadi (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1987), 261.

The thirteenth century was an eventful and often violent century that witnessed numerous power takeovers of Baghdad, Sunni-Shi`i hostility, and the devastating Mongol invasions. In the face of such unrest and political and religious instability, Sunni and Shi`i scholars engaged in heightened polemical debates, including on the location of `Ali's grave, which took place within larger polemics around the Imamate and the political and spiritual authority of `Ali. A hybrid scholar who moved between Sunni and Shi`i circles and identified as a Mu`tazili Shafi`i Sunni, Ibn Abi al-Hadid (d. circa 1258) composed one of the most famous commentaries on *Sharh Nahj al-Balagha,* a collection of writings which is attributed to `Ali and contains his sermons, letters, Qur'anic exegesis and narrations and covers many literary genres. A scholar of Arabic grammar, literature, poetry, rhetoric, history, and theology, he was from a town outside of Baghdad and spent much of his life in the `Abbasid capital. Ibn Abi al-Hadid had a complicated identity as described by Laura Veccia Vaglieri: he was "Mu'tazili for the usul, but Shafi`i for the furu` (thus decidedly Sunni in this field), but objective in his attitude to the ahl al-bayt and explicit in his affirmation of the rights of `Ali (therefore Shi`i); or else it has been suggested that, at first a Mu`tazili, he later became a Shi`i; it has also been said that he was between the Shi`i and the Sunni parties (*bayn al-fariqayn*)."[419]

Ibn Abi al-Hadid expounded on the numerous theories about Ali's burial and his statements reveal not only his familiarity with the numerous theories propagated by Sunni scholars, but also his access to a large library of materials:

> When `Ali was killed, his sons wanted to hide his grave out of fear from the Umayyads … so on the night of his burial, they tricked people into believing that they had buried him in several different places. They spread rumors about different locations of his burial. They tied his coffin on top of a camel and the

[419] L. Veccia Vaglieri, "Ibn Abi 'l-Ḥadīd." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online).

> scents of camphor emitted from his body. They left Kufa in the middle of the night with their companions, and made people think they were carrying him to Medina to bury him next to the grave of Fatima, they also made people think they buried him in al-Hira, as well as in a number of mosques, including the entrance to the al-Imara Palace, as well as in the house of Abdullah Ibn Yazid al-Qasri … as well as in several other mosques in Kufa. People were blinded about the location of his grave, and only his sons and their closest companions knew the real location of his grave. Following `Ali's request, they left with his corpse before dawn on the 21st of Ramadan and buried him in Najaf, in the well-known place known as al-Ghari. The place was not known and many people spread various rumors about the location of his grave and they spread.[420]

Ibn Abi al-Hadid made an interesting proposition and his text not only shows his erudition, but also comprises an attempt by a medieval scholar to reconcile the narratives in his attempt to locate `Ali's grave. Ibn Abi al-Hadid makes a further argument against Sunni scholars who deny the legitimacy of `Ali's shrine, stating:

> The traditionists make claims about the disagreement over his [`Ali's] grave, that he was carried to Medina, or that he was buried in Rahba in the [Kufa] Mosque, or that he was buried at the gate of the governor's palace, or that he was carried by a camel and the Bedouins took his body. [All of these statements] are invalid and do not contain any truth. His [`Ali's] sons knew where his grave was and the sons of all of the people knew where the grave was. This is the grave that they visited and built [the shrine] when they visited Iraq, including Ja`far ibn Muhammad, who was the most prominent and important.[421]

Despite Ibn Abi al-Hadid's hybrid identity, it is clear that he found the Shi`i traditions to be more reliable than the Sunni ones.

Ghiyath al-Din Ibn Tawus (d. 1294) was the grandson of the more well known Muhammad Ibn Ishaq al-Tawus and composed the seminal book about `Ali's grave, *Farhat al-Ghari fi ta`in qabr Amir al-Mu'minin `Ali ibn Abi Talib fi Najaf* (*The Delight of al-Ghari: Gazing Upon the Tomb of the Commander of the Faithfu*l), which is a

[420] Abd Ibn Abi al-Hadid, *Sharh Nahj al-balaghah*, ed. Muhammad Abd al-Karim Nimri, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-`ilmiya, 1998), 81-2.

[421] Ibid., vol. 1, 16.

veritable encyclopedia of sources on the singular topic of `Ali's grave. Ironically, the location of Ibn Tawus' grave has been debated by scholars: while his student Ibn al-Futi claimed his grave was near `Ali's shrine in Najaf, others claimed that he was buried in the shrine of Musa Ibn Ja`far in Kadhimiya.[422] Ibn Tawus was trained as a Shi`i jurist although he studied with both Shi`i and Sunni teachers. Ibn Tawus also provided a comprehensive defense against Sunni polemics against `Ali's shrine and even listed evidence from Sunni hybrid scholars who supported the Shi`i view. Ibn Tawus conveniently collected all extant sources into one text, although earlier Shi`i scholars also recounted the same narrative with slight variances.

Drawing on his encyclopedic knowledge of hadiths, legends, and biographies, Ibn Tawus composed *Farhat al-Ghari* to counter the various stories that were in circulation at that time about the lack of certainty regarding `Ali's final resting place. His goal was to put the rumors to rest by offering definitive proofs of `Ali's grave being in al-Ghari. Drawing on a long tradition of Shi`i scholarship, Ibn Tawus provided an extensive account of every single piece of evidence that points to the authenticity of `Ali's grave in Najaf. Ibn Tawus methodically provides proof after proof from traditions and narratives as he insists that "there is clear evidence that he [`Ali] is in al-Ghari, according to the agreed upon opinion that can be proven through science. The pure Imams, who are the leaders of legal rulings and religious affairs, have also confirmed this."[423] The fact that a Shi`i scholar would write an entire treatise to prove `Ali's burial location shows that it

[422] Ibn Tawus, *Farhat al-Ghari*, 41.

[423] Ibid., 77.

was a central issue during his time and that Sunni polemical attacks against Shi`i doctrine and the importance of validating pilgrimage to Najaf were an ongoing concern.

Ibn Tawus' sources go all the way back to `Ali himself, and he provided a narration that noted how `Ali had purchased a large swath of land outside of Kufa proper and that he was buried within his property, which was outside of the city of Kufa. Ibn Tawus questioned Sunni proposals that `Ali could be buried in Kufa, asking why `Ali would be buried in the Mosque of Kufa, if it was forbidden to place graves inside mosques or in the palace since it was reserved for kings.[424] The Governor's Palace in Kufa, which was located next to the Grand Mosque of Kufa, was the seat of the governors who ruled over Kufa. We can see that Ibn Tawus raised questions directly in response to the accusations of Sunni scholars to refute their claims and prove his point.

Fearing that the Umayyads would desecrate `Ali's corpse if they knew the location of his grave, numerous Shi`i scholars examined possible justifications as to why Sunnis were confused about the location of the grave. Ibn Tawus narrated that `Ali—in order to confuse his enemies about the location of his body—had commanded his son al-Hasan to prepare four graves for him in four different locations, including the Mosque of Kufa, al-Rahba, al-Ghari, and the house of a relative in Kufa.[425] Furthermore, Ibn Tawus provided detailed narratives from `Ali that prove his argument: on the day of his death, `Ali gave specific instructions to al-Hasan to secretly remove his body from Kufa after his death and to carry his corpse covered with a shroud to a place described by `Ali. He then explained that he should be wrapped in a funeral shroud and buried beside the

[424] Ibid., 111.

[425] Ibid., 116.

Prophet Noah's grave. His grave was to be covered with mud bricks and after his sons sat by the grave, it would disappear from plain sight.[426] Ibn Tawus' narrative echoes that of the previous generation of scholars, in particular Ibn Abi al-Hadid and al-Ganji, and he draws upon and compiles all of the major Shi`i works that offered up opinions on the location of `Ali's grave.

Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) and his student Ibn Kathir (d. 1373) were both notable Sunni theologians whose work shows extreme hostility against Shi`is. Both scholars appeared to have lifted al-Khatib al-Baghdadi's statements and repeated the same story practically verbatim. Ibn Kathir lived during the Mamluk era in Damascus and was a Shafi`i traditionist, jurist, Qur'anic exegete, and historian known for his reformist, puritan views of Islam. Ibn Kathir proposed at least four other possible locations mentioned by previous scholars and argued that:

> When `Ali died, his son al-Hasan carried out the death rites and then buried him in the governor's palace in Kufa out of fear that the Kharijites would exhume his body. This [story] is well known … Because of the Shi`is' ignorance, a lot of people believe that [`Ali's] tomb is in Najaf, but there is no evidence or origin for this.[427]

Ibn Kathir was known for his anti-Shi`i sentiments and took part in a council that condemned a Shi`i from Iraq to death for cursing the first three caliphs and the Umayyads.[428] In the case of Ibn Kathir, he must have known that Najaf was an important center for Shi`is and perhaps even Sunnis and he sought to discredit and debunk what he knew to be a falsity based on what he claimed to be weak sources. Another variant of the

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[426] Ibid., 118-9.

[427] Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidaya wa al-nihaya,* vol. 7 (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-`ilmiya, 1994), 342-3, 366.

[428] H. Laoust, "Ibn Kathir," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online).

narrative offered by a Sunni scholars comes from Khalil ibn Aybak al-Safadi (d. 1363), the son of a Mamluk governor in Syria who was a biographer and historian who had studied with Ibn Taymiyya.[429] In *Tamam al-mutun fi sharh risalat Ibn Zaydun* (*The Complete Texts Explaining the Treatise of Ibn Zaydun*), al-Safadi described the possible locations of `Ali's grave:

> There is a disagreement about the place of his [`Ali's] grave. It was said to be in the governor's palace in Kufa, Rahba in Kufa, and in the plateau (Najaf) of al-Hira. He [`Ali] was put in a coffin and they covered him in camphor and a camel carried him to Medina. When they arrived to the land of Tayy,[430] the tribespeople took his body and buried it in their land. And al-Mubarad reported from Muhammad ibn Habib, "the first person who was transferred from one grave to another was `Ali ibn Abi Talib."[431]

Al-Safadi's account corresponds to that of his correligionists apart from the addition that located `Ali's body in Tayy. With each different author, we can see a slightly different version of the event, and in the case of al-Safadi, `Ali's alleged burial in Medina was interrupted along the way and occurred in Tayy instead.

Historians and geographers most often mentioned `Ali's grave when either describing the region of Kufa or narrating `Ali's biography and/or hagiography. In the case of Sunni scholars, almost all proposed numerous possible locations for `Ali's grave and denied Shi`i claims to Najaf/al-Ghari. In the case of Shi`i scholars, they all exhibited agreement about the location of his grave in Najaf.

Claiming `Ali's Grave in Biographical Texts

Theologians framed their arguments in the context of theological debates and,

[429] Carl F. Petry, *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 431.

[430] Tayy was near the modern-day city of Ha'il in Saudi Arabia, about halfway between Kufa and Medina.

[431] Khalil al-Safadi, *Tamam al-mutun fi sharh risalat Ibn Zaydun* (Cairo: Al-maktaba al-`asriya, 1969), 199-200.

most often, discussion of `Ali's grave came up in collections of hagiographies that included narratives of `Ali's life and death. By the eighth century, there were clear branches of Shi`ism and their common belief held that `Ali was the rightful successor of the Prophet Muhammad.[432] As part of their efforts to consolidate the doctrine of the Imamate, Shi`i scholars compiled hadiths from the Prophet Muhammad and Imams that substantiated the elevated status of `Ali and the other Imams. Shi`i theological works from the traditionist school, which emerged after the occultation of al-Mahdi, the twelfth Imam, derived their sources from the large collection of hadiths of the Prophet, many of which differed from Sunni collections as well as the Imams, which validated their viewpoints.[433] The traditionist scholars examined in this chapter held that the Qur'an and hadith were the only sources of Islamic law. Sunni theologians also mentioned `Ali's grave in their biographies of him, although almost always made it a point to state their objections to Shi`i claims to Najaf and consistently pointed out that Shi`i sources were invalid and exaggerated.

In Baghdad and other urban centers, Sunni and Shi`i scholars often studied and taught in intrareligious educational settings and were involved in ongoing debates over theological and other differences. Many of these exchanges can be found in treatises where they directly address the work of their contemporaries. At times the exchanges were hostile and when it came to the issue of `Ali's grave, Sunni scholars were especially vicious in their accusations against Shi`is and they voiced their distrust in their sources. These sources reveal more than religious differences and according to Nancy Khalek,

[432] Howard, "Shi`i Theological Literature," 16.

[433] Ibid., 23.

biographies of the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad "were essential for the assumption and confirmation of political and social power in the medieval Islamic world."[434] Collections of biographies offer insight into religious authority and scholars' coverage of `Ali's life and death, as well as his burial, can tell us much about scholarly debates taking place and their attempts to claim authoritative knowledge and control over `Ali's body and grave.

Biographical texts are numerous and in this section, I examine works from four of many sub-genres, including 1) *tabaqat*, or generations, that provides biographies of notable figures in Islam by each century; 2) *manaqib* (virtues, feats, exploits), which were hagiographical collections that catalogued the lives of saints and important figures such as the `Alids, and as explained by Ibn Abi al-Hadid, belonged to a genre created by the early Shi`is who compiled hadiths that praised `Ali and his unique qualities;[435] 3) *khasa'is* (special qualities), which were similar to *manaqib*; and 4) *maqatil*, or martyrology literature, which narrated the lives and deaths of early Islamic leaders.[436] All four of these genres provided biographical information about important Islamic figures, but presented them from distinct perspectives. Starting from simple biographies of the Prophet Muhammad, scholars then began to compile information about his followers. To ensure the validity of the traditions, scholars then began to compile dictionaries of traditionists to offer background on their lives, reputation, and sources. These collections then led to the development of biographical dictionaries on different groups of scholars,

[434] Khalek, *Damascus,* 156.

[435] G. H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Hadith* (Cambridge, 1983), 12-13, and n. 10 citing Ibn Abi '1-Hadid, *Sharh nahj al-balagha*, ed. Muhammad Abu 'l-Fadl Ibrahim (Cairo, 1959-64), 11:48 f., 338.

[436] Ibid. 216.

poets, judges, and so on. Although the genre became more refined with each generation, it retained its connections with the science of hadith.[437]

One of the earliest biographers was Ibn Sa`d (d. 845), the Basran Sunni author of the *Tabaqat*. *Tabaqat* is an epic work and the earliest extant Arabic biographical dictionary that provides biographies of the early generations of Muslims. In his entry on `Ali, Ibn Sa`d proposed that `Ali was buried inside the entrance to the Kufa Mosque.[438] One of the earliest works, Ibn Sa`d's *Tabaqat* appeared to have set a precedent among Sunni scholars claiming that `Ali was buried in Kufa and not Najaf/al-Ghari. Another early Sunni scholar whose work echoes that of Ibn Sa`d is Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Baladhuri (d. 892), a Sunni Persian scholar based in Baghdad who enjoyed considerable patronage from the `Abbasid caliphs al-Mutawakkil and al-Musta`in, although he fell out of favor with the court under al-Mu`tamid. Al-Baladhuri composed *Ansab al-Ashraf* (Lineage of the Noble Ones), which is set up similiarly to *Tabaqat*, presenting early Muslims by each generation.[439] Al-Baladhuri quoted Ibn Sa`d, repeating the claim that `Ali was buried in Kufa, although he did not specify the exact location in contract to Ibn Sa`d.[440]

One early traditionist who could also be considered to be a hybrid scholar and compiled as many traditions as he could about the life and death of `Ali was Ibn Abi al-

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[437] M. J. L Young, "Arabic Biographical Writing," in *Religion, Learning, and Science in the 'Abbasid Period*, ed. J. D Latham and R. B Serjeant (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 168-9.

[438] Muhammad Ibn Sa`d, *Al-tabaqat al-kubra*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1957), 438.

[439] Becker, C.H. and Rosenthal, F. "al-Baladuri." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online).

[440] Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-ashraf*, ed by. Sohayl al-Zirikli, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dar al-fikr, 1996), 58.

Dunya (d. 894). Originally a freedman of the Umayyads, Ibn Abi al-Dunya was also a renowned traditionist and tutor to `Abbasid princes who went on to take over the caliphate.[441] A compiler of narrations, he sought to record as many accounts as were available to him instead of making a claim about historical events.[442] In *Kitab maqtal Amir al-Mu'minin* (*The Book about the Murder of the Prince of Believers*), Ibn Abi al-Dunya details the entirety of `Ali's life and death, including a chapter on the location of his burial, presenting a variety of versions of the account. The first account elaborated that there were no witnesses to `Ali's funeral or his burial, thus leaving room for doubt about the location of `Ali's grave. The next account insists that `Ali's funeral was attended by al-Hasan, al-Husayn, Ibn al-Hanafiyya, Abdullah ibn Ja`far, and their families, and that `Ali was buried at the back of Kufa; this version is compliant with the basic Shi`i one. Several other accounts presented the usual Sunni versions, proposing that `Ali was buried in the governor's palace in Kufa as well as al-Rahba.[443]

James Bellamy argues that even though Ibn Abi al-Dunya was not Shi`i, he recorded accounts from Shi`i historians, as they "monopolized 'historical' treatments" of `Ali's death and his work would have been incomplete without referring to at least one Shi`i source.[444] Significantly, and in contrast to both Sunni and Shi`i scholars, Ibn Abi al-Dunya merely reported his sources without revealing his opinion or bias; according to Bellamy, it was rare for traditionists to produce texts on historical topics although the

[441] A. Dietrich, "Ibn Abi 'l-Dunyā," *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online).

[442] James A Bellamy, "Sources of Ibn Abi 'L-Dunya's Kitab Maqtal Amir Al-Mu'minin Ali," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104, no. 1 (1984): 16.

[443] Abu Bakr Ibn Abi al-Dunya, *Kitab maqtal amir al-mu'minin `Ali ibn Abi Talib* (Damascus: Dar al-basha'ir, 2001), 72-4.

[444] Bellamy, "Sources," 17.

numerous historical texts composed by traditionists in this chapter are evidence that clearly negates this claim.[445] At the end of the chapter, Ibn Abi al-Dunya reported a distinctive story about `Ali's body that does not seem to be reported in other Sunni or Shi`i sources:

> Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf commanded that a dome be built in front of the Kufa Mosque. When they dug the base of the structure, they came across a recently buried corpse that had a fresh injury on its head. When they saw it, they said, "This is `Ali ibn Abi Talib," and al-Hajjaj was informed of this. Al-Hajjaj asked them, "Who can confirm this?" So they brought some elders from Kufa and when they saw the corpse, they said, "This is `Ali ibn Abi Talib." Al-Hajjaj asked, "Abu Turab?[446] Then we should crucify him!" Ibn Umm al-Hakam told him, "Remember God, O commander, this will cause a disaster between us and our brothers from Bani Hashim. Al-Hajjaj said to him, "What are you afraid of? Are you afraid that they will get your body after your death and exhume it? You should command them to bury you in a secret place." Ibn Umm al-Hakam said to al-Hajjaj, "I swear that I don't care if they exhume my body or someone else's, since they will say it is the body of an unknown person." So al-Hajjaj commanded [his men] to dig a number of graves in the daytime, then he commanded that `Ali's corpse be brought to him. His corpse was brought on a camel, splayed on its back. They carried his corpse in the middle of the night and buried it in another location that no one knows.[447]

This narrative presents another possibility for `Ali's burial and transfers the power and control of `Ali's body to al-Hajjaj (d. 714), who was known as a cruel despot, fierce Umayyad loyalist, and governor of Iraq under the Umayyad caliph `Abd al-Malik. It is curious that this account does not appear in any of the other sources consulted in this chapter, and illustrates Ibn Abi al-Dunya's attempt to faithfully record every single account of `Ali's burial and re-burial that he came across, even ones that were barely in circulation.

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[445] Ibid., 18.

[446] This is one of the many names of `Ali and can be translated as "the father of dust."

[447] Ibn Abi al-Dunya, *Kitab maqtal,* 74-5.

This is the only extant account of `Ali's body being discovered, and then re-buried, and it can tell us a lot about perceptions of `Ali's body in the ninth century. Katherine Verdery emphasizes the power of the reburial, claiming that "Politics around a reburied corpse thus benefits from the aura of sanctity the corpse is presumed to bear, and from the implicit suggestion that a reburial (re)sacralizes the political order represented by those who carry it out."[448] This unique narrative poses a challenge to the normative Shi`i and Sunni narratives. It complicates the issue of `Ali's burial further by negating the original burial narratives—both Shi`i and Sunni—and positing a new one based on the decision of al-Hajjaj to bury `Ali in an unknown location. This narrative gives al-Hajjaj the authority to control `Ali's body and to hide it from `Ali's followers, in his presumed efforts to prevent his grave from becoming a pilgrimage site and Shi`i stronghold. Most importantly, this narrative illustrates that numerous stories were in circulation and there was disagreement from a very early date.

Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani (d. 967) was a poet and historian who was a Shi`i and a descendant of the Quraysh tribe through the Umayyads in Islamic Spain. Al-Isfahani was patronized by the Buyids and in around 926, he completed the composition of *Maqatil al-Talibiyyin,* a book that covers the biographies of Abu Talib and his `Alid descendants up until the early tenth century, representing the height of its literary genre of *maqatil*.[449] Writing during the Shi`i century and formative period of Shi`i theology, al-Isfahani offered up two versions of `Ali's burial. The first account concurs with Sunni accounts that `Ali was buried in al-Rahba by the Kinda Gate in Kufa after the morning prayers.

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[448] Verdery, *The Political Lives,* 31-32.

[449] M. Nallino, "Abu 'l-Faradj al-Iṣbahānī." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*; Sebastian Günther, "'Maqâtil' Literature in Medieval Islam," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 25, no. 3 (1994): 205.

Immediately following this report, al-Isfahani narrated another version of the story tracing back to Hasan, which stated that after praying over `Ali's body at al-Ash`ath Mosque, al-Hasan and al-Husayn brought the body to the back of Kufa next to al-Ghari.[450] Al-Isfahani offered up the Sunni version as well as the Shi`i account attributed to al-Hasan, thus indicating that he sought to present variant sources on the event, which were both prevalent at the time and narrated to him by his teachers.

One scholar who set the precedent for popularizing numerous variants of `Ali's burial in addition to including the story of Harun al-Rashid's re-discovery of `Ali's grave is al-Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 1022). In *Kitab al-irshad,* al-Mufid devoted several pages to presenting variants of `Ali's burial; he is one of the earliest scholars to claim a connection between `Ali and the Prophet Noah:

> When death was close to the Commander of the faithful he said to al-Hasan and al-Husayn, peace be on them: "When I die, you two put me on my bier. Then take me out and carry (me) in the back of the bier. You two will protect the front of it. Then bring me to al-Ghariyyayn. You will see a white rock shining with light. Dig there and you will find a shield and bury me at it." When he died, we took him out and began to carry him on the back of the bier while we guarded the front of it. We began to hear a rustling and whistling of the wind until we came to al-Ghariyyayn. Behold! There was a white rock whose light was shining. We dug there and behold, there was a shield on which was written: "This is one of the things which Noah has stored for `Ali b. Abi Talib." We buried him there and went away. We were happy at God's mark of honour to the Commander of the Faithful. A group of the Shi`a followed us but they had not witnessed the prayer performed for him. We told them about what had happened and about God's mark of honour to the Commander of the Faithful.[451]

As we have seen in chapter one, Shi`i theology and beliefs in Ahl al-Bayt and the Imams connected them to the Biblical prophets, in particular Adam and Noah. The shield that Noah left signaled that Noah had decreed `Ali's burial place during his own lifetime and

[450] Abu Faraj al-Isfahani, *Maqatil al-talibin* (Qum: Intisharat al-Shari al-Radi, 1995), 54.

