



KAZEMAYN

KAZEMAYN (Kazemayn, lit. two Kāzems), a suburban town in the northwest of Baghdad and one of the four Shi'ite shrine cities in Iraq, known in Shi'i Islam as *'atabāt-e 'āliāt* (lit. sublime thresholds). It is named after Musā al-Kāzem (d. 186/802) and his grandson Moḥammad al-Jawād (d. 219/834), the seventh and ninth imams of the Twelver Shi'ites, who are buried there.

Medieval Islamic period.

During the 'Abbāsid period the cemetery at Kazemayn served as a burying place for Qorayš and the Prophet Moḥammad's descendants (*ašrāf*). The cemetery was also called Maqāber Bāb-al-Tebn (cemetery of the Straw Gate), because of its proximity to that gate. Following the burial of the two Imams, the name was changed to al-Mašhad al-Kāzemi and Kāzemyan (Le Strange, pp. 160-61), and the site acquired its sanctity among the Twelver Shi'ites. This sanctity drew Shi'ites to settle in the surrounding area.

It is not known who was the first to build the sanctuary at Kazemayn, but, according to Shi'ite tradition, a building of some sort already existed during the period of Hārūn al-Rašid (r. 170-91/786-809). In 336/947 the Buyid amir Mo'ezz-al-Dawla (r. 334-45) had two wooden domes erected above the two graves, and a surrounding wall was built (Kabir, p. 65). The 'Abbasid caliph al-Ṭā'i (r. 363-81/974-91) reportedly led public prayers at the shrine, which reflects the Shi'ite ascendancy at the time. As part of Sunnite-Shi'ite clashes under the Buyids, the shrine was attacked and pillaged in 443/1052 and 517/1123. However, 'Abbasid caliphs (e.g., al-Zāher in 606/1210, al-Mostaṣfer



in 634/1237) donated funds for its upkeep (Kālili, pp. 96-97, 106-7, 120-21). The geographer Yāqut Ḥamawī (d. 623/1226) describes Maqāber Qorayš as a populous suburb surrounded by a wall (Yāqut, V, p. 136). During the Mongol conquest in 1258, the tombs in Kazemayn were burned, and the caliphal tombs at Rosāfa were heavily damaged. The town itself, however, suffered less than Baghdad (‘Azzāwī, I, p. 180).

Safavid period. The rise of the Safavids marked a new phase in the town’s history. The present magnificent shrine was built by [Shah Esmā’il I](#) (r. 908-30/1502-24). The Ottoman Sultan Solaymān Qānuni (r. 926-74/1526-66) continued the construction, but it was completed only under Salim II in 978/1570, demonstrating the benefits that accrued to the shrine cities from Ottoman-Iranian rivalry in their desire to dominate Shi’ite affairs in Iraq (‘Azzāwī, IV, pp. 29, 34-35, 114). Although Shah ‘Abbās allocated funds for the buildup of the town and shrine (Naqdi, p. 74), Kazemayn, as well as Najaf and Karbala (Karbālā’), were overshadowed by Isfahan and other Iranian centers as a center of Shi’ite learning. It hosted, therefore, relatively few religious scholars (‘*olamā*’). Likewise, the immigration of Iranian clerics to the shrine cities following the collapse of Safavid rule turned mostly to Karbala, much less so to Kazemayn.

Under Ottoman rule. Following the return of Ottoman rule to Iraq after 1638, Kazemayn, which had been a predominantly Shi’ite town with a large Iranian concentration, was under tighter control than Najaf or Karbala due to its proximity to Baghdad. Thus, during the reign of the Mamluk officers (1750-1830), public Shi’ite commemorations of the death of Imam Ḥosayn (see [ĀŠŪRĀ](#)) were banned in Kazemayn. While in Karbala the Mamluks could enforce the ban, in Kazemayn passion plays (*majāles ta’zia*; see [TA’ZIA](#)) were held in underground cellars inside private homes. Following the return of direct rule from Istanbul in 1830, the Moḥarram rites were permitted. The first took place in Kazemayn in 1831, initiated by Shaikh Bāqer b. Asad-Allāh, who was also reportedly the first to introduce chest-beating in Iraq (Wardī, 1969-76, II, pp. 110-11).

