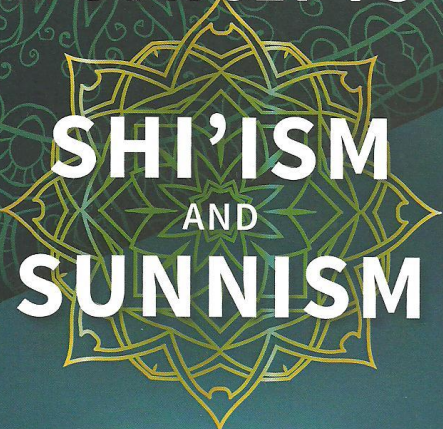


SUNNIS AND SHI'IS HAVE MORE IN COMMON
THAN WHAT APPEARS TO CASUAL OBSERVERS.

THE ORIGINS OF
THE CONCEPTS OF



SHI'ISM
AND
SUNNISM

SPAHIĆ OMER

amana publications

First Edition
(1437 AH/2016 AC)

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Photos on pages 151-154, 166 and 167 by Dr. Spahic Omer

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Spahic, Omer, 1968-, author.
Title: The origins of the concepts of Shi'ism and Sunnism / Dr. Spahic Omer.
Description: Beltsville, Md. : Amana publications, 2016. | Includes
bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2016027573 | ISBN 9781590080832 (soft cover : alk. paper)
Subjects: LCSH: Shi'ah--Relations--Sunnites. | Sunnites--Relations--Shi'ah.
| Shi'ah--History. | Islam--Doctrines--History.
Classification: LCC BP194.16 .S63 2016 | DDC 297.8/042--dc23
LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016027573>

Printed in the United States of America

To my wife, children, parents and in-laws

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Introduction

Following the demise of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)¹, religious sectarianism did not exist in Islam. There was neither Shi'ism and Shi'i Islam, nor Sunnism and Sunni Islam. The two concepts were the products of subsequent times and subsequent generations. Back then, there were only pristine Islam, the best generation of Muslims (*sahabah* or the companions), the exemplary nascent Muslim society, and all the problems that the people were attempting to come to terms with and successfully triumph over following the departure of their Prophet (pbuh). Definitely, this entire group of Prophet's companions, with a hierarchy of merits which they all shared, by the texts of both the Qur'an and the Prophet's tradition, were the best community that has ever lived and will ever come to live.

Moreover, the Prophet (pbuh) spoke much about the virtues of following *jama'ah* (the majority, or consensus of the *Ummah* or community), the Qur'an and his *Sunnah*, the last component signifying the way Islam was to be perceived, lived and practiced as taught and shown by the Prophet (pbuh), the most excellent role model for the faithful. At the same time, both the Qur'an and the Prophet's *Sunnah* in most uncompromising terms warned against disunity, schism and sectarianism, that is to say, against anything that may imperil the dignity and honor of the people. However, that which was feared most, and warned against, was predestined to come. Its coming was certain and unavoidable, on account of a wisdom whose profundity, for specific reasons, God concealed and did not make accessible to all. It's coming, furthermore, signified the most challenging test, or trial, which the community of the final Messenger to mankind was

¹ "pbuh" stands for "peace be upon him" which the Muslims are strongly advised to utter whenever a reference to the Prophet Muhammad is made.