

Opposing the Imām

Islam's fourth caliph, 'Alī, can be considered one of the most revered figures in Islamic history. His nearly universal portrayal in Muslim literature as a pious authority obscures centuries of contestation and the eventual rehabilitation of his character. In this book, Nebil Husayn examines the enduring legacy of the *nawāṣib*, early Muslims who disliked 'Alī and his descendants. The *nawāṣib* participated in politics and discussions on religion at least until the ninth century. However, their virtual disappearance in Muslim societies has led many to ignore their existence and the subtle ways in which their views subsequently affected Islamic historiography and theology. By surveying medieval Muslim literature across multiple genres and traditions including the Sunnī, Mu'tazilī, and Ibādī, Husayn reconstructs the claims and arguments of the *nawāṣib* and illuminates the methods that Sunnī scholars employed to gradually rehabilitate the image of 'Alī from a villainous character to a righteous one.

Nebil Husayn is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Miami, where his research considers the development of Islamic theology, historiography, and debates on the caliphate. Husayn obtained his Ph.D. in Near Eastern Studies from Princeton University.

Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization

Editorial Board

Chase F. Robinson, *Freer|Sackler, Smithsonian Institution (general editor)*
Anne Broadbridge, *UMass Amherst*
Michael Cook, *Princeton University*
Maribel Fierro, *Spanish National Research Council*
Alan Mikhail, *Yale University*
Intisar Rabb, *Harvard University*
Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Princeton University*

Other titles in the series are listed at the back of the book.

Opposing the Imām

The Legacy of the Nawāṣib in Islamic Literature

NEBIL HUSAYN
University of Miami



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-96576-7 — Opposing the Imam
Nebil Husayn
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108965767

DOI: 10.1017/9781108966061

© Nebil Husayn 2021

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

First published 2021

First paperback edition 2022

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data

Names: Husayn, Nebil, author.

Title: Opposing the Imam : the legacy of the Nawasib in Islamic literature / Nebil Husayn.

Description: 1. | New York : Cambridge University Press, 2021. | Series: Cambridge studies in Islamic civilization | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020057992 (print) | LCCN 2020057993 (ebook) | ISBN

9781108832816 (hardback) | ISBN 9781108965767 (paperback) | ISBN

9781108966061 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Shi'ah – Relations – Sunnites. | Sunnites – Relations – Shi'ah. | 'Aliibn AbiṬa'lib, Caliph, approximately 600–661 – Imamate. | Shi'ah – Apologetic works. | Sunnites – Controversial literature.

Classification: LCC BP194.16 .H87 2021 (print) | LCC BP194.16 (ebook) | DDC 297.8/042–dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020057992>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020057993>

ISBN 978-1-108-83281-6 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-108-96576-7 Paperback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

“Beware of mentioning ‘Alī and Fāṭima, for people detest nothing more than the mention of ‘Alī and Fāṭima.”

-A prominent chieftain among the descendants of ‘Alī
A little more than a century after the Prophet’s death

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	page viii
<i>Note on Conventions</i>	x
Introduction	1
1 ‘Alī: A Contested Legacy	15
2 The Umayyads and the ‘Uthmānīs	39
3 The Mu‘tazilī: al-Jāhīz	65
4 The Ibāḍī: al-Wārjalānī	89
5 The Sunnī: Ibn Taymiyya	112
6 The Rehabilitation of ‘Alī in Sunnī <i>Hadīth</i> and Historiography	161
Afterword	182
Chapter 1 Appendix: Anti-‘Alid Statements in Historical Literature	186
Chapter 2 Appendix: Reports about the Umayyads and the ‘Uthmānīs	198
Chapter 5 Appendix: Ibn Taymiyya’s <i>Minhāj al-sunna</i>	205
<i>Bibliography</i>	212
<i>Index</i>	230

Acknowledgments

This project would not exist without the guidance and support of Hossein Modarressi who served as my advisor at Princeton University. He inspired me with his erudition and humility. I seized his office hours as opportunities to query him about anything and everything. He patiently answered my questions with wisdom and occasional humor. I am honored to have received the opportunity to sit with such a fine scholar.

Michael Cook's commitment to his students seemingly possessed no bounds and he graciously accommodated all of my requests. I never doubted that he was invested in my future success. I thank him for his scholarship, teaching, and encouragement.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to a few scholars who agreed to read early draft chapters of this work: Sean Anthony, Michael Dann, Adam Gaiser, Najam Haider, Nancy Khalek, Jack Tannous, Wasim Shiliwala, and Hanna Siurua. Their comments and criticisms were critical to the development and completion of this book.

I would like to thank the editors and staff at Cambridge University Press for their support and patience. I must also thank the publisher for permission to use, in revised form, "The Rehabilitation of 'Alī in Sunnī Ḥadīth and Historiography," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 29, 4 (2019).

I am indebted to the faculty and administration of the Department of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University who generously provided financial and logistical support in the research, writing, and completion of essential aspects of this work that appeared in my doctoral dissertation.

I wrote many chapters of this book as a Visiting Assistant Professor at the Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations (NELC) Department at

Acknowledgments

ix

Harvard University. I am indebted to the administration and faculty of the Harvard Business School, the NELC Department, specifically, Ali Asani, Shaye Cohen, and Khaled El-Rouayheb for providing me with the opportunity to teach and research at Harvard.

I could not have pursued publication of this work without the generosity and good will of my colleagues in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Miami who took a chance on me. I am blessed to share good laughs and great conversations with everyone here in Miami. Our department's chair, David Kling, greatly facilitated the writing of this book by supporting my requests for research and family leave each semester that necessitated one. I am particularly indebted to Daniel Pals and Dexter Callender who kindly read proposals and draft chapters of this work. Thank you, Dexter, for encouraging me to move ahead with the project when I considered postponing it another year – or two! A 2018–2019 University of Miami Fellowship in the Arts and Humanities greatly assisted me in the writing of this book.

Patricia Crone and Shahab Ahmed were two brilliant scholars that I held in the highest esteem. Both of them smiled when I mentioned the idea of this project to them years ago. When I solicited her thoughts about my proposal to study depictions of 'Alī among the 'Uthmāniyya, Patricia joked, "Well, they certainly didn't like him." Perhaps Patricia and Shahab would have found something agreeable in this work, now that it is complete.

What is life without family? My mother is a woman of unconditional love and compassion. Her love has sustained me every day of my life. My father taught me honesty and an unyielding work ethic; Nejat, a fierce spirit. Each day that I share with all of my young siblings – Jemila, Ala, Jafar, and Aman – gives me great joy. The Hussen, Abdella, and Hussam families have all nurtured my intellectual and spiritual growth with their love and support, but none more than my wife Reshma. With her I learned to listen to the forest.

Note on Conventions

The transliteration of Arabic names and phrases is based on the guidelines of the third edition of Brill's *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. The death dates of medieval Muslim scholars appear in the Islamic *hijrī* calendar (AH), followed by the Common Era date (CE). Otherwise, I refer to dates in the Common Era. I forgo citation of the *bāb*, *ḥadīth* number, or first line of a report; conventions that are inconsistently used in western scholarship on *ḥadīth*. I simply cite the volume and page number of a classical Sunnī or Shī'ī *ḥadīth* collection. To aid researchers seeking to follow up these references in Arabic, I cite editions that coincide with those digitized and made freely available on www.shiaonlinelibrary.com. All translations from the Arabic are my own.