

Kerbala

The Land of Hussein the Revolutionary Martyr

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Kerbala is prominent in the minds of Muslims because it is the burial place of the grandson of prophet Mohammad, al-Hussein Bin Ali who died there with some of his family in Muharam of the year 61 AH/ 680 AD.

The city is situated 102kms south of Baghdad and its irrigated by the Husseniah River, a branch of the Euphrates, which is

surrounded by date palms groves and fruit fields –a familiar site in this part of the country. It has been said that the name "Kerbala" is Babylonian, and its roots are "Kerb" which means "A prayer room" and "El" which means "God" in Aramaic. The name therefore means, "Gods Temple", according to Mustapha Jawad.

The city was mentioned in the old literature,

as recorded in Al-Aghani, Volume 12. Al-Tabari narrates that Khalid Bin al-Walid stopped there during the conquest of Iraq. Al-Hamawi also mentioned it in his "Mujam al-Buladan" (Geographical Dictionary) when he talked about Kufa.

The city is important. It is visited by thousands of people on religious occasions, such as the martyrdom of Hussein on the tenth of Muharam and on the fortieth of his death. Most of the visitors come from Iran, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, India and Pakistan. The tradition of visiting the grave of Hussein started from the day of his burial, and became more popular during Abbasid times. Mutawakil prohibited the visits which peaked during Buwaihi times (372 AH) and a lot of care was dedicated to the shrine and the surrounding buildings. ➔

Abbas Bin Ali Shrine.
صحن العباس بن علي (رض).

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The Hussein Shrine:

The Hussein shrine consists of the mausoleum, the galleries, hall and courtyard. There is a dome surrounded by two golden minarets. The shrine is distinguished by its large courtyard (95 m x 75 m) and the number of galleries. It has 10 gates decorated with Kerba tiles, namely: The gate of Mecca, the Allamah Sherazi gate, the Gifts gate, the Martyr gate, the Karama gate, Naseri gate, Cedar gate, Sultani gate, the Head of Hussien gate and Zainab gate. Each gate has an archway decorated with Arabesque. The Mecca gate is also known as “The Golden Gate” since it is covered with gold and silver. The shrine has 65 galleries with rooms specially reserved for religious studies students which later became graves for ulama, such as Shiekh Abdul-Hussein al-Tehrani who renovated the shrine according to the wishes of Sultan Naser al-Dean Shah and Merza Muhammad Taqi al-Sherazi. The Qajari Sultan Naser al-Dean Shah



Visitors seeking the blessing of Hussein.

ضريح الحسين الشهيد والجموع تتبرك به.



Abbas Bin Ali Shrine.

مزار العباس.

expanded the western wing of the courtyard in 1276 AH and decorated the courtyard and galleries with Qashan.

The gallery that surrounds the mausoleum has eight doors all leading to the tomb with arabesque, verses from the Qura'an and sayings from the prophet - all in gold and beautiful Arabic calligraphy. The length of the hall surrounding the tomb is 14 m and 20 cm. Its width is 9 m and 15 cm. The lamps and valuable chandeliers in this holy place, especially the huge chandelier over the tomb, leave the visitor with an unforgettable impression.

On the eastern side of the mausoleum there is another mausoleum of Ali, the eldest son of Hussein who died with him during the battle of Kerbala.. The south eastern corner is reserved for the mausoleums of the Hussein loyalists who died with him. They have been renovated and the names of each individual martyr and their tribes have been added.

Over the mausoleum there is a spherical dome 27 m high, at the bottom of which are 12

windows. There are three minarets in the shrine for calling the faithful to prayers but one was demolished in 1937 when it started to tilt.

The Abbas Shrine:

Abbas was Hussein's half brother. His mother was from the Kilab tribe. He died with his four brothers under the banners of Hussein in the battle of Taf (Kerbala). The two shrines of Hussein and Abbas in the heart of the city are not dissimilar and are separated by only about 350 m. The Qajari Shah Fatih Ali ordered the building of the Abbas shrine considered an important historical treasure inextricably linked to the cultural heritage of Iraq.

The area of the Abbas shrine is about 4370 square metre. Its nine gates are: The Hassan gate, the Hussein gate and the Sahib al-Zaman gate (on the western side), the Ali gate, al-Alqami gate, (on the eastern side), the gate of the Prophet which is now called the Mecca gate on southern side. On the northern side, there are three gates: the ➔

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Jawad gate, the Mousa al-Kadhim gate and Ali al-Hadi gate. On the sides of the courtyard are several galleries and rooms in which several ulama, sultans, emirs and ministers were buried.

In the middle of the shrine is the tomb of Abbas, over which is there is a huge dome with Quranic verses and the prophets sayings in gold on the bottom. The dome is surrounded by two tall minarets. The mausoleum is made of pure gold and silver with inlays of mina (blue stones) and precious stones. It reportedly took three years to build and six months to install.

The vault of Abbas has treasures and antiques that cannot be valued. It has more than 16 Qura'ans, one of which is written in a Kufi style with gold, golden lamps weighing more than 417 weight (the weight equal 5 grams), golden hands weighing 16-29 weight, valuable, Persian carpets, gold crowns and chains inlaid with precious stones.



Kerbala is full with visitors all the year round.

كربلاء تعج بالزوار على مدار العام.

Other Shrines:

There are other shrines related to the battle of Kerbala when Hussein and his followers were martyred. One of them is the shrine of al-Hur al-Riahi who was initially with the Umawi army but realised his mistake, joined forces with Hussein and was killed with him.

Another site related to the battle of Taf is the camp situated to the south of Hussein's shrine where Hussein's family probably put up their tents. There is also the Zainab Hill where Zainab Bint Ali stood on the day of the battle to lament her dead. A prayer room with a silver window commemorating this part of the story of Hussein.

Another frequently visited site in Kerbala is the tomb of Awn bin Abdullah, a descendent of al-Hassan bin Ali. He is buried on the Baghdad road about 10 miles north of Kerbala. The tomb has a large courtyard with a silver chamber.

Ahmad bin Hashim is a descendent of Musa al-Kadhim, who died in 750 AH. His grave lies in the desert that extends to Arabia, in "Ain al-Tamr" or "Shithatha". The tomb is visited at the end of summer.

These shrines and holy sites were revered by sultans, emirs and presidents who have



ضريح حبيب بن مظاهر الأسدي الذي دافع بروحه عن الإمام الحسين.

The shrine of Habib Bin Mudhahir al-Asadi who defended Imame Hussein with his life.

visited them, especially the shrines of Hussein and his brother Abbas. The visits reflect a respect of the prophet and a love to his family.

Kerbala, blessed with many great shrines, has an important place in history and has become a favourite destination for visitors – especially pilgrims - from all corners of the world. ■