

Brief History of Transfer of the Sacred Head of Husain ibn Ali, from Damascus to Ashkelon to Qahera

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The most beloved grandson of Rasulullah(S), Al Imam al Husain ibn Ali (d. 61/680, Karbala, Iraq), along with his Seventy-two selected relatives and companions, was brutally massacred on the soil of Karbala, in Iraq, on 10th of Muharram 61/680 by the orders of Yazid bin Mu'awiyah(d. 64/683, Damascus, Syria), the second Umayyad ruler. On the second day after this great tragedy, the barbaric forces of Yazid raised the Sacred Head of the Imam on a lance. 19th Al Dai al Fatemi, Syedna Idris Imaduddin (d.872/1468, Shib'am, Yemen) expressed his heart breaking sentiments as follows:

"Abki Alal R'asil Sharifi wa Naqlehi;

Li Yazida, Mahmulan Alal A'awadi" [1]

(I am weeping on the Sacred Head of Husain, which was brought towards Yazid on a sharp pointed javelin).

In such a shocking manner, the Umayyads exhibited the Sacred Head to establish their so called victory, and took it to Kufa to present it before Ibn Ziyad, the notorious and ruthless governor of Kufa, leaving behind the mutilated body of the grandson of the Rasulullah(S). The headless body was thus buried there by the tribe of Banu Asad, who were living in the vicinity of Karbala. After the exhibition and display of the Head of Abi Abdillah al Imam al Husian, Ibn Ziyad dispatched it to Damascus to be presented to Yazid as a trophy of so-called victory and also to prove that the order of the ruler was successfully accomplished. Yazid celebrated the occasion with great pomp by displaying the Head of the Imam in his crowded and decorated court. The Head of the Great-son of Rasulullah(S) was then buried in a niche of one of the internal walls of Jame-Masjid, Damascus, Syria. Afterwards, The Sacred Head of Imam Husain remained confiscated and confined in Damascus by the order of the Umayyad monarch, Suleyman bin Abd al Malik (d.86/705, Damascus, Syria), in this condition for two hundred forty years, till 365 (A.H).

When the Abbasids snatched power from the Umayyads, in the garb of taking revenge from Ahl al Bait, they also confiscated the sacred Head of Imam and proved to be worst enemies than the Umayyads. From Abul Abbas al Saffah, the first Abbasid monarch till the fall of the Abbasid dynasty, all of them proved to great enemies and prosecutors of Ahl al Bait and their devotees. It was the Abbasid emperor al Muqtadar Billah (d.295/908) who confirmed himself as the bitterest enemy of Ahl al Bait. He showed his utmost hatred with Imam Husain, and attempted many times to stop the pilgrimage to the Sacred Head, but in vain. He thus tried to completely eliminate the sign of the sacred place of Ziyarat; he transferred the Sacred Head of Imam Husain to Ashkelon (presently

occupied by Israel) in secrecy, so that the pilgrims could not find the place. 'Batsheva Sobelmn' observes: [2]

"Sunni-(it would have been better if the writer had used: 'Abbasids', instead of Sunni, because majority of the Sunni-Muslims, also loved the Ahl al Bait), rulers displeased with the phenomenon, decided to relocate Husain's Head to the far edge of the Kingdom — Ashkelon, (Israel)".

Ashkelon is located about 6 miles (10 kilometres) from the Gaza strip and 36 miles (58 kilometres) south of Tel Aviv.

It was the 15th Fatemi Imam Nizar al Aziz (d.386/996, Qahera, Egypt) who traced the site of the Sacred Head of his great grand father through the office of his contemporary in Baghdad, in 985 (A.D.). In the city of Ashkelon, Israel, it remained buried at "Baab al Faradis", for a long time.

Legendry commander of the Fatimi forces, eminent writer, statesman and Dai of high caliber, Syedna Badrul'jamali (d.487/1095) conquered Palestine, during the period of 18th Fatemi Imam Maad al Mustansir (d.487/1094, Qahera, Egypt). The Fatemi Imam assigned him to discover the Sacred Head of the Imam Husain ibn Ali. The Dai, in 448(A.H) discovered the place of Raas al Imam al Husain with the help of Imam's blessings. The Sacred Head was put on a plate, and placed in a casket. This historical event took place in 448 (A.H).

