*Published:* December 15, 2004
*Last Updated:* June 24, 2015

# ḤOSAYN B. ʿALI II. IN POPULAR SHIʿISM

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Imam Ḥosayn's revolt and tragic death at Karbalā in present-day Iraq (10 Moḥarram 61/10 October 680) was one of the greatest calamities in the early history of the Muslim community. The cult of Ḥosayn first evolved locally, where the archetypal motif of the "God who dies" had been deeply engrained since the ancient Mesopotamian traditions. The elements specific to the cult of Ḥosayn, which have come together to establish the ʿĀšurā (q.v.) and Moḥarram devotions, may none the less be retraced to their own historical context.

According to tradition, Ḥosayn's son ʿAli Zayn-al-ʿĀbedin (see ʿALI B. ḤOSAYN) made a pilgrimage to his tomb with the women survivors of the Karbalā massacre forty days later (*arbaʿin*; q.v.). It seems, however, that the pilgrimage of Arab penitents (*tawwābun*) in 65/684 (see Denny, "Tawwābūn" in *EI*2) served as the prototype for Moḥarram devotions, since it placed emphasis on remorse, self-sacrifice, moaning, and wailing. Later, the revolt of Moḵtār (66-67/685-87; see Hawting, "al-Mukhtār b. Abī ʿUbayd al-Thaḳafī" in *EI*2) sparked the Kaysaniya movement, which branched out into various groupings that supported the Imamate of Ḥosayn's half-brother, Moḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiya (d. 81/700-701), whom they regarded as the Mahdi. With his war cry

"Revenge for al-Ḥosayn!" Moḵtār systematically hunted down and murdered those he considered responsible for Ḥosayn's death, including both Umayyads and Kufans. He mobilized the discontented Persian clients of Arab tribes (*mawāli*), and thus Persians came to participate in the early development of Shiʿism.

While Ḥosayni Alids remained quiet politically, a tradition of pilgrimage to the tombs of Ḥosayn and the other Karbalā martyrs quickly developed. Although they were to be repeatedly destroyed and rebuilt, from ʿAbbasid times onwards, the tomb and mausoleum (*mašhad*) also benefited from generous gifts and endowments from rulers of various dynasties, including the Buyids, Seljuqs, Il-Khanids, Safavids, and Qajars, which helped it to survive and flourish (see E. Honigmann, "Karbalā"). The shrine suffered more recently when it was sacked by the Wahhābis in 1215/1801. Many pilgrimage (*ziāra*) texts dedicated to Ḥosayn and the martyrs of Karbalā therefore came to be written, which could be recited in actual (or mental) pilgrimages.

In association with this pilgrimage, a genre of religious literature also evolved, called *maqtal* or *maqātel* after the *Maqtal al-Ḥosayn* attributed to the traditionist Abu Meḵnaf (d. 157/774; on Arabic *maqtal*s, see e.g., al-Mowaffaq al-Ḵᵛārazmi, *Maqtal al-Ḥosayn li'l-Ḵᵛārazmi*, Najaf, 1367/1947; ʿAbd-al-Razzāq Musāwi, *Maqtal al-Ḥosayn aw Ḥadiṯ Karbalā*, Najaf, 1383/1963. On Turco-Persian *maqtal* literature, see Calmard, 1975, pp. 220 ff.). These texts contain many more stories that are miraculous and supernatural than historical sources such as Ṭabari's *Tāriḵ*, and they include accounts of Moḵtār's terrible vengeance. Although originally in Arabic, the *maqātel* inspired the Turkish and Persian *maqtal-nāma*s, which were recited by storytellers (*maddāḥ*) who also produced other religious epics, such as *Abu Moslem-nāma*, *Moḵtār-nāma*, and *Jang-e Moḥammad-e Ḥanafiya*. Rather than grief and lamentation, these epics emphasize the theme of vengeance by the so-called "73 avengers of Ḥosayn's blood," most of whom are non-historical, such as Moḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiya.

