STUDIES ON PERFORMING ARTS & LITERATURE OF THE ISLAMICATE WORLD

Karbala in the Taʿziyeh Episode

SHIʿI DEVOTIONAL DRAMA IN IRAN

Lucy Deacon

BRILL

Karbala in the *Taʿziyeh* Episode

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By

Lucy Deacon

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The Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available online at https://catalog.loc.gov
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2024047984

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 2214-6563
ISBN 978-90-04-71613-1 (hardback)
ISBN 978-90-04-71614-8 (e-book)
DOI 10.1163/9789004716148

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In fond memory of Professor Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila

Contents

Acknowledgements IX
List of Figures and Tables X
Note on Transliteration XI

Introduction 1
1 The Plays under Analysis 7
2 Scripts and Script Collections 9
3 Connecting the Scholarship 21

1 **The History of *Taʿziyeh-khānī*** 25
1 The Trajectory 25
2 Those Involved: *Taʿziyeh*'s Many Players and Their Cultural Milieu 44
3 Conclusion 63

2 **Conventions and Compositional Features of the Muḥarram Cycle** 65
1 Type-Scenes 68
2 The "Floating Scene" 82
3 The Martyrdom *Kompositionsschema* (Composition-Scheme) 83
4 Conclusion 88

3 ***The Martyrdom of Abū'l-Fażl al-ʿAbbās*** 89
1 Script Sources, and Tracing the Narrative 90
2 Skeleton of *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās* and Function of Its Sections 94
3 The Night-Time Encounter: A Test of Loyalty, Evidence of Character 101
4 Historical Development 114
5 Conclusion 122

4 ***The Martyrdom of Qāsem*** 124
1 Script Sources, and Tracing the Narrative 124
2 Skeleton of *The Martyrdom of Qāsem* and Function of Its Sections 127
3 "After You I Sit amongst the Ashes" Foregrounding the Bereaved Mother 133

4 A Full Moon over the Battlefield: Physical Characterisation of Qāsem 140
5 Qāsem's Inner World and the Theme of *Nākāmī* 144
6 Historical Development 147
7 Conclusion 155

5 *The Martyrdom of Imam Ḥusain* 156
1 Script Sources 156
2 Imam Ḥusain's Martyrdom Transposed: From Historiography to the *Taʿziyeh* 158
3 Skeleton of *The Martyrdom of Imam Ḥusain* and Function of Its Sections 164
4 Transition of Leadership, Spiritual and Physical 172
5 Historical Development 180
6 Conclusion 188

6 *Bāzār-e Shām* (The Damascus Market) 190
1 Script Sources, and Tracing the Narrative 191
2 Skeleton of *Bāzār-e Shām* and Function of Its Sections 196
3 Diplomacy through the *Taʿziyeh* Lens: The European Ambassador 202
4 Technical Anomalies 214
5 The Theme of Exposure 219
6 Historical Development 222
7 Conclusion 228

Conclusion 230

Glossary of Persian and Arabic Terms 239
Bibliography 242
Index 254

Acknowledgements

My deepest gratitude is due to the many learned and kind people who have encouraged my interest in the *taʿziyeh*, generously shared their knowledge, patiently answered my many questions, helped me with sources, offered invaluable advice, feedback, and support. I thank the Iranian *taʿziyeh* audience for welcoming me so warmly, and the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana for access to the Cerulli Persian Collection. I thank my husband Dr Moritz Linkmann, Professor Nacim Pak-Shiraz, Dr Azin Mostajer Haghighi, Professor Andrew Newman, Mr Hamed Mir-Sadeghi, Dr Yaser Mirdamadi, Ms Matilde Wilkens, Dr Davud Fath-ʿAli Baigi, Dr Husain Esmaʿili, Dr Mustafa Laʿl Shateri, Professor Ulrich Marzolph, Professor Elisabeth Dutton, Dr Sara Khalili Jahromi, Professor Sarah Carpenter, and, of course, Professor Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila.

I owe special thanks to Professor Hämeen-Anttila for the honour of his mentorship, and for his enthusiasm in helping me to tackle the tricky challenges that arose whilst working with these scripts – turning many a daunting problem into an enjoyable puzzle. Thank you, Jaakko, it was such a pleasure. Any mistakes are, naturally, all mine.

This book is an evolution of my doctoral research that was funded by an ESRC award from the Scottish Graduate School of Social Science (SGSSS), UKRI.

Figures and Tables

Figures

1 Tekiyeh-ye Ḥusainī-ye ʿĀẓam, Armaghankhaneh, Zanjan Province, 8th Muḥarram 1439/2017. A modern *tekiyeh*: traditional staging conventions. Author's image 26

2 The Battle of Karbala, a *pardeh* (storyteller's canvas) painted by ʿAbdullāh Muṣawwar, late 19th–early 20th cent. CE. BPK/ The Metropolitan Museum of Art 56

3 Performer playing ʿAbbās b. ʿAlī, Tekiyeh-ye Ḥusainī-ye ʿĀẓam, Armaghankhaneh, Zanjan Province, 7th Muḥarram 1439/2017. Author's image 90

4 Qāsem Does Battle, painting on tile, anonymous artist, Tekiyeh-ye Muʿāven al-Mulk, Kermanshah. nazanin86 / Alamy Stock Photo 125

5 Performers playing ʿAlī Akbar and Umm Laila, Tekiyeh-ye Ḥusainī-ye ʿĀẓam, Armaghankhaneh, Zanjan Province, 8th Muḥarram 1439/2017. Author's image 139

6 Performer playing Ḥusain b. ʿAlī, Ḥusainiyah-ye ʿĀẓam, Baraghan, Alborz, 10th Muḥarram 1439/ 2017. Photographer Amir Nassiri 158

7 Performers playing Ḥusain b. ʿAlī and ʿAlī Aṣghar, Ḥusainiyah-ye ʿĀẓam, Baraghan, Alborz, 10th Muḥarram 1439/2017. Photographer Amir Nassiri 163

8 Performer playing the Dervish of Kabul, Ḥusainiyah-ye ʿĀẓam, Baraghan, Alborz, 10th Muḥarram 1439/2017. Photographer Amir Nassiri 181

9 Performers playing Shemr, Zain al-ʿĀbedīn, Zainab and the Karbala survivors, Garmaseh, Isfahan Province, 13th Muḥarram 1439/2017. Author's image 191

10 Performer playing the European Ambassador, Garmaseh, Isfahan Province, 13th Muḥarram 1439/2017. Author's image 204

11 The Family of the Prophet enter Yazīd's Court, painting on tile, anonymous artist, Tekiyeh-ye Muʿāven al-Mulk, Kermanshah. nazanin86 / Alamy Stock Photo 215

Tables

1 Script sources for *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās* 91

2 Script sources for *The Martyrdom of Qāsem* 126

3 Script sources for *The Martyrdom of Imam Ḥusain* 157

4 Script sources for *Bāzār-e Shām* 192

Note on Transliteration

Transliteration in this book seeks to stay as close as possible to modern Persian pronunciation, hence the use of "e" rather than "i" for *kasreh* and, thus, *eżāfeh*, and not writing the silent *vav*, e.g. using *taʿziyeh-khānī*, rather than *taʿziyeh-khwānī*. The silent "*heh* " ending is written, e.g. *nāmeh*. I give place names (that are still in use) in the standard English spelling. Words in common use in English such as "Imam" and "Shiʿi" are not transliterated.

Introduction

نه من شمرم، نه این خنجر　　نه اینجا کربلا باشد
غرض مقصود ما این است　　در این مجلس بکا باشد

I am not Shemr, this is not a dagger, nor is this Karbala.
In this enactment our intention is lamentation.

Taʿziyeh-khānī, also known as *shabīh-khānī*, is an Iranian form of Shiʿi devotional drama. Before an enactment commences the performer playing the arch-antagonist Shamer b. ẕī al-Jawshan, “Shemr”, paces the empty stage area and recites the verse above. He draws a careful distinction between actor and character: the real and the represented. There is no desire for verisimilitude here. The performance is a devotional offering that incites lamentation by representing pivotal moments in sacred history.

At the heart of the *taʿziyeh* repertoire is a cycle of plays traditionally performed during the Islamic month of Muḥarram to commemorate the martyrdom of the Third Imam of Shiʿi Islam, and grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad, Ḥusain b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb (b. *c*.6/627).[1] The siege and slaughter of Ḥusain and his companions on the plain of Karbala, in the year 61/680, are the central events that, as the tradition developed, it came to portray in episodic style. The practice of *taʿziyeh-khānī* dates back more than three centuries, and continues in present day Iran. Performances remain a highly important element of devotional culture for the many communities who stage them. Through the replaying of the events at Karbala, together the *taʿziyeh-khānān* (performers) and audiences preserve the memory of the martyrs, seek proximity to them, mourn their suffering, and hope for their intercession.

At an outdoor performance, after dark, in the village of Garmaseh (near Isfahan) in Muḥarram of 1439/2017 the performer playing the Umayyad caliph Yazīd b. Muʿāwiyyah, who ordered Ḥusain’s killing, dropped out of character and addressed the audience directly (a practice common in the *taʿziyeh*). “So great was our martyr, that his mourners are still here after a thousand years,” he

1 All dates are given in the *hejrī qamarī* (Islamic lunar) and Gregorian calendars, unless marked “SH” to indicate the *hejrī shamsī* (or Jalālī) solar calendar.

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said, gesturing towards the hundreds of black-clad women who filled one side of the cross-roads turned stage. They responded with an outburst of wailing.[2] Indeed, one of the overwhelming impressions of a literary study of the *taʿziyeh* repertoire (albeit of the central episodes, as I present here) is just how much the devotion of those mourners has shaped this art form. Far from being the legacy of elite patronage, the *taʿziyeh* emerges very much as the collective creative property of the performers and composers (often one and the same), and those who have participated *en masse* as audience members – a large and highly important contingent of whom are women.

The repertoire has acted as a repository for popular wisdom relating to Shiʿism's sacred figures. Whilst concurring broadly with the martyrdom narratives reported in historical and hagiographical sources, the central episodes of the *taʿziyeh* repertoire incorporate a wealth of additional detail. Old and little-known stories are embedded within these episodes. Interventions by angels, dervishes, and foreigners from diverse historical periods, the apparition of *jinn* (genies), and the significant treatment of the perspective of the women at Karbala, enrich the narrative texture.

Furthermore, successive generations of anonymous dramatists embellished the memory of Karbala with innovative narrative content. Between the 1830s and the 1890s under the Qajar Dynasty (r. 1210–1344/ 1796–1925), when elite patronage of *taʿziyeh* was at its height, new characters and scenes appear in the scripts of the central plays of the Muḥarram cycle: some of these innovations are dead ends and later disappear; other – obviously successful – innovations become permanent features of the plays, and over a couple of decades are integrated into renditions across the country. As these were texts for performance, for a new section of material to be successful it must have been accepted by both the players and their audience. This was no small matter as once a scene became a permanent feature of a central episode it would be played for generations, forming part of the memory of Karbala as conceived within the *taʿziyeh* universe.

Despite the intriguing nature of this manner of telling the Karbala narratives, and although there has been valuable work in the field of *taʿziyeh* studies, research examining the *taʿziyeh* as literature is scare. The study that I present in this book began from a desire to contribute to filling that gap; as I learned of the long hours spent by those performing and attending *taʿziyeh*, year after year, decade after decade, generation after generation, my study was fuelled by a burning curiosity about the plays' content. Due, in part, to the largely

2 Author's observation.

anonymous nature of their authorship, each episode is subject to numerous variations. To study the essential features of a particular episode, we cannot simply look at one version without the risk that conclusions reached could be contradicted by other renditions. I have therefore cast a broad net in terms of primary sources: focusing the analysis on four episodes, *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās*, *The Martyrdom of Qāsem*, *The Martyrdom of Imam Ḥusain* and *Bāzār-e Shām* (The Damascus Market), I refer in detail to over forty scripts. The assemblage of performers, audience and performance space is ever-present in my consideration of their contents, as are the questions of *who* has contributed to this tradition, and *how* they have left their mark upon it.

This literary analysis has revealed important evidence to suggest the strong influence of a separate and somewhat older performance form, an influence that has hitherto gone largely unrecognised, and has certainly not been subject to systematic evaluation. In the chapters that follow we will consistently see traces of connections to *naqqālī* (traditional storytelling) and in particular *pardeh-dārī* (also known as *pardeh-khānī*, or *shamāyel-gardānī*) – devotional storytelling using a painted canvas backdrop. The *pardeh-dārān* (storytellers) were dervishes who narrated episodes from the lives of the *ahl-e bait* (Holy Family), and the battle of Karbala in coffeehouses and marketplaces, but whose repertoire could include the stories of the Iranian epics.[3]

We see the migration of specific narrative material from the *pardeh-dārī* tradition to the *taʿziyeh*, and the characterisation of the Shiʿi martyrs as heroes of epic, commensurate with their *pardeh-dārī* portrayal. The very compositional features that I identify across my sample of plays, and indeed the wider repertoire, are typical of oral art forms. We will also see a societal connection between the Qajar era *taʿziyeh* performers and the brotherhood to which the *pardeh-dārī* practitioners belonged, and that connection reflected by the dramatic content and poetic form of certain *taʿziyeh* episodes.

The identification of *naqqālī* influence both illuminates and challenges our understanding of the *taʿziyeh*, which has long been conceived of as having descended primarily from the tradition of *rawżeh-khānī*, recitals (largely by mullahs) of the tribulations of the Shiʿi martyrs, as told in Ḥusain Vāʿeẓ Kāshefī's *Rawżat al-shuhadāʾ* and similar works. The prevailing scholarly theory is that the *taʿziyeh* emerged from the fusion of such recitals with the tableaux vivant of the Karbala tragedy, staged atop wagons in the Muḥarram processions. I will

3 I use the term *ahl-e bait*, literally meaning "people of the house", according to the Twelver Shiʿi understanding: to refer to the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā, her husband, Muḥammad's cousin ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb, their sons Ḥasan and Ḥusain, and the rest of the Twelve Imams.

discuss this theory and suggest an alternative to it in chapter 1, which deals with the history of the tradition. For now, it is sufficient to say that, whilst the influence of *rawżeh-khānī* upon the *taʿziyeh* is of undoubted importance, the connection with *pardeh-dārī* requires a new understanding of the *taʿziyeh* tradition, taking it further from Karbala as recorded in the written word, and closer to the memory of the martyrs that lived through its performance in the bazars and coffeehouses – and not only during Muḥarram.

Of course, vibrant living traditions are never static. An important branch of this research has been to track how the *taʿziyeh* episodes subject to this study evolved through time. My main temporal focus is the reign of the Qajar Dynasty, an era when the art form enjoyed both elite patronage and widespread popularity amongst the masses, certainly a highly important period in its evolution. Incorporating in my sample the earliest extant scripts, from the Zand Dynasty's reign (1164–1209/ 1751–1794) as well as scripts from the Qajar period, and up to the mid-20th century, I examine the changes that took place and observe patterns in how the repertoire developed. It is in this area that the following chapters will show the importance of the influence of women, as we see a steady increase through time in the treatment of their perspective. Before carrying this discussion further, however, I offer a brief synopsis of the events at Karbala according to the mainstream narrative and prior to their dramatization in the *taʿziyeh*.

In 61/680 Ḥusain, his family and a group of supporters set out from Mecca in the Hijaz area of the Arabian Peninsula and journeyed towards Kufa in present day Iraq.[4] Kufa was an important garrison town and Ḥusain had received correspondence from the residents promising support if he were to rise against the newly acceded Umayyad caliph Yazīd b. Muʿāwiyyah (r. 60–4/ 680–3). This challenge was part of a leadership dispute that had remained unresolved since the death of the Prophet Muḥammad (b. *c.*570 CE, d. 11/632).

4 The events briefly synopsized here are reported in a wide range of historical and hagiographical sources. See Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: The Caliphate of Yazīd b. Muʿawiyah*, trans. I.K.A. Howard, 39 vols., vol. 19 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 91–183; Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Mufīd, *Kitāb al-Irshād: The Book of Guidance into the Lives of the Twelve Imams*, trans. I.K.A. Howard (London: Partridge Green, Horsham: Balagha Books: Muhammadi Trust, 1981), 272–347; Balʿamī, *Tārīkh-nāmeh-ye Ṭabarī*, ed. Muḥammad Rowshan, 5 vols., vol. 4 (Tehran: Surūsh, 1380 SH), 703–15; Muḥammad b. Khāvandshāh b. Maḥmūd Mīrkhānd, *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, ed. Jamshīd Kiyān-Farr, 15 vols., vol. 3 (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Āsāṭīr, [*c.*1500 CE] 1385 SH), 2186–273; Ghiyās al-Dīn Khāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-siyār*, 4 vols., vol. 2 (Tehran: Enteshārāt Khayyām, [*c.*1539 CE] 1380 SH), 37–61; Ḥusain Vāʿez Kāshefī Sabzevārī, *Rawżat al-shuhadāʾ* ed. Muḥammad Rowshan (Tehran: Ṣedā-ye Muʿāṣer, [*c.*1502 CE] 1390 SH), 273–523.

Ḥusain represented the sector of the Muslim community, now identified as Shiʿi, who maintained that rightful leadership belonged to Muḥammad's hereditary line through Ḥusain's parents, Muḥammad's daughter Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā (b. *c.*615 CE, d. 11/633) and her husband, Muḥammad's cousin, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb (b. *c.*600 CE, d. 40/661). Before Ḥusain's party reached Kufa, news of the impending challenge had spread to the Umayyad capital Damascus. Yazīd had taken direct control of Kufa, deposing the governor and putting his own man, ʿUbaid-Allāh b. Ziyād, in charge. Ḥusain's paternal cousin Muslem b.ʿAqīl, who had been acting as envoy to the Kufans and had assured Ḥusain of their loyalty, had been publicly beheaded. The Kufans had abandoned Ḥusain's cause.

When Ḥusain and his party reached an area in the desert north of Kufa and near the banks of the Euphrates, now known as Karbala, they were cut off by both Syrian and Kufan troops. Surrounded and denied access to the water of the Euphrates, Ḥusain was given an ultimatum: swear allegiance to Yazīd or be killed. He refused to swear allegiance. Despite being drastically outnumbered, one by one the warriors of the besieged party fought bravely before being killed. Once the grown men were gone, young boys took to the battlefield in defence of Ḥusain. Eventually, on the 10th of Muḥarram, after three days without water, Ḥusain himself was killed. The women and children of his family, together with his one remaining adult son, Zain al-ʿĀbedīn (the Fourth Imam), who was too weakened by illness to fight, were captured and taken to Yazīd's court in Damascus.

The Muḥarram cycle dramatizes these events, with each play focussing on the martyrdom of an individual member of Ḥusain's family or the fate of the survivors as captives. The events are traditionally represented chronologically and the plays performed daily during the first ten to twelve days of Muḥarram. Set in Kufa, *The Martyrdom of Muslem b.ʿAqīl*, is performed around the beginning of the cycle, preparing the ground for the impending tragedy. As the cycle builds towards the climax, the focus moves to Karbala with the central episodes treating the martyrdoms of Ḥusain's prominent supporters and relatives. These plays are set in the besieged camp. The barren desert and encroachment of the enemy troops creates an atmosphere of high tension. With water withheld, desperate thirst, particularly that of the children, acts as an essential dramatic motor that drives fateful attempts to break the blockade on the Euphrates. The fact that the besieged party are a family allows for the treatment of themes such as obedience and familial hierarchy, fraternity, the derangement of a bereaved mother, and the rituals associated with marriage and mourning. The climactic play *The Martyrdom of Imam Ḥusain* is always enacted on ʿĀshūrāʾ, the 10th of Muḥarram, understood to have been the date of Ḥusain's death. After this, the action moves on from Karbala, following the

journey of the survivors and ending with a play such as *Bāzār-e Shām* (The Damascus Market).

In political terms, the mission of Ḥusain and his followers can be seen as a revolution, an uprising against a ruler perceived as unjust and illegitimate. However, from a Shiʿi perspective, Karbala is much more than that. Ḥusain is the Third Imam of Shiʿi Islam. For the Shiʿa, the members of the Holy Family are vital characters in sacred history. Many Shiʿi traditions claim that Muḥammad, ʿAlī, Fāṭemeh, Ḥasan and Ḥusain were created by God from the light of his own holiness and before the heavens and the earth. The earthly lives of these figures act as focal points through which the deeper meaning of existence can be understood. According to mainstream Shiʿi tradition, Ḥusain's martyrdom at Karbala was predestined; from as early as Ādam the prophets had received word of his fate. It is believed that his martyrdom was necessary in order that he should become an intercessor for the sins of the Muslim community on the Day of Judgement.[5] In this understanding Ḥusain, like the figure of Jesus Christ in Christianity, is incarnated for atonement. His martyrdom and the events of Karbala have a central importance within Shiʿi eschatology.

Crying for the Karbala martyrs is believed to have an important redemptive value. Tears shed for the Holy Family are even described in some traditions as a barrier between the mourner and hell:[6] attendance at *taʿziyeh* is not considered a religious duty, but the plays help to provoke the shedding of redemptive tears. The audience come both to remember the martyrs and to cry for them. The plays are typically around three and a half hours long, with the climactic play, *The Martyrdom of Imam Ḥusain*, lasting around five hours: the central episodes feature protracted farewells between family members before a martyrdom, and the focus is not on the battle, but rather the emotional agony of those involved. Thus the audience are taken to the very point where the suffering is most intense and then, to allow for lamentation, are held there for a considerable time.

The first chapter of this book will focus on the history of *taʿziyeh-khānī*, offering an original theory as to the process of the tradition's emergence, examining its consolidation and endurance, and exploring how it was woven into the fabric of Iranian society. The second chapter will discuss the compositional features and conventions of the *taʿziyeh* genre observed during the course of my study. These include structural features, including the type-scene, and techniques such as the application of a defined composition-scheme, that

5 For further information see: Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islām: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of ʿĀshūrāʾ in Twelver Shīʿism* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978), 27–36.
6 Ibid., 142–43.

are shared with other folk, epic and oral literatures. In addition to these recognised concepts, in describing the specifics of the *taʿziyeh*, I add the notion of the "floating scene." The conventions of the genre identified in chapter 2 will be seen in context in the remaining chapters that are organised by play, with a chapter focussing on each of the four selected episodes.

The *taʿziyeh* repertoire is broad. For example, the work of Ṣādeq Humāyunī lists and synopsizes 152 different *taʿziyeh* plays, and the Cerulli Persian Collection, the largest script collection in the world, includes scripts pertaining to almost 300 plays.[7] *Taʿziyeh* plays fall into two main categories. A full-length play (lasting between three and five hours) is termed a *vāqeʿeh* or *majles-e aṣlī* (main episode); these originally focussed on the events at Karbala, in particular the martyrdoms, but through time came to treat epic, historical and other religious stories. The second type of play is termed a *gūsheh* or *taʿziyeh-ye farʿī* (sub-episode). These are short, self-contained plays that are not performed alone but alongside the main episodes, either inserted into the body of the episode or played as a prologue or epilogue to it (a prologue being termed a "*pīsh-e vāqeʿeh*"). These sub-episodes treat diverse subject matter. They often use a dramatic device called *gurīz* (literally meaning "escape" or "digression") as a link to the Karbala narrative and the subject matter of the main episode.[8] This classification is useful when examining the evolution of the main episodes, as oftentimes an apparent innovation in content can prove to be a *gūsheh* that has been permanently integrated into the fabric of the episode.[9]

1 The Plays under Analysis

I selected the following four episodes for in-depth analysis due to their position at the core of the *taʿziyeh* repertoire and treatment of the experiences of the most beloved members of Ḥusain's family. Forming part of the Muḥarram

7 Ṣādeq Humāyūnī, *Taʿziyeh dar Īrān* (Shiraz: Navīd, [1368] 1380 SH) 349–89. For a full index of the Cerulli Persian Collection see: Ettore Rossi, Alessio Bombaci, and Enrico Cerulli, *Elenco di drammi religiosi Persiani:* (*Fondo Mss. Vaticani Cerulli*) (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1961). For a Persian translation see Ḥusain Esmāʿīlī, *Fehrest-e dastnevīs-hā-ye namāyeshī-ye maẕhabī-ye Īrān dar ketāb khāneh-ye Vātīkān* (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Namāyesh, 1396 SH).

8 These are terms used by *taʿziyeh* performers and thus by many scholars. For a particularly clear definition see Anayatullah Shahidi, *Pazhuheshī dar taʿziyeh va taʿziyeh-khānī: az āghāz tā pāyān-e dowreh-ye Qājār dar Tehrān* (Tehran: Daftar-e pazhuhesh-ha-ye farhangī-ye UNESCO dar Īrān, 1380 SH), 263–65.

9 ʿAlī Bulūkbāshī, *Taʿziyeh-khānī* (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1383 SH), 161.

programme played year after year, they are among the most widely performed episodes. What can be observed in the compositional features of these plays, and the trajectory of their development, reflects the repertoire as a whole. There are other prominent episodes worthy of analysis, but these four capture a range of the types of scene, character, and interaction that form the essence of the *taʿziyeh* genre.

1.1 *The Martyrdom of Abū al-Fażl al-ʿAbbās*

This play concerns the martyrdom of ʿAbbās b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb, Ḥusain's half-brother. ʿAbbās is a formidable warrior and guard to the *ahl-e bait.* Tradition holds that he was not only the standard-bearer at Karbala but also the *sāqī* (water-bearer) of the group on their journey. During the siege, determined to bring water for the children, ʿAbbās launches a raid on the Euphrates. Attempting to return to the camp, he is beset by the enemy and, drastically out-numbered, has both of his hands cut off before dying. This episode is crucial to the arc of the Muḥarram cycle. It marks the beginning of a downward spiral in the fortunes of the besieged party. Prior to this point, despite the dire circumstances, they have faith in the protection of the mighty ʿAbbās and thus some hope, but, this protection lost, they are exposed and vulnerable, and plunged into a state of grief. Leaving no surviving adult warriors besides Ḥusain, the demise of ʿAbbās marks the moment when junior members of the family take to the battlefield.

1.2 *The Martyrdom of Qāsem*

Also set during the siege at Karbala, this episode treats the marriage of the adolescent Qāsem, son of the deceased Second Imam (and Ḥusain's older brother), Ḥasan, to Ḥusain's daughter Fāṭemeh. The groom is then martyred before the consummation of the marriage. Featuring a macabre combination of the rites connected to marriage and to death, this play also explores the shame felt by an orphan and the derangement of a bereaved mother. The occasion of a wedding lends considerable attention to the women of the group, with most renditions of the play featuring long sections of inter-female dialogue. It thus offers a valuable opportunity to study the *taʿziyeh* treatment of the women at Karbala.

1.3 *The Martyrdom of Imam Ḥusain*

Anticipated throughout the cycle, the climactic play sees the fulfilment of Ḥusain's predestined martyrdom. Before the climax, we see the desperation caused by thirst intensify as the siege wears on. Also, the function of the female characters shifts. With no menfolk other than Ḥusain, the sickly

Zain al-ʿĀbedīn, and infant boys remaining, the women take on men's duties. They prepare themselves for the loss of their patriarch and for being taken captive. Alone on the battlefield, Ḥusain encounters a series of benevolent strangers. His refusal of their help is essential to the portrayal of his acceptance of his divinely ordained duty – to be martyred at Karbala in order to become an intercessor for the sins of the community. Ḥusain's beheading by the arch-antagonist Shemr sees this destiny fulfilled.

1.4 *Bāzār-e Shām*

This play portrays the aftermath of Ḥusain's martyrdom, with the action unfolding in and around Yazīd's court in Damascus. Beginning by focussing on Yazīd himself, who has become ill with impatience as he awaits news from Karbala, later renditions feature an element of satire, ridiculing Yazīd by having him attended by a European doctor who attempts to cure him with a nonsense remedy. News of the massacre arrives and the play goes on to provoke outrage by depicting the mistreatment of the captives and parading of the martyrs' heads as trophies. Shemr provides a graphic account of how he killed each one: Yazīd attempts to make Ḥusain's severed head drink wine. The heroism of the survivors, particularly Zainab (Ḥusain's sister) and Zain al-ʿĀbedīn, is shown through their bravery in speaking out against injustice. The play also features a European ambassador who attempts to intervene on the captives' behalf.

2 Scripts and Script Collections

Since the birth of the tradition over 300 years ago *taʿziyeh* performers and directors, both amateur and professional, have been the custodians of the repertoire's scripts, which have been handed down through generations, copied and recopied many times. The scripts included in this study span the reign of the Qajar Dynasty, incorporating examples from the Zand period where available. In order to establish whether the developments of the genre's heyday took root, I have also included scripts dated up to the 1950s. (It must be remembered that the scripts are usually marked with the date of the last copyist, as opposed to dates of composition, and that their content is therefore likely to be older than the date they bear.)[10]

10 Some of the scripts dated to the 1950s bear the name of an author and may well have been composed at that time. While such works are of less interest for the current purpose than those composed a hundred years earlier, they are still valuable in that they attest what the composers of said period perceived to be the essential elements of these plays.

Here I describe the scripts and the collections to which they belong not only to furnish the reader with an understanding of my sources but because they are an important part of the *taʿziyeh*'s material legacy and reveal much about the tradition itself. This said, we cannot understand a live performance tradition through reference to its scripts alone. In the chapters that follow I ground my analysis of the textual sources in the context of their production and live delivery. I will make frequent reference to witness accounts of *taʿziyeh* performances from different phases of the tradition's history, and the dynamics of the spaces in which they took place are ever present in my assessment of performer-audience interaction. While this is a historical study, it is also informed by my experience of attending *taʿziyeh* performances at a number of locations in Iran, during Muḥarram of 1439/ 2017.[11]

The vast majority of the scripts used in this study belong to the Cerulli Persian Collection, held by the Vatican Library. Comprising 1055 handwritten *taʿziyeh* scripts (some of which are fragments) the Collection includes multiple renditions of each central episode. These scripts take two distinct forms. Most are collections of small booklets, each containing the lines of an individual character, a form known as "*tak-nuskheh*" (acting sides).[12] These are 5–12 cm wide and no longer than 18cm, designed to be held in one hand during the performance. A *fehrest* (director's key or prompt sheet), listing the order in which the characters speak and the first word of each interjection, accompanies each collection of acting sides and thus the plays can be reconstructed for analysis. The second and less common variety of script are those that take the form of a *jung*; a *taʿziyeh* play is referred to as a *jung* when the lines of all characters, in the order in which they are delivered, have been written into a single booklet. These tend to conform to the dimensions of the acting sides. They may have been the master copies of plays held by a group or have been used by the director during performances. Neither the booklets of the acting sides, nor those in *jung* form, are bound. They are simple, handwritten booklets sewn together with thread. These are humble materials.

Working with these manuscripts presents the researcher with numerous challenges. The *fehrests* are often inaccurate, not corresponding entirely to the interjections featured on the acting sides. The scripts contain numerous

11 See E. Lucy Deacon, "*Taʿziyeh-khani* in Iranian Communities: Muharram AH 1439 (AD 2017)," *Medieval English Theatre* 42 (2020).

