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THE GROWING PHENOMENON OF TATTOOING AMONG HEZBOLLAH SHIITES IN LEBANON

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Abstract

This article discusses the growing phenomenon of tattooing among Shiite[1] youth in Lebanon, particularly young members of Hezbollah. After examining definitions of tattooing past and present and the position taken on tattooing by Sunnis and Shiites, it identifies the most common images and words that appear on tattoos obtained by young Shiites in Lebanon. With their varied forms and expressions, these tattoos are derived from symbols, sayings, and beliefs of the Shiite community. The article analyses these forms and expressions, examining their religious and social significance and meanings. It also explores the recent increase in this phenomenon, which stems overall from the desire to express pride in belonging to the Shiite sect in general, and to Hezbollah in particular, to declare Hezbollah's political and ideological stance, and to affirm their adherence to Shiite beliefs.

Keywords : Hezbollah, Lebanon, tattoos, tattooing, Shiites.

Preface

Tattooing has become quite widespread worldwide in recent decades, especially in the Western world, due to the development of the relevant techniques and dyes and the introduction of influences from the plastic arts. Indeed, it has become a popular fashion among art and sports celebrities, in addition to attracting broad sectors of young people. Many cultures continue to reject the practice of tattooing for reasons both religious and social. The vehemence of the opposition to tattooing and the sensitivity of the issue vary from one society to another, especially given the fact that it was associated throughout long historical periods with prisoners, gang members, troublemakers, and other individuals viewed as immoral or disreputable.

Arab society in particular has tended to reject or express reservations about tattoos, a fact which can be attributed to religious prohibitions. Tattoos are opposed not only by some religious groups, but in some cases by society at large. Nevertheless, certain Arab tribes used to place uniform tattoos on their bodies; they also stamped them on their livestock to identify who they belonged to. In such cases, the cosmetic function of tattoos is secondary, as their symbolism is

[1] The word Shiite and Shiites in this article refer to the Imami Shiites (Twelvers).

more important than the images themselves. Many young people today are adopting religious tattoos as a means of expression and as a way of affirming their religious affiliations with minimal thought for their aesthetic function. The current study will address the phenomenon of religious tattoos among Hezbollah youth in Lebanon.

The purposes and importance of the study

The academic study of the phenomenon of tattooing and its religious significance among Hezbollah youth in Lebanon is important for the following reasons. First: To my knowledge, no serious, extensive academic study has been devoted to the phenomenon of tattooing among Shiites, particularly members of the Lebanese Hezbollah. Second: The phenomenon of tattooing among Hezbollah youth in Lebanon has spread widely in recent years, becoming a major attraction among members of Lebanese society more broadly, as evidenced by online press reports dealing with the issue of tattooing among members of the Shiite sect.

Previous studies

Previous studies have discussed the topic of tattoos from a variety of angles. In what follows, I will present an overview of the studies that have informed my own research, pointing out their most prominent features, noting aspects of both agreement and disagreement, and identifying the gap which the current study seeks to fill. The studies reviewed are temporally and geographically diverse, having been published between 2011 and 2021 in a number of different Arab countries.

In his study entitled, "Tattoos: Dangers and Prohibitions,"[2] Muḥammad al-Dīb notes that Islam permits bodily inscriptions using henna, a temporary dye used at weddings and other social occasions, while prohibiting permanent tattoos, which conflict with certain Islamic teachings. For example, tattoos tend to draw others' attention, whereas the Qur'an instructs believers of both sexes to lower the gazes. Tattoos are also used for other purposes, such as to seek healing from illnesses, to ward off the evil eye and envy, to dedicate oneself to gods, priests, and sorcerers, to impart immunity, and to bring blessing, all of which are viewed as pagan in nature, as they involve idolatry, that is, associating partners with God, and a denial of God's oneness. Al-Dīb recommends efforts to reduce this growing phenomenon among young Muslims by supporting the role of the family, the school, places of worship, and various media in warning against this phenomenon, particularly in view of the fact that recent scientific discoveries have demonstrated the bodily harm that can result from tattoos, thus revealing a new aspect of the agreement between Islamic legal texts and the physical sciences**.**

[2]Muḥammad al-Dīb, "*al-Washm bayn al-makhāṭir wa-l-taḥrīm*," *al-Iʿjāz l-ʿIlmī*, no. 40, 2011, 20-22.

In her study entitled, "Tattooing in Pre-Islamic Poetry,"[3] Hanā' Kashkūl reviews the origins of tattooing, particularly in totemic religions, as well as the purposes for which tattoos have been used and their mention in pre-Islamic poetry. Pre-Islamic poets affirmed the use of tattoos on various parts of the body, including the back of the hand, the palm, the wrist, and the arm, whereas they refrained from mentioning them on other parts of the body such as the chest, the neck, the abdomen, the navel, the thigh, the calf, the ankle, and the foot. Pre-Islamic poets' mention of tattoos on the former set of body parts listed above and their failure to mention the latter appears to be due to the fact that the latter would have been invisible to onlookers, being concealed by clothing.

In her article entitled, "Tattoos: Symbol and Meaning,"[4] Nūr al-Hudā Bādīs arranges her discussion around six main axes. The first axis deals with the definition of tattoos; the second sheds light on tattoos in the ancient Arab milieu; the third distinguishes between *al-aṭlāl* (the remains of a house or campsite after its inhabitants have moved on) and *al-washm* (tattoos).[5] The fourth axis discusses tattoos associated with ancient pre-Islamic beliefs; the fifth focuses on tattoos vis-à-vis writing vs. oral speech; and the sixth highlights tattoos in relation to tribal custom and religious prohibition. The study concludes that as a phenomenon, tattoos sum up the popular memory of a group or tribe, which is integrated into a group's collective expression in a manner that might be likened to the spontaneity and improvisation that marks oral discourse.

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[3] Hanā' ʿAbbās Kashkūl, "*al-Washm fī al-shiʿr al-jāhilī: Dirāsah fī ḍaw' al-wāqiʿ al-ijtimāʿī*," *Majallat Kulliyat al-Islāmiya al-Jāmiʿa*, 2010, no. 7, 449-477.

[4] Nūr al-Hudā Bādīs, "*al-Washm: al-ramz wa-l-maʿnā*," *al-Thaqāfa al-shaʿbiyya*, vol. 10, no. 39, 2017, 144-155.

[5] Pre-Islamic poets often began their odes with a reference to such remains, which they would sometimes liken to a tattoo.

Jumʿa al-Aḥmar's study entitled, "The Cultural Significations of Tattoos: A Theoretical Study in Cultural Anthropology"[6] shows that tattoos were once a popular tradition that formed an inseparable part of daily life in virtually all human societies down the ages, serving purposes as disparate as treating illness, demonstrating one's social status, and personal adornment. Tattoos also came in numerous different forms, including geometrical shapes, flowers, trees, signs of the zodiac, planets, and crescent moons, with decorative patterns that bore specific meanings depending on the society's culture and beliefs.

In her study entitled, "Shifts in Aesthetic Values in the Art of Tattooing Women's Bodies,"[7] Īnās al-Ṣaffār shows that tattoos are a ritual tradition with deep roots in ancient cultures which has generally been associated with the value or cultural system of the society in question, including its beliefs and religion. With their symbols, shapes, and lines, tattoos have continued to be among the most important and abiding means of adornment for women throughout history, particularly on the face, the hands, and the feet, while also communicating meaning. This study consists of four chapters. Chapter One presents the research problem, which is to answer the question: What shifts in aesthetic values occurred in the art of tattooing women's bodies between 2008 and 2018? Chapter Two, "Theoretical Framework," addresses three topics: (1) the value system and its conceptual transformations, (2) tattoos' historical origins and types, and (3) the art of tattooing. Chapter Three, "Research procedures", describes the research population, which consisted of 30 artworks, while the study sample consisted of three such works, to which the researcher applied the content analysis method. As for Chapter Four, it contains results, conclusions, recommendations and suggestions.

