



FESTIVALS III, IV, V

iii. *Shi'ite.*

iv. *Yasidi and Ahl-e Haqq.*

v. *Kurdish (Sunni).*

iii. SHI'ITE

Shi'ite festivals mark important occasions in Shi'ite history as popularly understood, and are reckoned according to the Islamic lunar calendar. The festivals are noted for their often emotional expression of deep affection for the Shi'ite Imams and, occasionally, antipathy toward those understood as their enemies. Birth and death days of the Shi'ite Imams constitute the primary occasions for Shi'ite ritual observances (see 'AZĀDĀRĪ). Eleven of the twelve Imams of the Twelver Shi'ites were martyred, and the anniversary of their martyrdom receives particular attention in the ritual calendar. Although many Shi'ite festivals mark tragic events in the lives of the Imams and the history of the Shi'ite community, joyous celebrations do also occur, (e.g. Ġadīr Kōmm, q.v.), and some somber observances incorporate more conventionally festive elements. Given the profound impact of this religious calendar and its deep moral, social and political effect, the present article can only serve as a brief introductory survey to various festivals and commemorative days as observed in the last few decades, leaving the detailed analysis of their



historical and religious constituents to separate articles which describe important aspects of them in some depth. Imams and other holy figures of pivotal importance in the religious calendar are discussed under their individual entries (e.g., 'ALĪ b. ABĪ ṬĀLEB; ḤASAN; ḤOSAYN). The figural events at Karbalā (q.v.) and their dramatic reenactment in the *ta'zīa* processions in 'Āšūrā' (q.v.) and a host of cultural and religious technical terms associated with them (e.g., ARBA'ĪN, DASTA, ḤOSAYNĪYA, RAWḤA-K'ĀNĪ) are described in separate articles which examine their historical evolution in some detail. The entries on such pioneers of research on the *ta'zīa* as Aleksander Borejko Čhodzko, Enrico Cerulli, and Sir Lewis Pelly also provide valuable bibliographic information on the history of scholarship on *ta'zīa* and related topics.

Although all Imams are revered, some figure more prominently than others in Shi'ite hagiography. The anniversary of the death and birth of all Imams are recorded on official calendars, but public holidays are set aside for events associated with only some. Persian calendars for 1357 Š./1978 and 1376 Š./1997, years before and after the Islamic Revolution, included official holidays commemorating events in the lives of the Prophet, and the first, second, third, sixth, eighth and twelfth Imams.

The Islamic calendar year begins with the month of Moḥarram, the first part of which is also the most important Shi'ite commemorative period: the entrapment of third Imam, Ḥosayn, and his small band of supporters by Omayyad forces on the field of Karbalā; the bloody battle that ensued; the martyrdom of Ḥosayn and most of his male supporters; and the capture and mistreatment of the survivors. Activities recalling these events, especially the martyrdom of Ḥosayn, make up the core of the commemorative calendar of Shi'ite Islam. The emblematic nature of events remembered and recited contribute to a figural view of history in which they foreshadow and, in a sense, explain and justify, the later sufferings inflicted on the community and the sacrifices borne by them, the Iran-Iraq war providing the most recent and poignant example. The sequence of events at Karbalā are recalled vividly in *rawḥas* (q.v.), sermons which culminate in remembrance of the sufferings of Ḥosayn and his companions, and other holy figures, and in *ta'zīa* performances, dramatic reenactments of the same events (Beeman, pp. 363-370). Mourning activities reach their peak on Tāsū'ā, the ninth of Moḥarram, and 'Āšūrā, the tenth of the month and anniversary of Ḥosayn's martyrdom. On Tāsū'ā and 'Āšūrā *rawḥas* abound, and mourning processions