12 Translation borrowed from Rebecca Ansary Pettys, "The Taʿziyeh: Ritual and Drama of the Martyrdom of Hussein," *The Drama Review* 49, no. 4 (2005): 28.

orthographic errors and words are randomly joined or separated in the middle.[13] The booklets of a single play can contain a number of different handwriting styles; writing is very small and at times illegible. Many booklets are extremely fragile, the ink often smudged. As a general point, the fragile nature of these manuscripts has implications for the study of the earliest period; the further back we go, the less chance there is of such manuscripts having been preserved. These challenges aside, *taʿziyeh* scripts constitute an invaluable record of the history of the tradition and those belonging to the Cerulli Collection have rarely been used by researchers.

To widen the sample range, I have included scripts from a number of other sources. Many of these have been edited and published in Iran; others are from collections made by visitors to Iran. I treat these scripts, just like the scripts of the Cerulli Collection, as evidence of these plays as performed, rather than a purely literary product. The vast majority of the acting sides that I have studied show wear and tear from use; furthermore, many include minor edits by a hand other than that of the copyist, and in some instances the lines of two marginal characters (with not dissimilar profiles) have been written into the same booklet – suggesting that the same performer played both parts. Many of the Cerulli Collection scripts in *jung* form also show wear commensurate with having been held in the palm or folded to go into a pocket. This strongly suggests that these scripts were not only designed to be used in performances, but have been used in performances. Hailing from cities, towns and villages across Iran, they should be seen as written records of how the stories they tell were recited and enacted amongst local communities, for generations.

2.1 *The Collections*

Working forward from the oldest examples, I now detail the various sources from which scripts have been drawn for this study. I discuss briefly what is known of the collectors and collection processes, topics that in themselves offer glimpses of the colourful history of the tradition.

13 This joining of words, and other orthographic peculiarities displayed in the scripts of the Cerulli Collection, are long-standing features of the genre. Dāvūd Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī comments on their presence in scripts dating to the Zand period. Dāvūd Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Mehdī Daryāī, *Daftar-e taʿziyeh 11* (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Namāyesh, 1390 SH), 11. In order to for the reader to get an authentic impression of the scripts, quotations throughout the work below are given as found in the manuscripts (with any correction detailed in a footnote).

2.1.1 Zand Collection: Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī

This is a small yet highly important collection of scripts dating to the reign of the Zand Dynasty. Among a handful of other works, it includes the earliest extant renditions of: *Bāzār-e Sham,* dated 1184 (1770–71); *The Martyrdom of Imam Ḥusain*, dated 1204 (1790); and *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās*, dated 1206 (1791–92).[14] It has been gathered and edited by Dāvūd Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Mehdī Daryāī. These scripts are not only interesting in their own right, but also offer an invaluable starting point from which to analyse the plays' historical development. Their geographical origin is not always stated, but in the case of *The Martyrdom of Imam Ḥusain* "Farfāhūn" is given within the script as the place of writing,[15] this is likely to denote the small village of Farfahan in southern Markazi Province. The editors provide photographs, and an invaluable level of description of the manuscripts, detailing dating, location and authorship, where known, as well as how these aspects inform understanding of the tradition and its players during this early period. They also give insight into how the features of these plays compare to their later equivalents; in the following chapters I will frequently refer to the gems of information that they provide.

2.1.2 Chodzko Collection

Aleksander Borejko Chodzko worked as a translator for the Russian diplomatic service at various locations in Iran during 1830s and attended *taʿziyeh* performances in Tehran. He recalls attending, in 1833, a 14-day series of performances hosted by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mīrzā Abūl Ḥasan Khān, that made a great impression upon him.[16] He purchased the scripts of 34 *taʿziyeh* plays transcribed, seemingly by one hand, into a 326-page codex, a book with a lacquered board cover. This is a very unusual format for the transcription of *taʿziyeh* plays, suggesting that this collection is likely to have been transcribed specifically for the European collector, perhaps as a commission. The manuscript is now in the Bibliothèque nationale de France.[17] An annotation within it states that Chodzko purchased these scripts in Tehran, from Ḥusain ʿAlī

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14 See Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Mehdī Daryāī, *Daftar-e taʿziyeh 11.* For a further script dating to the same period also see *Daftar-e taʿziyeh 12* (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Namāyesh, 1392 SH).

15 *Daftar 11*, 153–54.

16 Aleksander Chodzko, *Théatre persan choix de téaziés ou drames* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1878), xxi–xxix.

17 Bibliothèque nationale de France, Supplément Persan 993, Jung-i Šahâdat. The manuscript has 35 entries, including one untitled fragment. For its contents see Francis Richard, *Catalogue des manuscrits persans: Bibliothèque nationale, Département des manuscrits*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Rome: Istituto per l'Oriente C.A. Nallino, 2013), 1300–06.

Khān, on 15th July 1833.[18] Chodzko describes Ḥusain ʿAlī Khān as a eunuch who directed performances in the "heart of Tehran". Whilst acknowledging these plays were usually anonymous, he suspects that ʿAlī Khān himself, reputedly a playwright, had either composed or edited the works.[19] These speculations aside, 14 of the plays included in the manuscript bear discrete references to an author.[20] Chodzko translated five of the plays into French;[21] six of them are available as an edition.[22]

2.1.3 Litten Collection

Diplomat Willhelm Litten spent time in Iran during the early 20th century, serving as the German Consul in Tabriz in 1914.[23] He collected and later published the scripts of 15 *taʿziyeh* plays.[24] Writing in 1928, Litten tells us that "over 20 years ago" he saw a performance of the *taʿziyeh* of *Amīr Tīmur* at the shah's theatre in Tehran and that he asked the director if he could purchase the script. The director was unwilling to part with the original but allowed a copy to be made. Litten explains that he then purchased another 14 plays that were original scripts but he does not state where or from whom.[25] Two of these scripts are marked with the dates 1247 (1831–2), and 1255 (1839).[26] The others, including his versions of *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās* and *The Martyrdom of Imam Ḥusain* (used in my study), are undated. Based on his description we can be confident that they were copied in 1908 at latest, yet they appear to be much older; arguing from their content, Ḥusain Esmāʿīlī believes the whole collection to date to around the 1830s.[27] My findings on the development of the repertoire compel me to agree.[28] Litten's published collection compiles

18 Jung-i Šahâdat, 324.

19 Chodzko, *Théatre persan*, xxxv.

20 See Richard, *Catalogue des manuscrits persans*, 1300.

21 Chodzko, *Théatre persan*.

22 See: Zahrā Eqbāl and Muḥammad Jaʿfar Maḥjūb, *Jung-e shāhadat: majmūʾeh-ye 33 majles-e taʿziyeh* (Tehran: Surūsh, 1355 SH).

23 Oliver Bast, "Germany ix. Germans in Persia," *Encyclopædia Iranica* X/6 (2001). Available online at https://iranicaonline.org/articles/germany-ix (accessed June 15th, 2024).

24 See Wilhelm Litten, *Das Drama in Persien* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1929). For an edited volume of these scripts see Ḥusain Esmāʿīlī, *Teshneh dar mīqātgah* (Tehran: Muʿīn, 1389 SH).

25 Litten, *Das Drama*, xv–xvii.

26 No. 13 in his collection *Durrat al-Ṣadaf* is dated *Shaʿbān* 1255 (October–November 1839) and no. 14, *Emām Jaʿfar as-Ṣādeq*, is dated 1247 (1831–2).

27 Esmāʿīlī, *Teshneh*, 17.

28 For example, characters introduced during the mid-19th century are absent from these scripts, interjections are generally long and use of stichomythia, pervading the dialogues

photographic reproductions of these scripts; they show that he bought them in *jung* as opposed to *tak-nuskheh* form.

2.1.4 Gobineau Translation

This study includes a French prose translation of *The Martyrdom of Qāsem*, by Comte Arthur de Gobineau, published in 1281–82/1865 (geographical origin unknown).[29] Gobineau spent time in Iran between the mid-1850s and mid-1860s, serving at various European missions.[30] He was a regular spectator at *taʿziyeh* and his memoires provide valuable evidence of the tradition during this period. Despite being a translation, this script is valuable not only because it offers an important data point on the timeline of the play's development, but also because it includes some stage directions, not customary in *taʿziyeh* scripts.[31]

2.1.5 Pelly Collection

Sir Lewis Pelly was British "Political Resident" at Bushehr between 1862 and 1873. He gathered a collection of *taʿziyeh* plays from a local source, 37 of which he published in prose translation.[32] Pelly describes his source as, "… a Persian who had long been engaged as a teacher and prompter of actors"; this source agreed that "… assisted by some of his dramatic friends, he should gradually collect and dictate all the scenes of the Hasan and Husain tragedy."[33] We can thus understand his collection to have been gathered from the local *taʿziyeh-khānān*. By "scenes", Pelly refers to the episodes and sub-episodes included in his collection. He does not specify a date or location for any single play but describes the collection process as having gone on for over several

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by *c.*1900, is sparse. In these respects, the scripts are similar to those of the Chodzko manuscript for which we have a date.

29 Arthur Gobineau, *Les religions et les philosophies dans l'Asie centrale* (Paris: Didier et Cie, 1865), 405–37.

30 Jean Calmard, "Gobineau, Joseph Arthur de," *Encyclopædia Iranica* XI/1 (2001). Available online at https://iranicaonline.org/articles/gobineau (accessed June 15th, 2024).

31 In addition to the translation in question, he devotes three further chapters in the same work to describing and giving his opinions about the *taʿziyeh* tradition. Arthur Gobineau, *Les religions et les philosophies dans l'Asie centrale* (Paris: Didier et Cie, 1865), 359–403 and 439–459.

32 Lewis Pelly, *The Miracle Play of Hasan and Husain*, 2 vols., (London: WM. H Allen and Co., 1879). Pelly collected 52 "scenes" in total but states that for fear of his translation becoming tiresomely long he only publishes 37. *Miracle Play*, vol. 1, v.

33 Pelly accredits the transcription and translation to his assistants James Edwards and George Lucas. *The Miracle Play of Hasan and Husain*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: WM. H Allen and Co., 1879), iv.

years. We must therefore take 1290/1873 (his departure from the area) as the latest possible date for these plays; in accordance with Pelly's residence, their geographical origin should be considered as Bushehr or Shiraz.

2.1.6 Darbandsar

A collection of scripts belonging to the performers of the mountain village Darbandsar (Tehran Province), compiled by Ḥasan Ṣāleḥī Rād and published in 1389 SH/ 2001–2, provides a further source.[34] The collection is wonderfully broad, the editor providing the scripts of 50 plays across two volumes. A firm dating for these scripts cannot be given. Local tradition holds that their composition dates to the reign of Muḥammad Shāh Qājār (1250–1264/ 1835–1848). However, the inclusion, in the Darbandsar rendition of the climactic play, of certain characters who were not customarily featured as early as the 1840s, suggests that the scripts were composed (or at least edited) somewhat later.[35] Indeed, with performances ongoing in the village it is probable that the plays of the Darbandsar collection continued to be subject to small changes up until the 20th century CE.

2.1.7 Hāshem Fayyāż: Mīr-e ʿAzā Collection

Hāshem Fayyāż was a Tehrani *taʿziyeh* director and performer who dedicated much of his life to collecting and staging the works of Qajar era composer Sayyed Muṣṭafā Kāshānī, known as Mīr-e ʿAzā.[36] *The Martyrdom of Qāsem* from this collection, edited by Samāneh Kāẓemī, has been included in this study.[37] In this case, the script appears to be a composite rendering, featuring verse by both Mīr-e ʿAzā and a certain ʻMīr-e Mātam; it bears the *takhalluṣ* (nom de plume) of both poets.[38] I thus refer to this as the Mīr-e ʿAzā/ Mīr-e Mātam rendition. It was last copied in 1326 SH/ 1946–7 by Fayyāż. The date of composition is not stated. However, given the period of Mīr-e ʿAzā's activity, we should attribute it (at least in part) to the last decades of the 19th century CE, and assume that the likely geographical origin is Kashan or Tehran. We will return to Mīr-e ʿAzā and his work in the next chapter.

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34 Ḥasan Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles-e taʿziyeh*, 2 vols., (Tehran: Surūsh, [1380 SH] 1389 SH).

35 Foreword by ʿAlī Bulūkbāshī, ibid., vol. 1, 14.

36 Samāneh Kāẓemī, *Mīr-e ʿAzā-ye Kāshānī dar qalamrow-ye taʿziyeh* (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Sūreh Mehr, 1386 SH), 8–9.

37 Ibid., 460–79.

38 Ibid., 455–56.

2.1.8 Cerulli Collection

Enrico Cerulli was Italian Ambassador to Iran from November 1950 to April 1954. He was a scholar of anthropology with an interest in folk literatures, language and religion.[39] During his time in Iran he became interested in the *taʿziyeh* and began to gather the vast script collection that he donated to the Vatican Library. Around half of the collection's 1055 manuscripts were sent to Rome during his stay in Iran, with the others being sent after his return. It is important to note that the sequence of the catalogue numbers corresponds to the order in which the manuscripts arrived in Italy.[40] Cerulli assembled his collection with the help of local agents ʿAlī (Arkady) Hānībāl and Ḥusain Shariyʿatī Ẕawq ʿAlī-Shāh.[41] The latter is described in the Vatican's guide to its collections as the leader of a mystical brotherhood, a Sufi *pīr* (spiritual guide) perhaps. Hānībāl was a Russian anthropologist who had taken up residence in Iran and converted to Shiʿi Islam; he was passionate about folk culture and tradition, served as Director of Tehran's Museum of Anthropology, and is recognised for his work in setting up further museums.[42]

Amīr Kāvūs Bālāzādeh and Ḥusain Esmāʿīlī treat the assembly of the Cerulli Collection in the foreword and introduction to the Persian translation of its catalogue. The fact that the names of Hānībāl and Shariyʿatī Ẕawq ʿAlī-Shāh, and some description of the collection process, are given in the Vatican's own collections guide (published six years earlier) appears not to have come to their attention. Bālāzādeh problematises the "silence" around this issue, going as far as to call it a "secret".[43] Nonetheless, they are aware of Cerulli having had dealings with Hānībāl, correctly hypothesize his being involved in assembling Cerulli's *taʿziyeh* script collection, and open a useful discussion around the levels of the collection process, a topic that certainly merits further research.

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39 Filippo Bertotti, "Cerulli, Enrico," *Encyclopædia Iranica* V/6 ([1991] 2011). Available- online at https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/cerulli-enrico-1898-1988-italian-orientalist-and-diplomat (accessed June 16th, 2024).

40 Rossi, Bombaci, and Cerulli, *Elenco*, xxvi. Mss. 1–532 arriving by December 1953, Mss. 533–816 in June 1954, Mss. 817–827 in October 1954, Mss. 828–844 in December 1954, Mss. 845–878 in February 1955 and Mss. 879–1027 in May or June 1955. Mss. 1028–1055, all of which, except MS 1055 (a collection of fragments), are in Turkish, arrived amongst the last four consignments but were catalogued separately due to language.

41 Angelo Michele Piemontese "Cerulli persiana," in *Guida al fondi Manoscritti, Numismatici, a Stampa Della Biblioteca Vaticana*, 2 vols., vol. 1, ed. Francesco D'Aiuto e Paolo Vian (Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2011) 402–403.

42 See ʿAlī Bulūkbāshī, "Hānībāl, ʿAli," *Encyclopædia Iranica* XI/6 (2003). Available online at https://iranicaonline.org/articles/hanibal-ali (accessed May 29th, 2024).

43 Esmāʿīlī, *Fehrest-e dastnevīs-hā*, 10, 13.

Hānībāl had apparently assembled his own collection of several hundred *taʿziyeh* scripts that he intended to bequeath to a museum (perhaps that of Qazvin); Bālāzādeh believes that, instead, he sold these to Cerulli and then, through his contacts with *taʿziyeh* players across Iran, went on to assemble Cerulli's wider collection.[44] Esmāʿīlī extends Bālāzādeh's theory, suggesting that the first 300 or so manuscripts in the Cerulli Collection may have been from Hānībāl's original script collection, with the others being gathered during the subsequent period. This assertion is based on the fact that the first 300 manuscripts do not tend to state an origin whereas later entries usually do.[45] He also mentions that manuscripts coming earlier in the sequence are often better organised with more concise titles, and that towards the end there are more fragments, plays with curiously long titles, and manuscripts that are odd for other reasons [suggesting a less experienced or discerning collector]. Acknowledging the collection's great value for research, he urges caution with respect to the later entries, believing that as word spread of the ambassador's enthusiasm to procure as many *taʿziyeh* scripts as possible, it is likely that scripts were rapidly copied, or even composed, for sale to the collector.[46]

The idea of Hānībāl's script collection forming the basis for Cerulli's sounds plausible, but there is at least one piece of evidence (an observation made during my own work with these manuscripts) that may contradict Esmāʿīlī's suggestion that the first 300 entries originally belonged to a separate collection. As previously explained, the booklets of the acting sides are often made from recycled materials. A significant number of acting sides, belonging to different manuscripts, have outer covers made from tobacco packaging, coloured card featuring a crown insignia; examples are found in the manuscripts numbered 43, 51, 354, 513, and 908. These are from diverse locations and are otherwise not identical in style.[47] Whilst we cannot rule out the idea that using tobacco packaging to bind the acting sides was a trend amongst *taʿziyeh* players of the period, the material connection between these booklets indicates them having

44 Esmāʿīlī, *Fehrest-e dastnevīs-hā*, 12–13.

45 Cerulli himself clarifies that these place names denote the location in which the script was collected and warns that it may not always be indicative of its origin. Rossi, Bombaci, and Cerulli, *Elenco*, XLIV.

46 Esmāʿīlī, *Fehrest-e dastnevīs-hā*, 24–26.

47 CP: MS 43, *Bāzār-e Shām* (Ghulām Ḥusain b. Mullā Sharīf, 1335/1916 and 1324 SH/1945); MS 51, *Martyrdom of ʿAbbās* (Ghulām Ḥusain b. Mullā Sharīf, 1371/1951–2); MS 354, *Dukhtar-furūshī* (Mazandaran, 1301/1883–84); MS 513, *Martyrdom of ʿAbbās* (Ghulām Ḥusain Ṣāberī, Kashan, 1331 SH/1953); and MS 908, *Bāzār-e Shām* (Ghulām Ḥusain b. Mullā Sharīf, Shiraz, 1372-1952-3). The fact that three of these attest the same composer is intriguing but, given their different origins, does not explain the material similarity.

passed through the same hands. Perhaps the team working on Cerulli's collection project favoured this packaging for repairs, the important point being that this material connection – between some of the earliest entries to the sequence and one of the latest – speaks against the likelihood of the first entries coming from a separate collection process.

This aside, Esmāʿīlī's note of caution is well founded. It is important to bear in mind that at the time of Cerulli gathering his collection, the *taʿziyeh* was not a grand affair, receiving generous sponsorship and attended by all sectors of society, as it had been when Chodzko, or even Litten, visited Iran. As will be discussed below, like other Muḥarram rituals, it was subject to restrictions and sporadic prohibitions under the Pahlavi Dynasty (r. 1304–57 SH / 1925–79) and thus, by the 1950s had largely retreated to the villages where the tradition was kept alive amongst players of humble means. Whilst some scripts may have been held by individuals with no ongoing personal connection to the tradition, we should assume that a large section of the materials gathered by Hānībāl, Shariyʿatī Ẕawq ʿAlī-Shāh and their collaborators, were obtained from such players.

In a small number of cases, the physical appearance of the manuscripts does suggest that they are likely to have been copied for Cerulli as opposed to being used scripts. This in itself does not pose a problem regarding their authenticity, as copying is part of the tradition. This is the nature of scripts that are part of a living performance form; they are designed for use, and over the centuries, when they have become worn, they will have been copied and replaced (often booklet by booklet, according to necessity).[48] However, with reference to the Cerulli Collection and the process of its assembly, it is interesting to note that there is a similarity in appearance (ink, paper and scribal hand) between some of the scripts that I have noted to be "unused". They are thus likely to be copies made for Cerulli. These are from different locations, suggesting a copyist (or team of copyists) working for the collector, in conjunction with the purchase of scripts held by local players. Whilst this does not entirely solve the mystery of Cerulli's collection process, it goes a long way towards building our understanding of it.

Accepting this scenario does not disqualify seemingly unused scripts from having potential as research materials, if used discerningly. Copies made for collectors (such as the Chodzko manuscript described above) are accepted as valuable sources within the field of *taʿziyeh* studies. By drawing the majority

48 It is common for the editors of *taʿziyeh* script collections to note that the acting sides of different characters (belonging to a single play) are written by different hands, and marked with different dates.

of its script sources from the Cerulli Collection, this book contributes to the field by bringing to light information from materials that are not easy to access for scholars of *taʿziyeh*, many of whom are based in Iran. To ensure balance, in the sample of renditions of each episode I include at least four from alternative sources. As a general point, I have not found the content of the Cerulli Collection renditions of these plays, including those that are later in date (or arrived later in Italy), to differ significantly from other examples.[49]

2.2 *Historiography, Hagiography, and Lithographs*

Accounts of the events at Karbala have been collected and reported by historians from as early as the century following the battle. These events have also been widely treated in the *maqtal* genre, broadly definable as a body of works that give a devotional record of the martyrdoms. It is clear that the *taʿziyeh* portrayal of the experiences of Ḥusain, his family, and supporters at Karbala is influenced by both of these categories of literature. It is beyond the scope of this study to trace the narratives of the episodes through such sources in any great detail. However, in order to understand the degree to which the dramatists exercised creative licence, it is necessary to have some understanding of the martyrdom narratives as they are likely to have received them. I therefore begin each chapter concerning an episode by briefly looking at its main characters and events as treated in a select handful of sources pre-dating the emergence of the *taʿziyeh* tradition.

These sources include historian Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk* (4th/10th century), and *Ketāb al-Ershād* (also 4th/10th century) by Imami-Shiʿi theologian Abū ʿAbdullāh Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Nuʿmān, "al-Shaikh al-Mufīd". Both works are valuable due to their relative proximity in date to the events in question and the citing of eyewitness accounts, including extracts from the lost work *Maqtal al-Ḥusain* by Abū Mekhnaf (d. 157/ 774), an important transmitter of Iraqi traditions. These works are in Arabic.

I also include Samanid vizier Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad Balʿamī's (4th/10th century) Persian translation of al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh*, entitled *Tārīkh-nāmeh-ye Ṭabarī*, which I refer to as his "version" of al-Ṭabarī's work due to its content differing

49 The plays of the Cerulli Collection manuscripts dating to the 1950s are often very similar in structure and content to the same episodes from the Darbandsar collection and frequently share sections of verse with them. What I do note is that some Cerulli Collection plays that are later in date are messier in appearance and include more orthographic eccentricities than those of the Qajar period, perhaps evidence of the tradition having had less highly educated guardians at that point in time.

significantly from the original. I also consider the accounts of two Safavid era historians, *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, composed around the turn of the 16th century CE by Muḥammad b. Khāvandshāh b. Maḥmūd, "Mīrkhānd", and *Ḥabīb al-siyar* (*c.*935/ 1538–9) by Ghiyās al-Dīn "Khāndamīr". These works are important not only because they were written closer to the *taʿziyeh* composers' time, but also because they encompass many Karbala accounts given in earlier works.[50] Close consideration of Kāshefī's *Rawżat al-shuhadāʾ*, composed in Timurid Herat *c.*1502 CE, has also been essential due to its undoubted influence on the *taʿziyeh* genre.[51] Despite Kāshefī's *Rawżat* belonging in a broad sense to the *maqtal* genre, I refer to it as a hagiography due to its treatment of the lives and deeds of the *ahl-e bait.*

With the exception of Kāshefī's *Rawżat*, I do not suggest that the *taʿziyeh* composers drew from these sources directly. However, al-Ṭabarī, al-Mufīd, Balʿamī, Mīrkhānd and Khāndamīr represent the upper echelons of the literary tradition treating Karbala, constituting something of an official version of events, with which the composers can be expected to have had at least some contact. Kāshefī's *Rawżat* proves to be the source of much of the *taʿziyeh*'s extra-historiographical narrative content: the composers may have been familiar with the text as it was used in *rawżeh-khānī* recitals, without necessarily referring to manuscript versions.

Separately, it is well known that the *taʿziyeh* composers drew from lithographed books of religious stories. Lithography in Iran began in the 1830s (parallel to the flourishing of the *taʿziyeh*). The following decades saw a trend in the publication of many illustrated collections of such stories. These works belong to what is known as the *rawżeh-khānī/maqtal* genre.[52] The most prominent of these is Mīrzā Ebrāhīm b. Muḥammad-Bāqer Jawharī s *Ṭūfān*

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50 For example, Khāndamīr frequently gives accounts which he attributes to the early 3rd/9th century scholar Abū Ḥanīfah Dīnavarī, and Abū Muʾīd al-Khwārezmī who in the 6th/12th century had also written a work entitled *Maqtal al-Ḥusain.*

51 Peter J. Chelkowski, "Kâshefi's Rowzat al-shohadâ': The Karbalâ Narrative as Underpinning of Popular Religious Culture and Literature," in *Oral Literature of Iranian Languages. Kurdish, Pashto, Balochi, Ossetic, Persian and Tajik: A History of Persian Literature*, ed. Philip. G. Kreyenbroek, Ulrich Marzolph, and Ehsan Yarshater (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

52 For the early days of print in Iran see Ulrich Marzolph, "Persian Popular Literature in the Qajar Period," *Asian Folklore Studies* 60, no. 2 (2001); Nile Green, "Persian Print and the Stanhope Revolution: Industrialization, Evangelicalism & the Birth of Printing in Early Qajar Iran," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30, no. 3 (2010). For more on the *rawżeh-khānī/maqtal* genre as lithograph see Marzolph, "The Pictorial Representation of Shi'i Themes in Lithographed Books of the Qajar Period," in *The Art and*

al-bukāʾ (The Tempest of Tears), completed in 1250/1834 and first published in 1252–53/1837. Other examples of such works include Sarbāz Burūjerdī's *Asrār al-shahādah*, "Bīdel" Qurbān b. Ramażān al-Qazvīnī al-Rūdbārī's *Mātamkadeh* and Muḥammad Ḥusain b. Muḥammad Reżā's *Vasīlat al-najāt*. Whilst the overlap in content between these works and the plays of the *taʿziyeh* is clear, I do not assume them simply to be sources used by the composers. Instead, I consider the interplay between these different forms of devotional artistic output. In many cases the stories transformed into print and illustration in the lithographs were already in circulation amongst the oral storytellers and, as the Zand period collection of scripts will show, were already being played in the *taʿziyeh*.[53]

3 Connecting the Scholarship

In addition to the painstaking efforts of the scholars who have produced edited volumes of historical scripts, there have been many valuable contributions to the field of *taʿziyeh* studies.[54] However, particularly outside the Persian language sphere, scholarship has not tended to engage with the *taʿziyeh* repertoire as literature. This may well be due to the vernacular nature of the primary sources, the complexities of which should now be evident. However, if we do not study the content of the plays, we are limited to discussing the phenomenon of people staging and attending these performances without knowing what is being shown or watched – the content matters. Furthermore, the scholarship that has taken place in Iran over the last two decades is detached from that which circulates in the international sphere. For example, the publication of the aforementioned Zand period scripts, much earlier in date than those widely known amongst scholars internationally, has, until now, not been discussed in the anglophone scholarship, save for my own work. The research

Material Culture of Iranian Shi'ism: Iconography and Religious Devotion in Shi'i Islam, ed. Pedram Khosronejad (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012).

53 For the interconnected nature of such art forms see Marzolph, *Narrative Illustration in Persian Lithographed Books* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 25–26; and "The Visual Culture of Iranian Twelver Shiʿism in the Qajar Period," *Shii Studies Review*, no. 3 (2019). For an excellent collection of illustrations from the many versions of *Ṭūfān* see ʿAlī Būẕarī, *Chehel ṭūfān: barrasī-ye taṣāvīr-e chāp-e sangī-ye Ṭūfān al-bukāʾ fī maqātel al-shuhadā* (Tehran: Ketābkhāneh-ye mūzeh va markaz-e asnād-e Majles-e Shuwrā-ye Eslāmī, 1390 SH).

54 For a list of the edited script collections published in Iran over the last three decades see: Esmāʿīlī, *Fehrest-e dastnevīs-hā*, 17–19.

presented in this book draws from both spheres and endeavours to bring the advances of the Persian language scholarship to an international audience.

The foundations for the scholarly study of *taʿziyeh* were laid between the mid-1960s and the late 1970s by Bahrām Beyżāʾī, Peter Chelkowski, Muḥammad Jaʿfar Maḥjūb, Ṣādeq Humāyūnī and others, leading to a flurry of international interest towards the end of the 1970s. Scholarship at this stage largely sought to define the characteristics of this form of devotional drama, and to understand the circumstances of its emergence and how it relates to other dramatic forms, with some limited attention given to its verse. International interest in the topic then dwindled. Nonetheless, certain significant contributions have been made during the last two decades, some of which pertain to the study of the *taʿziyeh* as literature.[55] Important among them are William Beeman's work that considers the treatment of time and space within the plays, and the themes of the climactic episode, and Mahnia Nematollahi Mahani's analysis of the portrayal of Zainab bint ʿAlī through study of the Darbandsar script collection.[56]

The recent contributions of Babak Rahimi and Matthew Randle-Bent are also significant. Rahimi's "Taʿziyeh Close-Up", an interview with *taʿziyeh* performer and scholar Moslem Nādʿalīzādeh, offers a welcome insight into how the tradition is developed, transmitted and preserved between generations of a family, both in practical and philosophical terms. The conversation between Rahimi and Nādʿalīzādeh begins to explore certain dramaturgical aspects, and to critically consider the extent to which *taʿziyeh* can be described as theatre.[57]

Randle-Bent also questions the terminology and, moreover, urges re-evaluation of the conceptual frameworks applied to the study of *taʿziyeh*. The main focus of his critique is the scholarship resulting from the symposium on *taʿziyeh* held at the 1976 Shiraz Arts Festival, the proceedings of which were published as a volume, edited by Chelkowski, and became a "touchstone" for the study of the tradition over the subsequent decades.[58] Randle-Bent's

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55 For a broad overview of contributions to the field of *taʿziyeh* studies see Mahnia Nematollahi Mahani, "Studies on Persian Passion Play (ta'ziya): An Annotated Bibliography," *Cultural and Religious Studies* 5, no. 2 (2017).

56 William O. Beeman, *Iranian Performance Traditions* (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, 2011), 117–69; Mahnia A. Nematollahi Mahani, *The Holy Drama: Persian Passion Play in Modern Iran* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2013).