During the 19th Century, Shi’ite pilgrimage to the shrine became an important source of income for Kazemayn. Most pilgrims visited Kazemayn and Baghdad first and then went to Karbala and Najaf. The visitation to Kazemayn was less exalted religiously than that to Karbala; pilgrims to the latter received the honorific title *karbalā’i*. Similarly, the Maqāber Qorayš cemetery was less popular than cemeteries in Karbala and Najaf, and its interment fees were less



than theirs. The decline of pilgrimage during World War I harmed Kazemayn's economy considerably (Nakash, pp. 167, 287).

Unlike Najaf and Karbala, Kazemayn did not share funds from the Oudh Bequest, which had been set up by the king of Awadh and served as an important source of revenue for the *'atabāt* during the second half of the 19th century. In 1867, however, the British, who administered the transfer of the fund, decided to allocate one-third of the bequest for the benefit of poor Indian residents of Kazemayn, Najaf, and Karbala, under the supervision of Eqbāl-al-Dawla (a member of the Awadh ruling family), who resided in Kazemayn. The Indian fund was abolished in 1903 (Litvak, pp. 1-21).

Proximity to central rule in Baghdad also had its advantages for Kazemayn, which never suffered from the presence of urban gangs, as did Karbala and Najaf, even though the divisions among the town's quarters were deep (Wardi, 1969-76, II, p. 191). It also benefited more from the reforms of the governor *Medḥat Pasha* (1869-72). Kazemayn was made a separate county (*qazā'*) in the district of Baghdad, and it was linked to Baghdad by a new, horse-driven tramway. Modern public schools were opened following the restoration of constitutional rule in the Ottoman empire after 1909, thanks to funds donated by Shi'ite merchants in Kazemayn and Baghdad. In the early 20th century, the population of Kazemayn was about 8,000, of whom 7,000 were Shi'ites. Arabs formed the bulk of the populations, while Iranians numbered around 1,000 (Kālili, pp. 134, 252-54).

Because of its proximity to Baghdad, Kazemayn served as a contact zone between Shi'ites and Sunnites in Iraq. The joint ruling (*fatwā*) of Shi'ite religious authorities (*mojtahed*) in Iraq, both Iranians and Arabs, in support of Ottoman holy war (*jehād*) against Italy following the Italian invasion of Libya in 1911 had a strong impact in Kazemayn, where a wave of pro-Sunni feeling reportedly swept over the Shi'ites of the town ('Azzāwi, VIII, pp. 199-200; Nakash, p. 59).

The revolt of Shi'ite 'olamā'. The Kazemayn *'olamā'*, led by Mahdi Kāleši and Sayyed Mahdi Ḥaydari, joined the religious leaders of Najaf and Karbala in issuing *jehād fatwā* against the British in 1914. Ḥaydari also organized tribesmen to fight the British invasion of Iraq, while Kāleši tried to contain the anti-Ottoman rebellions of Najaf and Karbalā' in 1915 (Kālili, pp. 138-42).

By the end of World War I, conflicting interests emerged between merchants



and *'olamā'* over attitude towards British rule. The mayor of Kazemayn, Sayyed Ja'far 'Oṭayfa, a leading merchant, organized a petition signed by forty prominent merchants, heads of the city's quarters, Indian *mojtaheds*, and tribal shaikhs, which called for British rule in Iraq. However, the *fatwā* of the Karbala-based mojtahed Moḥammad-Taḳī Širāzi forbidding the selection of other than a Muslim ruler had immediate impact on Kazemayn, where a petition by public leaders was sent stating support for "a new Arabic Islamic state whose Muslim king would be one of the sons of ... Sharif Ḥusayn, bound by a national assembly" (Wardi, 1969-76, III, pp. 77-78; Nakash, pp. 63-65). Kāleši and his rival Moḥammad Šadr cooperated with Sunni Baghdadi notables calling for a Sharifian (i.e., a member of the Hashimite family of the Hijaz) head of the new state (Nakash, pp. 63-65).

In reaction to the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, a Shi'ite-dominated clandestine society called Ḥaras al-Esteqlāl (Guardian of independence) was formed, with its center in Baghdad. It resisted the British occupation of Iraq and called for an independent Iraq under a Sharifian amir. The leaders of the Kazemayn branch were Moḥammad, son of the religious leader Ḥasan Šadr, and the merchant Moḥammad-Ja'far Abu'l-Timman. The society also played a leading role in pushing for Shi'i-Sunni cooperation. The month of Ramaḏān (May-June 1920) witnessed concerted efforts to transform the religious spirit into political fervor. Working together, people held in private homes and mosques Sunni celebrations of the Prophet's birthday (*mawled*) and Shi'ite passion play ceremonies organized by the Ḥaras. Sunni and Shi'i preachers gave joint addresses stressing the need for union under the banner of Islam (Nakash, pp. 69-70).

