# Sunnis and Shiites—Between Rapprochement and Conflict

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HE FALL OF THE BA'ATH REGIME IN IRAQ ignited a bloody conflict between Iraqi Sunnis and Shiites. The conflict is exemplified, inter alia, in the attacks by Sunnis on Shiites (including on mosques), Sunni allegations of murder of Sunni 'ulama by the Shiite Badr Forces, and Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's statement on May 19, 2004 branding the Shiites as "hypocrites" (*munafiqun*) whose "only objective is to please their masters among the apostates and the Crusaders." These trends may represent a new stage in the Sunni-Shiite conflict in Iraq with potential spillover into other countries.

The conflict between Iraqi Shiites and Sunnis may be viewed as a local conflagration in which a political elite which ruled the country since the end of the World War I struggles to maintain its predominance against a new elite which has taken over the country with the aid of an outside power and by virtue of its majority. Alternatively, it may be viewed as an ethnic conflict between a Sunni Arab minority and a Shiite ethnic majority which threatens to overthrow the social primacy of the former. A more optimistic analysis may see the conflict as one element or symptom in the syndrome of breakdown of law and order in a country hitherto ruled by an iron fist, which will disappear once the rule of law is reinstated.

All these explanations have their merits. However, the conflict in Iraq must also be viewed as a local reflection—both a result and a cause—of a much wider phenomenon of Sunni-Shiite animosity.¹ In many cases, the animosity between Sunnis and Shiites is clearly rooted in ethnic differences which are given religious justification by the religious leaders of the two sides. This is the case both in Pakistan and Afghanistan. In the former, the Deobandi Sunni *Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan* (Army of the Companions) is infamous for vicious terrorist attacks against the Shiites (particularly in Karachi), including attacks against Shiite mosques, and its branding of the Shiites as heretics. In Afghanistan, the conflicts between Sunni Pashtuns and Shiite Hazaris reached their acme in the massacre of Hazaris by the Taliban and the murder of the Hazari leader Ustadh

Abdul Ali Mazari. There too, the acts against the Hazaris were justified by the Taliban by the need to expunge the Shiite heresy of the former (it is noteworthy that the Taliban did not act in such a manner towards Sunni non-Pashtuns). Similarly, the Shiites of Bahrain are, for the most part, of Iranian extraction and, as such, are suspect as a Persian fifth column. In other cases, however, it seems that the religious sources of the animosity are predominant. In Malaysia, the moderate—albeit virulently anti-Western—Islamic regime of Mohammad Mahathir was also implacably anti-Shiite and in the late 1990's waged a campaign against Shiite heresies. Closer to the center of the Middle East, the Ikhwan rebellion against Ibn Saud demanded that the Shiites in the eastern region accept Sunni Islam or be put to death.

The significance of all of these conflicts is not so much the fact that Muslims have waged war against other Muslims, but the religious justification that has been accorded to these acts. In modern times, relations between Shiite and Sunni Islam have revolved around two poles. The first pole is *taqarub* or rapprochement (and even initiatives for unification). The second pole is conflict or even *takfir*—the excommunication or "heretication" of the other side.

This axis, however, is by no means symmetric. While Sunni Islam accepts a certain degree of internal pluralism, embodied in the existence of four schools of jurisprudence, few Sunni scholars have allowed themselves to accord the Shiites the same legitimacy of the other schools of Sunni jurisprudence. They have often been defined as *rafida* (rejectionists, pl. *rawafid*) who have "misled" Muslims, though only rarely have they been branded as total heretics or apostates (*kufr* or *murtaddun*). Likewise, Shiites, while they have branded their Sunni detractors as *Nawasib* (sing. *Nasibi*—enemies of 'Ali), tend to suffice with differentiating between the Shiite "believers" (*mu'minun*) or "distinguished" (*khassa*) and the plebeian (*'amma*) "Muslims" (*muslimun*), but do not reject the Islamic legitimacy of the latter. It may be argued that the trauma of the inter-Muslim discord (*fitna*) which gave birth to the Sunni-Shiite split remained throughout most of Islamic history a barrier against total "heretication" (*takfir*) of each side by the other.

