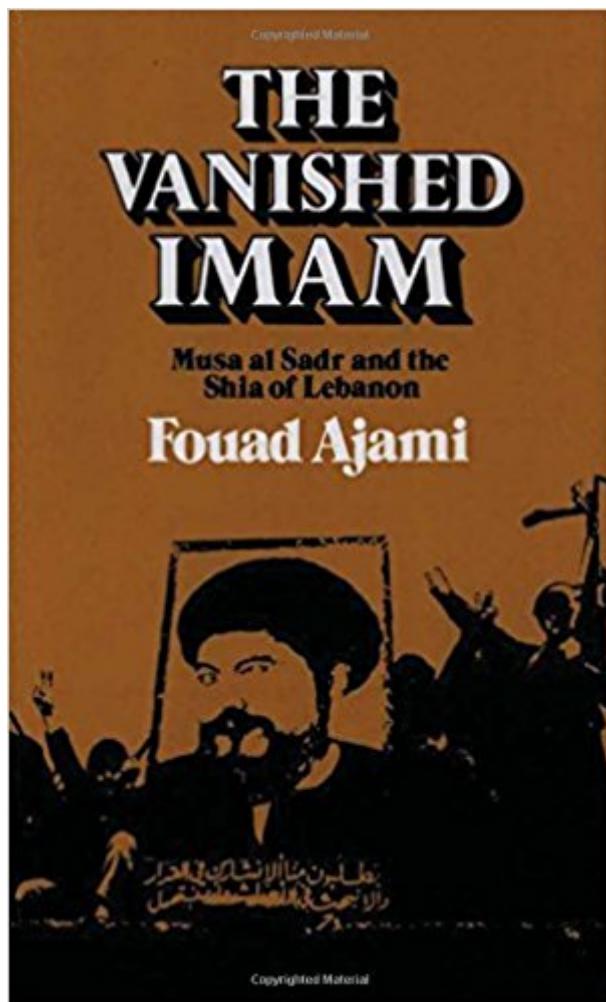


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# The Vanished Imam: Musa Al Sadr And The Shia Of Lebanon



## **Synopsis**

In the summer of 1978, Musa al Sadr, the spiritual leader of the Muslim Shia sect in Lebanon, disappeared mysteriously while on a visit to Libya. As in the Shia myth of the "Hidden Imam," this modern-day Imam left his followers upholding his legacy and awaiting his return. Considered an outsider when he had arrived in Lebanon in 1959 from his native Iran, he gradually assumed the role of charismatic mullah, and was instrumental in transforming the Shia, a quiescent and downtrodden Islamic minority, into committed political activists. What sort of person was Musa al Sadr? What beliefs in the Shia doctrine did his life embody? Where did he fit into the tangle of Lebanon's warring factions? What was behind his disappearance? In this fascinating and compelling narrative, Fouad Ajami resurrects the Shia's neglected history, both distant and recent, and interweaves the life and work of Musa al Sadr with the larger strands of the Shia past.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Sayyid Musa al Sadr came to Lebanon in 1959 and disappeared during a visit to Libya in 1978. What begins as a narrow study of a relatively minor figure becomes a sensitive and probing analysis of current Middle Eastern society. Ajami elucidates, for the general reader as well as the specialist, a charismatic and enigmatic man, combining religious and political leadership in contemporary Lebanon, a country torn by religious and political conflicts. In portraying this striking individual, Ajami brilliantly illustrates the religious and social conservatism of the Shiite community. He avoids the facile characterization of fanatic and provides an understanding of the tensions building in the Shiite

community before erupting into bloody civil war and fueling international terrorism. Highly recommended. Elizabeth R. Hayford, President, Assoc. Colls. of the Midwest, ChicagoCopyright 1986 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Important and insightful." *New York Times Book Review* "The questions Ajami raises are likely to remain central; he is challenging some of the fundamental assumptions with which many Arab and Western students of Arab history and politics have worked in recent decades." *Itamar Rabinovich, New Republic* "The Vanished Imam offers much more than a utilitarian account of recent developments in Lebanon. It takes the raw stuff of daily politics and turns it into a classic account of human achievement and strife. The details are local, but Mr. Ajami endows the story with a universal significance. His tale of the stranger who transforms a people and then, when his work is done, reenacts its most sacred drama, has the literary power of a masterpiece." *Daniel Pipes, Wall Street Journal* "Fouad Ajami is both a Shiite from South Lebanon and an American political scientist. In this fascinating and illuminating book he combines the understanding and concern that are the birthright of the one with the acumen and integrity that are the aspiration of the other." *Bernard Lewis*