57 Babak Rahimi, "Taʿziyeh Close-Up: A Conversation with Moslem Nadalizadeh." *Ecumenica* 15, no. 1 (2022).

58 Matthew Randle-Bent, "'Indigenous Avant-Gardes': The Shiraz Arts Festival and Ritual Performance Theory in 1970s Iran," *Arab Stages* 14, Spring 2023. Available online at: https://arabstages.org/?p=3473&preview=true (accessed May 10th, 2024); Peter J.

concern is that this scholarship artificially imposed the framework of ritual, as understood by Victor Turner and Richard Schechner, upon the *taʿziyeh*. He also argues that the staging of *taʿziyeh* at Shiraz in 1976, under Pahlavi state patronage and supported by the collaboration of international scholars and artists, detracted from the potential for the tradition to be understood in its own terms. Rather, it resulted in an understanding that reinforced nationalist, and even – albeit unintentionally – Orientalist, trends of thinking.[59] Whilst proper engagement with the questions raised by Randle-Bent is beyond the scope of this book, his work is a welcome reminder that all scholarship must be understood within its historical context, both political and intellectual, and of the ever-present need for reflexivity on the part of the scholar and artist.

My research is influenced by, and indeed builds upon, the work of Anayatullah Shahidi, Dāvūd Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī, and Muḥammad Ḥusain Nāṣerbakht, published in Iran. Shahidi's *Pazhuheshī dar taʿziyeh va taʿziyeh-khānī* focusses on the *taʿziyeh* tradition in Tehran during the Qajar period.[60] It categorizes the plays by theme and subject, looking closely at their verse, and analysing the types of dialogue. In recognising the curious way in which the script of any given play usually features both simple and sophisticated verse, Shahidi discusses these scripts passing through many hands and including the contributions of many poets. He shows that composers commonly borrowed from each other, from classical poetry, and from the lithographed works of the *rawżeh-khānī/maqtal* genre. Copyists and directors also commonly made additions or edits. As directors sought to breathe new life into their performances for each Muḥarram, they added new sections of verse (and action) to the scripts, some of which had been generated through improvisation during performance. In general, Shahidi does not see what we might term the "multiple hands on texts" approach as a corruption of some original work, but rather as part of the *taʿziyeh* tradition's character.[61] This agrees with what I have observed in the course of this study, that during the Qajar period the tradition was still fluid and open to a wide range of contributions.

Dāvūd Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī's *Āshnāyī bā mabānī-ye shabīh-khānī* addresses a number of topics important to our understanding of the *taʿziyeh* as

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Chelkowski ed. *Taʿziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran* (New York: New York University Press and Surūsh, 1979).

59 Randle-Bent, "'Indigenous Avant-Gardes'."

60 Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh-khānī: dowreh-ye Qājār*. Shahidi has worked extensively with the script collection of the Parliament Library, in Tehran.

61 Ibid., 558–61.

literature, including the influences of mysticism and myth.[62] Both his work and Nāṣerbakht's *Adabiyāt-e īrānī va āyīn-e shabīh-khānī* make important observations about the composition of *taʿziyeh* plays, drawing parallels with the structures found in other forms of Iranian literature, and considering the influence of the epics.[63] I take this further in the chapters that follow, identifying previously undiscussed recurring structural features of the *taʿziyeh*, and features that are also found in the verbal art forms of other cultures, thus showing a structural link to the storytelling traditions.

62 Dāvūd Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī, *Āshnāyī bā mabānī-ye shabīh-khānī* (Tehran: Sūreh Mehr, 1396 SH).

63 Muḥammad Ḥusain Nāṣerbakht, *Adabiyāt-e īrānī va āyīn-e shabīh-khānī* (Tehran: Sūreh Mehr, 1396 SH).

CHAPTER 1

The History of *Taʿziyeh-khānī*

As an essential point of departure, this chapter considers the origins of the *taʿziyeh* and its trajectory to the end of the Qajar period, also looking briefly at what followed. Our attention will then turn to those involved in the tradition, again focussing largely on the 13th/19th century and considering the connections between *taʿziyeh* and certain other types of performance. I will present the case for *taʿziyeh-khānī* as a practice that emerged outside urban centres, the earliest plays evolving from re-enactments of the battle of Karbala staged amongst ordinary people – remembering the martyrs through replaying their narratives. I will demonstrate the important contribution made by women to the shaping of this devotional art form, through their mass participation as an active and demanding audience, and through their creation, sponsorship and delivering of performances. We will see the prevalence of storytelling traditions in the environment in which the *taʿziyeh* took shape and a societal connection between the tellers of religious stories and the *taʿziyeh* practitioners, catching fleeting glimpses of the networks that might have sustained the early performances. We will also see evidence that the impulse to bring the divine into the realm of the profane, through celebration of the Shiʿa Holy Family in performance, had begun before the dawn of the Safavid period, and that this was sanctioned in devotional writings.

1 The Trajectory

1.1 *Roots and Early Influences*

Many scholars suggest that the origins of the Iranian *taʿziyeh* lie in pre-Islamic mourning cults. The most widely supported theory of this type is that ritual lament for Ḥusain is an evolution of the tradition of mourning for Siyāvash. Whilst intriguing, this theory is somewhat problematic. Characterised by purity and virtue yet unjustly killed, Siyāvash features in Ferdowsi's *Shāh-nāmeh* but also in Zoroastrian tradition and older eastern Iranian paganism. There is evidence of an annual mourning cult for him in Sogdiana and Khwārazm (around the Oxus river and in Transoxiana).[1] While the existence of this cult

1 Bahrām Beyżāʾī, *Namāyesh dar Īrān* (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Rowshangarān va muṭālaʿāt-e zanān, [1344] 1383 SH), 56, 123; Ehsan Yarshater, "Development of Persian Drama in The

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FIGURE 1 Tekiyeh-ye Ḥusainī-ye ʿĀẓam, Armaghankhaneh, Zanjan Province, 8th Muḥarram 1439/2017. A modern *tekiyeh*: traditional staging conventions

is fascinating no direct link between this and the rituals for Ḥusain has been convincingly established. To my knowledge, the latest evidence of an active cult of Siyāvash is from the 5th/11th century.[2] Meanwhile, annual Muḥarram rituals commemorating Ḥusain are not recorded on the Iranian plateau until the early 10th/16th century under the Safavid dynasty (r. 907/1501–1135/1722). This leaves a gap of around 400 years between the two traditions. Thus, to treat *taʿziyeh* as an evolution, or indeed transformation, of the mourning practice requires something of a leap.

What is compelling is the idea of a connection between Siyāvash and Ḥusain on the level of literary portrayal. Ehsan Yarshater has argued that the *taʿziyeh* treatment of the martyrdom of Ḥusain is parallel not only to the passion of Siyāvash but also to the *Memorial of Zarēr*, a religious epic with Parthian

Context of Cultural Confrontation," in *Iran: Continuity and Variety*, ed. Peter J. Chelkowski (New York: Center for Near Eastern Studies, 1971), 23; "Ta'ziyeh and Pre-Islamic Mourning Rites in Iran," in Chelkowski ed. *Taʿziyeh: Ritual and Drama*, 91–93; Humāyūnī, *Taʿziyeh dar Īrān*, 15–18; Jamshid Malekpour, *The Islamic Drama* (London; Portland Or.: Frank Cass Publishers, 2004), 38–49.

2 On this matter, the works of al-Bīrūnī, al-Thaʿālabī, and al-Kāshgharī (all pertaining to the 11th century CE) are cited by Ehsan Yarshater, "Mourning Rites," 90–91.

origins, again within the Zoroastrian tradition.[3] In both cases, Yarshater deems highly significant the fact that the unjust killing of the righteous hero is foretold within the narrative, and that the hero himself is aware of his fate. Indeed, as the following chapters will show, the outcome of the tragedy being foretold by the protagonists themselves is a key feature of the *taʿziyeh* genre. Other scholars have also commented on the similarity in the literary treatment of Siyāvash and Ḥusain, with particular reference to their foreknowledge of their deaths.[4] It is highly probable that, through their presence in Zoroastrian and epic literature, the legends of Siyāvash and Zarēr influenced the way that the plight of Ḥusain was conceived on the Iranian plateau.

Pre-Islamic influences aside, in traditional historiography mourning rituals dedicated to Imam Ḥusain are believed to have evolved from the commemorations carried out by the Karbala survivors and their supporters. It is argued that the first public recitation of the Karbala narrative was a speech made by Zainab, eulogising Ḥusain whilst condemning his killers, when she visited his grave whilst returning from Damascus to Medina.[5] Further to this, the practice of commemorating the anniversary of Ḥusain's martyrdom is said to have begun in the first few years following the Karbala massacre with the commemorations observed at his tomb by the *tawwābīn* (the repentant), remorseful Kufans and others.[6] While this would locate the first instances of ritual mourning for Ḥusain as far back as the late 1st/ 7th century, in the early Umayyad period, it is not until the 4th/10th century, under the Buyid Dynasty in Baghdad, that the first public procession commemorating ʿĀshūrāʾ is recorded. The account pertains to the year 352/963 and appears in *al-Bedāyah wa'l-nehāyah* (The Beginning and the End), a history of Islam by Esmāʿīl b. ʿUmar b. Kathīr, "Ebn Kathīr" (d. 774/1373). He reports that on the 10th of Muḥarram the ruler Muʿezz al-Dawlah Ebn Būyah ordered the closing of the markets and that the women display public mourning for Ḥusain by going barefaced into the markets with their hair dishevelled, wearing rough woollen hair cloths, wailing and beating

3 Yarshater, "Mourning Rites," 89–92. Also see Willem M. Floor, *The History of Theater in Iran* (Washington, D.C.: Mage Publishers, 2005), 82–83.

4 Nāṣerbakht, *Adabiyāt-e īrānī*, 251.

5 This occasion is recorded by al-Ṭabarī and in Muḥammad Bāqer Majlesī's collection of Shiʿi traditions *Behār al-Anwār*, among other sources. Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 152; Ali J. Hussain, "The Mourning of History and the History of Mourning: The Evolution of Ritual Commemoration of the Battle of Karbala," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25, no. 1 (2005): 80–81.

6 Ibid., 81. For the lamentation rituals of this period also see Babak Rahimi, *Theater State and the Formation of Early Modern Public Sphere in Iran: Studies on Safavid Muharram Rituals, 1590–1641 CE* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012), 206.

their faces. Over the next decade Ebn Kathīr records the phenomenon recurring annually and growing in size.[7] This early documentation of public mourning for Ḥusain is significant, yet it is not until several centuries later that we have the first evidence of a theatrical tradition forming part of the lamentations.

1.2 *Emergence and Survival of a Theatrical Tradition*

In considering when and how the *taʿziyeh* tradition began, the definition of the tradition itself is important. *Taʿziyeh-khanī* (or *shabīh-khānī*) is, in its essence, the practice of commemorating the martyrs of Karbala through scripted performances that re-enact the events (albeit in a stylised fashion). In the continuation of his chapter, we will see that a variety of performance forms celebrating the memory of the *ahl-bait* were present in Timurid Herat by the turn of the 16th century CE. This illuminates our understanding of the environment in which the *taʿziyeh* tradition emerged, a trend of commemoration of the Holy Family through public recitation of their virtues and tribulations being present in the Khurasan region before Shiʿism became Iran's religion of state under the Safavid dynasty. However, these performances were largely oratory, and were not yet what we could call devotional drama. So, how did the transition from reciting the stories of the martyrs to playing their likeness and scripting their dialogues take place?

Until recently, the predominant scholarly theory regarding the emergence of this practice was that put forward by Peter Chelkowski. He argues that the first *taʿziyeh* plays were generated through a fusing of the tableaux vivant of the Karbala tragedy, staged atop wagons in the Muḥarram mourning processions, with the *rawżeh-khānī* recitals of the tribulations of the martyrs, and that this took place during the mid-18th century CE.[8] This would mean *taʿziyeh* having

7 Esmāʿīl b. ʿUmar Ebn Kathīr, *al-Bedāyah wa'l-nehāyah*, 14 vols., vol. 11 (Beirut: Maktabat al-Maʿāref, [*c*.1367] 1990), 243; Hussain, "Mourning of History," 84.

8 Peter J. Chelkowski, "Ta'ziyeh: Indigenous Avant-Garde Theatre of Iran," *Performing Arts Journal* 2, no. 1 (1977), 32–33; "Shia Muslim Processional Performances," *TDR: The Drama Review* 29, no. 3 (1985): 22; "Narrative Painting and Painting Recitation in Qajar Iran," *Muqarnas* 6 (1989), 99–100; "Popular Entertainment, Media and Social Change in Twentieth-Century Iran," in *The Cambridge History of Iran from Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic*, ed. Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly, and Charles Peter Melville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 771–72; "Taʿzia," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online version (2009). Available at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/tazia (accessed June 16th, 2024). Whilst this theory is much echoed in the literature, some scholars have maintained that *taʿziyeh* had existed in some form during the Safavid period. Beyżāʾī, *Namāyesh*, 117 and 21; Jean Calmard, "Shiʿi Rituals and Power II: The Consolidation of Safavid Shiʿism: Folklore and Popular Religion," in *Safavid Persia: The History and Politics of an Islamic Society*, ed. C.P. Melville (London I.B. Tauris, 1996), 156–57; Bulūkbāshī, *Taʿziyeh*, 27–34.

emerged during the reign of Nāder Shāh Afshār (r. 1148–1160/ 1736–1747), or the early years of the Zand dynasty's reign. However, historical scripts, recently edited and published, indicate the existence of the tradition during the Safavid period. The oldest of these is a rendition of *Ghārat-e khaimeh-hā* (The Plunder of the Camp) dated 1136/1724.[9] This is at the tail end of the Safavid period, two years after the fall of Isfahan to the Afghans and before a brief reinstatement of the Safavid dynasty. However, far from appearing to be an early attempt at scripting such a performance, this play shows a tradition well underway. As will be discussed in the following chapter, it includes compositional features that are standard in later episodes. Also, interestingly, its closing lines (belonging to the character Zainab) call for God's blessings and forgiveness upon all those who cry for Ḥusain, not only the women and men of the audience but also the "*taʿziyeh-khān*" and "*nuskheh-gardān*" (*taʿziyeh* performer and script writer).[10] Thus, these were recognized positions: this an established tradition.

The aforementioned Zand period script collection has also contributed greatly to our knowledge of the *taʿziyeh*'s trajectory. These scripts show a dramatic tradition that had left its formative phase well behind.[11] Of particular significance is the fact that, in addition to treating the events surrounding the Karbala tragedy, the composers were treating more diverse subject matter, which even included some comedic material.[12] This degree of evolution, suggesting a significant period of time having elapsed since the inception of the tradition, is further evidence of it having undergone its early stages during the Safavid period.

Given these strong indications that the *taʿziyeh* emerged in a period earlier than previously suspected, the theory of how it emerged needs to be revisited. Chelkowski's hypothesis is based largely on traveller accounts, in particular that of Thomas Salmons and Matthias van Goch who give a vivid description of a Muḥarram procession from 1150/1737.[13] Spectacular ambulatory rituals of lament are documented in the travelogues of visitors to Iran from the 10th/16th century onwards, and throughout the Safavid period. These included a wide

9 For an edition and photographs of the script see Dāvūd Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Mehdī Daryāī, *Daftar-e taʿziyeh 13* (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Namāyesh, 1394 SH), 19–81. This volume includes an edition of a further play, *Hengāmeh qiyāmat* (The Resurrection), the script of which bears the date 1172 (1758–59).

10 Ibid., 62.

11 *Daftar 11*, 10.

12 Ibid., 10 and 89.

13 Thomas Salmons and Matthias Van Goch, *Die heutige Historie und Geographie oder der gegenwärtige Staat vom Königreich Persien* (Flensburg and Altona: Gebrüder Korte, 1739), 252–53.

variety of elements, from displays of self-mortification to riderless caparisoned horses carrying objects (such as turbans or weapons) representing the *ahl-e bait* and Karbala martyrs, and symbolic coffins that were paraded on lavishly decorated biers, displaying not only respect for the martyrs but also the wealth of the patrons.[14] Chelkowski finds the account of Salmons and van Goch, during the early reign of Nāder Shāh, particularly significant from a theatrical perspective; it features tableaux vivant and a float covered with sand representing the desert of Karbala, upon which lay performers simulating the mutilated martyrs.[15]

Chelkowski draws a parallel between this procession and a variety of *taʿziyeh* called *taʿziyeh-ye kāravānī* (also known as *taʿziyeh-ye sayyār* or *taʿziyeh-ye dowreh*) still performed in certain towns in modern-day Iran, with scenes from the Karbala tragedy played on flatbed trucks as they move through the streets. He argues that the first scripted *taʿziyeh* performances began this way, with the costumed performers in the parades playing out and reciting the text of the scenes as they stopped at crossroads.[16] Indeed, such tableaux were witnessed elsewhere: the Dutch painter Cornelis de Bruin records seeing floats bearing static representations of the battle, including characters featured in the *taʿziyeh*, in Isfahan in 1116/1704, 30 years prior to the procession reported by Salmons and Van Goch.[17] It is probable that this type of processional ritual did evolve into *taʿziyeh-ye kāravānī*. However, even when Salmons and van Goch witnessed this performance, the characters on the floats were still static and did not engage in dialogue. On the other hand, the recently discovered early scripts show that the *taʿziyeh* tradition existed well before this point. Thus, the question of how the theatrical tradition emerged remains unanswered. We are also left with the mystery of why, when a large number of travelogues record elaborate pageantry, put on at the behest of the shahs throughout the Safavid period, and an abundance of *rawżeh-khānī* recitals, did no one report witnessing a *taʿziyeh*?[18]

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14 For a highly useful bibliographical guide to the accounts of these rituals during the Safavid period given by foreign visitors to Iran, ordered by date, place and the type of ritual witnessed, see Calmard, "Shiʿi Rituals," 178–84.

15 Salmons and Van Goch, *Die heutige Historie*, 252–53.

16 Chelkowski, "Taʿzia". For general discussion of *taʿziyeh-ye sayyār* see Beyżāʾī, *Namāyesh*, 126–27; Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh-khānī: dowreh-ye Qājār*, 235–41; Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī, *Mabānī-ye shabīh-khānī*, 26–28.

17 Cornelis De Bruin, *Voyages de Corneille Le Brun par la Moscovie, en Perse, et aux Indes Orientales*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Frères Wetstein, 1718), 219–20.

18 For an overview of such accounts see: Calmard, "Shiʿi Rituals"; and Rahimi, *Theater State*, 216–234.

I have argued elsewhere that in our search for the emergent *taʿziyeh* tradition we need to re-evaluate both where we are looking and indeed, what we are looking for.[19] As for the *where*, we must consider the fact that the foreigners whose travelogues provide such valuable evidence were the guests of the Safavid elite, who were clearly keen for them to witness the most lavish processions. Their accounts recall both the grand and the grotesque, impressing their readers with details of the exotic riches and animals that they saw paraded, and rarely failing to mention what they found strange or shocking – such as the displays of self-mortification and the nudity of some penitents. But, could there have been other more modest mourning practices, observed amongst the lower classes, that escaped their attention? Furthermore, their accounts are predominantly from urban centres and we have little evidence of what was taking place in more rural areas.

It is indeed likely that the early *taʿziyeh* emerged from a tradition of the common people as opposed to something state sponsored. Were *taʿziyeh* to have received state patronage during the Safavid period, we would expect to find it not only more consistently mentioned in accounts of the grand spectacles put on by the shahs, but also in the records of their spending. In her study of commemorative rituals in Safavid Isfahan, Maryam Moazzen examines the royal allocation of funds for such activities held at the *Madraseh-ye Sulṭānī* of Isfahan, as attested by the madrasa's *vaqf* (religious endowment) records for 1123/1711, during the reign of Shāh Sulṭan Ḥusain.[20] Close attention needs to be paid to the terminology when interpreting these records. Indeed, they do specify that monies should be allocated for the "*taʿziyeh* of Imam Ḥusain" and other important figures, but the word *taʿziyeh* in this context is not "*taʿziyeh-khānī*" in abbreviated form (as I use it throughout this book). Rather, it is the word in its original sense, a synonym for *ʿazādārī* (mourning). Under the allocation for these "*taʿziyeh*" expenses, the breakdown of what is to be covered includes the fees of the *rawżeh-khān* and his assistant, a *tabarrāʾī* (performer of ritual cursing of the enemies of the *ahl-e bait*), and a *marsiyeh-khān* (elegist). Materials for decorating and lighting the venue, and sustenance for the attendees are also listed.[21] However, there is nothing to suggest a theatrical performance, no

19 E. Lucy Deacon, "Remembering Through Re-Enacting: Revisiting the Emergence of the Iranian *Taʿzia* Tradition," *Medieval English Theatre* 41 (2019).

20 Maryam Moazzen, "Rituals of Commemoration, Rituals of Self-Invention: Safavid Religious Colleges and the Collective Memory of the Shi'a," *Iranian Studies* 49, no. 4 (2016): 558–60.

21 Ibid., 558–59. For an edition of these deeds (and the sections in question) see ʿAbd al-Ḥusain Sepantā, *Tārīkhcheh-ye awqāf-e Esfahān* (Isfahan: Enteshārāt-e edāreh-ye kull-e awqāf-e manṭaqeh-ye Esfahān, 1346 SH), 163–5 and 241.

mention of costumes, props, or fees for the *taʿziyeh-khānān* or any synonym thereof. These rituals were clearly mourning assemblies featuring recitations by orators, and not theatrical performances.[22] In short, given the existence of *taʿziyeh-khānī* during the Safavid period but its apparent absence from the large-scale Muḥarram rituals funded by the elite, in the search for the emergent tradition we should look for a commemorative ritual taking place amongst the common people, and possibly outside urban centres.

In terms of re-evaluating *what* we are looking for, the repertoire includes a play entitled *Haftād-u-du tan* (The Seventy-Two People) in which all of the most prominent Karbala martyrdoms are enacted one after the other. This is considered to be the earliest form of *taʿziyeh*, before the stories of the individual martyrs were expanded and the plays assumed episodic form.[23] In such a performance the characters are recognisable by their distinctive attributes; their individual stories are shown through vignettes and short dialogues, as opposed to receiving extended treatment. The familial farewells are poignant, as they are in the episodes, but in this case, they are not protracted. And, since *Haftād-u-du tan* portrays a number of martyrdoms, it inevitably includes more battlefield action.[24] Thus, in our search for the nascent *taʿziyeh* tradition, we should be looking for something more similar to *Haftād-u-du tan* than to the episodes of the developed repertoire – a battle re-enactment with some degree of character representation. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that re-enactments of the battle of Karbala *were* staged amongst villagers and the urban lower classes and that these enactments came to include dialogue and the playing out of particular roles. I will go on to discuss a description of such a performance during the 11th/17th century and argue that it is highly plausible that the commemoration of Karbala by acting out the events began in this way and generated the earliest form of *taʿziyeh* play, the scripting of which became more elaborate through time.

Before examining the account of this proto-version of *Haftād-u-du tan*, it will be helpful to look at the earliest eyewitness account of a relatively fully-formed *taʿziyeh* performance that follows this same format. The performance in question took place on Kharg Island in 1179/1765 and is described in the

22 Moazzen uses the term "passion play" a number of times in her discussion, citing this as one of the rituals funded. Based on the meaning of this term in Christian culture one would expect this to mean a theatrical representation and thus to indicate *taʿziyeh-khānī* performances being staged. However, this is not so. The term in the *vaqf* documents translated as "passion play" is *rawżeh-khānī* (I thank Professor Moazzen for the clarification on this matter).

23 Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh-khānī: dowreh-ye Qājār*, 74; Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī, *Mabānī-ye shabīh-khānī*, 28.

24 For versions of *Haftād-u-du tan* amongst the Cerulli Collection see MS 699 (Beg. 20th Cent., Shahrud); MS 703 (Beg. 20th Qom); MS 915 (Beg. 20th, Shiraz).

travelogue of German cartographer Carsten Niebuhr.[25] Kharg was then under the control of the Dutch Empire and according to Niebuhr the island's Shiʿi and Sunni populations were equal in number. Far from receiving sponsorship, Niebuhr describes how (in order to avoid inter-religious tensions) public mourning in urban spaces during the first ten days of Muḥarram was prohibited, the Shiʿa forced to carry out their observances outside of town. He claims that it was for his own benefit, as he had never witnessed this spectacle of mourning, that the governor made an exception on ʿĀshūrāʾ of the year in question, allowing the Shiʿa use of the main square to play what he (Niebuhr) describes as their "tragedy".[26] The performance largely takes the form of a staged battle. Niebuhr recalls:

> Those charged with playing the army of Yazid under their commander Shemr ran around the stage with their swords drawn as though they were searching for the enemy. Then Ḥusain and a small group of followers entered the stage and were soon subject to a ferocious attack. From the faces and actions of Ḥusain's group their desperation was evident yet, not wanting to afford their enemy an easy victory, they defended themselves with all their might. One of the warriors who was called Qāsem was thrown down from his horse several times and when he wanted to remount, his daughters, weeping and wailing, begged him to withdraw from the battle. They cried from the bottom of their hearts in such a way that you would have said that their father was genuinely in danger of death.[27] The role of ʿAbbās the brother of Ḥusain, who lost both of his arms whilst attempting to quench his thirst from a spring, was played in a very realistic fashion. He had concealed his arms inside the chest of his costume so that both sleeves hung empty from the shoulder … Ḥusain's small army triumphed over the large army of the enemy several times but later, one by one and finally Ḥusain himself, they were cast down from their horses and the others were taken prisoner.[28]

25 Carsten Niebuhr, *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien und andern umliegenden Ländern*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Copenhagen: Nicholaus Möller, 1778), 199–201. Niebuhr travelled widely, his work offering a valuable record of life in the pre-modern Middle East. See Lawrence J. Baack, *Undying Curiosity: Carsten Niebuhr and the Royal Danish Expedition to Arabia (1761–1767)* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2014).

26 Niebuhr, *Reisebeschreibung*, 2, 198–99.

27 Niebuhr misidentifies the female characters here. Qasem being a newly-wed adolescent, those beseeching him were most likely his bride Fāṭemeh and his mother (or if, indeed, a second young girl, Fāṭemeh's sister Sakīneh).

28 Niebuhr, *Reisebeschreibung*, 2, 199–200. Author's translation from German, Deacon, "Remembering Through Re-Enacting," 72–73.

Niebuhr goes on to describe large pieces of wood being attached to the necks of the survivors who were paraded as captives to Damascus. He then describes a scene playing in Yazīd's court where a European ambassador intervenes on Zain al-ʿĀbedīn's behalf and is subsequently executed.[29] The details of Niebuhr's description make clear that this performance was staged on a low budget and by non-professional performers. Costuming was rudimentary and only a few horses featured, it appears very much a part of the cultural life of the masses.

This type of performance had been going on for at least a century before Niebuhr's experience on Kharg. A letter by M. de Montheron, travel companion of the Bishop of Baghdad, describes Muḥarram in Isfahan of 1051/1641.[30] He recalls that, at the order of the shah, the people of several different towns participated in the spectacle, and he notes that Muḥarram is commemorated in different styles depending on the location (unfortunately not giving further detail). He then describes a type of Karbala battle re-enactment that included some role-play and simple dialogue. This can be considered a proto-version of *Haftād-u-du tan*. De Montheron explains that in Isfahan the "spectacle of grief" of the tenth of Muḥarram is referred to as "Thahmachaa y Maaodisa".[31] The Persian word *tamāshā* denotes a performance (or watching); the second part of this expression may be the Arabic *mā ḥadatha* (what happened).[32] This is a minor detail but is interesting in this context as the notion of "a performance of", or "watching", "what happened", suggests the replaying of the events in question for commemorative purposes.[33] Added to which, there is a further possible interpretation of "Maaodisa". If we take into account De Montheron's francophone pronunciation, this could be the Arabic *mā ḥuditha*, meaning "what was narrated." Given that the spectacle he witnessed was more than a simple recital, this would again suggest a story being told by means of a performance – one that included the spoken word.

De Montheron first describes two *rawżeh-khānī* recitals, one for the shah and nobility, and one for the commoners, at opposite ends of the enormous main square. Then:

29 This scene is played in *Bāzār-e Shām* and will be discussed in chapter 6.

30 For de Montheron's full account in French and an English translation see Calmard, "Shiʿi Rituals," 171–75. Calmard himself sees this as a kind of dramatic performance and draws a parallel with the medieval European passion plays. Ibid., 157.

31 Ibid., 173–74.

32 Ibid., 176.

33 For further discussion see Deacon, "Remembering Through Re-Enacting," 76.

> These two predications being over, the first ones of this Tamasha enter the square to begin the spectacle. [First] there are the Arabs in great number, representing the Arabs of Medina screaming 'heut sej nem Khou, heut sej neut jet uounam Khou' [*Ḥusainam ku? Ḥusain-e javānam ku?*] … which means 'where is my Husain, where is my young Husain?'[34]

De Montheron then describes "a score of horses saddled, bridled and armed with arrows," being released on to the square and running around wildly to represent the horses of Ḥusain and his companions after the massacre.[35] Next there came around twenty camels "loaded with coffers and naked people who struggled and screamed as if [they were] in despair saying his [their] baggage [had been] plundered." Then there entered a cavalcade featuring elements frequently described by other witnesses to the processional rituals: wagons displaying trophies and weapons, biers carrying symbolic coffins and live performers doused in animal blood and hides to simulate injuries, and displays of self-mortification. As these wagons rotated, a pitched battle was staged by "an apparently infinite number of persons armed with big sticks". A wretched-looking group of women riding black mules also featured in the procession.[36]

Whilst this performance does not seem to have included explicit portrayal of the deaths of the individual martyrs, what De Montheron witnessed was a static performance that re-enacted the Karbala tragedy, albeit partly through symbolism, including the parading of the women as captives. Chelkowski's theory is relevant here in that moving wagons were used to depict part of the narrative. However, as with the performance witnessed by Niebuhr on Kharg Island, it was not those on the wagons, but rather those entering the mock battlefield riding four-legged beasts and on foot, who both spoke and participated in roleplay. We lack evidence as to whether such battle re-enactments were widespread outside urban centres. In Niebuhr's case (despite giving a particular explanation), he certainly states that the type of performance he saw usually went on outside town. It also merits comment that in modern-day Iran there still exists a variety of *taʿziyeh* known as *taʿziyeh-ye maidānī* (battlefield *taʿziyeh*) which is usually played in wide open spaces, with the script taking the form of *Haftād-u-du tan*.[37]

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34 Calmard, "Shiʿi Rituals," 174.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., 175.

37 The word *maidān* denotes a field and also a town square. We have seen above that such performances could take place in town squares. But in the *taʿziyeh* plays this word denotes

To discuss further the emergence of the practice of *taʿziyeh-khānī* would be to digress from the main concern of this book, the plays themselves. In brief summary, I suggest that the earliest *taʿziyeh* plays emerged from re-enactments of the battle of Karbala held in order to commemorate the events. The travelogues of most foreign visitors to Iran during the Safavid period do not, in their accounts of Muharram, describe such performances, because they were generally staged rurally, and were part of the culture of the common people as opposed to the urban elite.[38] De Montheron's account provides a glimpse of dramatic practice by 1051/1641, the best part of a century before our earliest extant example of a *taʿziyeh* script. How the telling of the narrative came to assume episodic form is a separate matter and will be considered in the continuation of this chapter when we look at the connection of the *taʿziyeh* to the tradition of *naqqālī* (traditional storytelling). Of course, this theory does not elucidate how the tradition of script writing began, but it does explain the emergence of the practice of replaying the events of Karbala for commemorative purposes: remembering by re-enacting.