are often held in tribal areas, villages, towns, and cities. Moḥarram observances have long been characteristic of Shi'ite religious expression and described in detail by foreign travelers and diplomats from the Safavid to the Qajar era (Massé I, pp. 130-38; Calmard 1983, pp. 214-22) as well as in Persian memoirs, particularly from the 19th and early 20th centuries (see, e.g., Mostawfī, *Šarḥ-e zendegānī*, I, pp. 288-310). Religious life, then as now, was rich with *rawžas*, *sofras* (q.v., vowed ritual dinners), and visits to tombs of *emāmzādas* (q.v.; descendants of the Imams). While *emāmzādas* may be visited and sermons and ritual dinners may be sponsored at any time of year in fulfillment of vows, *ta'zīa* performances and religious processions are restricted to the ritual mourning season. Cities, towns, and devout individuals go into mourning for the two months of Moḥarram and Šafar. Lines from a famous elegy lamenting the events of Karbalā, composed in seven-verse strophes and hence called the *haft-band*, by the Safavid poet Moḥtašam Kāšānī, printed on long strips of black cloth, drape the streets of modern Persian cities and are emblematic of the continuity of this commemorative tradition (Browne, *Lit. Hist. Persia* IV, pp. 173-77). The devout also dress in black for the full two months, or at least until the passing of Arba'in, the fortieth day after 'Āšūrā. Joyful celebrations, such as weddings, are not usually held during the months of Moḥarram and Šafar. The first twelve days of Moḥarram and the last ten days of Šafar are particularly observed as periods of mourning.

In rural Shi'ite communities all villages observe the remembrance of Imam Ḥosayn in Moḥarram, but certain villages in different parts of the country are famous for their spectacular *ta'zīas*. Only on 'Āšūrā and the 28th of Šafar, days marking the deaths of Imam Ḥosayn and the second Imam, Ḥasan, are communal rituals held in the Lorestān village described by Loeffler (p. 14, pp. 17-19). Among the Qermezī Qašqā'ī, Moḥarram observances culminate in a ritual termed *šozenia* (*šab-e zenda*), a night when people remain awake. Young men make and carry a standard made of a wooden cross dressed in Qašqā'ī women's clothes in black and green; a bell affixed to the upright pole summons people to the ritual. Verses of lamentation are recited, young men step in rhythm in a circle around the standard, which is borne away in a procession made up of men engaged in chest-beating (*sīnazanī*, q.v.). In general, the observance consists of a night of chanting for the young, some restrictions on washing, and, occasionally, a ritual meal (Beck, pp. 156-58). The exact character of processions and other Moḥarram observances in any given year is influenced by contemporary political events. Moḥarram processions held in a village outside Shiraz in early 1979 were particularly vibrant and



well-attended and combined with activity in support of the revolution (Hegland, pp. 37-40, photograph on p. 48).

In contrast to the simpler parades in rural areas, religious processions in cities tend to be very elaborate and highly organized. Members of religious brotherhoods (*hay'athā-ye madhabī*) plan well in advance for their role in the procession. They organize *dastas*: groups of men who practice chants and chest-beating rhythms and do so in unison while marching in the procession. *Dastas* may feel themselves in competition, especially on the basis of neighborhood affiliation, and violence has occasionally erupted among the groups (see [ḤAYDARĪ AND NE'MATĪ](#); Perry; Mirjafari, pp. 153-54). This was particularly dangerous in the past when men carried daggers (*qamas*) with which they scored their heads in mourning for the Imam (Lorey, p. 304). The use of small bundles of chains attached to a handles for *zanjīrzanī*, self-flagellation with chains in rhythm, is more common and persists.

Religious processions in different locales are distinctive. In Shiraz, the *hay'ats* devote time to making elaborate *ṭabaqs* (large festive platters) which are carried rather like floats in a parade. Some *hay'at* members volunteer to carry the often very heavy structures in fulfillment of vows. Old-fashioned *ṭabaqs* were sometimes tiered structures, layered like wedding cakes, with each layer holding decorations and lamps illuminated for the parade. *Ṭabaqs* carried in Shiraz in the 1970's were often tall structures, perhaps six feet in height. The outside lines of the cage-like constructions were made of neon light tubes, especially colorful at night. Inside a platform held decorative objects—artificial flowers, lengths of colorful fabric, tulle, pictures of Imams, especially 'Alī, Ḥosayn, or Imam Rezā, and perhaps a kerosene lamp or model of a tomb. The *ṭabaqs* often featured prominently the photograph of a young *hay'at* member who had died during the previous year. An implicit comparison was made between the young man and Imam Ḥosayn's nephew Qāsem, with him at Karbalā, who had also died an untimely death. Each *ṭabaq* was brightly decorated, representing the bridal chamber or *hejla* (q.v.), of Ḥaẓrat-e Qāsem, and recalled his marriage to Imam Ḥosayn's daughter on the field of Karbalā. The marriage took place to fulfill a promise Imam Ḥosayn had made to his brother and father of the groom, Imam Ḥasan. Only after Qāsem married Ḥosayn's eldest daughter was he permitted to defend his family on the field of Karbalā, where he was soon martyred (Betteridge, p. 79). Floats depicting personages and events from the Karbalā story have traditionally been carried on 'Āšūrā in villages outside Yazd (Fischer, pp. 171, 262, 263).