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[6] Jumʿa al-Aḥmar, "*al-Dilālāt al-thaqāfiyya li-l-washm: dirāsa naẓariyya fī al-anthrūbulūjiā al-thaqāfiyya*," *Majallat jāmiʿat al-zaytūna*, no. 31, 2019, pp. 1-11.

[7] Īnās Mahdī Ibrāhīm al-Ṣaffār, "*Taḥawwulāt al-qiyam al-jamāliyya fī fann washm jasad al-mar'a*," *Dirāsāt al-ʿulūm al-insāniyya wa-l-ijtimāʿiyya*, vol. 45. 2019, pp. 229-242.

A study conducted by ʿĀ'isha Sarār (2020) entitled, "Prisoners' Tattoos and What They Say About Repressed Sexual Orientations"[8] treats the subject of tattooing as a type of non-verbal language. Employing the case-study approach, Sarār sets out to determine whether the tattoos of inmates at the Re-education and Rehabilitation Institution in the city of Tazoult, in Algeria's Batna Province, convey repressed sexual inclinations. She concludes that the prisoners' tattoos are indeed a reflection of underlying sexual issues, that changes which occurred during adolescence prompted them to resort to tattoos as a means of communication, and that prisoners who wear tattoos with sexual connotations are expressing repressed homosexual inclinations and desires.

Lastly, we come to a study by Muḥammad al-ʿUṣaymī entitled, "Juristic rulings on tattoos and their contemporary forms: microblading as a model."[9] The study draws a distinction between subdermal tattoos, which are prohibited by Islamic law, and a modern type known as microblading which is drawn on the surface of the skin, and which is Islamically permissible according to the best-attested view of Muslim jurists.

In summary, the previous studies discuss the phenomenon of tattooing in terms of its symbolism and meanings, its dangers and its prohibition in Islam, and its cultural connotations in human societies throughout the ages, such as ostentation and adornment, and the use of tattoos to express aesthetic values in women's body art. One of the studies points out that prisoners' tattoos may also convey repressed sexual desires and inclinations. As for the current study, it draws on earlier research as background while going beyond it to treat the topic of religious tattoos among Hezbollah youth.

Research method

I employed two methods in this study: the inductive method, and the descriptive analytical method. In the first, I compiled observations on the tattoos of Hezbollah youth in Lebanon, after which I classified them and drew conclusions in keeping with the study criteria. In the second, I

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[8] ʿĀ'isha Sarār, "*al-Washm ʿind al-masjūn wa dilālatuhu ʿalā al-muyūlāt al-jinsiyya al-makbūta*," *Majallat al-bāḥith fī al-ʿulūm al-insāniyya wa-l-ijtimāʿiyya*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2020, pp. 203-212.

[9] Muḥammad Ḍāwī al-ʿUṣaymī, "*al-Aḥkām al-fiqhiyya li-l-washm wa ṣuwaruhu al-muʿāṣira: taqniyat al-māykrūblaydinj numūdhajan*," *Majallat al-sharīʿa wa-l-dirāsāt al-islāmiyya*, vol. 36, no. 125, 2021, pp. 85-123.

described and analysed the content of tattoos among Hezbollah youth in Lebanon. I then compared them to each other to determine the extent of the practical additions made, as well as the extent to which tattoos related to their religious creed recurred among them. By means of these two approaches along with theoretical extrapolation, I was able to form an objective picture of the phenomenon of tattooing among Hezbollah youth.

Research questions

This study seeks answers to the following questions:

(1) What are the most common words, expressions and images used in tattoos by Hezbollah youth?

(2) What do the Shiites intend to say or accomplish through these tattoos? What are their religious, social and educational connotations?

(3) What are the symbolic expressions of the phenomenon of tattooing?

Study population and sample

a. Temporal boundaries: the forms of tattoos published in Lebanese newspapers and websites between the years 2010 and 2020.

b. Spatial boundaries: the words, phrases and images that appeared in tattoos among Hezbollah youth in the western suburb of Beirut.

The scale of the phenomenon in Lebanon: We lack accurate statistics on the practice of tattooing among Shiite youth in Lebanon. However, many sources indicate that the phenomenon was particularly widespread between 2013 and 2015. The owner of a tattoo shop in the southern suburbs of Beirut reported that during the aforementioned period, he and a colleague of his tattooed nearly 1,700 Shiite youths, after which demand fell off drastically, with only 200 members of this group seeking tattoos between early 2016 and March 2017.[10]

The word *washm* (tattoo) in the lexicon

According to B. Shumayl, the Arabic word *washm* means a mark or a sign. As for B. Sīda, he tells us that it refers to a prick which a woman makes on her arm with a needle, after which she stuffs it with 'fire', that is, with soot or ashes. The phrase *washama al-yad* (to tattoo the hand) means to prick it with a needle, then sprinkle soot or ashes on it. Abū ʿUbayda wrote, "The tattoo is on the hand, because the woman pricks the back of her hand and her wrist with a needle… She then fills it with antinomy (kohl), soot or ashes, causing it to turn blue or green."

Nāfiʿ said, "Tattooing occurs on the gums," by which he explained the hadith which says that God curses the woman who tattoos [someone else], and the one who is tattooed. B. Athīr stated, "What is known now is that tattooing is done on the skin and the lips." And although the

[10] See Ḥalā Naṣrallāh, "*al-Ṭā'ifiyya fī al-awshām* [Sectarianism in Tattoos]," at www.alhurra.com, 6 October 6 2017 (accessed on 26 December 2018).

Prophet forbade tattooing as in the previous hadith because it alters what God has created, it is nevertheless still prevalent in numerous forms in many Arab countries, especially among women. A practice known in Sudan is the tattooing of the gums and the lower lip (known as *daqqat al-shalūfa*), which occurs when a girl marries. Tattooing is also found among Nubian women in the far north of the Sudan. This may be the result of Egyptian influences, as the tattooing of hands is common in Upper Egypt. Be that as it may, the purpose of such tattoos is not to distinguish an individual's identity, but rather to enhance her physical beauty. Indeed, many poets have sung the praises of tattoos. The oldest such reference might be the one which occurs in the *Mu'allaqa* of Ṭarafa B. al-ʿAbd (d. 568 CE), who said: "The ruins Khawla left on the mottled flatlands of Thahmad appear and fade, like the trace of a tattoo on the back of a hand."

The tattoo also indicates "an effect on something to adorn it, including tattoos on the hand if it is engraved and pierced."[11] As we have seen, the term *washm* in Arabic refers to the act of leaving an effect on something, and specifically, that of leaving a permanent mark on the body.[12]

As noted also, tattooing is a popular practice that has been known to numerous human societies down the ages. Its functions have ranged from protection and curing illness to ostentation and adornment for both men and women, with the functions of ostentation and adornment persisting into modern times.

The term tattoo

The term 'tattoo' refers to the practice of drawing or writing on human skin by piercing the skin with a needle using colors that meet identifiable specifications. It is an exacting, delicate process with its own rules, conditions and rituals. A tattoo is a decorative or symbolic drawing the purpose of which is to ornament the skin through, for example, engraving with ink or with coal-like substances or henna. In the present day, the process involves the use of advanced electrical tools.

The purposes of tattooing

Tattoos have many purposes, including:

1. To draw others' attention and make a desirable change.
2. To show religious, political, national or tribal affiliation.
3. To immortalize a memory that has left a deep impact on the person with the tattoo. This memory might be of a passionate love, an unspoken desire for revenge, or gratitude to a specific person. This sentiment is expressed by including writing in certain drawings,

[11] Aḥmad B. Fāris B. Zakariyyā, *Maqāyīs al-Lugha*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn (Cairo: al-Majmaʿ al-ʿIlmī al-ʿArabī al-Islāmī, 1979), 6: 113, entry on *w-sh-m*.

