



RS.IB8 Sunni and Shia Islam: The Historical Origins of the Split

AQA 8062 • Calculators not allowed • about 50 minutes

Total Marks

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Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Answer all questions. Short-answer responses may be phrases; the evaluation question requires full sentences. Time guidance: 50 minutes for the whole pack.

- 1** Which one of the following best describes the immediate cause of the Sunni-Shia split after the death of Muhammad in 632 CE, in the historical succession context?

- ☐ A: A disagreement over the correct recitation of the Quran
- ☐ B: A dispute about who should succeed Muhammad as leader
- ☐ C: A debate over whether to accept the Byzantine emperor
- ☐ D: A disagreement about pilgrimage routes to Mecca

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

- 2** Give two reasons why Abu Bakr was chosen by some of the early Muslim community to be the first caliph, referring to the succession crisis context in 632 CE.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

- 3** Explain two reasons why Ali was considered by some Muslims to be the rightful leader after Muhammad's death, referring to early Islamic history.

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

- 4 Explain two ways in which decisions about leadership after Muhammad influenced later Sunni and Shia views on religious authority, referring to the early succession crisis.

(Total for Question 4 is 5 marks)

- 5 Give three features of the events at Karbala in 680 CE that made the martyrdom of Husayn especially important for Shia identity, stating each feature briefly.

(Total for Question 5 is 3 marks)

- 6 Explain the importance of the Battle of Karbala and Husayn's martyrdom for Shia Muslims today.

(Total for Question 6 is 6 marks)

- 7 Explain two similarities between Sunni and Shia accounts of the early succession events, referring to the shared historical elements.

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

- 8** Explain two contrasting Muslim beliefs about a historical source used in arguments about Ali's right to leadership. Refer to a named source of wisdom and authority in your answer, for example the Hadith of Ghadir Khumm.

(Total for Question 8 is 5 marks)

- 9** Give three ways the historical split over leadership has been remembered or expressed in Muslim communities, naming each way briefly.

(Total for Question 9 is 3 marks)

- 10** Explain two effects that the succession dispute had on the political development of the early Muslim community, referring to historical outcomes.

(Total for Question 10 is 4 marks)

- 11** Explain two reasons why some modern Sunni and Shia communities might still place different emphasis on the early succession events when teaching about leadership, referring to both historical memory and contemporary identity.

(Total for Question 11 is 4 marks)

- 12** Evaluate the claim that the succession dispute immediately after Muhammad's death was the most important cause of the Sunni-Shia divide. In your answer you should give reasoned arguments to support this statement, give reasoned arguments to support a different point of view, refer to religious arguments, and reach a justified conclusion.

(Total for Question 12 is 15 marks)

Mark scheme · RS.IB8 Sunni and Shia Islam: The Historical Origins of the Split

Question 1

- **B1** selecting B, a dispute about who should succeed Muhammad as leader, cao
- **Answer: B**

Question 2

- **B1** reason 1: he was a close companion and father-in-law of Muhammad, giving him prestige and trust, oe
- **B1** reason 2: some community leaders valued immediate continuity and political stability, so they chose an experienced leader quickly, oe
- **Answer: Close companion and father-in-law of Muhammad; chosen to provide quick continuity and political stability.**

Question 3

- **B1** point 1: Ali was Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, giving a close family connection seen as a basis for leadership, oe
- **B1** development: this family tie was interpreted by supporters as a sign of special authority and suitability, oe
- **B1** point 2: some believed Muhammad had designated Ali as his successor on certain occasions, so leadership should pass through his family, oe
- **B1** development: this belief underpins the view that leadership should be based on appointment and spiritual authority rather than election, oe
- **Answer: Ali was Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, suggesting close familial claim; some believed Muhammad had designated him, implying leadership should remain in Muhammad's family.**

Question 4

- **B1** way 1: Sunnis emphasise community consensus and the role of elected caliphs, reflecting the early selection of Abu Bakr, oe
- **B1** development: this led Sunnis to accept caliphs chosen by consultation or appointment as legitimate religious-political leaders, oe
- **B1** way 2: Shia belief developed that leadership should be from the Prophet's family and include spiritual guidance from Imams, reflecting support for Ali, oe
- **B1** development: this resulted in Shia doctrines that combine religious and spiritual authority in the Imamate, distinct from Sunni models, oe
- **B1** reference to the succession crisis as the historical influence on both positions, oe
- **Answer: Sunnis emphasise community consensus and accepted elected caliphs, reflecting Abu Bakr's selection; Shia emphasise leadership from Muhammad's family and spiritual Imams, reflecting support for Ali.**

Question 5

- **B1** feature 1: Husayn was killed and martyred while resisting the ruling authority, oe
- **B1** feature 2: the event involved suffering and injustice, which are commemorated annually in mourning rituals like Ashura, oe
- **B1** feature 3: Husayn's death became a symbol of standing for rightful leadership and moral truth against oppression, oe
- **Answer: Husayn was killed resisting the ruling authority; the event involved suffering and injustice commemorated in Ashura; his death symbolises standing for rightful leadership and moral truth.**