Yazd is famed for its *naqls* (q.v.), large wooden structures carried in the processions (Malcolm, pp. 134-5; see frontispiece and plate facing p. 76). Fischer describes *naqls* as large tear-shaped wooden structures, draped in black, mirrored, and requiring a hundred men to lift each of them. He comments further that each *naql* represents Ḥosayn's coffin, and is carried at noon on 'Āšūrā. Some small *naqls* are carried in processions from Yazd to nearby villages (Fischer, p. 171). Arba'īn, the fortieth day after the death of Imam Ḥosayn, occurs on 20 Šafar and is the occasion of particularly expressive outpourings of emotion. The twenty-eighth of Šafar marks both the anniversary of the death of the Prophet Moḥammad, according to the Shi'ites, and the death of the second Imam, Ḥasan. *Ḥalwā* (q.v.) is distributed in Mašhad on the anniversary of Imam Ḥasan's death. These religiously important dates are often marked by ritual observances, such as *rawzas* in private homes and in *Ḥosaynīyas*.

The death and birth days of Fāṭema, daughter of the Prophet and the wife of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb, are commemorated on 13 Jomādā I and 20 Jomādā II. While not an occasion for a festival proper, these days are included in a three day period of observances known as *Fāṭemīya*, a time of *rawzas* and sermons devoted to remembrance of the Prophet's daughter.

Festive celebrations are held to mark the birth of the Twelfth Imam on 15 Ša'bān. In Shiraz the celebration continues for three nights, although only the fifteenth is an official holiday. People go to great lengths to decorate their surroundings for the twelfth Imam's birthday celebrations. In 1976 Shiraz was richly decorated with numerous victory arches (*tāq-e nošrat*), or booths, constructed for the occasion. The booths might be built in fulfillment of individual vows, or sponsored by local religious organizations. Some were small stands hung with carpets, some sections of the sidewalk were roofed with twisted crepe paper and hung with colored lights, in other areas walls were festooned with lengths of brightly colored cloth. In the more traditional southern neighborhoods of the city, some sidewalk areas were partitioned off and furnished for sermons inside the makeshift open-air rooms. A lavishly decorated victory arch usually served as the entry to the space.

While the month of Ramažān is devoted to fasting and religious contemplation, it is also significant for Shi'ites because it includes the anniversary of 'Alī's death. Two nights are observed: the nineteenth, on which 'Alī was stabbed, and the twenty-first, when he died (Schimmel, p. 118). Mosques are crowded with people who stay up for each of the three nights of



19, 21, and 23 Ramaẓān, called *šab-e aḥyā'*, or the night of wakefulness. *Laylat al-qadr*, or the night of destination, is believed by all Moslems to occur within the latter part of the month of Ramaẓān when the angels descend upon the earth and prayers are answered. The last Friday of Ramaẓān is celebrated as *jom'at al-wedā'*, "farewell Friday," to bid good-bye to the fasting month.

The last month of the Islamic calendar, Du'l-ḥejja, includes the important Shi'ite holiday of Ġadīr-e Kōmm (q.v.). Shi'ites celebrate Moḥammad's public designation of 'Alī as his successor on the 18th of the month, a public holiday in Persia (Massé I, pp. 137-39).