[12] Kashkūl, p. 372.

through writing alone, or by tattooing an image that expresses an emotional state, such as a name, a letter, or an image of the beloved.

4. To perform aesthetic functions, such as thickening the eyebrows, defining the lips, adding color to the cheeks, defining the eyes on a permanent basis, or conveying strength and toughness.[13] Some individuals believe that a tattoo demonstrates strength of character, especially if it contains terrifying images, such skulls, snakes, and the like.
5. To perform a curative or therapeutic purpose, such as the treatment of pain in the bones, joints, or nerves. A tattoo may be viewed as a sedative that drives out demons which enter the human body and cause pain.[14]
6. To aid in performing certain religious rituals and acts of worship. Tattoos might be associated with baseless superstitions and spells or incantations, as the ancient Egyptians believed that tattoos could cure illnesses and ward off the evil eye and envy.
7. To bring about sexual arousal, especially in parts of the body associated with sexual intercourse, the aim being to seduce and arouse the other party.
8. To identify prisoners and distinguish them from others.
9. To identify someone as belonging to a particular tribe, religious or political group or intellectual persuasion.
10. To compensate psychologically for a deficiency, satisfy a repressed desire, express subconscious hostility, or seek liberation from life's frustrating pressures and constraints. A tattoo may also reflect the culture of psychological gratification, the desire to mar or

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Muḥammad Barakāt Murād, "*Fann al-washm: ru'ya anthrūbūlujiyya wa nafsiyya* [The Art of Tattooing: An Anthropological and Psychological View]," at: http://www.alkalimah.net/Articles/Read/558 (accessed 20 May 2023).

distort one's appearance, or affirm the social and cultural privilege enjoyed by a given community.[15]

11. To redeem the individual. One ancient tradition of self-sacrifice for the gods (or the priests or magicians who represented them) required that on certain special occasions, a man subject his body to certain types of cutting and cauterization as a means of redemption, the belief being that the scars would grant him immunity and bring him blessing.
12. To conform to a fad.[16]
13. To fulfil a wish to be distinctive.
14. To demonstrate courage.
15. To ensure that children can be identified in the event that they go missing.

Types of tattoos

Tattoos may be permanent or temporary. The tattoos displayed on young men's and women's bodies, sometimes in the most alluring, eye-catching spots, also take many forms and shapes. Khālid al-Ghāmidī has identified five types of tattoos:

1. Injury tattoos: These result from materials such as asphalt or the tip of a pencil finding its way under the skin due to injury from a traffic accident or some other type of mishap.

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[15] Ḥusayn ʿAbbāsī, "*al-Washm ladā qabāʾil ifrīqiyā: al-dhāt wa-l-mawḍūʿ* [Tattooing among the tribes of Africa: Subject and Object]," *Majallat al-thaqāfa al-shaʿbiyya*, Bahrain, no.13, 2011.

[16] ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Sayyid Aḥmad, "*al-Tajalliyāt al-ramziyya li-l-washm fī al-muʿtaqad al-shaʿbī bayn al-khuṣūmah al-thaqāfiyya wa-l-thaqāfa al-shaʿbiyya* [Symbolic manifestations of tattoos in popular belief: cultural rivalry vs. popular culture]," *Majallat al-mawrūth al-shaʿbī al-ilaktrūnī* (Bahrain), June 2022, at: http://bahrainanthropology.blogspot.com/2022/06/2021_52.html (accessed 19 May 2023).

2. Amateur tattoos: These are tattoos done by the individual themselves or a friend by placing ink or ashes on the skin, then pricking it with a pin or a needle to allow molecules of this substance to get under the surface. Such tattoos have a slapdash appearance, and are quite superficial in nature.
3. Professional tattoos: These are done with a specialized device or instrument to introduce the required color beneath the skin. These tattoos are generally in the form of colorful, skillfully executed drawings containing materials that are placed in deeper layers of the skin.
4. Medical tattoos: These are used in very rare cases to mark a specific area that will undergo radiation treatment in cancer patients.
5. Cosmetic tattoos: Also referred to as permanent makeup, cosmetic tattoos may involve drawing the eyebrows, the outline of the lip or the entire lip, or what resembles permanent eyeliner with specialized materials. They may also be used after breast surgery to replicate the appearance of nipples after their surgical removal, or to conceal vitiligo through the application of a color that resembles the skin's natural hue.[17]

Tattoos in the Islamic religion

New geometric and decorative motifs, such as the star and crescent, were introduced into tattoos during the Islamic era. In fact, however, this art was viewed unfavorably by Islam,[18] which sought to minimize some aspects of popular visual representation for fear that such imagery would tempt people to revert to pagan practices. Thus, the art of tattooing and other forms of popular visual representation were met with a wave of prohibition for religious reasons.[19]

Tattooing is prohibited among Sunnis based on a hadith transmitted on the authority of B. ʿUmar, according to whom the Prophet said, "May God curse the woman … who does tattoos and

[17] Aḥmad, *al-Tajalliyāt,* p. 8.

[18] Sawsan ʿĀmir, *al-Rusūm al-taʿbīriyya fī al-fann al-shaʿbī* [Expressive drawings in popular art] (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 1981), p. 3.

[19] Akram Qāns̩u, *al-Taṣwīr al-shaʿbī al-ʿarabī* (Popular Arab visual representation) (Kuwait: National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, 1995), p. 20.

who seeks to have them done."[20] However, Sunni scholars disagree concerning the reason for which tattooing is prohibited.[21] It is believed that God has forbidden tattooing because it involves trapping the blood between the flesh and the skin, because of the harm it causes the body, and because it entails altering what God has created. We read in the Qur'an that Satan declared, "I will surely command them, and they will change God's creation (Qur'an 4: 119)."

In his commentary on the Qur'an, al-Qurṭubī states,

> What is meant by 'change' here is tattoos.[22] The reason tattoos are forbidden is that they change that which was created by God Almighty by adding something that remains [beneath the skin] after it is pricked with a needle. Further, it causes needless pain and torture to a living creature. There is a difference between a fixed, permanent adornment that changes the color and shape of a bodily part, and which is prohibited because it involves changing what was created by God Almighty, and temporary adornment, which is permissible.[23]

The Shiites' position on tattoos: Shiite texts do not prohibit tattoos. However, many such texts declare tattoos to be undesirable. For example, Shiite scholar al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī relates that

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[20] See Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Bāz (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1991), 7: 82, hadith no. 9937; and B. Ḥajjāj al-Nīsābāwī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Mansoura: Al-Iman Library, no date), hadith no. 119 (2124).

[21] **Ruling on Tattoos in Islam (accessed 6 February 2018).** http://muslimconverts.com/cosmetics/tattoos.htm

[22] Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li aḥkām al-Qur'ān* [Compendium of the Rulings of the Qur'an], ed. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Beirut: Mu'assassat al-Risāla, 2006), 5:395.

[23] Ibid., 7:141.

> The Messenger of God, may God's prayers and peace be upon him and his family, cursed women who remove the hair of their eyebrows and those who ask others to do this on their behalf. Similarly, he cursed women who file down their teeth or have others do so on their behalf. He also cursed women who engage in tattooing and who have others do so on their behalf.[24]

Although tattoos are not viewed favorably by Shiites, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani has issued fatwas declaring them permissible.[25] He states on his website, "Tattoos are permissible in and of themselves, but they must be concealed from strangers if they are viewed customarily as adornment." Commenting on tattoos containing images of the immaculate imams and their sacred names, Sistani writes, "They are not permissible if they are viewed as violating their [these individuals'] sanctity." Regarding tattoos containing images of animals, Sistani states, "They are permissible. However, tattoos in and of themselves are not desirable, and there are [authoritative] narratives which condemn them." In answer to a question about performing tattoos on the scalp and the body, Sistani stated, "In and of itself, it is permissible, and will not invalidate ritual washing, ablutions or prayer." When asked about tattoos that are drawn on the body with needles, he gave a similar ruling. Thus, we see that Shiites have discussed whether tattoos are Islamically permissible, and that those who declare them permissible do so based on the fatwas issued by Ali al-Sistani.[26]

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[24] Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Wasāʾil al-Shīʿah ilā taḥṣīl masāʾil al-sharīʿa* [a compilation of Shiite hadiths] (Qum: Āl al-Bayt Foundation for the Revival of Heritage, 1988), 17:133.