[451] Al-Mufid, *The Book of Guidance*, 15.

this account helped establish a strong connection of `Ali to Noah, and to give sanctity that existed from pre-Islamic times to al-Ghari. Despite the connection between Noah and Adam, al-Mufid did not indicate that Noah was actually buried in al-Ghari, a widespread belief among Shi`is that arose at a later time and has continued until today.

Al-Mufid also offered an explanation for the confusion around `Ali's grave:

> Then they said: "We would like to see what you have seen of his affair." "Traces of the place have been removed according to his bequest," we told them. They kept coming back and forth to us and they told us that they had dug but could not find anything.[452]

From al-Mufid's narrative, it can be ascertained that `Ali had requested his body be buried in a hidden location and that al-Husayn and al-Hasan covered their trail to avoid detection. Al-Mufid also quoted Muhammad al-Baqir to provide further legitimacy to the location of the grave:

> "He is buried," he answered, "in the region of al-Ghariyyayn. He was buried before the dawn rose and al-Hasan and al-Husayn peace be on them, and Muhammad, the sons of `Ali, and `Abd Allah b. Ja`far, may God be pleased with him, went into his grave."[453]

Furthermore, al-Mufid narrated an account traced back to al-Husayn who, when asked about `Ali's burial, answered that "we went out with him at night past the Mosque of al-Ash`ath until we brought him out on the upper ground beside al-Ghariyyayn. We buried him there."[454] Al-Mufid is one of the first scholars to embellish the account of `Ali's burial and add new details that were picked up by later scholars. His authoritative book provided strong chains of transmission back to the Imams and provided an important

[452] Ibid., 15.

[453] Ibid., 15.

[454] Ibid., 15.

source of proof for Shi`is.

In *Khasa'is al-a'imma* (*The Special Qualities of the Imams*) al-Sharif al-Radi (d. 1016) -engaged the debate among scholars about the location of `Ali's grave, listing Rahbat al-Qada' (al-Rahba),[455] the governor's palace, and Medina as possible sites.[456] After listing the alternatives usually proposed by Sunni scholars, he then goes on to state that, "The correct version, without a doubt and with complete certainty, is that he is in al-Ghari, on the plateau (Najaf) of Kufa. The proof of this is that Ja`far al-Sadiq visited this location when the `Abbasid caliph al-Mansur (d. 775) sent him there."[457] Previous narratives do not mention al-Mansur, nor do they mention that al-Sadiq was sent to `Ali's grave by the caliph. Despite his Sunni sympathies, al-Radi concurred with his teacher al-Mufid and previous Shi`i scholars that al-Ghari was the correct location of `Ali's grave.

In his work *I`lam al-wara bi-a`lam al-huda* (*The Notification of Humanity with the Signs of Guidance*), Abu `Ali Fadl ibn al-Hasan al-Tabrisi (d. 1154), an eminent Shi`i exegete and legal scholar, covers early Islamic history as well as the lives of the Prophet, `Ali and the Imams. Al-Tabrisi studied with prominent Sunni scholars as well as Shi`i scholars and his teachers had been disciples of al-Tusi.[458] Al-Tabrisi's work echoes that of Shaykh al-Mufid's *Kitab al-Irshad*, and he also presented Sunni historical sources and hadiths in his study of the lives of the Imams and Ahl al-Bayt.

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[455] Rahbat al-Qada' appears to be the name of a room in the Prophet's Mosque in Medina although it seems that a room in the Kufa mosque also was named al-Rahba.

[456] I offer a brief biography of al-Sharif al-Radi in chapter one.

[457] Al-Radi, *Khasa'is,* 39.

[458] Etan Kohlberg, "al-Ṭabrisī." *Encyclopaedia of Islam.*

In the section on `Ali's death and burial, al-Tabrisi included more detail about people who were present at `Ali's burial—including someone named Muhammad as well as `Abdullah ibn Ja`far, the nephew and son-in-law of `Ali. Presumably the more witnesses present at the burial, the more accurate the transmission would be. He reported that `Ali commanded al-Hasan and al-Husayn to shroud him and bring his corpse to al-Ghariyyayn (al-Ghari). He instructs that they should dig a hole at the place where they find a shining white stone. At the site, they would find a wooden shield and bury `Ali at that location.[459] Upon his death, al-Hasan and al-Husayn followed their father's instructions and found a wooden plank upon which was written, "This was buried here by Noah for `Ali ibn Abi Talib."[460] Like al-Mufid, al-Tabrisi was also interested in connecting `Ali to Noah and in further legitimizing `Ali's grave and establishing a deeper connection between Ahl al-Bayt and Biblical prophets.

Another example of a hybrid scholar is Muhammad Ibn Yusuf al-Ganji, (d. 1259) a thirteenth-century hadith scholar who came from a Sunni family in northern Iraq but had Shi`i affiliations and `Alid sympathies. Al-Ganji died in a brutal assassination in a Damascus mosque, allegedly due to his `Alid sympathies and collusion with the Mongols.[461] Al-Ganji would have had access to a large body of both Sunni and Shi`i scholarship, and he shows familiarity with many of the popular Shi`i and Sunni sources that preceded him, and meticulously lists his chains of transmission. Al-Ganji is an interesting case of a hybrid scholar who sought to present both Sunni and Shi`i sources

[459] al-Fadl ibn al-Hasan Tabrisi, *I`lam al-wara bi-a`lam al-huda* (Qum: Muassasat Al al-Bayt li-ihya al-turath, 1996), 394.

[460] Ibid., 395.

[461] Muhammad Ibn Yusuf al-Ganji, *Kifayat al-talib fi manaqib `Ali ibn Abi Talib* (Tehran: Dar ihya turath Ahl al-Bayt, 1983), 14-15

from a non-biased perspective.

In *Kifayat al-talib fi manaqib `Ali ibn Abi Talib* (*The Sufficient Book for the Student on the Virtues of `Ali ibn Abi Talib*), a comprehensive book of `Ali's life and death that is "perhaps the most thoroughly researched and elaborate biography of' Ali Ibn Abi Talib in existence,"[462] al-Ganji noted that he specifically wrote the book as a response to objections made by scholars who had attended a lecture he gave at a hadith madrasa about a hadith on the virtues of Ahl al-Bayt. To address those who had voiced their concern with the hadith, al-Ganji composed the book to assuage their suspicions about `Ali's rank and role in history.[463] Al-Ganji had a skeptical scholarly Sunni audience in mind and sought to convince them of `Ali's virtues by presenting them with a wide range of reputable hadiths from both Sunni and Shi`i chains of narrations. In another treatise entitled *al-Bayan fi akhbar sahib al-zaman* (*Clarification About the Reports about the Mahdi [Twelfth Imam]*), that accompanied *Kifayat al-talib,* al-Ganji directly addressed his audience, explaining that he "stripped off of it the Shi`i ways as the construction of the [logical] argument is stripped [of falsehood], since all that the Shi`a receive with acceptance, though soundly transmitted, is but the oil of their lighthouse and the falcon of their homeland, so arguing on the basis of something else would be stronger."[464]

At the very end of the book, al-Ganji included a discussion of `Ali's burial, offering up a direct quotation from Shaykh al-Mufid's *Irshad*. He claimed the grave was

[462] Masad, "The Medieval Islamic Apocalyptic Tradition," 150.

[463] Al-Ganji, *Kifayat,* 36-7.

[464] Al-Ganji, Ibid.,, 476, translation taken from Masad, "The Medieval Islamic Apocalyptic Tradition," 153.

kept secret until Ja`far al-Sadiq publicized its location and traced his source back to al-Shaykh al-Mufid.[465] Although most Shi`i scholars showed familiarity with Sunni sources, they did not directly refer to them in their work, but al-Ganji directly quoted from Sunni scholars. What is fascinating about al-Ganji is that he attempted to primarily draw upon Sunni traditions to convince his readers of `Ali's elevated state instead of using Shi`i traditions, which would have been dismissed by staunch Sunni scholars.

Al-Ganji divided the section about `Ali's death into separate accounts of his murder, his burial, and the location of his grave. In his section on the location of `Ali's grave, he first methodically presented the Sunni sources, which invariably are the same traditions related by previously examined scholars: 1) that `Ali was possibly buried in the mosque in the governor's palace and then his grave disappeared; 2) that after making the pact with Mu`awiya, al-Hasan carried `Ali's body and buried him in Medina next to Fatima's grave according to `Ali's will;[466] and 3) that when `Ali died, al-Hasan and `Abdullah ibn Ja`far performed the washing of his corpse and wrapped him in three simple shrouds. After praying over `Ali, al-Hasan buried him in Rahba, near the gates of Kanda after the morning prayers.

As for the traditions that come from Shi`i chains of transmission, al-Ganji also offered the multiple variants. First, recalling al-Isfahani's chain of narration, he mentioned that al-Husayn narrated that he brought `Ali's body first to al-Ash`ath Mosque, then to the "back" of Kufa next to al-Ghari on the plateau (Najaf) of Kufa, where they buried him, and `Ali's grave was hidden according to `Ali's will out of fear

[465] Al-Ganji, *Kifayat*, 468.

[466] Ibid., 470.

that the Umayyads would descretae his body. Alternately, according to a companion of `Ali who was present at his death, al-Husayn and al-Hasan carried out `Ali's wish that his body be taken in the middle of night to al-Ghariyyayn, commanding them, "where you [al-Husayn and al-Hasan] will see a shining white rock, when you dig there, you will find an empty space. Bury me there," so al-Husayn and al-Hasan buried `Ali in this space and then departed. Finally, al-Ganji quoted from Ibn Abi al-Dunya's *Kitab maqtal Amir al-Mu'minin `Ali ibn Abi Talib* and narrated Harun al-Rashid's miraculous rediscovery of `Ali's grave during his hunting trip.[467] The interesting detail in al-Ganji's narration is that al-Rashid is portrayed as having received information about the grave from a shaykh (tribal chief) from al-Ghariyyayn, which indicates that al-Ghari contained at least a minor tribal settlement.[468] Additionally, it is notable that al-Ganji began each section with Sunni traditions, presumably which he found to be weak, and ended with Shi`i accounts, which confirmed `Ali's grave in Najaf/al-Ghari. Al-Ganji offers a fascinating case in Sunni-Shi`i relations and represents an attempt to negotiate between the two denominations that differed in their sources of traditions and was often a source of contention.

Motifs of Re-Discovering `Ali's Grave

During the period of this study, Shi`i scholars appear to be buttressing their arguments with copious evidence in order to establish the authentic burial location of `Ali. Shi`i narratives reported that `Ali's grave was previously kept secret to protect his body from desecration by his enemies. After being hidden for more than 130 years, it was

[467] Despite attributing this account to Ibn Abi al-Dunya, it does not appear in the edition used in this study: Ibn Abi al-Dunya, *Kitab maqtal,* although a similar narrative appears in Tabrisi, *I`lam.*

[468] Al-Ganji, *Kifayat*, 471.

rediscovered in the late eighth century. The trope of rediscovering sacred space was common in the medieval Islamic landscape. As Meri argues:

> Devotees did not create or invent sacred space; they 'rediscovered it'. An essential component of this process involved the rediscovery, reclamation, and creation of traditions, which affirmed a place's sanctity. Structures that stood over sacred space … were reconstructed, restored, and rebuilt.[469]

In this way, the rediscovery of `Ali's grave was not a unique phenomenon, although the depiction of Harun al-Rashid as being charged with its rediscovery is curious considering his known persecution of the Imams and their followers. Therefore it is important to investigate the reasons behind the concealment of `Ali's grave and the significance of al-Rashid's later rediscovery of it.

That `Ali's grave was hidden for so long is interesting in and of itself and could be connected to the notion of *taqiyya,* or dissimulation and concealment. *Taqiyya* arose out of the intense persecution Shi`is suffered as a coping mechanism to protect themselves from the Umayyads. It is important to note the two different types of *taqiyya*, namely "one which is based on fear of external enemies and another which is based on the need to conceal secret doctrines from the uninitiated." The Arabic term *taqiyya* contains meanings of fear and caution and in the Shi`i context it refers to various ways to maintain secrecy to protect secret knowledge that was reserved for the Shi`i elite.[470]

Considering the widespread practice of crucifixion and other forms of corpse desecration in Late Antiquity and the early Islamic period in the Near East, it was

[469] Meri, *The Cult of Saints*, 43.

[470] Etan Kohlberg, "Taqiyya in Shi'i Theology and Religion," ed. Kippenberg, Hans G., and Guy G. Stroumsa, *Secrecy and Concealment: Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 345.

common for corpses of important figures to be buried in hidden graves.[471] Although `Ali was loved and respected by many, he also had numerous enemies, including those from the Umayyads and the Kharijite community. In his attempt to persuade the Kharijites to join his forces against Mu`awiya, `Ali ended up massacring members of their community at the Battle of al-Nahrawan.[472] Stories abound about Imams hiding their identities, and they asked their followers to not acknowledge them in the streets of Baghdad nor to visit them at their homes. Interestingly enough, al-Kazim concealed his identity out of fear of Harun al-Rashid, who was often referred to by Shi`is as the "tyrant of the age."[473]

Shi`i scholars took the concept of *taqiyya* further as practiced and taught by the Imams and created complex rules and explanations for Shi`is to follow for reasons of self-preservation.[474] Muhammad al-Nu`mani, a tenth century Shi`i scholar, stressed the importance of protecting the secrets of the Prophet's family. He cited a telling tradition from `Ali in which `Ali counseled his followers to transmit knowledge to people that they already had knowledge of and to withhold information from those of whom they had no knowledge. It was a duty for the followers of `Ali not only to accept the teachings of the Imams but also to keep them secret from outsiders.[475] Al-Sadiq has numerous statements encouraging his followers to keep their beliefs and knowledge secret:

> Conceal our doctrine and do not divulge it. God elevates in this world one who conceals our doctrine and does not divulge it and He turns it (i.e. the doctrine) in

[471] For a detailed study of exhumation and crucifixion practices during the Umayyad period, see Anthony, *Crucifixion and Death.*

[472] Vaglieri, "`Alī."

[473] Kohlberg, "Taqiyya," 347.

[474] Ibid., 351.

[475] Ibid., 353.

> the next world into a light between his eyes which will lead him to paradise. God abases in this world one who divulges our tradition and our doctrine and does not conceal it, and in the next world He removes the light from between his eyes and turns it into darkness which will lead him to Hell. *Taqiyya* is our religion and the religion of our fathers; he who has no *taqiyya* has no religion.[476]

Additionally, Shi`is were not only forbidden from revealing secrets, but also threatened with punishment for doing so. One of al-Sadiq's servants, al-Mu`alla, was executed by the `Abbasid government, and al-Sadiq credited al-Mu`alla's revealing of the Shi`i tenets of belief as the reason for his execution, which al-Sadiq deemed a permissible punishment for exposing beliefs which must be kept secret. Al-Sadiq explicated that the proper punishment for Shi`is who reveal religious secrets was to be killed by weapons or to die from madness.[477] Al-Sadiq and the other Imams made it obligatory that their followers hide their beliefs to protect their lives and ensure the continuing existence of the minority Shi`i community.

Because of the extreme persecution that the Imams and their followers experienced under the Umayyads and `Abbasids, numerous traditions from al-Sadiq and other Imams warn their followers of even revealing their love of Ahl al-Bayt in public, which they believed indicated their elevated status among all Muslims.[478] Another important belief that Shi`is were ordered to conceal was the belief that `Ali was the rightful successor to the Prophet.[479] Many other traditions abound that outline the Imams guidelines for *taqiyya,* and it can be surmised that they viewed it as necessary to conceal `Ali's grave from anyone outside their immediate family and companions. By providing

[476] Ibid., 355-6.

[477] Ibid., 356.

[478] Ibid., 358.

[479] Ibid., 359.

threats about what could happen to Shi`is who failed to practice *taqiyya*, the Imams strategically provided religious justifications to convince their followers of the necessity of the practice.

One narrative about the re-discovery of `Ali's grave that frequently appears in Shi`i narratives and adds to the veracity of the Shi`i versions of the story invokes the famous `Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid (d. 809). Al-Rashid's presence lends his weight and prominence, which helps add to the authenticity of `Ali's grave through the rhetorical claim of Sunni authority. Sunni historians neglect to mention this episode of al-Rashid's life, although it plays an important role in building a strong foundational narrative for Najaf in Shi`i accounts. It is compelling to consider that Shi`i narratives acknowledge al-Rashid as having re-discovered the shrine despite his known persecution of the Imams and their followers. This acknowledgement may indicate that the grave was intended to have been hidden for much longer and that al-Rashid's re-discovery broke the long-held secret based on *taqiyyya* of the grave's location or it may be a strategic legend introduced at a time when the shrine had become popular enough to be disclosed to the general public. It also indicates that Shi`is were not even safe from Sunnis after their death, even their corpses were threatened by desecration by the majority Sunni community.

Al-Shaykh al-Mufid narrated an intriguing legend as told by `Abdullah ibn Hazim, a companion of al-Rashid and a prince from Khurasan.[480] According to al-Shaykh al-Mufid, in the late eighth century, Harun al-Rashid had been hunting for deer with his retinue in the desert outside of Kufa in a place called al-Ghariyyayn (the dual form of al-Ghari) a couple of days' travel south of Baghdad. Upon spotting a gazelle, he gave chase

[480] Al- Mufīd, *The Book of Guidance.*

on his horse and followed it until it stopped at a small dirt mound. He commanded his hunting dogs and falcons to pursue the deer, but they refused to move. He then spurred his horse to approach the gazelle, but it, too, refused to budge. The caliph decided to sit and wait for the gazelle to make a move. When it finally descended from the mound, his dogs proceeded to run after it, but it ran back to the mound; and this happened three more times.

Because of the bizarre manner the animals acted around the mound, the caliph sensed there was something special about it and commanded his companions to bring him a local. His companions found an old man from the Banu Asad tribe—which was a supporter of the `Alids—to explain the secret of the mound.[481] After receiving a pledge of protection from al-Rashid, the old man told al-Rashid that his grandfather had told his father than the mound contained the grave of `Ali, and that "God has made it a sanctuary (*haram*) so that whatever seeks refuge there will be safe."[482] Ibn Abi al-Dunya's version of the story contains a few more details, most significantly that after al-Rashid had the structure built over `Ali's grave, he would visit it on an annual basis until his death.

The story is striking in its inconsistencies with widely accepted historical portrayals of al-Rashid and his fluctuating and often belligerent relationship with the `Alids. A Sunni who was more better known for his suppression of `Alid sympathizers and the destruction of al-Husayn's tomb in Karbala, than for his tomb-building ventures in Najaf, al-Rashid's reaction to discovering `Ali's grave is surprising. Upon finding out

[481] Ibid., 15-16; the same version of the story is also told by numerous other scholars, including Ahmad ibn `Ali Ibn `Inabah (d. 1425) in *'Umdat al-ṭālib fī ansāb āl Abī Ṭālib* (Bayrūt: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāh, 1963), 62; al-Hasan ibn Muhammad Daylami, *Irshad al-qulub: al-munji man `amil bi-hi min alim al-'iqab*, ed. Hashim Milani (Tehran: Dar al-Uswah lil-Ṭiba`ah wa-al-Nashr, 1996), 345-6; Ibn Tawus, *Farhat al-Ghari*, 266-272.

[482] Al-Mufid, *The Book of Guidance*, 16.

that `Ali was buried in the mound, he immediately performed ritual ablutions and prayed at the mound. He then rolled his body on the ground and wept for some time before returning to his camp.[483] Moreover, according to al-Mufid's account, `Isa ibn Ja`far, the governor of Basra during al-Rashid's rule, narrates that al-Rashid brought him to al-Ghariyyayn (al-Ghari) to perform pilgrimage to `Ali's grave.[484] His companion reports having watched al-Rashid praying, weeping, and rolling on the ground in front of the grave for most of the night. He also reported having heard al-Rashid speaking to `Ali's grave, "O cousin, I know your outstanding merit and your precedence (in Islam). By God, you have sat in my council while I was there and you were what you were: but your descendants are harming me and revolting against me."[485] Out of reverence for `Ali, al-Rashid performed pilgrimage to his grave on at least two occasions and also used his time at the grave to voice his frustrations. While reverent of `Ali, this story highlights the difficulties al-Rashid had with the `Alids. Harun al-Rashid is credited by Shi`i scholars with having rediscovered and erected the first tomb over the grave of `Ali, although they leave out his specific motives for doing so.[486]

Another version of the story is offered in an unlikely source by the Egyptian Shafi`i scholar of law Kamal al-Din al-Damiri (d. 1405) who wrote a zoological treatise on animals in *Hayat al-Hayawan* (The Life of Animals).[487] Under the entry of the lynx

[483] Ibid., 16.

[484] Ibid., 17.

[485] Ibid.

[486] Other scholars additionally mention further details about the tomb in their narratives that al-Rashid built a structure with four doors and a white dome over the grave, see Daylami, *Irshad*, 345-6; Ibn `Inabah, *`Umdat,* 63.

[487] Kamal al-Din Musa al-Damiri, *Hayat al-Hayawan* (vol. 2 (Cairo: Matbu`at al-istiqamah, 1963), 226

wildcat (*fahd*), al-Damiri narrates the story of al-Rashid, adding to Shaykh al-Mufid's narrative, verifying the authenticity of the grave,

> A man came from al-Hira and he said, "Did you not see that I guided you to the grave of your cousin `Ali ibn Abi Talib, what will you give me?" Al-Rashid answered, "a great reward." He said, "This is his [`Ali's] grave." Al-Rashid said to him, "Where did you hear about this?" He replied, "I used to come here with my father and visit his grave, and my father told me this. He [my father] used to come here with Ja`far al-Sadiq and visit it, and al-Sadiq used to come here with his father al-Baqir and visit it. Muhammad (al-Baqir) used to come it with his father Zayn al-`Abdidin and visit it. `Ali (Zayn al-`Abidin) used to come with his father al-Husayn and visit it. Al-Husayn told everyone about the location of the grave." So al-Rashid ordered that a room be built over the location and it was the first structure at the location.[488]

It is unclear about where al-Damiri found his sources, as he does not refer to any chain of transmissions. Furthermore, al-Damiri's account is not consistent with that of the mainstream Shi`i narratives, perhaps due to his unfamiliarity with mainstream Shi`i scholarship, which might not have been easily accessible in fourteenth-century Egypt. After narrating the story of al-Rashid, he reiterates the Sunni narrative of `Ali being buried in the governor's palace and that Mughira ibn Sha`ba could possibly have been buried in the grave thought to be `Ali's, and ends by stating that the location of the grave is not certain.[489]

It is futile to attempt to verify the authenticity of the story of Harun al-Rashid, but it is worthwhile to take note of which scholars mention this story and which ones leave it out. Shi`i scholars emphasize the story and repeat it often throughout their texts, while

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[488] Ibid.