The theory that I have outlined here is my own and original, but it agrees with trends noted by other scholars. Many believe that the tradition of *taʿziyeh-khānī* is likely to have emerged amongst the common people as opposed to originating from state or elite sponsorship. In terms of the time period that I delineate – the mid-to-late 17th century CE – for the rapid growth of the tradition, from a pitched battle featuring fragments of dialogue and limited characterisation to something scripted and much more emotive, Babak Rahimi's observations regarding Safavid era Muḥarram rituals are particularly pertinent. Considering the commemorations more generally, as opposed to focussing on *taʿziyeh-khānī*, Rahimi discusses the Muḥarram rituals as sites for both the demonstration and contestation of power. He makes a compelling case for the rituals of 17th century Isfahan (then newly established as the Safavid capital) steadily becoming more carnivalesque in nature. "Carnivalesque" here refers to the concept originating in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, implying an ambience of public ritual in which participants are unshackled to a great extent from the norms and hierarchies usually governing social order, and

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the field of battle, *maidān-jang*; the locations chosen for such performances reflect this. Examples of towns with an ongoing tradition of *taʿziyeh-ye maidānī* include Shush and Behbahan (Khuzestan), Fasa (Fars), and in the villages of Mir Shams al-Din (Mazandaran) and Naniz (Kerman). For such a performance in Ardabil during the Pahlavi period see Beyżāʾī, *Namāyesh*, 126.

38 For further discussion, including examples of accounts of armed men not only indulging in combat during the Muḥarram commemorations but also acting out details of Ḥusain's martyrdom narrative. See Deacon, "Remembering Through Re-Enacting.".

where more risky forms of expression, even acts of transgression and misrule, become possible. What Rahimi describes is a broad and diverse range of actors contributing to the Muḥarram commemorations, assuming their places within them with growing confidence and agency, mourning and the carnivalesque being intertwined.[39]

I do not suggest that the scripting of *taʿziyeh* performances was in itself transgressive, or that the early plays had content that challenged the status quo in terms of rulership. However, what is important in the milieu depicted by Rahimi is the uninhibited confidence of the ritual participants. Few were awaiting orders from above before expressing their interpretation of the right way to mourn, the right way to remember. In this environment the conditions provided for the gradual shift from visual representation of the Karbala martyrs and recitation of their suffering, to scripting their dialogues and the whole-hearted playing of their likeness.

A further important point about the proximity of the early *taʿziyeh* to the common people is that the tradition survived the dynastic changes of the 12th/18th century. The elaborate procession witnessed by Salmons and Van Goch was at the beginning of the reign of Nāder Shāh, who nonetheless went on to curtail the Muḥarram commemorations, prohibiting certain aspects altogether. As part of an effort at rapprochement with his Ottoman neighbours he suppressed Shiʿi practices that were potentially offensive to Sunnis.[40] Although there is no specific evidence of *taʿziyeh* performances being proscribed, their negative portrayal of the (Sunni) Umayyad armies cannot have been in keeping with this vision and, even if they were not censored, we certainly cannot imagine that they received sponsorship. Nonetheless, the tradition was kept alive and we find evidence of it flourishing in the early Zand period. This suggests that in the mid-12th/18th century it was the Shiʿi populace themselves who were the patrons of *taʿziyeh*, and credit is due to them for conserving the tradition.

In addition to Niebuhr's account and the aforementioned script collection, there are a number of sources that attest the existence of the *taʿziyeh* tradition (in a variety of forms) during the Zand period.[41] With regards to the repertoire's

39 Rahimi, *Theater State*. See, in particular, 216–234 and 321–327; and Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984) 423.

40 For Nāder Shāh's wider efforts to this effect see Ernest Tucker, "Nadir Shah and the Ja'fari Madhhab Reconsidered," *Iranian Studies* 27, no. 1/4 (1994).

41 For further discussion see Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh-khānī: dowreh-ye Qājār*, 76–84; and Peter J. Chelkowski, "Bibliographical Spectrum," in Chelkowski ed. *Taʿziyeh: Ritual and Drama*, 258–59.

development, the most important source is the description given by William Francklin who witnessed the Muḥarram commemorations of 1202/1787, during the reign of Jaʿfar Khān Zand (r. 1199–1203 /1785–89) in the dynasty's capital, Shiraz. His account attests the fact that a different aspect of the Karbala narrative was represented each day and is, thus, a record of *taʿziyeh* in episodic form.[42] He mentions finding the representation of the unconsummated marriage and martyrdom of Qāsem particularly moving, recalling the ardent lamentations of the crowd in response to the scene involving the parting of husband and wife. We know from the sophistication of the Zand period scripts that there are likely to have been some professional (or highly seasoned) *taʿziyeh-khānān* by this point, yet Francklin's account gives the impression that the performers he witnessed were amateur. He describes the mass creative participation of the people of the city. The location of these commemorations – the Zand capital – suggests state permission, and their scale indicates at least some sponsorship from the wealthier elements of society, state or other. By the close of the Zand period, the *taʿziyeh* had begun a transformation from an element of popular piety into a practice espoused by the elite.

1.3 *Qajar Period Patronage: Rapid Development of the Genre*

The Qajar period was a hugely important phase for the development of *taʿziyeh* as a genre. During this period *taʿziyeh* remained popular with the masses but also came into vogue with the upper echelons of society and enjoyed not only royal but widespread elite patronage. Abundant sources describe the grand spectacles of this period, attended by rich and poor alike. The memoires of the Qajar royals and their entourage, together with the travelogues of foreign visitors to Iran, have been widely used by scholars to paint a vivid picture of these performances and the social culture surrounding them.[43]

Royal patronage began under Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shāh (r. 1212–1250/ 1797–1834), during the early 13th/19th century. He entrusted the overseeing of the Muḥarram mourning ceremonies and *taʿziyeh* performances to prominent members of his court and he himself attended the performances on Tāsūʿāʾ and ʿĀshūrāʾ (the 9th and 10th of Muḥarram). The nobility of his time followed suit and, whether through personal religious commitment or a desire to increase their

42 William Francklin, *Observations Made on a Tour from Bengal to Persia, in the Years 1786–7* (Calcutta: Stuart and Cooper, 1788), 100–01. It merits comment that in Anglophone scholarship Francklin's description of these performances is often cited as the oldest extant *taʿziyeh* spectator account, not mentioning Niebuhr's evidence from 22 years earlier. A possible reason for this is that the English translation Niebuhr's memoires have been abridged and his description of the *taʿziyeh* on Kharq omitted.

43 See for example Humāyūnī, *Taʿziyeh dar Īrān*, 76–141; Floor, *Theater*, 132–203.

public influence through the display of such commitment, they sponsored many performances during the first ten days of Muḥarram.[44] Staging a performance could also be a way of making a religious offering and seeking divine intervention for a particular issue. For example, a programme of lavish performances staged in the courtyard of Mīrzā Abū al-Ḥasan Khān Shīrāzī, foreign minister to Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shāh, and attended by Chodzko in Muḥarram of 1249/1833, was dedicated to calling for the healing of his sick son.[45]

Sponsorship of *taʿziyeh* gave distinguished individuals the opportunity to show both their piety and their wealth; whilst initially many such performances took place in the internal courtyards of private houses, sometimes tented for the event, the newfound interest of the elite sparked a boom in patronage of architecture. *Tekiyehs*, spaces designed to house the art form (also called *ḥusainiyahs*), were constructed in cities across Iran.[46] The establishment of a professional circuit went hand in hand with this development. Whilst in earlier periods some of those delivering (and indeed composing) the *taʿziyeh* plays may have been remunerated for their efforts, under Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shāh we begin to have accounts that explicitly attest the involvement of paid performers.[47] Indeed, the two most important results of the patronage boom, those which facilitated the sophistication of the genre during the Qajar period, were the construction of *tekiyehs* to house the performances and the creation of a professional circuit.

A bustling professional circuit is already evident under Muḥammad Shāh Qājār (r. 1250–1264 /1835–1848). Russian orientalist Il'ya Nikolaevitch Berezin, who spent Muḥarram of 1259/1843 in Tehran, records as many as 58 *tekiyehs* (many of them temporary structures) across the city, and actors moving between them.[48] A decade later, only a few years after the accession of Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh Qājār (r. 1264–1313 /1848–1896), there were 54 purpose-built *tekiyehs* in Tehran alone. Indeed, Nāṣer al-Dīn's reign of almost 50 years would see the peak of *taʿziyeh*'s enjoyment of patronage and the construction of the most famous example of the architecture trend, Tekiyeh-ye Dawlat in Tehran. This

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44 Bulūkbāshī, *Taʿziyeh*, 93–94.

45 Chodzko, *Théatre persan*, xxi.

46 For this architectural trend see Bulūkbāshī, *Taʿziyeh*, 93–95; and Gobineau, *Les religions*, 381–403.

47 For example, in Chodzko's account of the performances staged by Mīrzā Abū al-Ḥasan Khān Shīrāzī he notes the patron being responsible for paying the actors. Chodzko, *Théatre persan*, xxii.

48 Ilya Nikolaevitch Bérézine, *Voyage en Perse du Nord*, trans. Jacqueline Calmard-Compa and Jean Calmard (Paris: Geuthner, 2011), 235.

was an elaborate arena style *tekiyeh* with a capacity of several thousand.[49] It was commissioned by Nāṣer al-Dīn in 1283/1866–7, with the first *taʿziyeh* performance being staged there in 1291/1874–5.[50]

The account of Belgian traveller Carla Serena, a spectator at Tekiyeh-ye Dawlat in 1295/1878, provides a vivid description of the building and the performers' creative use of its space. She also discusses engineering difficulties relating to the (unfulfilled) desire to build a roof over the arena, including the anecdote that Nāṣer al-Dīn wished his royal *tekiyeh* to resemble the Albert Hall that he had seen on a visit to London.[51] This idea is much repeated in the literature but is problematic, not least because Nāṣer al-Dīn visited London in 1873, several years after commissioning his *tekiyeh*.

Taʿziyeh plays are delivered "in the round", with the audience encircling the performance area. Although subject to some variation, the design of the *tekiyehs* that sprang up during this period reflects this – and was perhaps influential in consolidating this and other aspects of the plays' delivery. *Tekiyehs* feature a central *sakū* (platform) from which the majority of the dialogue is performed. Depending on the scale of the *tekiyeh* there is often a sandy track around the *sakū*, used for equestrian scenes and to represent battle scenes and journeys (with the performers circling the stage to indicate travelling or the passage of time). Around the *sakū* there is floor space for audience seating, in some cases encircled by graded stone benches, and surrounded by several levels of loggias, often for the use of the more affluent audience members.[52] The circular configuration of the audience is important. It allows audience members to participate in representing a key aspect of the Karbala narrative: the siege. During the performance of the main episodes those playing the besieged party remain on the stage at all times. The *tekiyeh* does not have wings; inside

49 It is argued that Nāṣer al-Dīn's great interest in *taʿziyeh* was due to more than his personal religiosity and keen interest in the arts. It is said that his public embracing of this and other aspects of popular Shiʿi devotional culture gave him a weapon with which he could triumph over the clerics, who otherwise had the monopoly on legalistic Shiʿism. Abbas Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar and the Iranian Monarchy, 1831–1896* (London: New York: I.B. Tauris, 1997), 434–35. For further discussion of the wave of elite patronage see Humāyūnī, *Taʿziyeh dar Īrān*, 130–33; Chelkowski, "Popular Entertainment," 772–73. For Tekiyeh-ye Dawlat, as a means of staging royal power, see Babak Rahimi, "Takkiyeh Dowlat: The Qajar Theater State," in *Performing the Iranian State: Visual Culture and Representations of Iranian Identity*, ed. Staci Gem Scheiwiller (London: Anthem Press, 2013).

50 Nāṣerbakht, *Adabiyāt-e īrānī*, 14.

51 Carla Serena, *Hommes et choses en Perse* (Paris: G. Charpentier et Compagnie, 1883), 172–76.

52 For more on traditional *tekiyeh* design see Beyżāʾī, *Namāyesh*, 124–26.

there is no space that is "offstage". The *sakū* is the camp, with the audience representing the legions of the enemy. Beeman discusses how this is at once simple and sophisticated, situating the audience in two different time frames, that of the battle and of the performance; they are not only mourners for the injustice endured by the martyrs but are implicated in its infliction.[53] While this is fascinating, and the audience configuration certainly lends itself effectively to the portrayal of the siege, it is difficult to be sure that the audience members were (or are) aware of representing the aggressors.

The *taʿziyeh* genre reached its maximum popularity during Nāṣer al-Dīn's reign, surpassing its original commemorative purpose and taking on the function of entertainment. Performances were not confined to Muḥarram and the following month of Ṣafar but took place throughout the year.[54] Many talented *taʿziyeh-khānān* from the regions travelled to work at Tekiyeh-ye Dawlat and similar, newly built venues in cities such as Shiraz, Isfahan and Kashan. In the chapters that follow, as we look at the evolution of the central episodes, we will see a huge flurry of innovation during this period. From the reign of Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shāh, new demand had seen the number of plays in the repertoire steadily grow.[55] The fixed and purpose-built venues allowed the performers to hone their stage craft, developing the stylistics of their delivery. The increased frequency of performances allowed some to dedicate themselves to this genre full time and afforded them ample opportunity to test new material, gauging its effectiveness with their audiences. The new venues and professional circuit also had implications for the dissemination of influences. When looking at the development of the main episodes we see the introduction of new characters and scenes; some of these are permanently incorporated and are found in renditions of the play from across Iran within a few decades. It is likely that the swapping and borrowing of dramatic material that took place between performers and composers from different regions as they rubbed shoulders in the new *tekiyehs* – hubs for exchange – was influential in this process.

53 For further discussion see William Beeman, "Cultural Dimensions of Performance Conventions in Iranian Ta'ziyeh," in Chelkowski ed. *Taʿziyeh: Ritual and Drama*, 26–28. Some *tekiyehs* (like Tekiyeh-ye Dawlat) have a separate smaller stage outside of the sand track and in front of one of the porticos. This is used largely for representing scenes external to the siege, such as Yazīd's court in Damascus. For an account of such use in performance see Serena, *Hommes et choses*, 190–94.

54 Chelkowski, "Popular Entertainment," 773. On how the repertoire reflects the shift towards entertainment see Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī, *Mabānī-ye shabīh-khānī*, 34.

55 *Mabānī-ye shabīh-khānī*, 33.

Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh was assassinated in 1313/1896 and a *taʿziyeh*, composed in his honour, played in Tekiyeh-ye Dawlat to commemorate him.[56] Royal patronage of *taʿziyeh* dwindled after this point, partly due to Nāṣer al-Dīn's successors being burdened with financial challenges and growing calls for political reform. Nonetheless, state sponsored performances went on until the beginning of the Constitutional Revolution 1323–29/1905–11. Whilst *taʿziyeh* fell out of favour with the elite, and many of the large *tekiyehs* closed their doors, it remained popular with the masses.[57]

1.4 *Restructuring of the Tradition: a Return to the Villages*

The subsequent decades are often referred to as a period of decline for the *taʿziyeh*, and it is true that the tradition faced less favourable conditions; Iran passing from Qajar to Pahlavi rule ushered in half a century of restrictions and sporadic prohibitions. Despite having participated as a performer in Muḥarram processions as head of the Cossack Brigades, after taking the throne Reẓā Shāh Pahlavī (r. 1304–20 SH/1925–41) steadily scaled back and curtailed the mourning rituals. Then, *taʿziyeh* performances and other Muḥarram observances were prohibited in the early 1930s, as part of the new shah's programme of modernising reforms.[58] Tekiyeh-ye Dawlat was demolished as part of this drive;[59] but while this certainly represented a reversal of fortunes, what happened to the *taʿziyeh* tradition was much more nuanced than a simple decline. Rather, it was a restructuring – a restructuring that had implications for the further evolution of the repertoire: the content of the main episodes did not undergo any major development, but new types of episodes emerged.

During the last decades of the Qajar dynasty's reign, given the drastically reduced market for *taʿziyeh* performances, many professional players who had been based at the large *tekiyehs* in the cities took to touring the villages. They began to compose new plays dedicated to the martyrdom narratives of the descendants of the Holy Family, the "*emāmzādeh-hā*", whose shrines were

56 For the events surrounding Nāṣer al-Dīn's assassination see Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, 440–44. For a translation of the Cerulli Collection version of this play see Peter J. Chelkowski, "Majlis-i Shâhinshâh-i Îrân Nâsir al-Dîn Shah," in *Qajar Iran: Political, Social and Cultural Change, 1800–1925*, ed. Edmund Bosworth and Carole Hillenbrand (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983).

57 Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh-khānī: dowreh-ye Qājār*, 195–96.

58 Kamran Scott Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shiʿi Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran* (Seattle; University of Washington Press, 2004) 49–53. For an account of how the reforms affected the performance landscape in the cities, with not only *taʿziyeh* but most types of storytelling being subject to restrictions, see Floor, *Theater*, 103–06.

59 Malekpour, *The Islamic Drama*, 15–18.

in the localities that they visited.[60] Furthermore, after the prohibition, the professional groups touring the countryside found it easier to evade enforcement of the restrictions if they played outwith the Muḥarram period. To sustain this, and to avoid police shut-downs and the objections of local clerics (some of whom disapproved of their performances), they composed new plays treating more diverse subject matter. This included more treatment of historical figures and myth, with less focus on martyrdom narratives.[61] It is said that many of the performances staged during the prohibition were dignified and powerful, perhaps even better than the extravagant performances of Tekiyeh-ye Dawlat.[62]

The approach of Muḥammad Reẓā Shāh Pahlavī (r. 1320–57 SH/ 1941–79) to Muḥarram rituals was much more nuanced than that of his father, oscillating between strategic sponsorship of certain events, patchworks of restrictions, and sporadic outright prohibitions, depending on the political climate. The extent to which these restrictions were enforced, or, indeed, enforceable, is unclear, but implementation was the responsibility of local authorities and, thus, is unlikely to have been uniform.[63] The strongholds of *taʿziyeh* during this period were certainly rural. *Taʿziyeh* proved particularly robust in places where the tradition was already longstanding, such as the areas surrounding Tafresh, Kashan and Qazvin. It was during the reign of the second Pahlavi monarch that Enrico Cerulli served as ambassador to Iran and began the project of gathering his extensive script collection. That Hānībāl and Shariyʿatī Ẕawq ʿAlī-Shāh, the local agents who worked on its assembly, were able to source such a vast amount of material, suggests that the tradition had resilient networks, despite the restrictions. The Cerulli Collection has the potential to offer a lens through which future studies could glimpse the tradition as it stood in the mid 1950s – a period in its history that is otherwise difficult to reconstruct.

It is noteworthy that, in terms of large urban spectacles, what *were* permitted were *taʿziyeh* plays staged as displays of an indigenous performance form. The performances at the Shiraz Arts festival in 1967 and 1976 are such examples: this festival, sponsored by the queen, Shāhbānū Faraḥ Pahlavī (r. 1338–57 SH/ 1959–79) presented *taʿziyeh* to an audience with a sizeable contingent of

60 *Taʿziyeh-ye Shāh-cherāgh* is a prominent example of this trend. Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī, *Mabānī-ye shabīh-khānī*, 42.

61 Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh-khānī: dowreh-ye Qājār*, 119. For a historical study of the attitudes of Shiʿi clerics towards the *taʿziyeh* tradition see Moslem Nādʿalīzādeh, *Shabīh az negāh-e faqīh: taʿziyeh dar ārā-ye faqīhān va ʿālemān-e shīʿeh* (Tehran: Khaimeh, 1391 SH).

62 Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh-khānī: dowreh-ye Qājār*, 118.

63 For further discussion see Aghaie, *Martyrs of Karbala*, 58–66; and Chelkowski, “Popular Entertainment,” 774–775.

international theatre practitioners and scholars. The performances were not held during the months of Muḥarram and Ṣafar, and were spectacles, packaging *taʿziyeh* as one of Iran's national performance forms, as opposed to mourning rituals.[64] The earlier efforts of anthropologists such as Hānībāl, who sought to record the tradition's features, gathering its material artefacts for categorization as museum exhibits, may well have inspired the showcasing at Shiraz. Both are now part of the survival story of the *taʿziyeh* tradition and have influenced how it is conceived.

The era of the Islamic Republic has provided relatively favourable conditions for *taʿziyeh*, particularly for the performance of the martyrdom narratives. Such performances are widespread and well-attended during Muḥarram. It is noteworthy that the locations of the modern hubs of *taʿziyeh* reflect the restructuring that the tradition saw during the Pahlavi period; an inordinately large number of these performances take place in small rural villages, many of which boast large *tekiyehs*.[65] As opposed to having entered a decline, the process that the tradition underwent from the late Qajar period onwards was a restructuring that included a return to its humble, and very probably rural, origins.

2 Those Involved: *Taʿziyeh*'s Many Players and Their Cultural Milieu

Returning focus to the Qajar period, we will now consider those who contributed to the tradition and their societal connections. The discussion of performers and composers will largely concern men. However, Qajar women were important participants in the tradition as a whole, and I will begin by looking at their contribution. One of the major results of this study is that during the genre's heyday, as the content of the main episodes developed, there was an expansion in the treatment of the female characters. As I will show in the following chapters, much more attention came to be given to their experience, including a significant increase in inter-female dialogues. This makes consideration of the contribution of women to the tradition all the more relevant.

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64 Randle-Bent, "'Indigenous Avant-Gardes'."

65 The village of Baraghan in Alborz is an example of one of *taʿziyeh*'s rural strongholds with a longstanding tradition. For accounts of two performances there during Muḥarram of 1439/2017 and further discussion of the modern-day tradition, including the distribution of performances see Deacon, "*Taʿziyeh-khani* in Iranian Communities."

2.1 *Women as Audients, Patrons, Performers and Copyists*

The women of Qajar Iran contributed to the *taʿziyeh* tradition in a variety of ways. Perhaps the most widely documented of these was their involvement as a highly engaged and vocal audience at the large-scale performances delivered by all-male casts. However, there were also performances delivered by women in private spaces for female-only audiences, and women contributed significantly as patrons.

The memoires of Mūnes al-Dawlah, maid servant to Nāṣer al-Dīn's favourite wife Anīs al-Dawlah, provide a colourful account of *taʿziyeh-ye zanāneh* (women's *taʿziyeh*); she gives a general description of this tradition and appears to have witnessed some performances herself.[66] Her account confirms that the tradition thrived during Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh's reign, and suggests that it had started somewhat earlier. She explains that the performers were female *rawżeh-khānān* and professional storytellers or other entertainers. The women played all characters without veiling; their performances included use of weapons such as swords, and at times an equestrian element. Women also played the music for these performances, sometimes accompanied by eunuch musicians. Indeed, the performers were apparently taught their parts by eunuchs, who had first been instructed by Muʿīn al-Bukāʾ (director of the royal *taʿziyeh* performances). Mūnes al-Dawlah explains that, while some of the *rawżeh-khānān* could read, most women were illiterate and thus many recited their lines from memory as opposed to reading them during the performance,[67] which was common practice amongst their male counterparts. One woman whom she describes as very literate ("*khailī ba savād u ketāb-khān*") was a certain daughter of Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shāh who directed such female performances. She is described as a formidable figure, marching around the stage conducting the musicians and directing the performers with an ebony cane.[68] Mūnes al-Dawlah does not give this director's name but other accounts say she was Qamar al-Salṭanah.[69] Indeed, Qamar al-Salṭanah is mentioned by Mūnes al-Dawlah for having put

66 Mūnes al-Dawlah, *Khāterāt-e Mūnes al-Dawlah nadīmeh-ye ḥaramserā-ye Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh*, ed. Sīrūs Saʿdvandiyān (Tehran: Zarrīn, [1345 SH] 1389 SH), 96–108. Mūnes al-Dawlah first published these memoires as a series of articles in the magazine *Zan-e rūz* in 1345 SH/ 1966–67 CE, in which she states that she is 95 or 96 years old at the time of writing. Ibid., 3–5.

67 Ibid., 96–98.

68 Ibid., 104–05.

69 Beyżāʾī, *Namāyesh*, 151–52; Floor, *Theater*, 188; Negar Mottahedeh, "Taʿziyeh: A Twist of History in Everyday Life," in *The Women of Karbalā: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shiʿi Islam*, ed. Kamran Scott Aghaie (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2005), 35.

on ten days of women's *taʿziyeh* every year at her residence. Large scale performances were also hosted by Munīr al-Salṭanah, wife of Nāṣer al-Dīn and mother of Kāmrān Mīrzā Nāyeb al-Salṭanah. However, we are told that the very finest performances were those staged in the shah's *andarūn* (women's quarters), with the daughter of Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shāh coming to direct.[70]

In addition to the martyrdom narratives, performed by the women during Muḥarram, plays from amongst the wider *taʿziyeh* repertoire treating topics such as marriage (popular due to their focus on female characters) were put on at different times of year. *ʿArūsī-ye Belqais u Sulaimān* (The Wedding of Belqais and Soloman), *Yūsuf u Zulaikhā* (Joseph and Zulaikhā), and *ʿArūsī raftan-e Ḥażrat-e Fāṭemeh* (Fāṭemeh Goes to a Wedding) were some of the plays performed in the month of Rabiyʿ al-Awwal, after the mourning season was over. The last mentioned is a satirical piece, and something of a "Cinderella" story. It sees the pagan women of the Quraish tribe convert to Islam, but first ridicules them by juxtaposing their absurdly opulent taste with the humble beauty of Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā. Initially reluctant to attend a wedding as she lacks the necessary finery, Fāṭemeh is dressed by the *houris* of heaven. Mūnes al-Dawlah gives a detailed account of a performance of this episode, including farcical elements like some women of the Quraish wearing saddles on their backs and entering on bare-backed donkeys.[71] Further to this, she gives a vivid account of the performance of another play, *ʿArūs-e Ḥażrat-e Fāṭemeh* (Fāṭemeh's Bride) staged every year at the house of Munīr al-Salṭanah to mark the date of Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā's birth.[72]

Despite their keen interest in these plays, it is not clear whether women were involved in the *taʿziyeh* tradition as composers. However, amongst the collections surveyed for this study we find evidence of at least one female copyist. Interestingly, it is from the Zand period. The play *Zan-e Zuhrī* (Zuhrī's Wife), dated 1198/1784, bears the names of two copyists.[73] One of these is a woman,

70 Mūnes al-Dawlah, *Khāterāt*, 106–07. For more on women of the Qajar royal family as patrons of *taʿziyeh* see Kamran Scott Aghaie, "The Gender Dynamics of Moharram Symbols and Rituals in the Latter Years of Qajar Rule," in *The Women of Karbala*, ed. Aghaie, 57–58.

71 Mūnes al-Dawlah, *Khāterāt*, 99, 104. Also see Floor, *Theater*, 189.

72 Mūnes al-Dawlah, *Khāterāt*, 106–08. In modern Persian the word "*ʿarūs*" denotes the bride of one's son, broadly translating as "daughter-in-law." Mūnes al-Dawlah describes the performance of this play being accompanied by a ritual in which a local orphan girl was adorned as a bride and celebrated by the women. Then, after the performance, they organised for her to be wed and provided lodgings and other necesities for the young couple.

73 The play's main theme is the merits of weeping for the tribulations of Ḥusain. It includes a miracle and some comedic dialogues. For the full script see Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 11*, 91–118.

the sister of a well-known *taʿziyeh-khān* of the time. Her name, Khānum ʿEzzat Nesā, is written on the bottom of Zainab's script, both in disconnected letters and their respective numbers according to the Abjad system.[74] The extent to which women were involved as copyists is not easy to ascertain, not least because many copyists did not sign their work; however, this is unlikely to be an isolated occurrence.

Furthermore, the women who contributed to the *taʿziyeh* as patrons were not only from among the royal family. Amongst the documents that are available on the wonderful digital archive *Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran* we find many examples of the wills, settlements and endowment deeds of Qajar women in which they make provisions for the "*taʿziyeh* of Imam Ḥusain". In some cases the type of ritual to be conducted is not specified and the term could denote something other than devotional drama.[75] However, the endowment deed of a certain Shāh-Parvar Khānum from the village of Qalat near Shiraz, dated 1271/1854–5, states that the revenue of several of her properties in the village should be used to provide for *taʿziyeh* performers, stipulating how the ongoing administration of this provision should be organised over subsequent generations.[76] A further entry in the archive dated 1321/1903–4 concerns a Vāliyah Ḥusn Jahān Khānum endowing a village in Kurdistan named Jameh Shuran for the performance of mourning ceremonies including *taʿziyeh-dārī* (sometimes used as a synonym of *taʿziyeh-khānī*).[77] Also, the will of a Gawharī Khānum, dated 1341/1922–3, charges her daughter as executor to sell a share of certain properties in the Hamadan area to pay for religious rites after her death, including ten nights of *rawżeh-khānī* and *taʿziyeh-dārī* for Imam Ḥusain.[78] Of course, bequests to cover the costs of *taʿziyeh* performances was also made by Qajar men. Nonetheless, patronage stands out as an important way in which Qajar women helped to sustain the tradition.

It was by no means only propertied women who played an important role in the flourishing of the *taʿziyeh*. The role of the women of the lower classes was

74 Ibid., 89–90.

75 Some of these documents indicate that women's interest in sponsoring such rituals predated *taʿziyeh*'s rise to popularity amongst the elite during the reign of Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shāh Qājār. For example, in 1208/1794 an Umm Salmah endowed properties in the Yazd area for purposes including mourning rituals during Muḥarram and Ṣafar. See Harvard University, "Umm Salmah's endowment, 1794," *Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran*, available online at: http://www.qajarwomen.org/en/items/13122A28.html (accessed June 17th, 2024).

76 "Shah Parvar Khanum's endowment, 1855," *WWiQI*, available online at: http://www.qajarwomen.org/en/items/14130A12.html (accessed June 17th, 2021).

77 "Valiyah Husn Jahan Khanum's endowment, 1903," *WWiQI*, available online at: http://www.qajarwomen.org/en/items/13118A18.html (accessed June 17th, 2021).

78 "Gawhari Khanum's will, 1923," *WWiQI*, available online at: http://www.qajarwomen.org/en/items/13106A11.html (accessed June 17th, 2021).

equally, if not more, important: they attended these performances in multitudes, outnumbering their male counterparts. ʿAbdullāh Mustawfī, administrator to the Qajar royals, recalls that *taʿziyeh* was particularly in demand among women and that they made up the majority of its audience.[79] The memoires of ʿAin al-Salṭanah, Nāṣer al-Dīn's nephew, recall Tehran's public places during Muḥarram thronging with women who moved from one performance venue to another throughout the day. He claims that they outnumbered the male audience members seven or eight to one. While this may be a slight exaggeration, many more such accounts from contemporary witnesses report women as the majority in the *taʿziyeh* audience.[80]

Women's keen participation in mourning ceremonies was certainly not new in the Qajar period. Numerous accounts from the Safavid period attest the active participation of women in public rituals. One example is the aforementioned letter by de Montheron, that tells of five or six hundred women crouching in front of the *rawżeh-khānī* recital for the common people in Isfahan's main square in Muḥarram of 1051/1641.[81] In the Qajar period we hear many reports of such women not only crowding into the *tekiyehs* but being a very active and vocal audience. The aforementioned Berezin who spent Muḥarram of 1259/1843 in Tehran describes the seating arrangement of a traditional *tekiyeh*, explaining that the performances were open to all, but whilst the elite watched from richly decorated loggias, the common people sat on the floor around the *sakū* segregated, of course, by gender. Women of the lower classes were therefore physically close to the players, constituting what we would think of in modern terms as the "front row." Berezin stresses the popularity of *taʿziyeh* with ordinary women, claiming that they were its most avid fans and that at least 1000 of them attended every performance. He comments on their enthusiastic engagement, their sobs at times rivalling the voices of the performers and being especially audible during scenes without dialogue. Giving the impression of overcrowding, he tells of the women in the pit, accompanied by their children, smoking *qaliyāns* (water pipes) and squabbling amongst themselves to the extent that they sometimes came to blows.[82] Such accounts show that because women of the lower classes attended in vast numbers, and sat close to the stage in the *tekiyeh*, they became the main audience to whom

79 ʿAbdullāh Mustawfī, *Sharḥ-e zendegānī-ye man: tārīkh-e ejtemāʿiy va edārī-ye dowreh-ye qājāriyeh az Āqā Muḥammad Khān ta ākhar-e Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Tehran: Zuvvār, [1341] 1343 SH), 288.