[25] *Brian S. Turner, Religion and Modern Society: Citizenship, Secularization, and the State (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 94.*

[26] Aḥmad, *al-Tajalliyāt al-ramziyya*, 10.

However, some Shiite sources have declared tattoos forbidden.[27] Ayatollah Sadeq Hosseini Shirazi, for example, wrote,

> Tattoos are undesirable. Moreover, it is not permissible for tattoos to contains verses from the Qur'an, the names of members of the Prophet's family (peace be upon them), drawings of imams, hadiths, or images which are non-Islamic or indecent. Ink of the type that remains on the skin is forbidden; as for the type that remains under the skin, it is permissible, but undesirable.[28]

Tattoos in the Christian religion

The Egyptian art of tattooing retained its distinctive feature, namely, that it was influenced by religion, under both Roman rule and the governance of the Christian Church. The use of tattoos under Christianity reached its peak during the Crusades, as Christian soldiers would draw the sign of the cross on their foreheads in order to recognize each other. During the First and Second World

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[27] See, for example: Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi (*"The Sufficient" - a hadith collection), Fourth Edition (Tehran: Islamic Book House, 1945), 5:559, hadith no. 13; ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabarsī, *Mishkāt al-Anwār fi Ghurar al-Akhbār* [The lamp niche for the choicest of traditions], Second Edition (Najaf: al-Ḥaydariyya Library, 1965), p. 318; Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Karājukī, *Maʿdan al-jawāhir wa riyāḍat al-khawāṭir* (Tehran: Al-Murtazaviah Library, 1974), p. 62; al-ʿĀmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shīʿa*, 17:458, hadith no. 22991.

[28] Syed Sadiq Shirazi, "FAQ Topics: Tattoos," Ayatollah Syed Sadiq Shirazi. Archived from the original on 9 May 2017 (retrieved on 16 October 2017).

Wars, tattoos took on a partisan stamp with the Nazis and the US Marines.[29] This was despite the fact that the Council of Nicaea (325 CE) had prohibited tattoos. Moreover, tattoos had been banned entirely under the Second Council of Nicaea (787 CE) as a pagan custom.

In 1870, the Japanese government issued a decree prohibiting tattoos, and in 1969, MP Martin Madden introduced the Tattooing of Minors Act, which officially prohibited tattoos in England for anyone under the age of 18, and which remains in force. In a report published by Al-Jazeera channel's website quoting the Reuters news network on Thursday, 17 June 2003, the European Commission warned that tattoo enthusiasts were injecting toxic chemicals into their skin given the prevailing ignorance of the materials used in tattoo dyes. They noted that most chemicals used in tattoos are industrial dyes that were originally manufactured for use in substances such as car paint or printing ink, and that there is little to no data supporting their safe use in tattoos.[30]

Tattoos in the Jewish religion

Tattoos are forbidden in Judaism based on Leviticus 19:28, which reads, "You shall not make gashes in your flesh for the dead, or incise any marks on yourselves. I am the Lord." This ban is viewed by contemporary rabbis as part of the general prohibition against modifications of the human form which serve no medical purpose (such as correcting a deformity or disfiguration). Twelfth-century Jewish scholar Maimonides explains that the ban on tattoos was Judaism's

[29] See the Rulings of Grand Ayatullah Sistani on Youth Issues at http://www.alulbayt.com/rulings/15.htm (accessed 6 February 2018).

[30] Matt Fradd, "What does the Church Teach about Tattoos?", *Catholic Magazine*, https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/what-does-the-church-teach-about-tattoos (accessed 9 May 2023). See https://echa.europa.eu/hot-topics/tattoo-inks#:~:text=To%20protect%20European%20citizens%2C%20thousands,REACH%20Regulation%20from%20January%202022.

response to paganism.[31] Moreover, there are Jews who are revolted by tattoos because they remind them of the Nazi concentration camps during the days of the Holocaust.

Phrases used in tattoos by Hezbollah youth

Gathering data from a variety of websites, the study observed a number of phrases that appear on tattoos made by Shiite youth in Lebanon. Most of these are religious sayings from the Shiite heritage. The following phrases were observed with the greatest frequency.

***Hubbū li-l-intiqām li-l-Ḥusayn* ("Rise to avenge al-Ḥusayn!")**

This is a call repeated by the Shiites during their commemoration of the Day of Ashura in response to al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī's cry during the Battle of Karbala (680): "Is there any supporter who will come to my aid?" Shiite worshippers place black brow bands on their foreheads bearing the words, "We are at your service, O Ḥusayn" (*labbayka yā Ḥusayn*) in expression of their willingness to die for al-Ḥusayn and avenge his death.[32] The Secretary-General of Hezbollah, Sayyed Ḥassan Nasrallah, has explained this call as meaning that "like al-Ḥusayn, the Shiite should be present in the battle, even if he is alone. Even if people abandon him, accuse him and betray him, he, his possessions, his family and his children must be present in this battle."[33]

***Yā Ḥusayn* ("O Ḥusayn")**

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[31]Rabbi Alan Lucas, "Tattooing in Jewish Law: A conservative ruling on body ink," https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/tattooing-in-jewish-law/(accessed 25 July 2021).

[32] For details, see: Markaz al-ʿItra al-Ṭāhira li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Buḥūth, *Ḥurmat al-talbiya wa-l-bayʿa li ghayri al-maʿṣūmīn ʿalayhim al-salām* [The prohibition against reciting the *talbiya* and the pledge of allegiance to anyone other than the infallible ones, peace be upon them], at http://aletra.org.

[33] Ibid.

This is another slogan raised by Shiites on the Day of Ashura. Similarly, it is written on banners of mourning during the month of Muḥarram and on the foreheads of Shiite fighters going to war, and repeated by Qur'an reciters and orators.[34]

***Khalliṣnā yā baqiyyat Allāh* ("Deliver us, O remnant of God")**

The Remnant of God (Arabic, *baqiyyat Allāh*) is one of several titles Shiites use for the Twelfth Imam, Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī. The reason for the use of this title is Shiites' belief that the first Qur'anic verse that will be uttered by the Twelfth Imam upon his return will be, "That which is left to you by God (*baqiyyat Allāh*) is best for you, if you are believers" (Qur'an 11:86). When they visit his crypt in the Iraqi city of Samarra, Shiites greet al-Ḥusayn with the words, "Peace be upon you, O Remnant of God in his land." The meaning of the phrase, "Remnant of God" is that the twelfth Imam is the remnant of the prophets, including Adam, Abraham, Noah, Jacob, Jesus, and Muhammad. As such, he—the twelfth imam—is heir to the knowledge of the prophets, and his re-appearance as the Mahdi following his occultation will restore the prophets' glory.

Accordingly, when Shiites utter the plea, "Deliver us, O Remnant of God," they are calling out to the Mahdi, and seeking to hasten his coming to deliver them from their enemies.[35]

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[34] See Jawād Muḥaddithī, *Mawsūʿat ʿĀshūrā'* [The Encyclopedia of ʿĀshūrā'], tr. from the Persian into Arabic by Khalīl Zāmil al-ʿIṣāmī (Beirut: Dār al-Rasūl al-Akram, Dār al-Maḥajja al-Bayḍā', 1997), p. 484.