[489] Mughira was first appointed the governor of Kufa by the second caliph Umar in 643 CE. He had a bad reputation after having been accused of adultery. He was later acquitted due to a technical issue with the witnesses, but was still considered by many to have been an adulterer and was disdained by the Muslim community. Mughira was later reappointed as governor of Kufa after Ali's death in 661 CE under the caliphate of Mu`awiya. Mughira was particularly despised by followers of Ali as he was a supported of Mu`awiya and his son Yazid, the mortal enemies of the Shi`i community and it is believed he helped the Umayyads persecute companions of `Ali; Kamal al-Din Musa al-Damiri, *Hayat al-Hayawan*, Ibid.

prominent Sunni historians, such as al-Tabari (d. 923), do not mention this important incident in their chronicles of Harun al-Rashid's life.[490] For Shi`i scholars, the story provides strong evidence for the authenticity of `Ali's shrine, whereas the story is superfluous for Sunni scholars, most of whom deny the possibility of Najaf being `Ali's burial location. This legend supported the more common Shi`i narrative of `Ali's burial—which all Shi`i scholars agreed upon—and contributed to the construction of the foundation myth of `Ali's grave and its authenticity, positing al-Rashid as an unwitting witness to the location of the grave.

Al-Rashid's story of discovery adds to solidifying the foundational narrative of Najaf. The story of al-Rashid's discovery of `Ali's grave might seem familiar to people who have studied global folk culture, as it employs the archetypal literary motif of a hunter pursing an animal and finding himself face to face with a supernatural being.[491] Traditional legends about hunters in pursuit of stags and other prey were surrounded by taboos and connected to magic, rituals, and the supernatural.[492]

Numerous legends share similarities with al-Rashid's story from nearly every culture and society around the world.[493] In the case of Placidas, he was depicted as a Roman citizen and high-ranking military commander who was on a hunt when he was led off the path by a large stag. At some point, the stag stopped and appeared to Placidas with

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[490] Abu Ja`far Ṭabari, *The 'Abbāsid Caliphate in Equilibrium*, trans. Clifford Edmund Bosworth (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

[491] Jean-Charles Seigneuret and A. Owen Aldridge, *Dictionary of Literary Themes and Motifs*, vol. 1 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 634.

[492] Ibid., 635.

[493] For a complete list of references on the gazelle in legends from around the world, see Malcolm C. Lyons, *The Arabian Epic*, vol. *2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 391.

a golden cross between its antlers. It claimed to be Jesus Christ and commanded Placidas to become baptized as a Christian. Placidas' wife had a similar dream the night before, and Jesus also commanded her to be baptized. Placidas' entire family converted to Christianity and was eventually martyred for refusal to participate in pagan rituals.[494] This legend portrays a hero being led astray and subsequently receiving an important message through the stag.[495] In the story of al-Rashid, it is the gazelle that conveys a message to al-Rashid by its movement at the gravesite of Ali. The stag, as well as al-Rashid's hunting dogs and horse, sensed the sacred nature of the place and go against their natural disposition and training to pursue the gazelle.

The motif of a stag leading its hunter to a Christian conversion experience is widespread in European hagiographic literature. One contemporary of `Ali, albeit far removed geographically, was St. Oswald of Northumbria (d. 642), who was a king in northern England who later became a venerated saint. A well-known hagiographic collection recounts a vernacular legend that describes Oswald on a quest to find a bride, accompanied by a stag, which is connected to his conversion of pagan armies. The legend describes the visit of the pagan King Gaudon who sees Oswald's stag running outside the tent, and Gaudon immediately decides he must possess the stag.[496] Gaudon and his troops pursue the stag for a number of days, as it stops and allows them to catch up with it and then darts past their grasp, as if to lead them. They finally lose sight of the stag but find it the next morning. The story abruptly changes course and describes a princess who sees

[494] Henry Mayr-Harting and R. I Moore, eds., *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R.H.C. Davis* (London; Ronceverte, W. Va.: Hambledon Press, 1985), 214.

[495] Seigneuret, *Dictionary,* 640.

[496] Marianne E. Kalinke, *St. Oswald of Northumbria: Continental Metamorphoses* (Tempe, Ariz.: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), 91.

the stag and goes out to watch the hunt. The princess and her maidens are able to escape with the help of the stag. Most notable about this story is that the stag, like the one in al-Rashid's legend, seems to be unusual and supernatural, assumedly connected to the Divine. One scholar asserts that it is most likely that the stag has antecedents from the Bible or earlier hagiographical material. The stag plays a role as a messenger to help leader Gaudon to convert to Christianity.

Another legend tells how an early French king prayed to God to ask for help to ford a river during a campaign to proselytize pagans. At dawn the next day, a doe appeared and led the king and his soldiers across a safe part of the river. Numerous other European legends echo similar conversion narratives connected with the hunt of stags, which lead the hunters to Christ.[497]

Although the deer motif is popular in European literature, M.B. Ogle asserts that the theme is "oriental in origin."[498] M.B. Ogle posits that the story of Placidus is derived from Sanskrit legends, via Arabic and Pahlavi versions.[499] The *Ramayana* contains a similar account wherein a demon king disguised as a stag leads Rama into the forest. The king is then able to kidnap Rama's wife, although Rama eventually kills the stag.[500] In a sixth century BCE narrative from China, the hunt of a stag is paralleled with the struggle of political power. The stag is a symbol of power and liberty and its capture represents the defeat of a state.[501] In the context of Arabic epics, the gazelle commonly is portrayed

[497] Ibid., 92-3.

[498] M. B. Ogle, "The Stag-Messenger Episode," *The American Journal of Philology* 37, no. 4 (1916), 410.

[499] Ibid., 411.

[500] Ibid., 412.

[501] Seigneuret, *Dictionary*, 639.

as a messenger and symbol of the unseen world.[502] Medieval Arab and Persian legends are replete with stories of gazelles in various contexts.[503] Furthermore, gazelles and stags were common symbols of the supernatural and divine in the Near East. In fact, before Islam, one of the idols that had decorated the Ka`aba was golden statues of gazelles.[504]

A study of the origins of the messenger stag motif in global medieval literature provides an overview of stories of heroes being led by stags, often to meet with fairies, beautiful women or other supernatural creatures who bear a message and often offer themselves to the hero.[505] Many of the heroes from various cultures who were led by stags or deer were male members of the elite, such as kings and military commanders. The legend of al-Rashid's discovery of the grave fits into this motif and suggests that it was adopted by Shi`i scholars as a literary trope to provide fodder for popular stories around the legitimacy of the grave. The story can perhaps illustrate how, according to Shi`is, even a ruler who was considered an oppressive tyrant could be used in the service of the Imams.

In order to understand the perception of Harun al-Rashid by Shi`i scholars, it is necessary to explore the interactions of al-Rashid with the `Alids. Harun al-Rashid is well known in Islamic history as the fifth `Abbasid caliph who governed during the period some scholars have called the "golden prime" of the `Abbasid Empire. Al-Rashid's reign was well recorded by al-Tabari and other historians. Al-Rashid was memorialized in the

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[502] Lyons, *The Arabian Epic,* 391.

[503] Ogle, "Stag," 412.

[504] William Muir, *The Life of Mahomet: With Introductory Chapters on the Original Sources for the Biography of Mahomet, and on the Pre-Islamite History of Arabia* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1861), cclvi.

[505] Ogle, "Stag," 413.

"Arabian Nights" oral folk tales as a hero king and model ruler, so it is not a surprise that he was also connected to the miraculous discovery of `Ali's tomb.[506] His relations with the `Alids, and in particular the Imams and their family, were volatile. Despite the pacifist stance of the seventh Shi`i Imam Musa al-Kazim (d. 799), al-Rashid ordered that he be arrested during a pilgrimage to Mecca.[507] Al-Kazim was sent to Basra and then Baghdad, where some say he was killed in 799 under orders from al-Rashid.[508] Medieval Islamic sources vary about al-Rashid's motives, but numerous Shi`i scholars report that advisors gave al-Rashid different versions about al-Kazim's activities, making him appear power-hungry for the position of the caliphate.[509]

According to medieval Shi`i historians, al-Rashid ordered the execution of al-Kazim, but the governor of Basra was convinced of al-Kazim's piety and had him instead brought back to Baghdad. Al-Kazim was kept under house arrest, apart from a short period when al-Rashid temporarily released him based on a command he received in a dream. Al-Rashid soon ordered al-Kazim back into house arrest out of fear that he would usurp the caliphate. Because of his lineage, al-Kazim was constantly seen as a threat by the `Abbasid caliphate and was dealt with accordingly. According to Kohlberg, reports narrate that when al-Rashid discovered that al-Kazim's followers were sending him lavish gifts, he subsequently ordered al-Kazim's death. On one hand, Shi`i sources indicate that al-Kazim was either poisoned or crushed to death inside a carpet. On the other hand, most Sunni scholars, including al-Tabari, maintained instead that al-Kazim

[506] Marshall G. S Hodgson, *Venture of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 292.

[507] Etan Kohlberg, "Mūsā al-Kāẓim," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*.

[508] F. Omar "Hārūn al-Rashīd," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*.

[509] Kohlberg, E.,"Mūsā al-Kāẓim."

died of natural causes.[510] Contested narratives about the Imams are very common and both Sunni and Shi`i scholars recorded accounts colored by their sectarian allegiances and communal narratives.

According to Shi`i historical memory, al-Rashid was said to have been responsible for the death of Musa al-Kazim, the destruction of al-Husayn's shrine in Karbala, and other anti-`Alid activities. Historians report that `Alids and their supporters were often forbidden from visiting the shrines of the Imams during al-Rashid's time as well during the reign of other `Abbasid caliphs, such as al-Mutawwakil (d. 861) and al-Muntasir (d. 862).[511] If so, then why would Shi`i sources highlight a story about someone who is considered an enemy of the Shi`is? Furthermore, Sunni sources that narrate Harun al-Rashid's life do not mention this story, which makes it even more curious. Al-Rashid's hostile policy towards al-Kazim and al-Kazim's potential threat to al-Rashid's position as caliph indicates that there was ambivalence and insecurity about the authenticity of the `Abbasid caliphate at the time. Al-Rashid had to eliminate al-Kazim in order to consolidate his power and ensure the legacy of the `Abbasid caliphate. It is also quite possible that al-Rashid was a complicated figure who changed his views over his lifetime, which would explain why he was associated with both building `Ali's tomb and destroying al-Husayn's shrine. Similar to the European legends of heroes such as Placidus being led to Christianity by a stag, al-Rashid, a powerful figure and enemy of the `Alids, is led by a gazelle to the unmarked and hidden grave of `Ali. The narrative of al-Rashid's discovery validates Shi`i claims of the location of `Ali's grave and his intense

[510] Ibid.

[511] Fakhr al-Din, *Tarikh al-Najaf,* 221.

reaction at `Ali's tomb goes against historical narratives that depict his antagonism against the `Alids.

Although he was an opponent of the `Alids and feared their claim to the caliphate, in the Shi`i narrative, al-Rashid becomes a supporter of `Ali and his family. Al-Rashid witnesses the truth of the Shi`i claim to `Ali's grave and mourns for `Ali's death and complains of his troubles with the `Alids. The Shi`i sources contribute to the formation of a mythic foundational narrative of `Ali's grave in the format of the unearthly hunt. As Shi`i sources provide large amounts of evidence to authenticate `Ali's grave in Najaf to counter Sunni polemical claims, using the character of al-Rashid strengthened and gave narratives legitimacy through a powerful leader. As the caliph who presided over the apex of the `Abbasid Empire, al-Rashid represents the epitome of political power, and his place in the narrative further adds to the narrative's clout.[512]

In addition to creating an unshakable chain of transmissions, the story also elucidates Shi`i understandings of sacred place. According to the narrative, even when `Ali's grave was unmarked and hidden, it emanated a form of sanctity through the earth. While humans were unable to detect it, hunting animals could sense its sacrality and would not attack the stag as long as it was on top of the grave. Thus, for a place to be sacred it does not even need human recognition or attention. If we were take the narrative literally, it would appear to resonate with Mircea Eliade's typology of sacred spaces, wherein Eliade posits that certain spaces are inherently sacred and are discovered by humans through "mysterious signs."[513] The place was deemed sacred by the very nature

[512] Later Safavid sources indicate that at one point there was a portrait of al-Rashid holding a bow standing in front of a stag that was hung up in `Ali's tomb, see al-Mahbuba, *Madi al-Najaf,* 41-2.

[513] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane,* 28.

of who was buried under the mound, recognized by animals and only discovered by humans through a hierophany that reveals an axis mundi.[514] Eliade further argues that "the discovery or projection of a fixed point—the center—is equivalent to the creation of the world."[515]

Although Shi`i narratives might appear to hold much in common with Eliade's notion of sacred space, it is necessary to examine the broader implications of these narratives and what they can tell us about how sacred space is constructed and where it fits in the spatial imagination of medieval Muslims. J.Z. Smith's theory of the sacred comes to mind and could help explain the importance Shi`is place on al-Ghari/Najaf. Al-Ghari had presumably been an empty plain outside of Kufa before `Ali was allegedly buried in its vicinity. Although Shi`i narratives would agree with Eliade's theory of hierophany, further analysis of the legend of al-Rashid suggests that Najaf became a sacred space due to "the social signs that give the place meaning" by Shi`i scholars who traced their narratives back to the Imams.[516] In the Shi`i perspective, `Ali's grave was one of the main centers of their religious map. Studying the creation and discovery myths surrounding this site allows us to understand the process through which sacred sites are constructed and imbued with sanctity by a certain community.

Through the recognition of `Ali's grave by the important and ostensibly hostile figure of al-Rashid, the grave gained even more significance. In order to dig deeper and to understand how `Ali's grave became a focal point of sanctity, it is necessary to go

[514] Ibid., 21.

[515] Ibid., 22.

[516] Smith, *To Take Place,* 28.

beyond Eliade's simplistic dichotomy of the sacred and profane and to investigate the broader implications of sacred space in the perspective of medieval Muslim scholars. The more evidence Shi`i scholars could provide about the authenticity of the grave, the more sacred and legitimate it became with the passing of time.

Understanding Divergent Narratives

As a scholar of religion, it is not my place to make a definitive statement about the location of `Ali's grave. The lesson to be learned from this debate around `Ali's grave offers insight into the historical imaginary of scholars and their contemporaries who continued to debate this issue for centuries. Their ongoing disagreement divulges little about what might have happened to `Ali after his death, although it offers much insight into the intellectual environment and attitudes of the scholars who were engaged in the debate.

After reviewing a large amount of material related to `Ali's death, burial, and re-discovery of his grave, I conclude that most scholars narrated a version of the story depending on their use of sources from their own sectarian tradition. At the same time, we can see a growing trend of hybrid scholars, whose affiliations and sympathies were fluid and differed depending on their audience and genre of writing. Ultimately, there appeared to have been one or two original versions of each narrative tradition that were passed down and embellished throughout the centuries of teacher-student transmission as well as scribal modifications. Over the centuries, Sunni scholars adopted narratives from their predecessors, sometimes embellishing the stories and proposing numerous locations and possibilities as to where `Ali's body ended up. Other scholars had a vague idea that `Ali was buried in the general region. As we have seen, Shi`i scholars rely on narrations from the Imams and early scholars to make their arguments and build upon each other's

work. It is clear that scholars were familiar with each other's claims about the location of the grave, and would refer to these claims in their works. Shi`i scholars in particular would often present both Sunni and Shi`i opinions and would conclude that the Shi`i claims were the most convincing. Najaf was at the center of the Shi`i sacred geography and therefore it is vital that they provide ample documentary evidence to hold up the authority of Najaf as a center of scholarship and pilgrimage.

What is significant about the findings in this chapter is that it reveals the importance that both Sunni and Shi`i Muslims placed on sacred space and the power that it contains. The grave of `Ali was so contentious that it occupied much scholarly time and energy for many centuries, most often in the context of writings on the figure of `Ali. Every Shi`i text that expounded on the family of the Prophet and `Ali often included a debate on the location of `Ali's grave. Apart from disputes about the various locations of al-Husayn's head (most scholars agree that his body is in Karbala), `Ali is the only other Imam whose burial location is contested. Sunni scholars often noted the contested nature of `Ali's grave in geographical and historical texts that include `Ali's life and death. As reflected in the texts, there appeared to have been ongoing polemics concerning `Ali's burial location between Sunnis and Shi`is; while there was a consensus among Shi`is about the location, not all Sunni scholars opposed the Shi`i position. Moreover, the tense nature of `Ali's life and death can been seen in the posthumous debate around the location of his body.

I assert that the Shi`i practice of *taqiyya* from an early period to protect themselves from the Sunni government led to the concealment of the graves of `Ali and others, and this factor contributed to the general confusion about the location of `Ali's

grave. Not only did *taqiyya* become an important doctrine in early Shi`i practice, but it could also explain the abundance of divergent narratives. Due to often intense persecution at the hands of the `Abbasids, Shi`is adopted the practice of *taqiyya* to protect their lives through the concealment of their true beliefs, practices and knowledge of the Imams. With this in mind, it makes sense that they would also spread rumors about `Ali's grave to confuse his enemies and prevent them from accessing his body. Contrasting traditions propagated by Shi`is hinted that they intentionally told "lies" to put `Ali's enemies off track. The Shi`i account transmitted from al-Husayn and al-Hasan of their burial of their father reveals that they intended to put off their enemies from the actual location of `Ali's grave. Sunni scholars must have picked up on these rumors and ran with them in order to prove their point that `Ali was buried not in Najaf.

Due to the necessity of using *taqiyya* for protection, Shi`is did not see the various versions of the story as a threat to the authenticity of Najaf whereas Sunnis viewed them as evidence of Shi`is lack of evidence for the grave being in Najaf. The use of *taqiyya* among Shi`is further complicated the issue as "recourse to notions of *taqiyya* may have been a way for later scholars to resolve or explain away contradictions and changes over time in the teachings of the Imams."[517] If Shi`is adhered to *taqiyya* as "the believers shield" as elaborated by the Imams, then they would not have had trouble accepting the ambiguity of the multiple narratives.[518]

While it might have been necessary to conceal `Ali's grave during the rule of the Umayyads and during the early `Abbasid period, it was no longer necessary for Shi`is to

[517] Dakake, "Secrecy in Shi`ite Islam," 349.

[518] Kohlberg, "Taqiyya," 373.

keep the location secret as time went on, and especially when they enjoyed relative freedom under the Buyids. Rather, as we have seen throughout this chapter, Shi`i scholars began to see the need to provide solid evidence for the location of the grave as a response to Sunni conjectures about the site of the grave. As discussed previously, some Shi`i scholars even made use of the `Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid—who was known for his anti-Shi`i policies and the destruction of al-Husayn's shrine in Karbala—to elevate Najaf as a sacred center and home to `Ali's body. The Shi`i campaign to authenticate Najaf as a sacred city provoked Sunni scholars to prove otherwise, perhaps in order to discourage Sunni Muslims from patronizing the growing shrine.

Beyond the need to conceal `Ali's body, there also appeared to have been some confusion among certain scholars about the geographical borders of Kufa and the actual location of Najaf/al-Ghari. Shi`i scholars all agreed that al-Ghari later became Najaf, although there was some geographic confusion among Sunni scholars, especially those who were not familiar with Kufa's geography. Al-Ghari was the original name for the place where modern-day Najaf stands, and the word *najaf*—which refers to a plateau that could not be flooded—was eventually coined to refer to the larger area around al-Ghari.

Furthermore, most Shi`i scholars refered to the grave as being located in al-Ghari although some refer to the "al-Ghariyyayn," or the two Gharis, which indicates that there could have been two places nearby with the same name. As noted by Yaqut al-Hamawi, the two Gharis referred to two monasteries or retreats that were at the "back of Kufa" near the grave of `Ali.[519] Based on this and other similar sources, it would appear that Christian monastics inhabited the area around `Ali's shrine. Until today, there are

[519] al-Hamawi, *Mu`jam*, 313.

countless caves carved out of the hillsides surrounding Najaf and Kufa, which locals attribute to the Christian monastics who inhabited the area.

As there are numerous plateaus in the region that might have been referred to as *najaf*, Sunni travelers such as Ibn Jubayr might have confused a different *najaf* for the emerging city of Najaf. Modern Shi`i scholars have pointed out that this confusion is a result of Sunni scholars' reliance on unreliable accounts. Sunni scholars generally maintained that one of the possible locations of `Ali's grave was inside Kufa by the mosque and/or governor's palace whereas Shi`i scholars and those with Shi`i/`Alid sympathies held that `Ali's body was definitively carried by al-Hasan and al-Husayn to al-Ghari/Najaf, just outside of Kufa. These divergent narratives indicates that there was continuing disagreement around the location of `Ali's shrine as well as the geography of Kufa and its borders.

During the period covered in this study, Sunni and Shi`i scholars agreed on many issues and shared much in common in the intellectual sphere.[520] Yet, when it came to the issue of sacred space, there was no room for compromise. Scholars were unable to find a common ground and appeared to be speaking past each other, engaged in polemical debates about `Ali's grave that have continued until the modern period. Although discussion over the grave took no more than a line or two in early works, over the centuries, it began to require several pages, and scholars added embellishments and added their own insights into the debate.

Despite the fact that the controversy over the location of `Ali's grave never usually took more than one page in the writings of most scholars, its consistent

[520] Al-Jamil, "Cooperation and Contestation," 161.

appearance signals the ongoing import of Najaf in scholarly discourse among the many debates around `Ali and his significance for Muslims. As Kufa was one of the early Shi`i strongholds in Iraq, the entire region was looked upon with suspicion by Sunni scholars. Kufa was often the center of anti-Umayyad and anti-`Abbasid rebellions and caused much trouble for the `Abbasid caliphs and later rulers of other dynasties. Shi`is responded to Sunni polemics by placing the blame on the Umayyads, claiming that they were responsible for spreading rumors about possible locations of `Ali's grave in order to discourage people from visiting and venerating his grave.

As we will see in the next chapter, pilgrimage rituals began to develop in the ninth century, and by the tenth century, Najaf became a center of Shi`i scholarship and piety after Shaykh al-Tusi settled in the city and founded the first Islamic seminary.[521] Politics does not enter directly into the texts of scholars who debate `Ali's burial location, but it is clear that this was part of the dispute. It was in the interests of Shi`i scholars to consistently verify Najaf as being the burial location of `Ali so as to attract more pilgrims, students, and subsequently wealth and popularity to the city. Without the claim to `Ali's body, Najaf would have been a side attraction from the large garrison city of Kufa, which itself claimed to contain the tombs of several prophets, remnants of Noah's ark, and other traces of visits of prophets and the Imams to the city.

In the perspective of medieval Muslim scholars, it is fair to claim that they viewed sacred space as absolute rather than a matter of degrees: either it was sacred or not. For scholars, a space was either part of the religious cognitive map or it was not; there was no

[521] See conference paper by Zachery Heern, "Myth or History: The Foundation of the Hawza in Najaf" (presented at the Clerical Authority in Shiite Islam, The History and Development of the Hawza, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2011).

ambiguity about sanctity of space. Muslims from diverse sectarian affiliations had different, although sometimes overlapping, cognitive maps of sacred spaces according to their doctrinal beliefs, historical memory, and narrative tradition. Najaf became sacred through the internment of `Ali in its environs. Historians and religious scholars depicted the shrine in their writings in such a way as to create a collective memory around it and attempted to control the narrative around the shrine and its legitimacy. By studying the spatial practice of scholars, we can understand two distinct competing imaginaries of sacred space, including how it was understood in medieval Islam and how it came to be imbued with the sacred. As chapter three further elaborates, Shi`i scholars emphasized the sanctity of `Ali's shrine through their writings and developed pilgrimage rituals that helped mold a cohesive Shi`i identity that contrasted with a Sunni one.