Under the instructions of the Fatemi Imam Mustansir, Syedna Badrul'jamali constructed a Masjid and donated several huge properties to meet the expenditure of the 'Trust', so as to maintain the affairs of the Mashhad. He also prepared a beautiful traditional wooden Minbar-pulpit and placed it in the Masjid, where Raas al Imam al Husain was buried. This Minbar bears the historical account which is engraved in Arabi Fatemi Kufi script about the Raas al Imam al Husain, which convincingly provides an evidence of its historical authenticity. Afterwards, the 20th Fatemi Imam Mansur al A'amir (d.526/1132, Qahera, Egypt) sent beautiful precious lamps, made of gold and silver, for this Mashhad. Celebrated historian and traveler, Ibn Khalik'an (d. d.681/1282, Damascus, Syria) and Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Batutah(d. in between 1368-1377, Morocco) admitted the authenticity of the burial place of Raas al Husain in Ashkelon.

Under the instruction of Salahuddin Ayyubi (d.1194, Damascus) this Minbar was transferred to the Masjid at 'Kahalil al Rahman', which is twelve miles distance from Bait al Maqdis. The gate of this Masjid was constructed sometime during the era of the 11th Fatemi Imam Abdullah al Mahdi (d.322/934, Mahdiah, Tunisia). 'Mashhad al Khalil' is a famous sacred place of the town: 'Kahalil al Rahman, where the graves of Ibrahim Khalilullah (A.S), his wife Syedah Sarrah, his son Ishaq (A.S), and his wife Syedah Rifqah, Yaqub (A.S)(also known as 'Israel'), and his wife Syedah Laiqah, and Yusuf (A.S) is a place of peace and reverence. Muslims, Jews and Christians devotees from across the boundaries of the world come here daily for Ziyarat. Hujjat al Jazirah of Khuras'an &

Badakhsh'an, Syedna Nasir Khusraw (d.481, Yamgan) has mentioned 'Mashhad al Khalil' in his celebrated "Safarnamah" as follow: [3]

"It is also known as Jabrun, Jabrin, Jabri and Matlun. This place is located on the north of Bait al Leham".

The following text is a translation of the Arabi Inscriptions, which is still preserved on the Fatemi Minbar [4]:

"Bismilla'hir Rahman'i Raheem". Hamd be to Allah who is only one and He has no partner, Mohammad (d. 11/632) is His Rasul; Ali (d. 29/661) is His Wali. Allah sends His Salaw'at on both of them and on their purified progeny. Children of both, (Mohammad & Ali), are known due to their glorious contribution in each era. Their Flags are flying high and miracles are being performed every moment; and among the miracles, a major glory with the wishes of Allah, is the recovery of the Head of our Imam, Abi Abdillah al Husain ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib. Salaw'at of Allah on him, his grandfather, and his father and on their Ahl al Bait, which was at the place of Ashkelon, where it was hidden by the tyrants, L'anat of Allah, upon them. They tried to conceal the Noor of Allah, which Allah has promised to reveal. Allah wishes to hide it from the enemies, and to show it to Awliya and their followers. And it was to relieve the heart of 'Devotees' of Imam Husain, as Allah knew their pure heartedness in Walayat and Deen.

And to proof His argument to the world, May Allah keep for long our Moula and Syed, M'ad Abi Tamim, Al Mustansir'billah, Amir al Muminin. And May Allah send His Salaw'at upon him and his forefathers. The Great leader, Commander of the forces, the Sword of Islam, the Helper of Imam, the Guardian of the Judges of Muslims, the leader of Do'at of Muminin, Aba Najam, Badr al Mustansari has discovered Raas al Imam al Husain in Imam Mustansir's period, and has taken it out from it's hidden place. It was a special honour reserved for him to give this respect to Raas al Imam al Husain. He specially built a Minbar for the Mashhad, at the place where this sacred Head lay buried. This place is now like a Qiblah for those who visit it and a Wasilah for those who seek Shaf'at.

