



‘AZĀDĀRĪ

‘AZĀDĀRĪ, to hold a commemoration of the dead, by extension, mourning, a word deriving from Arabic *‘azā*, which means commemorating the dead. This is also the basic meaning of the cognate *ta‘zīa*, which came to designate in addition the passion plays mounted in Moḥarram. Details of the commemoration of the dead as regulated by *feqh* are to be found in the chapters headed *al-janā‘ez* (funerals) in the handbooks of all the legal schools.

Because of diverse historical, geographical, and cultural factors, a great variety of funerary rites and death customs has developed in Iran. Despite a series of political and religious changes, beliefs and customs regarding death have been deeply influenced by the distant past. A general survey of pre-Islamic funerary practices on the Iranian plateau has not yet been made, but an extensive archeological survey of sedentary Central Asia—a vast area of Iranian culture—has demonstrated the existence of a great diversity in the disposal of the dead (see F. Grenet, *Les pratiques funéraires dans l’Asie centrale sédentaire de la conquête grecque à l’islamisation*, Paris, 1984, which discusses cremation, funerary towers, burial pits, embalment, inhumation, ossuaries, and cinerary urns). Mourning customs in Central Asia generally followed non-Zoroastrian patterns (*ibid.*, pp. 253ff.). References to pre-Islamic funerary practices are to be found in various versions of the Iranian national epic, as reflected in both textual and visual materials. Some of these practices may have continued to exercise an influence in the Islamic period. A case in point is the cult of kings and heroes such as Sīāvoš, tentatively identified by Russian scholars as the figure being mourned in a Panjikent wall painting (see E.



Yarshater “Ta‘ziyeh and Pre-Islamic Mourning Rites in Iran,” in P. J. Chelkowski, ed., *Ta‘ziyeh. Ritual and Drama in Iran*, New York, 1979, pp. 88-94, and in *Camb. Hist. Iran* III/1, pp. 449, 450, n. 2, and F. Grenet, op. cit., pls. XLVII and XLVIII). The cult of Sīāvoš may have influenced the Shi‘ite mourning rituals of Moḥarram (Yarshater, *ibid.*, p. 151); some connection has also been found between this wall painting and mourning scenes found in the iconography of Ferdowsī’s *Šāh-nāma* (O. Grabar, “Notes on the Iconography of the “Demotte” Shah-Nama,” in R. Pinder-Wilson, ed., *Paintings from Islamic Lands*, Oxford, 1969, pp. 32-47, 45ff.; N. M. Titley, *Miniatures from Persian Manuscripts*, London, 1977, subject index under coffins, funerals, mourners, processions, etc.; J. Norgren and D. Davis, *Preliminary Index of Shah-nameh illustration*, Ann Arbor, 1969). The *Šāh-nāma* abounds in references to ancient funerary beliefs and customs such as so-called Scythian Practices (see [ASB ii. AMONG THE SCYTHIANS](#)); in addition to mummification and embalmment, they include a cult of the horses of the dead prince or hero (see J. Kāleqī Moṭlaq, “Yak-ī daḡma kard-aš ze somm-e sotūr,” *Našriya-ye Dāneškada-ye adabiyāt wa ‘olūm-e ensānī*, Dānešgāh-e Ādārābādagān, 1357 Š./1978, no. 124, pp. 462-70; *idem*, “Yakī dāstān ast por āb-e čašm,” *Iran Nameh* 1/2, 1983, pp. 164-205; F. Wolff, *Glossar zu Firdosis Schahname*, Berlin, 1935, under *asp*, *summ*, *Raxš*, etc.) as well as the destruction of possessions and the suicide of wives, concubines, and slaves (see, e.g., *Šāh-nāma* [Moscow] IV, p. 65 vv. 888ff.). Customs such as disheveling, cutting or pulling out the hair, and biting or ripping the flesh off the arms, are also attested in the *Šāh-nāma* (see VI, p. 315 vv. 1558ff., and F. Wolff, op. cit., under *sōg*).