From the very beginning, we can see how the location of `Ali's grave is contested: by tracing the narratives back to the Imams, Shi`i scholars attempt to establish the legitimacy of `Ali's shrine in Najaf, while early Sunni historians emphasize that historical narratives prove that `Ali was buried in Kufa, debunking the sacred character of Najaf and the shrine. Sunnis would not recognize this or any other hadith that comes from the Imams that establishes the legitimacy of `Ali's grave and pilgrimage rituals. Although Shi`i historians, geographers, theologians, and biographers all voiced their opinions about `Ali's grave, it was Sunni scholars who deemed it important to raise doubts about Shi`i claims. For early Shi`is, belief in `Ali's right to the caliphate was central to their doctrine; and `Ali was more than just a charismatic leader, he was a divinely appointed Imam, or representative of God. Therefore, it was in their interest to claim possession of `Ali's body and to protect it from his enemies.

Shi`i traditions solidified the sacred nature of `Ali's shrine by expounding on the benefits of being buried near `Ali's grave, and the economy of death became an important source of income for the scholars; therefore they had to present solid evidence to prove the authenticity of `Ali's grave. Pilgrimage to the shrine of the Imams was seen as an act of covenant between the devotee and the Imam, and in their writings, scholars promised devout Muslim who visited the shrines spiritual and physical rewards and intercession on the Day of Judgment for their journey. The shrine drew wealth and religious authority to Najaf. Sunnis contested Shi`is claims, hoping to discourage Muslims from patronizing the Shi`i-majority city and `Ali's shrine and to disprove what they considered to be fabricated and heretical Shi`i beliefs.

In addition to clarifying the nature of Sunni-Shi`i contestations, this chapter also offers insight into perceptions of sacred space among medieval Muslim scholars. The body of a saintly figure such as `Ali could bring respect and wealth to a location and imbue the entire region with sacred authority and power. As Tweed argues, sacred spaces are confluences of political, social, and economic "streams" where meaning making occurs and where people negotiate and manipulate the power of the space.[522] The scholars who present long chains of transmissions and narrative to uphold the legitimacy of `Ali's grave "make" the shrine, while the grave also "makes" the space and transmits sanctity to the surrounding region. The rhetorical meaning of `Ali's grave shifted in the writings of scholars as they sought to claim absolute meaning of the sacred space. They consolidated their sectarian beliefs by arguing for or against the sanctity of the shrine in an ongoing rhetorical battle. Moreover, as Sunni scholars did not seem to have visited

[522] Tweed, "Space," 120.

`Ali's grave in Najaf—although there is evidence of Sunnis from all backgrounds visiting and patronizing the shrine—and disregarded its sanctity, their writings indicate that they viewed `Ali's grave as an undifferentiated space that did not hold any importance on their cognitive map.

The contestation of `Ali's grave is about the definition and location of the sacred. Spatial practice and conceptualization of `Ali's shrine appeared to differ according to the sectarian affiliation of scholars. We can understand the scholarly dispute between Sunnis and Shi`i as an attempt to claim space for one's particularly religious community. The rhetorical battle between Sunni and Shi`i scholars demonstrates the power of naming and locating Islamic cities such as Najaf. Despite Sunni attempts to debunk the sanctity of `Ali's grave, the very act of creating sacred space comes out of the Shi`i process of constructing a space that is adapted to their needs and identity, "Sacred space, in other words, is produced through the spatial, material, and discursive practices of social groups."[523]

This chapter closely examines conflicting narratives around the origins and rediscovery of `Ali's grave and reveals the power that lies in claims to the land. In the next chapter, we will examine Shi`i sources that establish the shrine as a definitive sacred site and that seek to place it in the center of the Shi`i spiritual map and create a unified sectarian identity affirmed through pilgrimage. By launching the process of canonization of pilgrimage rituals to `Ali's grave, Shi`i scholars were able to strengthen the role of space in establishing the sacred at the shrine.

[523] Adrian J. Ivakhiv, *Claiming Sacred Ground Pilgrims and Politics at Glastonbury and Sedona* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 45.

CHAPTER THREE
SACRED RITUAL: CANONIZING THE PILGRIMAGE TO NAJAF

Remembering `Ali through Pilgrimage Rituals

The first time I visited the shrine of `Ali ibn Abi Talib in Najaf in May 2011, the experience was intense and overwhelming. I had ventured to Iraq by myself with only loose contacts and a vague idea of what I would do once I landed in the Najaf Airport. The shrine of `Ali stood at the focus of my trip and while the plane descended to the Najaf airport, I watched the golden dome of `Ali's shrine glimmer in the changing light from afar in the midst of the brown buildings of the old city. Unfamiliar with the customs and norms of Iraqi society, I struggled to keep the heavy black *abaya* from falling off my head and to carry myself unobtrusively so as to avoid sticking out in the crowd of Iraqi, Iranian, Afghani, and Indian pilgrims. My first outing in Najaf was to the shrine of `Ali, the focus of my stay in Iraq.

On my way to the shrine, I had to pass through numerous checkpoints that provided the only entrance into the old city. I navigated through narrow alleyways until I spotted the golden dome and minarets of `Ali's shrine. After receiving a pat-down bag inspection by female guards in a temporary structure outside the shrine, I crossed the threshold of the shrine and was struck by the dazzling golden entrance to the inner sanctuary. In the courtyard I observed devout pilgrims bowed down on the ground, kissing the marble floor of the shrine and the large gilded doors. Groups of pilgrims followed religious guides who led them in communal supplications and individual

pilgrims read from small prayer booklets while holding out their hands in surrender to God. Upon entering the courtyard, I was immediately attracted to the gleaming gold entranceway and minarets of the inner shrine sanctuary. I walked towards the women's entrance to the tomb room, where I lost myself in the sensory overload of dizzying mirror mosaics that covered the walls and domed ceiling.

As I made my way towards the women's section of the tomb enclosure, I noticed that the women around me were in heightened emotional states and rushing to touch the grill of the tomb. They rubbed their bodies and pieces of fabric on the grill, as if their life depended on it, trying to absorb as much *baraka* as they could get through their vigorous movements. Iraqis sat in the corner of the shrine, beating their hands on their chests and crying out in longing and despair. The scene was one of intensity and deep piety centered on the lavishly decorated grave of `Ali and his spiritual charisma. For many pilgrims, visiting the shrine of `Ali is a once in a lifetime opportunity and offers them the chance to renew their loyalty to `Ali, petition for intercession in their lives, and to reflect on `Ali's life and wisdom.

The pilgrimage rituals developed by Shi`i scholars started out as basic collections and prayers, but over the centuries they developed into canonized collections of combined prayers and actions. These pilgrimage manuals can help explain, in part, the role of scholars in the process of institutionalization of ritual into the Shi`i tradition. The manuals comprised a literary performance, guiding pilgrims who visit `Ali's shrine through complicated rituals that allow them to obtain enough spiritual rewards to gain them a spot in Paradise. In this chapter, I examine how place and identity intricately intertwine. I assert that from as early as the ninth century, the tomb of `Ali was associated

with Shi`i identity, strengthened by the emerging genre of pilgrimage manuals. Pilgrimage manuals included several distinct literary genres that primarily drew from hadith, including history, *fada'il* (merits or virtues), *manaqib* (virtues, feats, exploits, primarily of `Ali and his descendants), and *du`a* (supplications). Each one of these genres offered a different component for pilgrims to consider and apply during the pilgrimage. The genre of pilgrimage manuals was widespread throughout the medieval Middle East among both Sunnis and Shi`is.[524]

Many scholars, including Eliade, J. Z. Smith, and Chidester and Linenthal, have debated the connection between sacred space and ritual. On the one hand, Eliade argues that sacred space is in eruption in space revealed by the divine and a human can only discover it but cannot alter its sacred nature. On the other hand, Smith posits that it is humans, rather than the Divine, who are responsible for the creation of the sacred. Furthermore, space is consecrated and sanctified through the very act of ritual performed by people.[525] Chidester and Linenthal takes Smith's idea further and contend that despite the overlapping of the sacred and the mundane, a sacred space is a "ritual site," separate from that of the quotidian. It is the process of ritualization that accomplishes the task of sanctification, giving a space its perceived sanctity. Moreover, the process can be considered to be a form of "embodied, spatial practice" that mirror the normative understandings of religion. These embodied practices consecrate sacred space, giving it meaning.[526] In the context of Najaf, the rituals and prayers catalogued in the prayer

[524] Meri, *The Cult of Saints,*10.

[525] Smith, *To Take Place,* passim.

[526] Chidester and Linenthal, *American Sacred Space*, 9-10.

manuals direct pilgrims to embody the life and death of `Ali and the other Imams in the space connected to `Ali, as well as to the prophets Adam and Noah.

The movement of pilgrims through embodied sacred space allowed them to experience a communal sense of identity in a confluence of sacred space, ritual, and identity. As Thomas Bremer posits:

> Construction of identity is involved with construction of places that binds together people and places. The making of place, sacred or otherwise, always involves the making of identities; conversely, the construction of identity always involves the construction of places…place and identity emerge together in a relationship of simultaneity.[527]

Pilgrimage is an important ritual in all traditions and played and important role in creating a feeling of communitas, or shared communal identity and sentiments.[528] Shi`i scholars were certainly aware of sentiments that people experience during pilgrimage and purposefully organized the rituals to make them a shared and venerated tradition.

In the *Origins of the Shi'a*, Najam Haider argues that pilgrimage as a form of communal identity emerged in the tenth century, although I would argue it began as early as the late seventh century.[529] For example, Shi`is began to place importance on the visitation of graves, especially those of the Imams, and various traditions record the Imams and their companions having visited the graves of their predecessors starting in the late seventh century.[530] Ja`far al-Sadiq (d. 765) advised his followers to pay visits to

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[527] Bremer, "Sacred Spaces," 27, 33.

[528] For a comprehensive study of the concept of communitas in the context of pilgrimage, see Victor W Turner and Edith L. B Turner, *Image and pilgrimage in Christian culture: anthropological perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

[529] Haider, *Origins of the Shī'a*, 243.

[530] As we will see, al-Husayn and al-Hasan are reported to have visited their father's grave after his death in 661 CE and the manuals I examine in this chapter indicate that most of the other Imams also visited `Ali's grave. For a comprehensive listing of all early visitors, see Ibn Tawus, *Farhat al-ghari*.

both `Ali and al-Husayn. Indeed this suggests that the pilgrimage began to be formalized during al-Sadiq's lifetime based on his recorded practices and supplications at the graves. Furthermore, as discussed in chapter two, medieval historians offered textual evidence that indicate `Ali's grave received pilgrims from the late eighth century, including non-Shi`is and Shi`is who were not closely connected to the Imams.[531] Al-Husayn Ibn al-Hajjaj al-Baghdadi (d. 1001), an Iraqi Shi`i poet who visited Najaf in the tenth century, wrote a long devotional poem in honor of his pilgrimage to Najaf. The poem describes the rituals he went through during his pilgrimage and also includes a description of the tomb,

> O you with the white dome in Najaf
> You heal whoever visits your grave and requests your help
> When you arrive, put on clean garments when entering
> heed his call and circle the grave
> When you circle his dome seven times
> Stop at the gate to meet him
> Say: Peace from God, Peace, `Ali
> the people of peace, knowledge and honor.[532]

This excerpt from the poem reveals that `Ali's tomb was already topped with a white dome and that specific pilgrimage rituals in practice during the ninth century.

Reports from medieval historians of Najaf narrate the architectural history of the structure above `Ali's grave. Scholars such as al-Shaykh al-Mufid and Tabrisi reported in the eleventh century that a tomb marker was built over `Ali's grave by Harun al-Rashid

[531] Ibn Tawus provides accounts that narrate that the Imams who visited `Ali's grave were accompanied by companions, as well as `Abbasid caliphs, such as al-Mansur (d. 775) Harun al-Rashid (d. 809), see Ibn Tawus, *Farhat al-ghari*.

[532] Ibn Tawus, *Farhat al-Ghari*, 18-19.

(d. 809) in the late eighth century and that pilgrims paid their respects to the grave even before al-Rashid:

> When we arrived to the noble grave—at that time there were stones but no structure around the grave, it was before the time of al-Rashid and before he built it—when we got there, some of us were reciting (the Qur'an) and some of us were praying and some of us were performing pilgrimage rituals.[533]

In *`Umdat al-talib*, Ibn `Inaba (d. 1424) claimed that al-Rashid's original structure was renovated and that it lasted until 1352.[534] Sometime in the ninth century, the Talibite Sayyid ruler of Tabaristan, Muhammad ibn Zaid al-Da`i (861-900 CE), added a dome to al-Rashid's structure. Many others also patronized `Ali's grave and contributed to improving and enlarging its physical structure and furnishings.[535] The activity surrounding `Ali's grave from such an early date suggests that pilgrims did visit `Ali's grave, however small, and were drawn there primarily due to their Shi`i affiliations and loyalty to `Ali and his memory.[536]

Shi`i scholars crafted Shi`i communal and sectarian identity through the genre of pilgrimage manuals that guided pilgrims during their visits to the grave of `Ali. This genre became particularly important in perpetuating Shi`i identity and rituals. Comprehensive Shi`i hadith collections included multiple narratives of the Imams visiting the shrines of `Ali and the other Imams, which were then compiled by scholars into specialized pilgrimage manuals. These manuals, which became iconic texts, mapped out the spiritual landscape of `Ali's shrine. This in turn helped create a ritualized sacred

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[533] Daylami, *Irshad*, 346.

[534] Ibn `Inaba, *`Umdat,* 63.

[535] For a thorough overview of the architectural history of `Ali's shrine, see Allan, *Art and Architecture.*

[536] Haider, *Origins of the Shī'a,* 246.

space. The iconic texts gave pilgrims added a spatial perspective on their experience of the shrine that was informed by the reports of the Imams' actions. Pilgrimage to `Ali's shrine was connected to certain auspicious days that corresponded to important events in his life and death as well as Islamic days of commemoration. In this way, sacred space was bound to sacred time as well as recorded in pilgrimage manuals. The complex rites in these manuals were akin to Hajj manuals that led pilgrims on an embodied journey. The manuals for `Ali's grave, however, guided pilgrims through reenacting the recorded actions and sayings of the infallible Imams. The physical aspects of the rites in accordance with the supplications made for a powerful combination that connected pilgrims both to the Imams and the larger Shi`i community.

Since the late seventh century, sacred places in the Shi`i religious landscape were patronized and expanded by the ruling elite and experienced by local and foreign pilgrims. Through their pilgrimage, both the elite and regular pilgrims sought proximity to the divine and rewards in the present world and in the afterlife. `Ali's shrine is ultimately connected to socio-political identity and helps connect Shi`is to their shared communal history. The sacred space of `Ali's grave was the product of human agency rather than being a result of a divine agency that produced a hierophany as described by Eliade. The rituals established by scholars contributed to the construction of the sacred at the shrine It proves valuable to study the material culture of `Ali's shrine to trace the development of its architecture and physical space and how people interacted with Shi`i sacred spaces. It would only be possible, however, to study the material culture and pilgrimage narratives in the later period, starting from the Ottoman and Safavid eras. To understand pilgrimage in the earlier period that this dissertation covers, we are limited to

literary sources, and so I turn to pilgrimage manuals, which offer insight into the type of activities that pilgrims were involved in during their visit.

By studying various ways in which scholars construct and imagine place, we can understand how place can help form people's identities. By visiting the shrine of `Ali and partaking in communal rituals guided by the pilgrimage manuals, Shi`is could empathize and remember the tragic murder of `Ali as well as strengthen their recognition of his spiritual and political authority. In sum, by guiding pilgrims through the rituals of pilgrimage, pilgrimage manuals allowed Shi`is to galvanize their sectarian identity in the context of the sacred place of `Ali's shrine.

Shi`i pilgrimage manuals represented a popular genre in the medieval period. I have chosen to examine four of the most well-known pilgrimage manuals starting from the tenth century. These manuals were all written by prominent Shi`i theologians and traditionists, and they are: 1) Ibn Qulaway's (d. 978/9) *Kamil al-ziyarat*[537] (*Complete [Guide] to Pilgrimages*); 2) Shaykh al-Mufid's (d. 1022) *Kitab al-mazar manasik al-mazar*[538] (*Those Strengthened for the Rites of Pilgrimage*); 3) Muhammad Ibn Ja`far al-Mashhadi's (d. 1198) *Al-mazar al-kabir*[539] (*The Big Grave)*; and 4) *Misbah al-Za'ir* (*The Lamp of the Pilgrim*) by Radi al-Din Ibn Tawus (d. 1265).[540] Ghiyath al-Din Ibn al-Tawus' *Farhat al-Ghari* (d. 1294) also serves as a useful reference source as he compiled

[537] Ja`far Ibn Qulaway, *Kamil al-ziyarat* (Qum: Nashr al-Faqaha, 1996).

[538] Muhammad al-Mufid, *Kitab Al-mazar* (Qum: Madrasat al-Imam al-Mahdi, 1988).

[539] Al-Shaykh Muhammad Ibn al-Mashhadi, *Al-Mazar al-kabir* (Tehran: Nashr al-quyum, 1998).

[540] Radi al-Din Ali ibn Musa Ibn Tawus, *Misbah al-za'ir* (Qum: Mu'assisa Al al-Bayt li-ihya al-turath, 1995).

rituals practiced by the Imams and other visitors in his book.[541] Earlier sources on pilgrimage exist in larger compliations of Shi`i law and hadith, such as al-Kulayni's (d. 941) *al-Kitab al-kafi* (*The Sufficient Book*), `Ali ibn Babawayh al-Qummi's (d. 991) *Man la yahduruhu al-faqih* (*Do-it-Yourself Jurist*), and Abu Ja`far al-Tusi's (d. 1067) *Tahdhib al-ahkam* (*The Refinement of the Laws*) and *al-Istibsar* (*The Book of Insight*). The authors of these manuals focused their writings on theology, law, hadith, and other Islamic sciences. That they composed entire manuscripts on the pilgrimage rites signifies that pilgrimage was a vital part of Shi`i practice that needed to be regulated and controlled by scholars and ultimately canonized into a formal rite. In this way, pilgrimage was integrated into Shi`i normative practice, which contrasts greatly to the more informal non-Hajj pilgrimages in the Sunni traditions.

Pilgrimage rituals developed by scholars allowed pilgrims to create meaning within the space of the shrine. By following the stations of rituals, pilgrims experienced each site in the shrine as a place of significance in the Shi`i religious landscape. The narrations around `Ali's grave transmitted in the manuals gave shape to how pilgrims would have experienced the sacred site.[542] Even though the focus of Haider's book is on the development of Shi`i jurisprudence and mosques in Kufa, he briefly touches on the strong connection between sectarian identity and space, especially in the context of pilgrimage to Najaf and Karbala. Haider elsewhere argues that "the act of pilgrimage is

[541] Ghiyath al-Din Ibn al-Tawus, the author of *Farhat al-Ghari* was the nephew of Radi al-Din Ibn Tawus.

[542] That being said, I can only make conclusions based on prescriptive practices that can be found in pilgrimage manuals and will not attempt to delve into the emotional and personal aspects of pilgrimage. This methodological approach would primarily be appropriate for modern pilgrimages that would allow the research to interview pilgrims. Liyakat Takim briefly discusses the theme of "emotional encounter with the Imams" in a decontextualized study that does not refer to the actual experience of pilgrims, Liyakat Takim, "Charismatic appeal or communitas? Visitation to the shrines of the imams," *Journal Of Ritual Studies* 18, no. 2 (2004): 106–120.

elevated to a core tenet of faith and integrated into a larger set of ritual acts central to the lived experience of the Imami community."[543] Although pilgrimage manuals mainly consist of hadiths and supplications, as Haider suggests, they directly impacted Shi`i practice and give us a glimpse of how medieval Shi`is performed their pilgrimage. I build on Haider's argument to discern ways in which Shi`i scholars took special care in composing pilgrimage manuals to ensure the perpetuation of pilgrimage to Najaf, its centrality in the Shi`i tradition, and contribution to the cohesiveness of Shi`i sectarian identity.

The Development of Pilgrimage Literature

The emergence of an authoritative textual tradition on pilgrimage began in the ninth century when Shi`i scholars began to compile hadiths from the Imams that mainly consisted of supplications and simple ritual actions performed at graves. Shortly after Ali's death, Shi`is began to perform pilgrimage to sites associated with the Imams and their supporters. These manuals provided narratives on the history of sacred sites and detailed instructions on how to receive spiritual rewards through correct performance of pilgrimage rituals. Ibn Qulaway reported that the first people to visit these sites were the Imams themselves, who visited the hidden grave of `Ali as well as that of al-Husayn and set the precedent for all future pilgrimage rites. They exhibited signs of humility and piety when they made supplications at the sites of their forefathers by rubbing their cheeks on the ground, kissing the ground around the grave, and weeping.[544] Their companions transmitted accounts of these visits to followers of the Imams and these

[543] Najam Haider, "Prayer, Mosque, and Pilgrimage: Mapping Shi'i Sectarian Identity in 2nd/8th Century Kufa," *Islamic Law and Society* 16, no. 2 (2009): 172.

[544] Ibn Qulawayh, *Kamil,* 95.

narratives eventually made their way to canonical collections of Shi`i hadith. This canonical process emulated for formation of the *Sunna* of the Prophet Muhammad, which led to embodied practice of everyday actions and religious rituals among both Sunnis and Shi`is. With hadiths from the Imams, Shi`is had additional exemplary models and based their practices on the Imams' in addition to the Prophet's.[545]

From the seventh century, the landscape of nearby Kufa became filled with mosques for Shi`is associated with the Imams and prophets or historical events.[546] Traditions recorded by Shi`i scholars that verify the sanctity of the sacred sites in the region were often attributed to the Prophet Muhammad or `Ali, although Haider proposes that these narratives were actually first spread by disciples of the Imams al-Baqir (d. 743) and al-Sadiq. Shi`i scholars contributed to many genres of literature, but it was through pilgrimage rituals centered on shrines where they were able to create their own literature and encourage their followers to go on pilgrimage.[547] During the lives of these later Imams in the seventh to eighth centuries, pilgrimage literature became a popular genre that was widely distributed among Shi`i communities. These texts provided a directory of sacred spaces, which gave the spaces a prominent and venerated status in the community.[548]

The rise of the genre of pilgrimage manuals coincided with the growth of Islamic seminaries in Najaf. To further cement Najaf and other shrine cities as centers of Shi`i

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[545] For more on the development of Shi`i hadith, see Ron P. Buckley, "On the Origins of Shi'i Hadith," *The Muslim World* 88, no. 2 (1998): 165–184; Ron P. Buckley, "Ja'far al-Sadiq: A Source of Shi'i Traditions," *Islamic Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (1999): 37–58.

