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THE HOLY DRAMA

PERSIAN PASSION PLAY
IN MODERN IRAN

Mahnia A. Nematollahi Mahani

Leiden University Press
In loving memory of my parents,
who inspired me to move forward in my life
Contents

Preface 9
Acknowledgements 10
Studies on Persian Passion Play 11
Translations in European languages 19

Introduction 23
A Short History of Ta’ziya 23
The Movements after ‘Āšūrā and the Development of Ta’ziya 24
Late Medieval and Modern Ta’ziya 26
The Devotional Contents of Ta’ziya 28
Oral Tradition in Ta’ziya Texts 28
Ta’ziya Players and Devices 34
Audience Participation in the Ta’ziya 35
Zeynab in Ta’ziya 37

‘Āšūrā, the Martyrdom of Imām Ḥuseyn 43
A Crisis of Succession 43
The Martyrdom of Imām Ḥuseyn 44
The Concept of Imāma in Shiite Tradition 45
Martyrdom (Šahādat) 47

Eschatology 53
Islamic Eschatology 53
Eschatology in the Ta’ziya Texts 55
The Ta’ziya Texts 57
Time and Setting as the Background of the Events 59
The Theme of Day 60
The Theme of Night 61
Settings in Ta’ziya 63
Doctrines and Philosophy in Ta’ziya 67
The Legitimacy of Ta’ziya 70

Zeynab in the Passion Play 73
Veiling and its Supporters in the Ta’ziya Texts 73
Zeynab as a Role Model for Iranian Women 75
  Zeynab’s Sermons 76
  Zeynab, Justice and Destiny 77
  Zeynab Inspired 79
  Zeynab’s Spiritual Power 80
  Zeynab the Leader 81
  Zeynab as Saviour of the Shiite Tradition and the Line of Imâms 84
  Zeynab the Generous 85
Zeynab and the Protagonists 86
  Zeynab and Imâm Ḥuseyn 86
Zeynab and Sakina 88
  Zeynab as Mother 88
  Zeynab as Defender 91
Zeynab and the Mother of Qâsem 92
Zeynab and the Antagonists 92
  Zeynab and Yazid 92
  Zeynab and Šemr 94
  Zeynab and Ibn al-Ziyâd 96

The Transformation of History 101

Pre-Islamic Iranian Elements in the Ta’ziya Texts 103

Conclusion 105

Glossary: The Ta’ziya of the Damascus Bazaar 109

The Ta’ziya of the Damascus Bazaar 112

Bibliography 205

Index 213
Preface

From my childhood I remember the beginning of the month of Muharram, when my mother wore black to honour the martyrdom of Imām Ḥuseyn. People in my city, Kerman, as in other cities, held mourning rites during the ten days from the first to the tenth of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar, to commemorate the death of Imām Ḥuseyn. Their houses were thrown open to the public. The city was decorated with black cloths and banners. Many people dressed in black to show their commitment to Shiism and their fidelity to Imām Ḥuseyn. Others would make vows to distribute sweets and sherbet among the poor or to the people on the streets, and believed that they received God’s grace for doing so. Sheep were sacrificed and the meat distributed among the needy, people cooked food and gave it to those who came to their door. Those who received the food treated it as a sanctified gift.

Finally, the tenth of Muharram dawns. People gather on the streets and in the bazaars through which the many processions to mourn the martyrdom of Imām Ḥuseyn will pass. The sounds of drums, cymbal and clarinet announce that the first procession is coming. As a child, on hearing the music, I would hurry outside, curious to watch the procession. At the head of each procession are several men carrying banners. They are followed by the musicians, and then the procession itself. The ta’ziya director walks along with the procession and reads elegies for the martyrs of Karbalā. He carries a copy (nuskha) of the script to read. He both directs the procession and stimulates the audience to lamentation and mourning. There is a harmony between the musicians, the procession, and the people who stand on both sides of the street or bazaar, crying and beating their chests and heads.

The procession carries various flags and banners in black or green, on which the names of Imām Ḥuseyn and his family are sewn. There are some cross-shaped banners, called ‘alam. They are large and very heavy and are decorated with specific signs: green and coloured cloths, bronze pigeons and bronze hands. A young man rests the ‘alam in a holster on his belt, and
others help him. When he arrives at an open space in the middle of the bazaar, the tone of the music changes and he begins whirling slowly. The people step back to give him more space to whirl. It is very important that the ‘alam does not fall. That would be a bad omen.

Alongside each procession walks a youth carrying rose water, which he sprinkles on the spectators. Another youth carries water or sherbet and distributes it among the people. It may take hours for all the processions to pass through the bazaar. The procession group may eventually arrive at a large house, or an open space prepared as a theatre, where they perform the ta’ziya, but in my childhood in Kerman and other large cities this was rare. At noon the members of the procession go to the houses to which they have been invited, taking blessings and honouring the landlord.

I also have a memory of a ta’ziya play being performed in Mahan, a small district in Kerman province. Close to the tomb of the master of the Nematollahi order, Shāh Nematollāh Vali, a crowd gathers. They stand in a circle and from either side the antagonists and protagonists ride in on their horses, swords in hand. The protagonists recite the elegies of Imām Ḥuseyn, and the antagonists answer them. Then they fight, and those representing Imām Ḥuseyn and his companions are killed. At that moment, a man wearing a lion dress enters the arena, pouring dust and straw on his head. He is followed by several camels bearing litters, and young boys seated in each. As they enter, the people lament loudly, for they represent Imām Ḥuseyn’s family being carried into captivity.

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to those who have helped me: to Dr. Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab for his supervision, advice, and guidance from the very early stages of this research. He has encouraged and supported me in various ways. I am indebted to him more than he knows. Words fail me to express my deepest appreciation to my husband Mahyar Kavoosi, whose support and love for me have taken a load off my shoulders. I am indebted to him for being unselfishly beside me.

I am very much indebted to the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (nwo) for the opportunity to write my PhD dissertation as part of the project Of Poetry and Politics: Classical Poetic Concepts in New Politics of Twentieth-Century Iran, and to finish this book. I would also like to thank Sen McGlinn for his careful editing of the text, and J.G.J. ter Haar for...
his invaluable comments and suggestions. I am also grateful to anonymous reviewers who offered me valuable suggestions to improve the contents of the book. Any inconsistency to be found in this book is my responsibility.

Studies on Persian Passion Play

Despite the fundamental importance of passion play (ta’ziya) in Iranian cultural patterns, studies on the topic have been limited. More research on the topic is necessary to fully explicate how deeply ta’ziya has influenced Iranians’ senses and thought.

Scholarly research on passion play commenced with the publishing of Peter J. Chelkowski’s 1971 article ‘Dramatic and Literary Aspects of Ta’ziya-khāni-Iranian Passion Play’. Notably, this piece offers a general and clear overview of various aspects of ta’ziya performance, such as its historical development, players, place of performance and its decorations, and its embedded narrative and mystical elements. Şādiq Humāyūni published another study on ta’ziya in 1975 entitled Ta’ziya va ta’ziya-khāni. Aside from addressing the historical roots of passion play, this book examines the text, instruments and characteristics of the players. Also of significance, it contains the following ta’ziyas, in addition to several medieval manuscripts of ta’ziya texts: ta’ziya of Qāsem, ta’ziya of ‘Abbās, ta’ziya of Imâm Rezā and ta’ziya hazrat-e Ma’ṣūma. The first two illustrate the tragic events that happened in Karbalā.

Another scholar, Mahmoud Ayoub, explores how ta’ziya performance and the conceptualization of Ḥuseyn’s death have been derived from the traditions later attributable to the Prophet in his work Redemptive Suffering in Islam (1978). Such Prophetic traditions are used to show that the angels informed the Prophet about Ḥuseyn’s cruel death in order to promote a sense of legitimate leadership amongst the audience. Ayoub further elaborates the latent effects of ta’ziya on the Shiite Iranians. For instance, Shiites actively participate in ta’ziya to receive heavenly rewards. Their act guarantees their eternal life in Paradise. Ayoub also examines the growth and expansion of ta’ziya performance in various periods. He describes the places, instruments and their symbolic meanings, and the audience’s reactions. The importance of lamentation poetry (marāti) and its development in regards to the motives related to Ḥuseyn’s death is another subject that is dealt with in his book. Ayoub shows how the Shiite Muslims treat Ḥuseyn’s tomb as a sacred sanctuary (haram).
In 1979, an invaluable collection of articles on the topic under the title of *Ta’ziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran*, edited by Chelkowski, was published. As the outcome of a symposium organized by the Shiraz Festive of Arts in the summer of 1976, the book deals with yet another aspect of *ta’ziyeh*: its origin, method of performance and symbolic meaning of the instruments, cultural dimensions, and its roots among Iranians before Islam. The literary and musical progression of *ta’ziyeh*, as well as its philosophy, are studied. Several articles are dedicated to addressing the extent to which Western-style theatre is influenced by *ta’ziyeh*.

Moreover, Chelkowski published an article in 1984 titled ‘Islam in Modern Drama and Theater’, in which he illustrates various theatrical plays in Iran such as *naqqāli*, *rūhowzi*, *kheyma šab-bāzi* and *rowza-khāni*. Chelkowski enriches this study with analysis of the development of written drama in Iran and the Middle East in conjunction with the social changes surrounding theatre. He goes on to explain various aspects of several rare *ta’ziyas*: namely, *Dhekr-e Muṣḥbat-e bar dār kardan-e Manṣūr-e Ḥallāj raḥmatullāh aleyh* (a remembrance of the tragedy of Ḥallāj on the gallows ‘God blesses him’). In 1985, the journal *Drama Review* published yet another article on *ta’ziyeh* by Chelkowski entitled ‘Shia Muslim Processional Performances’. In it, he sketches the development of *ta’ziyeh* performance from its Buyid dynastic beginnings (352/963), to the victory of the Islamic Revolution (1357/1979). Chelkowski also discusses various paraphernalia, such as *nakhl* or horses, prepared for performances, as well as places where *ta’ziyeh* has been performed, including open and enclosed areas, streets, and *tekkiya*. In 1986, Chelkowski published two articles in *al-Šerāt* magazine. In the first, entitled ‘Popular Shi’i Mourning Ritual,’ he discusses ritual performance in the Middle East in Arab, Persian, Turkish and South Asian Muslim communities. In the second, ‘From Maqātil Literature to Drama,’ Chelkowski illustrates how Ḥuseyn’s death is depicted in *ta’ziyeh* texts written by Arab composers. At the end of this article the author offers a translation from a *ta’ziyeh* entitled The Martyrdom of the Luminous Leader of the Bani Hāšem, Ḥaḍrat-e Abū ’l-Fażl al-Abbās.

Michael M.J. Fischer’s *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (1980) sheds light on the political conflict over passion play performance between several Iranian intellectuals and modern Shiite ulamā such as Khomeini and Ahmad Kasravi. The author mentions that in the city of Yazd, several objects, such as a mirrored *nakhl*, are carried as symbols of Ḥuseyn’s martyrdom and the captivity of his family. In three small villages outside of the city, parades represent Ḥuseyn’s martyrdom. He further draws a compari-
son between the biblical story of Joseph and his brothers, and the Qur’ānic story and ta’ziya texts, with the intention of showing that, for the Shiites, the concepts of sacrifice and suffering have a deep meaning. Fischer additionally discusses Āšūrā from historical and ethnographical perspectives in order to demonstrate how these events and their consequences have evolved into a remedy for social problems.9

A scholarly article written by Mary Hegland titled ‘Two Images of Ḥuseyn: Accommodation and Revolution in an Iranian Village’ (1983) is also worth mentioning. Poignantly, she stresses the influence of Ḥuseyn’s martyrdom on the formation and victory of the Islamic Revolution. She assesses that the Shiites of Iran believe in Ḥuseyn’s intercession on the Day of Judgement. According to Hegland, Ḥuseyn’s death at Karbalā becomes a focal point during the Islamic Revolution and, moreover, Ḥuseyn became the archetype of protest against the tyrannical Umayyad caliph Yazid, which Iranians sought to emulate. Furthermore, the author describes how the passive concept of hope for intercession shifted to active protest against the Pahlavi regime. In other words, every one aspired to the ideal, inspired by Ḥuseyn, of bravely standing up to a totalitarian regime.10

Moreover, Ṣadiq Humayūni published a scholarly work in 1989 titled Ta’ziya dar Iran (Ta’ziya in Iran). He discusses a wide range of topics including, but not limited to, the history of ta’ziya and its roots, how ta’ziya developed in Iran and how it declined. The writer asserts that aristocracy is the main reason for the destruction of ta’ziya. He gives valuable information about different types of ta’ziya, the composers, and how both Iranians and foreigners discussed ta’ziya. Humayūni writes about the instruments that are used in ta’ziya, the copies, and the order of reciting ta’ziya during performance, and the famous ta’ziya reciters (ta’ziya-khān) and the place of ta’ziya performance. The book contains a large number of ta’ziyas, such as ta’ziya of Abbās, ta’ziya of Imām Rezā, ta’ziya of ‘Ali Akber, ta’ziya of Qāniqā-e shāh-e farang (Qāniqā the king of a foreign country). The book is illustrated with a considerable number of photographs and manuscripts.11 Another commendable body of research has been produced by David Pinault. In his study The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community (1992), he hones in on a particular aspect of Shiism within the context of the ta’ziya ritual in India.12 One of Pinault’s articles entitled ‘Zaynab bint ‘Ali and the place of the Women of the Households of the First Imāms in Shi‘ite Devotional Literature,’ published in 1998, is another attempt to get a handle on the topic, in which he asserts Zeynab’s protest in the court of Yazid after the battle of Karbalā provided a model of activism for Iranian women during
the Revolution. He goes on to explain how Fāṭima, the Prophet’s daughter and Ḥuseyn’s mother, has become a role model for Iranian women.13

In 1993, Johan G.J. ter Haar published an invaluable article on passion play performance in Iran under the heading ‘Ta’ziyeh: Ritual Theater from Shi’ite Iran.’14 Lāla Taqīyān additionally provides the reader with general information about Iranian ta’ziya and theatre in her 1995 book Dar bāra-ye ta’ziya va te’ ātr dar Iran (About Ta’ziya and Theatre in Iran). In 1998, Šādiq Humāyūni published a brief survey on the historical origins and development of ta’ziya in Iran called Šīrāz khāstgāh-e ta’ziya (Shiraz, the Original Home of Ta’ziya).15

*The Administrative and Social History of the Qajar Period [The Story of My Life] (1997) by Abdullāh Mostowfī is an autobiographical chronicle of ta’ziya performance during the Qājār period. Mostowfī conveys how Nāṣer al-Din Shah changed the commemoration of Ḥuseyn’s martyrdom into a rationale based on pleasure and ostentatious luxury throughout the course of his reign. The author mentions that ta’ziya composers put in a great deal of effort, more to mobilize their audience than develop the plot. He describes the appearance of protagonists and antagonists, the role of Mu’in al-Bukā’in (‘coordinator of weeping’), the stage, and the parade of more than 200 camels before Nāṣer al-Din Shah. Mostofi also provides an account of a ta’ziya that was performed in the house of Ezzat al-Dowle, the sister of Nāṣer al-Din Shah.16 Significantly, it demonstrates that the religious aspects of ta’ziya performance were not of great importance to the Shah.

Kamran Scot Aghaie published a scholarly work in 2004 entitled *Martyrs of Karbala: Shi’i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran*, in which he illustrates how what occurred in Karbalā has transformed from a historical event into a symbolic paradigm and has been used in various time periods in the form of ta’ziya ritual to legitimize the state. The Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979) is an exception in this regard, as it tried to suppress ta’ziya performance in order to restrict its political influence. Importantly, Aghaie discusses how ta’ziya served the political purpose of the Qājārs, who ruled between 1796 and 1925, and the 1979 Islamic Republic of Iran. In particular, the Qājār elites participated in ta’ziya performance, which essentially represented their integration with the indigenous people. In other words, ta’ziya served as a social bond, one that connected them to society. Conversely, the Islamic Republic created a religious identity from the ta’ziya rituals to motivate the common people to overthrow the secular Pahlavi regime; later, the same rituals were used to mobilize youth to fight in the war against Iraq between 1980 and 1988.17
A collection of articles about passion plays was recently published in *The Drama Review Journal* (2005). As an introduction, Rebecca Ansary Petty offers a translation of a *ta’ziya* titled ‘The martyrdom of Hussein Ta’ziyeh dar Khour.’ The rest of the articles in this volume cover a wide range of topics: Šadiq Humāyuni’s article ‘A View from the Inside, the Anatomy of the Persian Ta’ziyeh Plays’ deals with the poetry, music, place and performance of *ta’ziya*. Acting Styles and Actor Training in Ta’ziyeh’ by William O. Beeman and Mohammad B. Ghaffari examines the artistic skills required from *ta’ziya* players. For instance, a player is expected to know how to fight, run, and perform other athletic movements while singing. Additionally, they consider the influence of *ta’ziya* on modern media such as Hollywood films. Peter Chelkowski, in his article ‘From the Sun-Scorched Desert of Iran to the Beaches of Trinidad: Ta’ziyeh’s Journey from Asia to the Caribbean,’ studies how *ta’ziya* performance migrated from Iran to India. More specifically, he concentrates on explaining *nakhl*: meaning its production process, and the symbolic meanings of objects associated with it. Chelkowski shows various developments of *ta’ziya* from India to the Caribbean, where *ta’ziya* has become both a symbol of pan-Indian unity and the community of Indians.

Another informative contemporary text on *ta’ziya* is Negar Mottahedeh’s ‘Karbalā Drag Kings and Queens.’ Here, she observes the role of gender in *ta’ziya* performance, which, in turn, leads to an important discourse on national identity. Mottahedeh claims *ta’ziya* performance differs amongst Iranian Twelver Shiite in Iran and its neighbouring countries, and that through studying *ta’ziya*, one may understand the concept of Otherness in respect to Iranians.

Another collection of articles (2005) is *The Women of Karbalā: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi’i Islam* edited by Kamran Scot Aghaie. The book is illustrated and divided into two parts. In the first part, the articles focus on Iran. The second part deals with the Arab world, South Asia, and the United States of America. In her article ‘Ta’ziyeh: A Twist of History in Everyday Life,’ Negar Mottahedeh argues how the gender dynamics of *ta’ziya* developed during the Qājār period. She holds that women were engaged in organizing the ritual. ‘The Gender Dynamics of Moharram Symbols and Rituals in the Latter Years of Qajar Rule’ by Kamran Scot Aghaie examines social, psychological and spiritual functions of Shiite symbols and rituals in Iranian women’s life in the Qājār period. He discusses how women played in *ta’ziya* rituals in both public and private rituals. Ingvild Flaskerud’s ‘Oh, My Heart Is Sad. It Is Mohar-
ram, the Month of Zaynab: The Role of Aesthetics and Women's Mourning Ceremonies in Shiraz,' examines the signs and symbols, places and the iconography of the images in modern Shiraz and the fact that women actively participate in ta’ziya rituals to achieve salvation in the physical world and the other world. In her article 'The Daughters of Karbalā: Images of Women in Popular Shi’i Culture in Iran,' Faegheh Shirazi explains the representation of female characters in religious eulogies and chants in modern Iran. She argues that the representations are used to support the Islamic Republic of Iran. 'Iconography of the Women of Karbalā: Tiles, Murals, Stamps, and Posters,' by Peter J. Chelkowski examines the images of female characters in Shiite religious drama. The writer illustrates how these female characters serve as a model for chastity, purity, and self-sacrifice through which the leaders of the Islamic Republic represented their ideals. In the second part of the book one reads the following articles: 'Sakineh, The Narrator of Karbalā: An Ethnographic Description of a Women’s Majāles Rituals in Pakistan,' by Shemeem Burney Abbas. She analyses how the narrative voice of Sakina presents gendered themes in mourning rituals in Pakistan. In his article ‘Sayyedeh Zaynab: The Conqueror of Damascus and Beyond,’ Syed Akbar Heyder studies how Zaynab is presented in modern Urdu poems and pious elegies. 'Gender and Moharram Rituals in an Isma’ili Sect of South Asian Muslims' by Reyhana Ghadially examines how women in the Isma’ili community of Bohra in India tend to be more active in private rituals than public ones. She finds that the women play a major part in universalistic Shiite Ideals. Mary Elaine Hegland’s ‘Women of Karbala Moving to America: Shi’i Rituals in Iran, Pakistan, and California’ draws a comparison between two Shiite communities that have migrated to the United States. She illustrates the distinction between them and holds that South Asian women are more active in religious rituals than Iranian women. ‘Women's Religious Rituals in Iraq’ by Elizabeth Warnock Fernea and Basima Q. Bezirgan illustrates that both men and women are active in public religious rituals. They show the supportive role of women in men’s rituals and men’s supportive role in women’s private rituals. The last article of this book is ‘From Mourning to Activism: Seyyedeh Zaynab, Lebanese Shi’i Woman, and the Transformation of Ashura’ by Lara Z. Deeb. She focuses on Shiite Lebananese rituals and their recent changes under the influence of urbanization, modernization and political Shiite parties: Amal and Hezbollāh.

A valuable work on the subject is Ta’ziya-khāni ḥadīt-e mašāebe qudsi dar namāyeš-e ā’ini (Performing Ta’ziya: Holy Tradition of Tragedy in Ritual
Play) by 'Ali Bulūkbāši (2006). This study illustrates historical aspects of ta’ziya and its effective influence on Iranians as a holy religious ritual.34

In 2010, Ḥuseyn Ismā’ili published a collection of ta’ziya texts entitled Tešna dar miqāt, matn va matnšenāsi-ye ta’ziya. This collection, published in 1928 by the German diplomat Wilhelm Litten, is the first ta’ziya collection to be published in Persian in the nineteenth century, according to Ismā’ili. The book contains 15 gatherings or majles of ta’ziya and begins with mourning for the sacrifice of Ismael (ta’ziya-ye qurbani kardan-e Ismā’il) and ends with mourning for Amir Teymūr (ta’ziya Amir Teymūr). At the beginning of each majles, Ismā’ili has added an introduction (darāmad) that consists of an explanation about the gathering afterwards. Under the heading of the origin of majles (khāstgāh-e majles), he notes the Shiite sources from which the main theme of the majles is derived; then, in the copies of majles (nuskha-hā-ye majles), Ḥuseyn Ismā’ili refers to the collections in which the majles is mentioned. This work contains manuscripts of several majles-e ta’ziyas.35

In 2011, William O. Beeman published an invaluable book entitled Iranian Performance Tradition. In it, he explains Iranian behaviour and norms in order to offer a deeper understanding of Iranian culture to the reader. He observes theatre, both comedy and tragedy, and holds that they have their roots in Iranian tradition. Beeman illustrates the connection between performance activity and daily life in Iran. In other words, ceremonies reflect real life and the ideals of the Iranian community are illustrated. This book covers a wide range of subjects about Iranian life, behaviours, folk culture, religious rituals, Rūhowzi comedy and media and the Revolution (1979).36

Another scholarly work published in 2011 is Gender, Sainthood, & Everyday Practice in South Asian Shi’ism by Karen G. Ruffle. In her work, the writer observes how the battle of Karbalā is commemorated by the Indian Shi’i community. She illustrates how deeply Indians are influenced by ta’ziya. For this study, she relies on hagiographical texts to show how Imām Ḥuseyun, his family and his companions are illustrated in these texts. On the importance of hagiography, Ruffle asserts that it ‘reflects local cultural values, variations in religious practice, political ideology, language and gender norms.’ In this study, the role of the saints (i.e. the twelve Shiite Imams) in the Indian Shiite community and the historical role of Iranian Shiites in developing and cultivating Shiite Islam are depicted.37

Citing another, yet older, source of literature on passion plays, ta’ziya processions are vividly portrayed in European travel accounts written during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They provide valuable descrip-
tions of the objects used in ta’ziya performance, in addition to the scenes and players. A detailed description of the events at Karbalā is preserved in the works of the European traveller Pietro Della Valle. Significantly, he documents the 1618 Muḥarram ceremonies in Isfahan. Cornelis de Bruyn, a Dutchman, describes a ta’ziya scene in his work Travels into Muscovy and Part of the East-Indies. Likewise, William Franklin, in his Observations Made on a Tour from Bengal to Persia, reports on a ta’ziya procession, consequently revealing the rapid development of ta’ziya in the second half of the seventeenth century. Morier’s travel account titled Second Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor between the Years 1810-1816, written in 1818, observes a form of ta’ziya performed before the king and his courtiers. The author illustrates how the objects used in the performance symbolically represented Ḥuseyn’s death at Karbalā. Morier also divulges in detail various other aspects of the performance, even decorating his work with several illustrations.

James Bassett is another traveller-observer of Muḥarram ta’ziyas. In his 1887 work Persia the Land of the Imams: A Narration of Travel and Residence 1871-1885, he explains the theatrical features of these ceremonies and the ostensibly pathetic stories that are read during the performance. According to Bassett, on the tenth day of the Muḥarram, members of the procession donned white clothing resembling shrouds, while walking with bare heads and feet. Later, they wounded their heads with sharp blades.

There is yet another vivid portrayal of ta’ziya performance in A Narrative Journey into Persia and Residence at Tehran by J.M. Tancoigne. He not only describes the procession of mourners, but also illustrates how the events of Karbalā and Ḥuseyn’s martyrdom are expressed in the nineteenth century.

Passion play processions and various forms of flagellation are also explained in travel accounts by Europeans. From a European perspective, these acts are important because they indicate that the mourning procession has theatrical features. Jean Chardin offers a vivid description of sina-zani (beating one’s breast) that he witnessed in 1667. The ta’ziya procession is also described by Pierre Ponafiedine in his travel account entitled Life in the Moslem East (1910). He describes the procession of the mourners. For instance, they not only inflicted wounds on their bodies, but also hung padlocks, daggers and horseshoes on their backs, arms and breasts. The mourners wounded their foreheads and shaved their heads, motivated by the belief that they would receive a reward. The author further mentions that throughout the first ten days of the month of Muḥarram, both non-
Qur’ānic and Qur’ānic stories were used to show the sufferings of Imām Ḥuseyn and his family.43

*The Shia World* (1910) by Muḥammad Ḥuseyn Khān Esfahāni provides a short but vivid description of a *ta’ziya* procession in the city of Yazd. In this travel account, Esfahāni illustrates how the procession was characterized by several theatrical features symbolically depicting the events of Karbalā. Like Morier, he uses an illustration, though, in this case, to visually demonstrate what the procession leaders looked like.44

**Translations in European languages**

Moreover, several translations of passion play performance also exist. Thirty-seven *majles* of *ta’ziya* have been translated into English by Lewis Pelly. It was during his journey to India and Iran that Pelly became intrigued by the *ta’ziya* performance. He dedicated two volumes of his 1879 work *The Miracle Play: Hasan and Husain* to this invaluable task. The first volume starts with the *ta’ziya* of ‘Joseph and his Brethren’ and then proceeds to sketch the events leading up to ‘the death of ‘Ali Akbar,’ who was Ḥuseyn’s son. The second volume begins with the death of Qāsim, the Bridegroom, and culminates in the scene of the Resurrection. Also of note, Pelly writes a short introduction at the beginning of each *majles*.45


In this book, I illustrate the major role of *ta’ziya* performance among Shiites of Iran. It analyses the role of the Prophet’s granddaughter in modern twentieth-century Iran and, more specifically, how Iranian women perceived her as the archetype of resistance and protest against the tyrannical Pahlavi monarch during the Islamic Revolution of 1979. In this study, the religious prohibitions and restrictions infused in *ta’ziya* performance are examined. It further shows how devotional themes such as predestination, salvation, intercession, free will and martyrdom are used in *ta’ziya* texts.
Notes


5. P.J. Chelkowski, ‘Shia Muslim Performance,’ in *The Drama Review*, vol. 29, No. 3, Processional Performance (Autumn, 1985), pp. 18-30. *Nakhel* is a big, tall bier (coffin) to which are attached daggers swords, luxurious fabrics, and mirrors. On the day of ‘Āshūrā, it is carried as if it was the coffin of Imām Ḥuseyn. Some times the *nakhl* is so colossal and heavy that it requires several hundred strong men to lift and carry it.’ See P.J. Chelkowski, ‘Art for Twenty-Four Hours,’ in *Islamic Art in the 19th Century: Tradition, Innovation, and Eclecticism*, eds. D. Behrens-Abouseif & S. Verrois, Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2006, p. 410.


7. Ibid.


42 J.G.J. ter Haar, ‘Ta’ziye: Ritual Theater from Shiite Iran,’ p. 163.
Introduction

The development of technology has overwhelmed the traditions of many Eastern countries. For them, following the Western pattern of life has become more attractive than preserving their own traditions and transmitting them to the following generations. Iran too has been affected by the wave of modernity. Iranians have discarded some of their traditions in favour of the attractions of modernity. Ta‘ziya, an Iranian form of ‘passion play’ commemorating suffering and martyrdom, has been one of the victims of this process. It has been banished from the large cities to more remote villages; but, despite the limitations imposed on it, a trace of the past glory of ta‘ziya has survived. Through ta‘ziya performances, an audience learns about the life of the Shiite Imāms¹ the afflictions that they suffered, the laws of religion, the social virtues, and historical events.

This study focuses on the character of Zeynab, Imām Ḥuseyn’s sister, the third Shiite Imām. The way she demonstrated exceptional behaviour in standing up to the Umayyad caliph Yazid (d.63/683)² during and after the battle of Karbalā is a crucial issue for Shiites. She protested against the tyrannies and oppressions that were inflicted upon Imām Ḥuseyn’s family. After analysing Zeynab’s behaviour during the battle and during her subsequent imprisonment, I will focus on how modern Iranian women have received Zeynab, especially during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s.

A Short History of Ta‘ziya

Ta‘ziya is an Arabic word, literally meaning ‘condolence,’ and referring to mourning for the dead, or enjoining patience. The Iranian ta‘ziya play is a form of religious drama, analogous to the Middle-English passion plays. It has its historical roots in pre-Islamic Persia, where Persians performed the tragedy of Mitrā (mašāb-e mitrā). During these rites, the worshippers wore masks and mimicked the afflictions that Mitrā had suffered, acting
them out on a platform. Mitrā is an Indo-Persian name meaning contract, agreement, treaty, alliance and promise. The name is associated with the sun (mehr). The god Mitrā punishes people who break their contract: he takes the strength from their feet and the light out of their eyes. He is a warrior who drives a chariot and carries a weapon. On the other hand, he rewards the faithful by bringing rain and making the plants grow, and he brings rugs, cattle herds and other rewards to the one who faithfully worships him.

It is reported that two other mourning rituals were performed in Iran. The first commemorated the tragedy of Zarir, the brother of King Vištāsp, who converted to the religion of Zoroaster. The story comes from the Sasanian period (224-651), when Middle Persian was spoken, and originated in Parthian history. Briefly, the story is that a neighbouring king, Arjāsb, objected to King Vištāsp’s conversion and attacked Vištāsp with a huge army. In spite of the odds, Zarir goes to the battlefield where he is murdered by Bidaraš, the brother of king Arjāsb. Zarir, like Imām Ḥuseyn, is the archetype of one who is murdered for his faith.

The other pre-Islamic tragedy commemorated the death of Siyāvuš, the son of Keykāwūs, Iran’s mythical king. Siyāvuš was brought up by Rustam, the Iranian hero of Sistān. When Siyāvuš returns to the palace of his father, he is falsely accused by Sūdāba, his father’s wife, who has made several attempts to seduce him. Siyāvuš proves his innocence in a trial by fire, but is forced to leave the country. He goes with his companions to Tūrān where initially the king, Afrāsiyāb, honours him. Siyāvuš even marries Afrāsiyāb’s daughter, but jealous courtiers induce Afrāsiyāb to murder Siyāvuš, and his head is cut off. The main source for this account is the history of Bukhāra by Naršakhi, who says that in his own era, each year, ‘The people of Bukhāra sing songs about the killing of Siyāvuš. The singers (qawwālān) call the songs the weeping of the Zoroastrians (geristan-e mughān)’.

The Movements after ‘Āşūrā and the Development of Ta’ziya

Contemporary Iranian ta’ziya is performed mainly to commemorate the death of Imām Ḥuseyn, the grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad (d.11/632), and the other events of ‘Āşūrā. Imām Ḥuseyn was killed on the plain of Karbalā in 61/680. The people of Kūfa had invited him to come to lead their community, but he never reached Kūfa. On the plain of Karbalā, on the first day of the month of Muḥarram in 60/680, he and his household were surrounded by the army of Yazid, the successor of the Umayyad caliph
Mu‘awiya. Imām Ḥuseyn preferred death to swearing allegiance to Yazid as the caliph of the Muslim community. After nine days of negotiations, during which the Imām and his followers were deprived of food and water, the battle started on the tenth of Muḥarram (‘Āshūrā). It lasted one day. Imām Ḥuseyn and his companions were killed and the surviving members of his household were arrested and taken to Yazid’s palace in Damascus, along with the heads of the dead mounted on lances.

After the martyrdom of Imām Ḥuseyn, the Shiites of Kūfa repented their failure to prevent his martyrdom and decided to kill his murderers or sacrifice their own lives. They felt ashamed before the Prophet and worried about the Day of Judgement when they would have to confess their shortcomings to God. They called themselves the Penitents (Tawwābūn). The penitents believed that ‘Ali Ibn al-Ḥuseyn (later named Imām Zeyn al-‘Ābedin) was Imām Ḥuseyn’s legitimate successor because he was related to Fāṭima, the Prophet’s daughter. They put more emphasis on his relationship to the Prophet through Fāṭima than through ‘Ali (the cousin of the Prophet). The Tawwābūn gathered Shiites from Kūfa and the neighbouring cities, encouraging them to fight against the Umayyad army. But before going into battle they went to Karbalā, to the grave of Imām Ḥuseyn, and lamented for him. In 65/684 they fought with Syrian forces in the siege of ‘Ayn al-Wardā, where they were defeated. Most were killed; the remainder fled to Qarqisiya, where their movement was eclipsed.

In 66/865 another movement was begun, by Al-Mukhtar Ibn Abi ‘Ubayda al-Thaqafi.10 The movement also sought to revenge Imām Ḥuseyn’s blood, and supported the succession of Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya, ‘Ali’s third son from a Hanafi woman. Since he was not from the bloodline of the Prophet, the two movements did not unite. The movement of ‘Ubayda ath-Thaqafi was also defeated by the Umayyad army.11

Almost three centuries after the Tawwābūn movement, the impulse of penitent commemoration developed into processions commemorating the martyrdom of Imām Ḥuseyn. On the tenth of Muḥarram 963, by order of the Buyid rulers (945-1055), the martyrdom of Imām Ḥuseyn was officially commemorated for the first time by mourning processions that passed through the streets and markets. In the following year, the commemoration was supplemented with the recitation of elegies, beating on the head and face and begging for water in imitation of Imām Ḥuseyn, who had asked for water for his infant, ‘Ali Asḡar, on the plain of Karbalā.12 The combination of processions and dramatic recitations gives us the elements of the late Medieval ta‘ziya. Such rites continued during the Buyid era.13
The mourning performance developed until it reached a high point during the Šafavīd period (1501-1722). The emergence of the Šafavīds had a lasting effect on the history of Iran. It was during their rule that the mass of the population converted to Shiīte Islam. Many theatrical features were added to taʿziya, which helped the director to make a vivid portrayal of the events of Karbalā.

Shah Ţahmāsb (1525-1576), the second king of the Šafavīd dynasty, ordered poets ‘to devote their time to writing eulogies of Imāms.’ He favoured devotional subjects so much that other literary forms such as lyrics and storytelling (dāstān-sarāʾi) declined. However, the poets of this period responded by using and adapting poetic forms for religious subjects. Muḥṭašam from Kāšān (d.996/1587-8) wrote the famous dawāzdah-band (‘the twelve-stanza poem’), an elegy on the martyrdom of Imām Ḥuseyn and a milestone in the development of Persian poetry. Ĥātef from Isfahān (d.1198/1783) followed Muḥṭašam in composing elegies, and later Qāʾāni (1808-54) imitated Muḥṭašam. Waqār from Shiraz (d.1298/1881) wrote his haft-band (seven stanza poem) in imitation of the dawāzdah-band of Muḥṭašam from Kāšān.

Another important book of elegies for the Imāms in the Šafavīd period is the Rawzat al-šuhadā (the Garden of Martyrs) by Ḥuseyn Waʿez Kāšefī (d.1504-5). This book relates the deaths of the Shiīte Imāms, particularly the martyrdom of Imām Ḥuseyn. Rawzat al-šuhadā had a major effect on the taʿziya texts. It provided a broader perspective for taʿziya composers. The recitation of Rawzat al-šuhadā and other books with similar religious subjects led to the practice of rawza-khāni, the animated reading of the passion of Imām Ḥuseyn, the singing of elegies and a sermon. Taʿziya as a dramatic form and devotional practice has developed from the rawza-khwāni. There are brief mentions of Āšūrā mourning processions with dramatic re-enactments in accounts by Pietro Della Valle in 1618, and Cornelis de Bruyn in 1704.

During the Afshāriya period there was a sharp decline in taʿziya performances. Nāder Shah Afshār (r.1147-60/1736-47), the founder of the Afshāriya dynasty, was a Sunnite Muslim and did not wish to commemorate the martyrdom of Imām Ḥuseyn.

With the advent of the Zand dynasty (1751-1796), the popularity of taʿziya was restored, and it reached a peak during the Qājār dynasty (1796-1925). Something about the development of taʿziya performances at the
time can be deduced from an account written by William Francklin around 1786-87:

[...] Among the most affecting representations is the marriage of young Casim, the son of Hussun and nephew of Hossein, with his daughter; but this was never consummated as Casim was killed in a skirmish on the Banks of the Euphrate, on the 7th of Muḥarram. On this occasion, a boy represents the bride, decorated in her wedding garment, and attended by the females of the family chanting a mournful elegy, in which is related the circumstance of her betrothed husband being cut off by infidels – (for such is the term by which sheīas speak of Sunnies). The parting between her and her husband is also represented when on his going to the field she takes an affectionate leave of him, and on his quitting her presents her with a burial vest, which she puts around his neck.

Nāṣer al-Din Shah (r.1848-96) was very fond of ta’ziya. During his long reign, ta’ziya was greatly developed and became popular among different classes of society. From this period, ta’ziya was performed in an enclosed area. The places used for ta’ziya performances were named tekiyas. The most famous in the Qājār period was the tekiya-dawlat (the Royal Tekiya), a circular building modelled on the Royal Albert Hall in London, which Nāṣer al-Din Shah had built on his return from London in 1873. It was used for ta’ziya performances for the royal family. It was destroyed in 1948.

From 1925, as Reżā Shah Pahlavi (r.1925-1941) initiated a process of modernization in Iran, the entertainment offered by radio, cinema, and later television supplanted ta’ziya performances, which went into a gradual decline. After World War Two, ta’ziya performances were largely limited to small towns and remote villages.

The Shiite Muslims later divided into several branches. Among these are the Zaydiyya, the Imāmiyya or ‘twelver’ Shiites, and the Ismā’iliyya. The Imāmiyya, the majority Shi’ite sect in Iran today, believe that the twelfth Imām, a child, was supernaturally concealed after the death of the eleventh Imām: he is still alive today and is expected to return before the end of the world. One of the fundamental doctrines of the Imāmiyya is that the Imām is protected (maṣūm) from sin and error. If the Imām fears for his own safety or for that of his community, he has to practice dissimulation (taqqiya).

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The Holy Drama

The Devotional Contents of Ta’ziya

Ta’ziya is the most important popular devotional ritual in Iran. Every year, from the first day to the tenth day of the month of Muharram, Iranian Shiites commemorate the martyrdom of Imām Ḥuseyn. They perform ta’ziya to keep alive the memory of the events of Karbalā and the tyranny that the family of the Prophet suffered. There are separate ta’ziya for each of the main events of Karbalā, and its aftermath. For instance, the ta’ziya called ‘the bazaar in Damascus’ (ta’ziya-ye bāzār-e Šām) describes the conditions of the prisoners after ‘Āshūrā. There is a ta’ziya on the martyrdom of two of Zeynab’s sons, a ta’ziya on the survivors’ ‘entrance to Medina’ (ta’ziya-ye vurūd-e be Medina), on the death of Zeynab (ta’ziya-ye vafāt-e ḡazrat-e Zeynab), and on the death of the two sons of Muslim Ibn al-Aqil, an uncle of Ḥuseyn. Muslim Ibn al-Aqil was martyred as well. There is also a conversion tale known as the ta’ziya on the Monastery of Širin.

There are also ta’ziyas for other events not directly related to Karbalā, such as the death of the Prophet (ta’ziya-ye vafāt-e paygamber) and the martyrdom of Imām ‘Ali (ta’ziya-ye šahādat-e ḡazrat-e ‘Alī). Another ta’ziya centres on the martyrdom of Qāsem, the son of Imām Ḥasan, the second Shiite Imām. But these are less frequently performed than the ta’ziyas on the martyrdom of Ḥuseyn. There are also ta’ziya on biblical figures.

Ta’ziya is a medium that teaches and reinforces Shiite beliefs and piety. In commemorating Imām Ḥuseyn’s martyrdom and other devotional events, the audience is dramatically confronted with Shiite doctrines such as fate, predestination and free will. Several of the written sources that have transmitted ta’ziya texts to us show Imām Ḥuseyn sacrificing himself for the salvation of the Shiites. Here, the concept of free will (ekhtiyār) is highlighted.