# The Trend Toward Rapproachement

Occasional attempts to bridge the Shiite-Sunni schism took place even before the modern age. In 1743, the Iranian Nader Shah made an attempt for rapprochement through a convention of Shiite (mainly Iranian) and Sunni (mainly Hanafi) scholars, resulting in a document in which the former agreed to forego the custom of cursing the first three Caliphs and the latter agreed to recognize Twelver Shiism as a fifth orthodox madhhab, or school of Islamic thought.<sup>2</sup> In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (1911-36) the Lebanese Shiite mujtahid

`Abd al-Husayn Sharaf al-Din maintained a correspondence in the same spirit with the rector of the Azhar Salim al-Bishri.<sup>3</sup> Rashid Ridda, editor of the Sunni revivalist *al-Manar* met at the General Islamic Congress in Jerusalem in December 1931, with the Iraqi Shiite jurist Muhammad al-Husayn Al Kashif al-Ghita' and expressed his support of rapprochement. Another initiative was taken by the Egyptian Shaykh Mustafa al–Maraghi in the late 1930's.

The Islamic revival and quest for Islamic unity of the 20<sup>th</sup> century gave impetus to a quest for Sunni-Shiite rapprochement. The cause of rapprochement was taken up in the formation in Cairo (1946 and until 1972) of Jama'at al-taqrib ("The Group of Rapprochement") under the Iranian Shiite scholar Muhammad Taqi Qummi. The professed goal of the group was the unification of the various schools and legitimizing the Shi'ah as a separate *ja'afari* school (based on the sixth Imam Ja'afar al-Sadeq who is credited with the codification of the Shiite legal code). This institution came under attack by many Sunni fundamentalists as a tool for Shiite propaganda among the Sunnis.<sup>4</sup> On 6th July 1959, Mahmoud Shaltut, then Head of Al-Azhar who had been involved in *jama'at al-taqrib*, issued a historic fatwa recognizing the Ja'fari or "al-Shi,a al- Imamiyyah al-Ithna 'Ashariyyah" (i.e., The Twelver Imami Shiites) as a *madhhab* that is religiously correct to follow in worship as are other Sunni schools of thought.<sup>5</sup>

The concept of tagarub is an issue of contention within the modern Saudi religious and political establishment. Support of tagarub with other monotheistic faiths in general and with Shiites in particular is generally identified with the policies of the new King Abdullah. His willingness to accept the petition of the leaders of the Saudi Shiites, which included demands for religious equality seemed to indicate that he was willing to consider a change in the traditional attitude of the Wahhabi state towards the Shiites. There are grounds for the argument that Abdullah's relatively new-found ecumenism is the result of the trauma of 9/11 and the growing view of the Wahhabism as an anti-Christian and anti-American ideology in the eyes of the American public. Be that as it may, such nascent indications of tagarub in Saudi Arabia remain outside of the Wahhabi mainstream. The treatment of the ex-radical journalist, Mansur al-Nuqaydan, for supporting tagarub (prevented from working as a journalist within the Kingdom or from traveling abroad) is just one case in point.6 In the eyes of most hard-line Wahhabis, tagarub represents no less than compromise with paganism—shirk—the very evil that the founders of the Kingdom set out to eradicate.

While Sunni enthusiasm about rapprochement diminished significantly after the Iranian revolution of 1979, the banner of *taqrib* was taken up almost

immediately by the founders of the Shiite revolution in Iran. Shortly after the Islamic Revolution the regime formed organizations for promoting the idea of unity of all Islamic "schools" and legitimizing the Shi'ah as the Ja'fari school within a generic Islam that was neither Sunni nor Shiite. However, the raison d'etat behind these efforts was clear: A Sunni Muslim may accept the authority of any Sunni Shaykh, whatever the school he and the Shaykh follow, and if the Ja'fari (Shiite) school is just another school, any Sunni Muslim may follow the authority of a Shiite scholar without having to cross the lines and become a Shiite. The two main organizations operating under the Iranian regime in this spirit are *Majm'-e jahani-ye ahl-e beit* (*Ahlu Beit*), headed until 1999 by Hoj. 'Ali al-Taskhiri, then by 'Ali Akbar Velayati, and since October 2002 by Shaykh Mohammad Mahdi Assefi, and the Majma'-e jahani baraye taqrib-e bein-e mazaheb-e eslami (Society for Reconciliation Between the Schools) under Hoj. Mohammad Va'ez-Zadeh Khorasani.7 Both organizations convene conferences, ostensibly for rapprochement between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, and organize programs for Sunni Muslims to study Islam in the madrasas of Qom. Most of the Sunni Muslims who become involved in these organizations are non-Arab Muslims, particularly from South-East Asia. In a number of cases, Sunni students who studied in these programs were recruited by Iranian intelligence, including for terrorist activity. It seems, therefore, that these programs serve two roles: they show the willingness of the Iranian religious establishment to promote rapprochement, and they provide the Iranian intelligence with a reservoir for non-Iranian and non-Shiite recruits.8