In addition to these religious epics, elegiac poetry (*marṯiya*; on Persian *marṯiya* literature dedicated to the martyrs of Karbalā and other Shiʿite sacred figures, see Calmard, 1975, pp. 193 ff., 510 ff.; Clarke, pp. 13-28; Hanaway; and Haywood) in Arabic and Persian about the Ahl-e Bayt (q.v.), particularly Ḥosayn and the Karbalā martyrs, was increasingly composed by authors of both Shiʿite and Sunnite persuasion. Under the Seljuqs (1038-1194), this devotional literature spread widely through storytellers. During this time,

elegies (*marāṯi*) and eulogies(*manāqeb*) continued to be composed, in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, by learned theologians, poets, and popular storytellers. A major synthesis of *maqātel* and *manāqeb* literature was provided by Ḥo-sayn-Wāʿeẓ Kāšefi (d. 910/1504-05) in his *Rawżat al-šohadāʾ*. During the imposition of Twelver Shiʿism by the Safavids (1501-1722), Kāšefi's work became the textbook of preachers, thus called *rawża-ḵᵛān*s, who also continued to use material from epic, elegiac, theological, and historical literature. Along with Kāšefi's book, the celebrated Moḥtašam Kāšāni's (d. 996/1587 or 1000/1591) *Davāzdah band* on the tragedy at Karbalā was used extensively in Moḥarram ceremonies and served as an unrivalled model for further elegies, homilies, and dirges.

Legendary accounts about Ḥosayn and his martyrdom were from the outset influenced by his status as a Shiʿite Imam, and one of "the fourteen immaculate personages," (Čahārdah Maʿṣum; q.v.), who are endowed with an extraordinary anthropogenic nature in Shiʿite cosmogony (see COSMOGONY AND COSMOLOGY v.) The cosmic dimension of his martyrdom was thus enhanced by his status among the most venerated Ahl-e Bayt and the fifth of "the people of the cloak" (Panj Tan; Ahl-e Abā) to die, thus symbolizing the death of all of them. The belief in Ḥosayn's return as a precursor of the Mahdi at the end of time was also prevalent in early Shiʿite eschatology (Ayoub, pp. 223 ff.). Parallels were drawn between his fate and the passion and ascension of Jesus Christ; thus the day of ʿĀšurā is celebrated on a Friday, although in fact it fell on a Wednesday. A parallel was also drawn between Ḥosayn and John the Baptist, as precursors of the Messiah, or Mahdi (Ayoub, pp. 246-47; Crow, pp. 90, 97, 105-6). For instance, the sky turned blood-red and wept for both of them when they were killed, each by individuals who were thought to have been illegitimate children, and it was believed that their blood would participate in the apocalyptic revenge. Ḥosayn's suffering is also compared with the Prophet Job's afflictions, and the universal character of the tragedy of Karbalā is seen to have been anticipated by Cain's murder of Abel (and the revenge that would follow), as well as by Abraham's sacrifice of his son Ishmael (Ayoub, pp. 32-33, 235-36, 246-47), among other such examples.

Many legends grew about the miracles performed by Ḥosayn's blood and his severed, "talking" head, including the conversion of a monk, which is the reason why a Byzantine ambassador is included among the cast at Yazid's court in the *taʿzia,* or passion play. Ḥosayn's legends and their related symbols may have been influenced by Persian pre-Islamic themes, such as the murder