The language of the ta’ziya texts is simple and understandable for all kinds of Persian audiences: even illiterate people can appreciate the text. Its leaders and performers require no formal religious training, and no knowledge of Arabic. Ta’ziya was (and is) composed in verse form, to be read aloud and preferably performed.

Oral Tradition in Ta’ziya Texts

Although the performers and director of a ta’ziya have texts, ta’ziya has many of the characteristics of oral literature. An oral text is composed for audiences and is based on their needs. It is composed for memorization
and recitation. Ruth Finnegan states that an oral text is composed in performance; at least, it is not separate from recitation or performance. The composer thinks about the time of performance and the expectations of his audience. The message of the *ta'ziya* text is what the audience understands when they see it and hear it being performed.

As oral literature, the *ta'ziya* text is not memorized word for word. If a player forgets a part, he improvises. The text is written, as an aid to memory, but it cannot be checked against one written version that is correct. In oral literature, every version is correct. In *ta'ziya*, each copy (*nuskha*) is treated as correct: the composers, performers and spectators do not seek an authoritative version.

Another characteristic of an oral text is that it is made up of formulaic thoughts and expressions that are memorized. The next is repetition, an important device in oral literature, and drama, because the listeners cannot go back to refresh their memories. Repetition fills the gaps when the speaker does not remember the next subject, but it also reinforces the thought in the mind of the audience, particularly through the repetition of motifs. Another characteristic of oral literature is the use of antithetical terms and balanced patterns, which again serve to make the message more understandable for the spectators. Finally, in oral literature, physical violence is vividly described. Examples of these four characteristics of orality in *ta'ziya* will be given below.

Firstly, some formulaic thoughts and expressions, drawn from everyday speech that one would not normally find in Persian written literature. To ‘give one's heart to credit, and be quit of cash’ (*be nesiya del bedahad naqd rā rahā bekunad*) (9) means to live in a fool's paradise, believing promises. ‘My house will be destroyed’ (*khāna kharāb būdan*) (9) is the state of a person losing all hope. ‘To see the brand-mark (portent of death) of one's child is intolerable’ (*dāġ-e farzand didan āsān nist*) (14) is self-explanatory. ‘Light of the eye’ (*nūr-e češm*) (23) is a clichéd expression said to a person whom one loves, for instance by parents to their child. ‘The black dust is on my head’ (*šud khāk-e siyāh bar sar-e man*) (47) refers to an irretrievable calamity such as the death of a loved one or having an incurable disease. ‘He was raised with the salt of my father’ (*namak parvarda-ye bābam*) (63) refers to a person who has grown up in a family or is indebted to them. The proverb shows that the recipient is inferior to the speaker. To ‘cry with one's face to a wall’ (*rūy be divār geristan*) (157) represents a condition in which there is no hope of assistance or improvement. Another cliché, used to encourage the audience to give alms, is ‘give alms because it repels calamity’ (*ṣadaqa
Another characteristic of oral literature is repetition. Participants may insert this to fill gaps, and there is also simple repetition of words in a single passage for rhythmic effect. The examples below show the repetition of motifs, whether as images or concepts, in words that may seem different but convey the same sense to the audience. For instance, the thirst of Imām Ḥuseyn, and his men and family, is a very common theme in taʿziya. For those who have seen taʿziya, the first association of the Imām Ḥuseyn’s name is that he was killed while suffering from thirst. This motif is repeatedly associated with the name of Imām Ḥuseyn, as an epithet. For instance, he is called the thirst king (Shah-e tešna kām) (41), the king whose lips are athirst (Shah-e tešna lab) (49), and the king whose liver thirsts (Shah-e tešna jegar) (51). The motif is more fully developed in particular episodes. In one, the sons of Imām Ḥuseyn’s sister Zeynab go to the battlefield, and are defeated. When Šemr is about to kill them he gives them some water but they do not drink it, so both are killed while suffering from thirst (18). Also, on the day of Ṭāḥer, Imām Ḥuseyn writes a letter to one of his Shiite followers and asks him to bring some water for the thirst (…) gar mitavāni barā-ye tešnegān ābi resāni) (73). In another episode a European messenger has come to the court of Yazid. He intercedes on behalf of Imām Ḥuseyn’s son, Imām Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin, who is about to be killed. Yazid orders the executioner to kill the European. He asks for a sip of water but then does not drink it: he says,

ābat nanūšam ḥāšā-vo kallā
lab tešna bāšand owlād-e Zahrā (132).

I will never drink water,
While the lips of Zahrā’s children are dry (132).

In another passage, Zeynab tells the audience that when Imām Ḥuseyn fell from his horse he tried to say something, but his lips were stuck together because of thirst (būd labhāš be ham časbida) (147). Then, she says, ‘he wanted water: dust be on my head!’ (āb mikhāst ke khākam bar sar) (147).

Another motif in the taʿziya texts is ġurbat, meaning exile and alienation, but also wretchedness. The term is used in poetry to describe the condition of looking back, in nostalgic memory, at the place that was home. In classical poetry, Nāṣer Khosrow (1004-1088) did in fact travel widely. He was
for many years away from home, but the persona of the wandering poet in exile is used widely, even by poets who were geographically less adventurous. Poets speaking in this voice call on their past memories to sustain them: exile and memory are two parts of one motif. In the ta’ziya texts, the ġurbat motif shows that Imâm Ḥuseyn and his family are far from their homeland and that they bewail the loss of their glorious past. Part of the pain of exile is not being in control of one’s fate. In the struggle between Imâm Ḥuseyn and Yazid, Imâm Huseyn is represented as one who is bound in exile: he has no choice but to fight Yazid’s army.

Two terms, ġurbat and ġarib, are repeated in many episodes. The former is the abstract noun for the condition of living away from one’s homeland, and the latter refers to a person living in another land. Both terms are used in relation to the martyrdom of Imâm Huseyn and his followers on the plain of Karbalâ. The ġurbat motif highlights their alienation, hopelessness and helplessness in the face of the enemy’s army. The term appears in all of the ta’ziya stories, underlining that Imâm Huseyn was killed in another land, far from his Shiite followers. For example:

Imâm Ḥuseyn says to Zeynab:

In exile, I only have you

\( \text{(dar ġaribi hamin tu râ dâram)} \) (14).

Zeynab says to Šemr:

We are strangers, and have no protector

\( \text{\( ġaribim-o kasi bar sar nadârim \)} \) (25).

Šahrbânû says to Zeynab:

What can I do, I am an exile, and in my exile you are my Friend

\( \text{\( ě ke kunam ke man ġaribam be ġaribiyam tu yâri \)} \) (43).

Imâm Ḥuseyn says to the Heavens (rûzgâr):

See our condition: we are strangers, alone and far from our family

\( \text{\( mâ râ ġarib-o bi kas-o bi aqrabâ bebin \)} \) (61).

Ruqiya says to Zeynab:
O! God I am a stranger, despised and afflicted
(khudāvandā ġarib-o khār-o zāram) (138).

Dorra Ṣadaf is a warrior who attacks Yazid’s army when she hears that the household of Imām Huseyn has been taken captive. When Mušari, one of her companions, hears that Imām Ḥuseyn has been killed, she says,

ĝarib-e vādiy-e karb-o balā Ḥuseynam vāy
šahid-e khanjar-e Šemr-e dağā Ḥuseynam vāy (100).

Alas, for my Ḥuseyn, the stranger of the plain of Karb-o balā,38 Martyred by the dagger of deceitful Šemr, alas! (100).

In the ta’ziya on the martyrdom of ‘Abdullāh Ibn al-‘Afif,’ Ibn al-Ziyād threatens Zeynab with death. There is no one to rescue her, but Sakina intercedes on behalf of her aunt and says,

bejuz in’amma mā yāvar nadārim
dar in ġurbat kasi bar sar nadārim (84).

We have no helper but this aunt,
In this our exile (ġurbat), we have no protector (84).

In a passage relating to the imprisonment period, Zeynab looks back on the time, in Medina when she was respected and protected. She tells Yazid’s wife Hendeh, who was previously Zeynab’s maid, ‘in Medina, the parasol of royalty was over my head’ (man dar madina čatr-e Shahi bar saram būd) (146). Other members of Imām Ḥuseyn’s family also talk about their glorious past when they lived in Medina, when the martyrs of Karbalā were alive. Imām Ḥuseyn’s daughter, Sakina, says, ‘How fine the day, when my father was alive’ (khuš ān rūzi ke bar sar būd bābā) (76).

The term orphan (yatim) often appears in the ta’ziya texts. A yatim is a child whose father and mother are dead; the concept complements the concept of ġaribi and makes a full image of the tragic situation of Imām Ḥuseyn’s children after the battle. It points to both the cruel behaviour of Yazid’s commanders and the unfair behaviour of the people of Kūfa. Both protagonists and antagonists use the term, reminding the audience that Imām Ḥuseyn’s children are orphaned. For example:
Come beside me, sister, for we are both orphans (biyā khāhar ke mā har du yatimim) (23).

He (Šemr) is the cause of the deaths of orphans (ke gardad bāʻet-e marg-e yatimān) (25).

I am orphaned, I am orphaned, I am orphaned (man yatimam, yatimam, yatimam) (51).

Another example is:

az yatimi du češmam pur āb ast
bar yatimān taraḥum țavāb ast (53).

My eyes are full of tears, because I am an orphan,
Compassion for orphans is requited (53).39

Much more could be said about the terms that are repeated in the ta’ziya texts, but we will suffice here with a brief review of some other terms that are repeated often. ‘Infidel’ (kāfar) (18, 40) is frequently used in reference to the antagonists. Its connotation is of infidelity rather than heresy. The enemies of Imām Ḥuseyn are infidels because they fight against him. ‘Damned’ or ‘cursed’ (la‘īn) (24, 30, 33, 53, 76, 77) refers to those to whom God will show no mercy. ‘Imprisonment’ (asir, zendāni) (26, 40, 43, 51, 54, 72) refers to the period when Imām Ḥuseyn’s family are at the court of Yazid in Damascus. They are taken there, passing from town to town (šahr-o bāzār burdan)40 (74, 76), with their heads kept bare (77, 81), and are then held in chains (zanjir, rismān).

Another feature of the ta’ziya text as oral literature is the heavy reliance on antithetical terms. The antagonists are unbelievers (kāfar), lacking faith (bi-imān), shameless (bihayā), faithless and oppressive (bivafā, jafākār), rebellious (‘ašrār), tyrants and oppressors (ẓālem va setamkār). The protagonists are full of faith (bi-imān, musalmān), fidelity (bā vafā), pious (‘abrār), innocent and oppressed (bigonāh va mazlām).

Physical violence is presented vividly in ta’ziya: the audience is encouraged to imagine themselves present in the battlefield. The antagonists’ cruel behaviour is described in detail, and the antagonists themselves explain their tyranny. The purpose is to increase the spectators’ hatred. In the ta’ziya on ‘entering the place of execution’ (ta’ziya vurūd-e be qatlgāh) (21-
there is an episode in which Yazid’s commander, Ibn-e Sa’d, orders the army to plunder and burn the tents. Then they take the prisoners to the plain of Karbalā where the headless bodies of their loved ones are lying. The prisoners recognize them from their clothes. In another episode in the same ta’ziya, Ibn al-Sa’d and his companion Būkhalīq go to the battlefield to count the wounds of the dead (28-31). They talk about each of them and describe how cruelly they killed the companions of Imām Ḥusayn. They regret that they killed Imām Ḥusayn, because he was a good servant of God. Another example is the description of the death scene of Imām Ḥusayn and his infant ‘Alī Asghar (115-117). Šemr describes how violently he treated the corpse of Imām Ḥusayn, and says that Yazid’s army did not allow a sip of water for ‘Alī Asghar or the other family of Imām Ḥusayn. Instead, they kill the child with an arrow, and Šemr kicks the wounded body of Imām Ḥusayn.

The physical violence of the antagonists is described in formulae such as ‘the shameless people tear you in pieces’ (ze bas in qoym bi šarm-o ḥayāyand šumā rā pāra pāra minamāyand) (12), ‘I whip the prisoners’ (mizanam bā tāziyāna) (24), while their victims suffer a ‘wounded side’ (pahlish-ye čāk-khurda) (26) and ‘broken chest’ (sina-ye šekasta) (26). Imām Zeyn al-‘Ābedin wails, ‘my father’s body is cut into pieces in the dust’ (qat’a qat’a na’s-e bābam bar zamin) (31). The exiles suffer from ‘wandering door to door’ or ‘homeless’ (dar be dar būdan) (137), living in a ruined place (dar kharāba tu rā gašta maskan) (139). Ruqaya says, ‘My face is bruised blue by Šemr’s slaps’ (rūyam kabūd gašta az zarb-e sili-ye Šemr) (139).

Both the depiction of violence and the antitheses are very much reinforced by patterns of repetition. Repetition could be described as the most influential stylistic feature of the ta’ziya texts.

**Ta’ziya Players and Devices**

The ta’ziya players are all men. They are divided into two main groups, protagonists and antagonists. The former perform the roles of the Imāms, their families and their followers. The latter play the role of the enemies of Imām Ḥusayn’s family. The director and the audience also participate in the performance.

In the ta’ziya performance, the director uses specific devices to distinguish the protagonists from antagonists. Antagonists are ugly, with harsh voices and rude behaviour. They wear red and yellow. Antagonists are cruel
to the protagonists, or they act the buffoon and appear ridiculous. They motivate the audience to hate them. Protagonists are handsome with soft voices. They chant when they speak, behave reasonably and are kind to their enemies. They wear white and green, colours that reflect their virtues. In the Qur’ān, the face of the blessed on the Doomsday is said to be white, while green is the colour of the Prophet. In Islamic tradition, the archangel Gabriel has two green wings and the well-Preserved Tablet (lawh-e mahfūz, see below, Zeynab and Imām Huseyn) is made of green emerald. The good and bad behaviour of the two groups is used to instruct the spectators in the laws of religion. For instance, the antagonists are shown drinking wine, which is forbidden in Islam.

There is a repertoire of stylized gestures and props that allude to the historical setting. For instance, a player will raise his hand as a shade over his eyes, to indicate a hot, sunny day. Circling the stage several times is used to represent the distance between two places, and thus a change of scene, for instance from the plain of Karbalā to Damascus.

A bowl of water symbolizes the Euphrates, which the Umayyad troops prevent Imām Huseyn and his family from reaching to drink water. A shroud (kafan) is the symbol of death: when a player wears it, the audience knows that he will soon die as a martyr. When the shroud is spotted with red, the player is wounded. The audience is familiar with the symbolic meanings of the objects. They help the audience to transcend the borders of time and space and feel like real observers of the events of Karbalā.

**Audience Participation in the Ta’ziya**

The role of the spectators is also important. The spectators freely show their anger and hatred towards the antagonists by shouting at them and cursing them, and they show sympathy for the protagonists. They follow the director’s actions, indicating when the audience members should beat their chests or heads. The audience’s role begins with literally setting the scene before the performance. For instance, if the ta’ziya is to be performed in a closed place such as the courtyard of a house or in a tekiya, the audience will decorate the walls or carpet the ground. If the ta’ziya is to be performed in an open area, the audience will help the director to erect a temporary tekiya. Some people may donate props for the performance, others will undertake to distribute sweets or sherbet among the spectators.
The *ta’ziya* spectator has a complex symbolic role. He is both mourner for Imām Ḥuseyn, and his enemy. On the one hand, he is mourning and wailing for his Imām, but at the same time the spectators surround the players in a circular form, like Yazid’s army around Imām Ḥuseyn and his followers on the plain of Karbalā. The background knowledge of the spectators helps them to form a perfect mental image of the events of Karbalā.

By actively participating in the *ta’ziya*, the audience bridge the emotional gap that separates them from the real events of Karbalā. They react like real observers near the battlefield, who cannot help Imām Ḥuseyn and his family. They curse Šemr and Ibn al-Sa’d. They mourn, lament, and beat their heads and chests, showing their frustration at not being able to intervene. Chest beating (*sina-zani*) is a form of physical audience participation that heightens the identification of the audience with the *ta’ziya*. First, the director beats his chest, then the procession of mourners (or players) follows him, and then the audience imitates them. There is a harmonic interplay between the director, the players in the procession and the audience. Beating one’s hands over one’s head operates similarly: the director sits and initiates this, the procession of mourners and the audiences follow his actions. It could be said that the audience takes part in the *ta’ziya* performance as amateur players.

The active participation of the audience in the *ta’ziya* is not limited to the performance itself. As previously mentioned, before the performance, people help the director to arrange the space, decorating the walls or spreading carpets on the ground, or helping the director to erect a temporary *tekiya*. They also bring objects to be used during the performance; through these contributions they become participants. Every object related to *ta’ziya* is acceptable. During the first ten days of the month of Muḥarram, some people make vows to God to distribute sweets and sherbet among the spectators. The audience’s eating can be seen as a symbolic re-enactment of the family of Imām Ḥuseyn, eating their last remaining food during the siege and imprisonment. Those who participate in the *ta’ziya* in these ways can hope for Imām Ḥuseyn’s intercession on Judgement Day, and to receive God’s reward in the Hereafter.

Whether the *ta’ziya* is performed in an enclosed place such as the yard of a private house or in an open area such as a bazaar or street, the audience stands in a circle around the *ta’ziya* players. Standing in this way, they represent the enemies of Imām Ḥuseyn who surrounded him, while also representing the supporters of Imām Ḥuseyn who wished to be present and help him, but are unable to intervene. They show their emotions while remaining completely aware that the situation is non-realistic. They draw on their
background knowledge to enrich the image of the battle of Karbalā. They are reminded of, or learn about, religious prohibitions, beliefs and moral virtues, and see vices embodied in the antagonists.

**Zeynab in Ta’ziya**

The main focus of this study is the presentation of Zeynab, Imām Ḥuseyn’s sister. She was present at the battle of Karbalā, as part of the household of Imām Ḥuseyn. After the battle, the survivors were taken to Damascus, to the court of the Umayyad ruler Yazid. Along the way, when the captives arrived in Kūfa, Zeynab preached a sermon and called the people of Kūfa ‘infidels’ because they had invited Imām Ḥusayn to come, but then did not assist him in Karbalā. Zeynab preached another sermon at the court of Yazid, when the ruler boasted of his ancestors and claimed that this war was revenge for the death of his ancestors, killed by the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Here, Zeynab criticized Yazid as being of the same rank as his pagan ancestors.

Zeynab’s character traits deserve a profound study, but a general outline of her character, beliefs and behaviour can be derived from several examples of ta’ziya texts compiled by Ḥasan Šālehi Rād Darbandsari, in his Majālis-e ta’ziya. This is the collection used in this study. It is recent (2001), and attracted my attention because it is a complete collection of the main copies (sar-nuskha) used by the directors. In the various episodes in the Majālis-e ta’ziya, Zeynab is seen playing an effective part before and after the battle of Karbalā, so it is an appropriate example to take for this study.

In this collection, Zeynab appears as the archetype of Shiite women and as a mirror reflecting a constellation of Shiite beliefs. For instance, she submits herself to fate and God’s decree. She talks to God in different tones in various situations. Sometimes she complains about Yazid and his commanders and asks desperately for justice, at other times she describes the situation and patiently waits for God’s decision. A Shiite learns from Zeynab that belief in predestination and submission to God’s decision is fundamental, but she also shows the concept of free will. Like other members of Imām Ḥusayn’s family, Zeynab receives inspiration (elhām) from the divine source. She is aware of her fate and accepts her destiny without trying to change it. Zeynab is the archetype of sacrificial behaviour. She sacrifices her children to serve justice. She is also the archetype of a leader. She teaches her community how to protest against the tyrannies of the Umayyad caliph.
Zeynab’s role as a woman is emphasized by a crowd of women in the audience, who identify themselves with her.

The effect of Zeynab’s curses is emphasized in several episodes. For instance, after the tenth day (‘Āšūrā), Šemr takes the earring of Fāṭima, Imām Ḥuseyn’s daughter, against her will. She cries and Zeynab curses Šemr, asking the earth to take him. In a moment, Šemr is paralyzed, until Zeynab asks God to forgive him. Zeynab’s spiritual power is emphasized repeatedly. For instance, when Ibn al-Ziyād orders his soldiers to trample the bodies of the martyrs, Zeynab sends her servant, Feposição, to bring a lion to protect the bodies.

As an archetype of Shiite virtue, Zeynab is portrayed as a generous person. When she and her family, who are treated as prisoners of war, return to Medina, Zeynab gives her anklet to Bašir, a man who helped them during the journey. Imām Zeyn al-‘Ābedin follows Zeynab’s example and gives his turban, while Sakina, the daughter of Imām Ḥuseyn, gives her necklace to Bašir (184).

A prominent feature of Zeynab is her role as the preserver of precious objects that are believed to exempt the Shiites from punishment on the Day of Judgement. These objects are two teeth of the Prophet, the bloody turban of Imām ‘Ali, the torn liver of Imām Ḥasan, and the bloody robe of Imām Ḥuseyn. These objects are described as trusts (amānāt), given to Zeynab who, on her deathbed, gives them to her sister ‘Umm al-Kulṭūm. These objects symbolize the Shiite devotional tradition, reminding Shiites of injustices done by Sunnite Muslims. For instance, the bloody turban of Imām ‘Ali reminds a Shiite Muslim of the murder of ‘Ali.

In the ta’ziya texts, Zeynab is the saviour of the line of Shiite Imāms. After the battle of Karbalā, Imām Ḥuseyn’s son, Imām Zeyn al-‘Ābedin, was the last surviving member of the Prophet’s bloodline. When the prisoners were taken to the court, and Yazid saw Zeyn al-‘Ābedin, he ordered him to be killed. Zeynab rescued her nephew, by telling Yazid that if he wished to kill him, he would have to kill her as well. Yazid released Zeyn al-‘Ābedin and he returned to Medina with the other survivors from Imām Ḥuseyn’s household.

In what follows, I have focused on Zeynab’s relationship with several members of the family of the Prophet, beginning with her brother Imām Ḥuseyn. In the ta’ziya texts, their relationship is portrayed in connection with the events at Karbalā. Imām Ḥuseyn is so extremely dear to Zeynab that she offers her two sons to him. There is always a parallel between Imām Ḥuseyn and his sister Zeynab. For instance, both of them were aware of their fates at Karbalā: one fragment of text describes how they share the events
of Karbalā between themselves. Imām Ḥuseyn says that he has accepted his fate, and that he knows what is going to happen to his family, informing Zeynab about the bodies of the martyrs, the dagger wounds, and the shameless Yazid’s attack on the holy household. Zeynab tells Ḥuseyn about the events that were to follow the battle, elaborating on the enemy’s assault on the tents and her responsibility to take care of the household. In addition to a theological dimension concerning fate, these conversations rouse the audience to sympathize with Imām Ḥuseyn and Zeynab.

There is a splendid portrayal of the relation between Zeynab and Sakina, the daughter of Imām Ḥuseyn. Zeynab behaves like a mother, a supporter and a protector of Sakina. Zeynab sacrifices herself to protect Sakina from Yazid’s tyrannies. Another person who is portrayed in the ta’ziya texts in relation to Zeynab is the mother of Qāsem, the wife of Imām Ḥasan. Her son was killed in the battlefield. The close relation between her and Zeynab is described briefly, but sufficiently, to show that Zeynab is a leader whose words are accepted by Qāsem’s mother.

Zeynab’s protest against the antagonists is also described. The Umayyad caliph Yazid and his commanders Šemr, Ibn al-Ziyād and Ibn al-Sa’d are the most notorious enemies of the Prophet’s family. Šemr killed Imām Ḥuseyn while he was suffering from thirst, and beat on his severed head in the presence of Zeynab and other prisoners. After the battle, Yazid ordered his army to arrest the women and children and take them through a bazaar and to his court, without allowing them to cover their heads with veils. The issue of unveiling is a crucial one in Iranian history. Režā Shah (1925-1941), the founder of Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979), outlawed the veil (ḥejāb) in public in 1936, as part of a modernization plan for Iran.47 Zeynab does not fear Yazid’s commanders, talking to them in loud voice, cursing them, and reminding them of God’s justice.

The ta’ziya composers have transformed several historical facts. For instance, Sakina, the four-year-old daughter of Imām Ḥuseyn, died during the imprisonment, but in the ta’ziya she appears as a mature girl who is Zeynab’s companion. In the last part, we see how the events of Karbalā are influenced by Persian concepts. For instance, Imām Ḥuseyn has eponyms such as ‘the headless king’ (Shah-e bi-sar) and ‘the king of Karbalā’ (Shah-e karbalā). The term for kingship, and the ethic of kingship alluded to, draws on the Persian monarchial tradition. In the ta’ziya of ‘the Damascus bazaar,’ Ḥuseyn is referred to as ān Shah-e bā farr – that glorious king (130), but the ‘glory’ (farr) is a specific divinely-given quality associated only with ancient Persian kings.
Zeynab plays an important role in modern Iranian culture. After their conversion to Shiite Islam, Iranians elaborated on the role of Zeynab in the context of Imām Ḥuseyn’s martyrdom, taking her as a religious and social example. Beliefs and virtues are represented in her behaviour. Thus, many women follow her character as the archetype of an ideal woman. Zeynab is particularly present in Shiite Iran during the first ten days of the month of Muḥarram. Sometimes, she is remembered during the devotional rituals; at other times, preachers recite an elegy for the oppressions that she suffered. For instance, she is honoured in connection with the commemoration of the martyrdom of Imām ‘Ali. She is present in everyday life and in the hearts of Iranians. Every year, many Iranians travel to Syria to visit Zeynab’s shrine.

Notes

1 The term Imām refers to the leadership of the Shiite community after the death of the Prophet. See ‘The Concept of Imāma in Shiite Tradition’ in the present study.
2 The first date is in the Islamic lunar calendar, followed by the Western calendar, i.e. A.H. /A.D.
4 H.P. Schmidt, in Encyclopaedia Iranica, under Mithra, i. Mitra in Old Indian and Mithra in Old Iranian; W. Sundermann, in Encyclopaedia Iranica, under Mithra, iii. in Manicheism.
7 For further information on Āšūrā see M. Ayoub, in Encyclopaedia Iranica, under Āšūrā. For information about the 40th day (arba’in) after the death of Imām Ḥuseyn see M. Ayoub, in Encyclopaedia Iranica, under Arba’in. Šāleḥi Najafābādi in his Sahīd-e jāvid (The Eternal Martyr) discusses how Imām Ḥuseyn protested and how his martyrdom at the plain of Karbalā was a political act. Najafābādi observes the roots of the battle in the historical conflicts between the Umayyad dynasty (661-750) and the Prophet’s family. See N.Š. Najafābādi,

8 The term Āšūrā is derived from the Arabic number ‘ašar, meaning ten.

9 According to Shiites, Imām Ḥuseyn was martyred (šahid) in the battle of Karbalā. The term šahid means ‘being witness’ and ‘testifying witness.’ The term šahāda refers to the formula used to profess faith in Islam: ‘there is no God but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God.’ See D. Gimaret, in The Encyclopaedia of Islam (second edition), under Shahāda. E. Kohlberg, in The Encyclopaedia of Islam (second edition), under Shahid. See also A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, Martelaren: Van mystieke weg tot oorlogspad, Amsterdam: KNAW Press, 2009.


15 See J.T.P. de Bruijn, in The Encyclopaedia of Islam (second edition), under Muḥtasham-i Kāshānī.

16 See Zabih Allah Sařa and eir, in Encyclopaedia Iranica, under Hātef, Sayyed Ahmad Esfahānī.


18 Š. Humāyūnī, Ta’ziya va ta’ziya-khāni [Tehran]: čāpkhāna bist-o panjom šahrivar, [1354/1975], pp. 34-35; P.E. Losensky, in Encyclopaedia of Islam, under Waḵār.


21 Ibid., pp. 165-167.


23 Humāyūnī, Ta’ziya va ta’ziya-khāni, p. 22.


25 Ibid.

28 Ibid., p. 69.
29 Ibid., p. 89.
31 Ibid., pp. 39-41.
32 Ibid., p. 38.
33 Ibid., p. 44.
35 Zahrā is a title of Fāṭima, the Prophet’s daughter.
37 Šahrbānū is the daughter of Yazdgerd III, the last Sasanian king of Iran. She is the wife of Imām Ḥusayn. See M. Boyce, *Zoroastrians their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1979, p. 151.
38 Karbalā here is called Karb-o balā, meaning ‘affliction and calamity.’
39 For more examples see H. Šālehi Rād Darbandsari, *Majālis-e taʿziya*, pp. 54, 55, 62, 74, 75, 76.
40 ‘šahr-o bāzār burdan’, refers to showing slaves in the bazaar to be sold.
42 A. Schimmel, in *The Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Colour.
43 A. Morabia, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (second edition), under Lawn.
A Crisis of Succession

After the death of the Prophet Muḥammad (13/632) Muslims faced a major problem in relation to leadership of their community. The Sunnis, who are today the majority group, trace their tradition to those who denied the importance of a blood relationship between the elected Imām and the Prophet. They believed that the Imām, in the sense of the leader of the Muslims, could be chosen by consensus (ejmā') or acknowledged by the community. The Shiites trace their tradition to those who believed that the Prophet had chosen ‘Ali Ibn Abi Ṭālib’ as his successor, at Gādir Khumm, and that ‘Ali also had a superior claim, being the cousin of the Prophet and the husband of his daughter, Fāṭima.

Those of the first group, who had majority support among the powerful men of the Muslim community, appointed Abū Bakr. He was one of the first companions of the Prophet to be called the ‘Vicar of the Messenger of God’ (khalīfa rasūl Allāh). After Abū Bakr two other companions of the Prophet, ‘Umar and ‘Uthmān, were selected to lead the Muslim community. Only after them did ‘Ali assume the leadership, as the fourth caliph. He led the Muslim community for just five years. When he was murdered (in 41/661), the Sunnite community accepted the leadership of Mu‘āwiya, even though he was not among the first companions of the Prophet. He was accepted for the sake of unity. Mu‘āwiya died in 680 but, before his death, he took the oath of allegiance from several tribes to choose his son Yazid as the caliph. Few refused to give the oath of allegiance to Yazid. According to the Shiites, Yazid drank wine and behaved immorally. Sunnites make a distinction between the first four caliphs, known as the rightly guided caliphs (rāsidūn), who completely followed the Sunna, and whose just acts and decisions have guided the community ever since, and the later caliphs such as Mu‘āwiya and Yazid who are considered mere worldly rulers. Obe-


dience to them is justified by the importance of maintaining the internal peace of the Muslim community.

The Shiites, however, believed in the leadership of the Muslim community by the descendents of Imām ʿAli. After his death, his two sons, first Ḥasan and then Ḥuseyn, were the Shiite Imāms, and the Imāmate was then handed down from father to son. The elder son Hasan was deprived of the caliphate by Muʿāwiya and seems to have been politically inactive. It is the life and tragic death of the second son, and third Imām, Ḥuseyn, which is the subject of taʿziya.

The Martyrdom of Imām Ḥuseyn

After the death of Muʿāwiya in Damascus, the Shiites of Kūfa wrote several letters to Imām Ḥuseyn, inviting him to their city to lead them. Imām Ḥuseyn sent his uncle Muslim Ibn al-ʿAqil Ibn Abi Ṭālib to investigate the situation in Kūfa. Muslim Ibn al-ʿAqil took the oath of allegiance from the people of Kūfa. Then he sent a letter to Imām Ḥuseyn confirming what the Kufians had written. When Ibn Ziyād, the governor of Kūfa, found out about the revolt of the people of Kūfa, he arrested Muslim Ibn al-ʿAqil and executed him. When Imām Ḥuseyn received Muslim Ibn al-ʿAqil’s letter (almost 17 days after his death), he set out from Medina to Kūfa with a small group of followers and his household, but he never reached Kūfa. The army of Yazid surrounded them on the plain of Karbalā near the Euphrates, but blocked their access to water. ʿUmar Ibn al-Saʿd, ʿUbaydullah’s commander, offered two options to Imām Ḥuseyn: to give an oath of allegiance to Yazid, or to fight Yazid’s army. The negotiation between Imām Ḥuseyn and the Yazid’s commanders lasted nine days, during which Ḥuseyn and his followers suffered from thirst and hunger. Abu al-Faḍl al-ʿAbbās, the half brother of Imām Ḥuseyn, could not tolerate the crying of the children, and galloped to the Euphrates several times to bring some water for them, but he was killed. On the tenth day of the month of Muḥarram in 60/680, the battle started: it lasted one day. Imām Ḥuseyn and his men were killed while suffering from thirst and hunger. In taʿziya performances, the thirst of Ḥuseyn and his family is elaborated to fan the audience’s emotions. To give one example, ʿAlī Aṣgar was Ḥuseyn’s six-month old child, who died of thirst. When Imām Ḥuseyn asked for a sip of water for him, a man from the tribe of Banū ʿAsad shot an arrow at the throat of the infant and killed him.
During the war, several warriors from Yazid’s army joined Imām Ḥuseyn and fought to the death. One famous ta’ziya episode is the story of Hurr Ibn al-Riyāhi, who was Ibn al-Ziyād’s commander. He joined Imām Ḥuseyn during the fight.

During the battle of Karbalā, all the men were killed except ‘Ali Ibn al-Ḥuseyn, later called Imām Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin. It is said that he was extremely ill and could not join the fight, or that he had to live in order to guarantee the line of the Shiite Imāms. After the battle, the survivors from Imām Ḥuseyn’s household were arrested and taken to Yazid’s court in Damascus (a distance of some 180 kilometres), along with the severed heads of the martyrs mounted on lances. According to the Shiites, Yazid treated the prisoners harshly, not even sparing the severed heads. He humiliated the prisoners and even struck the lips of the severed head of Imām Ḥuseyn with his staff. Zeynab protested and saved the life of Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin. After several days, during which the four-year-old daughter of Imām Ḥuseyn died, the prisoners were released and returned to Medina.

The Concept of Imāma in Shiīte Tradition

Imāmī theologians taught that there must always be an Imām, designated by the Prophet (in the case of ‘Ali) or the previous Imām. Under the leadership of Imām Ja’far al-Ṣādiq (d.148/765), the Shiite doctrine of the Imāmate crystallized. The Imām’s station was raised almost to the level of prophethood, except that the Imām did not have a Holy Book.4

The Shiite Muslims later divided into several branches. Among these are the Zaydiyya, the Imāmīyya or ‘twelver’ Shiites, and the Ismā’iliyya. The Imāmīyya, the majority Shiite sect in Iran today, believe that the twelfth Imām, a child, was supernaturally concealed after the death of the eleventh Imām: he is still alive today and is expected to return before the end of the world.5 One of the fundamental doctrines of the Imāmīyya is that the Imām is protected from sin and error (maṣūm). If the Imām fears for his own safety or for that of his community, he has to practice dissimulation (taqqiya).6

According to Shiite readings, the Qur’ān addresses the Imām as ‘the light of God,’ and his ‘witness’ (šāhed) among mankind. The Imāms are the ‘vicegerents’ (khulafā’) of God on earth. They have the knowledge of the Qur’ān, and of the past and present. Indeed, their knowledge is the same as the knowledge of the Prophet. The Imāms are inspired by angels, although
unlike the Prophet they cannot see the angels. For the community, disobey-
ing the Imām is equal to disobeying the prophet. 

In the ta’ziya texts, the Imām Ḥuseyn has the same characteristics as the Prophet. He advises Šemr, Yazid’s commander, that it would be better for him to join Imām Ḥuseyn. He claims to be one who reveals the secrets of the Torah to Jewish priests; who showed Moses the path, because he sees the manifestation of the light. Then he warns Šemr of the punishment (‘azāb) that he will receive in the grave (gūr) and on the day of Resurrection (10). In the above episode, Imām Ḥuseyn shows that his knowledge is equal to the knowledge of the prophets. In the ta’ziya texts, even Imām Ḥuseyn’s enemies regret his death. For instance, Šemr says that they have shot with an arrow a person whose heart derives inspiration from the divine source (sandūq-e ‘elm-e vahi-ye khudā) (171).

Several other characteristics are attributed to Imām Ḥuseyn. For instance, he is the locus of the lights of divine guidance (mażhar-e anvār-e hedāyat) (200), an intermediary between God and the people, and he guides Shiite Muslims. Similarly, in some passages, Zeynab (25) and Batūl (the title of Fāṭima) (16, 34, 241) are shown as able to intercede on behalf of the Shiite Muslims on the Day of Judgement. In the following examples we see that Imām Ḥuseyn sacrificed himself for the salvation of the Shiites. In other words, he accepted that he would see his family and followers killed and would himself be drowned in blood, for the sake of the Shiite community. Šemr, the archetype of a heartless enemy and the murderer of Imām Ḥuseyn, reports that when he was about to kill Imām Ḥuseyn, the Imām prayed to God that he would forgive the sins of the Muslims. Šemr says,

\[
\text{be zulmhā ke be jānam resid khursandam}
\text{be piš-e dida buridend sar ze farzandam}
\text{režā šudam ke be khūn ḡūtavar šavad qaddam}
\text{be šart-e ān ke bebakhsī be ʿummat-e jaddam (174).}
\]

The tyranny I have suffered, I accept:
They severed the heads of my children before my eyes.
I am content, that my body should be drowned in blood,
On condition, that you forgive the followers of my grandfather
(Muḥammad) (174).

In the ta’ziya texts, the Imām is respected by the angels. For instance, Imām Ḥuseyn in his childhood had such dignity that the angels around the throne
of God salute him (79). In the scene set in the Damascus bazaar, the young Imām Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin boasts about the dignity of his family before Yazid. He says that a carpet spread in their portico is the most exalted throne, that all who breathe (lit., all who eat) are their guests, that natural forces such as clouds, rain and wind obey their orders. He is the heir of the King of Religion [Imām Ḥuseyn] (127).

During her imprisonment in the ruins in Damascus, Zeynab says:

jalāl-o rafʿat-e mā rā khudā-ye ālamīyān
nemūda yād be ʿezzat be sūra-ye Qurʿān (144).

For honour’s sake, the Lord of the Worlds,
Has recalled our glory and dignity in a chapter in the Qurʿān (144).

In the taʿziya, Yazid too calls Imām Ḥuseyn the beloved of the Lord of the two worlds (ʿazīz-e khāṣ-e rabb-o al-ʿālameyn) (162).

Another important feature relating to the Shiite concept of leadership (Imāma) is that Shiites have to obey their Imām. When the Imām Ḥuseyn’s family are freed, they return to Medina. Bašir is the leader of their caravan. When they arrive near Medina, Bašir says to Imām Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin,

dardhā-ye hama darmān az tu
ḥukm hukm-e tu-vo farmān az tu (182).

You are the cure for all people’s pains,
It is yours to judge, and yours to give orders (182).

Such passages remind the audience that they have to obey the Imām, and turn to him because he heals their grief.

**Martyrdom (Šahādat)**

The term martyr (šahid) literally means ‘a witness,’ referring to a person who is slain in the path of God. Šahid is a Qurʾānic term and a divine name. Several verses, such as 3/140 and 4/69, emphasize the rank and dignity of martyrs in the eyes of God. According to the Qurʾānic statements, the šuhadā are alive (ahyā). The term šahādat (the station of a martyr) summons images of the rewards that a šahid receives in paradise. For instance, he is among the
blessed, his intercession for 70 members of his family will be accepted, and he does not suffer the torments of the grave.\(^8\)

According to both Sunnite and Shiite traditions, the body of a šahid does not have to be ritually washed (ġusl) before burial, because his martyrdom itself has cleansed the ritual impurity of dead things. He is buried in his own clothes, because the blood on them is a testimony to his martyrdom.\(^9\) Death in battle against infidels guarantees forgiveness and rewards from God in the Hereafter. The martyr has sacrificed his life, but receives a higher rank after death. In the early Islamic period, mothers whose children had been martyred in the battlefield did not mourn and did not organize a mourning service for them. This was also practised during the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and during the war between Iran and Iraq (1980-88).\(^10\)

Imām Ḥuseyn is called the master of the martyrs (seyed al-šuhadā‘): he was killed in the battle of Karbalā, fighting to preserve the religion of God. In paradise, he is the host for the other martyrs, who are called his guests. A person who fights in the path of God hopes to see his master after death. In the taʿziya texts, when Zeynab sends her two sons to the battlefield, she states: ’So that you may both be the guests of my Ḥuseyn (ke hastid har du mehmān-e Ḥuseynam)’ (24).

In the taʿziya texts, the concept of martyrdom is central, and is vividly depicted. The darkness of death is turned into the bright start of a new life beside the blessed saints in paradise. Death in the path of God is a medium through which the martyr receives grace (fayẓ) emanating from God. After the death of her brother, Zeynab tells Ibn-e Ziyād that God has given an emanation of His grace to Ḥuseyn through the cup of martyrdom (fayẓ az jām-e šahādat be Ḥuseyn dād khudā) (84). Martyrdom is likened to a cup of wine: by drinking it the martyr imbibes an effusion (fayẓ) of grace from God.