In general, it may be said that the cause of rapprochement seems not to have struck much of a chord in the hearts of the Sunni majority of the Muslim world. The wider support of the idea among Shiites may be easily attributed to political interests, such as the Iranian quest for levers inside the Sunni world, or the need of minority (and oppressed) Shiites for legitimization. The predominant tone in Sunni–Shiite relations has remained one of mutual recriminations ranging from historic charges of treason and heresy to accusations of mass murder, treachery and collaboration with the enemies of Muslims.

# Sunni Accusations against the Shi'ah

Classic Sunni religious literature is replete with assertions regarding the heterodox or even heretical nature of the Shi'ah. Some of the more common claims against the Shiites are:

1. The Shiite belief in Ali accords him divine status, thus contradicting the primary tenet of Islam—the uniqueness of Allah. This alone is tantamount to "polytheism" (*shirk*) and, hence, heresy. The Shiites add to the shahadah

("There is no God but Allah") the phrase "Ashhadu anna 'Aliyyan waliyyullah" ("I am witness that Ali is the agent of Allah"). Some Sunni polemists even claim that Shiites attribute Mohammad's mission to "mistaken identity" by the angel Jibreel, who was supposed to have given the mission to Ali.9

- 2. The Shiite doctrine of the infallibility (*ismah*) of the Imams positions them as Prophets along side or, as critics of the Shi'ah claim, even above the Prophet Mohammad. Moreover, Shiite beliefs in the ability of the Imams to intercede (*shifah*) are seen as a clear contradiction of the finality of Muhammad as the "seal of the Prophets."
- 3. The Shiites have a Qur'an that includes verses (*Surat al-wilaya*, *surat al-nurayn*) which are not in the Sunni Qur'an and that were forged in order to justify Ali's right to succession. In doing so, the Shiites distort the Qur'an (*tahrif*). It is also claimed that the Shiites have forged hadiths in order to justify their doctrines.<sup>10</sup>
- 4. The Shiites revile the first Caliphs and the Companions of the Prophet who in their eyes usurped the Caliphate that rightfully belonged at that stage to Ali.  $^{11}$
- 5. The Shiites are debauchees who allow *mut'ah* (pleasure) marriages for pre-determined periods.
- 6. The Shiites practice *taqiyya* (dissimulation) and therefore cannot be trusted even when they propose rapprochement.

The rise of modern Islamic fundamentalist movements (and the Muslim Brotherhood in particular) called for purification of Islam from all "innovations" (bid'ah), such as "pagan" customs of asking for intercession at graves, or performing pilgrimages (ziyarat as opposed to hajj) to "holy places" other than Mecca. While the criticism of these movements was mainly directed toward their own Sunni constituency, they could not ignore the fact that many of the customs they were endeavoring to purge were widely accepted in Shiite Islam. The various Sunni fundamentalist movements seemed to feel the need to define their attitude toward the Shiite creed. This is evident in the attitudes of the Muslim Brotherhood of the Arab world to the Jamaat 'Ulema in Pakistan.

It seems though that the pan-Islamic goals of the Muslim Brotherhood served to mitigate the more virulent anti-Shiite tendencies. This was not the case, however, of the Wahhabi movement and its attitude toward the Shiites. The official negative attitude towards the Shiites in Saudi Arabia is evident in the various restrictions on Shiite practices in the Kingdom and in the plethora of anti-Shiite literature coming out of official religious circles in Mecca. Since the majority of Islamic radicals—including the militants of the al-Qa-

eda movement—draw their ideological inspiration from the Wahhabi creed, it is these positions which are of particular interest. The Wahhabi scholars tend to subscribe to all the traditional criticism of the Shiites as listed above, updating them with political content. The Shiites are accused not only of religious deviation and heresy, but of treachery against Arab Muslims. This is not, however, a recent case of treason alone but also a historic one; the Shiites are accused of acting throughout history as a "fifth column" within Islam, scheming to destroy the Ummah from inside. The main motifs of these claims are:<sup>12</sup>