[546] Haider, O*rigins of the Shī'a,* 237.

[547] Ibid., 243.

[548] Ibid., 240.

piety and devotion, Shi`i scholars encouraged pilgrimage to the Prophet's family in Iraq and Iran in addition to Mecca and Medina.[549] Presumably, as scholars began to establish themselves in Najaf and other shrine cities, they saw a need to attract pilgrims to the sacred sites of the towns. The same period, specifically between 950 and 1050 CE, has been termed by Marshall Hodgson as the Shi`i century; it witnessed a flourishing of Shi`i scholarship and consolidation of power in North Africa and the Middle East.[550] Shi`i scholars began to compose pilgrimage and ritual literature, one genre out of the vast expanse of literature that emerged during this period and contributed to the budding scholarly tradition in Shi`i Islam.

Pilgrimage manuals in Shi`i literature became an important genre largely due to their authors, who were primarily prominent Shi`i scholars who also penned works on theology, hadith, and Qur'anic exegesis, among other topics.[551] Manuals on pilgrimage to `Ali's shrine shed light on ways in which medieval scholars conceived of and experienced Najaf. Although they cannot offer a perspective into how the average pilgrim experienced the shrine, they do offer insight into the scholarly interpretation of the shrine through the lens of elite male scholars, who invariably influenced the masses on some level. Shi`i scholars drew on Shi`i hadith to develop a canon of ritualized behavior for pilgrimages to the graves of the Imams. Through a promise of spiritual rewards for going on pilgrimage and the threat of punishment for not going, these rituals ensured that the majority of Shi`is——or at least those who had the physical and financial means—would

[549] Ibid., 243.

[550] See Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam,* vol. I, 35-39.

[551] Meri, *Cult of Saints,* 160.

visit Najaf.[552] These canonized rituals helped contribute to a sense of Shi`i communal and sectarian identity distinct from that of Sunni Muslims. While Sunnis and Shi`is often agreed on many theological and legal issues there was a sharp division between the two communities in the framework of pilgrimage and sacred space.

Shi`i pilgrimage manuals are typically divided into sections, starting with a brief overview of the virtues of pilgrimage. Many, but not all of the manuals elaborate on the merits and rites of visiting particular graves in the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, and Iran, but each in a different order. It is not clear as to why each author lists pilgrimage sites in different orders, but it could be based on their perceived sanctity, place of residence, or it could be random. Apart from short introductions, the guides lack commentary from their authors and are similar in their format and presentation. Presumably, scholars and pilgrim guides could study the manuals and carry a copy with them while leading lay followers through the rituals.

All of the Shi`i pilgrimage manuals in this study include directions for visiting the Prophet's grave in Medina, and the graves of the Imams, Ahl al-Bayt, and important companions of the Prophet and Imams. Guides to hajj were compiled in separate collections by scholars and thus were not covered in these manuals. The scholars do cover Medina in their books, but they place their emphasis and spend the majority of their books discussing pilgrimage to the graves of `Ali in Najaf and al-Husayn in Karbala over all of the other locations. In addition to the graves of these figures, other places associated with their lives and deaths were also described as sites of interest for pilgrims to allow them to connect further with the religious figures. At the beginning of each

[552] In the period of this study, Shi`ism was primarily limited to the Near East, I have not come across any evidence that suggests pilgrims came from faraway lands, such as India during this period.

section discussing a different shrine, the authors briefly cover its history and the *fada'il* (merits) of visiting that specific shrine. `Ali's shrine was the central landmark in the area of Najaf and Kufa, although the manuals also stressed that other shrines, mosques, and sacred spaces–including the Euphrates River–should be visited in the region, also in a specific order.

The earliest extant pilgrimage manual is *Kamil al-ziyarat* by Abu al-Qasim Ja`far Ibn Qulaway al-Qummi, who was considered a reliable and trustworthy scholar by his contemporaries. He was the teacher of al-Shaykh al-Mufid, whom, as we have seen, was responsible for advancing normative Shi`i theology, and penned numerous treatises on jurisprudence and hadith.[553] Ibn Qulaway studied with many reputable scholars, including his father, brother, and Muhammad ibn Ya`qub al-Kulayni (d. 941), who compiled one of the most important collections of hadith. Ibn Qulaway was buried inside the shrine of Kadhimiya next to al-Shaykh al-Mufid.[554] The editor of *Kamil al-ziyarat* stresses that Ibn Qulaway's hadith narrations are extremely strong and the large majority of them are authentic. He also stresses that the book is one of the most important books in the Shi`i tradition.[555] Ibn Qulaway lists the places of visitation in the following order:

1. the Prophet's grave in Medina
2. the grave of Hamza, the uncle of the Prophet
3. the mosques of Kufa
4. `Ali's grave in Najaf
5. the Euphrates River
6. the grave of al-Hasan, grandson of the Prophet, in Medina
7. al-Husayn's grave in Karbala
8. the graves of the nine later Imams after al-Husayn

[553] Ibn Qulaway, *Kamil*, 7.

[554] Ibid., 20.

[555] Ibid., 27.

9. the graves of believing Muslims
10. the grave of Fatima bint Musa ibn Ja`far in Qum, Iran
11. the grave of `Abdul Azim in Rayy, Iran

Ibn Qulaway began the section on Najaf by providing numerous narratives proving that `Ali was buried in Najaf, and also added accounts that were not present in any of the sources examined in chapter two. Ibn Qulaway narrated that al-Husayn's head was buried next to `Ali's grave. [556] He systematically presented traditions going back to the Imams that provided evidence for `Ali's grave being in Najaf, and addressed rumors about other locations of his grave. As one of the earliest pilgrimage manuals, *Kamil al-ziyarat* provided the basis for many later manuals and established the formal structure and tone of the literary genre. Later manual authors often depended on *Kamil al-ziyarat* for hadith references and for the text of supplications to include in their texts.

Another important manual, *Kitab al-mazar manasik al-mazar*, was composed by al-Shaykh al-Mufid. In this chapter, I refer to his vital book on pilgrimage to explore how Shi`i scholars added to the literary genre as well as the collection of pilgrimage rites and supplications. Similar to Ibn Qulaway's book, al-Mufid's *Kitab al-mazar* helped establish the genre of pilgrimage guides and was used as a source by many later scholars who penned their own guides, such as al-Tusi in *Tahdhib al-ahkam*, Ibn Tawus in *Farhat al-Ghari*, and Jalil Taqi al-Din al-`Amali al-Kaf`ani (d. 1495) in *al-Balad al-amin*.[557]

Although some books begin by covering pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, al-Mufid uses the following order:

1. the merits of Kufa and its mosques
2. the River Euphrates

[556] Ibid., 84.

[557] Al-Mufid, *Al-Mazar*, 12.

3. the grave of `Ali
4. the grave of al-Husayn
5. the grave of `Ali ibn al-Husayn
6. the grave of the martyrs who died with al-Husayn in Karbala
7. the grave of al-Abbas, al-Husayn's brother
8. the grave of al-Husayn [further explications of rites performed at the grave]
9. the grave of the Prophet
10. the grave of Fatima, the Prophet's daughter
11. the graves of the rest of the Imams
12. hajj
13. the graves of Shi`is

In this introduction, al-Mufid explicitly explains the reason for composing his book :

> I resolved to [compose *Kitab al-mazar*] in the order of the rites of pilgrimage to the two Imams—the Commander of the Faithful, `Ali ibn Abi Talib and al-Husayn ibn `Ali—to offer a description of what is obligatory [on the pilgrim] when setting out on the journey, actions to be performed at the shrines, the stations the pilgrim should follow … I set out to present a selection of hadith about the virtues of these places as I did not find any previous [Shi`i] scholars who presented the [same] order as [my book] of [pilgrimage] hadith collections. There are books in different orders [than mine], but they have difficulty with ordering the sections and there is a dispute about where each [sacred] place should go according to subject … So I intended to summarize all of that briefly, and composed [this book] for memorization and recollection. I ask God for help and rely on Him.[558]

Having noticed the conflicting and overly dense discussions of pilgrimage to the shrines, al-Mufid decided to compose a summary of the scholarly texts to make the text more accessible to a greater number of people.[559] Al-Mufid presumably thought it beneficial to produce a handbook for pilgrimage that literate Shi`is could bring on their pilgrimages in order to follow the rites according to the emerging canonical collection of pilgrimage rites. His introduction also indicates that scholars experimented with putting the sacred spaces in different orders and at this point in time, there was no consensus among scholars around the format of pilgrimage manuals.

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[558] Ibid., 3.

[559] Ibid., 3.

Another manual that remains an important source of pilgrimage in the modern period is *Al-Mazar al-kabir* by Muhammad ibn Ja`far al-Mashhadi. *Al-Mazar al-kabir* was largely unknown during the life of its author and for many centuries afterwards, and only recently gained prominence. Al-Mashhadi was a prominent hadith scholar who authored a number of treatises in hadith and jurisprudence, and taught many students according to the numerous certificates of teaching authority in his name.[560] Despite his important role as a scholar, as attested by the book's editor, Jawad al-Qiyumi al-Isfahani, little is known about al-Mashhadi, and modern scholars such as al-Sayyid al-Khoe'i, for example, have acknowledged that there is no information available about his life. Despite the book's relative obscurity, *al-Mazar al-kabir* was mentioned as a source by Ibn Tawus, al-Majlisi (d. 1698), and al-Hurr al-Amali (d. 1693).[561] Al-Majlisi praised the book and its strong chains of transmission.[562] In *Al-Mazar al-kabir,* al-Mashhadi stated that he received the narrations from one of his teachers, Shadhan ibn Jibril al-Qummi (d. 660), who received the narrations through numerous scholars going back to Ibn Babawayh.[563] Al-Mashhadi contains the same narrations as Ibn Qulaway in *Kamil al-ziyarat* of the Imams and presents the shrines in the following order:

1. the grave of Fatima
2. graves of companions of the Prophet in Medina
3. the mosques of Kufa and the River Euphrates
4. the grave of the Prophet Jonah in Kufa
5. the grave of `Ali
6. the graves of martyrs in Kufa
7. the grave of the Prophet Adam in Najaf

[560] Ibn Al-Mashhadi, *Al-Mazar,* 5-6.

[561] Ibid., 7.

[562] Ibid., 8.

[563] Ibid., 10.

8. the grave of al-Husayn in Karbala
9. the graves of the martyrs in Karbala
10. the graves of the rest of the Imams in Iraq and Iran
11. Hajj to Mecca
12. the graves of Shi`is
13. the grave of Salman al-Farsi

Like the previous guides, *Al-Mazar al-kabir* provides a collection of supplication and description of rites drawing on the traditions from the Imams. In the introduction, al-Mashhadi explained that:

> In this book, I have compiled all varieties of pilgrimages to shrines and graves of the noble ones and everything that one could desire for the blessed mosques, selected supplications and prayers and supplications that one could take refuge in during important occasions. All of these [traditions] have come [to me] through authentic narrations that go back to the descendants of the Prophet.[564]

It was important for al-Mashhadi and other traditionist scholars to stress that their hadith narrations were authentic and they provided chains of transmission back to the Imams. His 672-page work is an encyclopedia, and in it he explains that he collected all the sources that were available to him for the benefit of pilgrims to the shrines.

Radi al-Din Ibn Tawus hailed from a prominent Shi`i family and was a prolific author. Amir-Moezzi acknowledged Radi al-Din ibn Tawus, who composed *Misbah al-za'ir*, as the most methodical compiler of prayer collections.[565] Ibn Tawus lived at the end of the `Abbasid era and had access to more than seventy prayer books in his library that he drew upon for his own work.[566] In another work, Ibn Tawus noted that he intended for *Misbah al-za'ir* to be taken on pilgrimage, which explains its succinct length and easy-to-

[564] Ibid., 27.

[565] Amir Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam: Belief and Practices* (London: IB Tauris, 2011), 381.

[566] For an extensive overview of his life and work, see Etan Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim scholar at work: Ibn Tawus and His Library* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992).

use format. Ibn Tawus also mentioned his *ijaza* in Qulaway's *Kamil al-ziyarat.*[567] In his explanation of the importance of visiting the graves of the Imams, Ibn Tawus recalled a conversation that he attributed to the Prophet and `Ali:

> The Prophet said, "I swear you will be killed in the land of Iraq and buried there."
>
> I [`Ali] said, "O prophet of God, who will visit our graves and build them?"
>
> The Prophet said, "O Abu al-Hasan, God will make the grave of you and your son [al-Husayn] a spot of Heaven [on Earth] and an area of Heaven. God will make the hearts of the noble ones from His creation and his pure worshipers will yearn for you and will carry you humility and pain and will build your graves and will visit your graves in great numbers to gain proximity to God and intimacy with the Prophet. Those people, `Ali, are set aside for my intercession when they reach my presence, tomorrow they will be my pilgrims in Heaven.[568]

Ibn Tawus listed sequentially the visitations to the shrines of the following figures in this manner:

1. the Prophet Muhammad
2. Fatima
3. Companions of the Prophet
4. `Ali
5. Kufa
6. al-Hasan
7. al-Husayn
8. the Imams in Medina
9. the remaining Imams in Iraq and Iran
10. descendants of the Imams and righteous Shi`is

Ibn Tawus appeared to have set the precedent for later prayer books, which laid out the order of the graves according to chronological order. Not only did he present a streamlined collection of the most essential prayers and rituals, but he also included a section on the etiquette of pilgrimage and specific instructions for pilgrims to follow from the moment they announced their intention to perform pilgrimage. Due to the extensive

[567] Ibid., 46.

[568] Ibn Tawus, *Misbah,*14.

length of the aforementioned pilgrimage manuals, one can assume that they were probably used as a resource for scholars going on pilgrimage and for composing short prayer booklets, rather than taken by pilgrims on their journeys.[569]

On the whole, pilgrimage manuals comprised a coherent and rigid genre that left little room for scholars to offer their additions or commentary. The main differences between the four manuals I have analyzed here include: 1) the order of pilgrimage sites listed in the book; 2) the number of variants of rituals included; 3) the inclusion or lack of instructions that accompany the supplications; and 4) the inclusion of additional material, such as the etiquette of pilgrimage. Generally, core narratives are included in all manuals, with some scholars including more details and variants. Al-Mashhadi's encyclopedic collection was much more comprehensive and included numerous other pilgrimage stations and supplications. Al-Mashhadi included at least eight variants of the pilgrimage rituals of different lengths, and Ibn Qulaway included one version with less steps than that of al-Mashhadi. Al-Shaykh al-Mufid only covered the merits of visiting `Ali's grave and did not include an overview of the rites, and Ibn Tawus included five variants of the pilgrimage that included different supplications and different numbers of steps in the pilgrimage. In total, there are more than twenty-six variant versions of the pilgrimage to Najaf derived from these four manuals and several others not mentioned here.[570]Al-Mashhadi and Ibn Tawus added dimensions of sacred time of the shrine; certain days throughout the year, month, and week were considered to be especially auspicious days

[569] The printed version of Ibn Qulaway's *Kamil al-ziyarat* is 555 pages, al-Mufid's *al-Mazar* is 229 pages, al-Mashhadi's *Al-Mazar al-kabir* is 672 pages, and Ibn Tawus' *Misbah al-za'ir* is 546 pages.

[570] For a summary and translation, see Mohammad Mehdi Baghi, trans. *Compendium of Shi'i Pilgrimage Prayers: Al-Najaf al-Ashraf*, vol. 2 (London: MIU Press, 2013).

for visitation. The most auspicious days included the day of Ghadir on the 18th of Dhu al-Hijja, which commemorated the event of Ghadir Khumm. According to Shi`is, at Ghadir Khumm, the Prophet acknowledged `Ali as his successor. Another auspicious day was the 27th of Rajab, which, according to Shi`is, memorialized the day Muhammad was designated as a prophet by God.[571] Other auspicious days included the 17th of al-Rabi`i al-Awwal, celebrating the birth of the prophet Muhammad.[572]

The actions and prayers of the Imams as recorded by their companions set the precedent for the material found in Shi`i pilgrimage manuals. As I have elucidated in the previous chapter, Najaf was not actually mentioned by name by early Muslim historians as an established city and place of pilgrimage until the tenth century, two centuries after Harun al-Rashid built the first tomb over `Ali's grave. Instead, the area of al-Ghari was known among the Imams and their family members and close companions, who went on secret visitations to the hidden grave. Ibn Tawus managed to collect rituals and supplications from most of the Imams who visited `Ali's grave. For devout Shi`is, hadiths from the Imams offered proof for the value and merits of pilgrimage. One tradition attributed to al-Sadiq (d. 765) illuminates and establishes the importance of visiting the grave of `Ali and the spiritual rewards that come to those who make the pilgrimage:

> While traveling, he said [to his traveling companion], "O Safwan, stop the caravan, for here is the grave of my grandfather, the Commander of the Faithful [`Ali]." So I stopped the caravan and he got off and made his major ablutions (*ghusl*), changed his robes, and walked towards the grave. He said to me, "Do as I do … walk slowly and gently and drag your beard on the ground. For every step you take [towards `Ali's grave], 1,000 good deeds will be recorded and 1,000 bad deeds will be erased, and you will be elevated by 100,000 stations and 100,000 of

[571] A recent publication includes some of the rituals and prayers translated into English from the manuals Ibn Qulaway, Shaykh al-Mufid, al-Mashhadi, and the two Ibn Tawuses, see Baghi, *Compendium*.

[572] Baghi, 140.

> your needs will be met and you will receive a reward for every honest person who dies or martyr who is killed."[573]

Here we can witness how narratives of al-Sadiq established the precedent for the pilgrimage rituals to `Ali's grave, his insistence on the importance of visiting the grave, and the rewards pilgrims receive for their journey. This is one of the earliest descriptions of the rituals carried out at the tomb. The bulk of hadiths on pilgrimage can be traced back to Zayn al-Abdidin, Ja`far al-Sadiq, and Muhammad al-Baqirm, and their practices were later canonized by Shi`i scholars into formal rites and supplications.

Pilgrimage rituals to Najaf were specifically Shi`i in nature and attracted Shi`is from around the Islamicate world. Although there is some evidence that local Iraqi Sunnis paid their respects to `Ali's shrine, and elite Sunnis from the Middle East patronized the shrine, there is no evidence that they participated in the ritual aspect of the pilgrimage as laid out by the manuals.[574] Shi`i Muslims who had the financial means and health were expected to follow the routes in their pilgrimage guides and visit the sacred sites to avow their communal identity.[575] Pilgrimage manuals were aimed at a community of believers who shared similar beliefs about the Imams and their divine nature, and they helped form a cohesive body of rituals that Shi`is could perform collectively at shrines of their Imams.

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[573] Ibn Tawus, *Farhat al-Ghari*, 21-2.

[574] Further inquiry into the many forgotten manuscripts, religious endowments and material culture could uncover new material, but that remains for future research.

[575] Haider, O*rigins of the Shī'a,* 244.

Praising the Virtues of Visiting `Ali's Shrine

Fada'il literature emerged at the end of the seventh century and was a popular literary genre that often consisted of treatises that outlined the merits of specific cities, the Qur'an, religious rites, prophets, etc.; authors of pilgrimage manuals also included a section on the *fada'il* of each shrine it covered.[576] *Fada'il* literature came out of the larger compilations of hadith literature, and the earliest works looked at the virtues of the Qur'an. The genre of *manaqib*, which we have seen in the previous chapters, was often interchangeable with *fada'il*, although it focused on the virtues of the Prophet's companions, including `Ali.[577] Both Sunni and Shi`i scholars contributed to the genre of *fada'il* that praised `Ali and his family, although only Shi`i scholars wrote about the virtues and merits of visiting `Ali's grave, as well as the graves of other members of Ahl al-Bayt and the Imams. This specific form of *fada'il* literature can be found within pilgrimage manuals and served to provide incentives for pilgrims to perform pilgrimage to the shrines on a regular basis as a part of their adherence to the Shi`i tradition.

Scholars prefaced their pilgrimage manuals and each section covering different shrine with compilations of the merits of visiting shrines of the Prophet Muhammad, Ahl al-Bayt, Imams, martyrs, and other significant figures in Shi`i religious history. Scholars formed a system of ranking, and often listed shrines according to their levels of sanctity and amount of rewards that pilgrims would receive for visiting them; for example, prayer in Mecca was equivalent to 100,000 prayers, 50,000 prayers in Medina, 40,000 in

[576] Asma Afsaruddin, "In Praise Of The Caliphs: Re-Creating History From The Manaqib Literature," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31 (1999): 329.

[577] Ibid., 329.

Jerusalem, and so on.[578] The scholars use a large number of hadiths they attribute to Ja`far al-Sadiq, who praised `Ali's grave on numerous occasions. Al-Sadiq promised his followers that pilgrims who visited `Ali's grave on a daily basis pilgrims would be able to commune with 70,000 angels.[579] Al-Sadiq also described pilgrimage to `Ali's shrine as a method of ensuring one's place in Heaven, noting that "whoever visits `Ali after his death will be guaranteed Paradise."[580] Al-Sharif al-Radi attributed a hadith to al-Sadiq, in which he warned pilgrims that:

> God will not look at whoever does not perform pilgrimage to the Commander of the Faithful: why do you not visit him who is visited by the angels and prophets? Surely the Commander of the Faithful is the most virtuous of all of the Imams and he possesses the rewards of all of their deeds.[581]

As we can see here, not only did hadiths from the Imams promise pilgrims large rewards in this world and the hereafter, but they also were warned about the perils of not going on pilgrimage. The combination of the promise of rewards and punishments helped establish pilgrimage as a central practice of Shi`i Islam.

Other narratives were more than a little controversial in their contradiction of Islamic beliefs and practices, specifically regarding the Hajj, which are ostensibly shared by all Muslims. These narratives insinuated that pilgrims could receive more rewards from visiting Najaf than going on Hajj or `Umra, stating that "if the pilgrim walks to visit the shrine of `Ali, then, for every footstep he takes, God will write for him the reward of performing two obligatory pilgrimages to Mecca (hajj) and one lesser pilgrimage

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[578] Meri, *The Cult of Saints,* 47.

[579] Al-Radi, *Khasa'is,* 40.

[580] Ibid..

[581] Ibid..

(`umra)."[582] As for pilgrimage to al-Husayn's shrine in Karbala, "Making pilgrimage to Husayn … is equal to and more meritorious than twenty Hajj pilgrimages to Mecca."[583] Although it is likely that the scholars who made these assertions were not attempting to dissuade Shi`is from performing Hajj, the stress on the significance of pilgrimage to the shrines of the Imams shows the push to attract large numbers of pilgrims to the shrine cities. By imitating the sense of communitas created during Hajj, scholars helped to ensure that pilgrims to Najaf would also have a similar experience of community with fellow Shi`is.[584]

The traditions comparing pilgrimage to the shrines of the Imams to the Hajj pilgrimage offered an alternative for those who were unable to make the long and treacherous journey to Mecca. For Shi`is from Iraq and nearby regions, a once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage to the shrine cities was a difficult but not impossible venture, while Hajj was out of reach for most. Some Shi`i scholars argue that these and many other traditions in pilgrimage manuals are weak and fabricated by the companions of the Imams due to elements of exaggeration, such as the claim that pilgrimage to Najaf and Karbala are better than hajj.[585] Because pilgrimage was considered by the majority of Shi`i scholars as recommended (*mandub*) and not obligatory (*wajib*), scholars of hadith science did not deem it necessary to conduct studies of the chains of transmission of

[582] Husayn Talib, *Guide to Ziyarat: Selected Supplications*, trans. Liyakatali Takim (Toronto, Ontario: Mebs Printing Press, 2000), 64.