[35] Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Bābawayh al-Qummī al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-niʿma* (The perfection of religion and the completion of grace) (Qom: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, al-Aʿlamī li-l-Maṭbūʿāt, 1975), p. 318, hadith no. 16. See also Mujāhid al-Khafājī, *Maʿānī wa alqāb baqiyyat Allāh* (The Meanings and Titles of the Remnant of God) at www. Iraker.dk/index.php; and al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1: 472, hadith no. 5.

***Ya Zaynab* ("O Zaynab")**

This is an appeal addressed to Zaynab, the daughter of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. Zaynab, whom Shiites count among the purest and most devout of all believers,[1] is held sacred not only because she was the daughter of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and Fāṭima al-Zahrā', the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, but, in addition, for her role at the battle of Karbala in which her brother al-Ḥusayn was killed along with a number of his family members. The Shiites and a number of Sunni Sufi orders celebrate her birthday on 5 Jumāda I; the Shiites also commemorate her death.

Most Shiites date Lady Zaynab's birth to the year 6 AH (628 CE). As for her name, there are two main views concerning its origin and meaning. According to the first view, "Zaynab" is a compound name deriving from the Arabic words *zayn* (meaning 'good' or fine') and *ab* (father). According to the second, "Zaynab" is a simple (non-compound) noun referring to a tree or a flower. A number of titles have been bestowed on Zaynab, including: Zaynab al-Kubrā (Zaynab the Greater), to distinguish her from all others who have borne her name, al-Ḥawrā' (a woman whose eyes show a marked contrast between their pupils and their whites), Umm al-Maṣā'ib (mother of calamities), al-Gharība (the stranger), al-ʿĀlima ghayr al-Muʿallama (the untaught scholar), al-Ṭāhira (the pure one), Ṣāḥibat al-Dīwān (hostess of the meeting place),[36] and al-Sayyida (the lady). The title al-Sayyida is so exclusively associated with Zaynab that if someone in Egypt refers simply to al-Sayyida, it will be known that Zaynab is the person being referred to.

Historians have differed concerning the year of Lady Zaynab's death. Many researchers hold that she died in 62 AH/681 CE, while others date her death to 65 AH/684 CE. However, it is agreed that whichever year it was, her death occurred on 15 Rajab. As for the place of her death, many historians and biographical reports mention her having died and been buried in Damascus, which is the Shiite view. However, the Sunnis hold that she died in Cairo.

According to Shiite accounts, Zaynab's husband ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ṭayyār left Medina and moved with Zaynab to an estate he owned near Damascus in a village called Rawiya. Zaynab died in this village and was buried in the shrine known by her name in an area now known as Sayyida Zainab on the outskirts of Damascus. According to the account favored by Sunnis, Umayyad Caliph Yazid b. Muʿāwiya ordered that Zaynab be banished from Medina. She then went to Egypt, where she was given a warm reception by the people of Egypt, who came from all over

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[36] This name is a reference to the scholarly sessions Lady Zaynab used to hold in her home in Egypt, and which were attended by the governor and senior state officials.

the desert to greet her in the month of Shaʿban, 61 AH/679 CE. She was also well received by the Governor of Egypt, Maslama b. Mukhallad al-Anṣārī al-Khazrajī, who housed her in his home in Hamra, assigning her a suite of her own. Her shrine today is located in a mosque called the Sayyida Zaynab Mosque.[37]

Abū al-Faḍl al-ʿAbbās

The name 'Abū al-Faḍl al-ʿAbbās' is a reference to al-ʿAbbās b. ʿAlī b. Abi Ṭālib (647-680 CE), an important figure for Shiites. Al-ʿAbbās was known by several agnomens and titles which scholars attribute to his many virtues. The best known of these include *Abū al-Faḍl*, meaning "Father of Merit," and *Qamar Banī Hāshim* (the Moon of the Tribe of Hāshim). Al-ʿAbbās was al-Ḥusayn's half-brother and one of his companions in the Battle of Karbala. His mother was Fāṭima bint Ḥizām b. Khālid b. Rabīʿa al-Kilābiyya, who was nicknamed Umm al-Banīn. Al-Abbās was the standard bearer at the Battle of Karbala, and it was he who charged the enemy ranks and broke the siege on the seventh and tenth of Muharram. On his first attempt, he managed to bring water to al-Ḥusayn's camp, as a result of which he has been referred to as *al-Saqqā'* (the water-carrier). However, upon returning from his second attempt on 10 Muharram, 61 AH/680 CE, he was killed. His hands were cut off, he lost an eye to an arrow, and he was struck on the head with a pole, causing the water in the skin to spill out. He was buried in the city of Karbala next to al-Ḥusayn's tomb. Shiites' sources urge them to visit his grave, which is viewed as a duty when visiting his half-brother al-Ḥusayn. In the village of the Prophet Seth in Lebanon, located in the Bekaa region, there is an ancient shrine known as the Shrine of Abū al-Faḍl al-ʿAbbās.

***Kullunā ʿAbbās, yā Zaynab* ("We are all ʿAbbas, O Zaynab")**

These words were addressed to Zaynab bint ʿAlī, whose brother al-Ḥusayn had been protecting her at the Battle of Karbala. After al-Ḥusayn was killed, his companions said to Zaynab, "We are all ʿAbbās, O Zaynab," meaning that, like her brother al-ʿAbbās, they were prepared to

[37] For more detail, see Muḥammad Kāẓim al-Qazwīnī, *Zaynab al-Kubrā min al-mahd ilā al-laḥd* (Zaynab the Greater, from the Cradle to the Grave) (Beirut: Dār al-Murtaḍā, 2005), pp. 31, 60; and Dhabīḥ Allāh al-Maḥallātī, *Rayāḥīn al-Sharīʿa* (Sweet Fragrances of the Islamic Law) (Tehran: Islamic Book House, 1950), 3:30; and Jaʿfar al-Naqdī, *Zaynab al-Kubrā* (Zainab the Greater) (Qom: Al-Haydari Press Publications, 1999), p. 17.

protect her from the enemy. Through this tattoo, Shiite youth express their willingness to sacrifice their lives in the fight against their enemies. It bears noting that this slogan spread quickly among Shiite youth after the Battle of Arsal in July and August of 2014 in which, assisted by forces from the Lebanese Hezbollah, Syrian government troops defeated Fatah al-Sham (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra), ISIS and factions aligned with the Free Syrian Army.[38]

***Al-Imām al-Ḥusayn* ("Imam al-Ḥusayn")**

Born in 4 AH/626 CE in Medina, al-Husayn b. ʿAli b. Abī Ṭālib was the grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad by his daughter Fāṭima al-Zahrā'. He spent his childhood close to his grandfather the Prophet, who is reported to have had an intense love for al-Ḥusayn and taken special care of him. There is little biographical information about al-Ḥusayn after the death of the Prophet. However, some sources affirm that he grew up under the care of his father, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, until the latter's death in the year 40 AH/661 CE. Al-Ḥusayn is most likely to have taken part in the wars that his father fought against his enemies, who included the followers of Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān and the Kharijites.

Al-Husayn disagreed with his brother al-Ḥasan over the latter's decision to relinquish power to Muʿāwiya. Nevertheless, he respected his brother's agreement with the Umayyad caliph, and thus did not renounce his allegiance to Muʿāwiya. After the death of his brother al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn remained silent until Muʿāwiya died and was succeeded by his son Yazīd in 60 AH/680 CE. After refusing to pledge allegiance to Yazīd b. Muʿāwiya, al-Husayn received letters from the people of Kufa inviting him to come to them in order for them to pledge allegiance to him, and to stage a rebellion against Umayyad rule based on his claim to the caliphate. In response, al-Husayn left Mecca while performing the rituals of the pilgrimage and headed for Kufa. On his way to Kufa, al-Ḥusayn sent an emissary ahead of him, this emissary being his paternal cousin, Muslim b. ʿAqīl. However, the people of Kufa failed him and betrayed him to the Umayyad ruler of Kufa, ʿUbayd Allāh b. Ziyād, after which Muslim b. ʿAqīl was killed by the Umayyads.