80 For ʿAīn al- Salṭanah's comments and those of others see Floor, *Theater*, 187–88. Also see Aghaie, "Gender Dynamics," 55–56.

81 Calmard, "Shiʿi Rituals," 174.

82 Bérézine, *Voyage*, 235–238.

the *taʿziyeh-khānān* directly delivered their performances – an important contribution to the tradition indeed.

Accounts of densely packed and active female audiences are echoed in the reports of other witnesses. Chodzko's spectator account from the 1830s tells of the women in the *tekiyeh* revealing their dishevelled hair from beneath their veils to show their grief during a moment of great intensity in a speech by a *rawżeh-khān*. He also recalls the female audients quarrelling and not being shy to strike each other.[83] Lady Mary Woulfe Sheil who spectated at the Prime Minister's *tekiyeh* in Tehran in Muḥarram of 1266/1849, recalls several thousand people being in attendance, with "women of humble condition" present in "great numbers" and seated on the bare ground of the pit. She again reports physical fights breaking out between them as they jostled for space before the start of the performance, and explains that they were kept in check by "*ferrâches* … armed with long sticks." She tells of the fervour of the audience being such that the *Shemr-khān* (performer playing Ḥusain's killer) had trouble making his exit, in particular due to the fractious women.[84] Gobineau also comments on the impassioned participation of the female audience, mentioning their joining in the *sīneh-zanī* (rhythmic chest beating) and chanting, as processions of bare-chested men circled the *tekiyeh* in a ritualised expression of mourning prior to the performance of the day's episode.[85]

Indeed, it has been argued that the Muḥarram commemorations and their associated narratives offered women, particularly those of humble economic means, a source of empowerment. In a practical sense, attendance at these events was an opportunity to socialise: particularly for those from conservative families, whose movement would have been limited, it provided a legitimate reason to be in public.[86] But there was potentially more to it than that. The story of Fāṭemeh at the Quraishi wedding showed that a woman's real worth should be determined by her piety, not her worldly riches;[87] the model of

83 Chodzko, *Théatre persan*, xxvi–xxix.

84 Mary Leonora Woulfe Sheil, *Glimpses of Life and Manners in Persia* (London: John Murray, 1856), 126–28.

85 Gobineau, *Les religions*, 377. These women did not process around the *tekiyeh*, instead participating from their seated positions. Meanwhile, Mūnes al-Dawlah, gives a fascinating account of a female *sīneh-zanī* procession that took place in the seclusion of Nāṣer al-Dīn's *andarūn*. She describes the bare-headed and footed noble women and their servants led by Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shāh's daughter, who scattered straw and sang dirges, processing between different quarters beating their chests and carrying a bejewelled *ʿalam* (a standard, bearing icons relating to Karbala). *Khāterāt*, 106.

86 Aghaie, "Gender Dynamics," 47, 60.

87 Aghaie, "Gender Dynamics," 54–55.

Zainab who raised her voice against the injustice of the enemy (in particular that of the caliph Yazid), showed that it was correct – a moral duty even – for a woman to challenge a man's authority, regardless of his social status, if his behaviour were impious.[88] A potential window of opportunity for transgression, albeit a small one, opened during Muḥarram.

Seated around the *sakū*, opposite their male counterparts and greater than them in number, these emboldened women constituted the direct audience to whom the *taʿziyeh-khānān* delivered their performances. It is their reaction to the material on stage that would have been most apparent to the players, giving them the most immediate reflection of the effectiveness of this or that scene or innovation. Women of higher social standing were also present, but watching from the comfort of their loggias in which they were shielded from the eye by a gauze curtain. Their reactions would not have been discernible to the performers.[89] Meanwhile, the response of the women of the lower classes allowed the players to hone their craft and develop their repertoire.

Interestingly, in the development of the main episodes during this period we witness not only an expansion of inter-female dialogues but also further focus being given to the experience of the women from amongst Ḥusain's wider household. There is an increase in the treatment of individuals such as Qāsem and Akbar's mothers, and Feżżeh (Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā's elderly maid servant) who are revered due to their connection to the *ahl-e bait* but unlike Fāṭemeh and Zainab are not of Prophet Muḥammad's bloodline. We also see new scenes added that involve female characters of lower social standing, and will explore these matters further in chapters 4 to 6.

2.2 *Male Composers, Directors and Performers*

While it is beyond the scope of this study to treat the topic of *taʿziyeh-sarāyandegān* (composers), *taʿziyeh-gardānān* (directors) and *taʿziyeh-khānān* (performers) in any great depth, some preliminary information about them will facilitate the discussion of their works. An initial important point is that in many cases the same individuals have multiple roles within the tradition,

88 Illustrating this point, Aghaie presents a number of examples of women fighting not only each other for space in the *tekiyeh*, but their husbands or masters for the right to attend. Ibid., 55, 58–59.

89 Sheil, who spectated from such a loge described it as being covered by a "thick felt carpet, pierced with small holes" in order that the women could see out but no one see in. Carla Serena who spectated from the loge of Anīs al-Dawlah, described a similar curtain of brocaded gauze. Sheil, *Glimpses*, 127; Serena, *Hommes et choses*, 175.

composing and directing, directing and performing.[90] We have already seen some examples of this; Ḥusain ʿAlī Khān, the *taʿziyeh-gardān* from whom Chodzko purchased his scripts, was known both as a director and composer,[91] and Hāshem Fayyāż who assembled a collection of works by the composer Mīr-e ʿAzā-ye Kāshānī was himself both a *taʿziyeh* director and performer.[92] Furthermore, like many vocations, this tradition runs in families. For example, Mīrzā Muḥammad Taqī, a renowned *taʿziyeh-gardān* active under Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh, was the father of the aforementioned Muʿīn al-Bukāʾ, the famous director of performances at Tekiyeh-ye Dawlat. Muʿīn al-Bukāʾ's son, known as Nāẓem al-Bukāʾ, worked as his father's assistant.[93] The involvement of generations of a family in the tradition can be very long-standing. For example, Āqā Bābā, the composer of the Zand collection version of *Bāzār-e Shām*, is an ancestor of a present day *taʿziyeh-khān* whose family have participated generation after generation.[94]

The authorship of many (if not most) *taʿziyeh* plays is anonymous, but the tradition does have its famous composers. Some have been discovered by scholars because of a *takhalluṣ* (nom de plume) appearing in their works, while others were famous in their time. The copyist of the earliest extant *taʿziyeh* script (*Ghārat-e khaimeh-hā*, dated 1136/1724) gives the composer as Aḥmad Mullā Muḥammad ʿAlī Vāʿeẓ Khānsārī; his *takhalluṣ* is "Fanāʾī". The copyist states that the author was "late" by the time of writing.[95] Fanāʾī was thus a Safavid era composer. A number of the scripts belonging to the Zand collection are composed by a Sayyed Mīr-Zain al-ʿĀbedīn, from the village of Gheynar in Markazi province, whose *takhalluṣ* is "Nāṭeq."[96] Poet Muḥammad Taqī Nūrī (1201–1263/ 1785–1847) is known to have composed *taʿziyeh* plays, and other well-known composers include "Mīr-e Anjem", Mīr-e ʿAzā-ye Kāshānī's son "Mīr-e Gham", and to a lesser extent his grandson, Muṣṭafā.[97] The Cerulli Collection features a number of manuscripts attributed to Mīr-e ʿAzā and his

90 For more on the different roles within the *taʿziyeh* tradition, their requirements, and the interplay between them see Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī, *Mabānī-ye shabīh-khānī*, 145–61.

91 Beyżāʾī, *Namāyesh*, 134.

92 For a fascinating interview with Fayyāż see Kāẓemī, *Mīr-e ʿAzā*, 51–72.

93 Such was the legacy of these two figures, that after them the titles of Muʿīn al-Bukāʾ and Nāẓem al-Bukāʾ went into general usage to denote a *taʿziyeh* director and his assistant. Beyżāʾī, *Namāyesh*, 134–35.

94 Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 11*, 15.

95 Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 13*, 13–14.

96 For a collection of his works see Mehdī Daryāī, *Daftar-e taʿziyeh 14* (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Namāyesh, 1396 SH). Also see Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 11*, 127–49.

97 For Mīr-e Anjem's collected works see Muḥammad Ḥusain Nāṣerbakht, *Daftar-e taʿziyeh 8* (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Namāyesh, 1386 SH); *Daftar-e taʿziyeh 9* (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e

descendants.[98] Works attributed to Mīr-e ʿAzā are included in my analysis of *The Martyrdom of Qāsem* and *Bāzār-e Shām*.

Muṣṭafā-ye Kāshānī, known as "Mīr-e ʿAzā", was a prolific composer. Little is known about his life, but what is known speaks to the limitations of becoming a composer under the auspices of the royal family. Word of his talent having spread, he was invited to Tehran during Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh's reign. However, he later fell out of favour with the shah because he wrote a *taʿziyeh* play, *Zuvvār-e Turkmān* (The Turkman Pilgrims), that featured a convoy of pilgrims being attacked and robbed by a group of bandits whilst on the road to the shrine of Imam Reżā in Mashhad. Apparently, Nāṣer al-Dīn took offence at the way the play highlighted the lack of security on Iran's roads, and Mīr-e ʿAzā was dismissed after its performance.[99]

With regards to the identities and lives of the Qajar era *taʿziyeh* performers, a limited amount of information is available. They are known according to the roles that they played: *emām-khān*, *Shemr-khān*, *zanāneh-khān* (player of female roles), *ʿAbbās-khān*, and so on. While there was a small amount of flexibility – for example, a performer who played Shemr could also play Ebn-e Saʿd or an *emām-khān* play the Prophet Muḥammad – they were generally fixed in one role. This was due to the physical appearance and vocal skills required for that role but also the fact that their countenance came to be associated with a particular character. The performer's voice will have always been significant in determining the type of character he could play. In the *taʿziyeh* the antagonists declaim their lines whilst the protagonists sing theirs according to the modes of classical Persian music.[100] In the case of the *zanāneh-khānān* the vocal requirements will have been of paramount importance, as their costume of flowing black garments covered them from head to toe (including face and hands);[101] thus, besides stature, their physical appearance will have been of little concern.

The stories of some performers have been preserved in the memoirs of contemporary witnesses. Gobineau describes organised troops, each under the leadership of a director, that during Muḥarram would play from sunrise onwards, giving multiple performances each day in the different venues of a city. He recounts how a good looking 14- or 15-year-old boy with a good voice

Namāyesh, 1388 SH). For more on *taʿziyeh* composers, including other well-known figures see Humāyūnī, *Taʿziyeh dar Īrān*, 266–68.

98 Esmāʿīlī, *Fehrest-e dastnevīs-hā*, 26–27.

99 Kāẓemī, *Mīr-e ʿAzā*, 9.

100 Beeman, *Iranian Performance*, 96–98.

101 Mustawfī, *Sharḥ-e zendegānī*, 1, 289–90; Beyżāʾī, *Namāyesh*, 145–47.

(a perfect *ʿAlī Akbar* or *Qāsem-khān*) was the optimum *taʿziyeh* player. Such individuals were held in high esteem, earned what was considered a high wage, and were treated as "stars".[102] Mustawfī records that the aforementioned *taʿziyeh-gardān* Mīrzā Muḥammad Taqī scoured the country looking for the best performers to bring to Tehran. He tells of a Ḥājjī Mullā Ḥusain *zanāneh-khān* from a village near Saveh (Markazi Province), who left his farm every year for Tehran during the mourning season. He also mentions a *Shemr-khān* from Hamadan and a joke being made in the climactic play about Shemr's knife and cutting leather, due to Hamadan's fame as a leather centre. Some such performers became known to the king and received a stipend or perks such as reduction in taxes.[103] Other contemporary sources attest an established culture of professional *taʿziyeh* performance around Qazvin and in the Taleqan area (Alborz), whose participants both performed locally and travelled to Tabriz and Tehran for work.[104]

Mustawfī gives the impression that everyone went home after the close of the mourning season. Gobineau on the other hand mentions off-season work for the performers being irregular but sufficient to maintain them.[105] Furthermore, we know that by the end of Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh's reign there were troops of performers in Tehran who relied on this profession full time. This is evident from the fact that, as patronage in the urban centres dwindled, they resorted to touring the countryside.

We should conclude that there were both full and part-time *taʿziyeh* professionals. There was clearly some movement of performers to the cities during the season of high demand.[106] There will also have been those who stayed to perform in their home regions for a local audience, many of whom will have been amateur, giving the performance as an act of piety.[107] Those coming from the regions to work in the cities will have contributed to the development of

102 Gobineau, *Les religions*, 372–74. Also see Beyżāʾī, *Namāyesh*, 143. Serena also reports the busy schedule of the *taʿziyeh-khānān* and their movement between venues in Tehran in the 1870s. She describes them as "playing from sunrise to sundown and continuing after the evening meal." Serena, *Hommes et choses*, 181.

103 Mustawfī, *Sharḥ-e zendegānī*, 1, 290–91. For Ḥājjī Mullā Ḥusain, also see Beyżāʾī, *Namāyesh*, 143.

104 Floor, *Theater*, 165.

105 Gobineau, *Les religions*, 374.

106 Humāyūnī provides a list of the well-known *taʿziyeh-khānān* attached to certain performance venues in Shiraz and surrounding areas, many of whom were born in the mid-13th/19th century. *Taʿziyeh va taʿziyeh-khānī* (Tehran: Chapkhāneh-ye Bīst u panjum-e shahrīvar, 1354 SH), 82, 85; and *Taʿziyeh dar Īrān*, 458–69.

107 Chodzko, whilst mentioning paid actors in Tehran, notes that in the countryside the shepherds and peasants give the performances themselves. *Théatre persan*, xxii.

the genre by bringing with them local influences that may have resulted in innovations within the repertoire, and conversely by taking knowledge of the latest artistic developments home with them. However, we should also imagine that those dedicating themselves to the tradition full time, whether in rural or urban areas, will have been at the forefront of the art form, seeking to ensure the ongoing engagement of their audiences by continually renewing and refining their craft. Professional (or at least experienced) performers were involved in the composition of new verse to reinvigorate their parts and sometimes their improvisations during performances were so successful that they resulted in the editing of the script.[108] To understand their pool of creative influences, it is essential to consider the societal connections of the *taʿziyeh-khānān,* and in particular their links to other performance traditions.

2.3 *Connection to the Storytelling Traditions of* Naqqālī *and* Pardeh-dārī

The *taʿziyeh* has undoubtedly been influenced by the other verbal performance forms that existed in the milieu in which it developed. I have already made much mention of *rawżeh-khānī*, which existed alongside *taʿziyeh* in the programme of Muḥarram commemorations, with which it shares much narrative material, and that surely served as a source of inspiration to composers. However, to have a fuller picture of how the *taʿziyeh* repertoire evolved, we must also consider the influence of the storytelling traditions of *naqqālī* and *pardeh-dārī*. The importance of these traditions in shaping the *taʿziyeh* genre is recognised by other scholars,[109] and indeed it is argued that professional storytellers became involved in the *taʿziyeh* as performers during its early stages.[110] The contribution I make here is to give concrete examples of how these art forms (*pardeh-dārī* in particular) left their mark on the *taʿziyeh* repertoire, and to identify a certain societal connection between their practitioners and the *taʿziyeh* performers. I argue that the influence of *naqqālī* and *pardeh-dārī* on the *taʿziyeh* genre was not only due to the parallel existence of these performance forms but also to the contact between those involved. Whilst the art of storytelling has a long history in Iran, the temporal focus here is from the Safavid period onwards.

Naqqālī is a general term for storytelling but has come to denote a specific tradition. Although I discuss them separately, *pardeh-dārī* (also known as

108 Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh-khānī: dowreh-ye Qājār*, 558–61.

109 Beyżāʾī, *Namāyesh*, 121 and 28; Humāyūnī, *Taʿziyeh-khānī*, 24–26 and 28; Floor, *Theater*, 125.

110 Beyżāʾī, *Namāyesh*, 121; Anayatullah Shahidi, "Literary and Musical Developments in the Ta'ziyeh," Chelkowski ed. *Taʿziyeh: Ritual and Drama*, 42.

pardeh-khānī or *shamāyel-gardānī*) is essentially a branch of *naqqālī*. There is some crossover between these art forms but certain distinctions – in terms of subject matter, delivery, and the identities of the practitioners – can be made between them. The stories told by the *naqqālān* are largely from the epic literature, from the most famous example, *Shāh-nāmeh*, through the later epics such as *Garshāsp-nāmeh*, *Farāmarz-nāmeh, Bānū-Gushasp-nāmeh*, and prose works such as *Samak-e 'Ayyār* and *Eskandar-nāmeh*.[111] On special occasions the *naqqālān* may have made allusions to the Karbala tragedy at the end of their performances. Yet, although their repertoire included the exploits of religious heroes (as found in works such as *Abū-Muslem-nāmeh* or *Mukhṭar-nāmeh*), the material that they performed was not devotional in nature.[112] The *pardeh-dārī* tradition, on the other hand, specifically tells religious stories.

Pardeh-dārī emerged during the early Safavid period when dervish storytellers had a role in the propagation of Shi'ism.[113] The performer used a painted canvas backdrop, a *pardeh*, from which the sufferings of Imam Ḥusain and his supporters, and other religious stories, were narrated. Such canvases were often hung on a wall behind the *pardeh-dār* (performer), and at times were covered by a curtain which was pulled back little by little as the story was told. At other times the image supporting the performance had a wooden frame and was carried on a standard by the performer.[114] Whilst the use of a painted image generally distinguishes *pardeh-dārī* from *naqqālī*, the *naqqālān* also sometimes made use of a painted canvas when telling the stories of the epics. There is even evidence of some canvases used by storytellers in the late

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111 Most types of traditional storytelling performance were prohibited in the 1930s as part of Reżā Shāh's modernisation drive. However, narration of the *Shāh-nāmeh* continued to be tolerated due to its promotion of the concept of monarchy. Thus, the repertoire of the *naqqāls* was reduced to *Shāh-nāmeh-khānī*. For further discussion see Kumiko Yamamoto, "Naqqâli: Professional Iranian Storytelling," in *Oral Literature of Iranian Languages. Kurdish, Pashto, Balochi, Ossetic, Persian and Tajik: A History of Persian Literature*, ed. Philip. G. Kreyenbroek, Ulrich Marzolph, and Ehsan Yarshater (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010); Ulrich Marzolph, "Professional Storytelling (Naqqālī) in Qājar Iran," in *Orality and Textuality in the Iranian World: Patterns of Interaction across the Centuries*, ed. Julia Rubanovich (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

112 Suhailā Najm, *Hunar-e naqqālī dar Īrān* (Tehran: Mu'assaseh-ye ta'līf, tarjumeh va nashr-e āsar-e hunarī "Matn", 1390 SH), 23.

113 Yamamoto, "Naqqâli," 245. For a comprehensive introduction to *pardeh-dārī*, including the inception of picture narration in its Shi'i form and a study of the canvases see Najm, *Naqqālī*, 169–206.

114 Floor, *Theater*, 119–121. For *pardeh-dārī* as part of visual culture see Ingvild Flaskerud, *Visualizing Belief and Piety in Iranian Shiism* (London; New York: Continuum, 2010) 85–88.

FIGURE 2 The Battle of Karbala, a *pardeh* (storyteller's canvas) painted by ʿAbdullāh Muṣawwar, late 19th–early 20th cent. CE

13th/19th century featuring scenes from the martyrdoms of Ḥasan and Ḥusain together with the exploits of Rustam, the great hero of epic.[115]

In the case of both art forms, the performances were given in market places and in coffeehouses, with the performers collecting money from their audiences. They were solo performances (although a helper may have been present).[116] Because of the nature of their role in spreading the word of the Shiʿism, many *pardeh-dārān* were itinerant.[117] In the case of the *naqqālān* they told their stories in instalments, returning to the same place every day to tell some more and seeking to extend their stories for as long as possible in order to keep their pitch (and thus their income!).[118] If indeed the *naqqālān* became involved in *taʿziyeh* performance while the tradition was in its early stages, this may well have influenced the plays of the repertoire assuming episodic form. In both *naqqālī* and *pardeh-dārī* the stories were told in a combination of prose and verse, with the *pardeh-dārān* also using song. Both included

115 A traveller records seeing such a canvas used by a storyteller in the cemetery of the shrine of Imam Reżā in Mashhad. Floor, *Theater*, 119–20.

116 Najm, *Naqqālī*, 184.

117 Chelkowski, "Kâshefi's Rowzat," 276.

118 Najm, *Naqqālī*, 23; Nāṣerbakht, *Adabiyāt-e īrānī*, 235.

improvisation.[119] In the case of *naqqālī*, the *naqqāl* learned his craft from a seasoned performer and during his training would have recorded the plot structure and other details of the stories that would form his repertoire in his "*ṭūmār*" (prompt book or scroll).[120]

In the Qajar period most professional storytellers were dervishes from Selseleh-ye ʿAjam, a branch of the Khāksār order, and descendants of the proselytising Shiʿi Ḥaidarīs active during the Safavid period.[121] They performed both religious and epic material. Discussing their peregrinations, French diplomat Eugène Aubin (in Iran from 1324/1906 to 1325/1907) describes the ʿAjam dervishes as agents of both rural religious edification, and entertainment. Referring to them as the "rouzékhans des campagnes" (*rawżeh-khānī* reciters of the countryside) he tells of them giving impromptu narrations of the tribulations of the Karbala martyrs from the foot of the minbar (pulpit) in mosques, and eulogising ʿAlī in the bazaars, as well as telling stories from works such as the *Eskandar-nāmeh* and *Ḥamzah-nāmeh*.[122] Whilst *pardeh-dārī* appears to have been an art form specific to dervishes, the wider *naqqālī* tradition also drew practitioners from diverse backgrounds.[123] With regards to their impact on the *taʿziyeh* tradition, the most important points about both of these oral art forms are that they were practised by skilled professional performers, they were prevalent in the environment in which the *taʿziyeh* emerged, and continued to exist alongside it.

The content of the *taʿziyeh* repertoire shows the influence of both *naqqālī* and *pardeh-dārī*. As will be discussed in the following chapter, *naqqālī* had a significant impact upon the *taʿziyeh*'s compositional features. Also, in the discussion of individual episodes we will see the influence of the epic genre, the stories recounted and embellished by the *naqqālān*, on the characterisation of the heroes of the *ahl-e bait* and their kin. In the case of *pardeh-dārī*, we see narrative material originating from this tradition not only making its

119 For the skill of the *pardeh-dārān* in improvisation see Najm, *Naqqālī*, 183–84. For improvisation in *naqqālī* see Yamamoto, "Naqqâli," 254–55; Marzolph, "Professional Storytelling," 272.

120 For the *ṭūmār* in the *naqqālī* tradition see Yamamoto, "Naqqâli," 252; Najm, *Naqqālī*, 301–15. The *pardeh-dārān* may have also used *ṭūmārs*. Chelkowski, "Kâshefi's Rowzat," 277.

121 Marzolph, "Professional Storytelling," 277. For the ʿAjam and their origins see Abū Ṭāleb Mīr-ʿĀbedīnī and Mehrān Afsharī, *Āyīn-e qalandarī: mushtamel bar chahar resāleh dar bāb-e qalandarī, Khāksarī, ferqeh-ye ʿAjam va sukhanvarī* (Tehran: Farārvān, 1374 SH), 336–38. For the scholarly debate as to whether *Selseleh-ye ʿAjam* and the *Khāksār* order became completely assimilated see: Willem Floor, "Guilds and Futuvvat in Iran," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 134, no. 1 (1984): 107–08.

122 Eugène Aubin, *La Perse d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Colin, 1908), 241–42.

123 For discussion of such individuals see Yamamoto, "Naqqâli," 248.

way into the *taʿziyeh* repertoire but integrated into the central episodes. This material may have made its way directly from the canvases and orations of the *pardeh-dārān* into the *taʿziyeh* plays, or, in the case of material appearing in the *taʿziyeh* post-1830s, it may have first passed through the lithographed books of the *rawżeh-khānī/maqtal* genre that were used as sources by the *taʿziyeh* composers. In any case, that such material appears in the *taʿziyeh* shows the importance of *pardeh-dārī* in conserving and transmitting popular religious narratives.

The aforementioned play *Zan-e Zuhrī*, included in the Zand collection and signed by a female copyist, was a story told by the *pardeh-dārān*.[124] Dated 1198/1784, before the advent of lithography in Iran, it is an example of material passing directly from *pardeh-dārī* into the *taʿziyeh*. Furthermore, in the 13th/19th century two new scenes were added to the climactic play that feature stories traceable to the *pardeh-dārān*, their characters being depicted on a *pardeh* that has been dated to the Zand period.[125] One of these is the story of Sultān Qais-e Hendī and his vizier in India, who are attacked by a lion and call to Ḥusain for help: Ḥusain is in the midst of his final battle at Karbala but nonetheless hears their cry and instantaneously arrives to save them; he then returns to the battlefield to face his own martyrdom. The other new scene involves Ḥusain having a further encounter, shortly before his martyrdom, this time with a certain *Darvīsh-e Kābulī* (Dervish of Kabul) who arrives on the battlefield offering the Imam water from his *kashkūl* (beggars bowl).

This story is the founding myth of non-other than the aforementioned Khāksār dervishes, with whom Selseleh-ye ʿAjam – major participants in the *pardeh-dārī* tradition – were closely associated, if not synonymous. The Khāksār trace their lineage to a dervish from Kabul who had met Ḥusain at Karbala.[126] They believe that during this encounter Ḥusain put his hand on the dervish's shoulder and said a prayer for him.[127]

In chapter 5 I will examine the process by which these scenes came to be stable features of the climactic episode, noting the appearance of both stories in lithographs of the *rawżeh-khānī/maqtal* genre. Despite its inclusion in such works, given its relevance to Selseleh-ye ʿAjam, there is a strong possibility

124 Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 11*, 89.

125 For an image of the canvas in question see Jāber ʿAnāṣerī, *Sulṭān-e Karbalā: sharḥ-e vāqeʿeh-ye ʿĀshūrāʾ va āyīn-hā-ye sūgvārī-ye Abā ʿAbdallāh al-Ḥusain, ʿalaihe al-salām, dar Īrān* (Tehran: Zarrīn va Sīmīn, 1382 SH), 38–39; and Marzolph, "Visual Culture," 147.

126 Nūr al-Dīn Mudarresī Chahārdehī, *Khāksār va ahl-e al-ḥaqq* (Tehran: Chāpkhāneh-ye Khūsheh, 1353 SH), 7.

127 Ḥusain Partuv Beyżāʾī Kāshānī, *Tārīkh-e varzesh-e bāstānī-ye Īrān: zūr-khāneh* (Tehran: Zuvvār, 1382 SH), 43.

that the *taʿziyeh-khānān* knew the story of the Dervish of Kabul before it was committed to print. The incorporation of this story, of such importance to the Khāksār, into the climactic *taʿziyeh* episode during the 13th/19th century is fascinating, not least because there is evidence of a connection between the *taʿziyeh* players and the ʿAjam order during the same period, a matter to which we will now turn our attention.

2.4 Taʿziyeh-khānān *and* Futuvvat *Circles:* Futuvvat-nāmeh-ye sulṭānī *and the Seeds of Devotional Drama*

In addition to storytelling, the ʿAjam were practitioners of an art form called *sukhanvarī*, a contest in rhetoric between two contenders involving a lengthy duel in verse. Importantly, while the ʿAjam and Khāksār are best known for their activities during the Qajar period (and as descendants of the Ḥaidarīs), some argue that *sukhanvarī*, and thus the Khāksār order itself, existed under the Safavids.[128] *Sukhanvarī* contests took place in coffeehouses and were normally staged after Muḥarram and Ṣafar, often during Ramażān.[129]

Selseleh-ye ʿAjam had a *futuvvat* organisation, a working man's association, only for the "gainfully employed."[130] *Futuvvat* can be broadly summarised as a type of spiritual chivalry practised amongst brotherhood organisations in the Islamic world who shared an ethical code based on loyalty, bravery and generosity. It is synonymous with the Persian *javānmardī*. The creeds of these fraternities fused observance of scrupulously moral and orderly behaviour with a Sufi brand of religiosity seeking knowledge of, and reunion with, the Divine.[131] Open to a wide variety of professions and to all social classes, *futuvvat*, it is argued, was an accessible form of Sufism, allowing working men to participate in mystical practices and discourse.[132] In the Persian context, by the

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128 Najm, *Naqqālī*, 106–108. For a possible account of *sukhanvarī* in Isfahan during the mid-17th century in the travelogue of French gem merchant Jean-Baptiste Tavernier see Partuv Beyżāʾī Kāshānī, *Tārīkh-e varzesh*, 41–43. For *sukhanvarī* customs originating from events during the Safavid period see Mīr-ʿĀbedīnī and Afsharī, *Āyīn-e qalandarī*, 337.

129 For *sukhanvarī* contests and samples of the verse recited see: Mīr-ʿĀbedīnī and Afsharī, *Āyīn-e qalandarī*, 338–47 and 348–450; Muḥammad Jaʿfar Maḥjūb, "Sukhanvarī," *Sukhan* 9, no. 7 (1337 SH); and Najm, *Naqqālī*, 107–21. Also see Partuv Beyżāʾī Kāshānī, *Tārīkh-e varzesh*, 44–45.

130 Floor, "Guilds and Futuvvat," 107. For the connection between the rituals and customs of the Khāksār and *Futuvvat* circles see: Mudarresī Chahārdehī, *Khāksār*, 180–83.

131 For a good introduction to this concept see: Lloyd Ridgeon, *Jawanmardi: A Sufi Code of Honour* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 1–21.