of Šiāvoš and its revenge. This includes the tulip (*lāla*) representing the blood and suffering of martyrs, and the prominent role attributed to the hero's horse; moreover, in contrast to Ḥosayn, who has a heavenly nature, his murderers are demonized and transformed into animals, and it is believed that apocalyptic revenge will also afflict their descendents. However, the most important devotional aspects of Ḥosayn's cult are connected with redemptive suffering and intercession, emphasizing the merits of lamenting, weeping, repenting, suffering, and striving for revenge. Audiences tend to find particularly moving the anecdotes about Ḥosayn's nativity (a premature baby of six months, like Jesus), his repeatedly foretold tragic destiny together with that of his elder brother Ḥasan, and all the miracles connected with his death and its aftermath. Ḥosayn is referred to, often together with Ḥasan and their mother Fāṭema (q.v.), by many honorific titles, including in particular: Sayyed Šabāb Ahl al-Janna (Master of the Youths of Paradise) or Sayyed al-Šohadāʾ (Prince of Martyrs). Traditions concerning Ḥosayn were repeatedly published and commented on by later generations of Shiʿite and Sunnite theologians, together with those about the rest of the Ahl-e Bayt. They were systematically compiled by Moḥammad-Bāqer Majlesi (d. 1110/1699 or 1111/1700) in his massive work, the *Beḥār al-anwār* (q.v.). Majlesi's work and those of other theologians were then used together with *maqātel* and elegiac literature by the most literate *rawża-ḵᵛān*s.

It did not take long for public rites of remembrance for Ḥosayn's martyrdom to develop from the early pilgrimages. Under the Buyids (q.v.), Moʿezz-al-Dawla officiated at public celebrations of ʿĀšurā in Baghdad (352/963; see Calmard, 1975). (This provoked Sunnite counter-commemorations for many years.) These commemorations were also encouraged in Egypt by the Fatimid ruler al-ʿAziz (r. 365-86/975-96; Daftary, p. 185). From Seljuq times, ʿĀšurā rituals began to attract many participants from a variety of backgrounds, including Sunnites. With the enforcement of Twelver Imamism by the Safavids, Moḥarram ceremonies extended throughout the first ten days of Moḥarram (this remains unclear for pre-Safavid times). They were often called by European observers (Calmard, 1996, pp. 178-81) "the Feast of Ḥasan and Ḥosayn," on the basis of the devotees' shouts of "Ḥasan! Ḥosayn!" and "Yā Ḥasan! Yā Ḥosayn!" (hence the "Šaḵse-vaḵse" heard in Caucasian areas). In their most elaborate form, public rituals then included: (1) Daily and nightly sermons in public places, palace courtyards (as well as—probably—mosques, *takia*s, and *ḥosayniya*s, q.v.), with the participation of many women. (2) The ritual of burying oneself up to the head. (3) A processions of penitents engaged

in self-mortification using stones, chains, and blades, as well as burning themselves. (4) Ritual fights between neighboring quarters belonging to rival *Ḥaydari* and *Neʿmati* factions (see ḤAYDARI AND NEʿMATI). (5) Parades of coffins and a large bier of Ḥosayn (*naḵl*) accompanied by banners (see ʿALAM VA ʿALĀMAT), mimicry, and pageantry, with the more dramatic elements taking place on the central venue (*maydān*) and on floats. (6) Ritual burning of effigies of villains (ʿOmar-košān). Moḥarram parades thus took on certain carnivalesque aspects, mixing joy with grief.

Most of these elements were retained in the official post-Safavid Moḥarram ceremonies, although the ritual cursing of the first three caliphs was abandoned. In the course of the 18th century, the merging of stationary rituals (*majles-e rawża-ḵᵛāni*) and processions (see DASTA) gave birth to the theatrical performances of *taʿzia,* or *šabih-ḵᵛāni*s, the passion plays. Under the Qajars, in order to accommodate large crowds of devotees, *takia*s and *ḥosayniya*s were built in increasing numbers in Tehran and all over Persia. While being concentrated on the events at Karbalā, the *taʿzia* repertoire includes many other stories, from those about early prophets to those about contemporary personages. Female audiences tend to be moved in particular by stories about Ḥosayn’s mother Fāṭema, his sister Zaynab, his wife Bibi Šahrbānu (q.v.), and the tragic fate of Ḥosayn’s sons, ʿAli-Akbar and ʿAli-Aṣḡar (q.v.), his half-brother ʿAbbās (see ʿABBĀS B. ʿALI), and his nephew Qāsem b. Ḥasan, allegedly married to his daughter Zobayda (also called Fā ṭema-Kobrā).