Despite reports that Muslim b. ʿAqīl and companions had been killed, al-Husayn pressed on towards Kufa. When he and his party, which consisted of nearly 80 people, including men, women and children, reached a place called Karbala, they were intercepted by an Umayyad army, and fighting broke out between the two sides. The conflict ended with the death of al-Husayn on 10 Muharram, 61 AH/680 CE. Every year on the Day of Ashura, Shiites around the world commemorate the death of al-Ḥusayn, whom they consider the master of martyrs and their spiritual

[38]See Nasrallah, "Sectarianism in Tattoos," www.alhurra.com.

forefather, with dramatic displays of their grief. Al-Husayn's tomb, located in Karbala at the site of his death, has become a major Shiite shrine.[39]

Y*ā li thārāt al-Ḥusayn* ("Oh, to avenge al-Husayn!")

This phrase is a call by Shiite youth demanding revenge for the blood of al-Husayn b. ʿAlī. Appearing throughout Shiite sources, this call was uttered not only by the supporters of al-Husayn, but also by those who revolted under the leadership of Sulaymān b. Ṣurad al-Khuzāʿī in Kufa in the year 57 AH/676 CE seeking revenge for al-Ḥusayn's death, as well as by those who revolted under al-Mukhtār b. Abī ʿUbayd Allāh al-Thaqafī.[40] Similarly, it is said to be the slogan raised by the angels who will remain at his grave until the appearance of the Mahdi, by the Mahdi himself when he appears, demanding revenge for those slain at Karbala, and by the supporters of the Mahdi who long to be martyred in defense of God's cause.

***Yā Mahdī* ("O Mahdi!")**

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[39] Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Rustam al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il al-Imāma* (Evidence for the Imamate) (Beirut: al-Aʿlamī Foundation, 1988), pp. 71-77. See also Dwaight Donaldson, *The Shi'ite Religion: A History of Islam in Persia and Irak* (London: Luzac & Company, 1933), pp. 130-140; Jafri S. Husain, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* (London: Longman, 1979), pp. 260-288; George Kanazi, "The Massacre of al-Husayn b. 'Ali: Between History and Folklore," *Studies in Canonical and Popular Literature*, ed. S. Ballas and R. Snir (Toronto: York Press, 1998), pp. 23-36; and L. Veccia Vaglieri, "Al-Ḥusayn b. 'Ali b. Abī Ṭālib," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition (1971), pp. 607-614.

[40] See Muḥaddithī, *Mawsūʿat ʿĀshūrā'*, 485.

Shiites who have this phrase tattooed on their bodies seek to hasten the return of the occulted Mahdi, namely, the twelfth Imam Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, who disappeared from inside his house in the city of Samarra in 260 AH/874 CE.[41]

***Yā ʿAlī, madad* (“O Ali, come to my aid and grant me your strength”)**

This expression is often used by Shiites when they are seeking help from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, meaning, “O ʿAlī, provide me with your strength, and grant me victory over my enemy.” It originated during the Battle of Uhud, when the Prophet asked God for *madad* (support, assistance, reinforcements) in the face of the polytheists, who greatly outnumbered him and sought to put him to death, especially as the Muslims were scattered and fleeing. When the Prophet called out, saying, “O God, from Thee doth help come” (*yā Allāh, minka al-madadu*), the polytheists were scattered right and left. Then, realizing that the horseman who had come to his rescue was none other than Imam ʿAlī, he said, “You, ʿAlī, are the *madad*. O Ali, *madad*.” Thus it was that the phrase, *Yā ʿAlī, madad* came to be used widely among Shiites, especially in trying circumstances.[42]

***Labbayka Naṣrallāh* (“We are at your service, O Nasrallah”)**

This phrase is often repeated by Lebanese Shiites at mass gatherings led by Sayyed Ḥassan Nasrallah, pledging their allegiance to him unto death.[43] Many young Shiites have tattooed this phrase on their bodies as a declaration of their readiness to carry out his every command.

The most popular Shiite tattoo images and what they mean to Hezbollah youth

The tattoos observed among Hezbollah youth generally appear on the upper chest or back and/or the upper or lower arms. We found none on the legs or the waist given the privacy and sanctity accorded these areas of the body in Islam. As noted earlier, the cosmetic or aesthetic

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[41] Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām* (a Shiite ḥadīth collection) (Tehran: Islamic Book House, 1945), 3: 120, 253; 4: 183; 6: 88, 154, and *Kitāb al-ghayba* (The Book of Occultation) (Qom: Islamic Knowledge Foundation, 1990), p. 293.

[42] Hāshim al-Baḥrānī, *Madīnat al-maʿājiz* (City of Miracles) (Qom: Islamic Knowledge Foundation, 1995), 3: 10.

[43] See http://aletra.org.

function of such tattoos is secondary, as the symbolism of the tattoo takes priority over the drawing itself.

The following images were the most commonly found.

The number 313

The number 313 is by far the most popular symbol among youthful Hezbollah tattoo bearers. In Shiite belief, 313 is the number of military commanders who will lead the Mahdi's army when he reappears at the end of time. Their names and the names of their countries are mentioned in the sermon attributed to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib known as "The Sermon of Elucidation," and the number 313 has acquired important political connotations. Iran has included this number more than once in the names of its items of military equipment, such as the Fateh-313 ballistic missile and the Qaher-313 stealth fighter aircraft. The popularity of the number 313 has spread recently in Lebanese Hezbollah circles, where it can be seen tattooed on hands, heads, shoulders and necks, especially among women. Many cars have the number 313 written in bold print on their rear windows.

However, interest in the number 313 is not restricted to the Shiites. A militant Sunni group which calls itself Battalion 313 claimed responsibility for a July 2013 car bombing that injured more than 50 civilians in the southern suburbs of Beirut. Sunni al-Qaeda militants also operated under this name in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The reason for this shared Islamic interest in the number 313 is based on the traditional view that 313 represents the number of soldiers who accompanied the Prophet in the Battle of Badr in 2 AH/624 CE, which was decisive in the defeat of pagan Arab opposition to the new monotheistic religion. Similarly, 313 is the number of the companions of Saul who, according to the account in Qur'an 2:246-251, enabled the army of the Children of Israel to rout Gthe enemies of God after the time of the Prophet Moses.[44]

Hassan Nasrallah

One of the images seen most frequently in tattoos sported by Hezbollah youth is that of Hassan Nasrallah, Secretary-General of the Lebanese Hezbollah, an intensely beloved figure who is seen as a hero and a model of resistance and liberation. Notably, tattoos displaying images of

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[44] Salwā Fāḍil, "*Mā sirru al-raqm 313 fī al-ḍāḥiya*?" [What is the secret of the number 313 in the suburb?], at: http://www.saidaonline.com/news.php?go=fullnews&newsid=66623 (accessed on 1 August 2016).

Ḥassan Nasrallah outnumber those featuring either ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib himself or his daughter Zaynab.

The sword known as *Dhū al-Faqār*

Another image that appears in many young Hezbollah members' tattoos is that of a sword known as Dhū al-Faqār, which belonged to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. The sword has been described, and stories about it have been told, by many Muslim sources among Sunnis and Shiites alike, although it seems clear that the most intense interest in it is found among Shiites, who glorify it, even describing it in fantastical terms. We learn from historical sources that Dhu al-Faqār first belonged to the Prophet Muhammad, who obtained it as booty after the Battle of Badr, while according to linguistic sources, it was given the name *Dhū al-Faqār* (the Arabic word *faqār* meaning spine or vertebral column) because it had a number of small holes, dents and notches in its body.