He (Syedna Badrul'jamali) constructed this building from its foundations and acquired properties (as a trust), the revenue from which is to be spent only on this Mashhad and its custodians. This trust was functional from that day and for days to come till the day Allah will inherit the earth and all that is upon it. And He has spent in the above mentioned expenditures from what Allah had given him through Halal, and pure of his earnings. This all has been done in the way of Allah to attain His happiness and reward, and to publicly glorify the lofted place of this Imam, as Qur'an says:

"Surely Masajid of Allah shall be erected by those who believe in Allah and believe in the last day, and he offers Sal'at and pays Zak'at and is afraid of none but Allah". [5]

During the period of Salahuddin Ayyubi, and by his order, the Minbar was transferred from Ashkelon to the Masjid Khalil al Rahman (Israel). The 51st al Dai al Fatemi, Dr. Syedna Taher Saifuddin (d.1385/1965, Mumbai, India) got the honour to visit Masjid

Khalil al Rahman, and he discovered the Fatemi Minbar, one thousand years after the Satar-seclusion of the Fatemi Imams.

Famous historian [6] Taqiuddin al Muqrezi briefly narrates the account regarding the transfer of Raas al Imam al Husain. In Shab'an, 491 (A.H) =1098 (A.D), Fatemi Dai and Minister, Shahansha Afzal (d.515/1121), Commander of the Fatemi Forces and son of Syedna Badrul'jamali, under the instructions of the 19th Fatemi Imam Ahmad al Musta'ali (d.495/1101,Qahera,Egypt), marched towards Bait al Maqdis to conquer it. During that era Bait al Maqdis was controlled by the Turks. Dai Afzal contacted them and tried each method to avoid bloodshed, but in vain. The Commander of the Fatemi forces could not tolerate this negative attitude of the Turks and he attacked them. Due to heavy artillery fire of "Manjniaq", many parts of the city were damaged, which forced the Turks to hand over the city. Dai Afzal handled the Turks rulers with great diplomacy; he honored them, presented them gifts and allowed them to leave the city peacefully.

After capturing Palestine, Dai Shahansha Afzal proceeded towards Ashkelon and finally entered the city, where he learnt about an old house, which was in a deplorable condition. It was the place where the sacred Head of Imam Husain was buried. Dai Afzal took the Sacred Head from the casket, perfumed it, and put in another valuable casket. He bought a beautiful Villa and transferred the Sacred Head there. Afterwards he paid attention towards completion of the Mashhad, which was started by his father Syedna Badrul'jamali, as the historians admitted. Dai Afzal took out the Raas al Imam al Husain and embraced it with his chest and walked bare footedly towards that Mashhad, where it was reburied with great honour and reverence. In this manner the Raas al Imam al Husain remained buried in the same Mashhad.

After 21st Fatemi Imam, Tayyab Abulqasim went in to Satar-seclusion, his uncle, Abd al Majid was appointed "Regent" only to handle the affairs of the empire, occupied the throne of the Fatemi Empire. Fearing disrespect and the atrocities of the traitors and enemies, the Majidi-monarch, Zafir who is wrongly addressed as 'Fatemi', ordered for the transfer of the Sacred Head to Qahera. The W'ali of the city of Ashkelon, Al Amir Sayf al Mamlaka Tamim along with the custodian of the Mashhad, Qazi Mohammad bin Miskin, took out the buried casket of Raas al Imam al Husain from the Mashhad, and with due respect and great reverence, on Sunday 8th Jumadil Ukhra, 548 (31st August 1153 carried the Sacred Head from the city of Ashkelon to Al Moizziyat al Qahera, Egypt. [7] Syedi Hasan bin Asad (Hir'az, Yemen) discussed this event in his "Risalah" as follows:

"When the Raas al Imam al Husain was taken out of the casket, in Ashkelon, drops of the fresh blood were visible on the Raas al Imam al Husain and the fragrance of Musk spread all over".

Historians, al Muqrezi, al Qalaa'shandi, & Ibn Muyassar (d.1278) [8] have mentioned that the casket reached Al Moizziyat al Qahera on Tuesday 10th Jamadil Ukhra (2nd September 1153). Ust'ad Maknun accompanied it in one of the service boats which landed at the Kafuri (Garden). For security reasons, and due to fear of atrocities of the enemies, the

sacred Head was passed on by the Sird'ab (underground passage) of 'Al Qasar al Sharqi al Kabir', and buried there in the section known "Qubbat al Daylam or Turbat al Zafr'an". This place is currently known as "Al Mashhad al Husain", wherein lie buried underground thirteen Fatemi Imams (From 9th Fatemi Imam Ahmad al Mastur to 20th Fatemi Imam al A'amir). On the upper portion, Tabarruk'at of Rasulallah(S), a manuscript of Qur'an, attributed to Amir al Muminin, Ali ibn Abi Talib, and many other sacred valuables are preserved. This place is also known as "B'ab Makhallif'at al Rasul", whose literal meaning is 'Door of Remaining Parts of Rasul (S)'.

