

al-Sayyida Zaynab

Storia di una devozione egiziana

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Abstract – This volume presents an alternative narrative of the history of the cult of Zaynab bint ‘Alī, who stands for eloquence and courage against oppression in Islamic history. She is highly venerated by Shi‘a. Popular piety has identified at least three shrines dedicated to her in the Middle East; one of the most venerated is located in Cairo. We will explore the forgotten traces of the Egyptian devotion, in order to discover the roots of a contemporary Sunni/Sufi cult different from the Shi‘i one. The study of this important cult of a member of *ahl al-bayt* will be presented in an interdisciplinary perspective. After presenting how the figure of Zaynab bint ‘Alī has been constructed in the historical classical sources and her role in the conflict between the Alids and the Umayyads, we will examine the origin and the development of her cult in the Ottoman period from different perspectives: religious (devotional literature), social (the *mawlid*), architectural and literary. In particular, we will focus on how authors, from al-Azhar and the Sufi milieu, have expressed their love to al-Sayyida Zaynab in the devotional literature of the Ottoman period, from the 16th to the 19th century. The aim is to show how the cult of al-Sayyida Zaynab has been constructed in a period characterized by a strong attachment to the family of the Prophet, when confessionalization was not so strong. Finally, we will analyze the contemporary image of al-Sayyida Zaynab as described by important writers of the 20th century Egyptian literature, and the meanings they associated to her according to the social and political context of that period.

Keywords: al-Sayyida Zaynab; Egyptian veneration; historiography; Ottoman cult; contemporary Egyptian literature.