Historical and biographical sources are inconclusive with respect to who owned the sword before the Prophet won it as booty at Badr. However, the most convincing view is that its owner was a member of the Quraysh tribe by the name of al-ʿĀṣ b. Munabbih al-Sahmī, who was killed in the fighting by ʿAli b. Abī Ṭālib. Hence, the Prophet must have given or lent it to ʿAlī after the battle. The sword remained the property of ʿAlī and his children after him. It then came into the possession of the Abbasids, where it remained until it passed into the hands of the Fatimids, who kept it in their private armories, although we cannot be certain that the sword which the Fatimids kept in Egypt was the same as the original. In any case, the sword passed from the Fatimids to the Ottomans after they occupied Egypt in 1517 CE, after which they moved it to the Topkapı Museum in Istanbul. Given the sword's proverbial quality and strength, the saying, "There is no sword like Dhū al-Faqār" spread widely in the Middle Ages, and came to be engraved on medieval swords throughout the Islamic world.

Shiites believe Dhū al-Faqār to be a legacy of the Prophet that has been passed down along with a set of other weapons from one imam to the next. In Shiite belief, these weapons, including Dhū al-Faqār, serve as proof that a given person is indeed the Imam. Moreover, they believe that Dhū al-Faqār is now in the possession of the occulted Imam, or the Mahdi, who will reveal the sword when he appears at the end of time. The far-fetched descriptions of Dhū al-Faqār found in some Shiite narratives are a reflection of their interest in the sword and its association with the imams who are held so sacred in Twelver Shiite thought. According to some traditions, Dhū al-Faqār spoke to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. Others speak of angels joining ʿAlī on the battlefield as he waged war with Dhū al-Faqār. According to some Shiite accounts, Dhū al-Faqār descended from the sky, that is to say, it originated in Heaven. Alternatively, it is said to have been a gift from Balqis, Queen of Sheba, to Solomon son of David. Still other accounts tell us that it was originally made from tree leaves, after which the Prophet blew on it and turned it into an iron sword.

Shiites hold differing views on why the sword was called Dhū al-Faqār. It is mentioned in numerous reports relating to the major military expeditions undertaken during the early days of Islam. However, the accounts that have come down to us through Shiite sources contain so many

exaggerations that it is difficult to determine what its actual features were.[45] Most later sources lack precise descriptions of the sword, stating simply that it contained a number of holes or depressions resembling human vertebrae. The sixth century AH/twelfth century CE witnessed the emergence of new descriptions of Dhū al-Faqār, including that of Ibn Shahrāshūb al-Māzandarānī, according to whom the sword was two-pronged, in which respect it resembled the staff of the Prophet Moses. However, this view met with little acceptance in Twelver Shiite circles, as a result of which Shiite scholars who came after Ibn Shahrāshūb made no mention of it in their writings. However, by the eleventh century AH/seventeenth century CE, this view had gained widespread popularity among Iranian Shiites in particular, as evidenced by Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī's statement that in the view of most Shiites, the sword of Dhū al-Faqār was two-pronged.

This major shift in the description of Dhū al-Faqār might be explained by the intense presence during the Safavid Era of the figure of Abū Lu'u'a al-Majūsī, also known as Fayrūz al-Nahāwandi, who assassinated Caliph ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (reigned 634-644 CE). With its interest in evoking the story of Abu Lulu'a during that period, the Shiite imagination may well have taken the image of Abu Lulu'a's dagger, which, according to most historical sources, was double-bladed with the grip in the middle, and superimposed it on Dhū al-Faqār, after which the sword came to

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[45] Khālid Sindāwī, "*Sayf Dhū al-Faqār fī al-adab al-shīʿī*" [The Sword Dhū al-Faqār in Shiite Literature], *Al-Karmal: Abḥāth fī al-lugha wa-l-adab* 21-22 (2000-2001), pp. 201-218; E. Mittwoch, "Dhū`l-Fakar," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* I (1927), p. 959; F. W. Schwarzloze, *Die Waffen der alten Araber* (Leipzig: 1886), p. 152; G. Zawadowski, "Note sur l`origine magique du Dhou-l-faqar," *En terre d`Islam* (Lyons) 21 (1943), pp. 36-40.

be described as having two prongs or blades. Indeed, Dhū al-Faqār is depicted in this way in all Shiite drawings. This view is supported by the fact that in a Shiite narrative mentioned in his book, *Kāmil al-Bahā'ī*, ʿImād al-Dīn al-Ṭabarī writes, "I have mentioned that Abū Lulu'a killed ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb with a sword that he had made after the manner of the sword of Dhū al-Faqār."[46] The conflation of Abu Lulu'a's dagger with the sword of Dhū al-Faqār appears to have taken place in the context of the Shiite sectarian imagination, which was preoccupied with how to highlight the victimhood of the Prophet's family and the way in which they had taken revenge on their enemies. The ready acceptance of this conflation during the Safavid era may be attributable to the fact that, as Colin Turner has observed, al-Majlisī and other Shiite scholars who enjoyed the support of the Safavid sultans wrote many of their works in the Persian language and in a style that was easily understood and accepted by many Persians, thus making it easier for Persian speakers to adopt the ideas and narratives they contained.[47]

Motives for tattooing among Shiite youth in Lebanon

It will be clear from the foregoing that tattoos among Hezbollah youth are intimately tied to popular beliefs and practices. Charged with potent religious symbolism, tattoos play an important role in their lives, reflecting the spirit of the age and their current situation in Lebanon, including its religious and social dimensions. Moreover, they embody both existing traditions and the impact of newly introduced customs, or what is known as "fashion."

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[46] ʿImād al-Dīn al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī, *Kāmil al-Bahā'ī*, ed. Muḥammad Shuʿāʿ Fākhir (Qom: Intishārāt al-Maktaba al-Ḥaydariyya, 2005), 2: 148ff.

[47] Muḥammad Yusrī, "*Dhū al-Faqār: sayf ʿalī b. abī ṭālib alladhī ṭālamā ghaḍḍā al-mukhayyala al-shīʿiyya*" [Dhū al-Faqār: the sword of ʿAli b. Abī Ṭālib, which has long fueled the Shiite imagination]," at https://raseef22.net (accessed 18 June 2021).

There appear to be a number of motivations, most of them religious, underlying the tattoos of Hezbollah youths. Through their tattoos, Hezbollah youth want everyone to see how religious they are, and that their faith is not only inward, but outward as well.[48]

More specifically, they aim to:

- Express pride in belonging to the Shiite sect, especially in the face of the war raging in Syria, which Shiites view as a conflict between Sunnis and Shiites. The Syrian President, Bashar al-Assad, belongs to the Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shiism, whereas the overwhelming majority of the Syrian opposition is Sunni, and on the ground we have the Shiite Hezbollah and the Iranian Shiite militias which have rushed to its aid.
- Voice their profound love and affection for Ḥassan Nasrallah, Secretary-General of the Lebanese Hezbollah.
- Reinforce their sense of belonging, loyalty, shared identity and harmony with other members of the sect.
- Affirm their commitment to political action in keeping with their religious commitment.
- Declare their identification with the modern-day community in which they were raised and preserve its identity, despite what might be viewed as the outmoded mythology with which tattoos are associated.
- Inspire themselves and each other to live out their highest religious ideals as members of Hezbollah.

Other, non-religious motivating factors, might include:

- The need to prove themselves as young people who feel empty or insecure, or who lack a clearly defined religious culture or a sense of the value of life.
- A quest for individual freedom.
- The desire to show off, get attention, or express an opinion.
- Blind and excessive imitation of imported fads.
- A desire to attract the opposite sex.