Kāleši's strong opposition to the British, his *fatwās* against participation in the 1922 elections for the constituent assembly, and his public withdrawal of allegiance from King Fayṣal led to his deportation on 26 June 1923. Without him, Kazemayn once again reverted to a secondary role in Shi'ite politics. In 1947, for instance, it had 232 active religious scholars compared with Karbala's 601 (Luizard, p. 229; Batatu, 1981, p. 589).

Under the Hashemite monarchy. The newly-formed Hashemite monarchy sought to detach Kazemayn and Samarrā' from the influence of Najaf and Karbala. Kazemayn became a suburb of greater Baghdad, and in the case of Moḥarram ceremonies it was treated like the capital. The public ceremonies were held under tight police control, which reduced the level of religious fervor that could be exhibited in the city, so much so that in 1932 the rites



were hardly attended at all, as most Shi'ites went to Karbala. The decline of Shi'ite pilgrimage to shrines in Iraq after World War I affected Kazemayn and increased the competition between it and other shrine cities. The economic competition exacerbated earlier feuds between the people of Kazemayn and Najaf. Shi'ites in Kazemayn used to call themselves "sons of Musā," after Imam Musā al-Kāzem, while those of Najaf called themselves "sons of 'Ali." The battles between the two groups were described by both as a "fight between the sons of 'Ali and the sons of Musā," using tribal-patriarchal idiom to denote local-city antagonistic solidarities (Wardi, 1969-76, III, pp. 324-25). However, thanks to its proximity to Baghdad, Kazemayn was more integrated into the state, compared with Najaf and Karbala, and found new sources of income. This development was manifested in increased migration and, particularly, population growth from about 15,000 in 1917 to 62,162 and 127,220 in the 1947 and 1957 censuses respectively (Wardi, 1969-76, I, pp. 21-23; III, pp. 324-25; Nakash, pp. 181, 98; Batatu, 1978, p. 315).

The dominant role of the Jews in the economic life of Baghdad during the monarchy affected the socio-religious activity in Kazemayn. Accordingly, Shi'ite merchants in Baghdad and Kazemayn used to visit the shrines at Kazemayn on Saturday rather than on Friday, the preferred day for visitations, because their business activity depended on the services of the Jewish merchants and brokers who dominated the Baghdad trade (Nakash, p. 233).

Kazemayn experienced significant urban growth under the military regime of 'Abd-al-Karim Qāsem (1958-63), thanks to the rural migration from the south. Hence, it witnessed the growth of communist activity and was one of the strongholds of the resistance to the Ba'ṭ coup in February 1963 (Batatu, 1978, pp. 608-9, 978, 983-84).

Qāsem's secularizing policies were a catalyst to the growing militancy among Shi'ite traditional groups since the 1960s in Kazemayn. Yet, compared to Najaf, it played a secondary role in the formation of Ḥezb al-Da'wa al-Eslāmiya and in organized opposition to the Ba'ṭ regime, because of closer governmental control and the fact that Kazemayn was economically better off than other Shi'ite localities. The Kāleṣi family appeared on the list of the founders of the al-Da'wa movement, but later dropped out to reappear in London at the head of al-Ḥaraka, a small group of little influence (Batatu, 1981, pp. 578-94; 'Abd al-Jabbār, pp. 129, 246, 256)



After the 2003 U.S.-led invasion. The rise of the Shi'ites of Iraq to a dominant political position following the 2003 U.S.-led invasion benefited Kazemayn economically. Politically, the Sadrist movement, led by Moqtadā Ṣadr, gained prominence in Kazemayn, since its rivals, SCIRI (Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq) and al-Da'wa had never been strong there (Cockburn, p. 221). Concurrently, Kazemayn suffered a series of terrorist attacks by the Sunnites; the most dreadful event was on 31 August 2005, when approximately 1,000 Shi'ite pilgrims commemorating the death of Imam Musā al-Kāẓem died in a stampede on al-A'emma bridge (Jesr al-A'emma) over the Tigris, following rumors of imminent terror attack (*New York Times*, 1 September 2005). These attacks, however, did not disrupt the flow of pilgrims to the town, which amounted to hundreds of thousands during the commemoration dates of the two Imams.

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