The eminent medieval mystic Šihāb al-Din Suhrawardī (d.587/1191) presents a descending hierarchy of emanation from God, in which each entity receives the emanation from its superior entity, which is created by God. The lower entities are subordinate to the higher ones. The first medium of grace is universal intellect and the lowest is man. Love connects the entities together and it is love for the Creator that motives man to seek union with God, who is the origin of emanation.\(^11\) The Most Holy Emanation (al-fayẓ al-aqdas) is a reference to those entities that were in the presence of God before they entered the world. The Holy Emanation (al-fayẓ al-mugaddas) is the manifestation of divine qualities in the world, in the form of a creature.\(^12\) These creatures act as a medium between God and mankind; they
receive the emanation of grace from God and bestow it to other creatures. However, death in the path of God allows the martyr to receive the grace emanating from God directly.

In the ta’ziya texts there is an episode in which ‘Abd al-Allāh Ibn al-‘Afif, a follower of Imām ‘Ali who had lost his eyes in the battles of Jamal and Seffin, protests against Ibn al-Ziyād. ‘Abd al-Allāh is present at the court of Ibn al-Ziyād when the survivors of Imām Ḥuseyn’s household are brought in. When Ibn al-Ziyād strikes the lips and teeth of Imām Ḥuseyn’s severed head, ‘Abd al-Allāh condemns him and Ibn al-Ziyād orders the executioner to kill him.13 ‘Abd al-Allāh is happy and says, ‘Why should I be frightened, because I am to be a martyr in the path of God’ (če tarsi bāšadam zirā šahid-e rāh-e ḡaq gardam) (92). ‘Abd al-Allāh prays to God: ‘Martyrdom is to be my part, at the hand of the worst enemy’ (šahādat šud našīb-e man be dast-e badtarin dušman) (92). Belief in the concept of martyrdom eliminates the fear of death, and one killed by the enemy of religion will be rewarded in the Hereafter.

Another image, one which covers the fear of death with an attractive worldly desire, is the comparison of the martyr to a bridegroom. Marriage is associated with joy. The ‘marriage’ of a martyr will be on the Day of Judgment when he receives his reward. In the ta’ziya, when Zeynab sends her sons (Muḥammad and ‘Awn) to the battlefield to help her brother, she says to Muḥammad, ‘I wish I could see your wedding’ (delam mikhāst tā gardi tu dāmād) (17). He answers, ‘My wedding will be on the Day of Judgement’ (‘arūsiyam buvad dar rūz-e maḥšar) (17). When Zeynab asks her son what she should say to his father about their impending martyrdom, Muḥammad says, ‘Tell him that they were married at Karbalā’ (begū dar Karbalā gaštand dāmād) (18). Another example is the death of Qāsem, a young bridegroom who never consummated his marriage, and who is referred to as the martyr-groom. During the tragic events of Karbalā he married Fāṭima, the daughter of Imām Ḥuseyn, at the latter’s suggestion. After the battle, Zeynab goes to the battlefield, and when she recognizes Qāsem’s dead body, she says, ‘May his marriage be blessed’ (buvad dāmādi-ye Qāsem mubārak) (22). Imām Zeyn al-‘Ābedin responds, ‘May his festive clothes be blessed’ (lebās-e šādiy-e Qāsem mubārak) (22), likening his bloodstained shroud to the fine clothes put on for a festive occasion. Qāsem’s wife, Fāṭima, in her loneliness and helplessness, talks with her husband as a bridegroom just married (tāza dāmād): ‘I greet you, my sorrowful new groom, O! I greet you’ (as-salām ey tāza-dāmād-e ǧaminam as-salām) (103).
The shroud (*kafan*) is compared to the groom's wedding clothes (*lebās-e dāmādi*). When Zeynab sends her two sons to the battlefield, she first prepares their shrouds, saying:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{kafan az bahr-e ṭeflānam buridam} \\
\text{vali rakht-e ʿarūsi būd inhā} \\
\text{kafan rakht-e ʿarūsi gašt hālā (15).}
\end{align*}
\]

I am making shrouds for my children,  
but these were to be their wedding clothes:  
Now the shroud is a wedding dress (15).

Another image of the martyr is as a 'rose all in petals' (*gul-e parpar*), referring to a rose that has been torn apart, petal by petal. When Zeynab recognizes her brother in the battlefield among the dead bodies, she says, 'I guess this scattered rose is Ḥuseyn' (*gamānam in gul-e par par Ḥuseyn ast*) (22). The metaphor of a rose whose petals are torn apart is a fitting image, emphasizing how the bodies of Huseyn and his followers were cut to pieces. The image was widely used for soldiers killed in the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88). For instance, this exclamation was used, 'From where is this torn rose coming? / It is returning from Karb-o-bala' (*in gul-e par par ze kujā āmada/ az safar-e karb-o balā āmada*). War cemeteries were named the flower gardens of the martyrs (*gulzār-e šuhadā*).

### Notes

2. When the Prophet Muḥammad returned from his farewell pilgrimage (*ḥajat al-vedā*) he stopped at Gādir Khumm and said to his companions, 'He for whom I am the mawlā (the patron), for him ‘Ali is also the mawlā (man kuntu mawlāhu fa-ʿAli mawlāhu)’. For further information see L. Veccia Valieri, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (second edition), under *Ghadīr Khumm*.
3. For information on Abu al-Fazl al-ʿAbbās see J. Calmard, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under *Abbas ibn B. ‘Ali ibn Abū Ṭāleb*.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 E. Kohlberg, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (second edition), under Shahīd.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
Eschatology

Islamic Eschatology

The events that precede the Last Day (yawm al-ākher) are an important theme in the Qurʾān. The Last Day is indicated with terms such as ‘the day of resurrection’ (yawm al-qiyāma) and ‘the day of judgement’ (yawm al-din).1 Several verses warn people of the day of resurrection: a day that is already specified but is not known to men, including the Prophet. God is the only one who knows it. However, the Qurʾān refers to several natural apocalyptic signs as preludes of the Last Day. For example:

When the sun will be darkened, when the stars will be thrown down, when the mountains will be set moving, when the ten-month pregnant camels will be neglected […] then will a soul know what it has produced (81/1-14).2

These are among several cosmic events that, according to the traditional account, will follow the first blast of the trumpet on the Last Day. Upon the first blast of the trumpet, all creatures will die and on the second blast all creatures will rise. All of them, including humans, jinn and animals will gather (hašr). This is the time when each man’s deeds will be counted (hesāb). Each man receives the book that records his deeds and decisions in the physical world. People who acted morally will be given their book in their right hand, while those who acted immorally will be given their book in their left hand.3 In other words, man is responsible for his deeds and decisions in this world and will be judged or ‘weighed’ (mizān) by God on the Last Day. The physical world is the place of action and the Hereafter is the place of recompense for actions.4 Those who performed good deeds will enter paradise (behešt). Belief in the Last Day is, with belief in God and his Messengers, one of the most important actions we can perform.
The abode of the evil-doers is hell (jahannam). The kāfar, the people who do not believe in God and the Last Day and who do not submit to the religion of God, will fall into hell. On the Last Day, the evil-doers repent and ask God for the chance to return to the world and perform good deeds. According to the Qur‘ān, the evil-doers have to pass along a path (al-ṣirāt) (Q.37/23-24), which, for people who do not have faith and have not performed good deeds, will be a bridge sharper than a sword and thinner than a hair.5

People whose final place is hell are characterized as those who believe neither in God, nor in the Hereafter, who stray from the path of religion. In the Qur‘ān, hell has names such as jahannam (the purgatorial hell for the Muslims), laza (blazing fire for Christians), al-hutāmah (the intense fire for the Jews), sa‘ir (a flaming fire for Sabians), saqar (a scorching fire for Zoroastrians), al-jahim (a huge hot for idolators) and hāwiya (bottomless pit for the hypocrites).6 On the Last Day, sinners fall into the fire; they drink from the tree of Zaqqūm7 (Q.37/42-3), they suffer tortures such as drinking fiercely boiling water (Q.55/44), and are bound together in chains. When the evil-doers enter hell, a voice says: ‘Seize him and drag him into the depths of the chastisement of jahannam, then pour out boiling water over his head’ (Q.11/109).8 Such images of apocalyptic upheavals, an exacting judgement and terrible punishment, are far from reassuring, but a martyr (ṣahid) in the cause of Islam is assured of entering paradise. They ‘will rejoice in God’s bounty and blessing.’9 The Qur‘ān attributes several characteristics to the dwellers of paradise: they have believed in God and observed the religious laws, done good deeds such as feeding the poor and orphans, and have helped others for the sake of God. They receive their rewards in paradise, a garden where there is no bitter cold and where rivers of water, milk, wine and honey flow. The inhabitants of paradise may drink freely from the rivers. They are adorned with gold and clothed with fine silk robes, and black-eyed beautiful virgins (huris) serve them.10

Another important feature of Qur‘ānic eschatology is the concept of intercession (ṣefā‘āt). In general, God is shown warning that no-one can protect sinners from punishment: they are all responsible for their deeds and acts. But there are several exceptions to this: some beings, such as angels (Q.53/26), true witnesses (Q.43/86), and those who have made a covenant with God (Q.19/87) are allowed to intercede. The Qur‘ān contains no direct reference to the intercession of the Prophet Muḥammad, but this role is given to him by tradition.11
**Eschatology in the Ta’ziya Texts**

The ta’ziya texts use several Persian and Arabic synonyms for the Last Day (ākherat), such as mahšar (a place of assembly, the day of judgement), rūz-e āraṣāt (the day of presence in the Court), rūz-e bāz-pasin (the day that one brings back what he earns in the physical world, Hereafter), rastākhiz (the day of resurrection), rūz-e hesāb (the day of counting ‘judgement’), rūz-e jazā (the day of punishment), qiyāmat (the day of resurrection), and rūz-e našūr (the day of resurrection). The mentioned terms indicate a heightened sensitivity to the Last Day, which overshadows the present action. They remind the audience that evil-doers will be punished in the Hereafter. On the Last Day their apologies will not be accepted and they cannot delay their punishment. Yet, the grace of God might help the evil-doers. For instance, in the ta’ziya of Yazid’s Penitence (ta’ziya pašimān šudan-e Yazid), Yazid’s wife Hendeh tells him that God may have mercy on him (168). The mercy of God is conditional: if Yazid repents and apologizes to Imām Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin, and if the Imām accepts his apology, God will show mercy. She says,

*eṭ Yazid biyā tark-e rūsiyāhi kun be nazd-e ḥaζrat-e Sajjādāz ‘uzrkhāhi kun [...] ke balka čāre-ye dard-e tu gardad ey bi-din khudāy rāhm kunad bar tu rūz-e bāzpasin (168).*

O! Yazid, cease blackening your own face Apologize before his holiness, the one who bows in prayer, Imām Perhaps this will cure your pain, O godless one, God will show mercy to you on the Last Day (168).

Paradise and hell are important features of the ta’ziya texts. They emphasize the concept of hell to highlight the punishments that the Umayyad caliph and his army will suffer. Terms such as dūzakh and saqar refer to the hell where unbelievers are to be punished. The sin of infidelity (kufr) is associated with the main antagonists: Yazid and his commanders’ Šemr, Ibn al-Ziyād and Ibn al-Sa’d. Their army is also called the infidel army (sepāh-e kufr) (63, 89, 102, 170). Not only the audience, but also the antagonists know they will be punished. Ibn al-Ziyād, for example, tells his servants that his oppression of the household of Imām Ḥuseyn is a deed that will be counted on the threshold of hell (dūzakh):
O my servants! Our deeds will be counted on the threshold of hell (75).

In the ta’ziya texts the Prophet and his daughter Fāṭima will, on the Last Day, question the antagonists about their unjust behaviour towards Imām Ḥuseyn and his household. In one episode, the tyrant Ibn al-Ziyād orders that Mukhtār, who is one of the Shiites imprisoned for his faithfulness to Imām Ḥuseyn, should be brought to the court. When Mukhtār enters the court and sees the condition of the Imām Ḥuseyn’s family and followers there, he damns Ibn al-Ziyād and warns him that on the Last Day he will answer to God, the Prophet and Fāṭima. He states,

I have no idea what you will say in answer to God
What will you answer to Fāṭima, the embodiment of virtue and femininity? What will you answer to Muḥammad at the last judgement? O libertine, less than a dog, how will you answer? (78)

In the ta’ziya texts the most common torture that the antagonists will suffer in hell is falling into the fire. For example, in the ta’ziya ‘entering the place of execution’ (majles-e ta’ziya vurūd-e be qatlghāh), Zeynab damns Šemr and prays to God:

O! God, burn him in hell Because he is the cause of the death of orphans (25).

Zeynab believes that the fire of hell is not enough for the punishment of Šemr. She states,

O my servants! Our deeds will be counted on the threshold of hell (75).
Because of flaming lamentations, I know
That the fire of hell is not enough [for your punishment] (106).

Another feature of the punishment of unbelievers and oppressors in hell
is dragging them to the lowest level (darakāt). The evil-doers who fall into
hell will be deprived of the mercy of God. He damns (laʾn) them constantly
for eternity. In one episode, Yazid sees the Prophet in a dream, ordering the
archangel Gabriel to pull him (Yazid) to the lowest level. Gabriel then orders
the angel of hell (malak-e dūzakh) to take him down (157-158).

The Taʿziya Texts

The taʿziya texts are composed in verse, in simple language that is close to
the language of ordinary people. The composers do not use many literary
figures, difficult expressions and allusions. Therefore, the texts are under-
standable for all walks of life. Taʿziya is written to be performed, not to
be read silently. The manuscripts of the texts of taʿziya were recorded in
the pamphlet (daftar). Humāyūni quotes the historian Muhammad Muḥit
Ṭaḥṣībāʾi (d.1988) who saw a dated text that had survived from the Ṣafavid
period (1501-1722) and the date was mentioned twice in a single page. Such
information is valuable, offering us insights into the way texts interacted
with oral performative traditions such as Taʿziya. Humāyūni refers to a man-
uscript entitled ‘jung-e taʿziya’ (A Collection of Taʿziya), which has a table
of contents that contains useful information about the manuscript, such as
the names of players and the instruments that are needed for taʿziya perfor-
mance. Humāyūni informs the reader that the first collection of taʿziya was
published in 1332/1953, entitled Sargodhašt-e mūsiqi-ye Irān (the Narrative
of the Music of Iran) by Rūḥ Allāh Khāleqi. The taʿziya metre changes, and
there are sections without metre, according to the needs of the subject mat-
ter, the specific message intended for the audience or the emotional effect
that is sought. Taʿziya composers are mostly anonymous, because they seek
no worldly reward; they just want to gain ‘celestial merit.’ If a composer
wishes to mention his name, he places it at the end of the script in a very
modest way. Most taʿziya composers have written several parts of a taʿziya
and completed their works using the poems written by classical Persian po-
ets. Several authors have produced taʿziya by bringing together a collection
of taʿziya poems. For instance, the Rawżat al-ṣuhadā (the Garden of Martyrs)
by Ḥuseyn Wāʾiz Kāšīfī has been used.
Tracing the authors of *ta’ziya* is very difficult because, on the whole, they remain anonymous and so searching for the place of their birth or uncovering something about the way they lived is almost impossible.19

Each *ta’ziya* has several manuscripts (*nuskha*). The term *nuskha* is commonly used for medieval literary manuscripts, but here the term conveys two meanings. Firstly, it refers to the copies that each player takes to read his role. The *nuskha* is a long narrow paper, usually 10 cm wide and of varying length. Secondly, the term is used for the main copy (*nuskha-ye asli* or *sar-nuskha*), a scroll that the *ta’ziya* director or *ta’ziya* gardān assembles, to coordinate the copies of individual players. It shows the prompts of the players and a few words of the text of each speech. The director uses this to guide the players, by pointing to the player who is to speak or act.20 He uses gestures to direct their performance. This requires a close relationship and understanding between the *ta’ziya* director and each player.

There are about a hundred episodes dealt with in the *ta’ziya* plays, according to Humāyūni.21 The number attests to the popularity of *ta’ziya* in Iran. The subject matter of most *ta’ziyas* is the martyrdom of Imām Ḥuseyn himself, but other parts of the Karbalā cycle are also portrayed and, more rarely, other Shiite topics. In the Karbalā cycle, there is a *ta’ziya* for Ḥurr al-Riyāḥi, Ibn al-Ziyād’s commander who joins Imām Ḥuseyn during the battle. There is another *ta’ziya* for ‘the Sons of Muslim ibn al-’Aqil,’ Imam Ḥuseyn’s cousin and the husband of his sister Ruqeya. Muslim ibn al-’Aqil is killed at Kūfa and, after his death, Hāreth, who serves Yazid, arrests his sons and kills them. The *ta’ziya* on the death of Qāsem is one of the most popular. He is the nephew of Imām Ḥuseyn. Qāsem marries Imām Ḥuseyn’s daughter Fāṭima at Karbalā, with the Imām’s permission. The marriage is never consummated because Qāsem goes to battle and is killed. Among the other *ta’ziyas* in the Karbalā cycle are ‘the Martyrdom of Zeynab’s Sons,’ ‘the Death of her Holiness Zeynab,’ and ‘the Rebellion of Mukhtār.’ Among the other Shiite devotional *ta’ziyas* are those on ‘the Martyrdom of his Holiness ‘Ali’ (the first Imām, murdered by Ibn al-Muljam in 661), ‘the Death of the Prophet,’ and ‘the Monastery of Širin,’ also known as the *ta’ziya* on ‘the Monastery of the Monk’ or ‘the Monastery of the Foreigners.’ Širin was a faithful servant of Zeynab. After the battle, the people of Imām Ḥuseyn’s household were imprisoned and taken from town to town. They arrived, hungry and thirsty, at a monastery. Širin entered the monastery and asked for food and water. The Christian priest, whom Jesus had warned about the events of Karbalā in a dream, converts to Islam and marries Širin.22 The *ta’ziya* known as ‘the Throne of Solomon’
or 'the Throne of Belqeyss' recounts the marriage of the Prophet Solomon and Belqeyss, Queen of Sheba.

**Time and Setting as the Background of the Events**

Time and setting are two important elements in the *ta’ziya* texts. Time as a narrative element does not refer to the actual time that the event occurred. The narrator repeats the events and refers to them constantly in order to construct the time of a narration. The actual date of the event of Karbalā is the year 60/680 and the negotiation between Imām Ḥuseyn and the commanders of Yazid lasted nine days, from the first to the ninth of Muḥarram. Imām Ḥuseyn would not acknowledge the legitimacy of Yazid as Umayyad caliph, so, on the tenth of Muḥarram they started to fight, and the battle lasted one day. The events of the last day (tenth of Muḥarram), and of the night before it, are presented as taking place over a very long period. The *ta’ziya* composers have employed references to time and setting to intensify their portrayal of the events.

Time and setting motivate the emotions of the spectators. They allow the audience to imagine themselves under the same conditions that Imām Ḥuseyn and his family were facing. For instance, Zeynab says to the audience, 'O Muslims! Last night Ḥuseyn did not sleep because he was guarding me, he walked around the tents to protect his family' (9). The image is very close to the audience: it is how they would act if their children were in danger. Another image that elicits an emotional response from the audience is the loneliness of Imām Ḥuseyn on the battlefield. Zeynab’s son ‘Awn says to his brother that Ḥuseyn’s army has now gone, he and Zeynab are facing the enemy alone (10). The image encourages the audience to sympathize with Imām Ḥuseyn, even if the assistance they can offer is restricted to raising their voices.

The actual setting of the event of ‘Āšūrā is the plain of Karbalā. The *ta’ziya* composers employ this in order to elaborate the contrast between the protagonists and antagonists. The close relationship between the setting and the players is a matter of great importance. In other words, the setting leads the characters to behave in a certain manner. Constant reference to the plain of Karbalā causes an antithetical sense in the audience. Certain settings are loaded with emotional significance. The battlefield is not only the place of the protagonists’ heroism in battle; it is where the heads of the dead are put on lances (55), and their bodies are trampled by the horses of
The Holy Drama

the enemy (25). The focus of light and dark in one setting intensifies the hatred of the audience for the Umayyad caliph and his commanders.

The Theme of Day

In the ta'ziya, day is the time to assist Ḥuseyn in the battlefield. For instance, when Zeynab notices that her brother is alone on the battlefield, she sends her two young sons to assist him. She says, ‘Today is the time for the one who holds the stirrup’ \((\text{kunūn vaqt-e jelowdāri-st emrūz})\) (15), meaning, it is time for the lesser characters to act. Then, she adds, ‘Today is the day to assist’ \((\text{ke hengām-e madad-kārist emrūz})\) (15). ‘Day’ in these expressions does not refer to the day of the battle alone; it conveys a general attitude, reminding both the followers of Ḥuseyn (and the audience) to assist him. The repetition of the word ‘today’ \((\text{emrūz})\) emphasizes the urgency of the fight against injustice. In the ta'ziya texts, ‘day’ is a time when the tyrannies and oppressions of Imām Ḥuseyn's enemy are seen. On the day of the battle, Imām Ḥuseyn asks Ibn-e Sa'd whether he will fight against the Imām or not. He answers, ‘Yes: today I will fight with him with malice’ \((9)\). Terms such as today \((\text{emrūz})\) and yesterday \((\text{dirūz})\) refer to the chain of events that show the unjust behaviour of the Umayyad caliph towards Imām Ḥuseyn's family.

When Ruqeya, Imām Ḥuseyn's daughter, dies in the ruins in Damascus, Zeynab tells Imām Zeyn al-Ābedin, ‘Yesterday Ruqeya told me that there is no one in the city of Damascus as hungry as she’ \((133)\). The term \(\text{dirūz}\) does not refer to an exact date. It shows that during the imprisonment period Ruqeya was always hungry.

In one episode, Zeynab remembers the time when they entered the city of Damascus, where Ruqeya's hands were tied with her hair and she was wandering around while calling her aunt. The girls of the city came to watch her \(\text{day and night}\) \((150)\). The time reference emphasizes Ruqeya's pitiful state. Another reference to ‘day’ is the moment Hendeh, Yazid's wife, and previously Zeynab's slave girl, goes to the ruins where Zeynab and other members of Ḥuseyn's family are imprisoned. She recognizes Zeynab and becomes ashamed of herself. Here Zeynab says,

\[\text{khuš ān rūzi ke būd āqat, Hendeh} \]
\[\text{be nazd-e mā budy ma'vāt Hendeh}\] \((120)\).
How good was the day when he [Imām Ḥuseyn] was your master, Hendeh
When you were settled next to me, Hendeh (120).

Again, the reference is not to an actual ‘day,’ but rather to the time when her
brother was alive and people honoured them as the Prophet’s family. In such
references, Zeynab misses her family’s past glory. For the Umayyad caliph
and his family, ‘day’ is the time of their unfair victory on the battlefield and
the time of their pleasure. For instance, when Hendeh goes to the ruins to
see the prisoners, it appears in the ta‘ziya texts that gloating over foreign
prisoners was an amusement in the household of Yazid. Hendeh says to her
niece, ‘O my dear! Come to see who these prisoners are’ (119).

Another aspect of the day is the times of prayer. After the battle, Sakina,
the daughter of Imām Ḥuseyn, does not see her father at the time for noon
prayers. She remembers that her father used to hold her after the prayers
(41). The reference to the time marks how far we have gone through the day
of the battle. The afternoon is important because of the heat and thirst the
protagonists suffered.

Another episode, in which time is used significantly, relates to the dream
of a Shiite believer called ‘Abd al-Allāh, who is not at Karbalā. On a certain
day, he finds his heart so restless that he retires to bed. In his dream, a series
of four messengers tell of the events of Karbalā and the fate of the survivors
(96). ‘Abd al-Allāh laments Ḥuseyn’s death with his family. Their mourn-
ing is the prototype of the ta‘ziya, and the ‘true dream’ justifies the practice.

The Theme of Night

Night is another narrative element used as background and as actual time in
the ta‘ziya texts. Normally associated with rest and calmness, in ta‘ziya it is
the time of unease, restlessness and sorrow for Imām Ḥuseyn’s family. Night
is used as a cover to hide the grief of the prisoners. When Zeynab dresses
her sons in their shrouds (kafān) to send them to the battlefield, she says
that she will lament (afgān) day and night, that she wails and cries through
the night to early morning because of separation from them (mikunam tā
subh šabhā rūd rūd) (15). Here, night is both the real time and the objective
correlative of the emotion involved: pain is more intense at night, whether
it is the pain of losing a loved one, the pain of love or the pain of an illness.

In Shiite religious experience, the night after ‘Āšūrā is a time for the
antagonists to perform immoral or irreligious acts. Night is a cover that
hides wicked deeds. After the battle, at night, two men go to the battlefield to steal the possessions of Imām Ḥuseyn (31). They both know that their action is irreligious and illegal, but their desire for the objects leads them to mutilate Imām Ḥuseyn. One of them cuts off his finger to take his ring (33).

Šemr’s deceitful behaviour also takes place at night: he suggests that Ibn al-Sa’d should send a messenger to the city of Halab and announce the events of Karbalā to the people (96). He chooses night because no one should be aware of the secret mission of the messenger.

When night covers the world, it provides an opportunity to escape from danger. In the ta’ziya texts, after the martyrdom of Imām Ḥuseyn, his Persian wife Šahrbanū decides to escape from their enemies, as the Imām had wished. She tells Zeynab that they can evade the enemy if they escape at night through the desert, or if they go to Najaf to the tomb of Ḥeydar (the title of Imām ‘Ali), or if they return to Medina to the tomb of the Prophet (40).

In the ta’ziya texts the night is sometimes a time of special awareness. For instance, Muṣayeb, the chief of the tribe of Khazā’el, dreams that Imām Ḥuseyn and his followers are killed at Karbalā and their heads are severed (60). He decides to assist Imām Ḥuseyn but, when Muṣayeb’s messenger returns from Karbalā, he learns that he is too late. At the same time, the helpless family of Imām Ḥuseyn decides to send a letter to Muṣayeb asking for help (61). The antagonists also have dreams, making them aware of their unjust behaviour and leading them to regret it. An instance is the dream that makes Yazid ashamed of his deceitful behaviour towards Imām Ḥuseyn’s household. He dreams that he is sent to hell by order of the Prophet. He is frightened, invites the prisoners to a feast, apologizes humbly to them, and promises to punish the killer of Imām Ḥuseyn (156-171). His dream is a justification of Imām Ḥuseyn and his family.

Night is the time of mourning and lamentation for the prisoners. They mourn for those killed at Karbalā. In the ta’ziya texts, Dorra Ṣadaf is a warrior who fights, with her companions, against the enemies of Imām Ḥuseyn’s family to release the prisoners. Zeynab tells her that this is the night of mourning for the exiles killed at Karbalā (emšab šab-e ‘azā-ye ġaribān-e Karbalā-st) (108). Among Shiites, the third night after ‘Āšūrā is called the night of the strangers (šām-e ġaribān). On this night, people perform the mourning rites and walk in the streets, holding lighted candles. It is a symbolic re-enactment of the wandering of Imām Ḥuseyn’s family in the desert.

The absolute darkness of the night is a symbol of the loneliness and helplessness of Imām Ḥuseyn’s family. For instance, when Ruqaya, the daughter of Imām Ḥuseyn, dies in the ruins of Šām, Zeynab says,
na šam'-o na čerāq-o na yāri-yo hamdami
nūrī namānda dar šab-e tāram khudā khudā (133).

O! God there is no candle, no lantern, no assistant or companion
O! God, O God, there is no light in my dark night (133).

For those not suffering pain, night appears with all its beauties. The moon shines and stars glitter. An instance is the daughter of Yazid: she is oblivious to realities, so for her the night is another reason for happiness and cheerfulness. She says, ‘this is a very nice night,’ and asks minstrels to play to increase the sorrow in the heart of the prisoners (139).

**Settings in Ta’ziya**

Setting is another narrative element that is skillfully used in the ta’ziya texts. Karbalā is the actual site of the historical battle. Afterwards, the prisoners were marched through the desert, and passed through the city of Kūfa on the way to Damascus. They were imprisoned in a ruined mosque – an obvious sign of the corruption of government and society – and presented at the court of Yazid. After some days, they returned to Medina. The composers of the ta’ziya texts used these actual places to show the innocence and the legitimacy of Imām Ḥuseyn and his family and the unjust and cruel behaviour of the Umayyad caliph.

The desert (biyābān) is the authentic setting of the events of Karbalā, scene of the battle between Yazid and Imām Ḥuseyn. In classical Persian literature, the lover is often portrayed wandering bewildered in the desert to find the beloved. In the ta’ziya texts, Imām Ḥuseyn and his fellow men were killed in the desert, their severed heads were placed on lances and the army of the enemy trampled their bodies. The afflictions and hardships that the prisoners suffer are portrayed against the vivid background of the desert. It is in the desert that the families of Imām Ḥuseyn and his sisters are arrested; they are marched through the desert mounted bare backed on camels, and they suffer from thirst and hunger. The women are unveiled and the enemies whip them. Two children of Imām Ḥuseyn, Rāziya and Marzīyya, are lost in the desert and their bodies are later found. Zeynab buries them (21-25). The desert is the background for the bewildered wanderings of Šahrbānū, Imām Ḥuseyn’s Iranian wife and daughter of Yazdg-erd III (r. 632-651). Imām Ḥuseyn had told her that, if he died, she should
not stay. So, after the battle, Šahrbānū mounts Imām Ḥuseyn's horse and escapes to the desert. Along the way she meets her brother 'Abd al-Allāh, who has come to assist Imām Ḥuseyn but is too late. There is someone who follows Šahrbānū as she goes: it is the soul of Imām Ḥuseyn who comes to assist and protect her from the enemy (43-50).

Another setting is the court of Yazid, where the prisoners were taken after the battle. Two major features are mentioned repeatedly. Firstly, at the court, the severed heads of the dead mounted on lances are presented to Yazid. He strikes the severed head of Imām Ḥuseyn and pours wine on his lips, while he is mocking him (77, 127). Secondly, at the court, the prisoners are presented to the king in chains and without their headscarves (119-120). Yazid and his men constantly dishonour and threaten them. For instance, Yazid orders the executioner to kill Imām Zeyn al-‘Ābedin because he protested strongly when the lips of the severed head of Imām Ḥuseyn were struck (127-128). The court is the place where Zeynab protests against Yazid and his cruel behaviour towards the family of the Prophet. She threatens him that he will be punished in the Hereafter (82). It can be said that the court of Yazid is a portrayal of two opposites: good and evil, black and white, justice and injustice.

The ruins (kharāba) in the city of Damascus where the prisoners were imprisoned form the backdrop for many episodes. The term ‘ruins’ in the Persian language implies a roofless, uninhabited place. In the ta’ziya texts, the ruins are roofless and do not have a door. The setting of the ruins highlights the afflictions and tortures that the family of the Prophet, including the sisters of Imām Ḥuseyn, suffer there. They do not have basic facilities. They sleep in the dust and their pillows are bricks. They are humiliated by Yazid’s men. At times, people come to watch them. The pains and sorrows that they have suffered are mingled with the unpleasant place where they are now held. Yazid puts them in a ruin to humiliate them. The prisoners suffer not only from the deaths of their loved ones and their own imprisonment, but also from the cruel behaviour of the Umayyad caliph and his men. For instance, Yazid orders Šemr to take the head of Imām Ḥuseyn to the ruins and show it to his family (132). When Zeynab sees the head of Imām Ḥuseyn, she mourns and laments for him. She says,

dar in kharāba-ye bi-saqf-u bi-dar âmada-i barādar, barādar magar ke pāy nabūdat ke bā sar âmada-i barādar, barādar (132).

O Brother, O Brother, you have come to this ruin without roof, without door,
O Brother, O Brother, did you have no foot, that you come with a head (132).

Ruqeya, Imām Ḥuseyn’s daughter, appears in several episodes. She is among the captives who are imprisoned in the ruins. She is a child who constantly complains to her aunt, Zeynab, about their desperate situation. She says,

our father is dead, we do not have a house to live in, no one is as hungry as we are, we have to dress in old rugs and clothes, our enemies slap us and the people of Kūfa beat us with sticks and stones (138-139).

Ruqeya dies in the ruins and Yazid sends a camel litter for her, but Zeynab does not accept it (151). Their imprisonment in the ruins in Damascus is a time of grief and affliction, with no one to assist them or sympathize with them.

The prisoners constantly complain about the pain of their exile (ḡurbat) in the city of Damascus. The word ḡurbat (discussed above in oral tradition in taʿziya texts) refers to the condition of being far removed: it is used for aliens and travellers, but also for social outsiders, for the wretched. It characterizes both the setting of the painful deaths of Imām Ḥuseyn and his men at Karbalā, and the unpleasant situation of the prisoners. When the prisoners address Imām Ḥuseyn they refer to his wretchedness (ḡurbat) and his loneliness (biyāvari) on the battlefield. For instance, Imām Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin constantly says, ‘Father, my martyr! My exiled father!’ (šahidam bābā ġaribam bābā) (51). The association of not-belonging with the death of Imām Ḥuseyn makes it an especially painful and sorrowful event. His ḡurbat reminds the audience that he was killed as an innocent, with no one to assist him or his family. The prisoners in the ruins, also in a state of ḡurbat, can do nothing but mourn. In one episode, Imām Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin asks his family to gather around him to mourn for the dead of Karbalā, using the less abstract adjective ǧarib six times. He says,

bolbol ǧarib-o nāla ǧarib-o čaman ǧarib
Zeynab ǧarib-o šahr ǧarib-o vaṭan ǧarib (119).

The nightingale is a stranger, lamentation is foreign, the meadow is not here
Zeynab is an exile, the city is alien, our motherland is far away (119).
Notes

1 L. Gardet, in The Encyclopaedia of Islam (second edition), under Qiyāma.
2 F. Leemhuis, in Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān, under Apocalypse.
5 Ibid., see ‘the Crossing the Bridge (sirāt), the Possibility of Intercession (shefāʾa) and Preparation for the Final Consignment.’
8 Jane I. Smith, in The Encyclopaedia of Islam (second edition), under Torment of the Fire (al-nār).
9 Ibid., under Eschatology.
10 Ibid., see ‘the Bliss of the Gardens.’
11 Ibid.
12 Sajjād is a title of Imām Zeyn al-Ābedin.
13 Kheyr-o nessāʾ is a title of Fāṭima.
16 Ş. Humāyūnī, Taʿziya dar Iran, p. 267. For more information about the chronology of publication of the texts of taʿziya see Ibid., pp. 267-273.
18 Ibid.
19 Ş. Humāyūnī, Taʿziya dar Irān, p. 233.
20 Ş. Humāyūnī, Taʿziya va taʿziya khānī, p. 63.
21 Ibid., pp. 45-46.
22 Ibid., pp. 46-52.
24 For information on time and setting in Persian classic poetry see A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, Layli and Majnūn, Love Madness and Mystic Longing in Nizāmi’s Epic Romance, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2003, pp. 319-336.
Doctrines and Philosophy in Ta‘ziya

In modern Iran, the doctrines embodied in the ta‘ziya are usually deduced from the words of Imām Huseyn and his family. Two of the most recurring concepts in ta‘ziya are predestination (qadar) and free will (ekhtiyār). The concept of fate is crucial in the ta‘ziya text because Imām Huseyn submitted himself to God’s decree. God’s decision for man is best for him, although man does not understand the reasons for it. The idea is developed in several other theological concepts such as one’s allotted portion of destiny (nasib) and the moment of death (ajal). The former refers to the God’s decision for each individual based on his aptitude (este’dād). The latter denotes both one person’s term of life and ‘the appointed duration of the world.’ An associated motif, drawn from Persian poetry, is represented by terms such as the ‘sphere’ (falak, sepehr), ‘sky’ (āsemān), and ‘wheel’ (čarkh). The connotation of these is that the life of each individual is influenced by the heavenly bodies. In more theological terms, the ‘sphere’ is explained as a medium through which God’s decree is transmitted to the individual. The ‘sphere’ (falak) is said to be responsible for taking the caliphate from the descendants of the Prophet, and for the death of Imām Huseyn and the afflictions that his family suffered. In the ta‘ziya texts, the protagonists complain about the oppressions and tyranny that the sphere has imposed on them. For instance, Zeynab says,

\[
ey \text{ falak } \text{ zulm-e tu } \text{ tā } \text{ čand ravā } \text{ bar } \text{ Zeynab (137).}
ey \text{ O Sphere! How far you are going in oppressing Zeynab (137).}
\]

In one episode, Zeynab expresses her acceptance of the sphere’s action. It is before the battle begins, when Imām Huseyn puts his head on her lap for the last time and sleeps. Zeynab says,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{be } & \text{ zānūyam } \text{ barādar sar } \text{ nahāda} \\
\text{be } & \text{ farq-e } \text{ man falak } \text{ afsar nahāda (8).}
\end{align*}
\]
The wheel (čarkh) is another agent of heaven, responsible for the hardships that Imām Ḥuseyn’s family suffer. The new bride, Fāṭima, condemns čarkh for its deceitful behaviour in causing the death of her husband Qāsem. She says, ‘Who in the world widows a new bride / O deceitful wheel! / I pray that you will be turned upside down’ (39).

The concept of free will (ekhtiyār) is another doctrinal element in ta’ziya. Ekhtiyār literally means ‘choice,’ and ‘the power of choice.’ As we can see from the discussion of fate and destiny above, its affirmation is somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand, it is said that there is no ‘ekhtiyār except for God.’ On the other hand, one has the choice to recognize what is good. For the Shiite, the best choice is ‘the matter between two matters’; that is, the middle way. In the ta’ziya story, Imām Ḥuseyn was free to choose between giving his oath of allegiance to Yazid, or fighting his army. If he had chosen the first, he could save his life and the life of his family and followers, while the second way led to death. Here, there is no middle way: the option of turning back to avoid the confrontation was also excluded. According to the History of al-Ṭabari, the cavalry stopped him in Karbalā:

Al-Ḥuseyn appealed to them before God and Islam to let him go to the Commander of the Faithful. Then he would put his hand in his hand. They said ‘No, there is nothing else for you to do but submit to the authority of Ibn Ziyād.’

However they rejected this possibility. Therefore, Imām Ḥuseyn, having two choices (life and death), chose death. For him, death was the path of salvation. When Imām Ḥuseyn was preparing to go to Kūfa, many people had warned him of the infidelity of the people of Kūfa, but he had accepted God’s will.

Another doctrinal element in ta’ziya is the Shiite concept of salvation. Imām Ḥuseyn is martyred for the salvation of the Shiite community. He chooses death for the sake of the forgiveness of his followers’ sins. From the ta’ziya, the audience learns that Imām Ḥuseyn prayed on his deathbed for the salvation of his people (ummat). In the Majāles-e ta’ziya, Šemr, the murderer of Imām Ḥuseyn says,
mikard bā tāzaruʿ-u bā gerya in duʿā
bakhšā gunāh-e ʿummat-e man rā tu ey khudā (117).

Crying and lamenting, he prayed this prayer:
O God! Forgive the sins of my people (117).

The audience participate in the *taʿziya* ritual to ‘renew their commitment to a religious and ideological order,’ according to Humāyūni. The *taʿziya* reinforces religious commandments, and reminds the audience of religious prohibitions. They learn that the Umayyad caliph and his commanders respected neither Imām ʿḤuseyn, the grandson of the Prophet, nor religious law. There is a parallel here; a person today who does not respect the family of the Prophet will also not obey the religious law. For instance, according to the traditions and Qurʾanic verses, drinking wine is forbidden for Muslims. In the *taʿziya*, the prohibition is presented in the behaviour of Yazid, Ibn al-Ziyād and other antagonists. They are not just wine drinkers but also the archetype of an unfaithful person and enemy of Imām ʿḤuseyn’s family. In the *taʿziya* on ‘the bazaar of Damascus’ (majlis-e *taʿziya* bāzar-e Šām), when Yazid talks with the severed head of Imām ʿḤuseyn, he says,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ey Shah-e tešna-kām buvad rūz-e ʿeyš-e mā} \\
\text{labhāy-e khušk-e khis tu tar bā šarāb kun} \\
\text{Shahā biyā šarāb berizam be šūratat} \\
\text{ey seyed-e najib ze mey ejtenāb kun [...] (127).}
\end{align*}
\]

O thirsting King! Taste this, the day of our pleasure
Wet your dry lips with wine
O King! Come, so that I may pour wine on your face
O noble Seyed, abstain from wine... (127).

As he says this to the severed head of Imām ʿḤuseyn, the performer pours wine over the head; a hateful image that motivates Shiites to abstain from wine.

