



EBN ZĪĀD, 'OBAYD-ALLĀH

EBN ZĪĀD, 'OBAYD-ALLĀH (b. ca. 28/648), Omayyad governor responsible for the death of the Imam Ḥosayn b. 'Alī. He was the son of Zīād b. Abīh, a favorite of Mo'āwīa, and a Persian slave called Marjāna. He was given the governorship of Khorasan in 54/673 at the age of twenty-five, and soon afterward, he was appointed governor of Baṣra, where he subdued Kharijite unrest (Ṭabarī, II, pp. 168, 172, 185-87). At the accession of Yazīd I (r. 60-64/680-83), he forestalled the planned Shi'ite rebellion in Kūfa by intimidating the chiefs of the main tribes and publicly executing known agents of Imam Ḥosayn. When Ḥosayn and his family reached Iraq, Ebn Zīād sent the army of **Ebn Sa'd** against him; Ḥosayn was killed with his followers and most of the men of his family at Karbalā' on 10 Moḥarram 61/10 October 680. After Yazīd's death in 64/683, Ebn Zīād claimed the caliphate for himself, but finding little support in Kūfa and Baṣra, he fled to Syria, supporting the claim of Marwān b. Ḥakam after the death of Mo'āwīa II (64/684; Ṭabarī, II, pp. 433 ff.). Under Marwān and his son 'Abd-al-Malek, he fought to maintain control of Iraq, destroying the *tawwābūn* (repentants, i.e., those who repented for having left Ḥosayn to meet his fate) at the battle of 'Ayn-al-Warda (65/685). The Kufan Shi'ites revolted again under Moḳtār, who organized the *mawālī* (freed slaves and non-Arab freemen, mostly Persians), overwhelmed the Arab opposition, and sought revenge on those responsible for Ḥosayn's death. Moḳtār's general, Ebrāhīm b. Mālek Aštār, defeated the Syrian army near Mosul and killed Ebn Zīād (on the day of 'Āšūrā' 67/6 August 686), sending his head to Moḳtār, who dispatched it to 'Alī Zayn-al-'Ābedīn (who smiled for the first time since his father's death; Ya'qūbī, II, p. 309) or to Moḥammad b. Ḥanafīya (*Moḳtār-nāma*,



Tehran, n. d., p. 7).

Ebn Zīād's role in the death of Ḥosayn has made him a symbol of tyranny in the Shi'ite world. Though it is said that the advice of Šamer b. Dī'l-Jawšan prevented him from accepting the compromise negotiated by Ebn Sa'd, there is ample evidence that he was largely responsible for the outcome of the battle of Karbalā'. 'Abbasid historical sources stress his intransigence toward Ḥosayn and his followers. He is said to have struck the mouth of Ḥosayn's severed head with a stick, provoking the indignation of an old companion of the Prophet, Zayd b. Arqam, who had seen the Prophet kiss those lips (Ṭabarī, II, pp. 370 f.). He is also said to have refrained from killing 'Alī Zayn-al-'Ābedīn only because of the pleas of Ḥosayn's sister, Zaynab (Ṭabarī, pp. 372 f.). Most accounts, both historical and semilegendary, mention his sending the women of the [Ahl-al-Bayt](#) to Damascus in uncovered palanquins. The account in Bal'amī's Persian "translation" of Ṭabarī shows the growth of the Ḥosayn legend; Ebn Zīād is said to have had Ḥosayn's head presented to him on a golden plate (ed. Bahār, p. 271). Legend has embellished Ebn Zīād's death. A drop of blood from the head of Ḥosayn is said to have fallen on Ebn Zīād's thigh, causing a deep sore with such a foul stench that he was forced to tie a pouch of musk to it. The odor of musk identified his body on the battlefield (Dīnavarī, p. 288; Calmard, pp. 568 f.).

Ebn Zīād's tyranny has become a symbol in Persian folklore and *ta'zīa*. Allusion to his deceitful character can be found in proverbs (Dehḵodā, I, p. 11), and he figures in nearly all *ta'zīas* connected with Karbalā'. His tyranny is illustrated in numerous *majāles*, particularly those forecasting the sufferings of Karbalā' martyrs, those sometimes called "Bāzār-e Kūfa" showing his attitude toward the surviving Ahl-al-Bayt and Zaynab's famous imprecations against him, and those connected with Moḵtār's and Moḥammad b. Ḥanafīya's revenge (Calmard, pp. 262 ff.; on Malayan literature on the subject, see Brakel). The actor playing Ebn Zīād, clad in red, had to declaim his part with a harsh voice. When seated in his court, he generally wore a cashmere robe and a cashmere or *reżā'ī* turban on his head (Mostawfī, *Šarḥ-e zendagānī* I, p. 289). Most of these features have been retained in recent *ta'zīa* stagings in Persia. 'Obayd-Allāh b. Zīād is so accursed by the Shi'ites that the word "Allāh" is sometimes omitted from his name. He is then called 'Obayd-e Zīād in some *ta'zīas* (Rossi and Bombaci, no. 723) and in popular literature such as the *Moḵtār-nāma* (Calmard, p. 247).



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