Special foods are associated with certain festivals. *Āš-e Emām Ḥosayn*, a thick soup (see *ĀŠ*) is traditionally cooked and distributed on 'Āšūrā in Yazd (Fisher, p.171). *Āš-e Abū Dardā* named after a companion of the Prophet, Abu'l-Dardā 'Owaymer b. Zayd Kāzraji (Yāḥaqī, p. 65), is traditionally prepared in Mašhad on the last Wednesday of Šafar, the day on which Abū Dardā fell ill, and may be prepared to cure illness at any other time of year as well (Donaldson , p.124; Šakūrẓāda, p. 13). The *āš* is distinctive for including a small male or female figurine made out of dough, which is thrown into a stream once the patient has eaten the *āš* to bear away the sickness (see *ĀŠ ii.*). On the birthday of the Twelfth Imam, Emām-e Zamān, a rice dish (*šīrīn pilaw*) is customarily served at homes in Shiraz. Even those who remain at home are able to participate in the festivals by preparing and eating seasonal foods, reciting appropriate prayers, and, for mourning observances, wearing somber colors dictated by the season.

It should be pointed out that Shi'ite festivals vary in detail in different countries (Schimmel, p. 120) and that in those, like Pakistan, in which the Shi'ites are in a minority, conflicts and tensions sometimes arise between them and the majority Sunni population at the time of the processions (Mujeeb, pp. 397-98). On the other hand, both Shi'ites and Sunnis participate in celebrating important Moslem festivals, most notably that of 'Īd-e Feṭr at the end of Ramaẓān and 'Īd-e Qorbān or 'Īd al-Aẓḥā on 10 Du'l-ḥejja, with its own elaborate rituals including *šotor-qorbānī* or *šotorkošān* (see *CAMEL v.*).

For a music sample, see [Mowlūd Kāni in Mināb](#).



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(ANNE H. BETTERIDGE and EIr.)

iv. YAZIDI AND AHL-E ḤAQQ

The many similarities shared by these two religious groups do not extend to their festivals. The Yazidis have a relatively large number of festivals, which are the only occasions when communities gather for religious purposes. Ahl-e Ḥaqq (q.v.), on the other hand, congregate several times a year to participate in the performance of the

jam'

ceremony, but only one occasion mentioned in their tradition (on which see below) could be described as a festival.

Yazidi festivals can be divided into local and general occasions. The latter group in turn consists of movable festivals, which are of evidently Islamic origin and follow the lunar calendar, and fixed or seasonal ones, whose dates are now calculated by the Seleucid calendar (see CALENDAR), but which probably go back to the seasonal observances of the ancient Iranian peoples.



In the Šaykān area of northern Iraq, Yazidi local festivals are known as *ṭewaf* (Ar. *ṭawāf*). Every village with a shrine holds an annual *ṭewaf* in the name of the holy figure to whom the shrine is dedicated. Although religious rites form part of the proceedings, these events are noted mainly for their festive atmosphere, dancing, and communal meals. Many Yazidis who were evicted from their villages in Northern Iraq in the 1980s continue to hold the *ṭewaf* of the original village, in order to keep alive the memory of their former home, even if the new place of residence has a *ṭewaf* of its own.

The most important movable festivals of the Yazidi calendar are the “Night of Barāt,” the “Feast of Ramaẓān,” and the “Feast of ‘Arafāt.” The “Night of Barāt” is the Yazidi counterpart of the Muslim *Laylat al-barā’a*, when God is thought to determine the events of the following year. Like the Muslim observance, the Yazidi festival is celebrated on 15 Ša‘bān. On that night Yazidis gather at the sanctuary of Shaikh ‘Adī, and followers of one group of shaikhs perform a modified form of the Muslim *ṣalāt*. Shaikhs of another group traditionally disrupt the prayer and steal the prayer mats. This custom perhaps represents a compromise originally intended to ease tensions within the early Yazidi community.

The “Feast of Ramaẓān” is celebrated two days before the Muslim *‘Īd al-feṭr*. The explanation given for this early date is that one year Shaikh Kāl Šamsān, a disciple of Shaikh ‘Adī b. Mosāfer, returned to Laleš after a period of imprisonment two days before the end of the fast. Shaikh ‘Adī was overjoyed and promptly ordered the feast to begin.