Protecting the ‘right of an orphan’ is another law of religion that the *taʿziya* players wish to reinforce in the audience. They learn it from the contrary behaviour of the antagonists. For instance, after the battle of Karbalā, Šemr, Yazid’s commander, behaves harshly to the children of Imām ʿḤuseyn. He slaps them and dishonours them. The spectators who have these concepts in mind, and hatred for the enemies of Imām ʿḤuseyn in their hearts, find these concepts figured externally in the *taʿziya*. 
The Holy Drama

The Legitimacy of Ta‘ziya

In its traditional form, there are two types of ta‘ziya performance. In the first, it is performed by professional players. In this case, the ta‘ziya is the heritage of a family that has brought up their children to perform it. In the second, the ta‘ziya is performed by non-professional or semi-professional players. Normally, the ta‘ziya director chooses a company of players from among the common people. They prepare an arena in which the spectators can show their emotions and their commiseration with the martyrdom of Imām Ḥuseyn.¹¹

The ta‘ziya players are chosen from among the ordinary people, with daily occupations. They grow to symbolize the real martyrs and prisoners of the plain of Karbalā.¹² The players are divided into two groups, protagonists and antagonists. The former are the family and the companions of Imām Ḥuseyn, who fight against the enemy to preserve their religion. The latter are the enemies of Imām Ḥuseyn, and of his men and his household, enemies who fight for power or have submitted to an unjust worldly authority. These two groups are good and bad, black and white. But in some cases, the bad undergo a transformation of character on the battlefield. For instance, Hurr, Ibn al-Ziyād’s commander, turns to Ḥuseyn and will not fight against him.¹³

The very practice of ta‘ziya raises some doctrinal issues. Is it permissible for a player to pretend to be one of the holy figures? Is it permissible to imitate the antagonists? These questions have been discussed at least since the eleventh century. The key term here is tašābuh, ‘imitation,’ used in a negative sense in the context of the very well-known prophetic tradition (ḥadīt), ‘whoever makes himself resemble a group is in the category of that group.’¹⁴ The ḥadīt was originally used to condemn the imitation of Jewish or Christian devotional practices, but it could also appear to pose a difficulty for ta‘ziya players, and particularly those playing the antagonists. Abu al-Qāsem Maḥmūd Ibn ʿUmar Zamakhšāri (1074-1143), a famous theologian, wrote a justification of the rituals of the month of Muḥarram called Bazaars of Gold Presenting Preaching and Sermon. Zamakhšāri employs another ḥadīt: ‘one who makes people weep for the martyrs is among the virtuous.’ The antagonist, who causes the audience to weep for Imām Ḥuseyn, is therefore doing a good deed. This application of the ‘imitation’ ḥadīt to the audience also supported the practice of Maqtal-khāni, in which an audience is moved to tears by the reading of elegies to the martyrs. The elegies for Maqtal-khāni became a genre in themselves. Abul al-Mu‘ayyed Muwaffaq Khārazmi
(d.1172-73), a pupil of Zamakhšari, wrote an epic based on traditions concerning the martyrdom of Imām Ḥusayn. More than three centuries later, Wā'iz Kāšefi (d.1504-5) wrote his Rawżat al-šuhadā (The Garden of Martyrs), which was discussed above (in the section on Late Medieval and Modern Ta’ziya). Rawżat al-šuhadā had a lasting influence in Iran, expanding its effects to a religious ritual called rawza-khāni.

The imitation of Imām Ḥusayn and the other members of the Prophet’s family could be exempted from the generally negative connotation of tašābuh: these players are following the Imāms, not making themselves resemble non-Muslims (the sense in which tašābuh was forbidden). While the protagonists ‘imitate’ the Imāms and their families, they always distinguish themselves from them: to pretend to be an Imām would be a blasphemy. The term used for this imitation, which is not condemned, is tamat-tul, making a metaphor. The ta’ziya is conceived to be portraying the event of Karbalā, not reproducing it. Whether a ta’ziya player plays the role of a protagonist or an antagonist, he separates himself from the real character. It is very natural for a ta’ziya player to read directly from the text (nuskha), or to drink tea or water during the performance. Such behaviour is not unexpected for the audience; it shows that the players are distinct from those they portray.

Notes

1 A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, Layli and Majnūn, pp. 162-163.
2 F. Graf in The Encyclopaedia of Islam (second edition), under Predestination, the Theory of; C.E. Bosworth, in The Encyclopaedia of Islam (second edition), under Qisma (a.), Qismet (t.).
3 L. Gardet, in The Encyclopaedia of Islam (second edition), under Ikhtiyār.
4 Ibid.
7 One example of people’s warning Imām Huseyn not to go to Kūfa is the utterance of Farazdaq. When Imām Ḥusayn asks him about the people of Kūfa, he stated, ‘The hearts of the people with you, but their swords are with the Banū Umayyah. The decision will come from heaven, and God will do what he wishes.’ See Abu Jafar Muḥammad Ibn Jarir al-Ṭabarī, The History of al-Ṭabarī, p. 71. Also see ibid., p. 22.
8 H. Şâlehi Râd-e Darbandsari, Majâles-e ta’ziya, p. 117.
10 H. Şâlehi Râd Darbandsari, Majâles-e ta’ziya, pp. 111-135.
13 Ibid., p. 160.
Zeynab in the Passion Play

Zeynab is the third child of ‘Ali Ibn Abi Ṭālib and Fāṭima, the Prophet’s daughter. Zeynab was born in Medina. Sources on her childhood are meagre. She married her cousin, ‘Abd al-Allāh Ibn al-Ja‘far Ṭayyār. Although he was a wealthy man, it is said that he led a modest life, devoting most of his wealth to charity. They had four sons –‘Ali, ‘Awn, Muḥammad, ‘Abbās and one daughter, ‘Umm al-Kultūm.1

Zeynab played an important role in the battle of Karbalā. After the day of ‘Āšūrā, the household of Imām Ḥuseyn, along with his two sisters Zeynab and ‘Umm al-Kultūm, were taken to Damascus to the court of Yazid. A few days later, he released them and they returned to Medina. It is said that Zeynab did not survive for long after returning from Damascus. She died in 682/1283. There are several different suggestions about the day of her death: on the 11th or 21st of Jamādi ‘ut-tani, the 24th of Safar, or the 16th of Dhu‘l-Hijjah.2

Veiling and its Supporters in the Ta‘ziya Texts

The term hejāb derives from the Arabic root h-j-b. The Persian equivalent is parda: a general term for an object that conceals or covers something or someone. The term parda has different meanings in the Persian language such as, ‘curtain,’ ‘musical mode,’ ‘respect’ and ‘secret(ly).’3 The veil has various functions: sometimes it indicates the marital status of a woman. In Mesopotamian society, the veil was a sign of a woman’s chastity, in contrast to the prostitutes who appeared in public uncovered.4 After the revelation of Islam in 610, the significance of the veil in Arab society changed. It became an indicator of a woman’s belief in the sacred law (şari‘a) of Islam, as distinct from the dress of pagan Arabs. In that period, wearing a veil showed one’s belief in the Islam, but it was not a device for limiting women and secluding them in the court, in a harem or in the house.
The veil plays an important role in the Persian passion play. When, after the massacre in Karbalā, the family of Ḥuseyn were arrested and taken to the court of Yazid, Zeynab protests twice: first, in Kūfa against the people of Kūfa, and a second time, at the court of Yazid. At the court, she protests and saves the life of her nephew Imām Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin. Zeynab appears both with and without a veil. When her veil is forcefully removed, her character does not change. Zeynab, wearing a veil, supports Imām Ḥuseyn and follows him to Karbalā. She shows the ultimate sacrifice when she sends her sons to the battlefield. Her veil does not prevent her from taking part in the battle. The veil was not a means to seclude her as a woman. Later, Zeynab appears without a veil, protesting against injustice, embodied in the Umayyad caliph. Without any covering, she criticizes the people of Kūfa and Yazid. She reminds Yazid of the punishment that he will suffer in the Hereafter. Appearing without a veil or headscarf (sar berahna) in the bazaar of Damascus and at Yazid's court was very hard for Zeynab because, as one of the descendants of the Prophet, she would normally have been veiled in the company of men who were not among her intimates. After the battle, when the prisoners are being taken to the court of Yazid in Damascus, Zeynab says,

\[ \textit{be sūy-e kūfa bā meḥnat ravam bi čādur-u ma’jar} \\
\textit{če sāzam čāra natvānam khudāḥafez khudāḥafex} (26). \]

I am going to Kūfa, with no veil or headscarf,  
There's no remedy for me; may God be with you, God be with you (26).

She says that as soon as she arrives there, she will tell the truth to the people and dishonour Yazid. In the court of Yazid, Zeynab tells him,

\[ \textit{biparda miyān-e khalqam ammā} \\
\textit{rūh al-qudus ast parda dār-am} (125). \]

I am unveiled among the people, and yet  
The Holy Spirit, like a lady's maid, is proffering a veil (125).

From the above examples we see that Zeynab feels that it is her social and religious duty to protest against the tyrant Yazid. When a woman unveils herself, she is protesting against a situation.

The female audience in the ta'ziya performance wears the veil and supports veiling. When a woman spectator sees Zeynab's veil being forcefully
moved by the enemy, she is expected to curse the Umayyad caliph and his commanders such as Šemr and Ibn al-Sa’d for their malicious behaviour. For the audience, the veil increases the aura of chastity around Zeynab and, by association, around other women. So the veil is accepted as a sign of moral behaviour in public and unveiling is an evident sign of protest against injustice. When Zeynab says that the Holy Spirit is my *parda-dār*, she is expressing that her chastity is protected by it.

**Zeynab as a Role Model for Iranian Women**

Zeynab, presented as a chaste and brave woman who fights against injustice at the side of her brother, has become a role model for Iranian women. Before the Islamic Revolution (1978-79), she was presented as an afflicted, oppressed woman who, in spite of restrictions, protested against the ruling Umayyad caliph. During the Islamic revolution, Zeynab found a role, for the revolutionary women of Iran, as a symbol of the resistance against Muhammad Rezā Shah (1941-1979), who was ‘compared to the tyrant Yazid responsible for Ḥuseyn’s death’. During the Islamic Revolution, women took Zeynab as their role model when they protested against the Pahlavi king. The difference here is the role of the veil: Rezā Shah had politicized the veil (čādur, rūsari) in 1936 by officially banning it in public. The veil became part of women’s protest. They would conceal themselves in the veil as a sign of freedom of beliefs and ideas.

After the Islamic Revolution and during the war between Iran and Iraq (1980-88), Iranian women strictly followed Zeynab as a model. They supported the soldiers both behind the battlefield and at the front line. For Iranians, the war against Iraq was a ‘holy defence’ (defā’-e muqaddas). The state tried to shape perceptions of the war using the tragic paradigm of Karbalā. Women going to the front went as if they were Zeynab, going to assist Imām Ḥuseyn at Karbalā. State propaganda claimed that it was the ancestors of the Iraqi soldiers who had killed the Shiite Imām; now Iranians had to sacrifice themselves and their families to avenge the act.

After the Iran-Iraq war, Zeynab’s status as a model Shiite woman was used to reinforce the wearing of *hejāb* as a sign of chastity. An Islamic state organization called ‘the sisters of Zeynab’ (khāharān-e Zeynab) act in public to remind women to cover their body and head in public or in the company of those who are not their close relatives. Women who do not cover themselves completely are seen as protesting against the Islamic Revolution.
Zeynab's Sermons

After the battle of Karbalā, during the imprisonment period Zeynab preached two sermons, one in Küfā and one in Damascus. After the battle, the army of Ibn al-Ziyād set fire to the tents, arrested the women and children and took them to Küfā. Here, Zeynab preached a sermon, which is seen by the Shiites as a new chapter in the history of Shiite belief. After praising God and introducing herself and her family, she blames the people of Küfā and calls them ‘deceitful and renegade.’ She warns them of God’s punishment in the Hereafter.

She preached her second sermon in Damascus before the Umayyad caliph Yazid. He is noted as an unbeliever and an enemy of Islam, the Prophet and his family. Yazid says to Zeynab that the battle of Karbalā is revenge taken on the Prophet’s descendants, because the Prophet and his companions killed Yazid’s polytheist ancestors. Zeynab criticizes Yazid, listing the sins that he has committed. Citing a Shiite tradition, she says, ‘Denying the signs of Allah and ridiculing him and his Prophet is a sin.’ Then she says: ‘You [Yazid] have reached the point that you want to take revenge for your ancestors on the children of the Prophet. So you are still at the same stage that they [the ancestors] were;’ meaning that Yazid is still a pagan. She emphasizes that whatever Yazid does to the family of the Prophet, whether it is killing them, or arresting them and marching them through the blistering desert from one town to another, cannot disgrace them. She says to Yazid that his wrong ideas have made him proud of himself, but God says, ‘We only give them [unbelievers] time to let them increase their sins. For them there will be a humiliating torment’ (Q.3/178). She reminds Yazid that his ancestors were pagan, that he is an unbeliever, that his ancestors were among the last group to embrace Islam. Then she talks about herself and her well-known family. Her connection with the Prophet gives her a position superior to Yazid’s. The cruel behaviour of Yazid and his men cannot diminish the honour of Zeynab and other members of Imām Ḥuseyn’s family. She is particularly critical of Yazid’s mistreatment of the severed head of Imām Ḥuseyn.

Zeynab’s sermon shows her character. She is a very strong and brave woman. She speaks in Yazid’s court and criticizes him, while the severed head of her brother is before her. Her deep grief at the martyrdom of Imām Ḥuseyn and her children does not prevent her from protesting against Yazid and demanding justice.
Zeynab, Justice and Destiny

In the *ta’ziya* texts, Zeynab is the archetype of devotional beliefs and moral attitudes. She turns her face to God to ask for justice. She does not ask people for help. When she talks with people, she reveals how her enemies have oppressed her. Even when Zeynab talks with God, her tone is that of a person who complains about injustice. For instance, in the period of imprisonment a diplomat comes from Europe (*farang*) to the court of Yazid. Yazid respects him, but he does not respect Imām Ḥuṣeyn’s family. Zeynab complains to God,

*bār-elāhā sina-ye Zeynab az in ġam riš šud ey khudā bengar farangi qurbaš az mā biš šud* (122).

O God! My heart is wounded by this grief
O God, a man from Europe is more honourable than we are (122).

Zeynab’s tone changes when she seeks justice from God. She is forced to go to a public place such as a bazaar without her veil. She says, ‘O! May the hand of God make haste and destroy Damascus, like Khaybar because Zeynab has lost her veil’ (127). Here she draws a comparison between Khaybar, a fortification belonging to Jewish opponents of Muḥammad, and the city of Damascus where the court of Yazid is. The Jews of Khaybar were defeated by her father, Imām ’Ali. Through this comparison, Zeynab highlights the distinction between the family of the Prophet and the Umayyad caliph, between faith and infidelity. Several times, Zeynab prays to God asking him to take revenge. In such cases, she explains the situation like a person who wants to motivate someone else and asks him to help her. For instance, after the day of ‘Āšūrā, Imām Ḥuṣeyn’s family gathers around Zeynab. She prays and they say ‘amen’ twice. She swears to God, invoking his mercy, kindness and blessings to the previous Prophets (Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus). Then she invokes God in the name of the Prophet Muḥammad and, finally, in the name of the family of the Prophet who have been killed, asking God to take revenge on their enemies (155). The *ta’ziya* text reports that Zeynab’s supplication causes Yazid to have a dream in which the Prophet orders that Yazid should be thrown into hell (157). Because of the dream, Yazid is frightened and regrets his behaviour towards Imām Ḥuṣeyn and his household. He humbly apologizes to the Imām Ḥuṣeyn’s family, and specifically to Zeynab and Imām Zeyn al-ʿAbedin, for his cruel
behaviour. The event shows the spiritual power and the honour of Zeynab in the eyes of God.

When Zeynab faces the tyranny of her enemies, she also asks for justice from the spheres. Zeynab refers to the sphere as an oppressor, and she protests against her destiny. She talks to the sphere in a loud voice as if it hears her. She seeks revenge for the martyrs. The sphere is responsible for the death of her brother and her two sons. She refers to herself several times as afflicted and oppressed (setamkeš-e zār), and as sorrowful and wounded (ḥazin-e fegār). She says that the sphere oppressed her by separating her from Ḥuseyn. Zeynab says,

falak ze jowr-u jafāh-ye tu hezārān dād
ze sina barkešam az kina-at du šad faryād
če kina-hā ke nadārī be in setamkeš-e zār
če zulmhā ke nakardi be in hazin-e fegār
ze hejr-e rūy-e Ḥuseyn šahid-e bi yāvar
ravān nemūda-i az dīda-am tu lakht-e jegar
ze dāg-e Akbar-u 'Abbās-u Qāsem-u Ašgār
be rūz-u šab zanam az ġuṣṣa dast-e ǧam bar sar […] (199).

O Sphere! A thousand times I protest your tyrannies and oppressions,
Two hundred times I shout from my heart because of your rancour.
What tyrannies have you not imposed on this oppressed, afflicted one!
What oppressions have you not inflicted on this wounded sorrowing one!
Because of separation Ḥuseyn, the martyred, the friendless
You have caused bloody tears to flow from my eyes.
From the fateful marking of Akbar, 'Abbās, Qāsem and Ašgār
Day and night, for grief, I lay the hand of sorrow on my head […] (199).

The oppression of the sphere is not limited to the martyrdom of Imām Ḥuseyn and his companions. The sphere is blamed for having stolen the leadership of the Muslim community from Imām Ḥuseyn’s family.

The first four hemistiches rhyme on dād and faryād (to shout or to appeal for justice, to cry out), and on zār and fegār (afflicted and wounded). These words imply dissatisfaction and rebelliousness. In the second four hemistiches, the rhyme words strengthen the empathy of the audience: Ḥuseyn dies without a supporter (biyāvar), her tears contain part of her liver (lakht-e jegar), and she beats the hand of sorrow on her head (dast-e ǧam bar sar, a mourning practice). The emotive rhyme words arouse the
audience to seek revenge on the enemies of Imām Ḥuseyn’s family, and to show their feelings in the ta’ziya.

Although Zeynab addresses the sphere in a harsh tone, as if she is talking to her enemy, she submits to the power of destiny, because she believes in predestination (qadar). Qadar is a Qur’anic term meaning ‘eternal decision or decree.’ Zeynab employs this word to show her submission to God and his decision. She accepts her fate and tries to remain patient, while her restless heart is filled with sorrow and grief. The following hemistiche shows Zeynab’s submission to predestination. After ‘Āšūrā, the Imām Ūseyn’s daughter Sakina mourns for her father and complains about their situation. Zeynab says,

če kunam ‘amma kār-e taqdir ast (200)
What can I do, this is predestined (200).

**Zeynab Inspired**

Inspiration (elhām) is one of the essential traits of the Prophet and his family. Being the friends of God, they were fully aware of their fate. A friend of God receives inspiration from divine grace. For instance, when Imām Ūseyn was on the way from Mecca to Kūfa, many people asked him not to go further, but he responded that,

The decision is God’s, and God will do what he wishes. ‘Every day our lord exercises power in [every] matter. If fate sends down what we like, we praise God for his blessings […] However, although fate may frustrate their hopes, those whose intention is the truth and whose hearts are pious are not aggressors.’

This answer shows that he had utter trust (tawakkul) in God. Zeynab does the same. There is a parallel between them: both are aware of their fates and the fates of the other members of the family. Zeynab speaks in a way that shows she is divinely inspired. For instance, when she talks to Sakina, she mentions the place of her death. Zeynab says,

be khudā ke khūn šud az ġam del-e biqarār-e Zeynab ke be Karbalā mabādā bešavad mazār-e Zeynab (200).
I swear to God that Zeynab’s restless heart is bloody for grief, 
That Zeynab’s resting place may not be at Karbalā (200).

The narrator employs the term ‘may not be’ (mabādā) to emphasize that the event will happen in near future.

**Zeynab’s Spiritual Power**

One example of Zeynab’s spiritual power, in the Majāles-e ta’ziya, comes after the events at Karbalā, when Šemr goes to Medina to once more arrest Imām Ĥuseyn’s family. Zeynab says to her fellow women,

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{čādur-e 'eṣmat kunid 'al-e payāmbar be sar} \\
&\text{dušman-e jān-e šumā dast be khanjar resid} \\
&\text{jumla ravid in zamān bar sar-e qabr-e rasūl} \\
&\text{āh-o fağān barkešid Šemr-e setamgar resid (204).}
\end{align*}
\]

Put on the veil of protection, O family of the Prophet,
Your mortal enemy is arriving, dagger in hand.
All of you, go to the tomb of the Prophet,
Wail and mourn, the oppressor Šemr is coming (204).

In these couplets, Zeynab offers two means of escaping from Šemr, their enemy. Firstly, they are told to wear the veil of chastity. The veil acts like a protective boundary between a woman and those not immediately related to her. The word translated here as protection, ‘eṣmat, also means chastity. It also has a connotation of the spiritual power exercised by Muḥammad, Fāṭima and the twelve Imāms. Secondly, the women are told to take refuge in mourning and lamenting at the tomb of the Prophet. The supposition is that they will be assisted by the Prophet’s spirit. The idea that the deceased saints such as the Prophet, Imām ‘Ali and Fāṭima can assist the faithful is very common in the ta’ziya texts.¹⁴

Zeynab’s curse is also effective. It is linked to the idea that the sigh uttered by an innocent person has an effect. After the battle of Karbalā, Šemr tears Fāṭima’s earring from her ear. With her ear bleeding, Fāṭima cries and complains of Šemr’s cruelty to her aunt Zeynab. Zeynab says to Šemr: ‘Curse on you unfaithful Šemr that you make the daughter of the king of the Faith cry’ (53). Zeynab warns him that God will help her and that she is not alone. She
Zeynab in the Passion Play

swears to God that her sigh (āh) will have a profound effect (be khudu āh-e man khatā nakunad) (54). Then, speaking to the earth, Zeynab says,

\[
ey zamin kun madad be Zeynab-e zār
tā kamar gir in sag-e gaddār
tā bedānad ke mā sogir-u kabir
bahr-e 'ummat šudim zār-u 'asir (53-54).
\]

O earth! Assist Zeynab,
Take this deceitful dog up to his waist
That he may know that all of us, young and old,
Are afflicted and bound for the sake of the nation (53-54).

Zeynab’s prayer causes a miracle: at that moment Šemr is rooted to the spot. He asks Sakina for help, and Sakina intercedes on behalf of Šemr. Zeynab asks God to accept Šemr’s repentance, and then the earth releases him. The miracle is a warning to the audience, to respect Imām Ḥuseyn and his family, for disrespect has consequences.

Other miracles also show Zeynab’s spiritual power. After the battle, Ibn al-Sa’d orders his army to trample on the bodies of the martyrs. Feẓẓa (Zeynab’s servant) hears this order and asks Zeynab to find a solution. She adds that last night she heard a lion moaning the whole night. Zeynab tells her, ‘go to the lion and say, the family of ‘Ali have been arrested, come and guard the bodies of the martyrs’ (55). The lion obeys Zeynab and comes, and Ibn al-Sa’d’s army run away. According to Shiite tradition, when the Imām Ḥuseyn was killed, the whole universe lamented. Here the lion, the royal animal, represents the animal kingdom. In another episode, a lion moans for the martyrdom of Imām Ḥuseyn, and the audience is expected to accompany the lion. If the lion (the animal kingdom) respects Zeynab and obeys her, then the Shiites must do the same.

Zeynab the Leader

The role of Zeynab as a leader is signified both in history and in the taʿziya texts. As a leader, she teaches her family and, indirectly, the audience that they have to sacrifice themselves for the sake of justice. She is a model for her fellow women and subsequent generations of Shiite women. She is an archetype of sacrificial behaviour. For instance, she offers her children to
Imâm Huseyn and asks him to permit them to fight against Yazid’s army (10-12). In all situations, she is the first person who takes decisions for her small community, motivates her fellow women and teaches them to protest against their enemy. For instance, after ‘Āšūrā, she makes the people of Medina aware of the events at Karbalâ and the harsh behaviour of Yazid and his commanders against them. She also implies that what happened to Ḥuseyn and his household might happen to the rest of society in the future. She uses mourning and lamentation as a womanly weapon to motivate the people of Medina. They gather around the family of Imâm Ḥuseyn, asking about the events on the day of ‘Āšūrā. Zeynab behaves like a man fighting against his enemy. She mourns and laments, and in doing so protests against the Umayyad caliph. For instance, after the battle of Karbalâ she asks the mother of Qâsem to arrange a mourning assembly for the martyrs. First, Zeynab asks her fellow women to make a circle of mourning (mātam) around her. She says,

\[ \text{zanid ḥalqa-ye mātam be dowram ey yārān} \\
\text{kunid nawha-u zārī ayā havā-dārān} \ (202). \]

O! My friends make a circle of mourning around me,  
O! Partisans lament and wail (202).

Next, Zeynab gives them pieces from the clothes of the martyrs. She gives the bloody flag of ‘Abbâs to ʿUmm al-Kultûm her sister, the clothes of ‘Alî Asgâr to Sakina, the dress of Qâsem that is drenched in his blood to his mother, and the dress of ‘Alî Akbar to her sister, Fâṭima. Then she says, ‘My part is putting the robe of Imâm Ḥuseyn on my head while I am wailing and mourning’ (202).\(^{15}\)

\[ \text{Mātam is an Arabic term, referring to mourning and lamenting for a dead} \]
\[ \text{person. In Shiite terminology, the term mātam refers mainly to mourning} \]
\[ \text{and wailing for the martyrs of Karbalâ. The mourners perform mātam in} \]
\[ \text{the form of repetitive chest beating (sina-zani). The sound of chest beat-} \]
\[ \text{ing harmonizes with the chanting of elegies (nawha).} \]
\[ \text{In nawha, ‘vocal recitation and public performance’} \]
\[ \text{is an important factor. The expression, ‘circle of mourning’ (halqa-ye mātam) means that she asks them to mourn} \]
\[ \text{for the martyrs with her. In the tbody performance the audience stands in} \]
\[ \text{a circular form around the tbody players. Therefore the mourning circle is} \]
\[ \text{ready. The spectators are friends who gather around the ahl al-bayt, the holy} \]
\[ \text{family, and ease their sorrows by mourning with them. Zeynab addresses} \]
\[ \text{the audience as ‘My friends and Partisans’ (yārān and havā-dārān). The} \]
reference to the spectators motivates them. They lament bitterly, as Zeynab
asks them to. They wish that they could take part in the battle of Karbalā
and assist Imām Ḥuseyn and his family. Their chest-beating, and the lament-
ation of Imām Ḥuseyn’s family, harmonizes with the sound of the nawha
chant. This motivates the spectators to participate in the ta’ziya perfor-
mance. For the spectators, distinctions of time and place vanish and the
past and present mingle.

Another example of a direct address to the audience is in the passage just
mentioned, in which Zeynab says,

\[
\text{naṣib-e man bowad ey khāharān be šivan-o šin } \\
\text{be farq-e khud fekanam jāma-ye Imām Ḥuseyn} \ (202).
\]

O my sisters! My part in lamentation is,
To put Imām Ḥuseyn’s robe over my head \(202\).

The expression ‘O my sisters!’ \(\text{ey khāharān}\) is a reference to the audience. In Persian literature, the term khāhar has a profound meaning because the
khāhar is the closest relative who sympathizes with her sister under all con-
ditions. Here, Zeynab calls the audience ‘sister.’ On the one hand, she is
going to share her grief with the females who are present, as if they were
her sisters. She reminds them that Zeynab is their oppressed sister who was
alone and helpless before her enemies. Her helplessness invokes the image
of the Shiite community as helpless, but surviving despite the limitations
opposed on Shiites throughout history.\(^{18}\) On the other hand, Zeynab asks
them to lament and to mourn for their brother (Ḥuseyn) and the other mart-
rys. Here the spectators beat their chests and lament bitterly.

The ta’ziya texts show that the seed that Zeynab has cultivated grows.
The mourning of Imām Ḥuseyn’s family attracts the people of Medina. They
ask Imām Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin to explain ‘how the Imām of salvation (Imām
Ḥuseyn) was martyred’.\(^{19}\) The ta’ziya spectators symbolically become the
people of Medina, gathering to hear about the martyrdom. Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin
recounts how Imām Ḥuseyn’s loved ones were killed before his eyes. For
instance, he says how cruelly his half brother ʿAbbas, his son ʿAli Akbar, and
his nephew Qāsem were killed. The audience is taught, or reminded of, the
hardships that Imām Ḥuseyn suffered before his death. They compare these
with their own hardships and find them tolerable.

The awareness of the people of Medina of Yazid’s cruel behaviour then
causes uproar in Medina. People sympathize with the family of Imām
 hogyn and regret not being present at Karbalā. Zeynab’s mourning is a protest against the authority of the Umayyad caliph, a cry against oppression and for justice.

**Zeynab as Saviour of the Shiite Tradition and the Line of Imāms**

In the ta’ziya texts, Zeynab has a symbolic role as the holder of the Shiite Trusts (amānāt, the things entrusted for safekeeping). On the Day of Judgement, these Trusts will exempt Shiites from punishment. According to an episode in the ta’ziya on ‘the death of her holiness Zeynab’ (majles-e ta’ziya rehlat-e hażrat-e Zeynab), on her deathbed she passes on several Trusts (amānāt) to her sister ‘Umm al-Kulţūm. Zeynab tells her sister to preserve the Trusts, saying that on the Day of Judgement, her mother (Fāṭima, the daughter of the Prophet) will intercede on behalf of the Shiites because they have preserved the remembrance of the Trusts (210).

*Amāna* (Persian amānat) is a Qur’anic term derived from the Arabic root a-m-n. The most famous Qur’anic verse that refers to the amāna is, ‘we offered the Trust to the heaven and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it and were afraid of it: but man undertook to bear it […]’ (Q. 33/72). The Trust here is ‘free will and moral responsibility,’ which man alone was willing to bear. The Shiite Trust that Zeynab transmits is responsibility for the preservation of the Faith and community, embodied in certain relics. The fragment refers to the importance of preserving the relics because the salvation of the Shiites depends on them. The amānā are two teeth of the Prophet that were broken in the battle against pagans for the sake of the expansion of Islam; the turban of Imām ‘Ali who was murdered by Ibn al-Muljam in 661/1262 because he wished to preserve Shiite Islam; the torn liver of Imām Ḥasan, poisoned by the order of Mu‘awiya, the Umayyad caliph; and lastly, the shirt of Imām Ḥuseyn, martyred on the plain of Karbalā by the Umayyad army. For a Shiite, the objects depict the sequence of conflicts between the family of the Prophet and false claimants to the caliphate. The question is, how can a Shiite today preserve these relics that no longer exist? The answer is that commemorating and mourning for the owners of the objects will prevent them being forgotten. The remembrance of a thing is preserving its essence. In the ta’ziya ‘on the death of Zeynab,’ there is a reference to the intercession of Fāṭima, the Prophet’s daughter, on the Day of Judgement, for those who have preserved the rel-
ics. It is suggested that one who mourns and wails for the owners of the objects preserves their memory, so his salvation is assured.

Zeynab is the preserver of the line of Shiite Imāms in another way, because she prevented Imām Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin from being killed. After the battle of Karbalā, the severed heads of the dead were taken to Yazid’s court, where Yazid desecrated them. According to the taʿziya texts, Imām Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin criticized Yazid’s behaviour. He says to Yazid: ‘O! Oppressor! You struck the one whom the Prophet had kissed’ (127). Yazid orders his executioner to kill him. Zeynab protects Imām Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin and threatens Yazid,

If you kill him I will untie my hair [indicating the innocent victim], wail in God’s court of law and ask him for justice [...] I will go to Najaf without veil or footwear and lament so bitterly that the earth and heavens roar (129).

Then she calls on her father Imām ʿAli for help. Miraculously, Imām ʿAli appears to Šemr and orders him,

\[makuş makuş ke del-e ʿahl-e bayt khūn gardad\]
\[makuş makuş ke samāvāt sarnegūn gardad (129).\]

Do not kill him, do not kill him, lest the hearts of the Prophet’s family turn to blood […]
Do not kill him, do not kill him, lest the heavens be turned upside down (129).

When this vision appears to Šemr, he is frightened and does not dare to murder Imām Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin. The lesson for the audience is that the family of the Prophet is ‘spiritually present and actively involved in human affairs long after her [their] deaths’. Zeynab’s words not only preserved Imām Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin, they preserved ‘the line of the Imāms in human [Shiite] History’.

**Zeynab the Generous**

The taʿziya teaches the virtues and norms of society. As the archetype of Shiite virtues, Zeynab is described as a generous person. For instance, when
Yazid releases Zeynab and the household of Imām Ḥuseyn, they return to Medina, assisted in their journey by a man named Bašir. When they are near Medina, Bašir wants to separate from them. Zeynab thanks him and gives him her ankle-ring as a gift. She apologizes to Bašir and says that nothing else is left to give, because their properties were plundered by Šemr’s army. Sakina imitates Zeynab’s action and gives her necklace to Bašir, and Imām Zeyn al-‘Ābedin gives him his turban (184). The expectation is that the spectators will likewise be generous.

Zeynab and the Protagonists

Zeynab and Imām Ḥuseyn

The close relationship between Zeynab and her brother Imām Ḥuseyn is emphasized in the ta’ziya texts. She is his supporter and assistant. At Karbalā, as Imām Ḥuseyn is going to the battlefield, he asks Zeynab to bring his horse (9). She also hands him a weapon, saying ‘take the weapon of war from your sister’ (selāḥ-e razm rā bestān ze khāhar) (10). When all the men have been killed, she holds the flag of war as a man would (172). Imām Ḥuseyn is the last person to go to the battlefield; no man is left alive to help him, so Zeynab tells him that the women sheltered in his own tent will assist him (172).

There is another episode, in which Zeynab finds her brother alone and helpless on the battlefield. She sends her two sons, Muḥammad and ʿAwn, to help him. According to the ta’ziya texts, they were then aged seven and eight. Zeynab offers her sons as a sacrifice (qurbān) to her brother. She ties them with a rope, like sheep being offered for sacrifice (12), and both are killed in battle. Zeynab sacrifices her children to save her brother’s life; the question is, why does she do so? There is no doubt that her love for her brother is not the main reason. In fact, she sacrifices them to ensure the survival of Shiite Islam. The implication is that Shiites should sacrifice themselves and their children so that Islam can survive.

In the ta’ziya on Amir Muṣayeb (majles-e ta’ziya Amir Muṣayeb)24 there is an episode in which Zeynab and Imām Ḥuseyn talk about the coming events of Karbalā, and through their conversation reveal their spiritual relationship and their foreknowledge. The events of Karbalā are vividly depicted. Imām Ḥuseyn says,
resida vaqt ey khāhar ke mā az ham judā gardim
biyā tā dar zamān-e ḥāl az qesmat rezā gardim (61).

My sister, the time of our separation has come
You know that in this world we must acquiesce to our fate (61).

The term *qesmat* is derived from the Arabic root q-s-m, meaning ‘to share.’ In Persian literature, it appears with the meaning of ‘accepting the effect of predestination’ (*qadar*). Acquiescence (*rezā*) is a crucial concept in Islamic culture. It refers to man’s submission to God’s will (*az qesmat rezā gaštān*) (8). The fate of each man is written on the Well-Preserved Tablet (*lawḥ-e mahfūz*) (61-62). Thus, man cannot change his fate, but he can accept it happily.

When Imām Ḥuseyn says to Zeynab that they must acquiesce to their fate, he prepares the audience to hear unpleasant news. In this episode, Imām Ḥuseyn and Zeynab divide the coming events of Karbalā between them, each taking a number of parts. Zeynab tells Imām Ḥuseyn that she will take grief. He answers that he will take the parts of the plain of Karbalā and the shameless siege, as well as offering his head and his chest to the daggers of the enemy. He says that he also takes the martyrs of the plain of Karbalā as his part. ‘Abbās, whose hands are cut off, the body of Qāsem that is torn into one hundred pieces, ‘Ali Akbar, whose face is as beautiful as the moon, and ‘Ali Asḡar, the infant whose life is sacrificed. He takes two further parts: those of the pilgrim (*zā’er*) and of the preacher (*Dhāker* and *rawza-khān*) (61-62), who will retell the events of Karbalā and recite the suffering of Imām Ḥuseyn and elegies to him.

The roles that Zeynab takes are affliction, mourning (*mātam*), and the events that happen after the day of ‘Āšūrā. Therefore, her share is to preserve the indigent orphans from the attack of Šāmiyān’s army, to support Robāb, Ṣahrbānū and Umm al-Laylā, and the bride who does not have *jahāz* or dowry (61-62). The last refers to Imām Ḥuseyn’s daughter Fāṭima, who has married Qāsem in Karbalā but does not consummate the marriage because he is killed in the battle.

In the role of Imām Ḥuseyn, the wounds of daggers refer to his badly injured body, before his final death. The reference to his head and chest summons up an image of his martyrdom. His head is mentioned because he is beheaded, his chest because his body is trampled by his enemies. The body of ‘Abbās that is ‘without hands’ refers to the death of ‘Abbās, Imām Ḥuseyn’s half-brother. According to Shiite sources, the blockade prevented water from being obtained for ten days. Then, ‘Abbās galloped to
the Euphrates for some water, but the enemy cut off his hands and he was killed. The tearing of the body of Qāsem reminds the audience that he was newly married, and his body was torn to pieces. The sacrificed life of ṬAli Asḡar reminds the audience of Imām Ἠuseyn holding him, and demanding a sip of water for him. Harmala shoots an arrow and murders the infant. The last parts taken by Imām Ἠuseyn are the pilgrims (zāʾer) and the preachers (dhāker and rawza-khān). The former refers to Shiites Muslims who visit the shrine of Imām Ἠuseyn. The reference in the taʿziya increases the desire to visit Imām Ἠuseyn’s shrine. The latter (Dhāker and rawza-khān, see above) refers to those whose profession is to recite the elegies of Imām Ἠuseyn and narrate the events of Karbalā. The reference to them tells the audience that the family of the Prophet respected this occupation, and that its practitioners will be rewarded in the Hereafter (61-62).

The parts that Zeynab takes are the events after the day of ʿĀšūrā, beginning with mourning and lamentation. Zeynab is described as a mournful woman who takes responsibility for keeping the tragedy of Karbalā alive. In imitation of her, Shiite women have to mourn and lament for the martyrs of Karbalā. Second, Šāmiyān’s attack on the destitute children, the occasion when Ibn al-Ziyād’s army attacked the tents of Imām Ἠuseyn’s family, set them on fire, seized the women and children and marched them through the desert to the palace of Yazid in Damascus. Third, Robāb, Šahrbānū and ʿUmm al-Laylā are the wives of Imām Ἠuseyn whom Zeynab agreed to support after his death. The name of Šahrbānū, between the names of Imām Ἠuseyn’s other two wives, gives an Iranian flavour to the taʿziya. Šahrbānū reminds the audience of the Iranian presence at Karbalā, which underlines the duty of Iranian women to take part in the taʿziya and mourn the martyrs. Fourth, the image of the bride who does not have jahāz, referring to the marriage of Fāṭima and Qāsem (the son of Imām Ḥasan) at Karbalā. Qāsem was martyred while Fāṭima was captured and taken to Damascus. According to the taʿziya texts, their marriage will be consummated in the heaven.

Through the conversation of Imām Ἠuseyn and Zeynab, the audience remembers the entire tragedy of Karbalā and is moved to sympathy and to active participation in the taʿziya.
Zeynab and Sakina

Zeynab as Mother

In the ta’ziya texts, Zeynab acts as a mother for Imām Ḥuseyn’s children. The most vivid picture is of the relationship between Zeynab and Sakina. The word Sakina derives from the Arabic root s-k-n. There are many derivations from this root in the Qur’ān. It means, ‘To go down, rest, be quiescent, inhabit.’

Sakina is the daughter of Imām Ḥuseyn. She was present at the battle of Karbalā, with the rest of Imām Ḥuseyn’s family. Many ta’ziya texts refer to the relationship between Sakina and her aunt Zeynab. Zeynab always supports Sakina, like a mother who supports her daughter. When Sakina cries for the death of her father, Zeynab tries to calm her, like a mother who cannot bear to hear her daughter crying. When Zeynab talks with Sakina, she uses the expressions that a mother uses to comfort a sorrowful daughter. For instance, Zeynab says ‘I sacrifice myself for you’ (be qurbān-e tu) or ‘I sacrifice myself for your well-being’ (fadāy-e ḥālat). After the events at Karbalā, Sakina wails and laments for her father’s death. Zeynab says,

\[
\begin{align*}
mazan & \text{ bar sina-u sar ey Sakina} \\
be & \text{ qurbān-e tu ey mehnat qarina} \\
čegūna & \text{ bengaram geryān-u zārat} \\
bemiram & \text{ tā nabinam aškbārat} \quad (199).
\end{align*}
\]

O Sakina! Do not beat your chest and head
I sacrifice myself for you, for whom grief is a companion
How can I see you, afflicted and shedding tears?
I wish I could die and not see your tears (199).

Several times, Zeynab says, ‘I sacrifice myself for the sake of your head’ (fadā-ye sarat gardam).

\[
\begin{align*}
makun & \text{ tu gerya be qurbāni-ye sarat gardam} \\
fadāy-e & \text{ ān del-e andūh parvarat gardam} \quad (200).
\end{align*}
\]

Do not cry, I sacrifice myself for your head,
I sacrifice myself for your sorrowful heart (200).
The expression (fadā-ye sar gaštan) to make oneself a sacrifice for someone’s ‘head,’ has a profound meaning in Persian literature. The head (sar) is much more than the seat of reason it represents the person’s life.

Zeynab speaks as a mother talks to her very young daughter.

 agar mādar nadārī mādarat man
agar yāvar nadārī yāvarat man (122).

As you have no mother, I will be your mother
As you have no helper, I will be your helper (122).

The term child (tefl) has positive connotations. It is used to show kindness and compassion towards someone who is not necessarily a child. Zeynab calls Sakina, ‘my child of Ḥuseyn, who has no friend’ (tefl-e biyār-e Ḥuseynam) (199). This expression increases the empathy of the audience for Sakina, and reinforces their hatred for Šemr, who killed Imām Ḥuseyn.