- 1. Shi'ism is an invention of the Jews (and/or the Zoroastrians); Wahhabi detractors of Shi'ah find similarities between Shiite and Jewish or Zoroastrian customs and beliefs. It is said that it was Abdullah bin Saba, a Jew who, pretending to be a Muslim, coined and propagated the divine right of Ali Bin Abi Talib to the Caliphate as the successor to the prophet Muhammad. In reality, the Shiite doctrine of the Mahdi is the Jewish messianic doctrine.<sup>13</sup>
- 2. The Shiites are "agents of influence" of non-Arab revolutionary Iran inside the Arab world.
  - 3. Shiite doctrine permits killing a Sunni (nasibi).14
- 4. The Shiites are "hypocrites" (*munafiqun*)—a derisive designation of a "fifth column" within Islam whose members the Prophet condemned to the lowest rank of Hell. This is supported by highlighting the Shiite doctrine of Taqiya.
- 5. The Shiites are acting in accord with a long-range plan to topple Sunni Islam and to take over the Holy Places in the Hijaz. This claim is strongly reminiscent of classic anti-Semitic literature such as the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion."<sup>15</sup>

The above motifs are well expressed in the following recent anti-Shiite text from the pro-al-Qaeda website, al-Nida':

...The threat posed by the Shi'a to the [Islamic] nation is equal to the threat posed by the Jews and the Christians. They harbor the same ill will against the nation, which needs to protect itself from them and from being deceived by them... They pose a danger not only to Iraq, but to the whole region. If the Shi'a have influence over Iraq, or if they obtain some kind of autonomy in southern Iraq, they will be so much closer to extending their influence. After all, they exist in considerable numbers in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Bahrain. If these Shi'a get organized and if their initiatives get support from countries that sponsor them—Iran, Syria, and Lebanon—it will mean that they have reached advanced stages in their 50-year plan...We also cau-

tion against those who advocate befriending the Shi'a. Such [an] approach can only cause further harm to the nation. To get close to the Shi'a is more dangerous than getting close to the Jews, because the animosity of the Jews is well known, while the Shi'a pretend [to be friendly] and deceive the nation..."<sup>16</sup>

While the above text is taken from an al-Qaeda website, the anti-Shiite ideas it expresses are equally reflected in many "establishment" Saudi statements. The Saudi Sheikh and Professor at the Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University Abd al—Rahman al-Barrak went as far as to issue a fatwa permitting jihad against Shiites in an Islamic state if they insist on practicing their religion openly. Another respected cleric, Nassir al-'Umar, who has tacit support from the all-powerful Minister of Interior Prince Nayef, has been calling for cracking down on the Shiites in the Kingdom for over a decade.<sup>17</sup>

#### Shiite Atitudes towards Sunnis and Wahhabis

The Shiite writings regarding the Shiite–Sunni conflict are largely defensive. True, traditional Shiite beliefs also contain a number of severe charges against the Sunni majority in Islam. These include accusations of Sunni treachery against the fourth Caliph, the Imam 'Ali, customs such as the burning of effigies of the Caliph Omar, and in Iran, deeply rooted feelings of cultural superiority toward the Arabs.

These beliefs permeate Shiite texts and popular imagery. Nevertheless, traditional Shiite doctrines (Khomeini's revolutionary teachings notwithstanding) implicitly accept the Shiite status as a minority within Islam and refrain from positions that would strain the Sunni-Shiite relationship to a point of no return, where the two would irrevocably separate into two religions. A salient example of this restraint is the Shiite claim that two verses that were originally sent down to the Prophet and prove his choice of Ali as his successor (Surat al-wilaya, surat al-nurayn) were deleted from the canonical text of the Qur'an. Despite the claim, and despite the claim that the actual text of those verses is known, no Shiite sect has re-inserted them into its version of the Qur'an. It would seem that both Shiites and Sunnis are aware that such an act would create two separate scriptures and even lead to a final separation between two "Islams". It also may be interpreted as following the lead of Shiite tradition of submission to the stronger party until the return of the hidden Imam as the Mahdi and the vindication of his believers. One may claim that this in the eyes of traditional Shiite Islam is the example of the Imam 'Ali who accepted, for the sake of unity, the first three Caliphs

despite the fact that he knew that he had been the Prophet's choice, and of his son Hassan who abdicated his claim to the Caliphate for the same reasons.