The Yazidi “Feast of ‘Arafāt” falls on 9 Du‘l-ḥejja, i.e., on the same date as the sojourn at ‘Arafa during the Islamic *ḥājj*. It is said that members of the Yazidi “priestly” castes go to Shaikh ‘Adī a few days before the actual feast, and spend their time in pious discourse. On the day of the feast, they prepare various foods, and later climb to the top of Mt. ‘Arafāt (a mountain at Laleš) where they stay a short while. Then, near sunset, they run down the mountain to the sanctuary of Shaikh ‘Adī, where they wash their hands and faces in the waters of the Zamzam (a spring in the sanctuary).

The fixed festivals of Yazidism include a spring New Year, and summer, autumn, and winter celebrations. The New Year (*Sar-ē sāl*) is celebrated on the first Wednesday of April (Seleucid), with bonfires at night, and houses decorated with flowers and eggs colored for the children. The festival also has a more solemn side as a memorial for the dead is held on this occasion.



The “Forty Days of Summer” (*Āella-yē hāvīnān*) are a period of fasting. On 10 June (Seleucid), a number of religious dignitaries go to Laleš where they fast for three days; after this they continue their fast at home. A few days before the end of the forty-day period they go back to Laleš to complete the fast, this time accompanied by other Yazidis; there are then general celebrations to mark the end of the fast.

The autumn “Festival of the Assembly,” which strongly resembles the Zoroastrian Mehragān (q.v.), is the apex of the Yazidi religious year. It is held from 23 to 30 September (Seleucid). As the name indicates, this is the time when the entire community gathers at Laleš. Some Yazidis believe that the Seven Angels gather at this time to decide the fate of the world for the coming year, and their meeting is mirrored by the gathering of the terrestrial leaders of the faith at the sanctuary of Shaikh ‘Adī. The obligation on every Yazidi to attend the festival is one of the main requirements of the faith. The festival culminates on the fifth day, in the sacrifice of a bull at the shrine of Shaikh Šams, who was once a leader of the faith but is now venerated as an angel, and also represents the sun. Other observances include performances of the *samā’*, i.e., sessions when Yazidi hymns are chanted and the sacred musical instruments are played by a special group of performers (*qawwāl*) in the presence of many pilgrims. On the sixth day, the people of the village of ‘Ayn Sefnī buy and kill a sheep, which they cook whole in a large pot, tearing up the meat with their bare hands when it is done. On the seventh and last day another ceremony takes place, called “Rug of Netting” (*Bar-ē šebākē*). This commemorates the death of Shaikh ‘Adī b. Mosāfer, who is believed to have died on the sixth day of the festival. The ceremony consists of creating a “bier” by tying cords together in such a way that they form an oblong net. This is placed upon two bars, and covered with cloth. It is then taken from the Shaikh ‘Adī’s tomb-chamber to a well in the forecourt of the sanctuary, where it is washed; after this it is returned to the tomb-chamber.

At one time, a forty-day period of fasting similar to that of the *Āella-yē hāvīnān* may have been observed in Yazidism, but modern Yazidis only know a three-day fast in winter. The fast is followed by the festival of *Bēlenda* on the first of December, the anniversary of Ēzīd (or Yazīd, an important figure originally identical with the Omayyad Yazīd b. Mo‘āwīa). A feast of the dead, held on 10 December (Seleucid), is mentioned in older sources, but its observance has now come to be widely associated with *Bēlenda*. Another winter feast is that of *Kežr Elyās*, which the Yazidis share with other religious communities in the



area.

As in the case of Yazidism, a three-day fast in winter followed by a festival is associated with Solṭān Saḥāk, an early leader of the faith, is also found in the tradition of the Ahl-e Ḥaqq; some groups fast another three days after the feast. The occasion is generally said to be in commemoration of the three days which Solṭān Saḥāk spent in a cave when pursued by his brothers, while the feast celebrates his release. Another version claims that seven holy figures (the *Qawalṭās*) were dead or covered by snow for three days and then came to life again.

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v. KURDISH (SUNNI)

Community celebrations fulfill multiple roles in Kurdish social life, of which perhaps the most important function is to reinforce community solidarity,



since they often encompass the entire village or neighborhood. Festivals also help to establish or consolidate an individual's status within the community, an essential service, inasmuch as the social hierarchy in the typical Kurdish village is constantly in flux. Such re-evaluations of status do not require elaborate formalities; sometimes it is enough simply to observe the order in which guests are served food and drink (Barth, p. 114). Festivals also give the host, usually the village headman or some other person of standing, the opportunity to strengthen his ties to other members of the community. By enabling him to display his hospitality and generosity, qualities much prized in the Kurdish village, they enhance his moral authority and prestige.