Zeynab takes risks to rescue Sakina. In the ta’ziya on ‘the death of her holiness Zeynab’ (ta’ziya vafāt-e ḥażrat-e Zeynab), Šemr goes to Medina to once again arrest Imām Ḥuseyn’s family. He severely beats Sakina. When Zeynab sees his cruel behaviour, she curses him and says, ‘O unfaithful ugly oppressor,’ terms that show that Šemr’s behaviour results from his lack of faith. In this episode, Zeynab says,

 čūb bar peykaraš mazan ze jafā
zan be farq-e man ey la’īn-e dağā (206).

Do no beat her with a stick, for cruelty’s sake,
Instead, strike my head, you deceitful, cursed one (206).

Zeynab again behaves sacrificially when Šemr is about to seize Sakina. Seeing Sakina in danger, she asks Šemr to arrest her instead. She says,

 az yatimi čunin će mikhāhi
tu marā jāy-e ū bebar mal’ūn (205).

What do you want with such an orphan?
Seize me, instead of her, you accursed man! (205).
Both these examples present ideals for the audience to follow. The audience is deliberately involved. When Šemr goes to arrest Sakina, Sakina turns to the audience and seeks refuge. Her behaviour moves the audience to sympathy. Several key terms such as, O Muslims! (ey musalmānān), O Friends! (ey yārān), O my dears! (ey ‘azizān) connect the player to the audience, and motivate the audience to participate. This comes at the climax of the ta’ziya. The direct link with the player reinforces the emotions of the audience, and they wail and lament bitterly because they cannot help Sakina.

Sakina then rushes to her aunt asking for help. She says,

‘amma jān ‘amma jān be dādam res
juz tu ey ‘amma jān nadāram kas (206).

Dear aunt, dear aunt, respond to my appeal
I have no one but you, dear aunt (206).

In Persian literature, dād means justice, but also a lament or appeal for justice. The compound verb, be-dād residan means to respond, to release someone from oppression or hardships. Sakina asks Zeynab for justice, giving Zeynab the role of a judge, Šemr that of the oppressor, and Sakina is the oppressed one. The audience wants to know whether Zeynab rescues herself or assists the oppressed Sakina.

Zeynab several times refers to Sakina and Fāṭima, Imām Ḥuseyn’s daughters, as orphans. The term orphan (yatim) is derived from the Arabic root y-t-m. According to Shaham, it denotes ‘a child, below the age of puberty who has lost his father.’ The importance of observing an orphan’s rights is emphasized in the Qur’ān. For instance, the property of an orphan has to be preserved for him until he reaches to the age of puberty, when he is free to manage his property. Despoiling the property of an orphan is prohibited.

It is said, ‘Do not approach the property of the orphan, save in the fairest manner, until he is of age, and fulfill the covenant; surely the covenant shall be questioned of.’

In the ta’ziya texts the theme of orphans is used to emphasize the cruel and irreligious behaviour of Yazid and his commanders who neither obey God’s commands, nor follow social customs. The ta’ziya composer emphasizes the innocence and loneliness of the victims to highlight the unjust behaviour of the Umayyad caliph.
**Zeynab as Defender**

In the *ta’ziya* texts, Zeynab is present at almost all the events. When the family of Imām Ḥuseyn is humiliated by the enemy, she does not remain silent. She always refers to her rank and dignity. Her honourable lineage is a weapon. At Yazid’s court, when Sakina is asked about the reason for her sadness and why she beats her chest and her face. Sakina answers in tears that she is lamenting for her father. Hearing this, Yazid tells her, ‘You are correct, being an orphan is very hard, but now that you have come near me, you can be my daughter’s slave girl’ (124). Zeynab then defends Sakina, cursing Yazid in a loud voice and wishing him to be dumb and blind. She continues: ‘Who are you that you want to have a slave-girl from the family of the Prophet? Should Sakina who is the love of Fāṭima the Prophet’s daughter serve you as a slave-girl?’ (124). Yazid talks about Zeynab’s father and grandfather, Imām ‘Ali and the Prophet. He says, ‘Is this she whose father conquered the world with his sword? Is this she whose mighty grandfather was lifted to the throne by God?’ Then he thanks God that Zeynab is now humiliated and dishonoured (124). Although Yazid intends to mock her, his words show the dignity of Zeynab and her family.

**Zeynab and the Mother of Qāsem**

In the *ta’ziya* texts, Qāsem’s mother is a close companion for Zeynab. She follows Zeynab’s suggestions. Zeynab trusts her and turns to her in extreme circumstances.

After the battle of Karbalā, Sakina, Fāṭima and ‘Umm-e Kultūm lament for Imām Ḥuseyn and other members of the family who were killed. Zeynab tries to calm them but she cannot. She then asks the mother of Qāsem to arrange a mourning assembly. She answers, I will do it, O woman of power (or rank) (*be čašm ey bānūy-e bā-eqtedāram*) (201). Her answer shows Zeynab’s influence among her family. Zeynab asks her to mourn for the oppressed (those killed at Karbalā). Qāsem’s mother prepares a space for mourning for the martyrs (202). The episode shows that in the *ta’ziya* texts, mourning and lamentation are expected to calm a person.
**Zeynab and the Antagonists**

**Zeynab and Yazid**

According to the *ta’ziya* texts, Yazid orders to his commanders to kill Imām Ḥuseyn and his companions and to arrest his household. During the imprisonment period, Yazid’s men behave savagely to them. Zeynab is such a strong woman that Yazid is frightened of her influence. For Yazid, Zeynab is a real opponent and a major threat to his authority. So he puts her under a lot of pressure to make her remain silent in the face of his cruel and immoral behaviour.

Yazid’s cruelest act towards the prisoners is that he orders them to be led around in public places, such as the bazaar, without any veil or headscarf. In the *ta’ziya* texts we see several references to this event. For instance, Yazid thanks God when he sees Zeynab humble and dishonoured. Zeynab answers: ‘Seventy maids of Medina eat from my table, such am I / I am unveiled among the people, and yet the Holy Spirit, like a lady’s maid, is proffering a veil’ (125). Here, Zeynab shows her rank both in this world, among the people of Medina, and before God. Not being allowed a veil does not prevent her from defending herself and her family.

Another act by Yazid that Shiites particularly loathe, and the protagonists criticize, is that he strikes the severed head of Imām Ḥuseyn, in the presence of the Imām’s household and sisters. For instance, in one episode, Zeynab and Imām Ḥuseyn’s daughter, Sakina, say several times that Yazid strikes the head of Imām Ḥuseyn (81). This behaviour is highlighted in the *ta’ziya* of ‘the Bazaar of Damascus,’ in which Imām Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin, the son of Imām Ḥuseyn, criticizes Yazid when he strikes Imām Ḥuseyn’s head. Yazid then orders the executioner to kill Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin (127). In the same *ta’ziya*, when the head of Imām Ḥuseyn is taken to the ruins to be shown to Imām Ḥuseyn’s family, Zeynab says that the blackness of his lips shows that Yazid has beaten him (133).

In the *ta’ziya* texts, Yazid’s rancour toward Imām Ḥuseyn’s family is shown in several episodes. For instance, when the family of Imām Ḥuseyn is released and they return to Medina, the people of Medina commiserate with them, wailing and mourning for Imām Ḥuseyn. Yazid is informed of this, and regrets allowing Zeynab and Sakina to live. He says,

čeṛa be kuştan-e Zeynab nemūdehim qusūr
Sakina ra nanemūdim az če zenda be gūr (204).
Why did we neglect to kill Zeynab?  
Why we did not bury Sakina alive? (204).

In addition to showing his deep hatred for Zeynab and Sakina, there is an allusion to the worst custom attributed to pre-Islamic Arabs, that of burying newborn girls alive. By his words, Yazid shows that he is not a Muslim, but rather a pagan at heart.

Zeynab is not frightened by Yazid’s authority. She threatens to reveal his unjust behaviour to people. For instance, when the captives are being taken to Damascus, Zeynab tells the audience that, when she reaches Damascus, she will say what has happened and will disgrace Yazid (26). When the survivors of Imam Ḥuseyn’s household arrive as prisoners at the court of Yazid, Zeynab several times speaks harshly to Yazid and reminds him of his dishonourable lineage and his savage behaviour. She warns him of the divine punishment that awaits him on the Day of Judgement.

**Zeynab and Šemr**

Šemr is Yazid’s commander, whose cruel behaviour to Imām Ḥuseyn’s family, and specifically to Zeynab, is emphasized in the *ta’ziya* texts. He is the archetype of oppression, a person who killed Imām Ḥuseyn while he was thirsty. In the *ta’ziya* texts he is described as a heartless person who is happy with his own unjust behaviour. He slaps the children of Imām Ḥuseyn and humiliates them. For instance, after the day of ‘Āšūrā, Šemr goes to arrest Imām Ḥuseyn’s family and to take them to the court of Yazid. Zeynab is the first woman whom he seeks, and he wants to taunt her. Zeynab is not present when he enters, and Šemr tells the people,

\[
\text{khabar dahid be Zeynab du češm-e tu rowšan}  
\text{kunān ze rāḥ resid Šemr-e zel-jowšan} \quad (204).
\]

Tell Zeynab, ‘Now your eyes are delighted  
Now Šemr has come in his armour’ (204).

The expression ‘your eye is delighted,’ (*češm-e tu rowšan*) is used when a loved one returns from a journey. But Zeynab hates Šemr, as her father’s murderer; he is being sarcastic and taunting her. Šemr’s utterance increases the audience’s hatred for him.
Šemr annoys Zeynab by reminding her of her frustrating situation on the plain of Karbalā and in the court of Yazid. For instance, in the ta’ziya on ‘the Death of her holiness Zeynab’ (majles ta’ziya vafāt-e ḥaẓrat-e Zeynab), Šemr says to her that she must go to the bazaar without headscarf or veil, and be dishonoured (205). This harks back to what happened after the day of Āšūrā, in Damascus. The forced unveiling of Zeynab and other women of Imām Ḥuseyn’s family is so important that the audience is reminded of it repeatedly, in almost all the ta’ziya episodes.36

When Zeynab sees the cruel behaviour of her enemy, she raises her voice and protests. She is presented as the voice of righteousness and justice; she does not remain silent. She curses Šemr and reminds the audience that he is responsible for her death. Zeynab says,

\[ \text{vāy ke ān Šemr-e dūn ān sag-e kāfer resid} \\
\text{ʿumr-e man-e khasta jān az setamaš sar resid} \text{ (204).} \]

Alas! Despicable Šemr, that infidel dog, has come
The life of this broken soul has reached its end because of his injustice (204).

Zeynab provokes two responses in the audience. On the one hand, she talks harshly to Šemr, damns him and reminds him his ancestors were pagans, creating admiration for her in the audience. On the other hand, she addresses the audience as an oppressed, helpless, sorrowful woman who has been left without any support because the men have all been killed in battle, except for Imām Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin, who was too ill and very young. Zeynab says,

\[ \text{musalmānān hamin Šemr-e laʿin ast} \\
\text{ke az dastaš del-e zāram ḡamin ast} \\
\text{hamin ast ān ke āmad Karbalā vāy} \\
\text{Ḥuseyn rā sar burid ū az qafā vāy} \\
\text{hanūz az khanjaraš az rāh-e bidād čekad khūn-e Ḥuseyn ān Shah-e owtād} \text{ (205).} \]

O! Muslims this is that damned Šemr
Because of him, my bitter heart is so sorrowful.
Alas, he is the one, who came to Karbalā,
Alas, he beheaded Ḥuseyn.
The blood of Ḥuseyn, the King of the pillars, is still dripping from his dagger, because of his injustice.

Here, Zeynab addresses the audience as O! Muslims (ey musalmānān). Her helplessness and her critique of Šemr’s deeds encourage them to take part in the taʿziya.

**Zeynab and Ibn al-Ziyād**

Ibn al-Ziyād is another of Yazid’s commanders. After the battle he orders his army: ‘set fire to the tents of the household of Imām Ḥuseyn and trample the bodies of the dead.’ In one episode, when the prisoners have been taken to his palace, he strikes the lips of the severed head of Imām Ḥuseyn with a stick, as Yazid does, and says, ‘I was afraid of you.’ At that moment, Sakina laments, referring to the head of her father as ‘you’ (tu), as if her father was still living, rather than as ‘it’ (ū). She says,

\[
\text{čūb zad Ibn-e Ziyād vāy, vāy, vāy}
\]
\[
\text{bar lab-e tu az 'enād vāy, vāy, vāy (81).}
\]

Ibn al-Ziyād is striking, alas, alas, alas,
On your lips, out of enmity; alas, alas, alas (81).

Zeynab repeats Sakina’s words, in an address to her own dead mother, Fāṭima. Zeynab says,

\[
\text{fāṭimā ey mādaram vāy, vāy, vāy}
\]
\[
\text{khāk šuda bar saram vāy, vāy, vāy}
\]
\[
\text{čūb zad Ibn-e Ziyād vāy, vāy, vāy}
\]
\[
\text{ra’s-e barādar baram vāy, vāy, vāy (81).}
\]

O! My mother Fāṭima, alas, alas, alas
Dust is on my head, alas, alas, alas
Ibn al-Ziyād is striking, alas, alas, alas
On my brother’s head, in front of me; alas, alas, alas (81).

Then Zeynab says to Ibn Ziyād,
čūb mazan ey dağā vāy, vāy, vāy
bar sar-e Shāh-e hodā vāy, vāy, vāy
teşna-ye khuşkida lab vāy, vāy, vāy
bas ke bedida jafā vāy, vāy, vāy
ey dağā pur jafā kun hayā vāy, vāy, vāy (81).

You imposter! Do not strike, alas, alas, alas
The head of the King of Guidance, alas, alas, alas
His lip is dry with thirst, alas, alas, alas
He has suffered much tyranny, alas, alas, alas
You imposter, oppressor, be ashamed of yourself; alas, alas, alas (81).

Sakina then repeats almost the same words, and at last Ibn al-Ziyād himself, referring to the severed head of Imām Ḥuseyn, says,

mizanam az khayzarān bar lab-o dandān-e tu
mišekanam az 'enād bas del-e yārān-e tu (81).

I beat on your lips and teeth with a bamboo rod,
I break your friends’ hearts because of my enmity (81).

In these lines, Ibn al-Ziyād’s striking the severed head of Imām Ḥuseyn is referred to four times. The composer uses a rhetorical figure ‘repetition’ (takrir), by repeating the compound verb ‘to strike with a stick’ (čūb zadan), in the words of Ibn al-Ziyād, Sakina and Zeynab. The repetition is used to motivate the audience. For them, Ibn al-Ziyād’s behaviour is a sign of his enmity for the family of Imām Ḥuseyn. Thus, they hate him and curse him.

In these lines, Zeynab criticizes Ibn al-Ziyād and calls him an imposter or deceiver (dağā), and an oppressor (pur jafā). Ibn al-Ziyād asks Zeynab what her name is. She says, ‘I am one whose young sons you have killed, I am Zeynab who has seen the mark [of fate] on her brother (dāğ-e barādar), and I am Zeynab who is arrested by your hand [...]’ We see that she is constantly referring to Ibn al-Ziyād’s cruel behaviour to Imām Ḥuseyn, her sons and herself, reminding the audience how oppressed they are. Ibn al-Ziyād then praises God, because he has taken the caliphate from the family of the Prophet, and dishonoured Zeynab. Zeynab asks for help from her mother (Fāṭima) and her father (Imām ‘Ali). She says to Ibn al-Ziyād: ‘God bestowed salvation on us, we are loved because of his Prophet and you
The Holy Drama

will be publicly disgraced [...]’ Ibn al-Ziyād threatens Zeynab, saying, I will order your head to be cut off. Zeynab will not be silenced: she curses him,

O cursed one, O cursed one, you are the son of Marjāna; now hear of the dignity of the son of the Prophet [...]. God bestowed his grace on Imām Ḩuseyn from the cup of martyrdom. While you, you impure one, will be disgraced because of your behaviour. O infidel! Keep silent do not babble. God will pour fire from hell into your heart (82-4).

Ibn al-Ziyād orders his executioner to kill Zeynab, but Sakina intervenes. She laments and demands that Ibn al-Ziyād should leave Zeynab alive, because the children of Imām Ḩuseyn have no other supporter but her (81-84).

In the above episode, we see that Zeynab identifies herself by her relationship to the martyrs, while she identifies Ibn al-Ziyād as the son of Marjāna, in order to disgrace him. Zeynab curses him, reminds him that he killed her children and brother, while she praises her father and brother. For Zeynab, martyrdom was God's bounty for Imām Ḩuseyn. She addresses her enemy loudly and fearlessly. In imitation of her, a Shiite should protest against oppressors, and there is nothing to fear: Imām's martyrdom is the grace of God for the best of His servants.

The first couplet of the passage cited above shows the belief in the presence of saintly spirits. Zeynab talks to her father and her mother as if they were alive and could see her and help her. For instance, she says, 'Come my mother, cover my hair, see how red-faced I am because of shame’ (81). Her utterance teaches the audience that they too can benefit from the assistance of these saintly spirits, in opposing an oppressive ruler.

Notes

3 For more information on the term *parda* (veil) and its symbolic meaning in Persian poetry (classic poetry and Qājār dynasty) see A.A. Seyed Gohrab, 'The Symbolism of Veiling and the Poetics of Unveiling in Early Modern Persian Poetry'


6 The compound word 'parda dārī' (lit. to proffer a veil) means to show a person respect. In contrast, 'parda dari' (lit. to draw aside a veil, to reveal a secret) means to dishonour a person.


8 J.E. Tucker, 'Women in the Middle East and North Africa: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', in Women in the Middle East, p. 126.

9 Kūfā is the city whose people invited Imām Ḥusayn to lead them and release them from the tyranny of Yazid, the successor of Mu'āwiyah; but when Imām Husayn was surrounded by the army of Yazid at Karbalā they did not assist him.

10 After the battle of Karbalā, the martyrs are beheaded and their heads are taken to the court of Yazid. Yazid beats on the severed head of Imām Husayn with a stick. See Abū Ja'far Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr Ṭabarī, The History of al-Ṭabarī, p. 176.


14 For more instances of the presence of the soul of the holy figures see: H. Şālehi Rād Darbandsari, Majāles-e ta'ziya, pp. 50, 129, 156.


17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., p. 87.

19 begū šahid česān gašt ān Imām-e hudā (203).


21 On the Day of Judgement my mother / has to intercede the sin of the nation by these deposits (211).

bāyad ānke mādaram kunad be rūz-e jazā / šaфа‘at-e gunah-e khalq rā zin amānathā (211).


23 Ibid., p. 83.
According to Majālis-e ta’ziya, Amir Muṣayeb was a follower of Imām Ḥuseyn. Before the battle, the Imām sent him a letter asking for help. When Amir Muṣayeb arrived at Karbalā, Imām Ḥuseyn had already been killed. See H. Şalehi Rād Darbandsari, Majālis-e ta’ziya, pp. 59-72.

A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, Layli and Majnūn, p. 166; Daniel Madigan, in Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān, under Preserved Tablet.

Šahrbānū and ’Umm-e Laylā are both the wives of Imām Ḥuseyn. Šahrbānū was the daughter of the last Iranian King Yazdgerd III. She was arrested by Arabs when they invaded Iran. She was taken to Medina where she married Imām Ḥuseyn. See D. Pinault, ’Zaynab bint ’Ali and the place of the Women of the Households of the First Imāms’, in Women in the Medieval Islamic World, p. 80.

T. Fahd, in The Encyclopaedia of Islam (second edition), under Sakina.

See ’majles-e ta’ziya gārat-e khaymagāh-e ahl-e karbalā’ and ‘ta’ziya Amir Muṣayeb’ in H. Şalehi Rād Darbandsari, Majāles-e ta’ziya.

gātel-e bābam ān šah-e dowrān / āmada čūn kunam musalmānān [...] ey azizān yatīm-o afgāram / rah dahīdam ke khowf az ū dāram (205).

O Muslims! My father’s killer, the king of the age / is coming, what can I do [...]?
O my friends, I am an orphan and wounded / Help me, because I am frightened of him (205).

For instance, what do you want with such an orphan? (az yatimi čūnin če mikhāhi?) (205) Zaynab and ’Umme Kulṭūm several times refer to Fāṭima and Sakina saying: They are both orphans; their hearts are broken in two by grief (in har du yatimand az ġam del du nimand) (205).

R. Shaham, in The Encyclopaedia of Islam (second edition), under Yatīm.

Ibid.


The wife of Imām Hasan (the elder brother of Imām Ḥuseyn) is called ’the mother of Qāsem’ in the Majāles-e ta’ziya.

H. Şalehi Rād Darbandsari, Majāles-e ta’ziya, pp. 197-214.

See ibid., Majles-e ta’ziya Durra-ye șadaf, Mjlise ta’ziya bazaar Šām, Majlese ta’ziya vurūd-e be Medina.

King of the pillars refers to five unseen supports who sustain the world’s existence.

The Transformation of History

In what follows, I will examine several examples of the transformation of historical facts into oral tradition. In Shiite tradition, the events of Karbalā and the martyrdom of Imām Ḥuseyn and his companions were crucial, and their commemoration has become the most important devotional event in the Shiite calendar. The popularity of the commemoration has meant that several aspects of the historical events are now narrated in slightly different forms. The ta’ziya composers have added details to what is known about the events of Karbalā: details chosen to stimulate the audience’s empathy.

One example of this is the murder of Imām Ḥuseyn. According to Abū Ja’far Muḥammad Ibn Jarir Ṭabarī (d.839-923), on the day of ‘Āšūrā, Imām Ḥuseyn went to the battlefield, where the men of his family and his companions were killed. The battle between him and Ibn al-Ziyād’s soldiers lasted a long time. They were frightened to kill him. Several of them wounded him, but did not dare to kill him, until Šemr shouted at them, ‘Shame on you! Why are you waiting for the man? Kill him, may your mothers be deprived of you!’ They then attacked Imām Ḥuseyn: he fell from his horse and Sinān Ibn Anas Ibn ‘Amr al-Nakha’i stabbed him and killed him. Then he cut off his head.2 In the ta’ziya texts, it is Šemr who does this, and so incurs the guilt. This is simply a collapsing of Ṭabarī’s account, in which Šemr does not do the deed, but does prompt Imām Ḥuseyn’s killers, who might otherwise not have dared commit such an act.

Another historical fact that is transformed into oral tradition is Zeynab’s behaviour in rescuing her nephew, ‘Ali Ibn Ḥuseyn, from death. According to Ṭabarī, after the day of ‘Āšūrā, the prisoners were taken to Ibn-e Ziyād’s palace. When he noticed Imām Zeyn al-‘Ābedin he asked his companions whether he was mature or not. Receiving a positive answer, he ordered them to kill him. Zeynab then said, ‘I plead to you by God, if you are a believer: that if you kill him, you kill me with him.’3 Zeynab’s intervention led Ibn-e Ziyād to free Imām Zeyn al-‘Ābedin. In the ta’ziya texts this event happens in Yazid’s palace. Because Imām Zeyn al-‘Ābedin objects to Yazid striking
the lips of the severed head of Imām Ḥuseyn, Yazid orders his men to kill
Zeyn al-‘Ābedin. Zeynab then threatens Yazid, saying: ‘If you kill him, I
will untie my hair and complain to God. Then I will go, barefooted and
unveiled, to the tomb of the King of Najaf [her father Imām ‘Ali].’ Then she
calls on her father and his image appears to Šemr. He is frightened and does
not kill Imām Zeyn al-‘Ābedin (129).

The place of Zeynab’s death is another detail that is transformed in the
taʿziya texts. Tabari says that Zeynab did not survive for long after returning
from Damascus to Medina.⁴ According to the taʿziya texts, Zeynab dies in
the ruins in Damascus where the household of Imām Ḥuseyn were impris-
oned (210-213).

A final example of the effect of the oral tradition is the person of Sakina,
the four-year-old daughter of Imām Ḥuseyn who died during the impris-
onment in Damascus.⁵ In the taʿziya texts, Sakina is a mature girl, Zeynab’s
closest companion and, next to Zeynab, the primary target of the tyran-
nies of the Umayyad caliph and his commanders. In the taʿziya texts, it is
Ruqeya, another daughter of Imām Ḥuseyn, who dies during the imprison-
ment in Damascus (133).

Notes

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., p. 167.
4 Ibid.
Pre-Islamic Iranian Elements in the Ta‘ziya Texts

Another important feature of the ta‘ziya texts is the way Shiite Arab traditions are linked to Iran. The ta‘ziya composers give the events of Karbalā an Iranian flavour by employing words and expressions that are integral to Iranian life today. They also make plot links to Iran, so that the events of Karbalā seem more familiar to the audience. The most important of these is the presence of Šahrbânû, an Iranian princess, at Karbalā. She is the daughter of Yazdgerd III (r. 632–651), the last Sassanid (224–651) king of Iran before the Arab invasion. According to popular Shiite tradition, before the Arabs invaded Persia, Šahrbânû dreamt that Fāṭima, the daughter of the Prophet, told her that she would go to Medina and marry Fāṭima’s son, Ḥuseyn, and a line of Imāms would stem from this marriage (44). The day after her dream, she was arrested and taken to Medina, where she married Imām Ḥuseyn, and so is present at the battle of Karbalā. According to the ta‘ziya texts, Imām Ḥuseyn told her that if he should be killed on the battlefield, she had to take his horse and escape because the enemy must not arrest her. After the death of Imām Ḥuseyn, Šahrbânû first asks permission from Zeynab and then says farewell to other members of the family and leaves them. From the texts of the ta‘ziya, one learns that Sakina, Fāṭima and Imām Zeyn al-‘Ābedin are the children of Šahrbânû (43-45). Therefore, the line of Imāms is almost Iranian. So naturally, Iranians are responsible for continuing the commemoration of the martyrdom of Imām Ḥuseyn and other members of the Prophet’s family.

In the above episode, Šahrbânû’s brother ʿAbd al-Allāh has been expecting Imām Ḥuseyn, who does not arrive. ʿAbd al-Allāh sends a messenger to him, but the messenger does not return for two weeks. When he does return, he explains to ʿAbd al-Allāh the miserable situation of Imām Ḥuseyn and his companions on the plain of Karbalā (37-38). ʿAbd al-Allāh’s camp is in the desert, and his sister Šahrbânû comes to him there (48-49). In these texts, Yazdgerd’s son is named ʿAbd al-Allāh, whereas his real name was Pirūz.¹ The transformation of the name encourages Iranians to adopt Ara-
bic names and choose them for their children. Yazdgerd’s supposed acceptance of this name is a sign of his respect for Arab customs.

Another important feature that makes the ta’ziya seem more familiar for Iranians is its suffusion with motifs drawn from the Persian ethic of kingship. Hereditary kingship has very ancient roots in Iran. Terms such as king (Shah), crown prince (vali’ahd), and prince (Shahzāda) are associated with social rank in Persian. Iranians respect the idea of social rank: those who bear one of these titles are entitled to at least a presumption of dignity. In the ta’ziya texts, Imām Ḥuseyn is several times called the King of the Day of Judgement (pādešah-e rūz-e māād) (16), the King of Religion (Shah-e din) (33), the headless king (Shah-e bi sar) and the thirsting king (Shah-e tešna lab) (182). In the ta’ziya texts, the members of Imām Ḥuseyn’s family identify themselves with a lineage that can be traced back to royalty. For example, Ruqeya, Imām Ḥuseyn’s daughter, says to the daughter of Yazid, ‘our lineage traces back to kings, we are among the nobility of the world’ (mā az šahānim ze khūbān-e jahānim) (149).

The ta’ziya texts sometimes name Persian kings. In the ta’ziya on ‘the mourning of Dorra Ṣadaf’ (ta’ziya Dorra Ṣadaf), Dorra and her companions are setting out to fight Ibn al-Sa’d and so free Imām Ḥuseyn’s household (she is able to see Zeynab and offer her a headscarf (95-108)). On the way, she meets a man named Šabān, who is also going to take revenge on the enemies of Imām Ḥuseyn. He says to Dorra Ṣadaf that the legendary kings Jamšid and Dārā are mere slaves compared to her (101). This image and several other Iranian names mentioned in this ta’ziya assembly, such as Muṣṭary, Šabān and Sanān, make the events of Karbalā seem more familiar to Iranians.

Note

Conclusion

*Ta‘ziya* is the most important Shiite religious ritual. It is performed to commemorate Imām Ḥuseyn’s tragic death at Karbalā on the tenth of Muharram in 60/680. *Ta‘ziya* performances preserve the tragedy of Karbalā to the present day, by re-enacting it. These performances show us the core of Shiite religious identity. They picture the afflictions that Imām Ḥuseyn and his family endured at Karbalā, and motivate the audience to mourn and lament for him.

The present study sheds light on several aspects of *ta‘ziya* in Iran. It appears to have some continuity with the pre-Islamic dramatic tragedies of Mitrā (an Iranian god), of Zarir and of Siyāvuš. Where ancient Iranians mourned and lamented for the afflictions that Mitrā had suffered, medieval and modern Iranians mourn and wail for the afflictions that Imām Ḥuseyn endured on the plain of Karbalā. Where once they applauded Zarir, who fought a neighbouring king to defend the religion of Zoroastrianism, now they applaud Imām Ḥuseyn, who dies in the defence of his faith. Siyāvuš was killed innocently, his head cut off, and after his death his wife was captured by Afrāsiyāb, the king of Tūrān. This is similar to the events of Karbalā: after the death of Imām Ḥuseyn his head was cut off and his household was taken captive on the orders of Yazid, the Umayyad caliph. The common features (fighting for religion, innocence, death, captivity, suffering, affliction, and mourning) have prepared the ground for Iranians to commemorate the tragic death of Imām Ḥuseyn in a dramatic tragedy. For Shiites, the tragedy of Karbalā is a religious myth, and Imām Ḥuseyn and Zeynab are the main figures in it.

In *ta‘ziya* the religious beliefs and virtues of Zeynab are highlighted and mingled with Iranian terms and motifs. Although Zeynab is an Arab, she is so close to the spirit and beliefs of Iranian women that they live with her memories and emulate her behaviour. She is the heroine of the battle of Karbalā.
The *ta'ziya* ritual unites Shiites and reminds them about their common history. The women of Imâm Ḥuseyn’s household are role models for Iranian women in various ways. Fatimah and Imâm Ḥuseyn’s daughter Sakina are the archetypes of suffering and endurance. Imâm Ḥuseyn’s sister Umme Kulṭûm is a support to his children and a helper for her sister Zeynab. After the battle, Zeynab protests against the Umayyad caliph Yazid (r.60-3/680-3). Her behaviour enabled the tragedy of Karbalā to become a living tradition. Zeynab played a major role both before the battle and after the battle, during the imprisonment period. Zeynab’s character and her exceptional behaviour in standing up to Yazid have connected Shiite history with the events of Karbalâ. Her behaviour made her an archetype for Iranian women before the Islamic Revolution, during the Revolution, during the Iran-Iraq war (in the 1980s), and after it.

Imâm Ḥuseyn, too, is an archetype for Shiite behaviour. He teaches Shiites not to accept the authority of a ruler who does not obey the religious law. Imâm Ḥuseyn is the symbol of submission to God’s will. He sacrifices himself and his family to preserve the faith. This image, repeated in the *ta'ziya*, has motivated Shiites to preserve their religion and show their loyalty to their Imâm.

Zeynab is the archetype of protest against the ruling class. She transcends all prohibitions and restrictions to preserve Shiite Islam and the memory of her brother. Her loyalty to her mission makes her speak against Yazid. Zeynab’s story draws attention to the afflictions and hardships that the family of Imâm Ḥuseyn suffered during the siege period at Karbalā and in the imprisonment period.

Before the Islamic Revolution, Zeynab was generally presented in Iran as a passive protestor and an afflicted woman who stood up to Yazid. She appeared only in the *ta’ziya* plays held during the month of Muharram. During the Islamic Revolution (1979), Zeynab played a more prominent role, as the archetype of protest for Iranian women as a whole. They protested against the tyrant Muḥammad Rezâ Shah (1925-1979), whose father had forced women to go to public places without a veil or headscarf. The Shah had continued his father’s policies, and was treated as if he was the return of the tyrant Yazid.

In the *ta’ziya* texts, Zeynab is also the archetype of self-sacrificing behaviour and of support for Imâm Ḥuseyn and his lineage. Zeynab is pictured as a mother for the orphans of Imâm Ḥuseyn, especially Sakina, her closest companion. During the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88), Zeynab was ‘present’ in every house: mothers would send their sons and husbands to battle in
her name, to take revenge on the descendants of Yazid for Imâm Ḥuseyn's blood.

Those who died in the war were likened to the martyrs of the battle of Karbalā, because they died to preserve the religion of God, like Imâm Ḥuseyn. For them, there was no doubt that the dead would live in paradise beside their master, Imâm Ḥuseyn. Women who supported the soldiers from behind the lines were likened to Zeynab.

After the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88), Zeynab's image was adopted by a corps of moral police. Women who have taken on this role call themselves 'the sisters of Zeynab' (khāharān-e Zeynab). Thus, Zeynab is still among the Iranians. She has taken on responsibility for directing women to follow the religious law, she ‘commands the good and forbids the evil’ (amr-e be ma'rūf va nahy-e az munkar). She emphasizes wearing the headscarf that Zeynab was deprived of, after the battle of Karbalā, and she restrains women from doing what the religious law (šari'at) has prohibited.

Another important feature of Zeynab is her relationship with the saintly spirits of the Prophet's family, who assist her. This image is rooted among Shiites. They believe in the presence of the holy spirits in the physical world and their involvement in people's affairs. In general, all the members of the Prophet's family (ahl al-bayt) have a significant role among Shiites. They are their religious leaders, their moral teachers and their spiritual guides. They intercede on behalf of the Shiites in the Hereafter. Thus, the Shiites are responsible for preserving their memory.
Glossary: The Ta’ziya of the Damascus Bazaar

I follow the Persian pronunciation and spelling of Arabic names.

‘Abbās [Abu al-Fażl al-‘Abbās] (d.680): a half brother of Imām Ḥuseyn, killed at Karbalā
‘Ābedin (Zeyn al-‘Ābedin): the fourth Shiite Imām, the son of Imām Ḥuseyn
‘Ābes: a representative follower of Imām Ḥuseyn, killed at the battle of Karbalā
’Abū ’Amr-e Naš‘ali: a representative follower of Imām Ḥuseyn
Adam: the first man created by God
‘Ali (d.661): the first Imām of Shiite Muslims and the fourth caliph of the Muslim community (656-661)
‘Ali Akbar (d.680): the son of Imām Ḥuseyn.
He was killed at the battle of Karbalā
‘Ali Aṣgār (d.680): the infant son of Imām Ḥuseyn.
He was killed at the battle of Karbalā
‘Ali Ibn al-Ḥuseyn: see ‘Ābedin
Amīr-e gāyeb: a title of Imām ‘Ali
‘Amr-o ’Ās: one of Yazid’s commanders; he fought against Imām Ḥuseyn
‘Awn (d.680): Zeynab’s son
Bū Turāb: a title of Imām ‘Ali
Doctor: a narrative figure
European: a narrative figure
Executioner: a narrative figure
Fāṭima: the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad and Khadija
Ḡassāla: refers to a woman whose job is washing the dead
Ḥabib Ibn Mazāher (d.680): a follower of Imām Ḥuseyn, killed at the battle of Karbalā
Ḥasan (d.670): the son of Imām ‘Ali and Fāṭima and the second Shiite Imām
Hendeh: Yazid's wife
Hendeh's maid: a narrative figure
Ḥeydar-e Ṣafdar: a title of Imām ʿAlī
Hunter: a narrative figure
Ḥurr ibn-Riyāhi (d.680): Ibn-e Ziyād's commander at the battle of Karbalā. Later, he joined Imām Ḥuseyn and fought for him
Ḥuseyn (d.680): the son of Imām ʿAli and Fāṭima and the third Shi'ite Imām. He was killed at Karbalā
Ibn-e Sa'd: the governor of Kūfa and one of Yazid's commanders
Imam ʿEbād: see ʿĀbedin
Ishmael: son of Abraham. Refers to a Qur'ānic story that Abraham was told in a dream to sacrifice his son
Ja'far (d.680): Zeynab's son
Jacob: a Qur'ānic figure
Joseph: a Qur'ānic figure
Kaniz: a narrative figure
Messenger: a narrative figure
Minstrel: a narrative figure
Mu'āviya [Mu'āwiya Ibn Abī Sufyān] (d.680):
the founder of the Umayyad dynasty (661-680)
Muḥammad (d.632): the Prophet, son of Abdullah and ʿĀmena
Muslim Ibn ʿAwseja: a narrative figure
New bride: a title for Fāṭima, Imām Ḥuseyn's daughter
Preacher: a narrative figure
Prophet: see Muhammad
Qāsem (d.680): Imām Ḥasan's son, killed at the battle of Karbalā
Ruqiya (d.680): Imām Ḥuseyn's daughter. She died during the imprisonment period in Damascus
Sakina: Imām Ḥuseyn's daughter
Salmā: a narrative figure
Salmi: a narrative figure
Šemr: Ibn Ziyād's commander
Seyed-e Sajjād: see ʿĀbedin
Šowdhab: a narrative figure, a representative follower of Imām Ḥuseyn
The Family of the Prophet: refers to the survivors after the battle of Karbalā
ʿUmar-e Sa'd (d.680): the son of Vaqqās and the governor of Ray. He took part in the battle of Karbalā on Yazid's side
Vizier: see 'Amr-o ʿĀs
Yazid (d.683): the son of Mu‘awiya and Marjāna. He is the second Umayyad caliph
Zahra: a title of Fāṭima, the Prophet’s daughter
Zeyn al-‘Ebād: see ‘Ābedin
Zeynab (d.682): the daughter of Imam ‘Ali and Fāṭima. The Prophet’s daughter
The *Ta‘ziya* of the Damascus Bazaar

**Introduction**

(Spoken by Sakina)
O European! Help us
O European! Our lives depend on you.
O European! Turn back from this ruin,
We are all unveiled, afflicted, naked!

O European! Help us
O European! Our lives depend on you
O Father! King of Medina! Where are you!
A European has come, his eyes are on Sakina!
O European! Help us
O European! Our lives depend on you.
If my father was alive to support me
Surely, I would not be living in this ruin.
O! European! Help us
O! European! Our lives depend on you
مجلس تعزیه بازار شام

پیش خوانی

فرنگی دست ما بر دامن تو
فرنگی خون ما در گردن تو
فرنگی زین خرابه رو بگردان
همه بی چادریم و زار و عریان

فرنگی دست ما بر دامن تو
فرنگی خون ما در گردن تو
کجاای ای پدر شاه مدنیه
فرنگی آمده سیر سکینه

فرنگی دست ما بر دامن تو
فرنگی خون ما در گردن تو
اگر دست پدر برودی به دستم
چرا من در خرابه می تنشستم
فرنگی دست ما بر دامن تو
فرنگی خون ما در گردن تو
Yazid: Come ‘Amr-o ‘Ās, my companion in grief
Sit with me a while, here in private
Be the salve for my old wound
For the fire [of grief] has burned my wings.
Bring the word of God (the Qur’ān)
So I may read the omens, my heart marked with grief.

‘Amr-o ‘Ās: You are a sea of subterfuge, compared to me;
Next to you, I am less than an ant.
Take the word of God
Read the omens, your heart marked with grief.

Yazid [in Arabic, reciting a formula]:
O God! Thou the Generous, Thou the Merciful, Thou the Judge;
Thou the Proof, Thou the Beneficent, Thou the Praised,
Thou the Patient, the Wise, the Lord of glory and honour.
I appeal to You for a sign.
O God! Heart of my heart, whose remembrance is the light of my heart, I
consult you regarding all my affairs.

‘Amr-o ‘Ās [Opens the Qur’ān and reads]: Truly, the hypocrites will be in
the lowest depths of the fire,¹ then inform them of the supreme torment.

Yazid: O! ‘Amr-o ‘Ās, this is not a good omen, I will take another omen
and see what comes.

‘Amr-o ‘Ās gives the interpretation: ‘Soon will the oppressors know how
the changeable will be changed.’²

Yazid: This is again bad,
The Pure One [God] has informed us
Through his own Word, of a painful torment.
I will put aside this ‘Word of God.’
I sigh from the depths of my heart.
The spark of fever has set my soul on fire,
All my bones are burning
The spark of fever fired my soul
Surely Huseyn’s anger has made me burn so hot
یزید - بیا عمروعاص ای به غم یاورم
به خلوت نشنن ساعتی در برم
پشو مرحم زخم ناسور من
که آذربافروخت بال و پرم
پیاور کلام خداوندگار
تفاژل زنم به دل داغدار

عمروعاص - تو دریای تزوری اندر برم
به نزد تو از مور من کمترم
پگیر این کلام خداوندگار
تفاژل بنز به دل داغدار

یزید - استحیر بنک یاه الله یا کریم و یا رحیم و یا دیان و یا برهان و یا مئان و یا سبحان
و یا حليم و یا حليم و یا ذوالجلال و الاكرام
استحیرالله فی كل الامور ذات فی قلبي و ذكر الله نور

عمروعاص - ان المناققین فی الدار اسفل من النار فبشرهم بعداب اليم

یزید - عمروعاص این که بد آمد زنم یک بار دیگر فال و بینم چیست

عمروعاص در تعبیرش - وسيعلم الذين ظلموا ای منقلب ینقلبون

یزید - این هم که بد آمد
چون بشارلت داد ما را فرد پاک
از کلام خداوند دردناک
افکنم دور این کلام الله را
از رهاس خدود برآرم اه را
شمار تب زده آتش به جانم
همی سوزه مهام استخوانم
یقین خشم حسینم این چنین سوخت
O Vizier! I am dying of this pain!