Historians record the reason of transfer of Raas al Imam al Husain with reference to another account as follows: when the minister of al Zafir (d.544/1149), Sualeh Talai bin Ruzaik (d.556/1161), observed the atrocities of the Crusaders in Syria, he realized that for security reasons, the Sacred Head of Husain ibn Ali should be transferred to Al Moizziyat al Qahera, Egypt. For this purpose, he specially constructed a Masjid near "B'ab al Zawilah", as a proposed burial site of the "Raas al Imam al Husain". It was transferred from "B'ab al Faradis"-Ashkelon to Al Moizziyat al Qahera and it was placed inside the Masjid for a temporary period, but it was buried finally at "Turbat al Zafr'an". All the rituals of burial were observed with great reverence. As per another account, some members of the Court built the Mashhad with high quality stones and this work was completed sometime in 549(A.H).

During the golden era of Aimmat Fatemiyin, on the day of Aashurah, every year the people of Egypt from far and near used to gather and offer sacrifices of camels, cows, goats in the name of Allah, recite Marsiyah-elegies and pronounced L'anat loudly on Yazid, Shimar, Ibn Ziyad and other murderers of Imam Husain, the Ahl al Bait and the Ans'ar of Husain. During the tenure of Salahuddin Ayyubi all Marasim al Az'a or mourning commemorations for Imam Husain were declared officially banned. Salahuddin Ayyubi had no regard for Ahl al Bait as he declared 10th Muharram (Yaum al A'ashurah) as a day of joy and happiness. All necessary arrangements for fun and festivities on the day were made. Whatever he did to eliminate the love of Ahl al Bait from the minds of the people of his vast domain was unfruitful. All his malicious efforts were in vain. The sweet memories left behind by the Ahl al Bait did not leave the hearts of the people of Egypt, by force too. The reason for this was the Adal and the Ahs'an of the Ahl al Bait & the deep impressions and sweet fragrance, which they left forever.

[9] Famous Mamluk historian of Egypt, Mohiyuddin Abd al Zahir (d. 1292) wrote: "When Salahuddin came to power he seized all the Palaces of the Aimmat Fatemiyin and looted their properties and treasures. He destroyed the valuable and rare collection of the hundred thousands books, available in libraries, in the river Nile. He tried to remove each signs of Bani Fatemah from the nook and corners of Egypt. When he learnt through his intelligence bureau that a nobleman (Dai),(one of the custodians of Raas al Imam al Husain) was highly respected by the people of Al Moizziyat al Qahera, he surmised that perhaps he would be aware of the Khizain-treasures of the Aimmat Fatemiyin. Salahuddin issued orders to present him in his court. He inquired of him the whereabouts

of the Fatemi Khizain-treasures. The nobleman flatly denied knowing anything about the treasures. Salahuddin was angered, and ordered his intelligence service to ask him through 'third-degree-torture', but the nobleman bore all the torture and repeated the same statement. Consequently, Salahuddin ordered his solders to put a cap containing Centipedes on the head of the nobleman. It is said, that such type of punishment was so severe and unbearable, and none could survive even for a few minutes.

Prior to putting the Cap of Centipedes on the head, his hair was shaved, to make it easy for the Centipedes to suck blood, which in turn made holes in skull. But! In spite of that punishment the noble custodian of Husain's Head, the Dai felt no pain at all. Salahuddin ordered for more Centipedes to be put on the head of the nobleman, but it could not kill or pain him. Finally Salahuddin Ayyubi ordered for a tight cap full of Centipedes to be put on the head of nobleman, to accomplish the result. Even this method could not torture or kill him. The Ayyubid brutes were greatly astounded further when they saw, on removing the cap, the Centipedes were dead. Salahuddin asked the nobleman to reveal the secret of this miracle. The nobleman revealed as follow: "When Raas al Imam al Husain was brought to Qasar, Al Moizziyat al Qahera, he had carried the casket on his head. 'O Salahuddin! This is the secret of my safety". [10]

Allah granted the honour to make and fix the Maqsurah at Raas al Imam al Husain to the 51st Al Dai al Fatemi, Dr.Syedna Taher Saifuddin (d.1965, Mumbai). On the night of his demise, photographs of the Maqsurah were presented to him, which showed completion of Maqsurah fixture. He was very happy to see the photographs of the Zarih and said:

"Inform the authorities that we are coming", (for inauguration).