Along with the composition of *taʿzia* scripts, elegies and dirges (*nawḥa*s) to be sung in Moḥarram rituals were composed in great numbers, some by outstanding Qajar poets such as Qāʿāni (1223-70/1808-54), Yaḡmā (ca. 1196-1276/1782-1859), Soruš Eṣfahāni (1228-85/1813-68), and Weṣāl-e Širāzi (1193-1262/1779-1846). Safavid street-fighting was replaced by less violent competitions between the residents of neighboring quarters, mainly in the parading of banners, ritual singing, and self mortification, the latter taking the form of chest-beating (*sina-zani*) and flagellation with chains (*zanjir-zani*) or swords (*tiḡ-zani*, *qama-zani*). Moḥarram ceremonies extended into the month of Ṣafar during the Qajar period. This extension was perhaps due to the commemoration of the *arbaʿin* on 20 Ṣafar, when the Ahl-e Bayt made a pilgrimage to Ḥosayn’s grave, and the miraculous rejoining of his head and body (the *sar o tan* feast, a celebration attested in Safavid times). Furthermore the commemoration of the death of Imam Ḥasan was held on 28 Ṣafar (Massé, I, p. 136).

During the Qajar period *taʿzia-ḵvāni*s were sponsored by the Shah and the grandees. The most lavish presentations were performed in the huge Takia Dawlat established in Tehran by Nāṣer-al-Din Shah in the 1870s. Although it eventually started the tradition of secular theater in Iran, the *taʿzia* tradition itself suffered setbacks from politico-social changes, losing its official sponsoring and being restricted to provincial towns and villages. *Taʿzia- ḵᵛāni*s and extreme self-mortification were repeatedly condemned by the Shiʿite ulama. The tradition was eventually revived by the Iranian intelligentsia in the 1960s, notably at the Shiraz art festival and on televi-sion. Moḥarram ceremonies influenced not only Iranian theater but also architecture and painting. Specially constructed *takia*s or *ḥosayniya*s were decorated with murals depicting the battle at Karbalā and related scenes. These were also painted on wood, glass, and canvas. From Safavid times, such scenes were painted also on large leather screens which were used by traveling storytellers in their "one-man shows" (*šemāyel-gardāni* or *parda-dāri*). They were also reproduced in miniatures and lithographed booklets.

Moḥarram ceremonies are accompanied by profound expressions of grief, the wearing of mourning garb, abstinence, and the endurance of other hardships. Because of the merit attached to weeping, in order to increase tears, adjuvants, such as grilled lentils, have been used (Calmard, 1975, pp. 455-56; idem, 1974, p. 97). There is a widespread belief that devotees will produce tears kept in bottles for Judgement Day. Special virtues are also attached to prayer tablets (*mohr*) made from the clay of Karbalā (*torbat*) believed to be mixed with Ḥosayn's blood. Merit is also believed to be derived from meeting the expenses of these commemorations, for decoration, accommodation, appropriate food and drinks (tea, coffee, food for the poor on 10th Moḥarram, etc.). Besides royal and other official sponsorship, these expenses have been increasingly supported by communal and private contributions. Ḥosayn's cult and the Moḥarram rituals have been particularly important for the Persian *zurḵᵛāna* (gymnasium) tradition and guilds (see AṢNĀF).