[583] Meri, *The Cult of Saints,*158.

[584] Turner & Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 188-193. The Turners examined Hajj as an example of communitas that created a sense of unity and allowed pilgrims to enter a state of liminality.

[585] Dr. Mohsen Kadivar, "Conversation on Shi`i Pilgrimage," May 9, 2014.

narratives related to pilgrimage. Scholars concluded that people who carried out recommended practices, such as pilgrimage to the shrine cities, would receive the awards based on their intentions and not the authenticity of the traditions the practices are based on.[586] Despite questions about their authenticity, these reported virtues of visiting `Ali's grave presented enticing reasons for pilgrims to visit the shrines. Through the very act of making a journey to Najaf, they could make up for lost prayers during the year, gain additional prayers to assure a place in Paradise, and enjoy reassurance about their fate in the afterlife.

Shi`is could undertake pilgrimage for their own benefits even if they had engaged in forbidden acts. Presumably, laypeople did not read these extensive pilgrimage manuals, but rather, religious leaders and teachers would have given summaries of the virtues and rewards of pilgrimage in the context of religious lessons and Friday sermons. These strong statements imbued with religious authority ensured that the shrines received a steady stream of visitors, resulting in patronage of the shrines and financial support for scholars living in the shrine cities. Little is written about how this actually happened in the period of this study, although research on modern Shi`i pilgrimage can give us an idea of how medieval pilgrims might have received information about pilgrimage and carried out the rituals.[587]

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[586] For a comprehensive discussion of this topic in the Shi`i tradition, Muhammad Hasan Bujnurdi, *al-Qawai'id al-fiqhiyya*, eds. Mahdi Muhrizi and Muhammad Dirayti, vol. 3 (Qum: Al-Hadi Press, 1998), specifically chapter on "al-tasamuh fi adillat al-sunnan" (flexibility in the proofs of traditions), 327 or http://tinyurl.com/lfnj7a3.

[587] Several recent studies of Shi`i pilgrimage rituals in Iran and Syria can offer a glimpse of how medieval pilgrims might have performed and experienced pilgrimage to the shrines of the Imams, including Edith Szanto, "Following Sayyida Zaynab: Twelver Shi'ism in Contemporary Syria" (University of Toronto, 2012) and Anne H. Betteridge, "Specialists in Miraculous Action: Some Shrines in Shiraz," in *Shi'ism: Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies*, ed by. Paul Luft and Colin Turner, vol. 3 (London: Routledge, 2008). There have been few brief studies looking at Shi`i pilgrimage rituals in the pre-modern period as well as in

Scholars used a mixture of promising rewards and punishment to promote and integrate pilgrimage into the core of Shi`i practices. Narrations from the Imams set a precedent for all Shi`i Muslims to follow suit and perform pilgrimage to the grave of `Ali and the later Imams. Hadiths attributed to the Imams, especially Ja`far al-Sadiq, expounded on the benefits of performing pilgrimage and the negative consequences for those who failed to visit the graves of the Imams. In a conversation Ibn Tawus attributed to `Ali and the Prophet, the Prophet foreshadowed the sanctity that `Ali's grave would accrue:

> God has made your tomb and your son's tomb as one of the sites of Heaven … many people will visit your grave in the hope of becoming closer to God and to send prayers on the Prophet. [Those who visit your grave] are set aside for my intercession and they will enter the pool [of the Prophet on the day of resurrection], and they will visit me tomorrow in Heaven. Whoever visits your grave will receive the equivalent of seventy testimonies after the testimony of Islam and all of his sins are forgiven so that he returns home from visiting you like the day his mother gave birth to him.[588]

Here we can see that not only was Najaf considered to be a sacred space by the Imams, but it was, in fact, a piece of Heaven on Earth, akin to Eliade's concept of hieorphany.[589] Most of the Earth was considered profane, but certain spots that contained the bodies of

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general, including Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi`is of Iraq : with a new introduction by the author*, Princeton paperbacks (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); Y. Nakash, "An Attempt to Trace the Origin of the Rituals of ʿĀshūrāʾ," *Die Welt des Islams* 33, no. 2 (1993): 161–181; Y. Nakash, "The Visitation of the Shrines of the Imams and the Shi'i Mujtahids in the Early Twentieth Century," *Studia Islamica*, no. 81 (1995), 153–164; and A. J. Hussain, "The Mourning of History and the History of Mourning: The Evolution of Ritual Commemoration of the Battle of Karbala," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25, no. 1 (2005); and Najam Iftikhar Haider, *The origins of the Shīʻa : identity, ritual, and sacred space in eighth-century Kūfa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); L. Takim, "Charismatic appeal or communitas? Visitation to the shrines of the imams," *Journal Of Ritual Studies* 18, no. 2 (2004): 106–120; and Colin Turner, "Aspects of Devotional Life in Twelver Shi'ism: The Practice of du'a," in *Shi'ism: Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies*, ed by. Paul Luft, vol. 3 (London: Routledge, 2008).

[588] Ibn Tawus, *Farhat al-Ghari*, 203.

[589] Eliade *The Sacred and the Profane,* 36-7.

sanctified figures appeared to have been conduits to Heaven in Shi`i belief. Not only does this prophetic hadith indicate the sacred nature of Najaf, but it also offers a "get-out-of-Hell" card to anyone who makes the journey to `Ali's grave. Frequent reassurances about guaranteed salvation in return for the fairly simple act of pilgrimage was very common in pilgrimage manuals and certainly had some role in promoting pilgrimage.

Al-Husayn and the other Imams emphasized the virtues and sanctity of Najaf in their hadiths. A hadith attributed to al-Husayn by Ibn Qulaway and al-Shaykh al-Mufid illustrates the blessed nature of `Ali and his grave according to al-Husayn:

> Abu Wahib al-Basri went to al-Husayn while visiting Medina and said, "I sacrifice myself for you, I come to you and I did not visit the grave of the Commander of the Faithful."
>
> [Al-Husayn] said, "Never mind what you did, if you were not from our party (of the Shi`a), I would not have glanced at you. How could you not visit him who is visited by God and the angels, and who is visited by the prophets and believers?"
>
> [Al-Basri] replied, "I sacrifice myself for you! If only I had known that!"
>
> [Al-Husayn] said, "Know that the Commander of the Faithful is the most preferred of the Imams in the eyes of God, and he receives the rewards of all of their work."[590]

From this report, we can see how a Shi`i pilgrim who visited al-Husayn but neglected to pass through Najaf on his way to Medina was reprimanded and reminded of the high rank of `Ali, which was even higher than that of al-Husayn. Other accounts stated that Najaf was so sacred that things considered polluted in Islam could not enter it. If a person brought wine into the city, it would turn into vinegar, and dogs could not enter the city.[591] Not only was the grave of `Ali considered to be sacred, but traditions established that the

[590] Ibn Qulaway, *Kamil,* 89; al-Mufid, *al-mazar*, 20.

[591] Sindawi, "Image of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib," 185.

blessings of the grave extended over twelve miles from the grave.[592] `Ali's grave was the most sanctified shrine of all of the Imams, and pilgrims who visited it could be confident knowing that even God and the angels paid their respects at `Ali's grave. Thus, we can see that not only the immediate area around the grave was sanctified, but due to its intense power, it formed a larger sanctified landscape around Najaf, including Kufa and the Euphrates River.

One reason that Shi`is considered Najaf to be a blessed place to visit was because of what they alleged to be its historical connection with the prophets Adam and Noah, as we have seen in the previous chapter. With the added bonus of Adam and Noah's bones buried next to `Ali, pilgrims were promised great rewards for visiting the tomb. According to Ibn Qulaway, Shaykh al-Mufid, and Ibn Tawus, the plateau of Najaf has a long history of being associated with prophets; they claimed it was the very same mountain where God spoke to Moses (Mt. Sinai), where God sanctified Jesus, where God took Abraham as a friend, and where God took Muhammad as his beloved and made it a home for prophets.[593] An account attributed to al-Husayn by Ibn Qulaway narrated that "visiting [al-Ghari] opens up the gates of Heaven when he [God] calls for you."[594] In another account from Ibn Qulaway, al-Hasan allegedly asked the Prophet Muhammad about the merits of visiting his [Muhammad's] grave, to which the Prophet replied, "Whoever visits my grave in his life or death, or your father's [`Ali's] grave, will receive the privilege of receiving a visit from me on the Day of Judgment and will be purged of

[592] Ibid., 185.

[593] Ibn Qulaway, *Kamil*, 21; Ibn Tawus, *Farhat al-Ghari*, 90.

[594] Ibn Qulawayh, *Kamil,* 91; al-Mufid, *al-mazar*, 21; Ibn Tawus, *Farhat al-Ghari*, 90.

his sins."[595] The reward of visiting Medina and Najaf became equivalent. With the promise of eternal salvation for merely going on a pilgrimage, the act of pilgrimage to Najaf was exceedingly popular.[596] One tradition attributed to al-Sadiq by Ibn Ja`far al-Mashhadi confirmed the merits of visiting Najaf and the rewards that await its visitors:

> Complete this pilgrimage and supplicate with these prayers and visit them [`Ali and the Prophet Adam], for I will guarantee to you, by God, that whoever visits them using this ritual and prays using these supplications at the shrine will have his pilgrimage accepted, and his journey thankful and he will return home safely. His needs will be met by God and God will answer all of his prayers.[597]

As life expectancies were short and people frequently died of common illnesses, seeking intercession from the Imams for their prayers to be answered was a common way for Shi`is to find solace.

These promises of salvation established a strong tradition of seeking intercession from the Imams that formed part of the core beliefs in Shi`ism and strengthened Shi`i identity and belief in the power of the Imams. One story attributed to Ja`far al-Sadiq by al-Mashhadi related that a Bedouin from Iraq expressed his regret that he could not visit the Prophet because he lived too far away, but was able to visit `Ali in Najaf. The Prophet replied:

> He who visits `Ali it is as if he visited me. He who loves him it is as if he loved me. He who bears animosoity against him, it is as if he bore animosity against me. Impart it from me to all you kin, and he who intends to visit him it is as if he

[595] Ibn Qulaway, *Kamil,* 91.

[596] Evidence from travelers, such as Ibn Battuta, attest to the large crowds who visited the shrine, see Ibn Battuta, *Rihla*, 109-110. Also, the generous patronage of the shrines by rulers and the elite attest to the popularity and significance of the shrine in medieval Iraq, see Allan, *The Art and Architecture,* and Ja`far Dujayli and `Abd Allah Khaqani, *Mawsu`at al-Najaf al-Ashraf* (Bayrut: Dar al-Adwa, 1993) and Ibn Tawus, *Farhat al-ghari.*

[597] Ibn al-Mashhadi, *Al-Mazar,* 214.

> visited me and I will reward him on the Day of Resurrection and Gabriel will provide him with the rewards befitting the believers.[598]

The Imams' connection to the Prophet through their rightful claim to leadership compounded the virtues of visiting their graves and provided a strong spiritual impetus for pilgrims to travel from far and wide. Expounding on the virtues of `Ali and visiting his grave was an important component of pilgrimage manuals and provided a rich incentive for pilgrims who would undertake the often dangerous and brutal journey through the scorching Iraqi desert to Najaf.

Performative Aspects of Pilgrimage

One of the unique aspects of Shi`i pilgrimage in comparison to Sunni pilgrimage is the prescribed rituals that became part of the requirements for fulfilling the pilgrimage. The language of the prayers and rituals paralleled those used by pilgrims on Hajj and further worked to solidify the pilgrimage by relating it to the obligatory pillar of Islam.[599] Just like Muslims pilgrims who followed the footsteps of the Prophet Muhammad, Abraham, and Hajar during Hajj,[600] Shi`i pilgrims followed the footsteps of `Ali based on recorded events in Kufa and Najaf as well as those of the Imams who later visited `Ali's

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[598] Ibn al-Mashhadi, *Al-Mazar*, 13; Baghi, *Compendium,* 2-3.

[599] For studies on rituals of the Hajj and its historical significance, see Robert Bianchi, "Hajj," ed by. John L. Esposito, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Richard E. Martin, "Pilgrimage: Muslim Pilgrimage," ed by. M. Eliade, *Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987); Bernard Lewis, "Hadjdj," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online); William C. Young, "The Kaba, Gender, and the Rites of Pilgrimage," *International journal of Middle East Studies*. 25, no. 2 (1993): 285–300; Venetia Porter and Liana Saif, eds., *The Hajj: Collected Essays* (London: British Museum, 2013); M Abdel Haleem and Venetia Porter, *Hajj: Journey to the Heart of Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012); F Peters, *The Hajj: The Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca and the Holy Places* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994); M McMillan, *The Meaning of Mecca : The Politics of Pilgrimage in Early Islam* (London: Saqi Books, 2011). For more on the historical pilgrimage to Medina, see forthcoming book, Harry Munt, *The Holy City of Medina: Sacred Space in Early Islamic Arabia* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[600] John L. Esposito, "Hajj," *The Islamic World: Past and Present.* (Oxford Islamic Studies Online), http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/article/opr/t243/e124.

grave. As mentioned earlier, one of the main literary genres in pilgrimage manuals was collections of supplications originally recited by the Imams, complemented by directions as to where the pilgrim should recite specific supplications. Muslims could also make improvised supplications, although formal supplications transmitted by the Prophet and other important religious figures were considered especially efficacious.[601] Supplications are an important part of all traditions within Islam and an important aspect of the practice is the idea of reciprocity.

Formal supplications form an important part of piety and devotion in Islamic practices, and many were originally recited and composed by important religious figures, including the Shi`i Imams. Supplications are not monologues; they are prayers addressed to God or saintly figures such as the Imams.[602] There have been few studies on the broader genre of supplications in Islam, and in the context of Shi`ism in particular, but both Amir-Moezzi and Colin Turner examine the topic and offer overviews of the genre, only briefly touching upon the sub-genre of pilgrimage supplications.[603] Turner categorizes Shi`i supplications into nine different subgenres, including pilgrimage prayers, although he asserts that pilgrimage prayers are a hybrid of the other subgenres of supplications. The categories of supplications, according to Turner, overlap and are largely unproductive, especially since pilgrimage prayers include nearly all of the subgenres he lists separately.

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[601] Colin Turner, "Aspects of Devotional Life in Twelver Shi'ism: The Practice of du'a," in *Shi'ism: Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies*, ed. Paul Luft, vol. 3 (London: Routledge, 2008), 376.

[602] Amir-Moezzi, *Spirituality,* 377.

[603] Ibid.,; Turner, "Devotional Life." For an overview of prayer manuals from numerous Islamic traditions, see: Constance E Padwick, *Muslim Devotions: A Study of Prayer-Manuals in Common Use* (London: SPCK, 1961).

In the context of Shi`i supplications, the Imams are frequently the objects of address and the manuals referred to them both individually and as a single body. Amir-Moezzi, who in his presentation of doctrines of traditionists and extremist Shi`is, posits that the Imams "form a unique sacred entity" and that they are the vehicles of God on Earth.[604] When pilgrims visit the Imams' graves, it is as if the pilgrims visited all of them, as reflected in a supplication written by Ibn Babaway (d. 991) addressed to the Imams, "Your worship is in each worshipper, your names in all names, your body in all bodies, your spirit in all spirits, your soul in all souls, your sign in all signs and your tomb in all tombs."[605]

Amir-Moezzi further explains that the Imams are mediators who offer direct access to God and that recitation of the supplications can evoke an "intense spiritual experience" in pilgrims.[606] Through recitation of the prayers, Shi`is can connect with Imams' *walaya* and experience a heightened feeling of spiritual love.[607] In return for their devotees' prayers, the Imams can bestow upon devotees divine knowledge or miracles based on their petition, assuage their sorrows, grant them tranquility, and intercede on their behalf.[608] In a nutshell, formal supplications and embodied rituals, many of which are attributed to the Imams themselves, act as a vehicle to connect Shi`is to the Imams and ultimately to the Divine.

Karbala received the most attention in pilgrimage manuals even during the time of

[604] Amir-Moezzi, *Spirituality,* 392.

[605] Ibn Babaway, *Kitab man la yahdarahu al-faqih*, vol. 2, 374, quoted in Amir-Moezzi, *Spirituality,* 392.

[606] Amir-Moezzi, *Spirituality,* 392.

[607] Ibid., 394.

[608] A Ibid., 399.

Ja`far al-Sadiq; it appears that at least local pilgrims would visit the city on a regular basis. A hadith attributed to al-Sadiq explained that "Our Shi`a [in Kufa] allow a year or two to pass during which most of them do not visit al-Husayn b. 'Ali b. Abi Talib."[609] Al-Sadiq additionally warned that those who do not regularly visit al-Husayn will receive less spiritual reward and find themselves removed from the blessings of the Prophet Muhammad in the afterlife. In another tradition attributed to al-Sadiq, he questioned a guest from Kufa about how often he visited Karbala. When the guest responded that he seldom went on pilgrimage to al-Husayn's grave despite the short distance from Kufa, al-Sadiq stressed that the rite was not intended to be a burden and comes with the rewards equivalent to both Hajj and `Umra.[610] Yet another tradition records that al-Baqir stating that he would frequently visit al-Husayn if he lived in Kufa due to their proximity.[611]

By compiling traditions in manuals that made pilgrimage to the shrines of the Imams practically obligatory for Shi`is, scholars could ensure that the ritual became a distinct Shi`i practice that brought Shi`is around the world to one of the centers of Shi`i religious authority and scholarship. It was in the interest of Shi`i scholars to provide an incentive for people to visit Najaf and to bring prominence and authority to the city; as Meri asserts, "the formalization and consolidation of ritual was a necessary corollary to the development of central pilgrimage centres, which did not exist in the Sunni case."[612] In a way, pilgrimage manuals may well have been seen as a form of strategic advertising for scholars, Imams, and teachers to pass on to their communities as encouragement to

[609] Quoted in Haider, *Origins of the Shī'a*, 245-6.

[610] Ibid..

[611] Ibid., 246.

[612] Meri, *The Cult of Saints*, 158.

them to visit the shrine cities.

Most of the rituals and prayers were related from the Imams and made their way into canonical collections of rituals. Shi`i pilgrimage manuals included a strong stress on the performative aspect of pilgrimage, combining supplications with physical gestures of prayer to be embodied by pilgrims.[613] Pilgrims were not expected to only mourn the death of `Ali and the other Imams, but also to embody their physical and emotional lives and deaths and to connect with his historical memory.[614] Shi`i scholars asserted that all of the Imams visited `Ali's grave and their companions recorded their supplications, which made their way into pilgrimage manuals. These spontaneous supplications were then transmitted as formulaic prayers to be recited by the pilgrim at the grave. By repeating the same words as the Imams, pilgrims found that the prayers were imbued with a surplus of blessings.

Through the act of pilgrimage and rituals, the Shi`i community was able to renew and consolidate its bond with the Shi`i Imams.[615] More than merely a literary genre, pilgrimage manuals impacted Shi`i devotion and encouraged mobility throughout the Islamicate world. Although most pilgrims would not have had access to expensive manuscripts, nor would they have used the pilgrimage manuals during their trips, they might have carried small booklets that summarized the manuals with them.[616]

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[613] Talib, *Guide to Ziyarat,* 64.

[614] Meri, *The Cult of Saints*, 160.

[615] Y. Nakash, "An Attempt to Trace the Origin of the Rituals of ʿĀshūrāʾ," *Die Welt Des Islams* 33, no. 2 (1993): 161.

[616] I have not been able to come across any information about the use of pilgrimage manuals by pilgrims during their pilgrimage. Due to widespread illiteracy and difficulty in accessing manuscripts, I would conjecture that some literate pilgrims would have small booklets like the ones used by modern pilgrims, while the majority would rely on their pilgrimage guide, who would lead the pilgrims in group prayers and

Experienced guides, therefore, would have led them around the sacred places in Najaf, helping them recite the appropriate prayers at each station in the shrine. These guides would have studied the pilgrimage manuals and passed on this knowledge through their actions and by leading pilgrims in a communal recitation.[617] Until today at Najaf and other shrines cities, it is common to find groups of pilgrims from around the world engaged in prayers led by a guide, often a religious leader. Pilgrimage to shrines of the Imams was seen as an act of covenant between the devotee and the Imam, and pilgrimage manuals promise pilgrims spiritual and physical rewards and intercession on the Day of Judgment for their journey. Pilgrimage manuals led pilgrims through their journey with a combination of directives through the pilgrimage stations and prescription of prayers to recite at each station. By taking the same routes taken by that of the Imams and reciting the same supplications as the Imams, pilgrims could remember and embody the suffering and sorrow faced by the Imams, going through an emotional journey to reconnect with their Imams.[618]

Supplications prescribed for pilgrims to recite at numerous stations about the shrines consisted of a combination of praise for the Imams, request for intercession, and prayers to God, along with curses on the enemies of the Imams, especially those who were responsible for their death. Making supplications at shrines was a practice shared by most Muslims in the medieval period, although Shi`is also added the ritual of cursing to

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communal rituals throughout the entire journey. Until this day, it is still common for pilgrims to go on pilgrimage in caravans with a guide who ensures that they carry out their pilgrimage correctly and who is responsible for heightening the pilgrims' spiritual experience.

[617] Meri, *The Cult of Saints*, 160.

[618] Presumably, the material in these manuals would have been transmitted to pilgrims through preachers, religious teachers, and pilgrimage guides, as well as booklets that contained condensed versions of the manuals with the most popular variants of the pilgrimage rituals.

many of their prayers. Sunni supplications at the graves of saints almost always focused on praising and praying for the saint and petitioning the saint for intercession, whereas Shi`i supplications included these components but also emphasized the suffering of the Imams and cursing their enemies. Sunni supplications very rarely included curses on enemies other than curses that can be found in the Qur'an.

The supplications pilgrims were prescribed to recite in Najaf included the following components: 1) emphasis on `Ali as an oppressed martyr; 2) a focus on `Ali's high spiritual rank; and 3) importance placed on cursing the enemies of `Ali and Ahl al-Bayt. Traditionally called *du`a*, supplications in the context of Shi`i pilgrimage are referred to as *ziyara,* which is also often a term for pilgrimage.[619] In this way, *ziyara* has two meanings, indicating both the ritual of pilgrimage as well as the prescribed prayers.

The *ziyara* supplications were powerful and recalled the life and venerated state of `Ali. They were even more meaningful, however, because they had originally been recited by one of the Imams and allowed pilgrims to reenact the visits to `Ali's grave by the Imams. In anticipation of going on pilgrimage, Ibn Tawus, in *Misbah al-za'ir*, provided steps that pilgrims should take before undertaking the journey. Drawing on hadiths attributed to al-Sadiq, Ibn Tawus advised pilgrims to first fast on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday before their travels and to try and travel on a Saturday, Tuesday, or Thursday, which were praised as being the best days to begin a journey. Pilgrims should also make sure to avoid traveling on a Monday or Wednesday as well as the 24th, 25th, or 26th of any month. Pilgrims also had to make sure the moon was not in Scorpio, as Ibn

[619] Amir-Moezzi, *Spirituality*, 378.