The most important of all Kurdish festivals is New Year (*Nowrūz*, *Newrūz*,) which is celebrated in all parts of Kurdistan on the first day of the vernal equinox, i.e. on or about 21st of March. A pre-Islamic Iranian festival celebrated in Persia and then in the Islamic empire in the early centuries following the emergence of Islam, it undoubtedly originated in ceremonies attending the arrival of spring, and in modern times it has become a national Kurdish holiday. Thus predating Islam, it has no necessary connection with Islamic religious beliefs or events, and attempts by Shi'ite Kurdish theologians to transform it into a celebration of the birth of the Prophet Moḥammad or of Imam 'Alī have failed (Eiubi and Smirnova, p. 212). Rather, the festival marks the transition from the severity and grayness of winter to the warmth and greenness of summer, a time when the Kurdish shepherd can undertake his annual journey to mountain pastures and the Kurdish farmer can begin cultivation of the soil. It is the occasion for such entertainments as games and dancing and for the preparation of special foods and the reading of poetry.

The celebration varies from region to region. On New Year's eve in southern and eastern Kurdistan bonfires are lit to symbolize the passing of the dark season, winter, and the advent of spring, the season of light (see ČAHĀRŠANBA-SŪRĪpokin, (*pokīn* or *poken*) baked especially for the occasion (Bāyazīdī, pp. 123-26). Yet another variation has 'Ā'eša or Fāṭema visiting the home and blessing it by leaving the imprint of her hand in the festival cake, *samanī* (*samanū*), which is then shared with friends and neighbors (Bois, p. 70; Kayvān, p. 643; Wahby, pp. 155-56).

Characteristic also of the New Year observance is the election of the "false amir," (Bāyazīdī, 1990, pp. 239-49; Qazvīnī, pp. 13-16, 57-66; Wahby, pp 154-55). In Mahābād the inhabitants choose from among themselves an amir to rule over them for three days. During this time he engages in the most extravagant



behavior, making wild promises of long life and wealth to all his “subjects” and, in the general spirit of fun, fining those he judges guilty of “crimes” (de Morgan, pp. 39-40). A similar carnival was held in Solaymā nīya, the Kurdish cultural center in Iraq. In certain parts of Turkey and the Transcaucasus it took the form of electing a “false pasha,” while among the Kurds of Azarbaijan in the 1920s and 1930s it was customary for women to elect a “female shah” for a day as a means of asserting their rights in a society dominated by men (Aristova, p. 176). The Kurds in Mahābād and other places added the game of *mīrmīren* (amir or amir), which forbade the false amir to laugh, despite all the antics of his court jester, on pain of being driven from his throne (Eiubi and Smirnova, pp. 219-22). The election of a false amir was not merely an entertainment. It had political implications, too, as a protest against the abusive rule of real amirs.

Other festivals organized by Kurds have to do with shepherding, one of their primary occupations. The most important departure for the summer pastures, *barodan*, is attended by numerous rituals, among them the decorating of the sheep with tufts of colored wool and the assigning of places in the line of march to all persons young and old, dressed in their finest clothes (Şemo, pp. 62-71). The return journey at the end of the summer is also the occasion for celebration, especially of *beran-berdan*, the letting of the rams among the ewes, which is accompanied by the preparation of holiday dishes such as *gata* (sweet pastry) and *kaourma* (*qorma*, “cooked meat”), the arrangement of marriages, and, no less important, the payment of the shepherds for their summer work (Şemo, pp. 91-99).

Sunni Kurds regularly observe major Islamic festivals. The last day of Ramazān is celebrated by a religious service, the payment of a tax to the mosque, and a communal meal (Bāyazīdī, 1990, pp. 175-76). During *Qorbān-bāyrām*, the festival of sacrifice, anyone in the village may in theory offer an animal for the purpose, but social status usually determines who will enjoy the privilege. Kurdish communities also celebrate *Mawlūd al-Nabī*, the festival of the birth of the Prophet Moḥammad.

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