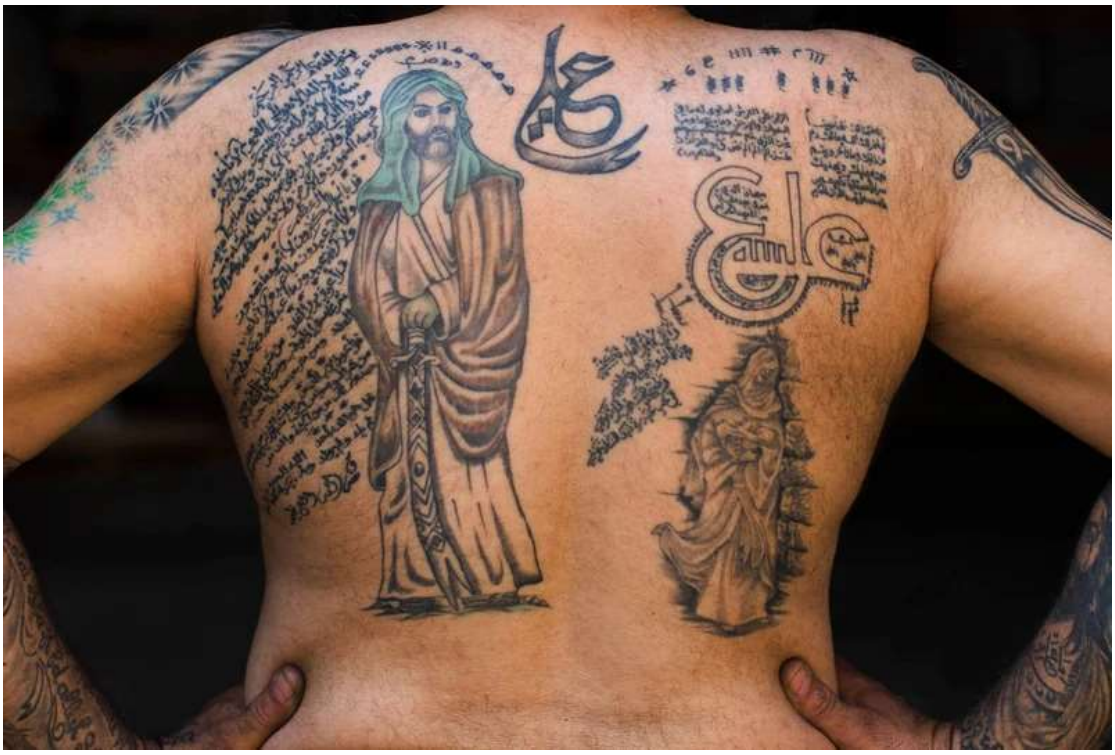
Conclusion

Tattooing among Shiite youth in Lebanon is a practice driven primarily by religious ideas and beliefs, and secondarily by a desire for beautification, adornment, and a means of proving

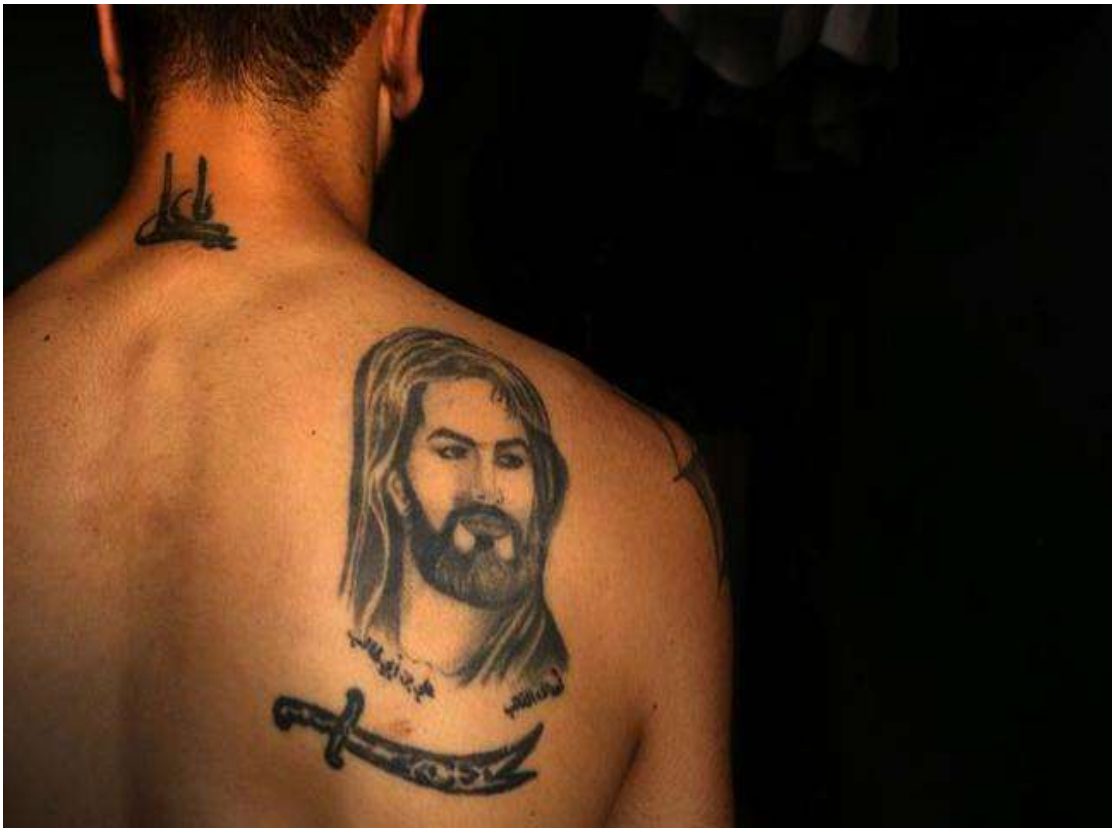
[48] Muḥammad al-Sharqāwī, "*al-Washm al-dīnī: unshurū al-ṭā'ifiyya ʿalā al-abdān*" [Religious tattoos: broadcasting sectarianism on bodies], at http://www.soutalomma.com, 12 October 12 2017 (accessed 25 June 2021).

identity. The tattoos observed vary in their forms, expressions, and placement (on the back, the arms, the hands, and the chest), with most featuring sacred Shiite expressions, the names and/or images of revered Shiite figures, and the famed sword of ʿAlī known as *Dhu al-Faqār*. Shiite youth appear to have resorted to this type of visual expression in order to demonstrate pride in their religious and political affiliation with the Shiite sect, thus preserving their sectarian identity. At the same time, such expressions have a political dimension that may reinforce already deepening societal and sectarian divisions in Lebanon, especially between Sunnis and Shiites, with the concomitant tendency to withdraw into isolation, become less accepting of the Other and pursue the quest for sectarian power over others. These silent icons might thus be exposing the dissonance and racism embedded in Lebanese society.

Appendix
Images of Tattoos Among Lebanese Shiites



Ali Hussein Nasr al-Din, 50 years of age, displays a tattoo containing an image of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and the sword Dhū al-Faqār, as well as the name of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and his merits. Source: an exhibition by Lebanese Hassan Ammar on Lebanese tattoos. See: www.vice.com (accessed 17 June 2021).



A tattooed image of ʿAli and Dhū al-Faqār. The neck tattoo reads, "O ʿAlī." See https://akhbarak.net/news (accessed 24 June 2021).



A tattoo reading, "O Ḥusayn" on a chest of a young Lebanese man. Source: https://www.lebanon24.com (accessed on 17 June 2021).



A tattooed image of Hassan Nasrallah, Secretary-General of Hezbollah in Lebanon. Source: https://www.vice.com/ar/article/mbzmg3 (accessed on 25 June 2021).



The number 313 tattooed on the neck of a young Lebanese man. Posted on the Facebook page of the Haya Tattoo Centre.



A tattoo on the back of a young Lebanese man containing the words, “There is no young man like ʻAlī, and no sword like Dhū al-Faqār” with an image of two crossed swords. Source: http://www.soutalomma.com (accessed 25 June 2021).