On the same night he departed to the divine world to meet his Creator. His Successor, 52nd Al Dai al Fatemi, Dr. Syedna Mohammad Burhanuddin fulfilled the wish of his illustrious father in his first journey to Al Moizziyat al Qahera.

The event of presentation of the Maqsurah is also unique in the history of loyalty and faithfulness. The Maqsurah of Raas al Imam al Husain was originally constructed for Mashhad of 'Sahib'il Liwa'il Husain', Syedi Abil Fazal al Abbas ibn Ali (d.61/680, Karbala, Iraq), at Karbala, Iraq, and it was manufactured at the very site which is now the resting place of the 51st Al Dai al Fatemi, Dr. Syedna Taher Saifuddin, located in India. This shrine is known as 'Ruzat Tahera', the only Shrine in the world where entire Qur'an is written inside the walls with pure-gold. When this Maqsurah reached at the Mashhad of Syedi Abbas ibn Ali, Karbala, Iraq, it would not fit on the place. The size of the Maqsurah and the site of the fitting place differed at the time of fitting, although every technical aspects and measurements of the site were taken into account very precisely. The Engineers were astonished, as what had happened, although every minute detail was handled very professionally. The loyalty of Syedi Abbas was also witnessed on that day too, as it had been witnessed on the day of Aashurah.

There a divine guidance came to the effect by way of intuition that a sincere, faithful, loyal and devoted brother could not tolerate, that the Head of Rasulullah's grandson, Husain, buried in Al Moizziyat al Qahera, Egypt, should be without a Maqsurah, thus how could he accept this gift for himself. Hence even after Shahadat, Syedi Abbas ibn Ali paid his tribute to his Moula Husain and presented his own Maqsurah for Raas al Imam al Husain. When this above-mentioned Maqsurah was brought from Karbala, Iraq to Al Moizziyat al Qahera, Egypt, it fitted upon the original position of the grave known as Mashhad of Raas al Imam al Husain in such a manner, as if it had been fabricated for Raas al Imam al Husain itself.

End Note:

Israel destroyed more than 100 Masjid in Palestinian villages incorporated into the state, including the sacred place where the Head of Imam al Husain, the grandson of Rasulullah(S) was buried. Afterwards, Israel's legendary general Moshe Dayan--himself an avid amateur archaeologist--gave the order to blow up the Masjid, while he was a young Lieutenant Colonel. "Masjid Al Mashhad al Husain" in Ashkelon dates back to the 11th century where the Head of Imam Husain was hidden. "Masjid Al Mashhad al Husain" was blown up deliberately as part of a broader operation that included at least two additional Masjid, one in Yavneh and the other in the nearby Mediterranean city of Ashdod. Muslim pilgrims, both Shia and Sunni, visited the site. After July 1950, there was nothing left for them to visit: that's when the Israel Defense Forces blew up "Masjid Al Mashhad al Husain". "Masjid al Mashhad al Husain, the holy site in Ashkelon, was leveled in 1950, but the devotees of Ahl al Bait did not forgo it.

A few years ago, the 52nd Al Dai al Fatemi, Sultan Dr. Syedna Mohammad Burhanuddin, Head of the 'Ismaili Musta'alavi Dawoodi Bohra' School, achieved blessings to build a beautiful marble platform, as per traditional Fatemi architectural design, at the site, on the ground of "Barzilai Hospital", and since then thousands of devotees have come across the boundaries of the global village there round the year to pay tribute to Moula Husain. [11]

*Husain Sal'am upon you that you got a brother like Abbas
Abbas Sal'am upon you, Fatemah is proud of you
O Maula! Help us by the Quwat of Allah; we are in Mushkil-trials
O Maula! Grant us opportunity to offer Sajadah at your Mashhad soon*

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