Certain features of ancient practices persisted into the Islamic period, such as the use of banners (*a‘lām*, see [‘ALAM VA ‘ALĀMAT](#)) and horses in funeral processions (see H. Massé, *Croyances et coutumes persanes*, Paris, 1938, I, pp. 86ff.). Mourning colors tended to remain dark: blue and purple were especially favored, with black, gray, and brown also being used (for the currency of these colors in pre-Islamic Iran, see H. Massé, *Firdousi et l’épopée nationale*, Paris, 1935, p. 204; Wolff, op. cit., under *banafš*, *kabūd*, *sīāh*). Self-laceration and the tearing of clothes—practices condemned by Islam—persisted well into the Islamic period, being practiced especially by rural women. The practice of repairing tombs eight days before Nowrūz is an obvious link of funerary customs of the Islamic period with ancient times (see Massé, *Croyances et coutumes* I, p. 115). Finally, mention may be made of funerary dances—pre-Islamic in origin—which persisted until recently in Tajikistan (see Grenet, op. cit., p. 259).



In general, however, Islamic tenets and practices relating to death have predominated: Belief in Azrael, the angel of death; Monkar and Nakīr, the interrogating angels; the torment of the tomb; and the entry of the soul after death into the *barzak* (an intermediary realm) have determined popular conceptions of death and the passage into the hereafter (see Massé, op. cit., I, pp. 113ff.; B. A. Donaldson, *The Wild Rue*, London, 1938, pp. 70ff.).

When death approaches, the expiring person pronounces the *šahāda*, encouraged and accompanied by those around him. His body is laid out in the direction of the Ka'ba, and to ease his passage into the hereafter the *sūra yā-sīn* (Qur'ān 36) is recited. The body is ritually washed (*gosl-e mayyet*) by the *morda-šūr* (corpse-washer) according to precise regulations and then wrapped in a series of funerary garments of which the outer-most is the *kafan* (shroud) before being placed in a *tābūt* or *naql* (bier). Martyrs are not washed and are buried in the clothes in which they met their death (Massé, *Croyances et coutumes* I, p. 95). Following the tradition established by the Prophet, most schools of law—including the Ja'farī—recommend prompt burial, generally on the day following death. This is held to have led on occasion to fatal errors, with apparently dead persons being buried alive (see Y. Ragib, “Faux morts et enterrés vifs dans l'espace musulman,” *Stud. Isl.* 57, 1983, pp. 5-30; Massé, op. cit., I, p. 95). Sometimes the bier is placed on a hearse (*naš-keš*), but more often it is carried by young men on their shoulders, walking quickly. Passers-by participate in this meritorious act by helping to carry it for a few steps, meanwhile reciting the *šahāda* (ibid., pp. 98ff). Once in the cemetery (*gūrestān/qabrestān*), the corpse is laid in the tomb, without bier, lying on its right side and facing the Ka'ba. Canonical prayers for the dead (*namāz-e mayyet* or *šalāt al-janāza*) are followed by supplicatory prayers on his behalf (*do'ā-ye amwāt*).

Post-burial rites vary from a simple funeral gathering, known as *majles-e tarhīm* (assembly for invoking mercy on the deceased) or *fāteha-kvānī* (recitation of *sūrat al-fāteha*), to a full *katm* (reading of the entire Qur'ān), with separate ceremonies for men and women, known respectively as *katm-e mardāna* and *katm-e zanāna*. Those attending such gatherings are served food and drinks (generally tea or coffee). The *katm* takes place at the latest three days after the funeral (Massé, op. cit., I, p. 104). Sometimes a Qur'ān reading takes place at the graveside, three days after burial; this is designed to assist the deceased in his interrogation by Monkar and Nakīr (see Donaldson, op. cit., p. 74; cf. the Zoroastrian parallel with the three days' judgment by Srōš and



Rašn; see I. Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*, p. 247, tr. C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern, *Muslim Studies*, New York, 1977, I, p. 224 n. 3). Further ceremonies are held one week (*hafta* or *pā-gereftan*), forty days (*čella* or *arbaʿīn*), and one year (*sāl*) after death, and optional ceremonies in commemoration of the dead are held in the cemeteries on the occasion of various religious festivals. It is also customary for women to visit tombs every Thursday evening (Massé, op. cit., I, pp. 106ff.). Prayers and passages from the Qurʾān are recited, and food—mostly *ḥalwa*—and alms are distributed (Donaldson, op. cit., pp. 74ff. nn. 11 to 18; Massé, op. cit., I, pp. 111ff.). Sometimes complete meals (*sofra*) are offered in memory of the dead.