Question 6

- **Level 3** (5-6): A detailed, well-organised answer that explains several reasons why Karbala and Husayn are important to Shia Muslims, supported by accurate reference to historical events and practice, with clear links made between the reasons given.
- **Level 2** (3-4): An answer that explains some reasons for the importance, with some supporting detail, though links between points may be limited.
- **Level 1** (1-2): One or two isolated relevant points are made about the significance, with little supporting detail or explanation.
- **Level 0** (0): No relevant content.
- **Indicative content:**
 - Husayn's martyrdom is a central example of sacrifice and standing against tyranny, forming a model of moral courage for Shia Muslims.
 - The event is commemorated annually during Ashura, which strengthens communal identity and reminds communities of suffering and resistance.
 - Karbala shapes ideas about suffering, justice and leadership, reinforcing the view that true authority includes moral and spiritual qualities.
 - Stories and rituals about Karbala encourage charity, remembrance and loyalty to the Ahl al-Bayt, the family of the Prophet, in many Shia communities.
 - The symbolism of Karbala has political and social influence, sometimes inspiring movements that oppose perceived oppression.
 - For many Shia individuals it provides a lived, emotional connection to history, theology and community practice.

Question 7

- **B1** similarity 1: both agree that Muhammad died in 632 CE and that the community faced the problem of succession, oe
- **B1** development: this shared historical fact is the common starting point for later differences, oe
- **B1** similarity 2: both traditions revere the Prophet and his close companions and family, though they emphasise different individuals, oe
- **B1** development: Sunnis often highlight the companions who led the community, while Shia honour the Prophet's family and Imams, oe
- **Answer: Both agree Muhammad died in 632 CE and the community faced a succession problem; both revere the Prophet and his close companions and family, though emphasis differs.**

Question 8

- **B1** belief 1: Shia Muslims often interpret the Hadith of Ghadir Khumm as Muhammad appointing Ali as his successor, oe
- **B1** development: Shia use this hadith as evidence that leadership should remain within the Prophet's family, supporting the Imamate, oe
- **B1** belief 2: many Sunni Muslims interpret the same event or hadith differently, seeing it as praise for Ali but not as a formal appointment to political leadership, oe
- **B1** development: Sunnis therefore do not view the hadith as overturning the legitimacy of the elected caliphs, oe
- **B1** reference to the named source, the Hadith of Ghadir Khumm, made accurately, oe
- **Answer: Contrast: Shia read Ghadir Khumm as an appointment of Ali to leadership; many Sunnis read it as praise of Ali without political appointment, both positions reference the same named hadith.**

Question 9

- **B1** way 1: commemorations such as Ashura mourning rituals in Shia communities, oe
- **B1** way 2: differing religious leadership structures, like caliphs and imams, oe
- **B1** way 3: historical writings and hadith collections emphasising different events or sayings, oe
- **Answer: Ashura mourning rituals; different leadership structures (caliphs versus imams); different emphases in historical writings and hadith collections.**

Question 10

- **B1** effect 1: the dispute led to periods of civil conflict and fits into the larger series of early civil wars, weakening unity, oe
- **B1** development: examples include disputes over loyalty and armed conflict in later generations, oe
- **B1** effect 2: different political models developed, with some groups accepting dynastic or elected rule while others supported leadership tied to the Prophet's family, oe
- **B1** development: these models influenced the form of later Muslim states and rival claims to legitimacy, oe
- **Answer: Civil conflict and weakened unity; development of different political models such as dynastic or elected rule versus leadership tied to the Prophet's family.**

Question 11

- **B1** reason 1: historical memory shapes communal identity, so communities emphasise events that reinforce their sense of legitimate leadership, oe
- **B1** development: this can maintain cohesion and provide moral examples tied to leadership models, oe
- **B1** reason 2: contemporary political or social contexts influence which aspects of the past are highlighted, oe
- **B1** development: in some places, leaders may use history to legitimise current authority or to resist perceived oppression, oe
- **Answer: Communal historical memory supports identity and models of legitimate leadership; contemporary political contexts shape which parts of the past are emphasised to justify or challenge authority.**

Question 12

- **Level 4** (10-12): A balanced and well-developed evaluation that analyses arguments for and against the claim, refers to religious and historical evidence, considers alternative causes, and reaches a supported and justified conclusion.
- **Level 3** (7-9): A clear evaluation that gives arguments on both sides with some supporting evidence, and a conclusion that is supported though not fully developed.
- **Level 2** (4-6): An argument that addresses both sides but with limited support or development, and a conclusion that is attempted but not fully justified.
- **Level 1** (1-3): A basic or one-sided response with little development and no real judgement or conclusion.
- **Level 0** (0): No relevant material.
- **Indicative content:**
 - Arguments supporting the claim: the immediate succession dispute determined competing claims to leadership, setting the pattern for Sunni acceptance of elected or consultative caliphs and Shia insistence on leadership from the Prophet's family.
 - The dispute created rival communities that developed different religious institutions and authority structures, making it a clear origin point for the divide.
 - Arguments against the claim: later events such as the Battle of Karbala and the martyrdom of Husayn had a profound emotional and theological impact that deepened and ritualised the split.
 - Social, political and regional factors, including power struggles, tribal alliances and the development of different legal and theological schools, also contributed to long-term separation.
 - Religious arguments might note that interpretations of scripture and hadith, and the role of Imamate theology, evolved after the initial dispute, so the split was a process rather than a single cause.
 - A balanced conclusion might argue that the succession dispute was a necessary and foundational cause but not the only or always the most important factor, since later events and institutional development also played major roles.