Tawus reported that Ja`far al-Sadiq had stated that it was a hated day for travel.[620] A hadith from al-Sadiq recommended that pilgrims give out alms before their travel in order to ensure their safety throughout the journey.[621] Before setting out, manuals instructed pilgrims to perform the major ablution, pray two prayer cycles with their family, and recite a long prayer of praise of God, the Prophet and his family to ensure they would return home safely.[622] After bidding farewell to their family, they should stand at the door of their home and recite a number of prayers and verses from the Qur'an.[623] Ibn Tawus also recommended that pilgrims bring a walking stick taken from a bitter almond tree, according to the tradition of the Prophet, and carve out a hole where they could insert a paper talisman inside with prayers for protection. Ibn Tawus recommended that pilgrims undertake the journey with traveling companions and to carry some dust from al-Husayn's tomb in Karbala as a protective talisman.[624] There were also specific prayers depending on what type of transportation pilgrims took, such as a boat or riding animal.[625] Ibn Tawus included prayers designated for every segment of the voyage, such as crossing a bridge, passing by a house, village, getting lost, and for instances when pilgrims experienced fear.[626]

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[620] Ibn Tawus, *Misbah,* 26-7.

[621] Ibid., 27.

[622] Ibid., 28.

[623] Ibid., 30.

[624] Ibid., 32; 34.

[625] Ibid., 35.

[626] Ibid., 36.

In order to provide an overview of the rituals and supplications included in the pilgrimage manuals, I present selections from different manuals according to the main stations of the pilgrimage to Najaf. Not all manuals included every station of the pilgrimage, so I provide a composite selection from the four manuals to offer an overview of the entire pilgrimage. Manuals instructed pilgrims to engage in preliminary rituals to prepare themselves before visiting Najaf. Manuals encouraged pilgrims to first visit Kufa and then bathe in the Euphrates River before finally making their way to Najaf. First, they should prepare their bags, complete the major ablution, wear clean clothes, wear perfume, remove their shoes, and then face towards Najaf.[627] In a calm and dignified state, they should recite the following supplication:

> O God, I have turned away from my house seeking your favor. I visit the successor of your Prophet. O God, grant me your favor and make it my fate to visit you. Protect my children and my family with the best protection, O most compassionate of the compassionate ones.[628]

This supplication indicated that the pilgrim had prepared him or herself for the sacred journey and that the pilgrim expressed clear intentions to visit `Ali's grave. A trench and high walls surrounded the old city of Najaf to protect the city from Bedouin raiders and other attackers.

On their way to `Ali's grave, pilgrims were instructed to stop at numerous locations around Najaf before reaching the shrine. The first stop was outside of the city walls, where pilgrims would recite the following supplication:

> God is most great … God is most great, the people of greatness and sacredness, and the people of praise and grandeur. God is most great and [protects] me from

[627] Ibn al-Mashhadi, *Al-Mazar*, 181.

[628] Ibid.,181.

> what I fear and am warned about. God is most great, He is my pillar that I rely on. God is most great, He is my hope and I seek refuge in Him.
>
> O God, you are the guardian of my blessings and can grant my wishes, you know my needs … Do not forbid us from visiting the Commander of the Faithful and the partisans (Shi`is) and the blessed chosen ones.[629]

These supplications bring to mind similar prayers that all Muslims recite when starting their Hajj pilgrimage: "Here we come, O God, here we come! Here we come. No partner have You. Here we come! Praise indeed, and blessings, are Yours—the Kingdom too! No partner have You!"[630] Pilgrims on Hajj and other pilgrimages also repeatedly recite "God is most Great," just as manuals instruct pilgrims to Najaf to do.[631] The initial supplications address God as the protector and request God to ensure a successful pilgrimage. Most importantly, pilgrims ask for salvation from God, as Muslims, but also specifically as Shi`i Muslims. While the supplications do mirror the prayers recited by pilgrims on hajj, there are some subtle differences that highlight the specifically Shi`i aspect of pilgrimage to Najaf. This emphasis on Shi`is as an elite group of Muslims served to differentiate Shi`is from other others and to consolidate components of sectarian identity.

After entering the city, pilgrims begin to recite supplications requesting purification, forgiveness, and for their pilgrimage to be accepted. When they reached a location within Najaf where they were able to see the dome of the shrine, manuals then instructed pilgrims to recite the following prayer:

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[629] Ibid., 181-2.

[630] Muhammad Yusuf, "Hajj Made Easy," *hajjumrahguide, 2006, http://www.hajjumrahguide.com/hajj_madeasy.html*

[631] For a look at the content of non-hajj Sunni pilgrimages, see Meri, *Cult of Saints,* 141-157.

> All praise is to God for having chosen for me a good birth, and who purified me to be among the righteous people, a purifying journey, to the chosen one of the scholars. O God, accept my journey to You, my supplications are between your hands. Forgive my sins, which cannot be hidden from you. You are God, the Kind, the all-forgiving.[632]

Similiarly, during hajj, pilgrims are instructed to recite supplications praising God upon seeing the Ka`ba.[633] Once again, we can see how Shi`i pilgrimage follows some of the same steps as that of hajj. This clearly represents an effort on behalf of scholars to present pilgrimage to Najaf as an official pilgrimage akin to hajj.

The manuals then guided pilgrims to continue their walk towards the shrine until they reached the flag in a location called Hannana outside of Najaf, and to recite the following prayer:

> O God, you see my place, you hear my speech, nothing can be hidden from you about my affairs … I came to you seeking intercession from your Prophet, the Prophet of Mercy, seeking mediation from the successor of your messenger. I ask of you through them (Muhammad and `Ali) to give me guidance and light in the afterlife and in this life, and proximity to you, you are the eternal King.[634]

The manuals noted that pilgrims should also pray two cycles at this location in commemoration of Ja`far al-Sadiq, who prayed at the site on his way to Najaf. Ja`far al-Safiq explained to his companions that he prayed at the location because the head of al-Husayn was buried there after being carried from Karbala.[635] Another stop along the way to Najaf was Thawba, a hill between Kufa and Najaf near Hannana. Here, manuals instructed pilgrims to pray two cycles of prayer, at the place where several of `Ali's

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[632] Ibn al-Mashhadi, *Al-Mazar*, 182.

[633] Muhammad Yusuf, "Hajj Made Easy," *hajjumrahguide, 2006, http://www.hajjumrahguide.com/hajj_madeasy.html*

[634] Ibn al-Mashhadi, *Al-Mazar*, 182.

[635] Ibn Tawus, *Misbah,* 93.

followers were buried.[636] Here we can see that many of the pilgrimage stations have historical significance connected to the Imams, and the connection of the rituals, prayers, and supplications would have allowed pilgrims to delve into the communal memory of the Shi`is. In this case of Hannana, which was said to contain al-Husayn's head, it gave pilgrims a chance to mourn his martyrdom and remember the unjust way he was treated by the Umayyads.

Finally, once the pilgrim reaches the gates of the shrine, al-Mashhadi instructed pilgrims to recite from among the most common Islamic prayers—"God is Most Great," "There is no god but God," "All praise is to God," as well as prayers on Muhammad and his family—thirty times each. Pilgrims could then cross over the threshold with their right foot first, just like in hajj and recite, "In the name of God, with God, and in the path of God, in the religion of the Prophet of God."[637] With each step as pilgrims get closer to `Ali's grave, they must continue in remembrance of God and remain in a devout state.

After entering the courtyard, the manuals advise pilgrims to pray two cycles of prayer of greeting to the shrine and to recite a longer prayer:

> Peace to the Prophet of God, the seal of the prophets, peace to his successor, the Commander of the Faithful. Peace to all of the angels who are in this sanctuary and greet him [`Ali] while they are gazing at his [`Ali's] shrine, and who are forgiving [the sins] of his [`Ali's] visitors. All praise is to God who blessed us with awareness of Him, and the Prophet and his family and who obliged us to obey Him.
>
> O God, I am your servant and your pilgrim, and I journey towards you, I seek proximity to you through the visitation of the brother [`Ali] of your Prophet.[638]

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[636] Ibid..

[637] Muhammad Yusuf, "Hajj Made Easy," *hajjumrahguide, 2006, http://www.hajjumrahguide.com/hajj_madeasy.html;* Ibn al-Mashhadi, *Al-Mazar*, 182-3.

[638] I have only translated the beginning of this long supplication here; Ibn al-Mashhadi, *Al-Mazar*, 183.

Upon entering the shrine, the supplications recited by pilgrims differ by putting more stress on the Prophet Muhammad and `Ali. Inside the core of the sacred space, pilgrims send greetings of peace onto the inhabitants of the shrine, including `Ali and the angels. Once again, pilgrims announce their intention to God to visit `Ali. After reciting the prayer, manuals instructed pilgrims to walk to the Bab al-Salam (the Gate of Peace), which faced the entrance to the inner sanctuary where `Ali's grave was located, and to enter with their right foot first. At this station, manuals instructed pilgrims to send greetings of peace to the Imams, ask their intercession to have God forgive their sins, and then address extended greetings of peace to `Ali. The supplications then go on to acknowledge `Ali's high spiritual rank and praise his deeds during his life.[639] This ritual also mirrors that of the hajj pilgrimage in more than one way: the main entrance to the Haram Mosque in Mecca was called Bab al-Salam, and pilgrims entered it with their right foot first, and supplicated God to bestow mercy on them.[640]

Once pilgrims entered the sanctuary of `Ali's grave, there were numerous rituals and supplications they could practice according to the manuals. Supplications often combined praise of the Prophet, his family, and the Imams along with cursing of their enemies. One supplication transmitted from Zayn al-`Abidin and recommended by Ibn Qulaway for recitation upon entering the shrine, claimed that during Zayn al-`Abidin's visit to `Ali's grave, he wept and recited the following:

> Peace be upon you, Commander of the Faithful, and mercy and blessings and peace upon you, trustworthy one of God in His land and his testimony on His

[639] I have only translated the beginning of this long supplication here; Ibid., 186.

[640] Muhammad Yusuf, "Hajj Made Easy," *hajjumrahguide, 2006; http://www.hajjumrahguide.com/hajj_madeasy.html*.

> servants. I bear testimony that you struggled in the path of God, and you did deeds according to His book and followed the traditions of His Prophet until God called you to His side and brought you near to him by his choice. He forced your enemies to bear witness to your Proof by killing them with your high proofs over all of His creation. God, with your power, make my soul tranquil, satisfied with fate, kindled with remembrance of you and supplication and love of purity.[641]

The guide then explained that Zayn al-`Abidin, the fourth Imam, rested his cheek on `Ali's grave and continued making supplications with intense longing for God. In addition to praying for `Ali, Zayn al-`Abidin petitioned God for rewards and blessings in his life and afterlife and pilgrims were encouraged to engage in the same acts. While praying at the grave, manuals recommended pilgrims kiss `Ali's tomb. After that they should then turn in the direction of Medina (south) to greet the Prophet Muhammad and then to the direction of Karbala (north) to greet al-Husayn.[642] Pilgrims were encouraged to perform the same actions and recite the same supplications as the Imams, thus effectively allowing them to transcend their individual identities through bodily engagement and experience a connection with their community.[643] Pilgrims were encouraged to engage in praise of remembrance not only of `Ali, whom they were visiting, but also the Prophet Muhammad, his family, and the other Imams.

Musa al-Kazim, the seventh Imam, was reported to have made the following supplications at `Ali's grave, and this prayer was to be recited inside the shrine:

> Peace be upon you, friend of God, I bear witness that you are the first oppressed one, and the first one who was robbed of his right. You were patient in anticipation of God's reward until God gave you certainty. I bear witness that you encountered God and you are a martyr. May God torture your killer with all sorts

[641] Ibn Qulawayh, *Kamil,* 92.

[642] Ibn Tawus, *Misbah,* 174-197.

[643] Vernon Schubel comes to a similar conclusion based on his study of Shi`i rituals in contemporary Pakistan, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam: Shi'i Devotional Rituals in South Asia* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1993).

> of punishments and continually renew the punishment. I came with awareness of your rights, with a vision of your affairs, with hostility towards your enemies and whoever oppressed you...
>
> … Friend of God, I have committed many sins, please intercede for me with your Lord, O my Master. You have a well-known station with God and you have a rank and intercession with God. God said [in the Qur'an] "they cannot intercede for any but those whom He has [already] graced with His goodly acceptance."[644]

Praise of the Imams often came alongside wishes of punishment and death for those responsible for the Imams' death. Al-Mashhadi included curses that pilgrims should recite upon the enemies of `Ali to show their solidarity with the Imams:

> O God, curse the killers of the commander of the faithful (`Ali). O God, curse the killers of Hasan and Husayn. O God curse the murderers of the Holy Imams, condemn them to eternal punishment, the likes of which You have not yet punished anyone in the whole universe, doomed ever to repeating damnation. They shall never experience relief, nor there should be a fixed time and end for their punishment, lest they may (again) destroy the authority of Your commands. Keep ready for them that punishment which none from among Your creation will ever encounter. And inflict a painful punishment in the lowest tiers of the burning Fire.[645]

As reflected in this supplication, cursing was an important aspect of pilgrimage rituals and included harsh condemnations of historical figures seen as evil and the enemies of God. As Mahmoud Ayoub states, "the sufferings of the [family of the Prophet] are seen by the Shi`i community as the culmination of all suffering of the pious from the beginning of human history until its final consummation."[646] Ritual cursing offers a glance into the expressions of mourning and suffering that figures into Shi`i devotion and piety. It reflects on the hardships endured by the family of the Prophet at the hands of

[644] Qur'an 21:28; Ibn Qulawayh, *Kamil,* 95.

[645] I have only translated a section of this long supplication here; Ibn al-Mashhadi, *Al-Mazar,* 234.

[646] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering,* 24.

Umayyad and some of the Abbasid rulers, whom the Shi`is believe represented the epitome of injustice and evil.

Although the pilgrimage supplications also contained statements of love for `Ali and the family of the Prophet, it is the hatred and hostility for his enemies that stands out and differentiates the rhetoric from that of Sunni—mainly Sufi—pilgrimage rituals. Mahmoud Ayoub posits that the pilgrim "emphasize[s] the role the imams play in his salvation and the ongoing natural processes."[647] The pilgrimage manuals express the core beliefs of the Shi`i tradition, which emphasizes the importance of justice and encourages followers to experience intimate empathy with the oppressed. One supplication transmitted by Ibn Qulaway includes praise of `Ali and Muhammad, and then proceeds to curse:

> May God curse those who killed you and those who crossed you and those who slandered and oppressed you and those who robbed you of your rights … by God, I am innocent [of these accusations]. May God curse the community that betrayed you and the community that denied your authority (*walaya*), and the community that protested against you and the community that killed you, and the community that turned away from you and let you down. All praise is to God who made the hellfire for people like this and the evil of those who come …
>
> God, curse the killers of your prophets and the guardians of your prophets, make the fire of hellfire hotter. God, curse the idols, the Devil, Pharaoh, al-Lat, al-Uzza, and the enchantment and the devil[648] and every rival that worships other than God and all those who slander God. God, curse them and their followers, partisans, friends, helpers, and those they love.
>
> God, curse the killer of the Commander of the Faithful (repeat three times), God curse the killers of al-Hasan and al-Husayn (repeat three times). God, punish them a terrible, painful punishment in a way you have never punished anyone before in

[647] Ibid., 191.

[648] According to Edward Lane, *al-jibt wa al-taghut* refer to two Jewish men during the time of the Prophet Muhammad who worshiped idols in order to attract Quraysh to fight against the Prophet, see Lane, L*exicon*, 9.

> the entire world, and multiply their punishment within your power, and keep on punishing them in a harsher way than you have punished any of your creation.
>
> God, enter into the lowest level of the Hellfire the killers of the helpers of your Prophet, the killers of the helpers of the Commander of the Faithful, the killers of the helpers of al-Hasan and al-Husayn … never go light on their punishment, make them always confused and accursed, bowing their heads out of regret and disgrace for having killed the offspring of your prophets and messengers and their righteous followers.[649]

The supplications against the enemies of the Imams reflect the prevalent Shi`i theology of the time. Not only were those who were directly responsible for the death of the Imams considered enemies, but also, anyone who denied `Ali's *walaya*, and those who slandered, oppressed, and treated `Ali, his relatives, and followers in a less than savory way. By both praising `Ali and asking for his intercession, as well as cursing his enemies and asking God to punish them for their sins, pilgrims are promised spiritual and material rewards as well as hope and security. Thus the pilgrimage is two-fold and it brought together Shi`is from different backgrounds to engage in communal praise and veneration of `Ali as well as communal cursing of his enemies.

As Shi`i doctrine was shaped by its dualist conception of the world, love for `Ali was often coupled with hatred for his enemies. Shi`is both recognized `Ali's *walaya* and embraced *tabarra'/ bara'a*, a belief that mandated Shi`is to disassociate themselves with those who opposed or who caused harm to the Prophet Muhammad and his family.[650] One tradition ascribed to the Prophet highlighted the importance of this concept: "`Ali! *Walaya* towards you and the Imams in your lineage is only accepted due to *bara'a* towards your enemies and those of the imams in your lineage. Angel Gabriel told me this

[649] Ibn Qulaway, *Kamil*, 99-100.

[650] Amir-Moezzi, "Imami-Shi'i Walaya," 524.

in person."[651] From a fundamentally dualistic viewpoint, belief in `Ali's *walaya* made it incumbent for Shi`is to also express hatred for those who opposed and oppressed him.[652] Furthermore, there are numerous variants of a tradition that states, "He who enters in *walaya* of Muhammad's descendants has entered into paradise; he who enters into *walaya* of their enemies has entered hell."[653] With such emphasis on both expressing love for the Imams and hatred for their enemies, including cursing in prayers that were intended to be recited in the presence of `Ali would be included as part of the formal ritual.

After supplicating at `Ali's grave, pilgrims learn from al-Mashhadi to throw themselves on the grave, kiss it, and then rub their cheek on it. When they are standing at the place of `Ali's head, they should then turn towards the direction of Mecca and pray two cycles of prayer and recite specific chapters from the Qur'an. They should then use their rosary beads to recite prayers, ask forgiveness from God and make supplications. Finally, the pilgrim should bow on the ground and recite a prayer wherein they surrender themselves to God and praise Him.[654] The next directive instructs pilgrims to lay their right cheek on the ground and to recite a prayer that illustrates their surrender to God and then to lay their left cheek on the ground and to praise God and recite a short supplication three times. They then return to the bowing position and recite "Thank you, thank you" [to God], 100 times. Upon completing the "prayer of thanks," pilgrims should then stand up and pray four cycles of prayer. If pilgrims decide to abstain from the complex set of

[651] Ibid., 524-5.

[652] For more on the dualistic nature of Shi`ism, see Ibid., 532.

[653] Ibid., 527.

[654] Ibn al-Mashhadi, *Al-Mazar*, 190-191.

prayers, they could make up for it by reciting the Qur'an and completing a brief version of the pilgrimage rituals, and focus on seeking forgiveness from God and asking God to grant their prayers.[655]

At this point, pilgrims should turn towards where `Ali's legs are buried and recite prayers of greeting to `Ali, recalling his martyrdom and requesting his intercession. The prayer ends by sending prayers upon `Ali and the Imams. Pilgrims are then advised to supplicate for whatever they need, ask forgiveness from God, prayer, recite the Qur'an, and praise God. The location next to `Ali's legs was considered to be especially auspicious and spiritually potent. After completing their prayers at `Ali's grave, pilgrims then recite a short prayer of greetings at Adam and Noah's graves, which were alleged to be in the same spot as `Ali's. There were individual prayers for both Adam and Noah.[656] Acknowledging the *praesentia* of Adam and Noah and their prophethood was a crucial part of the pilgrimage, and served to include `Ali in the broader narrative of prophethood and affirm the legitimacy of `Ali's grave.

Finally, before completing their pilgrimage rituals, pilgrims must engage in the ritual of bidding farewell to `Ali. Pilgrims should stand at the grave in the same way they started out at the beginning of the pilgrimage and face the grave in the same direction of Mecca. They then should recite a prayer wherein they bid farewell to `Ali, praise him and the other Imams, curse his enemies, and ask God to accept their pilgrimage.[657] There are many variations of the prayers that pilgrims are required to recite at different locations in

[655] Ibid., 190-191.

[656] Ibid., 191-192.

[657] Ibid., 193.

the shrine in imitation of the Imams who set the precedent. The ritual actions are directly tied into the content of the supplications. The focus of the supplications is derived from Shi`i doctrine and is closely tied to Shi`i sectarian identity. These formulaic prayers that are connected to locations within the shrine and at different parts of `Ali's grave corresponding to his body. By including praises of the Imams and curses of their enemies, the manuals encouraged sectarian unity among Shi`i pilgrims and cemented beliefs related to the community and its shared beliefs. It is within the shrine that Shi`is created their own sacred space separate from that of Sunni Muslims, a place they could claim for their own.

All of the manuals provided basic prayers and instructions for pilgrims visiting `Ali and drew upon most of the same sources, with some including more variants of the rituals. The rites of pilgrimage rituals became more extensive in their maturity with al-Mashhadi and Ibn Tawus in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Although there are major difference between the manuals in terms of their inclusion of variants of the pilgrimage and different supplciations, the canonical format and core collection of narratives assured that there was uniformity of ritual practice among Shi`i pilgrims.

Community Formation Through Ritual

The challenge of studying pilgrimage rituals is to reconcile ideal and practice. This chapter has concentrated on the ideal as prescribed by elite male scholars. As little textual or material evidence of practice remains from the period of this study, it would be nearly impossible to reconstruct pilgrimage to `Ali's grave over the ninth through fourteenth centuries as it actually took place in the lives of men and women who lived during this time. Despite this gap of knowledge, later writings such as pilgrimage

narratives, journals, and poetry offer insight into how pilgrims carried out rituals at the shrine as evidenced in Safavid, Ottoman, and later material, even if these sources also leave out the perspective of everyone but non-elite males. As Judith Tucker puts it, "Islamic literature [does not offer] a descriptive account of how things happened" and it is "essentially prescriptive in nature," reflecting "the normative gender system that existed in the minds of an urban male educated elite, not the lived experiences of men as men and women as women." Furthermore, "most historians now agree that the study of these texts should not be confused with the study of historical society."[658] Thus, in this chapter, I limit my study to examining the projections of scholars onto pilgrims and their practices as a reflection of the elite scholarly worldview of Islamic ritual.

With these limitations in mind, the pilgrimage manuals can still offer a window into prescribed forms of ritual prayers as well as forms of embodiment by pilgrims during the rites. Pilgrimage manuals contain many promises of rewards to pilgrims that inspired pilgrims to visit `Ali's grave in large numbers. Pilgrims were led on intricate rites similar to those of Hajj during which they imitated the recorded actions of the Imams who had visited the grave. During the rites, they recited supplications believed to have been originally spoken by the Imams. The entire pilgrimage ritual allowed Shi`is to embody the physical actions and prayers of the Imams and to connect with `Ali on an intimate basis. As Alphonse Dupront observes in his study of the pilgrimage of Santiago de Compostela in Spain, pilgrimage allows the pilgrim to become the "other" and to transcend the material world into a world set apart from the mundane. The pilgrimage goes through a form of "space therapy," wherein the space itself serves as a vehicle of

[658] Judith Tucker, "Gender and Islamic History," in Michael Adas, *Islamic and European Expansion: The Forging of a Global Order* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 38.

transformation. The pilgrim experiences the sanctity of the sacred space and gives meaning and affirms its sanctity.[659]

At `Ali's grave, pilgrims could petition him for intercession on their behalf, gain proximity to God, and seek salvation in the material world and the afterlife. Pilgrims also purchased religious souvenirs and other items in the bazaar, interacted with each other, received religious guidance from religious scholars, presented gifts to the shrine's guardian, and engaged in recreational activities in and around Najaf. When they reached the shrine, they carried with them the worries, illnesses, and problems of themselves and their family, seeking out solace and salvation.