Sayyid Musa al Sadr was a genuine and charismatic modern Muslim reformer. His story is presented by noted scholar, author, and news analyst and commentator Fouad Ajami in a book that is well-researched, superbly written, and told in a clear and gripping style. The author starts by setting the backdrop for the Imam's (religious leader) mission. He provides a very good history of Lebanon (especially that of the South, home to the Lebanese Shia population) and the numerous challenges present there during the middle of the twentieth century (especially that of a severe lack of essential infrastructure). He also provides a very useful personal history of the Imam himself and that of his family and extended lineage (which traces back to the prophet Muhammad). The author spends much time going over various social, religious, economical, political, and historical aspects that may be difficult for a Westerner to grasp initially, but which are necessary for the overall story (and its proper context) to be understood. The crux of the Imam's mission is summarized by the author on page 96: "Musa al Sadr's political agenda emerged out of the way he interpreted the faith. Faith was not about ritual, but about social concerns, about the needs of men. Religion was not something that had to be quarantined and kept pure by stern guardians; it could be made to address modern needs. Thus the man of religion, rajul al din, need not hide and solely concern

himself with old books and rituals."The author does a terrific job of conveying to the reader that this was indeed what Musa al Sadr believed and stood for while working tirelessly to enact reform and build a better future for his people, his adopted country, and perhaps even for greater Islam itself, during very difficult times and challenging circumstances. This is a moving story about a rare, larger than life personality narrated by a gifted writer and respected scholar. Highly recommended.  
/author/ahmad.

Fouad Ajami is one of the best if not the best contemporary Arab writers. An excellent read on the history and struggles of the Shia in Lebanon and their persecution by the Ottomans and other groups in Lebanon. Musa Al sadr was a truly amazing figure.

This book is Ajami's best. It creates the ideological, sociological and historic context for the career of one of the most illustrious Iranian-born Lebanese Shiite mullahs in Lebanon. Ajami also provides clear genealogy of the roots of Mussa Sadr. In 1959, Sadr had arrived in Lebanon to succeed the mufti of Tyr in southern Lebanon. Unlike religious men of his time, Sadr took his position to unprecedented levels as he started preaching a reverse in the fortunes of the Shiite community of Lebanon that had presumably been until the arrival of Sadr a marginalized and impoverished group living under the grip of its unsympathetic feudal lords. Ajami skillfully captured the revolutionary and untraditional discourse of Sadr as he painted his importance in Shiite minds by comparing him to Shiite legendary imams. Ajami also highlighted the contradiction in Sadr's message upon the breakout of Lebanon's civil war in 1975. While Sadr first announced that he was opposed to violence, realities had in fact forced him to start forming his own armed militia. The book is informative while Ajami's entertaining style adds much value to this work.

Ajami, what can you say about him...he is prosaic and honest

Magnificent book vital to understanding As Sadr's role in redefining the politics of the Lebanese Shia and the genesis of Amal and Hezbollah. Through it you also learn a great deal about the Lebanese state and the interactions of its main communities. There are deep insights here and a visceral understanding of south Lebanon as only someone like Ajami (a Shi'i orig from that area) could impart them. The weakness is that it is perhaps too admiring, to the detriment of some alternative insights that a more balanced and objective view would provide.

Too much non-essential theological history that doesn't seem relevant to the real implied story in the title.

Excellent history of a confusing set of Middle East relationships that are very much a part of the situation still today. Since what goes on in the Middle East is very much a part of world wide events and tension a good grasp of the history given in this book is well worth the study. There is a terrific outline of main historical Islamic events from Muhammad's life to the bombing of the US Marine Barracks in Beirut.

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