From pre-Safavid times, the "Karbalā paradigm," as a symbol of tyranny and injustice, has had political implications, with oppressors often being labeled as "the Yazids of the Age." This includes the Ottoman sultans and even the Qajars, since some of the Shiʿite ulama encouraged rumors that their ancestors had assisted Yazid against ʿAli's family (Calmard, 1975, p. 192; idem, 1974, p. 91; Algar, pp. 121, 252). Ḥosayn's revenge and the Advent of the Qāʾem also had a symbolic meaning for the persecuted Bāb (Amānat, pp. 377-78; see also

Calmard, 1976-77b, p. 193). From the Constitutional revolution of 1905-11 (q.v.), Moḥarram rituals took a more definite political character. In 1977-79, mourning transformed into revolution, and it continued to assume political functions under the Islamic Republic (see ʿAZĀDĀRI). Symbols relating to the blood of the Karbalā martyrs were frequently used, such as Ḥosayn's red flag, and the blood shed by the insurgents and martyrs of the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-88 (see GRAPHIC ARTS ii.).

Ḥosayn's martyrdom is commemorated by Shiʿite communities throughout the world. In Iraq, apart from the pilgrimage to Karbalā, the traditions are similar to those which take place in Iran, but there are no dramatic performances. *Taʿzia-ḵvāni*s influenced by the Persian tradition are, however, performed in Lebanon. Dramatized Moḥarram rituals were also introduced in Central Asia in the late 18th century (Turkmenistan, Fergāna, Bukhara) through the influence of Persian elements in the population. In South Caucasian khanates these rituals retained the sanguinary self-mortification characteristic of the Safavid period; and, until around the time of the Soviet Revolution of 1917, passion plays could be performed openly. In Ottoman areas and Kurdistan, Moḥarram ceremonies remained connected to the rituals of mystical orders. The Qezelbāš, the Bektāšis (see BEKTĀŠIYA), and the Šabaks, who have in common an intense devotion to the Imams, all hold special mourning ceremonies for Ḥosayn. Besides fasting, the Bektāšis accompany their ritual weeping by reciting Fożuli's *Ḥadiqat al-soʿadāʾ*. On the last day, they eat "aşüre," a sweet dish made from rice and milk specially for this occasion, hence its name. As far as the Nosayris are concerned, like Jesus before him, Ḥosayn was not really killed, and so they celebrate ʿĀšurā joyfully.

In the Indian subcontinent, Ḥosayn's martyrdom has been commemorated for centuries. Although local traditions have over time permeated the associated beliefs and rituals, the elegiac literature in the vernacular languages (Urdu, Hindi, Sindhi, etc.) was influenced originally by the Persian sufi tradition. Devotional aspects, both private and public, are paramount, especially during the recital by the *rawza-ḵᵛān*s, which are called *rawza-ḵᵛāni*s. Mourning assemblies have sometimes been held in buildings erected specifically for this purpose (called *emāmbāra*s, *ʿazā-ḵāna*s, and *ʿāšur-ḵāna*s), such as the huge *emāmbāra*s which were built in Lucknow (Cole, pp. 94 ff.; Hassan ul-Ameene, IV, pp. 189-90). The processions with the *taʿzia* (or *tābut*), a supposed reproduction of Ḥosayn's tomb, are believed to have special qualities; the most precious ones have been kept in *emāmbāra*s, and at the end of the celebrations

the others have been buried in a local “Karbalā ground” (as may have been the case in Safavid Persia; *Mrs Meer Hassan Ali’s Observations*, p. 18; Jaʿfar Sharif, p. 182; Hollister, p. 173). The participants in the Shiʿite processional rituals, including Sunnites and Hindus, compete with each other in their acts of devotion. These affairs have often had a festive rather than mournful character, with much spectacular pageantry, including parading elephants, but a tradition of passion play performances has never developed here. By the mid-19th century, these Moḥarram rituals had been exported to the Caribbean island of Trinidad by Indian migrants (Korom and Chelkowski, pp. 150-75). Since the creation of Pakistan in 1947, there has been an effort to eliminate extraneous influences from the Moḥarram rituals and to revive the practice of extreme self-mortification.

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