Hence historically, Shiite animosity towards the Sunni majority of the Muslim world has been much less vehement and widespread than its Sunni correlate and for the most part it has been defensive, aimed at refuting the Sunni charges and defending the Shi'ah against Wahhabi attacks. Some of the main motifs of the Shiite attacks on the Wahhabis are:<sup>19</sup>

- 1. Comparing the Wahhabis to the *Khawarij*—the sect which, in the eyes of both Sunni and Shiite Islam "exceeded the limits" and caused dreaded internal strife (*fitna*) among the early Muslims. Some Shiite polemists even find the Wahhabis worse than the *Khawarij* in that the former represents "corruption" (*fasad*) and internal strife (*fitna*). In their actions they "exceed the limits" (*ghuluw*)—an act forbidden by the Qur'an.
- 2. Implications that the Saudi Wahhabis are uncultured nomads, "eaters of lizards," who after accepting Islam returned from the civilization of al-Medina to the backward ingorance (*jahili*) of desert life. <sup>20</sup>
- 3. Asserting that the Wahhabis are the agents of western imperialism. The Saudi State serves the interests of the Americans and the British (and, of course, Israel) in the Muslim world. The Wahhabis (Saudis) even agreed to hand Palestine to the Jews. This is, in essence, the Shiite version of the Sunni accusation mentioned above regarding Jewish influences over the Shi'ah. It too finds references in the early days of Islam, claiming that the Jewish Rabbi, Ka'b Ibn Mati' Al-Himyari (Abu Ishaq/ Ka'b al—Ahbar) ingratiated himself into the service of the Caliphs Omar and Uthman and tricked them (and was even involved in the assassination of Omar).<sup>21</sup>

## **Conclusions**

The above short description of Sunni-Shiite relations seems to indicate that the trend toward conflict is on the rise. This may be attributed to the situation in Iraq, however, this in itself is not enough. The Sunni-Shiite impasse in Iraq is but a reflection of a wider phenomenon, fanned by the traditional Wahhabi view of the Shi'ah as an apostasy. The ascendancy of the Shiites in Iraq in place of a Sunni—albeit evil and Ba'thist—regime only serves to reinforce the above view; the heterodox, even heretical Shiites, the natural allies of Shiite Iran, came to power in Arab Iraq on the points of American bayonets and through an alliance with the secular and non-Arab Kurds, ostensibly in a democratic process, but actually in order to promote the American plan for a Greater Middle East in which the Arabs will be diluted in the non-Arab components (Turkey, Pakistan, Iran, Israel) and Islam will lose its

status. This development is viewed not only from the most radical wings of the Sunni world, but even in traditional Wahhabi circles in Saudi Arabia, as a strategic challenge not only to the predominance of the Sunnis in Iraq, but to their supremacy in the Muslim world in general.

It would be imprudent to assume that the traditional Shiite tendency towards passive defense will continue under these circumstances. A case in point for such a change is the Khomeinist revolution itself, on the ideological plane. Khomeini himself enunciated this difference in saying the he is "a Husseini, not a Hassani", i.e. unlike the Imam Hassan, who abdicated his right, he would take arms against his opponents, even to the price of martyrdom. As the Iranian Revolution gave rise to a new Shiite self-confidence and willingness of various Shiite communities to assert themselves (the obvious case being Lebanon, but also in Shiite communities in Central Asia), the new Shiite predominance in Iraq may have a similar effect. This effect need not be the result of active Shiite "export" of revolution, as was the case with Iran. Such a development would probably add fuel to the fire of the anti-Shiite tendencies in the Sunni Gulf and among Wahhabi-type Islamist movements.

### Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Prof. Isaac Hasson of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem for his insights and references on the subject, upon which many of the comments here are based.
- 2 Martin Kramer, *Islam Assembled—The Advent of the Muslim Congresses* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 1–2.
- 3 The correspondance was published in *Abdul Husayn Sharaf al-din*, al-Murajaat, (Beirut: Dar al-Bayan al-Arabi, 1989)
- 4 See: Rainer Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism in the 20th Century. The Azhar and Shiism between Rapprochement and Restraint*, Leiden-Boston 2004; Dr. Nasir 'Abdullah al-Qafari, *Mas'alat al-Taqrib bayna al-Sunnah wa-al-Shi'ah*, ND.
- 5 See: Muhammad Jawad Chirri, Inquiries about Islam, (Detroit, 1986).
- 6 Michael Scott Doran, "The Saudi Paradox", Foreign Affairs, February 2004, p. 3.
- 7 Wilfrid Buchta, "Teheran Ecumenical Society (Majma' al-taqrub): a veritable ecumenical revival or a Troyan horse of Iran?", in R. Brunner and W. Ende (eds.), *The Twelver Shi'a in Modern Times, Religious, Culture and Political History*, Brill, Leiden 2001, 349. The use of the concept ahl al-Bayt (the household of the Prophet) derives from the hadith al-Thaqalayn in which the Prophet is said to have told the believers that he leaves them two precious things: the Qur'an and his household. http://rafed.net/aalulbayt/
- 8 Shmuel Bar, *Iranian Defense Doctrine and Decision Making*, (Herzliya: Institute for Policy and Strategy, October 2004), pp. 29, 55.

- 9 See Hason, Isaac Hasson, *Les sdites vus par les néo-Wahhabites*, forthcoming in *Arabica* (unpublished paper) Also see Internet chat. Remarks by Muhammad Tayyib Ramadani, Feb. 6, 2000, 3:00 AM.
- 10 In fact, the Shiite Qur'an is identical to the Sunni book. However, the Shiites do claim that these two verses were deleted from the text.
- 11 For example, there is a popular Iranian holiday of bonfires (similar to the English Guy Fawkes Day) in which effigies of the Caliph Omar are burnt.
- 12 Isaac Hasson, *Les sdites vus par les néo-Wahhabites*, forthcoming in *Arabica*. I would like to thank Prof. Hasson for his invaluable help with the material for this article. See also anti-Shiite polemic from the Taliban website (now defunct) www.taleban.org, August 14 "The Shiites are the followers of Ibn Saba, the Jew, and of Abu Lu'l'ah, the majusi (Zoroastrian)".
- 13 Ibid, p. 19.
- 14 Abdallah ibn Mohammad al-Salafi, Some of the Shiite Creed
- 15 Ibid, p. 26. Prof. Hasson cites the Wahhabi publication "brotokolat ayat Qumm hawla alharamayn al-muqaddasayn" ("The Protocols of the Ayatollahs of Qom Regarding the Two Holy Cities")—a clear allusion to the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion".
- 16 Al-Nidaa' website: http://www.bkufus.com/images/img/?subject=2&rec=1049 (April 25, 2003)
- 17 Doran, p. 7.
- 18 See: Shaykh Muhammad Jawad Chirri, *The Shiites Under Attack* (Detroit: The Islamic Center of America) in: http://al-islam.org/underattack/; Dr. Mohammed Al-Tijani Al-Samawi Thumma Ahtadayt (Then I was Guided), digital form on: http://al-islam.org/guided/
- 19 Isaac Hasson, hawahhabim b-'eini Ha-Shiiim ha-post Khomeinim (The Wahhabis in the eyes of the Post–Khomeinist Shiites). Unpublished paper.
- 20 The Iranian poet Ferdousi expressed astonishment that "Drinkers of camel-milk and eaters of lizards, the Arabs came to dare aspire to the throne of the Kings of Kian [an ancient Persian dynasty] and they spit upon you, Oh wheel of Fate—they spit upon you!" quoted in: Zeev Maghen, "The New Shu'ubiya, Iranian Dissidents Resurrect an Ancient Polemic," <u>Ha-Mizrah He-Hadash</u> (Hebrew), 42, (2001): 185-208. Modern Iranian history books depict the Arabs as violent tribal idol-worshipping tent-dwellers who practiced the live burial of infant girls, as opposed to the Iranian civilization, which included athletics (before the Greeks), a developed ethical religion (Zoroastrianism, based on "good thought, good speech and good behavior"). See Aloni, pp. 28-31.
- 21 http://al-islam.org/underattack/