Although not viewed as forbidden (*ḥarām*) by most legal schools—including the Jaʿfarī—the construction of buildings over tombs, as well as decorating and inscribing them, is regarded as reprehensible (*makrūh*). Nonetheless, Iran—like other Muslim countries—has seen a proliferation of richly laid-out tombs, mausoleums, and sanctuaries (see “Ḳabr,” “Ḳubba,” “Maḳbara” in *ET*²; Massé, op. cit., I, pp. 102, 114ff.). A distinctively Iranian trait, found at tombs in tribal and other areas, is the presence of funerary effigies of lions or rams as symbols of bravery, connected, perhaps, both with the proverbial valor of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb (Asadallāh “the lion of God”) and with pre-Islamic cults and beliefs (ibid., pp. 116ff.).

In literature, mourning has inspired the genres of eulogy (*fażāʿel* or *manāqeb*), dirge (*nūḥa/nawḥa*), and elegy (*marṭīa*).

Iran’s adherence to Shiʿism from the Safavid period onward introduced new elements into Iranian funerary practice. Dust gathered from the tomb of Imam Ḥosayn (*torbat*) at Karbalā would be mixed with water to form a beverage given to the dying. Burial at the Shiʿite shrines in the *ʿatabāt* in Iraq and at Mašhad and Qom within Iran has been regarded as highly desirable. From Qajar times onward, the transport of corpses over long distances for interment in sacred territory became a common practice, one involving both legal and sanitary problems (Massé, op. cit., I, p. 102 n. 2). Bodies buried in Mašhad would often be carried around the tomb of Imam Reżā in a kind of *ṭawāf* before interment (E. Šakūrżāda, *Aqāyed o rosūm-e ʿamma-ye mardom-e Korāsān*, Tehran, 1346 Š./1967, pp. 180ff.). Finally, various aspects of the Moḥarram rituals have been imitated in general Iranian funerary practice (see I. Lassy, *The Muharram Mysteries among the Azerbaijan Turks of Caucasia*, Helsingfors, 1916, pp. 132-209).



The mourning ceremonies of Moḥarram, commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Ḥosayn at Karbalā in 61/680 and reaching their climax on the tenth day of the month (‘Āšūrā’, q.v.), originated in Arab Iraq (see M. Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of ‘Āshūrā’ in Twelver Shi’ism*, The Hague, 1978). However, they were held in Iran as early as the twelfth century, when both Sunnites and Shi’ites participated in them (see J. Calmard, *Le culte de l’Imam Husayn*, thesis, Paris, 1975, pp. 434-49). In the Safavid period, the annual mourning ceremonies for Imam Ḥosayn, combined with the ritual cursing of his enemies, acquired the status of a national institution. Expressions of grief such as *sīna-zanī* (beating the chest), *zanjīr-zanī* (beating oneself with chains), and *tīg-zanī* or *qama-zanī* (mortifying oneself with swords or knives) emerged as common features of the proliferating mourning-processions (*dasta-gardānī*). In some towns these processions often led to clashes between rival factions known as *ḥaydarīs* and *ne’matīs* (q.v.). Mourning for the martyred imam also took place in assemblies held in buildings erected especially for the purpose, known either as *ḥosaynīyas* or *takīas* (tekkes), as well as in mosques and private houses. At these assemblies, called either *rawza-kvānī* (the recitation of *Rawzat al-šohadā’* by Ḥosayn Wā’eẓ Kāšefī (d. 910/1504-05) or similar works on martyrs of the Imamite line) or *marṭīa-kvānī* (the recitation of elegies), professional reciters and preachers would recount the deeds of the martyrs and curse their enemies, arousing the emotions of the mourners who responded by singing dirges at appropriate intervals in the narrative (see M. J. Maḥjūb “Az faẓā’el o manāqeb-kvānī tā rawza-kvānī,” *Iran Nameh* 2/3, 1984, pp. 402-31). Theatrical representations of the tragedy at Karbalā (*šabīh-kvānī* or *ta’zīa*)—possibly the most remarkable feature of the entire corpus of Moḥarram ritual—also made their appearance in the Safavid period (on this significant development, see the works listed in P. Chelkowski, ed., *Ta’ziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran*, New York, 1979, pp. 255-68 (“Bibliographical Spectrum”), and J. Calmard, “Moḥarram Ceremonies and Diplomacy,” in E. Bosworth and C. Hillenbrand, eds., *Qajar Iran: Political, Social and Cultural Change, 1800-1925*, Edinburgh, 1983, p. 224).