‘Amr-o ‘Ās: how can I cure an incurable pain?

Yazid: O Vizier! I am dying because of this double-dealing.

‘Amr-o ‘Ās: I will invite one of the European doctors.

Yazid: Go and bring one of them as soon as possible.

‘Amr-o ‘Ās: (Now I invite the doctor for the patient)
O Doctor! The fate that was asleep, is wakened now
Yazid the shameless, is now ill
If you are able to kill, do it!
Have mercy on his wife.

Doctor: Why am I in this wretched condition?
My heart and my eye are filled with blood,
I will go, but I do not want to.
It’s as if there is a pitfall on this path.
O Caliph! Greetings to you,
the sorrowful heart is cheered on meeting you.
Now, I have come to practise medicine
I am going to find the cause of your illness.

Yazid: Greetings to you, Aristotelian genius
Come and sit at the banquet of my favour.
Ho! My comely, charming, servants,
Bring some sherbet for the sage.

Doctor: O King! What is your condition?
[Yazid:] My condition? My heart is overflowing with blood?
[Doctor:] Give me your hand so that I can take your pulse.
[Yazid:] Doctor, I fear that I may die!
[Doctor:] Fear not, it is not the time for your death.
[Yazid:] Help me, Doctor.
وزیرا آه مردم من از این درد
عمرواعص - چه چاره درد بن درمان توان کرد
یزید - پیرمرد ای وزیر از این دورنگی
عمرواعص - بیارم از اطبای فرنگی
یزید - پیار و زودتر پایی تو بگذار
عمرواعص - طبیب آرم کون از بهر بیمار
طبیب باخت خفته گشته بیدار
یزید بن حبا گردیده بیمار
گر توانتی بخش حلالش گن
رحم بر حالت عیالش گن
طبیب - ندائم حال زارم را چه چون است
دل من همچو چشم پر ز خون است
روم من لیک پایم مانده در راه
تو پنداری سر راهم بود چاه
سلامم بر تو نباد ای خلیفه
دل غمگین ز تو شاد ای خلیفه
کون من امدم بهر طبیب
بیمتم تو مريضي از چه بابت
یزید - علیک السلام ای ارسطو ضمیر
به بزم تقرب بیا جای گیر
ایا خادمان فشنج و وسیم
بیارید شریبت برای حکیم
طبیب - تو را ای پادشاه احوال چون است؟
چه احوالی؟ دم لبپز خون است
بده دستت که تا نپشت بگیرم
طبیب ترس از آن دارم پیرم
مخور غم نیست وقت مردن تو
طبیب دست من بر دامن تو
Doctor: Is any bone in your neck painful?

Yazid: Yes, I am fainting from pain.

Doctor: Can you sleep on your side?

Yazid: O Sage! Not for a long time, but for a short time.

Doctor: Tell me, is your breathing difficult?

Yazid: As if there is a stone on my chest.

Doctor: O afflicted man! And what taste is in your mouth?

Yazid: Sometimes it is bitter, sometimes sour, and sometimes it is salty.

Doctor: Now tell me, do you thirst for water?

Yazid: My heart is on fire for water.

Doctor: What is your condition when you cough?

Yazid: When I cough my headache increases.

Doctor: Open your mouth, I want to see inside.

Yazid: Look then! May all my pain and afflictions be on you.

Doctor: God be praised! There is an incurable disease in your throat.

Yazid: You villain, do not say useless words to me.

Doctor: Tell me does your wounded heart thirst for water?

Yazid: O Sage! I am dying because of the burning fever.

Doctor: Does your heart flutter like a slaughtered bird?

Yazid: It feels as if there are needles in my heart.
ـ کند حیچ استخوان گردنت درد؟
یزید - بلی این درد بن حام چنان کرد
طبیب - به پهلو گر بخواهی می توانی؟
یزید - نه بسیار، ای حکیم، اندک زمانی
طبیب - نفس بر سینه ات بروگو که تنگ است
یزید - تو پندازی به روی سینه سنگ است
طبیب - دهان دارد چه طعم ای مرد رنجور؟
یزید - گهی تلخ و گهی ترش و گهی شور
طبیب - بگو بر آب داری هیچ خواهش؟
یزید - دم یگرفت بهر آب آتش
طبیب - به وقت سرفه کردن حال چون است
یزید - چو آید سرفه درد سر فزون است
طبیب - دهانت باز کن بینم دهانت
یزید - بین درد و پلاهایم به جانت
طبیب - بحمدالله به حلقت کوفت افتاد
یزید - مگو بیهوده بر من، زشت بنیاد!
طبیب - بگو دارد عطش قلب فگارت؟
یزید - حکیما مردم از سوز حرارت
طبیب - طیپش دارد دلت مانند بسمل
یزید - تو پندازی که سوزن هاست بر دل
Doctor: O good Vizier! It’s certain that
The reason of the illness has been found, I will tell you the remedy.

‘Amr-o ‘Ās: Tell me, what is the nature of this essence of rancour?
How did you find what the illness is?

Doctor: His essence is worthless,
But the illness is pneumonia of the chest.
You have to prepare a poultice for him.
Do not delay, prepare it quickly.

‘Amr-o ‘Ās: O skilful doctor! Blessed with the [healing] breath of Jesus!
Write a prescription for whatever ingredients you wish.

Doctor: Certainly. First, you have to prepare
A poultice from beeswax, camphor and sandalwood
Then add to it chalk, rose and sugar
Sweet basil, the seed of purslane and the seed of coriander,
Mallows, jujube and Sebestens,
the leaves of leek and the seeds of sweet basil.
Then add some chicken fat,
and peanut oil.
If his stomach is flatulent, I tell you next.
He must take some sodium bicarbonate
and three to six kilos of large plums,
and one hundred and seventy tortoise eggs.
Boil the medicines for him
Pour them in his poisoned throat.

‘Amr-o ‘Ās: Slave girls! Come to the threshold
Bring us the mortar and pestle.
O King! Arise, turn your face to your servants,
Drink the medicine that preserves your health.

Yazid: I’ll have nothing to do with these ingredients.
The cure for my pain is a cup of wine.
These ingredients will make me more ill.
The cure for my pain is the blood of Huseyn.
When has jujube ever removed grief?
When has the violet ever caused cheerfulness?
طبیب - یقین دان ای وزیر نیک بیاید
مرض معلوم شد باید دوا داد

عمروعاص - بگو این جوهر کین را غرض چیست؟
چه سان معلوم بنمودی مرض چیست؟

طبیب - اگر چه ذات او ارج و قدر است
مرض ذات الریه با ذات صدر است
ضرادی بایدش ترتیب فرمود
نه چندان دیر، باید ساختن زود

عمروعاص - ایا نیکو طبیب دم مسیحا
هر آن ادویه خواهي نسخه فرما

طبیب - بلی، باید مهیا کرد اول
ضراد از موم و از کافور و صندل
نباشی و گل سرخ و شکر نیز
سره، تخم خره، تخم گذینی
ز خیازی و عمام و سیستان
ز گرگ گندنا و تخم ریحان
ز یه مرغ بعد اندک بیفز
اضافه روغن بادام فرما

دلاش گر نفخ دارد گویم این
بده بر او تو قدری جوش شیرین
یک دو از مال اخباری درشت
یک کم و هفتاد تخم لاک پشت
دوادا را با میوه نشین بیهور
برای یاد دن انگن در گم زهرش

عمروعاص - کیزان روب بر درگاه آرید
همه هاون برای ما بپاره
شها بخشُت و رو بر چاکران کن
دوای حفظ صحت نوش جان گن

یزید - مرا از این دواها اعتناب است
دوای در درد من چام برای است
مرا از این دواها شور و خشین است
دوای در درد من خون حسین است
یزید - کجا عتاب رفع غم فاید
بنفشه کی در شادی گشا یاد

The Ta’ziya of the Damascus Bazaar | 121
I am afflicted, I will be cheerful when
I lead Zeynab around the bazaar.
My heart will be free of sorrow on the day
When a messenger comes from Karbalā.

**Messenger:** I am a messenger and now
I am carrying a secret letter, with a hundred admonitions to Yazid.
Greetings, O commander of Damascus:
The bird of fortune has fallen in a trap.
I have brought a letter from the commanders of the army:
Take it the black-faced commander.

**Yazid:** Greetings, eloquent messenger,
You are welcome; weary one.
O Preacher, O nightingale in speech,
Mount the pulpit and recite the letter for me.

**Preacher:** I take refuge in God from Satan the damned,
In the name of God the compassionate the merciful.
Hear now, this letter is written by ‘Umar-e Sa’d-e Vaqqās, a slave who is
ready to sacrifice his soul, and ‘the whisperer [of evil] who whispers in the
heart of man,’ to Yazid ibn Mu‘awiya, who deserves to go to the hell.
Now that the world has turned in your favour,
Your are appointed and ‘Ali is deposed.
The bright palace of the king of the two worlds is ruined,
The body of the king of the world was covered with the blood and dust.
They burnt the tents with the fire of rancour,
The veil of shame has been completely drawn from our face.
Šemr has slapped the face of the children until they were as red as red
juniper.
Their ruby lips were dry with thirst, wanting one sip of water.
They cut off the hand of ‘Abbās, who carried the flag [of Huseyn]
The body of Akbar fell in the dust, and was seen drowned in blood.

**Yazid:** Thanks be to God, the sphere is turning to fulfil our desire
The wild bird of fortune has fallen in our trap
Grief is ended and sorrow is removed from our heart.
Pour the wine of good cheer in our cup,
شوم خشنود آن وقتی من زار
كه زینب را بگردانم به بازار
رها دل را ز غم روزی ماهم
كه آید قاصدي از کربلایم

قاقد - قاصدم این زمان به صد تأکید
مي برم نامه از برای یزید
السلام اي امير كشور شام
مرغ دولت فتاده اندر دام
نامه آوردم از سران سپاه
بستان ای امير روي سيده

یزید - السلام اي قاصد نیکو بیان
این زمان خوش آمدی ای خسته جان
ای خطیب ای بیلی شیرین زبان
رو به منبر نامه از بهرم بخوان

خطیب - اعوذ بالله من الشیطان رجیم، بسم الله الرحمن الرحیم
اما بعد این نامه، نامه ای است از غلام مرغ جان فشان عمر سعد وقاص الخناس الذي يوسوس

فسوی پادشاه عام و خصیتی زردن بن معاونی عليه الهاویه نوشته است:
تا که اوضاع جهان با نام او گردده شد
مسنند تو چیده از آل على برچیده شد
کاخ نورانگی سلطان دو عالم شد خراب
پیگر شاه جهان در خاک و خون غلطیده شد
خیمه ها را از شرار آتش کین سوختند
پرده شرم از رخ مار سر به سر بدریده شد
شرم از سیلی رخ اطافل كرده مدرسو
از برای جرعره ای به علشان خشکیده شد
دست عباس علمدارش ز تن انداده کرد
پیگر اکبر به خاک افتاد و در خون دیده شد

یزید - شکر خدا که دور فلل شد به کام ما
افتاد مرغ وخشی دولت به دام ما
اندوه شد کام و غم از سینه دور شد
رژید باده طرب اینک به چام ما
Decorate my court like the garden of heaven
Decorate the streets and bazaar of our city, Damascus.
Bring the minstrels who sing lyrics and play the harp,
and our pretty dancers who walk gracefully.
O Cupbearer! Bring wine and make us cheerful,
Light our candle with the light of wine.

**Yazid:** Servants! Bring sherbet!
Make sweet the mouths of our friends and loved ones,
Slaves! Bring my water pipe,
that I may dispel from my heart the pain of disturbing speech.
Pour aloeswood, musk, rose, tulip and jasmine.
Sing, minstrel, so that grief may leave my heart.

**Minstrel:** The events of Karb and balâ have made our heart bloody
Because there is no cure for an incurable pain,
Alas, that the sphere has lit such a fire in Damascus
That its smoke has darkened the lamp of Medina
This day is Yazid’s day: minstrels play the tambourine
The King of Religion has been martyred, all of you clap your hands
O Minstrels! play the tambourine and clap your hands
The King of Religion has been martyred, this day is Yazid’s day.

**Yazid:** Since Šemr has given his allegiance to us,
It is fitting that we honour him.
Lead out seventy of my best horses,
with amphora, braziers and incense
Šemr, come before us with such splendour
It is fitting that he should enter the city with honour and glory.

**Šemr:** O Shiites! I have brought the musk of Tartar from Karbalâ,
I have brought the family of the Prophet, despised and afflicted,
I have chained the hand of Zeynab, the afflicted sister of Huseyn.
By God, I have brought the daughter of the lion of God [Imâm ’Ali] and
dishonoured her.

**Šemr:** Greetings, O king of Damascus.

**Yazid:** Greetings!
زینت کنید بارگه من چو باغ خلد
آذین کنید کوچه و بازار شام ما
آرید مطربان غزل خوان و چنگ زن
رقاصگان خوب رخ و خوشخرام ما
ساقی بیار باده و تر کن دماغ ما
از نور باده ساز منور چراغ ما

یزید - شیرین بار ورد شما بیشکباثت
شیرین کنید گام عزیزان و دوستان
قلبان بیاورید غلامان برای من
تا درد دل برون کنم از غفلت سخن
ریزید عود و مشک و گل و لاله و سمن
خوشخوان بخوان که رفته برون از دم محن

خوشخوان - حدیث کرده و بلا پا کرده خون دل ما را
که چاره ای نتوان درد پر مداوا را
فغان که چرخ براو و چرخ آتشی در شام
که تهره گرد ز دوشگاه بخیما را
دور دور یزید است، ای مطربان دف زنید
سلطان دین شهد است کف جمله بر کف زنید
ای مطربان دف زنید کف جمله بر کف زنید
سلطان دین شهد است دور دور یزید است

یزید - چون شمر کرد خدمت خود را به ما دراز
می زید این که ماش گلیم سرفراز
هفتاد اسم خاصه من را پرکن کنید
با آبادی و قبل و منتقل و گذاز
با این چهل شمر بیان دارد حضرت ما
زیبد اگر به شهر در آید به عز و تاز

شمر - شیعیان از کریلا مشک تنارآورد ام
اهل بیت مسالمتی را خوار و زار آورد ام
بسته ام بازیاب از ویزیت خواهر زار حسین
الله الله دختر شیر خدارا کرده خوار آورده ام

شمر - سلطان شهر شام سلام

یزید - السلام، ها!
Šemr: I have brought news for you.

Yazid: From where?

Šemr: From the plain of Karbalā.

Yazid: Is it victory, or defeat?

Šemr: Fortune favours the king, it is victory.

Yazid: Praised be God who has fulfilled our desire. Has the King of Religion been martyred?

Šemr: Yes, he was drowned in blood.

Yazid: Did no one assist him on the plain of calamity?

Šemr: Yes.

Yazid: Who assisted him there?

Šemr: His brother.

Yazid: What was his name?

Šemr: His holiness ‘Abbās, the Faithful.

Yazid: Was ‘Abbās killed?

Šemr: Yes, he was martyred. For spite, both his hands were cut from his body.

Yazid: How did he fight?

Šemr: Bravely.

Yazid: Give me a description.

Šemr: He attacked our army like a brave dragon.
پرآورده ام خیر
یزید - زکجا؟

شمر - دشت کریلا

یزید - فتح است یا شکست؟
شمر - به اقبال شاه، فتح!

یزید - حمّد خدا را که خدا داد کام ما!
سلطان دین شهید شد؟

شمر - آری به خون تپید
یزید - کس یاری اش نکرد به دشت بپلا؟

شمر - چرا!

یزید - که کرد یاری اش مگر آنجا؟
شمر - برادرش

یزید - نامش چه بود؟
شمر - حضرت عباس یاوفا

یزید - عباس کشته گشت؟
شمر - بیلی او شهید شد
از کنده هر دو دست شد از پاکش جدا

یزید - چون چنگ می‌فود؟
شمر - دلبرانه

یزید - وصف کن
شمر - زد بر سپاه ما چو یکی نره ازدها
Yazid: Did the army resist?

Šemr: No.

Yazid: Then what?

Šemr: They fled.

Yazid: From one person?

Šemr: Yes, they fled like the sparrow that flees the eagle.

Yazid: How many fighters were killed there?

Šemr: One thousand.

Yazid: Over how many days?

Šemr: In a single attack.

Yazid: Well done.
What did Hurr do with Huseyn?

Šemr: He supported him.

Yazid: Was he not our friend?

Šemr: No, he turned away from us.

Yazid: How many soldiers did we have?

Šemr: One hundred thousand.
But the enemy’s army was larger than ours.

Yazid: Why did their army [Huseyn and his companions] leave Karbalā?

Šemr: Because most of them were turncoats.

Yazid: Who sacrificed himself for Huseyn there?
یزید - لشگر ستاده بود؟
شرم - نه
یزید - چون شد؟
شرم - گریختند
یزید - از یک نفر؟
شرم - بلی چو مگس از بر هما
یزید - از ما چقدر کشته شد آنجا؟
شرم - هزار تن
یزید - در چند روز؟
شرم - به یک حمله
یزید - مرحبا!
حر با حسین چه می کرد؟
شرم - یاری اش
یزید - با ما مگر نبود؟
شرم - نه، گرداند رو ز ما
یزید - آیا چقدر لشگر ما بود؟
شرم - صد هزار
اما سیاه خشم بد افزون ز فوج ما
یزید - پس آن سیاهشان ز چه از کربلا برفت؟
شرم - بودند چون که اگر آن قوم بی وفا
یزید - آنجا که شد فداي حسین؟
Šemr: The youth, Vahab.

Yazid: Who else?

Šemr: Barir.

Yazid: Who else?

Šemr: The moon-faced ‘Awn.

Yazid: Who else?

Šemr: Habib, Ja’far, the Turkish slave, and Muslim Ibn ‘Awseje, the servant of God.

Yazid: Who else was there?


Yazid: Who else?

Šemr: Šowzab fought in many encounters beside ‘Ābes.

Yazid: How did ‘Ābes fight?

Šemr: He was naked.

Yazid: Did ‘Ābes fight naked?

Šemr: Yes from head to foot.

Yazid: Was he not frightened of our army?

Šemr: No, he was ready to sacrifice his life, He fought and killed [our soldiers] until he was killed and his head was cut off.

Yazid: Who else was killed among the companions of the King of Religion?
شمر - نوجوان وهب
یزید - دیگر؟
شمر - بریر بود.
یزید - دیگر؟
شمر - عون لقا
یزید - دیگر?
شمر - حیب و جعفر، با آن غلام نونم، با مسلم بن عوسج، آن بنده خدا
یزید - دیگر که بود؟
شمر - ابو عمر نشعلی
یزید - دیگر؟
شمر - شوذب کنار عابس کردند جنگ ها
یزید - عابس چگونه جنگ غود؟
شمر - او برهنه بود
یزید - عابس برهنه شد؟!
شمر - بله، از فرق تا به پا
یزید - خوف از سپه نداشت؟
شمر - یه از چان کشته بود جنگید و کشت تا که شد از تن سرش جدا
یزید - دیگر که کشت تا یا انصار شاه دین؟
Šemr: Seyf Ibn abū Tamāme and the faithful Tarmā.

Yazid: Was his son ‘Ali-ye Akbar martyred?

Šemr: Yes he was drowned in blood on the plain of Karbalā.

Yazid: Didn’t he have a mother? Alas, for the youth, alas.

Šemr: His mother wept many tears beside his corpse.

Yazid: Was no-one thinking of his wedding?

Šemr: Yes, they were.

Yazid: Then what happened?

Šemr: It turned into a wake!

Yazid: Did Huseyn plead with you on the plain of Karbalā?

Šemr: Yes.

Yazid: How did he beg? Tell me, you deceitful dog!

Šemr: I am ashamed to say it, while people sit silently, 
And are not waking heaven with the cry ‘Ya! Huseyn!’
The first time, he held up his infant Asğar, 
and said, O Soldiers! O Shameless people! 
For three days now my child has had no water, 
Give me some water for my infant ‘Ali Asğar.

Yazid: Who gave water to Huseyn’s suckling babe?

Šemr: Heartless Harmala, shot an arrow at his throat.

Yazid: When else did Huseyn plead with you?

Šemr: In the battlefield, when he had been knocked down.
شمر - سيف ابو طمامه و ترمای با وفا
یزیده - آیا على اکبر او هم شهيد شد؟
شمر - آری به خون تیبد به صحرای كربلا
یزیده - مادر مگر نداشت؟ جوان حیف بود، حیف
شمر - مادر كنار پیكر او كرد گریه ها
یزیده - آیا کسی نبود به فكر عروسی اش؟
شمر - بودند
یزیده - پس چه گشت؟
شمر - بدل گشت بر عزا!
یزیده - در كربلا حسین به شما التماس كرد؟
شمر - آری
یزیده - چگونه كرد؟ بگو ای سگ دغا
شمر - چرم آیدم بگويم و ساکت نشسته خلق
فریاد یا حسین نرسانند بر سما
یک بار آننه اصغر خود را به روی دست
بگرفت و گفت ای سیه، ای قوم به حیا
طفلم سه روز قطره آبی نخورده است
آبی دهید بهر على اصغر شما
یزیده - بر طفل شیرخوار حسین پس كه داد آب؟
شمر - زد حرمله به حنجر او تیر از جفا
یزیده - دیگر چه وقت كرد حسین التماستان؟
شمر - در قتلغاه چون كه بیفتد اوا ز یا
Yazid: So he pleaded with you, covered in dust and blood?

Šemr: No!

Yazid: Then how was it, and where was it?

Šemr: When the King of Religion fell on that ground
Ibn-e Sa’d said, ‘Who is ready to cut off his head?’
We ten, all swore to kill him,
We went to the place where that shining sun [Imām Huseyn], was to die
O Yazid! When we came to the place of execution,
nine of us fled and I alone remained.
I took the dagger from my belt and I tied in my cloak,
Then I lifted my sleeve above my hand,
I had no shame before God: in a foul rage, I placed my boot
On the chest of the King of Karbalā.
Suddenly, he opened those eyes that see the truth, he looked at me,
He sighed, and said, ‘O Shameless Šemr!’

Yazid: What did he say?

Šemr: He said a word that burned my heart.

Yazid: Damn you! Tell me what Huseyn said!

Šemr: With his dry lips, he said, ‘I am thirsty’.

Yazid: Did you give him water?

Šemr: No, I didn’t.

Yazid: Tell me, why?

Šemr: I wanted him to be martyred, suffering from thirst.

Yazid: So! Because of what you did, our faces are blackened.
Now tell me, did Huseyn cry?

Šemr: Yes, he cried twice.
یزید - بر روي خاك و خون به شما اتماس كرد؟

شمر - نه!

یزید - پس چگونه، چه سان بود، در كجا?

شمر - چون او فتاد خسرو دين اندر آن زمين گفت ابن سعد كيست ماید سر شد ده تن شديم هم قسم از بهر قتل او رفته سوي مقتل آن شمس والضحى وارد به قتلگاه چو گشتيم اي یزید بگريختند نه تن و من مانديم به چا خنجر كشييم از كمر و بر كمر زدم دامن پس آستين بنمودم ز كفر رها شرم از خدا نكردم و پشت هم از غضب با چکمه روی سيه تن شاه کربلا ناگه کشود ديده حق بین به روی من آهي كشي و گفت كه اي شمر بي حيا

یزید - گفتا چه؟

شمر - گفت كلامي كه سوختم یزید - اظهار كن كلام حسین ای لعین به ما شمر - با آن لبان خشك به من گفت: تشنه ام یزید - داديش آب؟

شمر - من ک ندادم یزید - بگو چرا؟

شمر - مي خواستم كه با لب عطشان شود شهيد یزید - آري؟ سياه گشت از آن فعل روي ما اکون به من نيو که حسین گرده كرده هیچ؟

شمر - آري، دو بار گريه هυوده است او
Yazid: Where?

Šemr: Once, when his son Akbar fell to the ground, He cried out, ‘O kind father! Help me!’ The King of Religion mounted [his horse] like the Valiant Lion [Imām ‘Ali]. He attacked the army like the leviathan that attacks from the sea of calamity. Sometimes he attacked on the right, sometimes he attacked on the left Sometimes he was busy with the army and sometimes with the tents.

Yazid: Did he cry when he saw the army of the infidels?

Šemr: No, he did not cry because of fear.

Yazid: Then why?

Šemr: The King of Religion leapt from zu al-Faqār [his horse] Tenderly, he lifted the head of his son from the ground, Tearfully, he said one thing, and the heavens wept tears, He said ‘I will carry your body to the bridal chamber’. He sighed, and raised a lament that rose to the sky. ‘Alas! That a youth like you should be felled,’ He held up the body of that green youth, He carried his body from the battlefield to the tents.

Yazid: O Shameless one! Didn’t your heart burn, When you inflicted so many tyrannies and oppressions?

Šemr: I’m the mother of villainy and master of tyranny My heart has never burned for tyranny! Never!

Yazid: Where else did Huseyn cry?

Šemr: When I was about to sever his head from his body.

Yazid: Was he frightened of death, then?

Šemr: No, he had no fear.
یزید - کجا؟

شمر - یک دفعه چون که اکرش افتاد بر زمین
فریاد زد که ای پدر مهربان یا
سلطان دین چو خیبر صفر دوار شد
زد بر سیاه همچون نهنگ از یم بلا
که در یمین روانه شد و گاه بر یسار
گاهی نظر به لشگر گاهی به خیمه‌ها

یزید - وقتی که دید لشگر کفار گریه کرد؟

شمر - نه، او ز خوف گریه گفت کرد

یزید - پس چرا؟

شمر - یکی ز ذوالجناح شه دین یپاده شد
برداشت از زمین سر فرزند از وقایا
ینه که گفت یک مخنی که آسیبه گریست
گفتا به حجله گاه بر می پرک ترا
آمی کشید و شد به فلک ناله اش بلند
حیف از تو نوجوان یکی فتادی کون ز یا
پریش تازه جوانش به روی دست
برد از میان معرکه جسمش به خیمه‌ها

یزید - یا این همه تعلیم و ظلمی که کرده ای
آیا نسوخت قلب تو بی شرم و بی حیا؟

شمر - ام الفساد هستم و استاد ظلم و جور
هرگر مم نسوخته از ظلم مطلقا

یزید - بار دگر حسین کجا گریه کرده است؟

شمر - وقتی که خواستم سر ش از تن کم جدا

یزید - از مرگ بیم داشت مگر؟

شمر - نه، نداشت بیم
Yazid: Why did he cry, tell me what happened.

Šemr: When the King of Religion fell from the back of his saddle, He said, ‘Allow me to pray’.
He was allowed, and he performed his ablutions with sand, He prostrated himself, and he prayed to God.
Some time passed, but he did not lift his head from prostration.
Ibn-s Sa’d said, ‘He is praying that we be damned.’
Slowly and silently, I crept to his side.
I heard him, he was crooning, like this...
Weeping and lamenting, he was praying this prayer, ‘O God! Forgive the sins of my people.’

Yazid: What did you do after you had martyred him?

Šemr: I inflicted a thousand tyrannies on the people of his house, to make you pleased with me.

Yazid: Did you burn the tents to take revenge?

Šemr: Yes, they burned, and went up in smoke.

Yazid: And what of Huseyn’s children? Do any remain?

Šemr: One son survives him, and he is ill.

Yazid: Is there any thing else that you want to say?

Šemr: I want to ask you to bestow a robe of honour on me.

Yazid: Well done! This is the path of fidelity,
This was service to the family of Sufyan.
You deserve a robe, and gold, a garland, and jewels,
Because you have destroyed the family of the Lion, ‘Ali.
You who attend me in my throne-room,
bring two robes of honour from the treasury, fitting for Šemr.

Šemr: What do you order to do with these captives?
Should we bring them with respect or humiliation?

Yazid: Go, bring them like ’Uzbak or Tatar prisoners, lead them, bareheaded, through the streets and bazaar.
پژید - به چه گریه کرد؟ بیان گی کن تو ماجرا

شمر - از پشت زین چو آن شه دین خورد بر زمین
گفتا بهد اجازه غازی کنم ادا
رخصت گرفت و کرد تیمی به روی خاک
در سجده رفت و داشت مناجات با خدا
طولی کشید چو این گردن سر از سجده برنداشت
فرمود این سعد که نفرین کند به ما
آهسته و پواش چو رفتم کنار او
کردم چو گوش زمزمه می کرد این نوا
می کرد با تضرع و با گریه این دعا
بخشا گناه امت من را تو ای خدا

پژید - بعد از شهادتش تو چه کردی؟

شمر - هزار چو احیا که تو گردی ز من رضا

پژید - آتش ز راه کین به سرافرده ها زدی

شمر - آری چنان که دود شد و رفته بر هوا
پژید - فرزندی از حسین ندانم به جای ماند؟

شمر - بیمار مانده است از او یک چپ به جا
پژید - دیگر چه مانده است تو را گفتئی، بگو؟

شمر - خواهم که خلعتی بنمایی به من عطا

پژید - صد مرحبای که رسم وفاداری این بود
خدمت به خانواده سفیان چنین بود
چون خانواده خراب کن آل حیدری
شاپست قبا و زر و تاج و گوه و
ای حاضرین مجلس من از ابرای شمر
آرید از خزانه دو خلعت سرای شمر

شمر - چه در ورود اسیران به شهر فرمایی
به احترام بیارم یا به رسواپی

پژید - برو به مثل اسیران ازبک و تاثار
سیر برتهنه بگردن به گوچه و بازار
Šemr: After enduring tyranny and oppression, when they have passed through the bazaar, Where are the strangers to be housed? Where is the dwelling of those whose portion is sorrow?

Yazid: On the far side of the square, there is a ruined building, It is a mosque, without a door or prayer niche, I think there is no place better, for the family of the Prophet, than that ruin.

Šemr (to the audience): Know, all you people of Damascus, That the household of Huseyn the thirsty are arriving. Come Zeynab, Sakina and ʿĀbedin, Now, for cruelty’s sake, I am going to take you to Damascus.

Zeynab: Helpless, unfortunate Zeynab, In one place she is imprisoned, in another she is a stranger, In one place she is mounted on a bare camel In another, people are playing instruments and beating the drum. Where is my son Akbar, that he may see how I am injured, Where is the King of my Faith? I bear no more. O My brother! O My brother! You have been martyred with the sword of tyranny, And I am a prisoner in the land of strangers, Here are the heads of the virtuous, here are the lances of villains, Here is Zeynab the afflicted, here in the streets and bazaar!

Imam ʿEbād: O father! O father! My martyred father O Head! On your account, black bile has filled my heart. Your love has drawn us to the bazaars. We are prisoners, ashamed of our appearance, You, who aspire to nothing, let these words teach you shame.

Sakina: O Father! Grief for you left me despised and afflicted The sphere has left me an orphan in childhood.
 anderen جور و کینه و آزار
چون گذشته از سر بازار
به کجا منزل غربان است
به کجا چا غم نصبین است؟

زهید - یشت میدان عمارتی است خراب
مسجدی هست یب در و محراب
بهر این اهل بیست یغمبر
ز آن خرابه نیافتم بهتر

شهیر - خر شوید شما اهل شام سرتسار
که می رصد عیال حسین تشنه چگر
زینب ییا سکینه ییا عابدین ییا
اکون به شام آرمان از ره جفا

زینب - پیچاره زینب در بی تصبر
یک چا اسیری، یک چا غربی
یک چا بر اشر عربان سواره
یک سو نوازنده، ساز و نقاره
کو اکر من بیئن فگارم؟
کو شاه دینم، طاقنت ندارم
یا اخا یا اخا ای انت شهیت بهسیف العدوان
و انا اسیر، به دیار الغرب
سر خیار کجا نیزه اشراز کجا
زینب زار کجا کوچه و بازار کجا؟

امام عیاد - یا ابا یا ابا بایا شهیدم یبایا
داشت سودای تو ای سر یا دل ما کارها
می کشد عشق تو ما را بر سر بازار ها
ما اسیران از نگاه خود خجالت می کشیم
آخر ای بی همتان شریم از این کتارها

سکینه - آه ای یه گم تو مرا خوار و زار کرد
در کودکی یتیم مرا روزگار کرد
Šemr: Soldiers! Play the drum and tabor,
For the world has turned to Yazid’s desire.

Zeynab: O apostate, deceitful Šemr! Come before me,
Both God and the soul of Mohammad hate your face.
Tell me the reason for the lamentation in the city.
Is today the Feast of Sacrifice, according to the doctrines held here?

Šemr: O daughter of the seal of the prophets,
You are the pure essence of lineage of the Prophet,
Did you hear the sound of the drums?
Did you see the people of Damascus?
The feast that you see
Is newly prepared for you, by Yazid.

Zeynab: O Šemr! What has happened to dignity and honour?
After all, you are an Arab! What has happened to manly behaviour?
I have no companion or helper,
and now, I have no brother.
O Šemr! Show mercy!
Do not take us among the people.

Šemr: I have cut your Huseyn’s head from his neck,
I have drowned the body of ‘Ali Akbar in blood,
You have no other companion or helper.
Why don’t you give up your haughtiness?

Zeynab: (Why does the infidel Šemr have no shame?
No one would inflict such tyranny on unbelievers.)
O Infidel dog!
You imagine that no-one could cure my pain.
I will complain to God about you.
By God! My sigh will not miss its mark.
But I fear that God
Does not separate wet from dry.
شمر - بنوازید دهل، طبل زنی کمایر
که جهان گشت به دلخواه یزید امای لشگر

زینب - ییا به نزد من ای شمر مرتد گذار
خدا و روح محمد روز تو بیزار
به من بگو که در این شهر این چه افغان است
مگر به مذهب این قوم عید قربان است

شمر - ای دختر حامی النبیین
ذریه پاک آل یاسین
اوایز نقاره ها شندی
جمعتی اهل شام دیدی
این عیش که آیدت به دیده
بهر تو یزید تازه چیده

زینب - ای شمر وقار و عزتت کو
آخر عربی حمیتت کو
من مونس و یاوری ندارم
امروز برادری ندارم
ای شمر بیا بگن ترحم
ما را تو مبر میان مردم

شمر - حسینت را ز حنجر سر بریدم
به خون نش علی اکرم کشیدم
دگر تو مونس و یاور نداری
چرا دست از برگی برنداری

زینب - شمر بی دن چرا حیا نکنی؟
کس به کافر چنین جفا نکنی!
به خیال تو ای سگ کافر
که کسی درد من دوا نکنی؟
شكوه ات می برم به پیش خدا
به خدا آه من خطا نکن
لیک ترسم که حضرت باری
خشک و تر را ز هم جدا نکنی
Šemr: O family of Muhammad, dismount, all of you. Go into this roofless ruin with no door.

Imam ʿEbād: O People! Go to one side, So that we may sit in a private place, wailing and lamenting, and conduct the mourning rite. May the nightingales gather, that we in concert may lament the memory of the garden, our homeland. The nightingale is a stranger, lamentation is foreign, the meadow is not here Zeynab is an exile, the city is alien, our motherland is far away.

Yazid: Bring all the prisoners to our throne-room Give them a place in some corner at our gathering.

Šemr: Have all of you given up all hope for your lives? You are all going to the court of Yazid.

The family of the Prophet (together): We are being taken to Yazid, bound in the chains of tyranny. These shameless people are taking us before Yazid.

Yazid: O Slave! Your task is to go to the chamberlain’s office Pass through the curtain to the private apartments On this radiant day, to the court of that shining moon. To the private sanctuary of my palace, say to Hindeh, my silvery, moon-faced idol: ‘Come here because I am going to take the veil of grief from your face.’

Šemr: I obey your command, with pleasure, obeying your order is a grace to my soul. Greetings, O intimate [of the king]! O houri-faced! The king has summoned you.

Hendeh: I obey the king’s command, with pleasure. Come, girl, we are going to watch them.
شمر - گروه آل محمد همه پیاده شوید
dر این خرابه بی بام و در فرود آید

امام عباد - ای قوم رودکی کناری
تا ما به فغان و آه و زا
یک گوشه خلوتی نشینیم
یک مجلس ماغی پچیم
آید بلبلان که همه هم‌منان شویم
با یاد گلستان وطن در فغان شویم
بلبل غرب و ناله غرب و چمن غرب
زینب غرب و شهر غرب و وطن غرب

یزید - بیاورید به مجلس همه اسیران را
به کن محفل ما جا دهد ایشان را

شمر - ای جماعت از یک گوشه نمید
روان شوید جمی به بارگاه یزید

اهل بیت - بسته به زنگیر حفا نزد یزید می‌برند
این قوم بی شرم و حیا نزد یزید می‌برند

یزید - ایا غلام به دار انظام ماموری
بکش به غرفه مجلس حجاب ژنوری
به روز مهر به درگاه ماه تاپنده
حیرم، خاصه دولت‌دار از هنده
بگو به آن بت سیمین ماه رخسارم
بیا گه پرده غم از رخ تو بردارم

شمر - به چشم آنچه تو گویی مطع فرمانم
قبول امر شما منتی است بر جانم
السلام ای حرم حوالقا
شاه احظر غوده است تو را

هنده - فرمان پادشاه دهم بر دو دیده جا
عمه بیا رومی اماشا کنیم ما
We are going to see who these prisoners are
O Slave! You go ahead, we will follow.

Yazid: Welcome, my faithful wife.
Sit beside me, my moon-like cypress.

Zeynab: O Sphere! May you turn upside down for grief.
May grief fill your liver as it fills mine, in my misery.
You have brought the family of the martyred king,
to Damascus because of your enmity.
I hope that you will be turned upside down!
O Sphere, you have ruined my house.

Hendeh: Look, my aunt, at these prisoners,
Light shines from their faces, up to the heavens.
Look at the moon-faced girls
They all put their heads on their knees.
These moon-like women, who are despised and afflicted,
From which city and land do they come?
O aunt! It is clear,
that they are nobles.

Hendeh’s maid: O Hendeh! Know that all these prisoners
Are natives of Medina.
It seems that they are all Arabian,
They are people of stature.

Hendeh: Do not mention Medina to me,
It makes my heart burn.
My master and lord lives in Medina,
Don’t you know that my master lives there?

Hendeh’s maid: Your stature puts the cypress tree to shame,
Say, who was your master in Medina?
Truly, your face is like paradise, your stature like the tree of Tūbā,
whoever hear of a king talking with a poor man.
Do you not scorn to look on the prisoners?
Please, sit on the golden chair.
این مردم اسیر بیننیم گیستند
رو ای غلام پبش گبه آییم از چنقا

زنبد - آه ای چرخ ز غم برگردی
خون چرچ چون من ضرط گردنی
اهل بیت حرم شاه شهید
سوی شام از ره کری آورده
دارم امید شوی زیر و قرب
ابن ذلک خانه خراب کردنی

هنده - عمه بنگر به این اسیران
نور از رخشان رود به گیوان
بنگر تو به دختران مه رو
پنهاده عمام سر به زانو
این ماه رخان که خوار و زارند
از اهل چه شهر و چه دیارند؟
پیداست از این قرار عمه
هستند بزرگوار عمه

کیز هنده - ای هنده بدوان که این اسیران
از اهل مدینه اند ایشان
گویا عربند این جماعت
هستند عمام با مناعت

هنده - مبر در پیش من نام مهنده
که م ایقتد مراآ آتش به سیته
مودنی سرور و موالیم آنجاست
غی دانی مگر؟ آقا آنجاست

کیز هنده - تویی گه سرو خجل گشته پبش بالاییت
بگو به شهر مهنده گه بوده آواست؟
ای رخت خلق قامته طویبی
سحبت شاه با فقیر کجا
غارته آی آید ز دیدن اسرار
بنشین روی صندلی طلا
Hendeh: Know that my master is the light of my eyes
He is the honourable Huseyn, the Imām and the King of Religion.

Zeynab: Hendeh! Blessed was the day when your master lived,
and you lived with us, Hendeh.
Blessed was the day in Medina when,
My slave girl was a unique person, like you.
O sphere, be just, for the sake of chivalry,
Where is chivalry, where is manliness?

Hendeh: Who was this woman? My soul burns,
I swear to God, the marrow in my bones is burnt.
The lamentation of this prisoner has turned me to water.
O My aunt, my aunt, she has burnt me with grief.
Dear aunt, let me go beside her,
I see her sorrowful state.

Kaniz: Truly, your face is like paradise, your stature like the tree of Tūbā,
Whoever heard of a king talking with a poor man.
Do you not scorn to look on the prisoners?
Please, sit on the golden chair.

Zeynab: It is fitting that you scorn me,
There you are, and here am I, in my misery.
You are adorned in a gown, gold and jewellery.
I beat on my chest and head because I have no one,
You are sitting on the golden chair,
I am sitting in the dust of calamities.

Hendeh: Dust be on my head, this is the voice of my lady
This is the complaining song of a nightingale far from the meadow,
Dust be on your head, Hendeh, because of this tyranny and oppression.
Zeynab goes bareheaded while you are sheltered behind the curtain.
My day has been turned to night by watching this scene,
I will go out from behind the curtain, to Zeynab’s side.

