



'ALĪ AŞĠAR

'**ALĪ AŞĠAR** (ABDALLĀH), Imam Ḥosayn's youngest son, killed at Karbalā (10 Moḥarram 61/10 October 680). His mother was Rabāb bent Emrā' al-Qays b. 'Adī Kalbī (Ṭabarī, p. 387; Mofīd, *al-Ekṭeşāş*, Tehran, 1379/1959-60, p. 83). According to various sources, he was a new-born child (Ya'qūbī, II, pp. 290f.), or an infant (one-year-old in Baḷ'amī; *Tārīk*, p. 268; *Chronique* IV, p. 43; six months in the Arabic "historical romance" of Ebn Ṭā'ūs Ṭā'ūsī, tr. F. Wüstenfeld, *Der Tod des Husein ben 'Ali und die Rache*, Göttingen, 1883, p. 91). After trying to reach the Euphrates River, Ḥosayn, surrounded by his enemies and badly wounded, took 'Abdallāh in his lap. A man from the Banū Asad shot an arrow into the baby's neck, killing him; Ḥosayn gathered his blood in his hands, spilled it on the ground, and invoked God against the evil-doers (Ṭabarī, II, pp. 359-60; Baḷ'amī, p. 268; *Chronique* IV, p. 44). Various later accounts confuse 'Abdallāh b. Ḥosayn and 'Abdallāh b. Ḥasan, the latter of whom was killed defending his uncle Ḥosayn. According to Ṭabarī (II, p. 387), the 'Abdallāh b. Ḥosayn was killed by Hānī b. Ṭabīt Hażramī, and 'Abdallāh b. Ḥasan by Ḥarmala b. Kāhel. According to the later Persian tradition, 'Abdallāh b. Ḥosayn was killed by Ḥarmala b. Kāhel Azdī, who shot an arrow through the baby's throat (Ḥosayn Wā'eż Kāşefī, *Rawżat al-şohadā'*, ed. M. Ramażānī, Tehran, 1341 Š./1962, p. 343; *Ḥabīb al-sīar* [Tehran], II, p. 55). *Rawżat al-şohadā'* adds that the arrow also penetrated Ḥosayn's arm; he removed it, stanching the bleeding, and took care not to spill a drop of blood on the ground. In various chronicles not concerned with Shi'ite tradition regarding the three sons of Ḥosayn named 'Alī, there are further confusions; thus 'Alī Zayn-al-'ābedīn is sometimes called 'Alī Aşġar instead of 'Alī Awsaṭ (e.g., Dīnavarī, Cairo,



1330/1912, p. 256; *Ḥabīb al-sīar* II, p. 61). In *Tārīk-eQom* (ed. S. J. Tehrānī, Tehran, 1313 Š./1934, pp. 195ff.) “Emām ‘Alī Akbar” refers to Šahr-bānūya’s son (i.e., Zayn-al-‘ābedīn), and “Alī Aşĝar, the son of Laylā,” to ‘Alī Akbar; ‘Abdallāh (= ‘Alī Aşĝar) is killed by an arrow in his mother’s arms.

In Moḥarram ceremonies and commemorations, ‘Alī Aşĝar is represented as an innocent child suffering unbearable thirst; his martyrdom provokes loud lamentations in the whole harem (and in Moḥarram assemblies). Popular iconography represents Ḥosayn, generally riding a white stallion, holding ‘Alī Aşĝar in his arms before the enemy ranks; he says to them, “Oh people, even if in your opinion I am a sinner, this baby is sinless. Give him a sip of water!” (*Rawzat al-šohadā*, p. 342; *Ḥabīb al-sīar* II, p. 55). ‘Alī Aşĝar’s martyrdom is celebrated at length in *rawza-kvānī* literature (e.g., Jawharī, *Ṭūfān al-bokā*, Tehran, n.d., pp. 254-59); in Cerulli’s collection of *ta’zīas*, he is not specifically mentioned, though his martyrdom is represented in the *majles* dedicated to the death of Emām Ḥosayn (Rossi and Bombaci, *Elenco*, nos. 539, 576, 583, 603/1, 699). It seems that in earlier *ta’zīa* tradition a complete *majles* was dedicated to ‘Alī Aşĝar (A. Chodzko’s collection, *Cat. Bib. Nat.*, Supplément persan, no. 993, drame no. 23). The infant’s cradle is a conspicuous element on the stage (see, e.g., the list of properties in Rossi and Bombaci, *Elenco*, no. 603/1). ‘Alī Aşĝar is also represented in Moḥarram processions (H. Massé, *Croyances et coutumes persanes*, Paris, 1938, I, p. 127, after S. G. Wilson) and celebrated in folklore. His name is applied to a baby who has difficulty speaking or, scornfully, to a grown person who has a speech impediment (‘A. A. Dehḳodā, *Amṭāl o ḥekam*, Tehran, 1352 Š./1973, I, p. 391). He is buried with other martyrs of Karbalā near Imam Ḥosayn’s grave.

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See also Y. Lassy, *The Muharram Mysteries among the Azerbaijan Turks of Caucasia*, Helsingfors, 1916, pp. 39ff., 99, 124.

E. Rossi and A. Bombaci, *Elenco di drammi religiosi persiani (fondo mss. Vaticani Cerulli)*, Vatican City, 1961 (indices).



H. ul-Ameene, *Islamic Shi'ite Encyclopaedia*, Beirut, 1973, IV, pp. 172ff.

J. Calmard, *Le Culte de l'Imām Ḥusayn, Etude sur la commémoration du drame de Karbalā dans l'Iran pré-safavide*, thesis, University of Paris III (Sorbonne), May, 1975, index and Tableau A, Tableau B.