

of nineteen men guarding a barricade or fighting independently where she was needed. She was killed during a sortie, having acquired a reputation among both the Babis and the besieging troops for dash and valor.

Despite rumors that the Babis had "a regiment of virgins," Zaynab was evidently atypical. The Babi women did play an important support role remarked on by most of the historians of the siege, but for the most part they did not fight. In the simultaneous siege of the Babis of Nayriz in southern Iran, women also took an active part, but again are not recorded as fighting.

Zaynab, whose story straddles folklore and history, is most important as a symbolic figure. The Bab had challenged the very legalistic Shi'ite Islam by proclaiming the abrogation of Islamic law and its replacement with a new system of religious law. Moreover, many Babis believed that they were in an interregnum in which no formal religious law applied. Since Islamic law enforced strict gender roles, the activities of individuals like Zaynab symbolized to the Babis and their Bahá'í successors the liberating quality of the new revelation; to their Muslim opponents she personified the danger to the foundations of society posed by the new religion.

It is interesting that one of the Muslim clerics of Zanjan issued a ruling during the siege that Muslim women were obliged to participate in the jihad in Zanjan. There is no evidence that any did so.

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