Yazid: O My shameless, ill-behaved wife!
I am shamed in my throne-room by your behaviour.
You come out from our private apartment, your head bare.
هندَه - یبان آقایی من نور دو عین است
امام و شاه دین آقا حسین است

زینب - خوش آن روزی که بود آقات هندَه
به نزدما بید مأوات هندَه
خوش آن روزی که در شهر مدينَه
کنز بود چون تو بی قرینه
فلك انصاف ده از روی غیرت
کجا رفته است غیرت گو مروت

هندَه - این زن آیا که بود؟ جانم سوخت
به خدا مزغ استخوانم سوخت
ناله این اسب آم کرد
عمه عمه ز غم گایم کرد
عمه جان اذن ده روم بر او
بنگرم حالت مکدر او

کنزی - ای رخت خلد و قامت طوبی
صحبت شاه با فقیر کجا
عارت آید ز دیدن اسرا
بنشین روزی صندلی طلا

زینب - چای دارد که عارت از من باد
تو کجا و کجا من ناشاد
تو مکلل به رخت و زیور و زر
من ز بی کسی زنی به سینه و سر
تو نشسته به صندلی طلا
من نشسته به روزی خالک بلا

هندَه - خاکم به سر این صدای خاتون من است
این ناله نوا بر غر دور از چمن است
خاکت به سر ای دهنده به این چور و جفا
زینب سر عریان و تو در پرده سرا
روزم همه گشت زین ماشا چون شب
از پرده روم برون به نزد زینب

یزید - بی حیا زوجه تبهکارم
کرده ای شرمسار حضارم
سر عریان روزی برون ز حرم
The court is filled with strangers. 
Does the matchless private sanctuary mean nothing? 
What is the meaning of this disorder and uproar? 
You make yourself the topic of banter and jest, 
and in the end the reproach is on me.

**Hendeh:** O cursed one! Am I shameless, or is it you? 
Am I the black-faced deceiver, or are you? 
Do you find it too grievous to look on your wife, 
in the presence of strangers? 
Are they not the family of the Prophet? 
You ill-fated, cursed fellow. 
Rejected one, you sped to cover my head with a cloak, 
so hurriedly, hastily. 
I am adorned in a gown, gold and jewellery, 
While the daughter of Fātima has no head covering.

**Yazid** (to his slaves): take Hendeh whose heart is filled with blood, 
to the private apartments, and bring me red wine.

**Šemr:** O wise commander, I have a message for you, 
An envoy has arrived from European lands.

**Yazid:** Tell the people of Kufa and Damascus 
to come quickly and welcome the messenger of the European king.

**Šemr:** O people of Kufa and Damascus, 
Quickly, welcome the European.

**European:** what is this burning coal in my chest? 
Once more: what is the coal, I feel in my heart? 
Saturn is bent double because of the dagger of grief. 
The sword of mourning is on Gemini’s skull. 
The leader of prayers is busy with dancing and play, 
The ear of the sphere is deafened by the sound of drums and trumpets 
I had heard that in Damascus, 
An event has occurred that is causing grief. 
One party is playing the flute and tambour in flowering gardens, 
Another group in an uproar are wailing and beating their heads.
بارگه پر بود ز نامحرم
حرم بن مثال یعنی چه؟
فتنه و قیل و فال یعنی چه؟
خلق شطرنج خوش دلی بزاد
بعد از این ها ملامتم سانند

هنده - ای لعین، بن حیا منم یا تو!
رو سیاه دغا منم یا تو؟
تتوانی عیال خود از غم
بنگری در حضور نامحرم
مگر اینها عیال پیغمبر
ناستند ای لعین بداخل؟
با هزاران شتاب ای مردود
بر سر من عبا فکندی زود
من مكلل به رخت و زیور و زر
دخرت قاطمه است بی معجر

پریزد - بپریزد سوی حرم هنده جگر خون را
بیاورید برهم باهد های گلگون را

شمر - خطاب من به تو یاد ای امیر با فرهنگ
رستیده است نکی ایلچی از دیار فرهنگ

پریزد - گو به کو و شامی همه به استعجال
رسول شاه فرهنگ را کنند استقبال

شمر - کوفیان، شامیان به استعجال
بر فرنهگ کنند استقبال

فرنهگ - بپریزد سوی این چه اخگر، در سینه پیداست
باز این چه آذر در دل هوریداست
از دشته غم پشت زحل خم
شمشیر ماتم، بر فرق جوزاقت
شیخ هیزی در رقص و پازی
کوش فلک کر از کوس و کرناست
بشنیده بودم شرحتی که در شام
وضعی غم افزار فکندت بی پایست
قومی به گلشن، مزار و دف زن
جمعی به سر زن با شور و غوغاست
Sakina: O King of Medina, where are you?
The European has come to look at Sakina.

European: O God! Who are this group of beauties?
They are bound in chains from head to foot,
O God! Who has chained a woman?
It seems that the necklace of the Pleiades has been scattered.
I cry out against the hand of the executioner
who has brought down these noble people.
This head on a lance, its lips red as ruby,
has drunk without pause to the health of these two beauties.12
There’s no doubt that he must be the brother
Of these two sisters who are younger.
From the mystery of this [other] head, I am certain
That he desires this moon-like countenance.
This is a new bride and he is a new groom,
This one is like Salmi, the other like Salmā.
This infant has no milk, no blame, no guilt,
has never seen the breast of his mother.
And this bright head: from every side we see that he
is one who is straight-necked, his head held high.
It seems that he was the water carrier for the children,
He has never found any water in the world.
O Acclaimed and Living Lord, O Only God,
reveal this hidden mystery,
kām kūs jaras paras fluriyāni Bonjour Monsieur Yazid.13

Yazid: Do not speak in that foreign tongue, speak in another language,
Submit to the religious law of the Prophet.

European: O Wise king, my greetings to you,
I am one of the viziers of the European king.
I have brought two cameras,14 two watches and two sword sheathes,
to present them to you, O great commander.
سفرگی - یا رب کیانند این خیل خوبان
بسته به زنجیر از فرق تا پا
یا رب که بسته زن را به زنجیر
گویا کسی است که عده ثریا
ای داد بیداد از دست چیاد
کاین سروران را افکنده از پا
این سر که بر نی لعل لبش می
نوشد پایی پر این و عال...
پی وهم خاطر باشد باشد
بر این دو دختر، بر این دو صغری
از سر این سر، گشتی که به تمام
کاین مه چیزی را دارد متنا
این نوروز و آن تازه داماد
این همچو سلمی و آن همچو سلمی
این طفل، بی شیر بی جرم و تقصیر
پستان مادر نادیده اصلاً
این رأس اورکر دی این سر آن سر
یک گردن و سر یک گردنه باالا
گویا که باشد سقای طفلاً
آی به دوران ناکرده پیدا
ای چن حسن وی فرید بردن
این راز پنهان کن اشکارا
کلم کلوس خرس پرست فلوریائی بازور موسمی یزید
پیزید - مگو زبان فرنگی بی گو زبان دغر
سلام کن تو به قانون شرع یخیمر

فرنگی - سلام من به تو ای پادشاه یا فرهنگ
منم یکی ز وزیران پادشاه فرنگ
دو دوربین و دو ساعت، دو قیضه شمشیر
به رسم پیشکش آوردهام امیر کبیر
And further, out of loyalty, the king has sent a message: If there is anything else that you seek, tell me.

**Yazid:** Greeting to you, O envoy from foreign lands, These multicoloured presents are accepted from you.

**Zeynab:** O God! My heart is wounded by this grief O God, a foreigner is more honourable than we are. The European is honoured while the family of the Prophet suffers tyranny, The European is respected while the family of Ahmad\(^{15}\) suffers oppression.

**Yazid:** One of you trustworthy courtiers who is allowed to enter the private apartments: Go and bring my daughter. My moon-faced flower-faced daughter.

**Šemr:** I obey your commands and whatever you wish, Because you are king. Greetings, O fairy-faced ward of the palace apartments, Your father has summoned you.

**Yazid’s daughter:** This is a fortunate, auspicious omen; You go ahead, I will follow. Greetings, Father, to your beautiful and bright face, May the shade of fortune remain over your head forever. Sit me on your lap like the bloom of a rose, I am like a particle of dust in search of the sun, shelter me.

**Yazid:** My greetings to you, with your rose-like face and moon-like countenance, Come here and sit like the rose bloom on my lap, Come here, take your place like the rose bloom on my lap. Look at this group of captives for a moment.

**Now ‘arūs:** O God! Why do I have no father! Since I am an orphan, people do not honour me. If my kind father was alive
دکر پیام چنین داده پادشه ز وفا
اگر که هست تو را مطلعی بیان فرما

پیام - علیک من به تو ای قاصد دیار فرمنگ
قبولش ز تو این تحفه‌های رنگارنگ

زینب - یاز واقع و دلیب از این غم ریش شد
ای خدا بنگ فرمنگ قربش از ما بیش شد
بر فرمنگ عزت و بر آل پیغمبر جفا
بر فرمنگ حرمت و بر آل احمد ظلمها

پیام - یکی از معتمدان درگاه
که به دربار حرم دارد راه
روه و آوردان دختر من
دختر مه رخ و گل پیکر من

شمر - هر چه فرمان دهی و می‌خواهی
سر می‌پیچم از آن چون شاهی
السلام ای حرم حور لقا
بابت احضار فوجه است تو را

دختر پیام - برو به پیش آی مقبل همان‌پندا
برو به پیش که اینک بیایم از دنیال
سلام بر رخ زیبای انورت بابا
همیشه ساغه اقبال بر سرت بابا
مرا چو غنچه گل روی دامنت چا ده
چو ذره در طلب آفتاب مأوا ده

پیام - علیک من به تو ای گل‌دار ماه جهین
بیا چو غنچه گل روی دامنم بنشین
بیا چو غنچه گل روی دامنم جا کن
به این گروه اسیران دمی‌شان کن

نواعوس - چندین از چرا بابا ندارم
بتیم می‌پش مردم چا ندارم
اگر می‌بود بابای نکویم
Šemr the vile would not slap my face.  
Where are you, my mother Šahrbānū,  
That you may put my head on your lap?

Zeynab: O Sakina! Your afflicted aunt dies for you,  
she cannot bear this sorrow for your pain.  
Since you have no mother, I will be your mother,  
Since you have no support, I will be your support.  
Come here, so I, in place of your mother  
may put your head on my lap.

Yazid: Who is this small homeless child?  
A child who is bareheaded, barefoot, her heart full of blood.

Šemr: She is the new bride of Qāsem, the new groom  
who was martyred at Karbalā.

Yazid: O unhappy child of Huseyn!  
The new bride of the Huseyn’s new son-in-law,  
why are you crying, so young and marked by fate,  
You lament like the nightingale.

Now ‘arūs: How can I not weep and wail like a bell?  
May no one see what I have seen!  
I have suffered much grief and heartfelt sorrows,  
I am one whose father has been killed, whose brother is dead.

Yazid: Don’t cry so much, O daughter of the martyred king.

Now ‘arūs: How can I not cry, I am in mourning, Yazid.

Yazid: Why have you covered your face with your hands?

Now ‘arūs: I have no face veil, and all these people are strangers.

Yazid: Who is looking at you here?

Now ‘arūs: My new groom is watching me.
زینب - سکینه عمه زارت چیرد
غم درد تو را بر دل نگیرد
اگر مادر نداید مادرت من
اگر یاور ندارد یاورت من
پیتا من به چاپ مادر تو
بگیرم بر سر زانو سر تو

یزید - کیست این طفل صغير در به در
سر بهنها یا برهره خون چگر

شمر - این عروس قاسم نوکدخایست
تازه داماد شهید گربلاست

یزید - یا صغيره طفل ناشاد حسین
نوغروس تازه داماد حسین
از چه گریاب ای صغيره داغدار
هست افغان تو ماتنده هزار

نوغروس - چون نگرم چون نتام چون جرس
آنچه من دیدم نبیند هیچ کس
غضبه وا خون دلها خوردزام
من پدر کشتار، یا بادر مردام

یزید - گریه کم گن دختر شاه شهید

نوغروس - چون نگرم من عزادرم، یزید

یزید - دست بر سرذیر گرفت از چه باب؟

نوغروس - این همه نامحرمان، من بپنقاب

یزید - که میاشیت در اینجا میکنند؟

نوغروس - تازه دامادم میکنند
Yazid: Why has your tulip-like face gone pale?

Now ‘arūs: Because I am so very thirsty, Yazid.

Yazid: No one has seen one marked like you, Both your father and brother are martyrs. Tell me, do you have another brother in this world?

Now ‘arūs: Know, O Oppressor, I have one brother.

Yazid: Tell me, do you have any sister in your wailing and lamenting?

Now ‘arūs: One or two sisters survive, from my father Huseyn.

Yazid: There is no hope for you! Tell me their names.

Now ‘arūs: O Yazid, one is Sakina and the other is Ruqaya.

Yazid: Are you Sakina the daughter of the peerless king? Are you the one who cheered the heart of Huseyn the thirsty?

Sakina: O Yazid, O Yazid: I am Sakina the daughter of the king of east and west O Yazid, O Yazid: My God kill me, I am the daughter of Huseyn.

Yazid: O child! Why do you beat your head and your chest?

Sakina: Because of the recent fate of my ‘Ali Akbar, who died young.

Yazid: Why do you hold the chain so firmly in your hand?

Sakina: Because my neck is wounded by cruelty.

Yazid: Why do you cover your face with your hands in your bewilderment?

Sakina: I protect my face with my hands because I am distressed.

Yazid: Sakina, why has your face turned livid with resentment?
یزید - از چه رنگ از لاله رویت پرید؟
نووعروس - بسکه بی آبی کهیمد ای یزید

یزید - داغ دیده کس به مثل تو ندیده:
هم پدر شد هم برادر شد شهید
گو به من داری برادر در جهان

نووعروس - یک برادر دارم ای ظالم بدان

یزید - خواهر ار داری بگو با شور و شین
نووعروس - یک دو خواهر مانده از بابم حسین

یزید - نامشان را بازگو ای نامید
نووعروس - این سکینه این رقیه ای یزید

یزید - سکینه دختر سلطان بی قرینه توی؟
حسین تشنه چگر را سرور سپینه توی؟

سکینه - سکینه دختر سلطان مشرقینم من ای یزید ای یزید
خدا مرا بكشد دختر حسینم من ای یزید ای یزید

یزید - تو ای صغيره چرا میزنی به سینه و سر
سکینه - ز داغ تازه جوافرگ خود علی اگر

یزید - چرا به دست گرفتی چنين سلامی را؟
سکینه - برای آن که شده زخم گردمن ز چفا

یزید - چرا دو دست به صورت گرفته حیرانی؟
سکینه - حفاظ صورت خود سازم از پرشانی

یزید - چرا سکینه شده صورتت ز کین نیلی؟
Sakina: Because Šemr the shameless slapped me several times.

Yazid: Orphan of Huseyn, why are you crying constantly?

Sakina: How could I not cry, How could I not lament? I am an orphan; I have no father, Your daughter is seated beside you, I am standing before you. In that sitting, and my standing, There is nothing for me but a heart full of blood. A cry has blocked my throat. May God give what they deserve!

Yazid: You are right; it is not easy to be an orphan, There is no one in distress like you. O child, come to my side, From now on, be a slave girl to my daughter.

Zeynab: May God strike you dumb and blind your eyes! May you be far removed from the grace of God. Who are you that you call yourself great, and want a slave girl from the family of the Prophet? How far has this high rank of yours gone? That you want Zahra’s’t darling to be your slave girl.

Yazid: who is this fortunate, blessed woman? Whose voice rose from among [the captives]? May God requite you! What can I say?

Šemr: She is one, whom you have despised, whom you have dishonoured. She is Zeynab, Huseyn’s sister. You should know her by her tearful eyes.

Yazid: She is one, whose father seized the world, with the blows of his sword, zulfaqar. She is one, whose most laudable grandfather was taken up to the throne by his God.
سکیه‌ن‌ه - ژ بس که حوردهام از شمر بی حیا سیلی

یزید - چرا تو گریه کنی هر دم ای یتیم حسین؟

سکیه‌ن‌ه - چرا نگریم چرا ننام
که من یتیم یپر ندارم
نشسته پیش تو دختر تو
ستاده‌ام من بربر تو
از این ستادن از آن نشستن
به غیر خون جگر ندارم
گرفته کرده ره گلویم
خدا جوابت دهد چه کویم

یزید - راست گفتی پیش چه آسان نیست
همی کس مثل تو گریه نیست
پس بی ای صغریه در بمن
شدو این دم کنیز دختر من

زینب - الهی آن که شوی لال و هر دو چشمت کور
ز فیض حضرت پروره گردی دور
تو کبستی که گورد را عزیز می‌خواهی
ز اهل بیت نبوت کنیز می‌خواهی
رسیده است کجا ربه عزیری تو
عزیز کرده زهرا کند کنیزی تو!

یزید - کبست گو این ژن سعادقند
که صداپیش شد از مینه بلند

شمر - این است که گردهای تو خوارش
انداخته‌ای ز اعتبارش
این زینب خواهر حسین است
بشناص ز چشم اشکبارش

یزید - این است که باب وی جهان را
بگرفته به گربه دوالفقارش؟
این است که چد امجدش را
برده است به عرش کرگارش
A thousand thanks to God that I can see her dishonoured, despised and afflicted.

**Zeynab:** I am the daughter of the father of seven and four.\(^{19}\)
I am alone, without assistance or support.
Seventy maids of Medina ate from my table, such am I.
I am unveiled among the people, yet the Holy Spirit, like a lady’s maid, is proffering a veil.
I am Zeynab, Huseyn’s sister, you should know me by my tearful eyes.

**Yazid:** When women’s souls are on fire,
There’s no answer, it’s best to hold one’s tongue.
Bring in the heads of the martyrs,
Put them in a corner at our gathering.

**Šemr:** These thirsty ones have drunk water from the sword’s blade,
They gave the world its soul, in giving their souls.

**Yazid:** Tell me, whose is this shining head?

**Šemr:** That is the head of the hero, Hurr.

**Yazid:** And whose is this pure, unsullied head?

**Šemr:** This is the head of Habib Ibn Mazāher.

**Yazid:** I see two heads; tell me each of their names.

**Šemr:** One is ‘Ābes, the other is his slave Šowzab.

**Yazid:** The head of a black man lies before me.

**Šemr:** That is the head of the Turkish slave of Huseyn, the King of Religion.
صد شکر به چشم خویش دیدم
رسوا و ذلیل و خوار و زارش

زینب ـ من دختر باب هفت و چهارم
من پی کس و پی معین و پارم
آنم که زنان مکه بودند
هفتاد کنیز ریزه خوارم
یب پرده میان خلقم اما
روح القدس است پرده دارم
من زینب خواهر حسینم
بشناس ز چشم اشکارم

یزید ـ در جواب زنان سوخته چان
باید اندر دهان کشید زبان
بیاورید به مجلس یسر شهدان را
به کنگ محفل ما چا دهید ایشان را

شمر ـ این تشگان که آب ز شمشیر خورد هاند
جانبخش عالمند که یانها سپرده اند

یزید ـ یگو از کیست این رأس منور؟

شمر ـ بود آن سر جر دل اور

یزید ـ همین سر از که باشد پاک و طاهر؟

شمر ـ بود رأس حبیب ابن مظاهر

یزید ـ دو سر بینم یگو یک ز نامش

شمر ـ یکی عابس دگر شودب غلامش

یزید ـ سر مرد سیاهی پیش عین است

شمر ـ غلام تراک یکه دین حسین است
Yazid: I see two heads here, like a pair of stars.

Šemr: They are the heads of Zeynab’s sons.

Yazid: I see a head whose face is like the Houris.²⁰

Šemr: This is ‘Abbās, standard-bearer to Huseyn.

Yazid: Tell me about the swordsmanship of that skillful man.

Šemr: He cut, killed, bound or felled many.

Yazid: Bravo, well done, to that strength and that arm.

Šemr: Yes, he had the strength of Heydar.

Yazid: Tell me, whose is this shining head?

Šemr: That is the head of Prince Akbar.

Yazid: I heard that his heart had been cheered by marriage.

Šemr: He was not the groom, Qāsem was the groom.

Yazid: How was the candle of Qāsem’s soul blown out?

Šemr: He married, but he died young.

Yazid: Šemr, you scoundrel, whose is this head?

Šemr: It is ‘Ali Asḡar, who did not drink milk.

Yazid: I do not see the head that I am looking for.

Šemr: The head that you cannot see, that you say is not here, is this. You say it is not on his enemy’s lance, but it is. [To himself] O Huseyn! I’m like a blind man, who has fallen in a well,
یزید - دو سر بینم در این جا چون دو کوکب
شمر - بوند آنها سر طفلان زینب
شمر - سر عباس علمدار حسین است
یزید - بگو از ضرب دست آن هنرمند
شمر - بسی بدرید و کشت و بست و افکند
یزید - زهی احسنت بر آن زور و بازو
شمر - بلی بودی به حیدر هم ترازو
یزید - بگو از کیست این رأس منور؟
شمر - بود آن سر شهرزاده اکبر
یزید - شنیدم شد ز دامادی دلش شاد
شمر - نش داماد قاسم گشت داماد
یزید - چگونه شمع جان قاسم افسرد؟
شمر - کرد اما نوجوان مرد
یزید - همین سر از که ای شمر شریر است؟
شمر - علی اصغر ناخورده شیر است
یزید - عروسی سری کو هست منظورم نه پیداست؟
شمر - آن سری کر دیده ناپیداست گویی نیست هست
بر فراز نیزه اعاداست گویی نیست هست
کورکورانه فتادم یا حسین در چاه من
The Holy Drama

A blind man is aware of what he has done: you may say he is not, but he is.
O bloody head, Yazid demanded you from me.
This court will surely pass away; one may think not, but it is so.
[To the head] Yazid, Henda’s son, is coming; receive him.
Honouring the king is a good deed; you may say it is not, but it is.
[Holding it up] This is Huseyn, this is Huseyn, this is Huseyn’s [head].

Yazid: Bring him before me, he who has two houris beneath him.\(21\)
O adornment on the Prophet’s shoulder! You are welcome
O successor of Heydar-e Safdar! You are welcome
You did not want to come alone to our presence?
You are welcome, with ’Awn, Qâsem and ’Ali Akbar.

Yazid: O Šemr! Know that I have several questions.

Šemr: Tell me, so that I may cheer your soul.

Yazid: Was this head severed with a cleaver?

Šemr: O Commander, what do you mean by asking this question?

Yazid: Why are the bones of his neck broken in pieces?

Šemr: If I say it, the [hearts of] friends and enemies will burn.

Yazid: Say it, to ease the fire in my heart.
May Muslims never hear it, and the infidel never see it.
Did you cut through it, or strike it off from a distance?

Šemr: As butchers do, I cut it off with a cleaver.

Yazid: How many blows did you take to cut off his head?

Šemr: I cut off his head with ten blows, in my enmity.
کور اندر کار خود بیناست گویی نیست هست
ای سر پر خون، یزید از من طلبکار تو شد
رفت آن بارگه بر جاسم گویی نیست هست
زاده هنده یزید آمد تو استقبال کن
حرمت شه داشت زیبایی گویی نیست هست
حسین است این حسین است این حسین است

یزید - حضور آور که در پایش دو عین است
ای زیب دوش پیمبر خوش آمدی
ای جانشین حیدر و صفرد خوش آمدی
تنها نخواستی که بپای حضور ما
با عون و قاسم و علی اکبر خوش آمدی

یزید - بدن ای شمار دارم مطلی چند
شمار - یفرما تا کنم چان تو خرسند

یزید - مگر این سر چگاشته به سطور؟
شمار - امیرا زین سوالت چیست منظور؟
یزید - چرا خرد استخوان گردن اوست؟
شمار - اگر گویم بسوزد دشمن و دوست

یزید - بگو تا آتش از جانم نشیند
مسلمان نشنود کافر نیپند
بریدی با زدی ضربت تو از دور؟
شمار - چو قصابان زدم با ضرب سطور
یزید - جدا کردى سرش با چند ضربت؟
شمار - به ده ضربت بریدم از عداوت
Yazid: What did he say when you struck the first blow?  
Šemr: He cried, ‘O Muhammad! O Muhammad!’

Yazid: What did he say in his helplessness, when you struck the second blow?  
Šemr: He said, ‘O Mother Fatima! Where are you?’

Yazid: And what did that solitary king say when you struck the third blow?  
Šemr: He said, ‘O Ali! Come to my aid!’

Yazid: What did he say when you struck the fourth blow?  
Šemr: He said, ‘O Hasan! Look to Huseyn!’

Yazid: By God, tell me what he said at the fifth blow?  
Šemr: He said, ‘Alas Zeynab, alas Zeynab.’

Yazid: What did that peerless man say when you struck the sixth blow?  
Šemr: He said, ‘O Sakina, my daughter you have lost your father.’

Yazid: May I know what he said at the seventh blow?  
Šemr: He said, ‘I am the intercessor for the Shiites.’

Yazid: What did he say when you struck the eighth blow, O Šemr?  
Šemr: He said, ‘Where is faithfulness, where is chivalry, O Šemr?’

Yazid: My soul burns! What did he say when you struck the ninth blow?  
Šemr: He said, ‘Alas for my wives!’
یزید - چه گفت اول که بر او ضربت آمد؟
شمر - بگفتا وا محمد! وا محمد!
یزید - دوم ضربت چه گفت از بینوایی؟
شمر - بگفتا فاطمه مادر چگاهی؟
یزید - سوم ضربت چه گفت آن شاه یک‌س؟
شمر - بگفتا یا عفریا از رنگ! یزید - چه حرفی گفت ضرب چارمین را؟
شمر - بگفتا او حسن بنگر حسین را
یزید - چه گفتا پنجشی را چه گفت آن یارب؟
شمر - بگفتا یا زینب! وا زینب!
یزید - ششم ضربت چه گفت آن بی قرینه؟
شمر - بگفتا بی پدر بابا سکینه
یزید - چه گفتا هفتمین ضربت ندای؟
شمر - بگفتا من شروع شیعیانم
یزید - چه گفتا او به هشتم ضربت ای شمر!
بگفتا کو وفا! کو غیرت ای شمر!
یزید - نهم ضربت چه گفتا سوخت جانم!
شمر - بگفتا یا وای بر حال زنانم
Yazid: What did he say when you struck the tenth blow, O disciple of cruelty?

Šemr: He said one word that struck fire in my soul!

Yazid: What did he say, you scoundrel? Answer me!

Šemr: He said, ‘I thirst for one drop of water.’

Yazid: Did you pour any water on the fire in his soul?

Šemr: I kicked his mouth with my booted foot.

Yazid: What did he say when you kicked him?

Šemr: At that, he fainted, and surrendered his soul with his lips still dry.

Yazid: What happened after his death?

Šemr: Both the earth and the sky were shaken.

Yazid: O Cupbearer, pour the sun-like wine
Quickly, the movement of the sphere knows no delay,
O Cupbearer! Remove the veil from the face of that lady, the wine jar,
Pour blood in the spirit of the lineage of Bū Turāb
O thirsting King! Taste this, the day of our pleasure
Wet your dry lips with wine.
O King! Come, so that I may pour wine on your face
O noble Seyed! Abstain from wine.
O Yazid! Alas what a sin this was, what an act this was?
Be ashamed before the beauty of He who is the intercessor on the Day of Judgment,
Where is the Qur’ān? Where is the wine? Dust be on my head!
You there! Fill the cup with wine.
Although you cannot sleep, come,
put your head on Yazid’s lap and sleep a while.

Zeynab: O hand of the heavens, set to work!
یزيد - دهم ضربت چه گفتا ای چفا کیش؟

شمر - کلامی گفت بر جانم زد آتیش

یزيد - چه گفتا رو سیه برو چفو جوابم

شمر - یگفتا تشهی یک جرعه آیم

یزيد - یگوه، آبی زدی بر نار جانش؟

شمر - زدم با پای چچمه بر دهانش

یزيد - چه گفتا او ز تو چون یک لگد خورد؟

شمر - بدان غش کرد و جان لب تشنه بسرد

یزيد - ز بعد قتل او برو چه روه داد؟

شمر - زمین و آسمان در لرزه افتاد

یزيد - ساقی به جام باده چون آتکاب گن

دور فک درنگ ندارد شتاب گن

ساقی نقاب از رخ خاتون خم بکیر

خون در روان سلسله بو چرک گن

ای شاه تشنه کام بود روز عیش ما

لب های خشک خویش تورتا شاراب گن

شاما بیا شاراب بریزم به صورتت

ای سید نجب ز می اجتناب گن

اه ای یزید این چه خطو و چه کار بود؟

شرم از جمال شافعیم یوم الحساب گن

قرآن کجا، شاراب کجا خاک بر سرم

هان ای بشر تو مشربه را پرگلاب گن

خواب ارچه نایدته به دو چشمان. ولی بیا

بر دامن یزید زمانتو خواب گن

زینب - ای دست کردگار تو پا در رکاب گن
Zeynab’s veil is gone to the winds,
Lay hands on the ring on Damascus’ gates,
Destroy them, as Kheybar’s tower and wall were destroyed.

**Yazid:** Alas, I have remembered the battle of Nahravān.
[To Huseyn’s head] Sit in the golden bowl, and parry questions with me. How does it feel to be beaten with a stick, O son of Bū Torāb? Now complain about me to your grandfather and father.

**Imam ‘Ebād:** You oppressor! You beat one whom the Prophet has kissed. May your hand be cut off! Hammer away, do your worst. O Shameless One! The friend of God is present, you are beating the beloved in the presence of the lover. He is Jacob and I am Joseph, under the oppression of Egypt. I am Joseph and you are beating Jacob in my presence.

**Yazid:** Who are you, poor suffering soul, burning with fever and bound in chains? With such dignity, glory and finery, perhaps you are ‘Ali Ibn Huseyn.

**Imam ‘Ebād:** May you be struck blind, if you do not know me! I will tell you my name, that you may know me, The highest throne is the carpet in our portico, all who breathe are our guests. North South East and West are like the ball to our polo stick. The wind, rain and clouds obey our commands. I am heir to the king through whom the Faith has flourished, O Infidel! I am the enemy of your soul, Do I have to say my name more clearly than this? I am Seyed-e Sajjād, Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin.

**Yazid:** O ‘Ali! Have you seen the justice of God? How justice has been placed at the centre? Though Huseyn’s heart was turned away from us, You see, in the end, he was killed with a dagger.

**Imam ‘Ebād:** O shame of the Arabs, uncouth fellow, Do you boast without reason, in the presence of this head?
بر باذ رفته معجز زینب شتاب کن
دستی بزن به حلقه دروازه‌های شام
مانند برج و باروی خیر خراب گن

یزید - آخه که یادم آمد از جنگ هنروان
بر تشت رز نشین و سوال و جواب گن
چون نی به زیر چوب ایا سط بوتراب؟!
آکون شکایتم به بر چد و یاب گن

امام عباد - ظالم به بوسه گاه نبی چوب می‌زنی
دستی بردیده باد بزن خوب می‌زنی
ای بی حیب حبیب خدا حاضر است و تو
پخش حیب چوپ به محبوب می‌زنی
یعقوب اوست یوسف مصر ستم منم
یوسف منم تو چوب به یعقوب می‌زنی

یزید - کیستی ای مستمیند دردمند
با تن تبدار و با زنجیر و بند
با چنین قدر و جلال و زیب زین
بلکه می‌باشی علی ابن الحسین

امام عباد - گور شو ای دشمن ار نشناسم
گویمت من نام تا بشناسیم
عرش اعلا فرش در ایوان ماست
هر که رویت می‌خوره مهبان ماست
شش جهت چوپ گوی در چوگان ماست
باد، باران، ابر در فرمان ماست
وارث سلطان دین پروز منم
دشمن جان تو ای کافر منم
گویمت من نام واضح تر از این
سید سجاد زین العابدین

یزید - یا علی دندی تو عدل کردار
حق چه سان یگرفت بر مرکز قرار
گر حسین فلبش زما برگشته شد
عاقبتی دیدی ز خنجر کشته شد

امام عباد - در حضور این سر، ای ننگ عرب
فخر به چا می‌کنی ای پی ادب
His father’s rank is higher than the sphere,  
His mother is the Prophet’s daughter.

**Yazid:** You, who have survived the storm of Karbalā,  
You victim of injustice, honourable Zeyn al-‘Ebā,  
Listen to me! Break with your practice,  
confirm my leadership.

**Imam ‘Ebād:** You imagine that you have merely killed Huseyn,  
You have only drowned one body in blood.  
But you have killed both Muhammad and ‘Ali.  
You have killed both the Prophet and his vicegerent.  
You have killed three sisters and six brothers.  
You have killed seven fathers and eight mothers.  
O oppressor! You killed the essence of the world beyond.  
O Shameless one! You have killed the blood of God.  
If you wish to consult with me,  
Tell me about your grandfather, your father and your mother.  
You adulterer, son of an adulterer, son of an adulteress.  
Both your father and your mother were criminals.

**Yazid:** Ho! Executioner! Ho! Executioner!  
You apostate, deceitful executioner! I am talking to you!  
Cut off the head of Zeyn al-‘Ebād, ill as he is.

**Śemr:** I obey you, I obey you.  
Confess the oneness of God, because I am going to cut off your head.  
I am going to separate your soul from your body.

**Imam ‘Ebād:** Farewell, my homeless aunts,  
Farwell, my broken-hearted sisters.

**Zeynab:** Alas, ‘Ābedin, your aunt is dying for you.  
You look at me each moment,  
my dear, but I have no remedy.  
What can I do? [Confess that] there is no God but God.

**Sakina and Now ‘arūs together** (to the audience):  
O you who are present! If you are Muslim,  
say something in intercession.
قدر بابش از فلك بالاتر است
مادر او دختر پیغمبر است

پزید - ای ز طوفان کربلا بر جا
ای ستمکش چناب زین العبا
بشنو از من تو ترک عادت گن
بر من اقرار بر امامت گن

امام عباد - تو گیمان کردن حسینی گشه‌ای
مختصر جسمی به خون آغشته‌ای
هم محمد هم علی را کشت‌دار
هم نبی و هم ولی را کشت‌دار
تو سه خواهر، شش برادر کشت‌های
هفت‌بایا هشت‌مادر کشت‌های
ظراف‌بن مسوا را کشت‌دار
بی خیون خدا را کشت‌دار
گر تو می‌خواهی سخن در مشورت
گو سخن‌کو چند و باب و مادرت
زانی ابن زانی ابن زانیه
باب تو جانی و مادر جانیه

پزید - جلاد! جلاد!
خطاب من به تو جلاد مرتد غدار
بنز تو گردن زین العباد تن بیمار

شعر - لبیک لبیک!
یگو شهادت که سر از تند جدا سازم
میان جان و تند طرح دوری اندادم

امام العباد - الوداع ای عمه‌های در به در
الوداع ای خواهران خون چگر
زینب - عابدین عمه‌های پیرد آه
دم به دم می‌کنی به من تو نگاه
چاره‌ای من ندارم ای عمه
چه کم لا اله الا الله

سکینه و نوعروس با هم
ایا جامعه حضار اگر مسلمانید
شما برای شفاعت لبی بجنابی‌د

The Ta’ziya of the Damascus Bazaar | 175
Is there no Muslim among you?  
Is there no firm believer in Damascus?  
Now I beat my head with a stone for the [lack of] manliness [here].  
I will go to the European ambassadors to entreat them.  
O Europeans! We are so cowed by the tyranny of Šemr and Yazid  
That now we entreat you.

**European:** O God! What do I see?  
The eye of the sphere has never seen its like!  
I am amazed at the Muslim sovereign,  
why is he the enemy of the faithful?  
No one has done the like to the people of his own religion,  
for as long as the heavens have been turning.  
O Muslims present in this meeting,  
someone should intercede for these prisoners.  
It is not acceptable, to our way of thinking,  
for a Christian to intercede for Muslims.  
But where there is immeasurable oppression,  
intercession for the innocents will be rewarded [in the hereafter].  
Come, executioner, that I may kiss your hand and foot,  
Do not kill him, may my soul be a sacrifice for you.

**Šemr:** No Muslim in the court of Yazid  
intercedes on behalf of this person who must give up all hope of life.  
Leave me, because I will not release him.  
[To Imam 'Ebād] Confess the oneness of God, my blade is on your throat.

**Sakina:** O European! We are strangers in this city.  
Here, we are foreigners, who have no portion.

**European:** Executioner, stay your hand.  
Do not torment a person who is ill, like this.  
I am going to meet Yazid the Unchivalrous.  
I will intercede on their behalf,  
I will have no regard for my own dignity, in his presence,  
so that he may refrain from execution.  
O Yazid, show mercy to these children,  
or may I be a sacrifice in their path.  
Do not kill a youth who is ill,  
who is ailing, and weeping and pitiful.
مگر میان شما یک نفر مسلمان نیست
به شهر شام مگر هیچ اهل ایمان نیست!؟
زنم به فرق خود این لحظه از حمیت سنگ
به التماس روم پیش ایلچیان فرنگ
ز ظلم شمر و زیرد آن قدر ذبلی شدیم
فرنگیان! که شما را کنون دخیل شدیم

فرنگی- خنداوندا چه می‌آید به دیده
که چشم چرخ مانندش ندیده
عجب دارم ز سلطان مسلمان
چرا دشنم شده با اهل ایمان
کسی با اهل دین خود چنین جور
نکرده تا که گردون می‌زنند دور
ایا حضار مجلس از مسلمان
یکی گردد شفیع این اسیران
نبانش این به زعم ما گورا
شفیع مسلمین گردد نصرا
ولی جایی که ظلم به حساب است
شفاعت بهر مظلومان ثواب است
بیا جلال بوس دست و پایت
مکش ای را شوش جانم فدايت

شمر- مگر نبود مسلمان به بارگاه یزید
که تا شفیع شود بهر این ز چنان نومید
پرو که از سر او دست برم‌دارم
بگو شهاده به حلق تو تیغ بگذارم

سکینه- در این شهر ای فرنگی ما غربیم
در این جا ماغرب و بی نصبیم

فرنگی- پس ای جلال دست اکنون نگه دار
مده این خسته را این گونه آزار
روم پیش یزید بی مروت
کمن از بهر ایشان من شفاعت
بریزم پیش او من آب را
که سام مصرف از کشتن او و را
ای یزید رحم بر این طفلان گن
بیا مرا در رهشان قربان گن
بگذر از قتل جوان پیمان
که علیل است و چنین زار و نزار
Have mercy on these strangers,
These people whose portion is grief are innocent.
It is obvious that this despised group
Have no [male] relative, except this helpless one.
What is the benefit of killing an ill person?
Is there even any blood in his veins, for you to spill?
Have mercy on him, leave him alone, he has no-one.
Otherwise, I offer my head to your dagger.

**Yazid:** Come European; sit on the throne [beside me].
You have distressed us to no effect.
Intervention is not acceptable here.
Order is necessary.
Ho, Executioner! Ho, Executioner!

**Zeynab:** Withdraw your hand from the family of the Prophet.
Otherwise I will untie my hair in this court.
I will wail in God’s court of law,
I will plead with the Almighty for vengeance.
I will go to Najaf without veil or footwear.
I will hold fast to the grillwork around the tomb of the king of Najaf,
to arouse the zeal of the lion of God [Imâm ‘Ali].
I will lament so bitterly that the earth and heavens roar.
O ’Ali, my dear father! O ’Ali, my dear father!

**Amir-e ġâyeb** (Imâm ‘Ali): Do not kill him, do not kill him, lest the heavens
be turned upside down.
Do not kill him, do not kill him, lest the hearts of the Prophet’s family turn
to blood.
Do not kill him; do not kill him, because the daughters of Huseyn have been
dishonored.
Do not kill him, do not kill him, because the sisters of Huseyn are prisoners.

**Imam ‘Ebâd:** O my grandfather! Look at my broken head.
O my grandfather! Look at my hands that they are bound in chains.

**Amir-e ġâyeb:** I wanted your head to be broken, so that,
I may faithfully intercede for my people on the Day of Judgement.
بیا رحمی گا بر این غربیان
گناهی نبست با این غم نصبان
بود معلوم این جمعی گه خوارند
بجز این بینوا محرم ندارند
ز قتل شخص بیماری چه خیزد
ندارد خون گه تن بر گرو چه یرزد
ترحم کن از این بی گس تتو بگذر
وگرته از من این سر از تو خنجر

پیام بخشین فرنگی پر روز اورنگ
به‌هوا کرده، ما را تو دلنگی
اینجا وساطت جایی نباید
باید نظامی در گار باشد
جلاد! جلاد!

زینب ـ بدار دست تو از عرشه رسول الله
وگر نه موی پریشان کنم در این درگاه
فغان به محکم حضرت الله برم
شکایت بر جبار دادخواه برم
کنون روم سر و پای برجه سوی نجف
ضرح شاه نجف را بگیرم اندر کف
که غیرته سادات‌هایی اش به جوش آرم
ز گریه ارض و سما را به جنب و جوش آرم
ای بابا جان یا علی ای بابا جان یا علی

امیر غایب ـ مکش مکش که سماوات سرنگون گردد
مکش مکش که دل اهل بیت خون گرد
مکش مکش که حقیران حسین
مکش مکش که اسرار خواهران حسین

امام عباد ـ سر شکسته من را نظر کن ای چد
دو دست بسته من را نظر کن ای چد

امیر غایب ـ سر شکسته تو خواستم به روز جزا
کلم شفاعت این امانت ز راه وفا
Šemr: O ill-fated Yazid! I am speaking to you. 
Listen, I will explain the condition of this distressed soul. 
When I was about to cut off his head in my rancour, 
Someone in a black veil came, from the direction of the kiblah. 
The masked one terrified me so that, 
my whole body was trembling for fear. 
A sudden terror so petrified me 
that the dagger fell from my hand at once.