Commemoration of the drama at Karbalā reached its apogee in the mid-nineteenth century. By then it had spread across a vast area, extending from the Middle East and the Caucasus eastwards to India, Indonesia, and Thailand, and it had even been established in Trinidad by Indian Muslim migrants. In Iran, the memory of Karbalā came to permeate social and cultural life, with mourning assemblies and dramatic performances being organized throughout



the year, not only in Moḥarram. The occasion might be furnished by the death of a revered person or the need to fulfill a vow. Gatherings known as *sofra* (lit. tablecloth), in which the preparation and serving of food played a focal role, were exclusively feminine: the preachers as well as the mourners were all women, and the lives and tribulations of women such as Fāṭema and Zaynab were the principal topic of commemoration. Gatherings of this type appear to have originated in the late nineteenth century.

From the period of the Constitutional Revolution (1905-11) onward, mourning gatherings increasingly assumed a political aspect. Following an old established tradition, preachers compared the oppressors of the time with Imam Ḥosayn's enemies, the Omayyads (see J. Calmard, "L'Iran sous Naseroddin Chah et les derniers Qadjars," in J. Aubin, ed., *Le monde iranien et l'Islam* IV, Paris, 1976-77, pp. 189-94; A. Fathi, "Preachers as Substitutes for Mass Media: The Case of Iran 1905-1909," in E. Kedourie and S. G. Haim, eds., *Towards a Modern Iran: Studies in Thought, Politics and Society*, London, 1980, pp. 169-84).

The political function of Moḥarram observances was very marked in the years leading up to the Islamic Revolution of 1357 Š./1978-79, as well as during the revolution itself. In addition, the implicit self-identification of the Muslim revolutionaries with Imam Ḥosayn led to a blossoming of the cult of the martyr, expressed most vividly, perhaps, in the vast cemetery of Behešt-e Zahrā, to the south of Tehran, where the martyrs of the revolution and the war against Iraq are buried (on the connection between recent events and the Moḥarram cult in Iran, see E. Neubauer, "Muharram-Bräuche im heutigen Persien," *Der Islam* 49/2, 1972, pp. 250-72; G. E. Thaïss, *Religious Symbolism and Social Change: The Drama of Husayn*, Ph.D. thesis, Washington University, 1973; P. J. Chelkowski, "Iran: Mourning Becomes Revolution," *Asia* 3, May-June, 1980, pp. 30-37; M. J. Fisher, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1980, pp. 136ff.; H. G. Kippenberg, "Jeder Tag 'Ashura, jedes Grab Kerbala. Zur Ritualisierung der Strassenkämpfe im Iran," in K. Greussing, ed., *Religion und Politik im Iran*, Frankfurt am Main, 1981, pp. 217-56; M. E. Hooglund, "Hoseyn als Vermittler, Hoseyn als Vorbild. Anpassung und Revolution im iranischen Dorf," *ibid.*, pp. 257-76; M. Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, New Haven and London, 1985, pp. 233ff.).

Finally among modern developments, it may be noted that the legitimacy of some forms of self-mortification and of dramatic performances has been a subject of controversy among Shi'ite communities in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq



(see W. Ende, “The Flagellations of Muḥarram and the Shi‘ite ‘Ulamā’,” *Der Islam*, 55/1, 1978, pp. 19-36. See also ‘ĀŠŪRĀ’; MOḤARRAM; and MOURNING.

For a music sample, see [Abbās Khāni – Navā](#).

For a music sample, see [Marsiye Kāni](#).

For a music sample, see [Nowhe of Men’s Mourning](#).

For a music sample, see [Nowhe Zeynab](#).

For a music sample, see [Ta’zia of Qazvin](#).

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For details of Shi‘ite burial regulations see Moḥaqqueq Ḥellī, *Šarā’e’ al-eslām*, tr. A. Querry, *Recueil des lois concernant les musulmans chyites*, 2 vols., Paris, 1872, I, pp. 27-36, 96-100.

On regional and tribal beliefs and customs, which are often quite distinct from those generally prevailing in Iran, see ‘A. Bolūkbāšī, “Āyīn-e be kāk sepordan-e morda wa sūgvārī-e ān,” *Payām-e novīn* 7/9, 1344 Š./1965, pp. 73-84.

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