132 Ridgeon, *Jawanmardi*, 5–15.

early 10th/16th century, *futuvvat* treatises had taken on an increasingly Shiʿi flavour.[133] They emphasised the combination of inner spirituality with outward sobriety and social involvement, placing importance on the honour of carrying out a profession. This preoccupation is demonstrated in *Futuvvat-nāmeh-ye sulṭānī*, composed by the same Kāshefī whose *Rawżat al-shuhadāʾ* was so important to the development of the *taʿziyeh*. Composed in Timurid Herat around the turn of the 16th century CE, this treatise dedicates a large section to categorisation of the professions, detailing the correct code of conduct and spiritual significance of each one.[134]

Selseleh-ye ʿAjam's *Futuvvat* organisation sought to draw affiliates from amongst 17 occupational groups whose trades correspond to those of their founding members. The nature of these 17 occupations differs somewhat according to the source. In a discussion not related to *taʿziyeh* Willem Floor provides and compares seven lists of these vocations from different sources.[135] Of great interest to our current discussion is that three of the lists cite the membership of *rawżeh-khānān*, and one also specifically mentions *taʿziyeh-khānān* as members. This is concrete evidence of a connection between the *taʿziyeh* performers and the ʿAjam. Furthermore, we have a specific example of that connection: the aforementioned *taʿziyeh* composer "Nāṭeq", whose work forms part of the Zand collection, is said to have been a *sukhanvarī* participant.[136] As *sukhanvarī* was peculiar to the ʿAjam order,[137] this would suggest that the composer himself was a member.

The *taʿziyeh* performers' membership of the ʿAjam *futuvvat* circle is interesting for three reasons. It shows that *taʿziyeh* performance was considered an established profession in its own right. It shows a societal connection between the *taʿziyeh* performers and professional storytellers (the ʿAjam dervishes). Furthermore, in Kāshefī's aforementioned *futuvvat* treatise, in his categorisation of the professions, those that involve giving a performance are given a special status. In particular, performances that involve preserving the memory of the *ahl-e bait* are exalted as acts of devotion. This last point merits further discussion. It is of course speculative, but the presence of such ideas in the

133 Riza Yildirim, "Shīʿitisation of the Futuwwa Tradition in the Fifteenth Century," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 1 (2013).

134 For an edition see Ḥusain Vāʿez Kāshefī Sabzevārī, *Futuvvat-nāmeh-ye sulṭānī*, ed. Muḥammad Jaʿfar Maḥjūb (Tehran: Bunyād-e farhang-e Īran [*c.*1500 CE.] 1350 SH). For a translation see *The Royal Book of Spiritual Chivalry* (*Futūwat nāmah-yi sultạ̄nī*), trans. Jay R. Crook (Chicago: KAZI Publications, 2000).

135 Floor, "Guilds and Futuvvat," 108–10.

136 Daryāī, *Daftar 14*, 9.

137 Mīr-ʿĀbedīnī and Afsharī, *Āyīn-e qalandarī*, 335; Floor, *Theater*, 117–18.

milieu in which the *taʿziyeh* emerged may well have given the early performers the pretext to go beyond the recitation of the tribulations of the Imams to embodying and playing out these stories as a devotional act.

Futuvvat-nāmeh-ye sulṭānī is composed of seven chapters; chapters six and seven discuss the merits of, and code of practice for, a wide range of occupations. Chapter six treats professions that involve giving a performance and chapter seven those that involve the use of a tool or implement (including weapons). Kāshefī establishes giving a performance as a noble undertaking and provides practitioners in this field with a religiously sanctioned framework for their art. Some scholars go as far as to describe the "strain of *futuvvat*" treated in Kāshefī's work as, "… intimately connected with certain guilds whose occupations were ritual and theatrical."[138] He refers to performers collectively as *maʿrekeh-gīrān*. *Maʿrekeh* means "battle", but in Kāshefī's environment of Timurid Khurasan the word denoted a place of public entertainment where people gathered to watch any type of display, from wrestling to oratory performances.[139] Kāshefī details the proper rules of conduct to be observed when giving any kind of display.[140] He divides the performers into three groups: *ahl-e sukhan* (the orators), *ahl-e zūr* (the strongmen) and *ahl-e bāzī* (players). Kāshefī devotes much attention to the *ahl-e sukhan* and indeed it is his treatment of a sub-group among them that is of interest to the current discussion.

This subgroup includes the *maddāḥān* (eulogists), *gharrā-khānān* (master reciters), and *saqqāyān* (water-carriers). Kāshefī's encouragement of the tradition of eulogy could not be stronger: he describes the eulogists as being closer than anyone to the example of the Prophet and his progeny.[141] Of course, his point of view may have been influenced by the fact that he was himself a preacher.[142] However, in addition to lauding eulogy, he explicitly encourages

138 Mojtaba Zarvani and Mohammad Mashhadi, "The Rite of the Water-Carrier: From the Circles of Sufis to the Rituals of Muharram," *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* 4, no. 1 (2011): 26.

139 Arley Loewen, "Proper Conduct (Adab) Is Everything: The Futuwwat-nāmah-i Sulṭānī of Husayn Va'iz-i Kashifi," *Iranian Studies* 36, no. 4 (2003): 565.

140 Kāshefī, *Futuvvat-nāmeh*, 277–78. This includes the stipulation not to coincide with obligatory prayer times, a point carefully observed in the programming of *taʿziyeh* performances. A further instruction is that performers should call for blessings upon the prophet and his family. This is observed in the traditions of *taʿziyeh* and *naqqālī* alike; the performers punctuate certain points in the narrative by calling for *ṣalavāt*, to which the audience obediently reply. Author's observations; Yamamoto, "Naqqâli," 253–54.

141 Kāshefī, *Futuvvat-nāmeh*, 277–280. *Qeṣṣeh khānān* (storytellers) and *afsāneh gūyān* (fabulists) are also included amongst other subgroups of the *ahl-e sukhan*; whilst not exalted like the eulogists, Kāshefī commends the didactic value of their craft.

142 Loewen, "Proper Conduct," 564.

the activities that will be fundamental to the birth of the *taʿziyeh* tradition. For a devotional drama to emerge, three activities are necessary: scripts must be composed; their verse must be recited or sung by parties additional to the composer; and those giving voice to these lines must move past simple recitation to physical emulation of the martyrs, the playing out of the events at Karbala.

In *Futuvvat-nāmeh-ye sulṭānī* not only are the composition and recitation of narrative devotional poetry highly commended, but so are additional actions to ensure that the poets' message reaches the masses. The poets Kāshefī celebrates are "Those who compose praises of the Prophet and his family with all their ability and string the gems of their narratives (*revāyāt*), stories (*ḥekāyāt*), virtues (*manāqeb*) and dignity (*marāteb*) in verse (*naẓm*)."[143] This is the very type of verse from which the dialogues of the *taʿziyeh* scripts will be built. Kāshefī praises those who perform this verse, the *rāviyān* (narrators), and also the water-carriers. It is between the roles of these two groups that we see a space being created for the *taʿziyeh* players.

In the case of the *rāviyān* the connection with those who will give voice to the verse of the *taʿziyeh* plays is clear. However, the attention Kāshefī gives to the water-carriers is even more significant. Placing them amongst the highly esteemed eulogists, he commends the fact that in addition to eulogy they, "perform another task so that the blessings may reach the public."[144] He thus implies that rituals of remembrance for the martyrs should surpass the vocal and include acts of a physical nature. The action carried out by the performers of *taʿziyeh*, playing the likeness of the members of the *ahl-e bait*, their supporters and aggressors to provoke the shedding of redemptive tears, can indeed be considered the performance of just such a task – ensuring that blessings reach the public. Moreover, in the water-carriers we have an example of emulation as a devotional act.

In his engagement with the spiritual significance of the task of water-bearing, Kāshefī gives special attention to ʿAbbās b. ʿAlī. Recounting in detail his selfless struggle to reach the Euphrates at Karbala and his subsequent demise, Kāshefī praises those acting as water-bearers for their emulation of ʿAbbās and invocation of his memory through repetition of his actions.[145] This is again parallel with the task to be undertaken by the performers of *taʿziyeh*. Furthermore, it shows devotion by emulation as an accepted and encouraged

143 Kāshefī Sabzevārī, *Spiritual Chivalry*, 278.

144 Ibid., 282.

145 Kāshefī, *Futuvvat-nāmeh*, 295.

element of liturgy, which helps us to understand the progression towards full-scale re-enactment as a religious act.[146]

Whilst it cannot be claimed that the emergence of the *taʿziyeh* tradition was a direct response to the message of Kāshefī's *Futuvvat-nāmeh-ye sulṭānī*, his particular attention to the art of performance, seeking to codify and ennoble it and encouraging a trend in the performance of religious stories, offered a source of inspiration for devotional re-enactments. In his concern for proper behaviour and societal organisation, built around the roles of different professions, he not only created a separate category for performers but brought them to the top of his list. He gave particular recognition to the importance of eulogy, the recital of religious poetry, and commended remembrance through emulation. His treatise turned a performance, such as those he witnessed at the *maʿrekeh*, into a potential religious offering. This, since the eulogy was of a Shiʿi nature, created conditions ripe for the emergence of a Shiʿi devotional drama in the subsequent centuries.

3 Conclusion

Considering the emergence, development, and survival of the art of *taʿziyeh-khānī* through the centuries we see a tradition inspired by the impulse to remember the lives and sacrifices of Shiʿism's sacred figures through re-enactment. It is a tradition periodically embraced by the ruling classes, but that comes from, and is sustained by, the devotion of the common people. We see the giving of a performance to inspire remembrance of the *ahl-e bait* described as a valuable act of piety, and even the sanctioning of their emulation to this end, in an important treatise coinciding in date with the dawn of the Safavid period. Moreover, the treatise in question – Kāshefī's *Futuvvat-nāmeh-ye sulṭānī* – records a variety of performance forms present in Timurid Herat around 1500 CE that celebrate the *ahl-e* bait through performance. Thus, while it is beyond doubt that the establishment of Shiʿism as Iran's religion of state under the Safavids facilitated the emergence of a Shiʿi devotional drama, the seeds of that process had been sown significantly earlier.

Nonetheless, it took some time for these rituals of remembrance to become what we can call drama. The earliest *taʿziyeh* performances, those that evolved into the first scripted plays, in the form of *Haftād-u-du tan*, were re-enactments of the battle of Karbala staged amongst ordinary people, outside urban centres.

146 Partuv Beyżā'ī Kāshānī argues that it was the Khāksār dervishes who made up the ranks of the water-bearers in the Safavid era Muḥarram processions. *Tārīkh-e varzesh*, 45–46.

This custom existed by the mid-11th/17th century at the latest. There may, of course, have been other early forms of enactment, but this was certainly prominent among them. The same sector of society, common people, mostly living rurally, safe-guarded the tradition during the reign of Nāder Shāh, allowing for its re-emergence once conditions again become favourable (a process that we see repeated during the Pahlavi era). The boom in patronage enjoyed under the Qajars resulted in a surge in the tradition's development due to the emergence of a professional circuit. The great demand not only gave *taʿziyeh* performers the opportunity to hone their craft but led to the exchange of influences, as performers from different regions travelled to the cities to work during the mourning season.

As for contributors to the tradition, we must note the importance of women, not least those of the lower classes who, due to the large numbers in which they flocked to the *taʿziyeh* and their seating position in the traditional *tekiyeh*, constituted the vast majority of the direct audience to whom the *taʿziyeh-khānān* performed. Those performers were influenced by the storytelling traditions of *naqqālī* and *pardeh-dārī*, and there is evidence of a societal connection between their practitioners.

CHAPTER 2

Conventions and Compositional Features of the Muḥarram Cycle

> A coherent reading of any art work, whatever the medium, requires some detailed awareness of the grid of conventions upon which, and against which, the individual work operates. It is only in exceptional moments of cultural history that these conventions are explicitly codified … but an elaborate set of tacit agreements between artist and audience about the ordering of the art work is at all times the enabling context in which the complex communication of art occurs.[1]

Whilst the Karbala tragedy provides its solid core, the *taʿziyeh* corpus can seem a somewhat amorphous body of material. The repertoire is broad and offers myriad glimpses of the lives and deeds of the Holy Family, their offspring, and supporters. The plays have been written and rewritten by many hands and have changed through time. Even the central episodes of the Muḥarram cycle include a dizzying number of variations between renditions. Nonetheless, when reading a selection of these plays one frequently has a sense of *déjà vu*. Despite their individual narrative detail, the repertoire's central episodes bear a certain similarity, and the innovations that we observe in their content, while sometimes surprising, are often reminiscent of material from other areas of the cycle. Indeed, while specific details relating to a martyrdom at Karbala are usually traceable to information found in historical or hagiographical sources, the retelling of these incidents has been organised within the *taʿziyeh* according to very particular conventions. On close examination, these prove to be compositional techniques typical of verbal art forms, and literatures with a strong connection to them, that are observed across a wide range of cultural contexts. The *taʿziyeh* composers' use of stock epithets – a feature typical of

1 Robert Alter, *The Art of the Biblical Narrative* (London: Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), 47.

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such literature – has been touched upon in earlier scholarship.[2] To this I add the use of type-scenes and a *Kompositionsschema* (composition-scheme).

Before examining these techniques in the plays of the Muḥarram cycle, I must clarify that, despite the compositional features that they share with verbal art forms, I do not argue here that the *taʿziyeh* plays were composed and transmitted orally; nor do I suggest that the conventions I describe below existed as a set of instructions followed by early *taʿziyeh* composers, in the way that a novice storyteller of the *naqqālī* tradition would have had recourse to the plot structure and detail of the stories he had collected in his *ṭūmār*. Rather, these compositional features are testament to the evolutionary path of the genre; their adopting a certain shape in the *taʿziyeh* context is likely to have been the result of the playing and replaying of these sacred stories.

As detailed in the previous chapter, the high degree of crossover between the narratives recounted in the Safavid period *rawżeh-khānī* recitals and the content of the *taʿziyeh*'s Muḥarram cycle shows a genetic link between these two traditions; moreover, not only did the *rawżeh-khānān* read from works concerning the lives and tribulations of the *ahl-e bait* and their kin in the mourning assemblies, but religious stories were told by professional storytellers whose performances also influenced the repertoire. Little is known about the background of the early composers of *taʿziyeh* scripts. They may well have been from amongst the ranks of these same orators and, as we have seen, there was certainly a connection between practitioners of professional storytelling and those involved in the *taʿziyeh* tradition. Even in the case of composers with no personal connection to the storytelling traditions, it is reasonable to assume that the recitations of the mourning assemblies and the performances of the storytellers were part of their environment and that the verbal arts influenced their approach. As no other form of live theatre existed in the Persian context, public recitations and storytelling would have been the playwrights' only exposure to narrative performative texts. It is therefore not surprising that they should adopt many of the conventions (structures and techniques) of oral storytelling in their endeavours to communicate a narrative to a live audience.

The influence of traditional Iranian storytelling on the format of *taʿziyeh* plays has been recognised by other scholars. Both Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Nāṣerbakht find that the *gūsheh-hā* (sub-episodes) that act as prologues/epilogues to, or are inserted within, the main episodes give the plays a "*zanjīr-mānand*" (chain-like) structure. This is a feature of old Persian storytelling and has passed from *naqqālī* into the *taʿziyeh*. Both cite *Hezār-u-yek shab* (One

2 Elwell L.P. Sutton, "The Literary Sources of the Ta'ziyeh," Chelkowski ed. *Taʿziyeh: Ritual and Drama*, 177.

Thousand and One Nights), an Arabic work likely to have originated, at least in part, from the much older Persian *Hezār afsān* (A Thousand Stories), as an example of how deeply-rooted the telling of multiple interlinked stories is in Persian culture.[3] Whilst such stories are generally described as "enframed", "chain-like" is indeed a better description of the structure of *taʿziyeh* plays that feature multiple *gūsheh-hā*. These *gūsheh-hā* are sections of narrative material usually linked together to construct the telling of a particular event, as opposed to stories of diverse events told within the context of an over-arching frame story. According to Hashem Fayyāż (the aforementioned late *taʿziyeh* performer and director) *taʿziyeh*'s addition of *gūsheh-hā* that often feature miracles and marvels is typical of Eastern storytelling in which the end of the story, already known to its audience, is delayed by the recounting of ancillary stories.[4] In the case of the *naqqālān* this spinning out of the yarn will have been influenced by practical concerns; in order for a performer to use his pitch for as long as possible and to make a living, he extended his stories by adding more and more of them.[5]

On a technical level, the chain-like structure of *taʿziyeh* plays is not only due to the incorporation of *gūsheh-hā* into the episodes. The plays themselves are made up of short, relatively self-contained, sections of action that include a few scenic movements and/or a dialogue, termed *faqareh-hā* by the performers. Some of these include essential information whilst others are ancillary or decorative. The latter stress, or draw renewed emphasis to, what is already known; they can be omitted depending on resources and the attention span of the audience.[6] The contribution that I make here is to show that some of the *faqareh-hā* and *gūsheh-hā* that make up this chain-like structure are in fact "type-scenes" a compositional phenomenon also found in the folk literatures of other cultures internationally.

3 Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī, *Mabānī-ye shabīh-khānī*, 46–52; Nāṣerbakht, *Adabiyāt-e īrānī*, 231–36. For the evidence indicating the likely Persian origin of this work see Ulrich Marzolph, "Arabian Nights," in K. Fleet, G. Krämer, D. Matringe, J. Nawas and D.J. Stewart eds., *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three Online* (Brill, 2007). https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_0021.

4 Nāṣerbakht, *Adabiyāt-e īrānī*, 232–34. For the addition of *gūsheh-hā* as a means of developing episodes see Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh-khānī: dowreh-ye Qājār*, 260–61; Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī, *Mabānī-ye shabīh-khānī*, 43–44.

5 Nāṣerbakht, *Adabiyāt-e īrānī*, 235.

6 Ibid., 232–34. On *faqareh-hā*, also see Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh-khānī: dowreh-ye Qājār*, 265; Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī, *Mabānī-ye shabīh-khānī*, 42.

1 Type-Scenes

1.1 *An Introduction to the "Type-Scene"*

Below I will borrow the concept of the type-scene to classify a compositional phenomenon observable in the *taʿziyeh*, but first the concept itself requires further elaboration. Mark Edwards gives a useful and succinct definition:

> A type-scene may be regarded as a recurrent block of narrative with an identifiable structure, such as a sacrifice, the reception of a guest, the launching and beaching of a ship, the donning of armor.[7]

The type-scene as a compositional convention was first identified by Walter Arend in 1933 in his endeavour to understand the repetition present in the poems of Homer.[8] Arend observed that particular scene types recurred and that they were structured according to set patterns. The Homeric scene types identified by Arend were:

1. Arrival (*Ankunft*), including the visit, arrival of a messenger, and dreams
2. Sacrifice and meals (*Opfer und Mahl*)
3. Journeys by ship and carriage (*Schiff und Wagenfahrt*)
4. Donning of armour and clothes (*Rüstung und Ankleiden*)
5. Preparing for sleep (*Schlaf*)
6. Deliberating over a decision
7. Gathering (*Versammlung*)
8. Bathing (*Bad*)

Arend demonstrated that such scenes are constructed of a chain of components that normally follow a certain order, with the poet often making use of the same or similar sections of verse to narrate these scenes. However, he also noted that depending on the context, certain components could be expanded, abridged or at times omitted.

The pioneer of oral-formulaic theory Milman Parry engaged with Arend's theory, using it to argue for the oral nature of Homer's composition on the grounds that fixed formulae and patterns of action served the same purpose: providing ready-made material for the structured improvisations of the oral bard. He also made a claim not dissimilar to that I make in the case of the

7 Mark W. Edwards, "Homer and Oral Tradition: The Type-Scene," *Oral Tradition* 7, no. 2 (1992): 285.

8 Walter Arend, *Die typischen Scenen bei Homer* (Berlin: Weidmann, [1933] 1975).

taʿziyeh: that such repetition shows that Homer was working within a tradition that over many generations had defined such conventions as the format of the scenes.[9]

Indeed, the type-scene as a compositional device has been observed in a wide range of cultural contexts. Before Arend's seminal work (and seemingly unbeknown to him), in 1885 Vasilii V. Radlov's ethnographic study of the oral poetry of the Kara-Kirghiz Turkic people of Central Asia had identified the use of *Vortragstheilen*, "recitation-parts" and *Bildtheile* "idea-parts."[10] This phenomenon is clearly akin to the type-scene: Radlov described the oral bards having sections of material at their disposal for the depiction of occurrences such as "… the birth of a hero, his coming of age … preparation for battle … a hero's speech before battle … a banquet … a funeral lament".[11] Furthermore, in their study of south Slavic oral poetry, Parry and later his student Albert Lord observed a compositional unit, a grade larger than oral formulae, and synonymous to a type-scene, which they termed a "theme".[12] These treat situations such as the council, the gathering (of an army or wedding guests), the composing of letters and arming.[13] However, an important distinction between the type-scene as defined by Arend and "the theme" described by Parry and Lord is that the latter "… requires a major degree of verbal correspondence", whereas the former does not.[14] For this reason, it is the type-scene as opposed to the theme that is appropriate for describing the phenomenon witnessed in the *taʿziyeh*, where the repeated scenes use a recognisable set of components and motifs but do not feature verbatim repetition of sections of verse.

In the Persian context, Ulrich Marzolph has studied the techniques of oral composition identifiable in *Ḥusain-e Kurd* which belongs to the genre

9 Milman Parry, "Die typischen Scenen bei Homer by Walter Arend," *Classical Philology*, 31, no. 4 (1936): 358.

10 Vasilii V. Radlov, *Proben der Volkslitteratur der nördlichen türkischen Stämme: Der Dialect der Kara-Kirgisen*, 10 vols., vol. 5 (St. Petersburg: Commissionäre der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1885). These are the translations of the German terms given in the following useful synopsis of Radlov's work: John Miles Foley, *The Theory of Oral Composition* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 10–13.

11 Radlov, *Proben der Volkslitteratur*, xvi–xvii. Translated by Foley, *Oral Composition*, 11.

12 Milman Parry, "Ćor Huso: A Study of Southslavic Song," in *The Making of Homeric Verse*, ed. Adam Parry (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, [1933–1935] 1971).

13 Albert Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, ed. Stephen Mitchell and Gregory Nagy, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001), 68–98.

14 Albert Lord, "Memory, Meaning and Myth in Homer and Other Oral Epic Traditions," in *Oralità: cultura, letteratura, discorso*, ed. Bruno Gentili and Giuseppe Paioni (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1985), 44.

of *dāstān-e ʿāmmiyāneh* ("popular romance").[15] The adventures of *Ḥusain-e Kurd* are known to have been narrated by *naqqālān* alongside works such as the *Eskandar-nāmeh* and *Ḥamzah-nāmeh* in the coffeehouses of Qajar Iran.[16] The oldest known copy of *Ḥusain-e Kurd* is a manuscript dated 1255 AH (1839–40 CE) and Marzolph asserts that the narrative cannot have been transposed from oral to written form long before this. He supports this argument on the basis that *Ḥusain-e Kurd* includes a vast number of narrative formulae characteristic of oral performance, including devices for the organization of the plot. In examining such devices Marzolph identifies what he calls "content formulas." Under this label he describes how recurring actions such as a burglary, or combat, begin in a highly codified manner and include a set of stereotyped ingredients.[17] Whilst using different terminology, here he is describing a concept unmistakably similar to the type-scene.

It is also noteworthy that the idea of the type-scene has been applied in the study of religious texts and is much used by scholars of the Bible. Robert Alter was the first to apply this concept in interpreting biblical narrative.[18] He is not concerned with verbal repetition or whether the existence of such scenes indicates oral composition; rather, he is drawn to this approach when faced with a problem similar to that encountered by readers of the *taʿziyeh*'s Muḥarram cycle. He explains:

> The most crucial case in point is the perplexing fact that in biblical narrative more or less the same story often seems to be told two or three or more times about different characters, or sometimes even about the same character in different sets of circumstances.[19]

Alter finds a solution to this problem in the concept of the type-scene, proposing that the careers of biblical heroes have an attached set of recurrent

15 Ulrich Marzolph, "A Treasury of Formulaic Narrative: The Persian Popular Romance Hosein-e Kord," *Oral Tradition* 14, no. 2 (1999): 282. Set during the reign of the Safavid Shāh ʿAbbās I (r. 996–1038/ 1588–1629), the story's eponymous hero is an adventurer whose antics take him to India and the court of the Mughal Emperor Akbar (r. 963–1014/ 1556–1605).

16 Fritz Meier and Richard Gramlich, "Drei moderne Texte zum persischen „Wettreden"," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 114, no. 2 (1964): 292.

17 Marzolph, "Hosein-e Kord," 282–293.

18 Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 47–62. For examples of further such works see: Pamela Lee Thimmes, *Studies in the Biblical Sea-storm Type-scene: Convention and Invention* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992); Brian Britt, "Prophetic Concealment in a Biblical Type Scene," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (2002); Michael D. Press, "A Single Combat Type-Scene in the Hebrew Bible?," *Hebrew Studies* 57 (2016).

19 Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 49.

narrative episodes that are akin to Homeric type-scenes because they depend on "… the manipulation of a fixed constellation of predetermined motifs."[20] However, he asserts that, far from reducing a religious text to a mere collection of stories, the composers were using a set of conventions well known to the audience of their day, and introduced variations in the elements of these familiar scenes to convey subtle levels of meaning. This idea is intriguing with reference to the *taʿziyeh*, where it is clear that the playwrights were composing for an audience well acquainted not only with the narratives of the Muḥarram cycle but also with the structures and motifs of the genre, the annual repetition of the cycle providing an opportunity to develop this messaging system, exploiting it for maximum dramatic impact. This will be discussed as we examine the specifics of the type-scene in the context of the Muḥarram cycle and the dynamics of the unspoken pact between the audience and the storytellers, in this case the performers.

1.2 Taʿziyeh *Type-Scenes*

In the context of the *taʿziyeh*, I use the term "type-scene" to signify a recurrent scenario with a fixed set of components, normally featured in the same order, without necessary verbal correspondence. The type-scene as described by Arend covers frequent, sometimes daily occurrences where a great level of description is given of a relatively mundane topic e.g. preparing for sleep. By contrast, in Alter's analysis of the type-scenes of the Hebrew Bible he notes that due to the nature of biblical narrative – normally catching its protagonists at moments of vital importance – the biblical type-scene treats critical occurrences in the lives of its heroes as opposed to the rituals of daily life. In the Muḥarram cycle, the environment that the type-scenes help to construct is one of an uprising, siege, uneven military odds, familial separation, martyrdom, loss, capture and humiliation. Thus, corresponding somewhat to Alter's observations in the biblical context, *taʿziyeh* type-scenes treat highly charged as opposed to mundane occurrences.

Further study would no doubt reveal more recurrent type-scenes across the *taʿziyeh* corpus. Here I identify three, the existence of which became evident during this in-depth study of four of the principal episodes. They are:

- An Apparition from Beyond the Grave
- The Arrival of a Stranger
- The Unwilling Killer.

20 Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 51. He then identifies a number of biblical type-scenes and gives an extended analysis of the variations of the type-scene, "the encounter with the future betrothed at a well."

Given the breadth of the repertoire and, moreover, the significant variations in content between renditions of these plays, to list the number of occurrences of these type-scenes would be impossible. However, I will give examples of their repetition.[21]

1.2.1 An Apparition from beyond the Grave

This is by far the most common *taʿziyeh* type-scene: it features frequently in the plays of the wider repertoire and is present in three of the four episodes on which this study focuses.[22] It is short and simple. Its elements are as follows:

- At a critical juncture the protagonist calls on a member (or members) of the Holy Family in heaven to look upon his/her fate
- The one called upon appears before the protagonist (shortly after, but often not immediately following, the call)[23]
- The spirit reveals his or her identity, expresses grief at the earthly suffering, offers comfort and then disappears

Of the episodes included in this study, the scene features in *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās* with the ghost of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb appearing before ʿAbbās,[24] and in *The Martyrdom of Imam Ḥusain* as Ḥusain is visited by the ghost of Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā (sometimes accompanied by those of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb and the Prophet Muḥammad). It also features in *Bāzār-e Shām*, with Zain al-ʿĀbedīn being visited by his grandfather, ʿAlī.[25] Further examples of the occurrence of this scene from the wider repertoire include the Prophet Muḥammad appearing before Muslem whilst his neck is in the noose in *The Martyrdom of Muslem b. ʿAqil*,[26]

21 Due to the variations between renditions, when I give an example of a type-scene appearing in a particular play, it may not appear in all renditions.

22 To give an idea of its frequency. The Darbandsar script collection features a total of 50 plays, 12 of these include an example of this type-scene. Interestingly, whilst this collection includes plays telling the stories of ancient prophets, it is not until the chronology reaches the plays treating the house of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb and his descendants that we see this type-scene.

23 When more than one ghost appears, an additional element is added as the apparition is preceded by a conversation between them, deciding to visit the protagonist in question.

24 CP: MS 51; MS 513 (Ghulām Ḥusain Ṣāberī, Kashan, 1372/1952); MS 617 (Mid-20th Cent., Tehran); and the Darbandsar rendition Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles*, 1, 405–06.

25 All renditions among my sample except CP: MS 405 (End 19th cent., Mazandaran), see chapter 6 “Script Sources”.

26 Rendition from Khur, for an edition see Murteża Hunarī, *Taʿziyeh dar Khur* (Tehran: Markaz-e mardom shenāsī-ye Īrān, Vezārat-e farhang u hunar, 1354 SH), 5–58. For an

and the Karbala survivors being visited by the spirit of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb and Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā in *Ghārat-e khaimeh-hā*.[27]

In some instances, the visit is framed as the spirit appearing to the protagonist in a dream: the visitor has lines and therefore would have appeared on stage. When the visit is framed as a dream, it will usually include the visitor predicting the protagonist's imminent death.[28] Such dream visits can be distinguished from dreams in which Ḥusain and other members of the *ahl-e bait* appear to show dreamers the error of their ways:[29] these are a separate phenomenon recurrent in the *taʿziyeh* but presented in scenes without a structure regular enough to be considered a type-scene. Indeed, across the wider repertoire we do see members of the Holy Family intervening in situations that are outside the contexts of their earthly lives: for example there are a number of stories of Ḥusain, usually on the day of ʿĀshūrāʾ, arriving to aid the faithful in peril such as the Shiʿa of Armenia, Sultan Qais of India, or a boy in Kufa sold into slavery so that his family can stage a mourning ceremony.[30] These stories are diverse and are not examples of the apparition type-scene, which will follow the elemental structure that I have described.

Importantly, despite the apparition type-scene taking place when the protagonist is in danger or undergoing intense suffering, the visit does not usually change the trajectory of the narrative. Rather, it serves to show that the members of the *ahl-e bait* already in paradise share in the suffering of their offspring and supporters on earth. They appear in order to mourn with them and to provide moral support and comfort: for example, when ʿAlī appears to his son ʿAbbās, who asks if he has an instruction for him, ʿAlī replies that he should go to bed and rest. Such quotidian advice is echoed in other visits. Despite

English translation see Rebecca Ansary Pettys, "The Ta'zieh: Ritual of Renewal in Persia," vol. 2 (PhD diss.), Indiana University, 1982), 2–33.

27 For an edition see Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 13*, 19–62.

28 For example, in the Darbandsar rendition of *The Martyrdom of Imam ʿAlī*, Prophet Muḥammad appears to Imam ʿAlī in a dream. Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles*, 1, 239–61. For other examples of the dream format see *Taʿziyeh-ye shahādat-e Ahmad b. Mūsā* (*Shāh-cherāgh*) and *Taʿziyeh-ye shahādat-e Ḥażrat-e Emām-zādeh Dāvūd*, *Majāles*, 2, 351–74 and 407–21.