Yazid: Apostate, deceitful Šemr: go to one side. 
Do not repeat what you have said to anyone.

European: O God, who is this shining moon? 
He is covered in blood, as if he were rolled in it. 
It seems that I have seen him in some city. 
He looks familiar to me. 
O head, tell me the circumstances. 
You are like the sun passing over the contingent world.³³ 
If you are Adam, where is Ceylon?²⁴ 
If you are Noah, where are the sea and the storm? 
If you are Khalil, where is the fire of Namrūd? 
If you are the Ishmael, where is the Ram? 
If you are Jacob, separated from Joseph, 
this is neither Egypt, nor Canaan. 
From [the sight of] these demons and beasts, 
I am sure that you are Solomon among them. 
I am certain that you are Muhammad, 
reciting the verses of the Qur’ān like this. 
It seems that Ahmad said, ‘O Huseyn, 
your head will be cut off with a sharp blade.’ 
It seems that you are a stranger here and have no mother, 
that she cries for your sake like a cloud giving rain. 
Do not be sorrowful, because Christians will cry, 
in sympathy with you.

Yazid: Tell me European, what nonsense is this?
پرگو فرنگی یزید - بر به یک طرف ای شمر مرتند غدار
به نزد خلق مکن این سخن دگر تکرار

فرنگی - یا رب که باشد، این ماه تایان
گردنده در خون، غلتان یبدن سان
گویا که او را دیدم به شهري
آید به چشم از آشنایان
ای صاحب سر احوال بر گو
هستی چو خورشید در برج امکان
گر آدمی تو پس گو سراندیب؟
ور نوح هستی کو بحر و توفان؟
گر تو خلیلی کو نار مرود؟
ور تو ذبحی پس کوت قربان؟
یعقوبی از تو در هجر یوسف
اینجا نه مصر و اینجا نه کنعان
زین دیو و زین دد کشته یقینم
در بین آنها هستی سلیمان
باش یقینم باشی محمد
این گونه خوانی آیات قرآن
گویا حسینی، می گفت احمد
برزن رآست با تبخ پرzan
گویا غربی باد نداری
گریز ز بهرت چون ابر باران
اما مخور غم چون در غم تو
باشد نصرا از دیده گریان

یزید - برگو فرنگی داری چه چوغا

شمر - خطاب من به تو باید ای یزید بد اخیر
بدر گوش تو بر شرح حال این مضطر
چو خواستم سر او را گم ز کینه جدا
ز سمت قبله بیامد تقدیر سیاه
نهیب گرده مان آن ناقبادن چنان
که گشت جمله وجود ز ترس آن لرزان
نهیب ناگه او کردن ناقبادن پستم
که اوحیاد در آن لحظه خنجر از دستم
What are you telling that head, here?  
What are these tears amidst our festivity?  
All the time you are debating with yourself!

**European:** The infidel Zoroastrian, are you questioning me?  
See the result of your own behaviour.  
By God! The injustice you have done to Islam,  
I have never seen from one infidel to another.  
What I have seen, is beyond words.  
The Lord, whose head this is, amazes me:  
how honoured he is in the eyes of God,  
how honoured he is in the eyes of the Prophet.  
I see angels standing wing to wing.  
From the heavens to the earth’s surface.  
Now explain to me in detail, the circumstances of this head  
So that I can recount these things day and night,  
in Europe, from the top of the pulpit.

**Yazid:** You are asking me about the circumstances? Listen then,  
I cut off his head as one kills a sheep.  
His name is Huseyn the son of Heydar.  
His grandfather is Muhammad, his mother is Zahra.  

**European:** May your tongue be cut out  
by a bolt of lightening.  
In the end, you killed Huseyn out of enmity.  
May your line die out!  
You chained his wives in a line,  
despised and bareheaded.  
God is great, God is great.

**Yazid:** Did you see Huseyn in some city?  
Did you touch your head to his foot?  

**European:** Listen, I will tell one secret about this head.  
Remember my gem-like words.  
I was King John’s ambassador
با سر چه گویی اگون در اینجا
در عین شادی این گریه‌ها چیست
با خویش داری هر لحظه غوغا

فرنگی - پریسی از من ای گر کافر
از سر برخی بی‌درد و بی‌قدر
ظلمی که دیدم از تو به اسلام
بالله نکرد کافر به کافر
این‌ها که دیدم از خاطرم رفت
در حیرت من از صاحب سر
دارد چه قربی نزد خداوند
دارد چه قدری نزد پیغمبر
کر آسمنها تا سطح بی‌غورا
بينم ملاک پر بسته بر پر
باری به تفصیل اگون بیان کن
احوال این سرا از سر
کاندید فرنگ این، قصه بخوانم
هر صبح و هر شام بایلی منبر

پزید - پریسی از من احوال بی‌نشنو
چون گوستندی بریدمتش سر
نامش حسین است فرنگند حیدر
جذشع محمد، زهرا مادر

فرنگی - امیدوارم از تیغ آذر
گردد زبان قطع ای ستمگر
از کینه آخک کشی حسین را
نسلت و افتاد گردن تو ابز
بستی به زنگیر یک سر زانش
در عین خواری، عاری ز چادر
الله آخر، الله آخر

پریسی - آیا حسین را دیدی به شهری
آیا به پایش سایدهای سر؟

فرنگی - بی‌گویم سری از این سر
در گوش درکش حرفم چو گوهر
از بوحناشاه ایلچی بدم من
to Medina, to the Prophet.  
At once, I saw the face of this lord coming in.  
like a shining moon.  
Muhammad rose immediately,  
He took him to his bosom like his own dear soul.  
Zahra the Pure  
put a vest on him.  
The fastening was so tight around his pure throat,  
you could see a circular line.  
Muhammad kissed him constantly  
and shed tears like pearl.  
I asked him: ’Why you are crying?’  
He said: ’This line will be cut with a dagger.’  
I asked him where this event would be seen.  
That glorious king said: ’At Karbalā.’  
I asked: ’What is his worthy name?’  
He said: ’His name is Huseyn. It is a pure name.’  
I asked: ’Who will his killer be?’  
He said: ’Yazid, an infidel.’

**Yazid:** If you have anything else to narrate, do it.  
Tell me about the condition of this man.

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**Bahr-e tavil**

**European:** O Yazid, do you not know that this pure shining head, lying despised in the golden bowl, is a portion of Zahra’s heart? You will not know and will not understand, unless I tell you this story: there was once a young gazelle, it was beautiful, elegant and delicate. In the open plains, it fell in a trap, and a hunter brought it before the Lord of ‘But for Thee.’ He presented it to the lord of the spheres.
اندر مدين هزند پامير ناگه بديدم از در درآمد
چون ماه تايان اين صاحب سر
برخاست از چا آن دم محمد
چون جان شيرين بگرفت در بر
پراهنی را پوشانده بودی
بر قامت او زهرائي اطهر
از سختى بند بر حلقي پاکش
بودی غایان خطي مدور
پوسيد او را هر دم محمد
میرخت اشکش مانند کوهر
پرسيدم از وي اين گریه از چيست؟
گفتا كه برند اين خط به خنجر
گفت كيما اين، رخ ميايده؟
در گربلا گفت آن شاه با فر
گفت چه باشد نام شريفش؟
گفتا حسین است، نامي مطهر
گفت كه او را قاتل كه باشد؟
گفتا يزيد است، يک مرد كافر

پيزيد- گر باز هم توتعريف داري
برگو برایم از حال اين سر

بحر طويل

فرنگي- ای يزيد اين سر پاكیزه پر نور كه در طشت طلا خوار نظرهاست، ندانی كه جگر
گوشه زهراست؟ ندنانی تو و نشناسي اگر، با تو من اين فصه بگويم كه يكى برآهوي
قشنگي و لطيفي و ظرفي به بابان به يكى دام در افتاد و صياه، بياورد پر سيد لولاک
دهد تحرف به آن سرور افلاک.
That King of Religion, that companion and friend of the trustworthy Gabriel, took the fawn and gave it to Hasan. He was his little darling, his grandchild, the son of her Holiness, Zahra.

When Huseyn, another grandson [of the Prophet], saw Hasan’s fawn, he jumped up and went directly to the al-Aqsā mosque. He asked his grandfather, ‘Where is my gazelle?’ The Prophet said, ‘Another gazelle will arrive at any moment. It is for Huseyn, the light of my eyes’.

At once a voice cried out from the throne [of God] to a mother gazelle, saying ‘You are the ornament of the gazelles of the world, take your fawn quickly to the mosque of al-Aqsā, to the Ornament of the Prophets. He is going to give your fawn to Huseyn, the light of his eyes, so that the heart of that darling child should not be saddened’.

I will tell you another story. Once, the one whose head lies here, along with his grandfather who is the ornament of mankind, was on the way to the noble and pure house, as a guest. At once a cloud appeared. It rained fire and water. As Huseyn was passing through to go to his mother, the Prophet, who is the master and chief [of both worlds], turned his face to implore the heavens, saying, ‘O Powerful Creator, stop the rain from this cloud for a while, so that it does not rain on the head of one who is the light of Zahra’s heart and eyes’.

O Yazid! Son of the adulterous sinner Henda, the tyrant. You cut at the roots of Islam by killing one whom the Prophet loved and honoured. On top of that, why are you now beating his pure lips and teeth with a stick? May God cut off your hands, you wicked scoundrel! May God strike you dumb and cut off both your hands [sic] for killing the son of the Lion of God, Imām ‘Ali.
گرفت آن شه دین، همدم و هم صحبت جریان امین آن پر آهو به حسن داد، که فرزند
عزیزش بُد و دلبند عزیزش، نوه‌اش، آن پسر حضرت زهرا.

چون دید حسین، آن پسر دیگر او پر آهو بود از آن حسن، زود ز جا خاست. پش راست
سوی مسجد اقصی به پر جد کبیرش که مگر آهوی من هست کجا؟ گفت نبی آهو دیگر
که بود مال حسین نور دو عین. می‌ریست از راه هم الساعه، همین جا.

ناده از عرش ندا آمد به مادر آهو که تو ای فخر غزالان جهان پره خود را ندوان زود پر
مسجد اقیصی به همان جا که بود فخر رسولان پره پر آهو به حسین نور دو عینش که
نرسید دل آن کودک دلبند دلارا.

بازگویم به تو یک قصه دیگر که همانا مگر این صاحب سر هم هر آن پر کبیرش که بود
فخر بیش داشت که چه به بیت الشرف طاهره مهمان بود. لیک عیان گشت به ناگاه
سحابی، چه سحابی که فرو ریخت از آن آتش و آبی، تحو حسین بود روان تا که رود در
پر مادر، نبی آن سور و سالار رخ عجز اسی گنبد دوی که خالق جبار، دمی
پارش این اب نگه دار، نریزی در سر آن که بود نور دل و دیده زهرا.

ای یزید، ای پسر هند زناکز ارغام جفاپیشه تک ایش تو بر ریشه اسلام که کشت تو
کسی را که نبی داشت عزیزش، دگر اکنون تو چرا چوب زنی بر لب و دندان می‌پریزش، قطع
الله ییدیک، مردک بدرک، الهی که شوی لال و شود قطع دو دقی طو.
**Yazid:** Be silent, you Zoroastrian infidel!
I will order them to cut your head from your body.
Ho, executioner! Ho, executioner!
O Executioner you are a master of tyranny,
Cut off the head of this idol worshipper, for injustice's sake.

**Šemr:** Confess the Oneness of God, because I am going to cut your head from your body.
I am going to separate your soul from your body.

**European:** Stop it, you cursed, merciless, oppressor, Yazid.
I am a Christian, but I have not martyred the family of the Prophet.
You thirst for my blood: very well: give me some water.
Give a sip of water for my sorrowing, restless heart.

**Yazid:** O Šemr, give water to the European, for fidelity’s sake,
then cut his head from his body.

**Šemr:** Yazid, we did not give water to Huseyn.
We martyred him while his lips were dry.
Why should I give water to the European?
It is not a sign of fairness and fidelity.
[To the European]: Take this crystal cup full of water,
Now, quench the fire in your heart with water.

**European:** [To Imām Huseyn] O thirsty one, you had no power over the dagger.
It seems you were a stranger and lost your mother.
[To Šemr]: I am a European, and you give me water.
You killed Huseyn while he was thirsty and distressed.
I will not drink this water, God forbid!
while Zahra’s children are thirsty.
[To Imam ‘Ebād]: O Memento of the King of the Virtuous,
make me a Muslim now.
که گشته پسر شیر خدا را.

یزید - لب را فرو بند ای گیر کافر گویم بذرند از پیرگز سر جلااد! جلااد!
خطاب من به تو جلااد در جفا استاد بزن تو گردان این بپرست از بیداد
شمر - بكو شهاده که از سر تنت جدا سازم میان جان و تنت طرح دوری اندامزم

فرنگی - پس کن ای ملعنون بر رحم ستمگر ای یزید من نصاراهم نکردم سیط پیغمبر شهید باری ای تشه به خونم تشنهام آبم بده جرعمه آبی به قلب زار بیتابم بده

یزید - برهم آب ده به فرنگی تو از وفا وانگاه رآس او بنما از بدن جدا

شمر - به حسین آب ندادیم یزید با لب تشه مودیم شهید به فرنگی بدهم آب چرا نبود شرط ز انصاف و وفا جام بلور، پر آب دریاب بر آتش دل اكتون بزن آب

فرنگی - ای تشه لب تو طاقت خنجر نداشتی گویا جربب بودی و مادر نداشتی ز اهل فرنگم، بر من دهي آب کشته حسین را بی آب و بیتاب آبی ننوش حاشا و کالا لب تشه باشد اولاد زهرام ای یادگاری از شاه خویان اکون بفروما من را مسلمان
Imam ‘Ebad: You have been favoured, O devout European
that you confess the religion of Muhammad.
Say: ‘there is no God but God,
Muhammad is the Messenger and ‘Ali is the Vicegerent of God.’

European: O Master, on the Day of Resurrection, bear witness
that I said, ‘there is no God but God
Muhammad is the Messenger and ‘Ali is the Vicegerent of God.’

Šemr: Get out of here, European, because I am going to cut off your head.
I am going to separate your body from your soul.

European: I am delighted to go now, to the Messenger of God,
Saying, ‘there is no God but God.
Muhammad is the Messenger and ‘Ali is the Vicegerent of God.’

Yazid: Put the head of Huseyn Ibn ‘Ali in a golden bowl,
Take it to his sorrowing daughter in the ruins.

Šemr: I place the head of Huseyn Ibn ‘Ali in a golden bowl.
I take it to his sorrowing daughter in the ruins.

Zaynab: This scent is like the flowering path to Huseyn’s door.
I am amazed! From whom can the scent of Huseyn be coming?
O Women! Huseyn has come, with honour and glory.
Offer all your souls at his feet.

Šemr: O group of prisoners! Huseyn’s head is coming.
O army of mourning! The General of the two worlds is coming.

Zeynab: O head! My heart is crushed on seeing your face, brother, brother.
امام عیاد - خوشا به حال تو باد ای فرنگی دین‌دار
که می‌کنی تو به دین محمدی اقرار
یگو که اشهد ان لا اله الا الله
محمد است رسول و علی ولی الله

فرنگی - گواه باش به روز قیامت ای آقا
که گفتتم اشهد ان لا اله الا الله
محمد است رسول و علی ولی الله

شمر - برو تو فرنگی سرت جدا سازم
میان جان و تنت طرح دوری اندامزم

فرنگی - روم ز شوق کنون جانب رسول الله
اقول اشهد ان لا اله الا الله
محمد است رسول و علی ولی الله

یزید - سر حسین علی را به طشت زر بنهید
برای دختر زارش سوی خرابه برد

شمر - سر حسین علی را به طشت زر بنهم
برای دختر زارش سوی خرابه برم

زینب - شمیم گلشن کوی حسین می‌آید
به حیرتی ز که بوع حسین می‌آید
مخذرات، حسین آمده به عزت و ناز
به یاد او همه جان‌ها کنید یا اندامزم

شمر - یا گروه اسیران سر حسین آمد
سیاه تعریه، سردار علی‌ملک آمد

زینب - ز دیدن رخت ای سر دم به تنگ آمد برادر برادر

The Ta‘ziya of the Damascus Bazaar | 191
How strange, how strange, that you have remembered those who have no-one, brother, brother.
You are not on the road now; why do you have your face covered, brother, brother?
I am the one who came on foot, why are you tired, brother, brother?
You have come to this ruin without roof, without door, brother, brother,
Did you have no feet that you come with a head, brother, brother?

Zeynab: How black your lip is, O pearl on the exalted throne, my dear brother Huseyn.
If I am not mistaken, it is the sign of Yazid’s stick, my dear brother Huseyn.
When they took your head to the monastery and church, my dear brother Huseyn,
They took me to the cities as a spectacle, my dear brother Huseyn.
I smelled the food in all the houses, my dear brother Huseyn,
But for three days and nights I went to sleep hungry, my dear Huseyn.
Drink no water, although you desire it, my brother, my brother,
No-one gave us water, not for forty stations, my dear brother Huseyn.
Enough salt is poured on the wound in my heart, my brother, my brother,
To see your killer standing before me, dear brother Huseyn.
O Ruqiya! This is life for your lifeless body.
Good news, good news! Your father is our guest.

Ruqiya: O dear father, have you heard any news about me?
My hands are tied with rope, did you know that?
A yellow-haired [European] asked me from Yazid, to be his slave girl.
Did you know how despised I am?
Šemr slapped my face and said: ‘you are orphaned’.
Alas, did you have any news of this pain and sorrow?
عجّب عجب که تو را یاد بی کسان آمد برادر برادر
ز ره رسیده چرا روی بسته شدی برادر برادر
پیاده آمدام من چرا تو خسته شدی برادر برادر
در این خرابه بن سقف و بی در آمدلایی برادر برادر
مگر که پای نبوخت که با سر آمادهای برادر برادر

زینب - کبودی لیت ای گوشوار عرش مجدد برادر حسین جان
اگر غلط نکتم هست چجای چوب یزید برادر حسین جان
سر تو را که به دیر و کلیسیا بردنی برادر حسین جان
می برای ماما به شهرها بردنی برادر حسین جان
ز خانه همه بیو طعام بشنیدم برادر حسین جان
ولی سه روز و سه شب من گرسته خوابیدم برادر حسین جان
نخوریت آب برادر، اگر به خواهش دل برادر برادر
بی ما نداد که تا چهل منزل برادر حسین جان
بگی بر است بر جراحت دل من برادر برادر
همین که گرفت اساتده در برابر من برادر حسین جان
ای رقیه تن به جان تو را جان آمد
مؤدده ده ترده که باید تو مهیان آمد

رقیه - جان بابام ز من هیچ خبر داری تو؟
بیسته دستم به رسن هیچ خبر داری تو؟
زردمویی ز یزیدم به گنبد طلبد
از چنین خوارش شدن هیچ خبر داری تو؟
شمر سیلی به خرم مزرد و می گفت بیم
واج از این رنج و محسن هیچ خبر داری تو؟
The women gave me bread and dates, as alms.  
Nothing passed my lips, did you hear any news of that?  
The pillow for my head was gold brocade.  
Now, a brick is my pillow, did you hear any news of that?  
O Father, I have used an old worn rug,  
to cover my body, did you hear any news of that?  
[Soliloquy] I am so happy on seeing my father’s beautiful face  
that I am freed from the pain of the world.  
O Aunt, come beside me for a moment.  
Listen to this, my Will.  
Take Akbar’s curl,  
when you go to Medina, give it to Suġrā.  
O noble one! By the truth of the Qur‘ān,  
by the dignity of exalted ‘Ali,  
send me quickly to my father.  
I am freed from the pain of the world.  
O Father! The pain of separation from you takes me to the grave.  
I say, I bear witness that there is no God but God.

_Zeynab_: O Muslims! Reason and wisdom have left me,  
I do not hear the voice of my child.  
O my nightingale, why are you silent?  
O my dove, why have you swooned?  
O my dear, why are you lifeless, having surrendered your life  
like a rose petal, in a corner of this ruin.  
Come my dear, that I may close your eyes,  
I will stretch out your arms and legs towards the Kiblah.  
Come, I will lay a brick under your head.  
I am a sacrifice for your sorrow-filled heart.  
O my dear ones, this is the ancient custom of the world.  
Ruqiya’s covering is a worn out rug.  
O my master Huseyn, Zeynab’s support,  
Where are you, light of my eyes?  
Why you do not enter these ruins?  
Why are you separated from we prisoners?  
O enfeebled ‘Abedin, may I be your sacrifice!
هر به تصدق دادند نان و خرماست که زن‌ها به تصدیق دادند
نگذرانم به دهن هیچ خبر داری توه
متفکر سر مسنده است و استیرهن بوی خشت شد پالس من هیچ خبر داری توه
این گلیمی که شده مندرس و کهن‌ه، پدر
گردن‌هام یوشش تن هیچ خبر داری توه
ز روی زمین جمال بابا
خلاص گُشتم ز رنج دنیا
بیا به نزدم زمانی عمه
بده تو گوشی به این وصایا
بگیر از من تو یک لفک اگر
مدتینه رفتی بهد به صفراء
پزگووارا به حق قرآن
بیا به حق حاکم علا
رسان به زودی مرا به بابی
خلاص گشتم ز رنج دنیا
غم فراق تو بابا به گور برمآه
افقول اشهد ان لا اله الا الله

زینب - مسلمانان ز سر شد عقل و هوشمند
صدای طفل من نانی به گوشمند
چرا ای پلیم گشتی تو خاموش
چرا ای قمری؟ گشتی تو مدهوش
چرا عمه چو نکرک رسم فزرد
در این گنج خرابه جان سپرده
بیا عم بیمدهنیم چشم‌هایی
گذارم سوی قبله دست و پا بهت
بیا خشتی نهم زیر سر تو
به قربان دل عقدها بیا
عزیزان رسم دنیا از قدیم است
رقبه یوشش کهنه گلیم است
ای یار زینب آقای حسین
اندر کجاپای ای نور عینم
در این خرابه از چه نیایی
از ما اسپرمن از چه چدایی
شوم فدای تو ای عابدین افسره‌ه

The Ta’ziya of the Damascus Bazaar | 195
May you live long, now that your sister is dead.

**Imam ‘Ebād:** Come my sister that I may close your eyes. I will stretch out your arms and legs towards the Kiblah. O my sister! Why are you lifeless, having surrendered your life like a rose petal, in this roofless ruin? O God, O God! I am sorrowful and alone in the corner of this ruin. O God, O God! To whom can I turn my face, in Damascus?

**Zeynab:** There is no candle, no lantern, no assistance or companion. There is no light in my dark night. O God, O God!

**Imam ‘Ebād:** O my sister! I sacrifice myself for the chain on your neck. I weep for your condition, O God, O God!

**Zeynab:** Yesterday this afflicted one [Ruqiya] said one word to me, that burnt my wounded soul, O God, O God!

**Imam ‘Ebād:** Tell me, what my afflicted sister said to you? I am sorrowful and lamenting for her.

**Zeynab:** She said ‘There is no one in Damascus as hungry as I am.’ I have no more strength or energy, O God, O God!

**Yazid:** One of you, go to the ruins, Bring me some news quickly.

**Šemr:** I will go to the ruins again. I will bring news for you, O ill-fated one. O Yazid the unchivalrous, how long will you oppress? O Yazid the unbridled, how long will you oppress? The storm of tyranny has taken a rose. O Yazid! A child has died in these ruins. What a beautiful and well-spoken child she was.
سر تو باد سلامت که خواهرت مرده

امام عباد - بیا خواهر ببندم چشم‌هایت
گذرانم سوی قبله دست و پایت
چرا خواهر چو برگ گل فسردی
در این ویرانه و به سقف‌تی
کنچ خرابه بی کس و زارم خدا خدا
در شهر شام رو به که آرم خدا خدا

زینب - نه شمع و نه چراغ و نه پاری، نه همدی
نوری مانده در شب تارم خدا خدا

امام عباد - خواهر فداً دانه زنجری گردنت
از بیه تو سر شک ببارم خدا خدا

زینب - دیروز این حزینه به من یک سخن بکفت
که آتش زده به چان فگارم خدا خدا

امام عباد - چگونه که گفت خواهر محزون من تو؟
از بیه او غمینم و زارم خدا خدا

زینب - گفتا چو من گرسنه نباشد کسی به شام
درگ توان و تاب ندارم خدا خدا

زینب - یکی اند گرفته پا گذارد
خبر زودی براوی من ببارد

پژیب - ییکی اند خرابه پا گذارد
خبر آرم برابیت ای بد اختیر
پژیب ای بی مروت ظلم تا کی
پژیب ای بی حمیت ظلم تا کی
گلی را تندیاد ظلم برده
پژیب طفیل در این ویرانه مرده
چه طفل نیک روی خوش بیانی
She told her secret grief to me.
She told me, ‘My father is dead,
I am an orphan, so people do not honour me.’
My heart burnt for her when they slapped her face.
Your slave girls pulled her hair from her head.

Šemr: O Yazid! Be manly, bridle your desires, you will be rewarded.
O Yazid! Zeynab’s heart is burning tonight.

Yazid: Alas, that there is no cure for my pain.
On the Day of Judgment, Murtezâ [Imam ‘Ali] will be my enemy.
Go and tell the woman who washes the dead [the Ġassāla],
To wash Huseyn’s pitiful child, with wailing and lamenting.

Šemr: Ho! Ġassāla, go and wash Huseyn’s pitiful child,
with wailing and lamenting.

Ġassāla: O my dears, I am going to the ruins,
to wash the body of this dead child.
Greeting, you who are alone in the trap of affliction.
I wish you all well.
O my dears! Go to one side,
that I may wash the body of this dead child.
Why is the mouth of this child so dry?
Why is her pillow made of raw brick?
I am sure that she has no mother.
She is an orphan, she has no protector.
Why is the chin bound to her arm?
Why is her body afflicted and broken?
What was her sin in this life?
Who has bound her arm in this way?

Ġassāla: O Lady, may I ask you a question?

Zeynab: Ask your question, I have no heart [for this] any more.
به من می‌گفت غم‌هایی به من می‌گفت از پاها ندارم
پی‌شیپ مردم جدا ندارم
دم‌زندگی زندگی سپری به رویش
کنیزانت زسر کننده مویش

شماره مروت کن حمیت کن صواب است
یزید امشب درگذست کباب است

پزید یا بر حالم که دردم بی دواست
ذشمن در روز محشر مرتضاست
رو بگو غشاله با صد شور و شین
تا یکی هر این طفل افکار حسین

شماره آی آی غشاله با صد شور و شین
رو بشوی این طفل افکار حسین

غشاله ـ روم اندر خرابه، ای عزیزان
بشویم پیکر این طفل بر جان
سلام ای پی کسان در دام محنت
بگویم جملگی را سر سلامت
روید اندرت کاری ای عزیران
بشویم من تن این طفل بر جان
چرا این طفل این سان خشک کام است
چرا پالین او از خشت خام است
پیشین شد که او مادر ندارد
پی‌شیم است و کسی بر سر ندارد
چرا زنجیر بر بارویش بسته
چرا نهاده جم او در روزگاران
که بسته بازی او را بیدان سان؟

غشاله ـ آی ای زن سؤالی از تو دارم
زینب سؤالت را بگوی من در ندارم
Ğassāla: It seems that you are the first among these women.

Zeynab: Why do you pour salt on my wounds?

Ğassāla: Why is her neck as black as tar?

Zeynab: Know that this sign shows that she was chained.

Ğassāla: Why has a thorn pricked her foot?

Zeynab: She was running in the desert so much.

Ğassāla: I am sure that she has no mother. She is an orphan and has no protector. I am not going to wash her body right now. They have killed this child with sticks and stones.

The family of the Prophet (in unison): Where are you Fātima? O mother! Where are you? In the corner of these ruins? Why you do not visit your children in the corner of these ruins? O Sphere! Was it fair, that in Karb-o balā, you inflicted such injustice on Huseyn? See what you have done to those whose hearts burned! O Sphere, may your house prosper!
غضاله - یزارگ این زنان گویا تو باشی
زینب - چگ بر زخم من بهر چه پاشی؟
غضاله - چرا پس گردنش قبر است ای زن؟

بدان این چای زنجیر است ای زن
چرا خاری به پای او خلیده؟
زینب - ژبس اندر بیابانا دویده

غضاله - یقینم شد که او مادر ندارد
یتیم است و کسی بر سر ندارد
من یکشومی تن او بی درنگ
کشته اند این طفل را یا چوب و سنگ

اهل بیت با هم - چجا یای فاطمه مادر کجا یای
در این کنج خرابه
چرا سر وقت طفلانت نیایی
در این کنج خرابه
کی روا بود که در کرب و بلا
به حسین این همه بیداد فلک!
آنچه کردی به چگ سوختگان
خاکشتن همه آباد فلک!
Notes

1. Q. 4:145.
2. Q. 26:227.
3. گر توانتي بكش حلالش كن: the meaning is obscure: ‘release him from his misery’ may be meant.
4. Q. 114/4-5.
5. I.e., Without armour.
6. The heads are carried in on lances.
7. In mystic poetry and love poetry, the lover is ‘drawn to the bazaar’: he wanders in public showing how love has maddened him.
8. Fate, destiny.
9. ‘eyd-e qurbân’, the last day of the pilgrimage to Mecca, when sheep are sacrificed.
10. dâr al-Nazâm.
11. Literally ‘Aunt’, an affectionate name for her maid, who appears below.
12. Zaynab and her sister ‘Umm-e Kuljûm.
13. Nonsense words, to show that the speaker is a foreigner.
14. In Steingass’s Persian dictionary (1892), dûr-bin is a telescope and the players would presumably have had two telescopes as props. Nowadays the word refers to a camera.
15. Ahmad is a name of the Prophet Muhammad.
16. Fâtima, the daughter of Imâm Huseyn, is called Now ‘arûs throughout the text, perhaps to avoid confusion with Fâtima, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad.
17. Zahrà is a title of Fâtima, the Prophet’s daughter.
18. There is a play on two meanings of ‘aziz here: grandeur and beloved.
19. Seven and four allude to the seven planets: the moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn; and the four elements: air, wind, fire and water. See A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, The Mirror of Meanings, p. 2.
20. Hûr-e ‘eyn, referring to the Qur’ân 44/55.
21. Reading ‘eyn as the plural of a’yân, the word has different meanings; the name of a letter ‘eyn, eye; source; essence; and appearance. With respect to the meanings the line may be translated in different ways. See A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, The Mirror of Meanings, p. 22.
22. Bû Turâb is a title of Imâm ‘Ali.
23. Lit: ‘in the tower of the contingent world,’ but ‘tower’ here refers to a sign of the zodiac.
24. In the Islamic tradition, the story of Adam and Eve is located in Ceylon.
25. This refers to the metre of the section that follows: ‘long’ metre.
26. A title of the Prophet, referring to a tradition in which God says: ‘But for thee, I would not have created the heavens.’
27 *Sic.* When this *ta’ziya* text was composed, this could only refer to the *al-Aqsa* mosque in Jerusalem.
28 This could be a particular house known by this title, but the term is not in common use today. The meaning may simply be that the Prophet has been invited to a noble, pure house.
29 *Sepah-e ta’ziya,* referring both to the defeated remnants of Huseyn’s army, and the audience of the *ta’ziya.*
30 Meaning stations on the road, where travellers stop.
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Index

‘Abbās, Zeynab’s son 11, 73, 87
‘Abbās, Abū al-Faẓl al-, 44, no. 50, 82, 109, 122, 126, 164
‘Abbās, Abū al-Faẓl al-Abbās, see ‘Abbās
afġān 61
ākherat 55
‘alām 9-10, 206
‘Ali Asgār 25, 34, 41, 44, 78, 82, 87-8, 109, 132, 164, 206
amānāt 38, 84
antagonist 8, 10, 14, 32-5, 37, 39, 55-6, 59, 61-2, 69-71, 92
Arabic 23, 28, 41, 55, 73, 82, 84, 87-8, 91, 103, 114
Arjāsb 24
‘ Āšūrā 7, 13, 24-6, 28, 30, 38, 40, 59, 61-2, 74, 73, 77, 79, 82, 87, 88, 94, 101, 205
‘Awn 49, 59, 73, 86, 109, 130, 166
Banū ‘Asad 44
Banū Umayyad 71
Bidaraḵš 24
Buyid dynasty  (945-1055) 12, 25
čādur (see veil) 74-5, 80
čarkh 67-8
consensus (ejmā’) 43
curse (see nefrin) 33, 36, 38, 75, 80, 90, 95, 97-8, 150, 188
Damascus 16, 21, 25, 28, 33, 35, 37, 39, 44-5, 47, 60, 63-5, 69, 73-4, 76-7, 88, 93-4, 102, 109-10, 112, 122, 124, 140, 142, 146, 150, 172, 176, 196, 208
dawâzdah-band 26
drama 12, 15, 20-1, 29, 41-2, 71-2, 205
Religious – 16, 23
ekhtiyār, see free will
eschatology 53, 55-6, 210
Euphrates 35, 44, 87
fate 28, 31, 39, 37-8, 61, 67-8, 78-9, 97, 116, 156, 158, 202; Ill-fated 196, 150, 180
free will (ekhtiyār) 19, 28, 37, 54, 67, 68, 84
Gādir Khumm 43, 50, 211
Haft-band 26
Ḥasan 19, 22, 28, 37-9, 44, 84, 88, 100, 109-10, 168, 186
Hātef from Isfahān (d.1783) 26, 41, 209
hejāb, see veil
hell 54-7, 62, 97, 122, hereafter 36, 48-9, 53-5, 64, 76, 88, 107, 176
Holy Spirit (rūḥ al-qudus) 74-5, 93, 107, 162
The Holy Drama

Hurr Ibn al-Riyāḥī (d.680) 45, 58, 70, 110, 128, 162,
Ibn al-Sa’d 34, 36, 39, 44, 55, 60, 62, 75, 81, 104, 110, 122, 134, 138
Ibn al-Ziyād 32, 38, 39, 44-5, 48-9, 55-6, 58, 68-70, 76, 88, 96-8, 101, 110, Imām 23, 26-7, 38, 40, 45, 47, 71, 84-5, 103
Imāmate 44, 45
infidel (kāfar) 27, 33, 37, 48, 54, 55, 95, 97, 136, 146, 166, 172, 182, 184, 188
infidelity 33, 55, 68, 77
intercession (šafā’at) 13, 19, 36, 48, 54, 66, 84, 174, 176
Islamic Revolution (1978-79) 12-4, 19, 48, 75, 106
kāfar, see infidel
kafan 35, 50, 61
Kāšefi, Huseyn Wā’ez (d.1504) 57
khāharān-e Zeynab (Zeynab’s sisters) 75, 107
Kheybar 172
Kūfa 24-5, 37, 48, 54, 55, 71, 74, 76, 79, 99, 110, 150
lawḥ-e mahlfūz (Well-Preserved Tablet) 35, 87, 99
lion 10, 38, 81, 136, 138; → dress 10; → of God 124, 178, 186; valiant → 136
lyrics 26, 124
majāles-e ta‘ziya 37, 80
majles-e ta‘ziya-ye vurūd-e be Medina 28
majles-e ta‘ziya-ye vurūd-e be qatilgīh 33, 56
majles-e ta‘ziya-ye bāzār-e Šām 28, 69
maqta-l-khānī 70
martyr 9, 14, 32, 38-9, 35, 47-50, 65, 70, 78, 82, 87, 92, 98, 107, 124, 126, 140, 156, 158, 162, 188; ~s of Karbalā 14, 88
martyrdom (šahādat) 19, 23, 25, 28, 47-9, 82-3, 98; – of Imām Huseyn 9, 13, 15, 18, 25-6, 28, 31, 40, 43-4, 58, 62, 70, 71, 76, 78, 81, 87, 101, 103; Cup of → 97
Medina 32, 38, 44-5, 47, 62-3, 73, 80, 82-3, 85-6, 90, 93, 99, 102, 103, 124, 145, 148, 162, 184, 194; King of → 112, 152
mihr 24
Mitrā 23, 105
mātam 82, 87
Mu‘awiya (d.680) 25, 43, 84, 110, 122
Muḥammad Ibn Abd-Allāh (d.632) 24, 37, 41, 54, 56, 77, 80, 109-10, 144, 168, 174, 180, 182, 184, 190, 202
Muḥammad Ibn Hanafiyya 25
Muḥarram 9, 18, 24-5, 27-8, 36, 40, 59, 66, 70, 106
Muḥtašam from Kāshān 30
Muhammad 26
Nāder Shah Afšār (r. 1736-47) 26
Najaf 62, 85, 102, 178
Nāṣer Khusraw (1004-88) 30
Nāṣer al-Din Shah (r. 1848-96) 14, 27
nuskha 17, 29, 37, 58, 71
oral literature 28-30, 33, 57, 65
orphan (yatim) 32-3, 54, 56, 69, 87, 90-1, 100, 106, 140, 154, 160, 198, 200
Pahlavi Dynasty (1925-1979) 13-4, 39; – monarch 19; Reżā Shah Pahlavi (r. 1925-41) 27; Muḥammad Reżā Shah (r. 1941-79) 75
paradise 11, 29, 47, 48, 53-5, 146, 148
passion play 11, 14-5, 17, 19, 23, 74
penitents (tawwābūn) 25
predestination (qadar) 19, 28, 37, 67, 79, 87
procession 9-10, 12, 17-9, 25-6, 36
protagonist 10, 14, 32, 34-5, 59, 61, 67, 70-1, 86
Qā‘āni from Shiraz, Mirzā Ḥabib Allāh (1808-1854) 26
Qājār dynasty (1796-1925) 15, 26, 27
Qāsem 11, 28, 43, 58, 68, 72, 78, 82, 83, 87-8, 92, 110, 156, 164, 166
qurbān 86, 89; eyd-e 202
rawza-khwāni 26, 71, 88
rawza al-shuhādat 26, 57, 71
rūḥ al-qudus, see Holy Spirit
ruins (kharāba) 47, 60-2, 64-5, 93, 102, 112, 140, 144, 146, 190, 192, 194, 196, 198, 200
Ruqiya 31, 110, 192, 194, 196
Safavid dynasty (1501-1722) 26, 57
Shah Tahmāsb (1525-1576) 26
šahādat, see martyrdom
Šahrbānū 31 37, 62-4, 87-8, 103, 156, 164
salvation 16, 19, 46, 68, 83, 84, 97
šām-e garībān 62
Sassanid dynasty (224-651) 103
Sakina (Imām Ḥuseyn’s daughter) 16, 32, 38-9, 61, 79, 81-2, 86, 88-93, 96-8, 102-03, 106, 110, 112, 140, 152, 156, 158, 160, 164, 174, 176
Šemr 30, 31-4, 36, 38-9, 46, 55-6, 62, 64, 68-9, 75, 80-1, 85-6, 90-1, 94-5, 101-02, 110, 123, 124, 126, 128, 130, 132, 134, 136, 138, 140, 142, 144, 150, 154, 156, 160, 162, 164, 166, 168, 170, 174, 176, 180, 188, 190, 192, 196, 198
seyyed al-shuhādā’ 48
Shah Nematollāh Vali 10
sina-zani 18, 36, 82
storytelling 26
ta’ziya-ye bāzār-e Šām 28, 69
ta’ziya gardān 58
ta’ziya-ye pašimān šudan-e Yazid 55
ta’ziya-ye šahādat-e Ḥazrat-e ‘Alī 28
ta’ziya-ye šahādat-e Muslim Ibn ‘Aqil 19
ta’ziya-ye vafāt-e Ḥazrat-e Zeynab 28, 90, 94
ta’ziya-ye vafāt-e peyghambar 28
ta’ziya-ye vurūd-e be Medina 28
ta’ziya-ye vurūd-e be qatlgāh 33, 56
tamaţţul 71
taşābuḥ 70, 71
tawwābūn, see Penitents
tekiya 27, 35, 36; -dawlat (the Royal Tekiya) 27
tawakkul 79
‘Ubaydullāh 44
‘Umm al-Kultūm 38, 73, 82, 84, 92, 100, 106, 202
veil (hejāb) 39, 73-5, 77, 80, 85, 93-4, 102, 106, 122, 144, 156, 162, 170, 172, 178, 180
Vištāsp 24
Waqār from Shiraz (d.1881) 26
wine 35, 43, 48, 54, 64, 69, 120, 122, 124, 150, 170,
witness (shāhed) 19, 47, 54, 190, 194
Yazgerd III (r. 632-651) 63, 103-04
Zarir 24, 105
Zeyn al-’Ābedin 25, 30, 34, 38, 45, 47, 49, 55, 60, 64-5, 74, 77, 83, 85-6, 93, 95, 101, 102, 103, 109-11, 140, 172, 174
Zoroaster 24
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