Studies of modern Shi`i practices of rituals can help us understand ways in which medieval pilgrims might have embodied the pilgrimage rituals. One perspective on this topic comes from David Thurfjell's examination of ritual in contemporary Iran. He considers how practicing Shi`i men in Iran appear to adhere to normative practices as laid out in normative prescriptions of prayer, but in actuality their practices differ. Thurjfell asserts that their performance is often an embodiment of more personal emotional experiences.[660] Thurfjell's interlocutors took an active and conscious role in practicing normative modes of Shi`i tradition and in conforming to what they saw as the correct beliefs and practices. Participants in these rituals are active agents and formulate their own ideologies in the rituals, which sometimes were contrary to the discursive Islamic tradition. Those who participate in the rituals contribute to what Thurfjell terms

[659]Alphonse Dupront, *Du sacré: croisades et pèlerinages, images et langages* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 318, 370, 373, 413.

[660] David Thurfjell, *Living Shi` ism: Instances of Ritualisation among Islamist Men in Contemporary Iran* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006), 238.

"authorization," although this does not necessarily mean that they adhere to normative traditions.[661] Although it would be impossible to apply the same form of analysis to the medieval context, it is easy to imagine that pilgrims' participation in rituals at `Ali's grave did not always adhere strictly to the steps laid out in the pilgrimage manuals.

Susan Morrison, who writes about pilgrimage in medieval England, confirms Thurjell's thesis by emphasizing that "the meaning in the performance of pilgrimage is received differently depending upon the actor and the audience of the performance."[662] Although pilgrims traveled to Najaf to visit `Ali's grave, they had different intentions and goals. Following from Morrison's thesis, pilgrims to `Ali's grave may well have been more focused on their own concerns and worries than on recalling the footsteps of the Imams.

I assert that `Ali's grave began to be considered sanctified through the rituals associated with it starting with the early visitations of the Imams. As J.Z. Smith elaborates, ritual "is not … a response to 'the sacred'; rather, something or someone is made sacred by ritual." Smith disputes the notion that ritual is empty of meaning and argues instead that it allows people to direct their attention to the idealized projection of the world.[663] Shi`i rituals appeared to be full of significance, both historical and religious, although pilgrimage manuals represent a normative projection of Shi`i ritual practice. It is very likely that a study of pilgrims' actual encounters in Najaf would differ from the intentions of the scholars who compiled the manuals. Each generation of pilgrims was

[661] Ibid., 238-240.

[662] Susan Signe Morrison, *Women Pilgrims in Late Medieval England* (London: Routledge, 2000), 88.

[663] Smith, *To Take Place,* 105.

further removed from the suffering of the Imams and was concerned with personal issues as well as affairs that affected their communities. By connecting the Imams and other notable religious figures to Najaf, scholars were able to ensure that the shrine and city would be absorbed into the Shi`i religious landscape.

The canonization of pilgrimage rituals led to the development of what Anne Marie Yasin calls a "place-based sacrality," informed by Smith's definition of the sacred, that attracted Shi`is to gather together in shrines to venerate the Imams and perform religious rituals.[664] Shi`i scholars penned countless pages to prove that Najaf was intricately connected to `Ali as well as Adam and Noah, ensuring the city's continuing sacredness and role as a pilgrimage destination. The vehicles of memory and ritual help "people create and sustain social identities."[665] The relationship between space and memory offers insight into the process of communal identity formation, and examining the importance of ritual in this relationship adds to the understanding of this process.[666] In the same way that scholars' social, political, and religious environments affected their memory of `Ali and their views on the location of his grave, I maintain that pilgrims' communal memory was informed both by their shared religious past and by their present lives and communities.

On first glance, pilgrimage manuals—which span the tenth through thirteenth centuries—as a whole appear to be merely collections of generic supplications, like the many thousands that exist in the Islamic tradition. Yet, upon closer examination, these

[664] Ann Marie Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces in the Late Antique Mediterranean: Architecture, Cult, and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1.

[665] Amy Mills, "Critical Place Studies and Middle East Histories: Power, Politics, and Social Change," *History Compass* 10, no. 10 (2012): 784.

[666] Ibid., 784.

manuals can tell us much about the meaning of ritual and sectarian identity from the perspective of medieval Shi`i scholars. The instructions for rituals that should be performed while reciting the supplications provided a textual map of `Ali's shrine and surrounding landscape. Manuals guided pilgrims through stations of the Imams until they made their way to the grave of the first Imam, `Ali. Along the way, manuals provided a formal practice through which pilgrims could recall the sufferings of `Ali and the other Imams and embody the strong emotions into their own pilgrimage experience. The pilgrims' bodies play a fundamental role as they interact through ritual with the sacred space around them, as "the body is foundational for the experience and representation of both space and the sacred."[667] By practicing distinctly Shi`i rituals that recalled the Imams in a communal setting, Shi`i pilgrims could simultaneously connect with their past, address their own personal issues, and experience a sense of exclusivity with their coreligionists.

Pilgrimage to Najaf and the other shrines may have arisen organically out of a need for `Ali's followers and descendants to celebrate his life and mourn his death, but scholars were responsible for integrating the ritual into formal Shi`i practice. Pilgrimage manuals were a form of spatialized texts that led pilgrims through `Ali's shrine and "reproduce[d] the ideological forms which produce[d] it and which ma[d]e both these forms and itself appear 'natural.'"[668] What this means is that the manuals arose out of already established rituals that were formalized, and actually "reflect[ed] the social

[667] Kim Knott, "Spatial Methods," in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, eds. Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler (London; New York: Routledge, 2011), 497.

[668] Morrison, *Women Pilgrims*, 87.

factors which produced it in the first place."[669] The work of Shi`i scholars played an important role in the pilgrimage by authoring pilgrimage manuals that guided pilgrims to embody practices that "made" the sacred space of Najaf. It is noteworthy to observe that the rise of the genre of pilgrimage manuals—which corresponded to the rise in the prominence of Najaf as a center for pilgrimage and Shi`i scholarship—occurred at the same time as Sunni "orthodoxy" matured with the formation and consolidation of the four legal *madhhabs*.[670] The position of Shi`is as a sectarian minority in a Sunni-dominated empire was often shaped in response to threats and prejudice they experienced at the hands of Sunnis.[671] Sunni authorities often threatened Shi`is based on their affiliations and it makes sense that Shi`i scholars would look for ways to consolidate and sustain Shi`i identity, pilgrimage being one of them. Pilgrimage to the grave of `Ali and the other Imams was one strategy scholars used to bring Shi`is together in a cohesive community where they could their affirm their identity in a relatively safe environment, away from Sunni dominance.

Both the scholars who compiled and canonized the pilgrimage rituals and the pilgrims who reenacted them ensured Najaf's sanctity, just as Patrick Desplat observes:

> Mecca is made a place fraught with ritual meaning through believers who engage in the hajj … Medina is 'made' into a sacred place by people who, through embodied practices, commemorate the hidjra, the flight of the prophet Muhammad with his followers from Mecca. Jerusalem becomes a place with particular (ritual) meanings through ritual practices that invoke and honor the miradj.[672]

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[669] Ibid.

[670] Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy,* 1.

[671] Ibid., 74-5.

[672] Desplat, "Representations of Space," 21.

Shi`is strongly held that Najaf was innately sacred due to the presence of `Ali's body and the miracles and religious and biblical figures associated with the site. The connection between `Ali's grave and pilgrimage rituals practiced by the Imams and subsequently by pilgrims partly explains why all Shi`is consider Najaf to be a sacred site, and why Sunni scholars disregard its sanctity. As Patrick Desplat emphasizes in his discussion of the role of society in constructing sacred space:

> Processes of place-making are always embedded in their socio-political and cultural contexts. To imbue a sacred and special meaning to physical structure often implies nuances, metaphors or notions of a specific cultural background."[673]

The study of Shi`i rituals sheds light on the medieval scholarly imaginary of construction of the sacred and the process in which scholars acted as agents in mediating the construction of the sacred and creating a sectarian identity through texts.

In sum, the case study of medieval Shi`i pilgrimage manuals can offer ways of understanding how religious leaders act as agents to represent the sacred through the medium of text. Rituals may have arisen organically, but these manuals demonstrate a concerted effort to control and regulate by those who possessed authority in order to draw them into the fold of normative Shi`sm. As Morrison puts it, "pilgrimage is a social construct and is viewed by society, represented by that society, and interpreted by that society."[674] Presumably, pilgrimage manuals asserted pilgrims' perspectives of the sacred space and partly shaped their experience and imaginary of the shrine and its surrounding environment. Informed by legends of miracles and virtues of the area, pilgrims would have approached the shrine with a sense of awe and respect. The manuals therefore

[673] Ibid., 25.

[674] Morrison, *Women Pilgrims,* 4.

assured the preservation of the stories that drew pilgrims to the shrine and offered incentive for those who made the journey. Fundamentally, sacred space comes out of human interactions with a space, and rituals assert the connections of people to that space. Performing and promoting a shared ritual system is one way a community infuses their members with a shared sense of belonging. Thus Shi`i scholars played an essential role in adopting pilgrimage rituals into normative Shi`i practice, which served as yet another marker of sectarian identity that set Shi`is apart from the majority Sunni community.

CONCLUSION
CREATING THE SACRED IN NAJAF

This dissertation analyzed medieval Muslim constructs and perceptions of sacred space from the ninth to fourteenth centuries using `Ali's grave as point of departure. Each chapter grapples with a different theme, namely sacred body, sacred space, and sacred ritual, all of which shed light on ways in which Shi`i scholars helped to mold communal memory and identity, as well as how Sunni scholars contested Shi`i claims to legitimacy based on their distinct memories of the past. I do not seek to prove whether `Ali actually performed miracles, nor if his body is actually in Najaf or elsewhere, nor the validity of hadiths used by Shi`i scholars to institutionalize the pilgrimage to Najaf. Rather, as Halbwachs suggests, "even at the moment of reproducing the past, our imagination remains under the influence of the present social milieu;" further, "religious memory … does not preserve the past but reconstructs it with the aid of the material traces, rites, texts, and traditions left behind by that past."[675] I am interested in how and why scholarly representations of `Ali's body, grave, and pilgrimage rituals impacted the development of normative Shi`ism.

In chapter one, I explored the concept of the body in Islam. I questioned how memories of `Ali's body, and in particular hagiographical accounts of his embodied miracles, ensured that he would be remembered as a sanctified figure among Shi`is. By

[675] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 49, 119.

establishing `Ali's *walaya*, Shi`i scholars could elevate the status of Najaf through contact with the *praesentia* of `Ali's sanctified body contained within it.

In chapter two, I delved into often conflicting Shi`i and Sunni narratives of `Ali's burial and location of his grave as found in geographical, historical, and hagiographical texts. Taking this debate as a case study, moreover, allows the question of sectarian identity to come to the forefront as scholars often, but not, always, take an opinion over the location of `Ali's grave based on their sectarian affiliations or sympathies. In addition to scholars who conformed to mainstream Shi`i and Sunni views on the debate, history witnessed a number of hybrid scholars, who may have followed a Sunni school of law but held `Alid sympathies, and thus agreed with Shi`is concerning narratives of `Ali's burial. By claiming the legitimacy of `Ali's grave, Shi`is could uphold Najaf's reputation as a pilgrimage destination, as well as retain control over the city, despite being persecuted minorities in a majority Sunni environment. Some Sunni scholars saw Shi`i-controlled Najaf as a threat in addition to their general distrust of Shi`i scholarship and doctrine. This tension underscores how sacred spaces are multivalent and only sacred insofar as a community invests in perpetuating their memory as sacred and includes the space, as Tweed explicates, on their cognitive map.

In chapter three, I examined the implications of the canonization of pilgrimage rituals to Najaf. The process arose organically out of his followers' need to show their devotion to his memory and legacy and to seek out blessings from contact with his grave. Starting in the ninth century, Shi`i scholars saw fit to formalize the pilgrimage to Najaf and other graves of the Imams. The ritual practices and supplications recommended by scholars in their pilgrimage manuals guided pilgrims through a reenactment of

pilgrimages scholars claimed were performed by the Imams when `Ali's grave was hidden. I suggest that scholars contributed to the growing genre of pilgrimage manuals in order to bolster the communal Shi`i identity and create a setting where Shi`is could express their religious devotion in a sacred space away from the domination of the Sunni majority.

While my dissertation focuses on medieval debates among scholars, the contestation around sacred space continues to have resonance in modern Iraqi politics, as Shi`i-Sunni conflicts have escalated since the US invasion of Iraq. Today, Sunni-Shi`i conflicts in Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and even Europe have continued to make headlines, and both media pundits and scholars alike describe it as an eternal battle between the two major denominations in Islam. In today's era, though, sectarian affiliations are much less fluid, and the contestation of `Ali's grave is not as simple as it is made out to be, as it does not always reflect hostility between members of both denominations.

Some Sunnis and Shi`is do take hardline positions, though, and current discussions around the grave reflect the present tense political climate often colored by sectarian clashes in Iraq carried out by Sunni and Shi`i extremists. As asserted by one contemporary Shi`i scholar, Shaykh Abdulhusayn al-Amini (d. 1970), "There is a huge disagreement between people around the burial of the Prince of Believers that is a result of politics in order to discourage people from visiting the holy shrine."[676] Some Muslim scholars continue to propagate the same views as their medieval predecessors, both sides unwilling to capitulate to their opposition as representative of the bigger problem of

[676] Abdulhusayn al-Amini, vol. 5, *Al-ghadir fi al-kitab wa al-sunnah* (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-ilmiyya, 1977), 68ff.

ignorance and the unwillingness by some to seek out rapprochement between Sunnis and Shi`is.

Sayyid Hibatuddin al-Shahristani, a native of Najaf, asserts that after al-Khatib al-Baghdadi's *Tarikh Baghdad* was reprinted in the 1930s, the polemical dispute over `Ali's gave was rekindled after being forgotten for centuries. An article responding to the wave of rhetorical Sunni attacks on Shi`i claims of the legitimacy of `Ali's grave first published in *al-`Itidal* Magazine from Najaf has been reprinted numerous times by Iraqi Shi`i publications.[677] Contemporary Shi`i scholars who have edited books about `Ali's grave and Najaf's history attack medieval Sunni scholars for fabricating narratives and being bad scholars. Muhammad Fakhr al-Din, the author of a comprehensive history of Najaf and a native of the city himself, provides a comprehensive overview of historical writings on Najaf. He interjects his own commentaries while summarizing the scholarship of Sunni scholars and ultimately sets out to prove that `Ali was indeed buried in Najaf.[678] Salah Mahdi al-Fartusi, the Najaf-born editor of Ibn Tawus' *Farhat al-Ghari*, clearly states his disgust with medieval Sunni scholars such as Ibn Sa`d, al-Tabari, al-Mas`udi, al-Baghdadi, Ibn `Asakir, and others, asserting:

> There is a propensity of the narrations [of Sunni scholars] to fall apart after scrutiny as well as the lack of reliable chains of transmission that can be found in biographical dictionaries; they are all lies. One should not take these narrations seriously, which are all mixed-up stories that were widespread in their books … and when I looked at the accumulation of narratives, I was amazed at how some of them sprinkle people's eyes with sand [cover the truth]. They not only do this for their own benefit, but also to fuel the spirit of hatred between Muslims. Therefore, I resolved to sift through the sources and study them without zealousness, so that I could convince others of the objective nature of my research

[677] Islamic Sciences Committee in NCRHF, "Refutation of Those Denying Ali's Burial Place in al-Najaf," *Turath al-Najaf (The Heritage of Najaf)* 1, no. 1 (March 2009), 13-15.

[678] Fakhr al-Din, *Tarikh Al-Najaf.*

and my lack of biases.[679]

Scholars such as Fakhr al-Din and al-Fartusi discount what they view as weak narratives from Sunni scholars and back up claims by medieval Shi`i scholars on the authenticity of the hadiths from the Imams. As we can see in this example, Shi`is continue to feel under attack by literalist Muslims and continue to push back against accusations of fabrication and superstitious practices. Even the process of editing and publishing *Farhat al-Ghari* can be see as a political protest against Sunni attacks on Shi`ism.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, literalist Sunnis continue to draw on medieval Sunni sources to prove that `Ali was not buried in Najaf. Online forums of Salafi and Wahhabi orientations refer to Shi`is in the derogatory as *rafida*, or rejecters [of the truth], and are filled with animosity towards Shi`is and misconceptions about Shi`i beliefs and doctrines.[680] Many modern Salafi and Wahhabi scholars adhere strictly to the texts of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathir and tend to repeat the narrations reported by their medieval predecessors. An example of this can be seen in a popular internet show called "Kasr al-sanam" ("Breaking the Idols") based in the Gulf, which states that its mission is to debunk Shi`ism, which supposedly kills "the people of Islam, stabs at the goodness of the Prophet Muhammad, and denounces his wives and Companions."[681] One episode on YouTube includes an interview with a scholar who presents numerous proofs—based on evidence presented by medieval Sunni historians—that the real body buried in Najaf is

[679] Muhammad Mahdi Najaf, *Farhat al-Ghari*, 6-7.

[680] Some of the many Arabic-language forums that have covered this debate include: http://www.dd-sunnah.net/forum/showthread.php?t=61968; http://www.alagidah.com/vb/showthread.php?t=4356; http://www.alajman.net/vb/showthread.php?t=15477; http://www.saaid.net/Doat/Zugail/270.htm; http://www.almeshkat.net/vb/archive/index.php/t-30229.html.

[681] http://www.kasralsanam.com/main/default.aspx.

that of Mughira ibn Shu`ba and not `Ali. This strongly anti-Shi`i campaign reflects continuing Salafi and Wahhabi animosity against Shi`i beliefs and practices and their ongoing attempts to delegitimize Shi`ism at its very core.[682]

While there remains much to explore in the medieval and early modern texts which discuss Najaf, there are a number of other avenues of research that would be fruitful to pursue. One project that would be of interest is an exploration of the numerous shrines dedicated to `Ali, including in Mazar-i Sharif in Afghanistan and Shah-i Mardan in Tajikistan, and a small roadside shrine in western Israel/Palestine.[683] These shrines appeared many centuries after `Ali's death and were built in commemoration to `Ali and his memory, rather than as tombs for his body supposedly buried within them. Rather, patrons built the shrines after locals had visions and were instructed to erect a shrine to `Ali. The origins of these shrines are very different from that of the one in Najaf in that they represented locals' powerful spiritual connection with `Ali, were not founded by Shi`is, and have always been shared spaces among Muslims of different backgrounds. They are also examples of local pilgrimage destinations that attract only pilgrims from within the same region. It would also be noteworthy to conduct an ethnographic study of Afghanis and Tajiks who have visited both Najaf and the shrines of `Ali in their homelands to explore what the different shrines mean to them in terms of authenticity, sectarian identity, and veneration of `Ali.

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[682] The channel even has its own Android App, Instagram account, Twitter account, and YouTube channel, for a direct link to the clink on `Ali's grave, see: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3XHL4p7Ec74. For an English summary of the show's ideology, see: http://www.kasralsanam.com/main/articles.aspx?article_no=1213.

[683] While the former two are still active shrines, the latter one in Palestine is now located in the middle of a highway in modern-day Israel, located between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. It is all but impossible for people to access (and Palestinians would not be allowed to visit it at all) and is now in ruins, see: http://borisfenus.blogspot.ru/2013/01/3-maqams-judaean-mountains.html.

At the present time, it would be very difficult for a researcher to spend an extended period of time in Iraq, primarily due to safety concerns. But in the future, when Iraq becomes more stable (inshallah!), an ethnographic approach to the study of scholarly projections of Najaf and Shi`i pilgrims' embodied practice at `Ali's shrine would offer further insight into the nature of the process of creating sacred space. This could shed light on ways in which communal memory and identity are bolstered through control and access to sacred space, especially in times of conflict. Of special interest would be the impact of coalition forces' imposition in Najaf during the Iraq War, and their conflicts with Muqtada al-Sadr's forces around the shrine and in the nearby Wadi al-Salam cemetery. A few scholars and even a retired Marine colonel have written about the military incursion in Najaf from a military and political science perspective, although they base their analyses on secondary English-language sources and never spent time in the city.[684] These studies did not genuinely consider the voice of the Muslim inhabitants and leaders of Najaf and their perceptions of the coalition forces and their encroachment on Najaf's sacred spaces. It would be useful to offer an analysis of this event from a religious studies approach and its implication for the production and contestation of sacred space.

A final project of interest related to this study would be an examination of Shi`i pilgrimage online through the portals of the high-tech websites hosted by the administration of the shrine.[685] The shrine websites are currently available in Arabic,

[684] See David Siddhartha Patel, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq's Sacred Spaces," in *Treading on Hallowed Ground: Counterinsurgency Operations in Sacred Spaces*, ed. C. Christine Fair and Sumit Ganguly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); R. E. Hassner, "Fighting Insurgency on Sacred Ground," *Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2006): 149–66; Richard D. Camp, *Battle for the City of the Dead: In the Shadow of the Golden Dome, Najaf, August 2004* (Minneapolis: MBI Pub. Co., 2011).

[685] The website of `Ali's shrine is: http://www.imamali-a.com/

English, Persian, and Urdu, and are also linked to Youtube channels and Facebook pages. The website contains rich resources for pilgrims looking to connect with the shrine and its past, including: a page where pilgrims can request a shrine employee to perform pilgrimage on their behalf (*al-ziyarah bi-l-'inaba*), a live video stream of the men's area of the tomb, a streaming radio station, a virtual library and photo gallery, a photo show of distinguished visitors to the shrine, an extensive history of the shrine, news about current projects and developments, a guide to Najaf for pilgrims, a Flash player presentation of miracles that occurred recently at the shrine including before and after photos of the person who was healed, and much more. The Internet allows Shi`is from around the world to connect with `Ali's shrine in Najaf, virtually receive the rewards of pilgrimage from home, and experience a sense of the sacred through their computer screen.

The focus of my dissertation examines scholarly constructions and contestations of sacred body, space, and rituals, and shows the importance that sacred space can have on communal identity formation and memory. Studying the construction of sacred space in Islamicate contexts indicates a new direction in the study of Islam in the discipline of religious studies, although scholars from disciplines such as art history, history, and geography have been grappling with it for several decades. Interpreting issues of sacred space is crucial to understanding how religion functions in society, and the numerous studies on this topic from different disciplines in the Euro-American academy can testify to this. By studying the works of the earliest medieval and early modern scholars, I have been able to trace Muslim imaginings of the beginnings and early history of `Ali's grave and shrine. This effort has revealed much about the importance and contested nature of space in its ability to perpetuate communal memory and identity.

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