29 Examples include: Ebn-e Vahab being taught the error of neglecting to perform pilgrimage by Ḥusain; and Yazīd repenting ordering Ḥusain's killing after seeing Muḥammad; See respectively *Taʿziyeh-ye shahādat-e Ḥażrat-e Emām Jaʿfar-e Ṣādeq*; and *Taʿziyeh-ye pashīmān shudan-e Yazīd*, Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles-e taʿziyeh*, 2, 291–312, and 153–175.

30 For the first two examples see *Majles-e taʿziyeh-ye pesar-furūsh* and *Majles-e taʿziyeh-ye Qāneyā sulṭan-e Arman*, Ibid., 439–54 and 419–38. For an English translation of the story featuring the Shiʿa of Armenia see "Conversion of King Caniah," Pelly, *Miracle Play*, 1, 304–25. I discuss the story of Sultan Qais of India in chapter 5.

lamenting the tragic state of affairs, the visitors have not come to attempt to alter the pre-destined course of events.

This general rule is broken in the example of this type-scene as it appears in *Bāzār-e Shām*; in my analysis of this episode (chapter 6) I will show variation of the type-scene used as a dramatic device. When the ghost of ʿAlī appears before Zain al-ʿĀbedīn in this episode he does indeed change the course of events, saving his grandson's life by frightening Shemr and thus preventing his execution. This was a moment of vital importance because Zain al-ʿĀbedīn is Ḥusain's only remaining son; his survival is essential for the continuation of the imamate. One is here reminded of Alter's argument that the composers were using a set of conventions so well-known to the audience of their day that changing a component of a familiar scene functioned as a tactic to convey meaning. In other words, the scheme of the type-scene being set up, its breaking is a shock tactic, showing in this case that the course of events had to be altered because of the imperative that the Fourth Imam should survive.

It is possible that the apparition type-scene was initially inspired by a report appearing in the Karbala accounts of historians, the oldest version of which was transmitted by Abū Mekhnaf and is recounted by al-Ṭabarī. This holds that shortly before the battle, Ḥusain had seen in a dream his grandfather, Prophet Muḥammad, who had told him not to be sad as tomorrow he would be with them [his family, in paradise].[31] Thus, it is probable that the visit first featured in the *taʿziyeh* in its dream context, later evolving into an apparition. What is clear is that this type-scene has been a very long-standing feature of the repertoire, as we find it included in the oldest extant script of a *taʿziyeh* play, the rendition of *Ghārat-e khaimeh-hā* dated 1136/1724.[32]

1.2.2 The Arrival of a Stranger

This *taʿziyeh* type-scene is less common but is nonetheless repeated in a number of the main episodes. The elements of the scene are as follows:

– Stranger (often of distant origin) observes the hero or heroes without knowing their identity, describes their desperate situation
– Stranger becomes astonished by the hero's resplendence, suspects a holy identity

31 Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, 112. Also see Mufīd, *Irshād*, 319; Balʿamī, *Tārīkh-nāmeh*, 4, 706; Mīrkhānd, *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, 3, 2234–35. Ḥusain dreaming of Muḥammad who predicts his martyrdom at Karbala is also recounted by Kāshefī, *Rawżat*, 277–78.

32 Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 13*, 19–62.

– Stranger converses with hero, becomes aware of his/her identity, is outraged by the injustice
– Stranger (converts to Islam and) offers help
– (Stranger sacrifices him/herself in hero's defence)

Of the plays studied here, "the arrival of a stranger" features in *The Martyrdom of Imam Ḥusain* and *Bāzār-e Shām*. In the former it is realised in the Dervish of Kabul's meeting with Imam Ḥusain at Karbala. In the latter, it is exemplified when the "Īlchī Farangī" (European Ambassador) encounters the surviving family members at Yazīd's court in Damascus.[33] From amongst the wider repertoire further examples of this type-scene include a benevolent Jew meeting Ḥusain's daughter Ruqaiyeh in the desert in *Ghārat-e khaimeh-hā*,[34] and in *Majles-e dairānī-ye farangī* (The European Monk), when the captives are lodged overnight in a monastery on their journey to Damascus, a monk becoming mesmerized by Ḥusain's head.[35] A further example is a Christian lady and her maid coming across the bodies of the Karbala martyrs in *Majles-e zan-e naṣrānī* (The Christian Lady). At first glance, these are diverse incidents yet they unmistakably follow the same template.

These scenes can be relatively succinct, as is the case with the Dervish of Kabul and the Jew, where the encounter ends quite soon after the stranger offering water to the parched hero or heroine. However, they can also play out over the course of an episode. The story of the monk is such an example. He is immediately drawn to Ḥusain's head and, sensing its special nature and wishing to honour it appropriately, anoints it with rosewater. However, there then follows a long interval before his conversion to Islam, during which he acts as a witness while the head is visited by a long succession of former prophets and biblical figures. Likewise, in the case of the European Ambassador in *Bāzār-e Shām*, the elements of the type-scene are played over the course of the episode. He first becomes curious as to the identity of the captives and upon seeing the heads of the martyrs is drawn to their resplendence, suspecting a holy identity. Although their prophetic lineage is then confirmed, it is not until

33 The term *farangī* comes from "Frankish" but is used to denote the European and Christian. In *taʿziyeh* scripts it can also generally denote the foreign, and *farang*, abroad. For example, Sultan Qais of India describes his origin as "*farang*", clearly meaning India not Europe. CP: MS 28 Ghulām Ḥusain b. Mullā Sharīf, (Unknown Origin, 1371/1951).

34 Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 13*, 40–46.

35 For a French translation of this play (from the Chodzko manuscript) see Chodzko, *Théatre persan*, 177–219.

later in the episode that he tries to intervene on their behalf, converts to their creed and (in some renditions) is sacrificed for them.[36]

In the story of the Christian lady too, the components of the type-scene in question provide the framework for the entire episode. Initially unaware of the battle that has recently taken place, her alighting with her caravan at Karbala is portrayed as happenstance, yet from the outset she senses the special nature of the site and that the very ground exudes divine immanence. This continues throughout the narrative as, despite the unsettling occurrence of blood gushing from the ground when her entourage hammer down their tent pegs, she is unwilling to leave. Walking in the desert, she and her maid come upon the bodies of the slain, are drawn to their resplendence and outraged at their suffering. Their offer of help in this case (similar to that of the monk) is through their display of reverence and kindness, lamenting over the martyrs' corpses in the place of their absent womenfolk. They also perform basic funerary rites, washing them with their tears; in the Pelly rendition the mistress puts the parched infant Aṣghar to her breast. The play ends with the Christians Lady's conversion by Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā, who also visits the scene.[37]

Although scenes of this nature often feature the stranger converting to Shiʿism, they are not simple conversion narratives. Incidents of conversion by the *ahl-e bait* are relatively common in the *taʿziyeh* and take place in a wide range of contexts but here the conversion is neither essential nor the most important component. Rather, the importance lies with the role of the stranger as a witness and his or her ability to temporarily take on a narratorial role, describing the suffering of the hero/es as viewed from outside. Whilst the stranger's arrival is not essential to the recounting of the Karbala tragedy, as it does not alter the trajectory of the besieged party's ordeal, it is a valuable opportunity to depict the suffering of the protagonists through having it described by an outsider. Further to this, the stranger's reaction to Ḥusain and his family reaffirms their holy nature and thus their legitimacy, whilst simultaneously showing the callousness of the enemy. With the resplendence of the *ahl-e bait* and their offspring driving the stranger to offer help – and even in certain instances to sacrifice himself for them – the cruelty of the likes of Yazīd and Shemr, and the Kufans' abandonment of Ḥusain's cause, become all the

36 Whilst in all renditions of *Bāzār-e Shām* he is threatened with execution and his script ends with him saying the *shahādah* (declaration of faith), it is not clear that the execution was played in all cases. In the Zand rendition of the play the fact that he is executed is explicit.

37 Pelly, *Miracle Play*, 2, 286–303. For the Litten collection rendition see Esmāʿīlī, *Teshneh*, 577–609.

more intolerable. In addition to this, the identity of the stranger can work to represent sympathy for Ḥusain amongst different social or cultural groups.[38]

These particular strangers' encounters with Ḥusain's family do not generally appear to be rooted in evidence from the accounts of early historians.[39] However, there are many instances in early Arabic historiography of non-Muslims recognising and being drawn to the prophetic nature of Ḥusain's grandfather. In *al-Sīrah al-nabawiyyah*, a 2nd/8th century biography of the Prophet Muḥammad by Ebn Esḥāq, the original being lost but the content surviving through the work of one of his editors ʿAbd al-Malek Ebn Heshām (d. 213/828 or 218/833), we find many examples of non-Muslims recognising the veracity of Muḥammad's prophetic mission. The most prominent of these is the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius who from a mere description of Muḥammad becomes convinced of his prophetic nature. Heraclius himself wishes to follow him and tries to persuade his army to this effect but such is their ire at the suggestion that he reluctantly abandons this attempt.[40] Negus, the Christian Emperor of Ethiopia, upon receiving a letter from Muḥammad, recognises his prophethood and converts.[41] A Christian monk, Baḥīrā, who meets Muḥammad as a boy, is drawn to him and recognises him as a messenger of God whose coming had been foretold.[42] While not all of these figures convert to Islam, like the strangers in the *taʿziyeh* who cannot fail but attest the holy nature of Ḥusain and his family, their acknowledgement of Muḥammad's prophethood serves to legitimate his mission.

With respect to the direct inspiration for this *taʿziyeh* type-scene, it is likely Kāshefī's *Rawżat al-shuhadāʾ* played an important role. It includes several instances of Jews and Christians confirming the holy nature of the *ahl-e bait* and subsequently converting.[43] For example, Kāshefī tells the story of a Jew

38 This will be discussed further in chapter 5.

39 Not early historiography but nonetheless noteworthy, a version of the story of the Christian monk and Ḥusain's head (varying somewhat from the *taʿziyeh* rendition) is included in *Tārīkh-e Sīstān*, dating to the mid-5th/11th century. Jean Calmard, "Muharram Ceremonies and Diplomacy (preliminary study)," in *Qajar Iran: Political, Social and Cultural Change, 1800–1925*, ed. Edmund Bosworth and Carole Hillenbrand (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983) 215, 225.

40 Muḥammad Ebn Esḥaq and ʿAbd al-Malik Ebn Heshām, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. A. Guillaume (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 654–57. For further discussion also see Nadia Maria El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* (Cambridge Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 48–51.

41 Ebn Esḥaq and Ebn Heshām, *Life of Muhammad*, 657–58.

42 Ibid., 79–81.

43 I thank Dr Roxana Zenhari for her fascinating presentation on "Men of *farang*" in martyrdom stories at ECIS 9.

who saw the heads of the Karbala martyrs as they were being transported to Shām. After hearing a whisper from Ḥusain's lips he bestowed gifts upon the Karbala captives and promptly embraced Islam. When threatened by their captors he drew his sword, fought and was martyred.[44] Yet, while the main elements of the type-scene are included here, it would be misleading to say that the *taʿziyeh* inherited this type-scene in full from the stories transmitted in Kāshefī's *Rawżat*. Perhaps due to the absence of a narrator in these performances, the way in which these benevolent strangers watch and describe the suffering of the protagonists has been developed greatly in the *taʿziyeh* context.

On a separate note, when we consider the development of the *taʿziyeh* repertoire and indeed how the content of the main episodes evolved over time, this type-scene provides an example of how use of a familiar framework could allow for the introduction of new characters and their acceptance by a well-versed audience. The European Ambassador features in *Bāzār-e Shām* from the oldest extant rendition (dated 1184/1770–71); the Dervish of Kabul on the other hand, was not introduced to the climactic episode until the mid-19th century CE.[45] As I have mentioned, this character's experience at Karbala is the founding myth of the Khāksār dervish order, yet, having his encounter with Ḥusain take the form of a type-scene already extant within the repertoire, allowed for its smooth insertion – continuity accompanying change.

1.2.3 The Unwilling Killer

The type-scene of the "unwilling killer" is not dissimilar in function to "the arrival of a stranger" in that it affirms the holy nature of Ḥusain and his family. The elements of this scene are that the unwilling killer character:

- is ordered to kill hero
- approaches hero, overcome by his appearance, recognises hero as someone holy
- converses with hero, becomes aware of his identity
- refuses to kill him
- converts to Islam or begs forgiveness/ expresses regret
- (sacrifices himself in the hero's defence)

Variations of this scene appear in *The Martyrdom of Imam Ḥusain*, as an individual from amongst the enemy troops is sent to kill Ḥusain but then cannot.

44 Kāshefī Sabzevārī, *Rawżat*, 490.

45 For an edition of the former see Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 11*, 15–82. For the Dervish of Kabul's integration see E. Lucy Deacon, "The Curious Addition of Non-Religious Characters to *The Martyrdom of Imam Husain*," *Iranian Studies* 54, no. 1–2 (2021).

At times this character is a *farangī* (European/foreigner) and is also described as a *naṣrānī* (Christian) – these descriptions being interchangeable in some scripts. Some renditions of the climactic play feature an alternative unwilling killer in the person of Senān b. Anas, who is neither European nor Christian.[46] This type-scene also features in *The Martyrdom of Mūsā b. Jaʿfar*, which again has a Christian as the unwilling killer, in this case sent by the ʿAbbasid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd to kill the Seventh Imam Mūsā b. Jaʿfar (also known as Mūsā al-Kāẓem). The scene also exists in an expanded format in *The Martyrdom of Ḥurr*, in which Ḥurr b. al-Yazīd al-Riyāhī is sent by the newly appointed governor of Kufa, ʿUbaid-Allāh b. Ziyād, to intercept Ḥusain's party and draw first blood. However, after their meeting, he doubts his mission and martyrs himself in Ḥusain's defence.

In the variant of the scene in the climactic play where the unwilling killer is a Christian, Ebn-e Saʿd offers him copious bounty. He approaches Ḥusain intending to take his head but then recognises that he must be of a prophetic line, like his own ʿĪsā (Jesus). He asks about and is informed of Ḥusain's lineage. This scene can include the pair discussing the fact that the Christian had seen ʿĪsā in a dream the previous night and that in the dream his meeting with Ḥusain was foretold.[47] It can also simply feature Ḥusain telling the Christian of his tribulations, and the Christian expressing outrage at the uneven odds he is facing (followed by Ḥusain revealing his identity).[48] Either way, the Christian regrets having come to kill Ḥusain and instead asks to be converted; Ḥusain obliges. The Christian then goes to Ebn-e Saʿd stating his aversion to carrying out the task and is subsequently killed – martyred for Ḥusain. A rendition of the climactic play by the composer Nāṭeq dated 1217/1802–3 shows that this scene was played, with all of its essential elements, by this early point. Nāṭeq's unwilling killer is an Armenian surgeon who does not speak of having seen ʿĪsā in a dream but immediately recognises Ḥusain as being of ʿĪsā's ilk, embracing Ḥusain's religion and martyring himself for him.[49]

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46 The Chodzko rendition of the climactic play is the only one among my sample to include the variation featuring Senān, but it is not uncommon. It is included in CP: MS 28, in the Mīr-e ʿAzā rendition of the climactic play, and in an anonymous version from Tehran (dated 1325/1907–8) from the Hāshem Fayyāż collection. See Kāẓemī, Mīr ʿAzā-ye Kāshānī, 230–31 and 257–58. According to Fayyāż, this scene originates from Tehran and does not feature in renditions of the play from Kashan. Ibid., 231 and 257.

47 CP: MS 726 (Tafresh, Beg. 20th cent.) and MS 938 (Shiraz, Beg. 20th cent.). The Chodzko rendition also includes this detail but is more cryptic saying that ʿĪsā had given him permission to go to the highest heaven and freed him from the bonds of apostasy.

48 CP: MS 583 (Isfahan, 1351/1932) and MS 576 (Tehran, Mid-20th cent.).

49 Daryāī, *Daftar 14*, 75–78.

In a dramatic sense, the insertion of this type-scene into an episode allows for a peak in the action before the climax. But, perhaps more importantly, it highlights the holy credentials of Ḥusain and his descendants by showing their resplendence as impossible to ignore (even for followers of other creeds or those hungry for rewards). The inclusion of ʿĪsā lends them further legitimacy, demonstrating their connection to former prophets and showing that he encourages his own followers to support them. This is again reminiscent of the stories legitimating Muḥammad's prophethood in Ebn Heshām's rendition of Ebn Esḥāq's *Sīrah*. The version of the scene played in *The Martyrdom of Mūsā b. Jaʿfar* also employs the idea that ʿĪsā had appeared to the Christian in a dream the night before, predicting the encounter with Mūsā. It also features an onstage apparition of ʿĪsā, who reminds the Christian of the dream. It again satisfies the type-scene's schema in full, the Imam inspiring such wonder in the Christian that he begs to be converted and then harangues Hārūn al-Rashīd for his evil ways.[50]

In the variant of the scene where Senān Ebn-e Anas is the unwilling killer, during the final stage of the battle, he is sent by Ebn-e Saʿd to take Ḥusain's head. He sets out intent on doing this, but when the two meet Ḥusain asks his name and then rejects him as his killer, telling him that he is not the one. Despite this interesting additional detail, the scene still follows the criteria of the unwilling killer type-scene in that Senān repents when reminded of Ḥusain's holy lineage. He goes back to Ebn-e Saʿd saying that he no longer cares about rewards and will not kill the children of Muṣṭafā; when Ḥusain looked at him, his eyes resembled those of the Prophet and he felt ashamed.

In the case of *taʿziyeh* of *The Martyrdom of Ḥurr*, Ḥurr b. Yazīd al-Riyāḥī intercepting Ḥusain's caravan near Karbala at the order of Ebn-e Ziyād, but later switching sides and being martyred for Ḥusain, is widely documented in historical sources.[51] Here the *taʿziyeh* composers were dramatizing the story of a historical figure that had come to them complete in narrative detail. His being unwilling to kill Ḥusain was not of their imagining. Nonetheless, they depict his journey towards sacrificing himself according to the components of the unwilling killer type-scene, but played out slowly. Although initially reluctant to take on the mission, he later embraces it, only to become torn once he witnesses the resplendence of the Holy Family and their noble behaviour,

50 Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles*, 2, 320–23.

51 For example, see Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, 92–144.

slowly recognising their true legitimacy, repenting and wishing to be martyred for Ḥusain.[52]

The unwilling killer type-scene is not found *per se* in the Karbala accounts of early or Safavid era historians, but we find inspiration for the concept in their reports. They describe a general reluctance amongst the enemy to fight Ḥusain, let alone to take individual responsibility for killing him.[53] Meanwhile, Kāshefī's *Rawżat al-shuhadāʾ* does feature a clear example of this type-scene. It recounts that after Ḥusain had fallen from his horse an anonymous soldier approached with the intention of finishing him off, but that Ḥusain refused to accept him as his killer and expressed concern that he would burn in hell. So touched was the man by this compassion that he attempted to turn the very weapon with which he had intended to kill Ḥusain on Ebn-e Saʿd: subsequently cut down by the enemy, he asked to be considered amongst Ḥusain's martyrs and was accepted as such.[54] Kāshefī cites other similar stories that mention the power of Ḥusain's gaze and allure of his resplendence, details that feature in the *taʿziyeh* versions of this type-scene.

Although Kāshefī's *Rawżat* features a number of conversion narratives, it is noteworthy that none of his unwilling killers are followers of other creeds. The unwilling killer as a *farangī* and a Christian, which allows the scene to include a conversion and highlights the cruelty of the antagonists (outdone in mercy by these outsiders), appears to be an innovation of the *taʿziyeh* composers. Or indeed it may have been a development that took place during the centuries between Kāshefī's work and theirs, as the stories were told and retold by the orators. The Christian as unwilling killer does feature in Jawharī's *Ṭūfān al-bukāʾ*, completed in 1250/1834, but given that we have an example of the scene being played in the *taʿziyeh* from as early as Nāṭeq's 1217/1802–3 work, this would be an instance of the *taʿziyeh* having influenced the content of the lithograph, rather than vice versa.[55]

The fact that the *taʿziyeh* also features Senān Ebn-e Anas as an unwilling killer is curious. Senān is commonly mentioned by historians as being amongst the group who committed the fatal attack on Ḥusain. These same sources do not describe him as having turned back; in fact, many of them describe him as having dealt the fatal blow. This is a matter to which we will return in chapter 5

52 This is an important episode, played during the first ten days of Muḥarram. For the Darbandsar rendition see Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles*, 1, 451–71.

53 Al-Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, 157–60; Balʿamī, *Tārīkh-nāmeh*, 4, 710; Mīrkhānd, *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, 3, 2232 and 2258–60; Khāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-siyār*, 56.

54 Kāshefī Sabzevārī, *Rawżat*, 468–69.

55 The Christian as unwilling killer is also present in "Geryān" Ardestānī Esfahānī's *Ṭarīq-al-bukāʾ* first published in 1273/ 1856–57. Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī, *Mabānī-ye shabīh-khānī*, 82.

on *The Martyrdom of Imam Ḥusain*, when I will discuss the fact that Shemr was not fixed as Ḥusain's killer until relatively late. For now, suffice it to say that the inclusion of a scene in which Senān is close to killing Ḥusain but turns back appears to be an attempt by the dramatists to reconcile conflicting sources.

2 The "Floating Scene"

In the Muḥarram cycle we also encounter what I term "floating scenes", segments of action that, although integral to the plot of a particular episode, can change their position in the episode's structure depending on the rendition. What's more, they can feature in more than one episode, sometimes repeated verbatim. Unlike the type-scenes described above, these scenes tend to be based specifically on information about the events at Karbala transmitted in historical sources. An example of a floating scene, and indeed one that moves across episodes, is one in which, as the enemy encroach on the camp, Zainab wakes the sleeping Ḥusain. He complains at being disturbed, as he was having a pleasant dream in which he had seen his grandfather, father and mother (and sometimes brother Ḥasan) in paradise. He has been told that tomorrow he will be their guest. This is a dramatization of the dream reported by Abū Mekhnaf that is likely to have inspired the apparition type-scene. As it has been rendered in the *taʿziyeh*, the verse of Ḥusain and Zainab's exchange features the *radīf* (word following the rhyme) "*naguẕāshtī*" (why didn't you leave me?). It features, together with this distinctive refrain, in *The Martyrdom of Imam Ḥusain*, *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās* and *The Martyrdom of Ḥurr*.[56] The existence of such scenes that float between episodes may be explained by the fact that several of the plays of the Muḥarram cycle dramatize events that took place on the same day or night but each foregrounds the experience of a particular hero. They therefore use the same material to give context to the hero's story.

Such scenes, so familiar to the audience, also provide a potential means of messaging should the dramatists wish to innovate. For example, the play commemorating Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh narrates the circumstances of his assassination; it draws a subtle parallel between the king's murder and the martyrdom of Ḥusain through allusion to the oft-repeated floating scene in which Ḥusain is awakened. Nāṣer al-Dīn sees a masked stranger in his sleep who informs him

56 Details of renditions of the former two plays featuring this scene will be given in chapters 3 and 5. For the scene featured in a rendition of *The Martyrdom of Ḥurr* see Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles*, 1, 460–61.

of his imminent death, tells him to have faith and not to be afraid, and dictates the steps he must take to fulfil this destiny.[57]

3 The Martyrdom *Kompositionsschema* (Composition-Scheme)

The martyrdoms of the main protagonists in the Muḥarram cycle – ʿAbbās, ʿAlī Akbar, Qāsem and Ḥusain – each occupy an episode that follows a very clear composition-scheme, while featuring narrative detail specific to the individual hero (usually traceable to historical and hagiographical sources). This fixed pattern is again reminiscent of the compositional techniques identified in the study of oral traditions. In his study of South Slavic oral poetics, Gerhard Gesemann analysed the technical methods by which the singers improvised, identifying the existence of a "*Kompositionsschema*" (composition-scheme), "a multiform traditional unit as large as the entire tale."[58] This provided the artist with a structure for his performance as a whole. Albert Lord, in his celebrated *The Singer of Tales*, observes the same phenomenon, which he refers to as a "story-pattern."[59] This is not to say that such artists, or the *taʿziyeh* composers, were necessarily aware of following a scheme. In fact, in the case of the latter it is more likely that this was simply the pattern of certain early renditions that then became customary. Or, perhaps, during the centuries prior to the emergence of the *taʿziyeh*, this had already become the standard way to recount a Karbala martyrdom, as these narratives circulated orally amongst the storytellers.

The structure and elements of the martyrdom composition-scheme within the Muḥarram cycle are as follows (these elements will be present in the following order in the episodes using the scheme, with narrative material specific to the individual hero inserted between them):

1. **Threats from the enemy; *munājāt* (prayer); Ḥusain's final battle appears imminent**

   The enemy observe the resplendence yet defencelessness of the party and mercilessly calls for the next combatant to come forward. Ḥusain prays (sometimes accompanied by Zainab and other family members): he decries the bitterness of fate, calling upon the heavens to witness their plight. This section also often features the fates of the individual family

57 Chelkowski, "Majlis-i Shâhinshâh-i Îrân," 234–35.

58 Foley, *Oral Composition*, 14; Gerhard Gesemann, *Studien zur südslavischen Volksepik* (Reichenberg: Gebrüder Stiepel, 1926).

59 "Songs and the Song," in Albert Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, ed. Stephen Mitchell and Gregory Nagy, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001).

members being foretold in detail, even by the characters themselves, and frequently includes the infant Sakīneh begging for water. This is a catalyst to push the hero towards the Euphrates and thus the battlefield.

2. Hero requests permission to do battle in Ḥusain's defence; Ḥusain refuses

Due to the drastically uneven odds, if granted, this request will undoubtedly lead to the hero's death. The Imam's unwillingness to see him martyred demonstrates the bond between them. It allows for portrayal of Ḥusain's suffering and simultaneously for characterisation of the hero through the reasons stipulated by the Imam in his insistence that the other must survive.

3. Hero frustrated at not being considered worthy, contests decision based on wishes of a senior relative – permission granted

The refusal is an obstacle that the hero must overcome to achieve his goal, to sacrifice himself for Ḥusain; his response to it creates an opportunity for treatment of his emotions. The fact that he has recourse to the wishes of a senior relative underscores the hierarchical rule essential to the genre. Everyone is bound by hierarchy.

4. Hero bids a prolonged farewell to the womenfolk, entrusts them with his *vaṣiyyat* (last will and testament)

The hero is characterized by the earthly concerns that he expresses here. The women vehemently protest his parting; this is also a space for development of the female characters and familial relationships. The hero is shown to be torn between his heavenly and earthy duties. His determination to be martyred for Ḥusain is pitted against his desire to protect the family; the women and children thus act as an earthly bond.

5. Hero prepared for martyrdom

The hero is dressed in a *kafan* (shroud), often also in a garment belonging to an ancestor, attesting his lineage (further grooming can feature). The dressing of the hero for battle signals that both Ḥusain and the women have been forced to accept his impending martyrdom. In particular, the shroud being placed over his head symbolises his death becoming a certainty. There will be no return from this point. This is a space for treating

the agony of the family at the impending separation. A challenge from the enemy sees a sharp end to the tender preparations. The hero's horse is brought forward; the family often beseech it to ensure his safe return.

6. Hero goes into battle (and returns to camp)

Upon entering the battlefield the hero makes a last attempt at negotiation. He calls on Ebn-e Saʿd to step forward and asks for water for the family, which is refused. This demonstrates that a peaceful solution was sought at all costs, showing not only the hero's honourable nature but also (importantly due to their role as intercessors) that he tries to save his enemy from the sin of killing him. Having no option but to fight, the hero shows super-human strength in battle, triumphing over vast numbers of opponents and surviving heavy injury. He makes a return to camp complaining of great thirst and bids a last farewell.

7. Final conflict and death of the hero

Back on the battlefield, the hero finally succumbs to his injuries and a simultaneous attack by multiple aggressors. He falls from his horse, calling out to Ḥusain. The Imam crosses the battlefield and reaches him. Mortally injured, the hero often asks not to be taken back to camp before death, to avoid his female relatives seeing him in this state. Shemr arrives and beheads the hero. A response from nature such as the sky darkening and earth trembling commonly follow this moment.

My identification of this composition-scheme is an original contribution. However, other scholars acknowledge certain recurrent structural elements in the *taʿziyeh*'s central episodes. Shahidi has commented that all episodes treating the Karbala martyrdoms and the stories of prophets open with either Ḥusain or the prophet in question in prayer (*munājāt*), often joined by his family, who interject in order of hierarchy.[60] The enemy challenge that usually precedes this initial prayer is a recognised element termed "*mubārez-khānī*."[61] Nāṣerbakht argues that *taʿziyeh* plays involving battles have taken many of their features from epic literature, including the donning of armour, single combat and young warriors asking permission to do battle. He likens young

60 For his detailed discussion of the verse and content of these prayers and their development through time see Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh-khānī: dowreh-ye Qājār*, 613–18. Also see Shahidi, "Literary and Musical Developments," 58.

61 *Taʿziyeh-khānī: dowreh-ye Qājār*, 620–22; Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī, *Mabānī-ye shabīh-khānī*, 199.

warriors such as Qasem, Akbar, and Zainab's children seeking Ḥusain's consent before entering the battlefield to scenes in the *Shāh-nāmeh* such as the young hero Bīzhan asking his father Gīv's permission to fight in the story *Davāzdah Rukh* (Twelve Combats).[62] A clear difference would be that in the *taʿziyeh* the young heroes seek not only to prove their worth on the battlefield but to sacrifice their lives for Ḥusain. The term *shūq-e shahādat* (fervour for martyrdom) is used frequently in the scripts to describe their ardour in this respect.

I begin each of the chapters that follow with a detailed outline, by section, of the episode that they treat. This illustrates the episode's essential components, which can be considered its skeleton, fleshed out by the dialogues. The skeletons of the plays foregrounding the martyrdoms of ʿAbbās, Qāsem and Ḥusain show that they follow this composition-scheme. Given Ḥusain's pivotal role in the scheme it may seem curious that the episode featuring his own martyrdom could follow the same pattern, yet it does.

Whereas the other heroes sacrifice themselves for Ḥusain, in *The Martyrdom of Imam Ḥusain* he sacrifices himself for the Shiʿi community in order to become their intercessor. Interestingly, as Ḥusain becomes the hero of the episode, his practical functions within the composition-scheme – giving the blessing required to release the hero onto the battlefield, and arriving at the injured hero's side before death – are largely assumed by Zainab.[63] This is a marked change within a familiar system and foreshadows the shift in leadership of the group that will take place after Ḥusain's death. It suggests that a composition-scheme not only provided the dramatists with a template for creating the main episodes or new renditions thereof, it also offered a potential means of messaging. Since these works form part of a cycle, played day after day (and indeed year after year) during Muḥarram, the audience would have been very familiar with this framework; thus, variation of its elements could be used to communicate specific ideas.[64]

With regards to the inspiration for this framework, it is noteworthy that the main elements of the scheme: permission to fight being initially denied then later given; the hero being dressed for martyrdom; an attempt at negotiation with the enemy; a thirsty return to camp during battle; and Ḥusain arriving at the dying hero's side, all appear somewhere in the historical and hagiographical

62 Nāṣerbakht, *Adabiyāt-e īrānī*, 238.

63 For elaboration see chapter 5, "Skeleton of *The Martyrdom of Imam Ḥusain* and Function of its Sections".

64 A further example of this scheme being used to convey a message can be found in *The Martyrdom of Ḥurr*. Whilst the whole episode does not follow the scheme, after Ḥurr switches sides to support Ḥusain, he is given the treatment of a martyr hero by the elements of the scheme being applied to his final battle. For this section of the play in the Darbandsar rendition see Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles*, 1, 469–71.

literature pertaining to Karbala. The main difference between those accounts and the *taʿziyeh* telling of the same martyrdoms is that, whereas in the earlier sources these elements are mentioned here and there with respect to different individuals,[65] in the *taʿziyeh* they all occur in the martyrdom narratives of all of the main protagonists.

A further marked difference between the *taʿziyeh* and the aforementioned literature is the extent of the attention paid to the martyr heroes making their *vaṣiyyat*, and their interactions with the womenfolk, prior to entering the battlefield. The female perspective and the relationships of the male martyrs with their womenfolk have been expanded considerably in the *taʿziyeh*. It is not surprising that the historians pay very little attention to the experience of the women when recounting the battle, other than to say that they were in the camp and were later taken captive. Even Kāshefī's elaboration of these events, which does describe the women mourning after the deaths of their menfolk at Karbala, does not routinely feature familial farewells (equating to what I have described as "section 4" of the composition-scheme) prior to a martyrdom.[66] There is, however, an interesting exception to this: his narration of Qāsem's martyrdom narrative does feature a considerable amount of dialogue between the hero and his bride and mother. In fact, his rendition of Qāsem's story is relatively complete in the detail of the martyrdom composition-scheme observable in the *taʿziyeh*, and may have acted as a source of inspiration for the composers structuring the Muḥarram cycle's main episodes.

As a final point it is noteworthy that in episodes conforming to the martyrdom composition-scheme, when a section of material appears that is supplementary to the scheme and does not pertain to the historical narrative of the hero's deeds, it often proves to be a type-scene (inserted into some but not all renditions). This implies that type-scenes were additional bodies of material available to the composer should s/he wish the plot to become more elaborate, and should the necessary resources be in place. Such resources would have included the performers, animals, props and costumes available to a particular community or performance troop.

65 For example: for Qāsem initially being refused permission to fight on account of his young age see Mīrkhānd, *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, 3, 2255–56; for ʿAlī Akbar being dressed by Ḥusain for battle, including him donning ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb's leather belt see Kāshefī Sabzevārī, *Rawżat*, 450; for ʿAbbās going to Ebn-e Saʿd to negotiate on Ḥusain's behalf see Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, 112–14; for Akbar's thirsty return to camp during battle see Balʿamī, *Tārīkh-nāmeh*, 4, 709; and for Ḥusain rushing to Qāsem's dying body on the battlefield see Mufīd, *Irshād*, 332–33.

66 Kāshefī's rendition of Ḥusain's martyrdom narrative does include mention of familial farewells and conveying of *vaṣiyyat*. However, the treatment of these interactions is minimal compared their elaboration in the *taʿziyeh*. See Kāshefī Sabzevārī, *Rawżat*, 464–66.

4 Conclusion

I have shown here that the compositional phenomena of the type-scene and the *Kompositionsschema* (composition-scheme), are identifiable in the central plays of the *taʿziyeh* repertoire. This is testament to the close relationship of the *taʿziyeh* to oral art forms, namely the traditional Iranian forms of storytelling (*naqqālī* and *pardeh-dārī*). Type-scenes, relatively self-contained bodies of narrative, lend themselves well to the inherently chain-like structure of the *taʿziyeh* plays. Furthermore, they offered the composers a tool with which they could create new material, yet introduce it in a format already familiar to their well-versed audiences, making its addition to the portrayal of the fates of their religious heroes more likely to be accepted. This allowed for the rejuvenation of the central episodes, and assisted in the creation of new ones; the presence of the Christian as unwilling killer in *The Martyrdom of Mūsā b. Jaʿfar* can be seen as an example of the latter.

What I have termed "the martyrdom composition-scheme", a compositional unit as large as the episode itself, combines elements of battle scenes from Persian epic literature with details of the experiences of the Karbala martyrs as transmitted by early Arabic and Safavid period historians and indeed in Kāshefī's *Rawżat*. It is not surprising to find these influences in the *taʿziyeh* treatment of the martyr heroes' final battles. However, the fact that all elements came to be applied (in the same order) to all of the central figures suggests that the composers used this format as a compositional resource with which to expand the stories of the martyrs as they became individual episodes. It also hints at an implicit pact between the composers, performers, and their audience, suggesting that in the treatment of a martyrdom each of these elements was expected to be present in some form. Whatever the martyr's individual story, this was the standard way to treat a martyrdom, showing due respect to the martyr and his family.

The *taʿziyeh* composers may have inherited this composition-scheme from the storytellers, or it may have evolved as the dramatizations of the Karbala martyrdoms assumed episodic form. It is significant that this format, although used to treat the stories of male martyrs, includes considerable space for the treatment of their interactions with their womenfolk. It thus marks out an important place for such interactions in the *taʿziyeh*'s central episodes, and sees the women receive far more attention than they do in either historical or hagiographical accounts of Karbala. This is in keeping with a general observation of my research, presented across the following chapters, that the *taʿziyeh* is very much composed for both a female and male audience.

CHAPTER 3

The Martyrdom of Abū'l-Fażl al-ʿAbbās

افتاد دست راست خدایا ز پیکرم   بر دامن حسین برسان دست دیگرم
دست چپم به جاست اگر نیست دست راست   امّا هزار حیف که یک دست بی‌صداست[1]

> My right hand, O God, has fallen from my body. Enable my other hand to reach the robe of Ḥusain. My left hand is in place even if my right hand is not, but a thousand sorrows that one hand is without voice.

The episode *Shahādat-e Ḥażrat-e Abū'l-Fażl al-ʿAbbās* (The Martyrdom of Abū'l-Fażl al-ʿAbbās), referred to hereafter as *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās*, treats the death of ʿAbbās b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb, Ḥusain's half-brother and standard-bearer at the battle of Karbala. He is the son of Imam ʿAlī but his mother is Umm al-Banīn,[2] not Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā; therefore, he is not a grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad, but is revered as a loyal and brave protector of the *ahl-e bait*. In the *taʿziyeh* he is characterised as a warrior on an epic scale; the wider repertoire treats not only his martyrdom but his birth and stories of his heroic deeds, and even has him conduct miracles. In the treatment of Karbala, his closeness to Ḥusain is always underscored, their fates portrayed as interlinked. It is not until the death of his champion that Ḥusain will draw his sword.[3] According to the popular narrative of ʿAbbās' martyrdom, in addition to being a brave warrior and flag-bearer, he was the *sāqī* (water-bearer) of the children of Ḥusain's party; when besieged at Karbala the thirst of the children drove ʿAbbās to break heroically through the blockade on the Euphrates. Attempting

1 Famous lines spoken by the character ʿAbbās in most renditions of *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās*. See CP: MS 51 (Ghulām Ḥusain b. Mullā Sharīf, 1371/1951–2); MS 622 (Mid-20th Cent., Isfahan); Chodzko MS, BnF, Supplément Persan 993; the Zand and Litten collection renditions, and Lewis Pelly's translation. Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 11*, 299–300; Esmāʿīlī, *Teshneh*, 429; Pelly, *Miracle Play*, 2, 35. The second couplet also features in Muḥammad Ebrāhīm al-Marvazī Jawharī, *Ṭūfān al-bukā* (Tehran: Sherkat-e nesbiy-ye kānūn-e ketāb, [1834] *c.*1940), 208.

2 Mufīd, *Irshād*, 346.

3 Esmāʿīlī, *Teshneh*, 376–78.

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FIGURE 3 Performer playing ʿAbbās b. ʿAlī, Tekiyeh-ye Ḥusainī-ye ʿĀẓam, Armaghankhaneh, Zanjan Province, 7th Muḥarram 1439/2017

to return to the camp, he was beset by the enemy, drastically outnumbered, had both of his hands cut off and then died.

1 Script Sources, and Tracing the Narrative

I have made my analysis of this episode based on ten renditions of the script, listed here. The majority of these are in manuscript form, and they include all of the complete copies of *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās* from the Cerulli Collection, and the Chodzko manuscript rendition. Throughout the discussion below I give the dates for the Cerulli Collection manuscripts (if the manuscript itself is not date marked) as they appear in the collection's index, for example "Late 19th century".

TABLE 1 Script sources for *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās*

Rendition	Date	Origin	Author or copyist
Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī, Zand Collection[a]	1206/ 1791–2	Unknown	Anon
Chodzko MS (XVIII.)[b]	1249/1833	Tehran	Anon
Litten Collection[c]	1830s	Unknown	Anon
Pelly Collection[d]	*c.*1873	Shiraz/ Bushehr	Anon
Ṣāleḥī Rād Collection[e]	Late 19th cent.	Darbandsar	Anon
Cerulli Persiani, MS 416[f]	End 19th cent.	Mazandaran	Anon
Cerulli Persiani, MS 51	1371/1951	Unknown	Ghulām Ḥusain b. Mullā Sharīf
Cerulli Persiani, MS 513	1331 SH/ 1952	Kashan	Ghulām Ḥusain Ṣāberī
Cerulli Persiani, MS 617	Mid-20th cent.	Tehran	Anon
Cerulli Persiani MS 622	Mid-20th cent.	Isfahan	Anon

a Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar-e taʿziyeh 11*, 253–301
b BnF, Supplément Persan 993, 140–153
c Litten, *Das Drama*, 85–112; Esmāʿīlī, *Teshneh*, 381–432
d An English prose translation. Pelly, *Miracle Play*, 2, 18–36
e Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles-e taʿziyeh*, 1, 397–418
f This is a *jung* and is missing the final page(s). After 14 pages of dense script, it cuts off shortly before we would expect ʿAbbās to be given Ḥusain's permission to do battle. Despite being incomplete, I estimate it to retain at least ninety percent of the content; it is a valuable addition to the sample due to its date and origin.

In discussing how ʿAbbās' martyrdom has been dramatized in the *taʿziyeh* I will focus largely on the play's centrepiece, a scene that I will refer to as "the night-time encounter", in which ʿAbbās' loyalty to Ḥusain is tested by the arch-antagonist Shemr. We will see how the dramatists created a colourful verbal duel between these two major characters, and evoked the epic genre to portray ʿAbbās as a formidable warrior hero, also stressing his spiritual lineage to convey the divinely ordained nature of his role as Ḥusain's protector. We will also look at the play's historical development considering early origins and innovations in content, and finding evidence that the introduction of lithography to Iran in the 1830s affected the episode's evolution.

First, I will briefly touch upon how the martyrdom of ʿAbbās b. ʿAlī has been treated in historical sources and hagiographical literature, focussing on elements of this treatment likely to have given rise to the *taʿziyeh* plot detail. Indeed, accounts of ʿAbbās' heroism, sacrifice and fierce loyalty to Ḥusain are found in early historical sources. Al-Ṭabarī's 4th/10th century *Tārīkh* tells of

ʿAbbās' successfully leading a group of 30 horsemen and 20 foot soldiers to the Euphrates but, despite his own thirst, refusing to drink before bringing water to Ḥusain.[4] Importantly, al-Ṭabarī also records that ʿAbbās was related through his maternal line to Shamer b. ẕī al-Jawshan (the *taʿziyeh*'s Shemr), and that for this reason before the beginning of the battle he was offered "safe-conduct", which he vehemently refused.[5] This detail becomes important in the *taʿziyeh* as this offer is dramatized in the "night-time encounter", suggesting a threat to the bond between ʿAbbās and Ḥusain. Al-Ṭabarī affirms that ʿAbbās was killed at Karbala but does not give details of the martyrdom or of his hands being cut off.[6]

Balʿamī's 4th/10th century Persian version of al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh* records ʿAbbās loyally defending Ḥusain at Karbala but does not record not his raid on the Euphrates. Rather, Balʿamī simply says that when all of Ḥusain's supporters had been killed only his brothers ʿAbbās, ʿAbdullāh, ʿUs̱mān, Muḥammad and Jaʿfar remained, and that they entered the battlefield and were martyred together.[7] Interestingly, ʿAbbās is the only one of these five brothers to be treated in the *taʿziyeh* rendition of these events.[8] Although he does not mention a mission to the Euphrates, Balʿamī does record ʿAbbās' body being buried near the river, perhaps suggesting that he fell in this location.[9]

Al-Shaikh al-Mufīd's 4th/10th century *Ketāb al-Ershād* gives an account of ʿAbbās' deeds at Karbala similar to al-Ṭabarī's. He describes a joint attempt by ʿAbbās and Ḥusain to reach the river during the battle of the tenth day, with ʿAbbās defeated only once the brothers have been separated. This detail is also important in the *taʿziyeh* re-telling of ʿAbbās' martyrdom, as some renditions of this story record a joint mission with defeat only after separation, using this to highlight the invincible nature of the bond between the two brothers. Mufīd does give an account of ʿAbbās' death and the location of his burial (near to the river).[10]

ʿAbbās is also mentioned by Persian historian Mīrkhānd, in his *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, composed around the turn of the 10th/16th century, and by Mīrkhānd's

4 Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, 107–8.
5 Ibid., 111–12.
6 Ibid., 179.
7 Balʿamī, *Tārīkh-nāmeh*, 4, 710.
8 The number and names of Ḥusain's brothers who fought at Karbala vary across the accounts of historians, and *maqtal* renditions of the event; in addition to those mentioned by Balʿamī brothers named ʿAwn, ʿUmar, and Abū Bakr are mentioned in other sources. See: Esmāʿīlī, *Teshneh*, 376.
9 Balʿamī, *Tārīkh-nāmeh*, 4, 712.
10 Mufīd, *Irshād*, 334–37.

grandson, Khāndamīr, in his *Ḥabīb al-siyar* (*c.*935/ 1538–9). Their treatment of ʿAbbās is brief; however, the special nature of the relationship between Ḥusain and his brother is recalled by both historians. They record that upon ʿAbbās' death Ḥusain exclaimed, "Now my back has been broken."[11] This exclamation is also mentioned in Kāshefī's, *Rawżat al-shuhadāʾ* (908/1502). Kāshefī tells us that most histories report that upon ʿAbbās' death Ḥusain said:

الآن انكسر ظهري و قلّت حيلتي[12]

> Now my back has been broken and my remedy diminished.

This obviously influenced the *taʿziyeh* composers' conception of this event as, although their Persian translation of this Arabic sentence varies, it features in the vast majority of their treatments of ʿAbbās' martyrdom.[13]

Kāshefī's *Rawżat* appears to be the earliest Persian literary treatment of ʿAbbās' story that recounts him losing his hands.[14] Unlike the work of the historians, Kāshefī's narration of the Karbala tragedy not only recounts ʿAbbās' mission to bring water from the Euphrates but also begins to imagine his motivation – his strong desire to fulfil his duty to Ḥusain and his kin. Even after losing his hands, when his *mashk* (water-skin) is pierced with an arrow, he bemoans the unfairness of the water not getting to his family.[15] Such motivations are further elaborated by the *taʿziyeh* dramatists in their development of ʿAbbās' character.

There is one very important point to be stressed here. In the analysis below we will see numerous examples of how the *taʿziyeh* dramatists invoke the language and imagery of the epics to paint ʿAbbās' as a hero of legendary proportion. However, although much of the detail of his *taʿziyeh* martyrdom narrative is traceable to Kāshefī's *Rawżat al-shuhadāʾ*, Kāshefī, while stressing his strength in battle, makes no attempt to use metaphor to connect ʿAbbās to

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11 Mīrkhānd, *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, 3, 2252–53; Khāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-siyār*, 2, 52–54.

12 Kāshefī Sabzevārī, *Rawżat*, 418.

13 Such as the Zand, Chodzko, Litten and Pelly collection renditions, CP: MS 51; MS 513; and MS 416 (Mazandaran, End 19th Cent.). Also see Jawharī, *Ṭūfān*, 209, 242.

14 According to Jean Calmard stories regarding ʿAbbās' martyrdom were popular amongst *futuvvat* circles in the late ʿAbbasid period. He cites the presence of the detail about ʿAbbās losing his hands in the (Arabic) work of Ebn Ṭāwūs, dating to the 7th/13th century. See: Calmard, "ʿAbbās b. ʿAli b. Abu Ṭāleb," *Encyclopædia Iranica* I/1 ([1982] 2011). Available online at: https://iranicaonline.org/articles/abbas-b-ali-b-abu-taleb (accessed June 17th, 2024).

15 Kāshefī Sabzevārī, *Rawżat*, 417–18.

the heroes of epic. The *taʿziyeh* dramatists did not inherit the epic treatment from *Rawżat*. It was either their own innovation, or a development in the way the personage of ʿAbbās was envisaged that had taken place between Kāshefī's composition (*c.*908/1502) and our earliest extant *taʿziyeh* treatment, in the late Zand period.

It is highly probable that such characterisation was influenced by the work of the *naqqālān* and *pardeh-dārān*, who told the stories of the epics. A study by Ulrich Marzolph, of the canvases used by the *pardeh-dārān* and other visual depictions of Karbala such as the painted tile panels of shrines, is of interest here. He finds that all male characters are shown as heroic warriors, and that the trend through time became to portray ʿAbbās as the most prominent, placing in the centre of the canvas or panel an image of him doing battle, framed with scenes of his family wounded or mourning. The most prominent among such scenes is Ḥusain grieving over his dying son ʿAlī Akbar. These images thus show ʿAbbās as the "quintessential warrior", by contrast with Ḥusain who, although his prowess in battle is in no doubt, is most importantly shown suffering: he witnesses the slaying of his loved ones before his own demise, and is the "quintessential martyr".[16]

The materials studied by Marzolph date only from the Zand period onwards, yet this representation of the brothers closely coincides with their *taʿziyeh* portrayal as it already stood by our earliest example of the script (1206/ 1791–2). Thus, the trend identified by Marzolph emerges as part of a more deeply-rooted process of how the stories of the devotional literature found new levels of expression across verbal and visual artforms.

2 Skeleton of *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās* and Function of Its Sections

This episode broadly follows an arch plot structure. The main driver of the action is thirst. As water-bearer of the party ʿAbbās finds the inability to fulfil his obligation unbearable. It is clear from the outset that he will be impelled to take action; this conflict can only be resolved by his obtaining water or by his martyrdom, yet the strict rules of hierarchy require that he await Ḥusain's command. The forward motion of the action, towards ʿAbbās' fateful raid on the Euphrates, is interrupted by a scene in which his loyalty to Ḥusain is tested by Shemr. This night-time encounter features in the play from the earliest extant rendition. As the play developed, and additional scenes were

16 Marzolph, "Visual Culture," 160–164.

added towards the end of the 19th century CE, it became one of a series of three one-to-one encounters. Analysis of these later additions is reserved for my discussion of the play's historical development. Here I outline the play's skeleton, its essential components, stable over time. *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās* is this book's first example of an episode composed according to the "martyrdom composition-scheme" outlined in chapter 2.

2.1 *Section 1 – Impending Catastrophe: Urgent Need for Water (Exposition)*

Ḥusain and his family pray, calling upon the heavens and their ancestors to witness their suffering and the injustice they are facing. They foretell their own and each other's fates: gory deaths for the menfolk, capture and humiliation for the womenfolk. True to the martyrdom composition-scheme, a challenge delivered by Shemr or Ebn-e Saʿd boasts of the power of the enemy and declares that there will be no compromise. Sakīneh begs for water.[17] The status quo is established; Ḥusain's party face overwhelming military odds, the fates of the individual protagonists are not only predestined but known to them. The focus on Sakīneh's desperate need for water determines the trajectory of ʿAbbās the water-bearer; he will be compelled to satisfy this need even if the cost is his life. ʿAbbās is not usually present in this scene: rather, in response to Sakīneh's pleas, Ḥusain has Zainab summon him and a new section of action begins.[18]

2.2 *Section 2 – ʿAbbās Sent as a Messenger to Demand Water from Ebn-e Saʿd (Rising Action)*

Ḥusain gives ʿAbbās an empty *mashk* (water-skin) and orders that he demand water from Ebn-e Saʿd for the children. ʿAbbās does so, citing their lineage and stressing the unfairness of the Prophet's descendants being denied this resource. Ebn-e Saʿd responds that there will be no water unless Ḥusain swears allegiance to Yazīd.

This is a "floating scene", an integral part of this episode although its position in the chronology of the action can change. When following the usual order of the martyrdom composition-scheme, it would be played towards the end of

17 In the Chodzko rendition and CP: MS 416, she is falling unconscious and Ḥusain tries to give her water from his own mouth. A similar detail features in Balʿamī's *Tārīkh* which describes ʿAlī Akbar begging his father for water during his final battle and Ḥusain putting his tongue into his son's mouth to alleviate his thirst. Balʿamī, *Tārīkh-nāmeh*, 4, 709.

18 CP: MS 622 is an exception in terms of structure amongst my sample. It begins with the scene where Shemr arrives from Kufa and converses with Ebn-e Saʿd, detailed below as normally featuring immediately prior to "the night-time encounter".

the episode, as a last-ditch attempt by the hero to resolve the dispute by negotiation, before drawing his sword. My sample includes a significant number of renditions that feature the scene as the play's second section,[19] and others that amalgamate it into ʿAbbās' final fatal mission to the Euphrates.[20] Dramatically, when in the latter position, Ebn-e Saʿd's refusal removes the final hurdle for the action to accelerate towards the climax, and for ʿAbbās to uninhibitedly pursue his goal of water or martyrdom.[21] By contrast, when his remonstrating with Ebn-e Saʿd is the episode's second section, ʿAbbās is shown returning to camp humiliated. Not only must he face the family empty-handed, but he longs to destroy their oppressors and lacks Ḥusain's permission to fight. His obedience to Ḥusain is thus underscored in advance of his impending test by Shemr.

2.3 *Section 3 – Night of Goodbyes: Fates Foretold* (*Exposition Continued*)

In the camp, after nightfall, Ḥusain dolefully declares that this will be his last sleep. The family must bid each other goodbye; doom will be upon them in the morning. They express their mutual affection, again foreseeing their fates, this time in more detail. ʿAlī Akbar will be cut to pieces, Qāsem's wedding will turn to sadness, ʿAbbās will lose his hands and Ḥusain his head. Zainab (and Kulṯūm) will be taken prisoner, humiliated and degraded like slaves in the market; Sakīneh will be orphaned and shamed. Sakīneh is often shown going from one family member to another crying for water. All try to comfort her but cannot. There is some variation in ʿAbbās' whereabouts during this scene. In some renditions Ḥusain explicitly asks him to guard the camp while he, himself, sleeps;[22] in others he tells ʿAbbās to sleep.[23] However, ʿAbbās does not rest as he is wary of an enemy ambush and keeps his sword nearby. If ordered to be on guard, and sometimes without an order, he patrols the camp.

19 The Zand, Darbandsar and Pelly renditions and CP: MS 51. In the latter ʿAbbās and ʿAlī Akbar are sent together to call Ebn-e Saʿd to negotiate. The Chodzko rendition plays the scene twice, in both of the positions mentioned.

20 The Litten rendition, CP: MS 617; MS 513; and MS 622. MS 416 is an exception in that it does not feature this scene. However, it may have featured in the manuscript's missing final section.

21 Variations of the scene when played towards the beginning include Ebn-e Saʿd suggesting that ʿAbbās should switch sides (Chodzko and Zand renditions). Or, Ḥusain using this meeting to demand that Ebn-e Saʿd either allow him to negotiate directly with Yazīd (CP: MS 51) or grant him and his family safe passage to a foreign land (Chodzko). The second variation is played more consistently in the climactic play and will be discussed in chapter 5.

22 Chodzko rendition; Litten rendition; CP: MS 416.

23 Zand rendition; CP: MS 513.

With its strong theme of foreboding, this scene belongs thematically to the exposition of the martyrdom composition-scheme which, in certain renditions of the play, has been interrupted by the insertion of the floating scene featuring negotiations with Ebn-e Saʿd. The tender relationships between the family members bring them closer to the audience, showing them as human and vulnerable. Once it is clear that the other characters are asleep, literally dormant, the context of the subsequent night-time encounter between ʿAbbās and Shemr is established.[24]

2.4 *Section 4 – Night-Time Encounter: Shemr Tries to Turn ʿAbbās* (*Rising Action*)

A conversation between Shemr and Ebn-e Saʿd introduces this section.[25] Shemr has arrived with an army and orders from above. Reminding him of the rewards at stake, Shemr berates Ebn-e Saʿd for tarrying in drawing blood from amongst Ḥusain's kin. Rumour has it that he has been negotiating and may have allowed water; Ebn-e Ziyād is losing patience. Ebn-e Saʿd must do the job or go back to Kufa. Ebn-e Saʿd responds that Ḥusain is of the Prophet's house and will be an intercessor on Judgement Day. He admits to being troubled about killing the offspring of Ḥaidar (ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb), arguing that peace would be the best outcome.

Shemr is undeterred: where Ebn-e Saʿd is holding back, he himself will do the job and claim the prize (governorship of Ray). Ebn-e Saʿd changes tactic, warning that it will not be easy to kill Ḥusain whilst he has ʿAbbās as his guard, reminding Shemr that ʿAbbās holds *Ẕū-l-feqār* (the legendary double-headed sword of his father, ʿAlī). He cites ʿAbbās' lion-like qualities, often recalling ʿAbbās' performance at the Battle of Siffin. Shemr tells Ebn-e Saʿd that he and ʿAbbās are related through the maternal line. On that basis, he plans to separate ʿAbbās from Ḥusain by pretending to help him. This vignette characterises two of the main antagonists, depicting their motivations and the difference between them. It also sets up Shemr's deceitful intentions and introduces ʿAbbās as a formidable warrior.

Shemr approaches the camp alone to carry out his plan. Feigning friendship and citing their blood connection, he pretends to be concerned for ʿAbbās and to bring a message that if he abandons Ḥusain's cause he will be amply rewarded. ʿAbbās angrily declares that he would never desert Ḥusain. A long and lively exchange begins that is best described as a verbal duel: this is the

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24 The Pelly rendition omits "the night of goodbyes".

25 The Chodzko rendition does not include this conversation; in CP: MS 622 it opens the episode.

play's centrepiece and will be analysed below. Whilst the rest of the episode follows the martyrdom composition-scheme, this section is additional to it, featuring narrative material specific to ʿAbbās, no doubt inspired by the detail about his blood tie to Shemr transmitted in historical sources.[26] The scene ends with the verbal altercation escalating towards physical blows and Shemr calling for the war drums to be sounded.

2.5 *Section 5 – ʿAbbās Doubted? Tension in the Camp* (*Rising Action*)

The women awake hearing the war drums and see the enemy encroaching. An anonymous voice tells them that ʿAbbās has gone over to the enemy. Ḥusain is asleep and as Zainab tries to wake him, the floating scene is played in which Ḥusain complains at being disturbed as he was dreaming of seeing his parents in paradise (discussed in chapter 2). Zainab tells him what the voice has said about ʿAbbās. He assures her of ʿAbbās' loyalty and asks that she summon him, but ʿAbbās is missing. In some renditions Akbar and Qāsem are also missing and feature briefly arriving at ʿAbbās' side at the close of his encounter with Shemr.[27] The family panic about what they would do without ʿAbbās, but he reappears.

Ḥusain tells ʿAbbās that he knows about Shemr's offer and suggests that he accept. There is great tension as he tries to send ʿAbbās away. Most renditions use this scene to clearly express Ḥusain's moral dilemma; such is his affection for his brother that he desperately wishes to avoid him being martyred. He also sees ʿAbbās' survival as an opportunity to secure protection for the women and children after his own death.[28] ʿAbbās, however, is devastated at Ḥusain's suggestion, perceiving it as mistrust and rejection. Crestfallen, he says that he will go, not to the enemy, but to his father's grave at Najaf. After demonstrating his desolation, he begs permission to do battle. Ḥusain refuses but ʿAbbās argues that it was his father's wish that he should sacrifice himself for Ḥusain at Karbala. Ḥusain eventually gives in.

With ʿAbbās requesting permission to give his life for Ḥusain the episode readopts the martyrdom composition-scheme, including its typical detail of Ḥusain's initial reluctance to grant the hero's request being over-ruled by his duty to respect the will of a senior relative. The dramatists inserting ʿAbbās'

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26 Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, 111–12.

27 Zand rendition; Darbandsar rendition (Akbar only); CP: MS 513; MS 617; and MS 622.

28 CP: MS 513 and MS 617 script this scene somewhat clumsily, omitting the nuance in the dialogue or direct statements made by Ḥusain to convey his motives. In these versions Ḥusain appears to genuinely berate ʿAbbās but then rapidly backtracks, claiming never to have doubted him.

night-time encounter with Shemr into the scheme before the hero requesting permission to fight lends tension to Ḥusain's initial refusal.[29] Having just witnessed his unwavering dedication tried and tested, the audience share in the emotional torment undergone by ʿAbbās at Ḥusain's suggestion he should accept Shemr's offer. The idea of the brothers being separated, introduced in the conversation between the antagonists, comes close to being imposed by Ḥusain himself. Thus, Ḥusain's eventual acquiescence, confirming his trust in ʿAbbās, and honouring his right to sacrifice himself at Karbala, is indeed a release.

2.6 *Section 6 – Permission for Martyrdom Granted: Familial Farewells* (*Rising Action*)

In accordance with the martyrdom composition-scheme, ʿAbbās now takes leave of the family one by one, and they dress him for martyrdom. Although it is implied (or shown) that he bids farewell to Zain al-ʿĀbedīn, Akbar and Qāsem,[30] this scene is composed predominantly of extended conversations between ʿAbbās and his sisters Zainab and Kulṣūm, and his niece Sakīneh.[31] They object to his parting, affectionately begging him not to go. ʿAbbās is stalwart, refocussing each conversation onto his own wishes in death. He asks to be dressed in a *kafan* (shroud) and tells them his *vaṣiyyat* (will). He requests that if they return to Medina they take news of his martyrdom to his mother, Umm al-Banīn, and at times also his daughter.[32] He expresses fear that his mother will be destitute and his daughter ridiculed as an orphan. He asks that in the absence of a wife or mother at Karbala, one of his sisters (or Sakīneh) should mourn over his body, that he not be shamed in death. He sometimes specifies the burial rites to be observed.[33] Requesting forgiveness for any wrong-doing is also a feature of these farewells. The remonstrations of the womenfolk are intensive, but ultimately, they concede. Sakīneh is torn between not wanting ʿAbbās to risk his life and begging him for water. Her thirsty cries and Ḥusain's heartbroken blessing see ʿAbbās enter the battlefield.[34]

29 The Chodzko rendition is an exception. ʿAbbās first asks permission for martyrdom in the play's second section; Ḥusain defers answering, instead sending him to request water from Ebn-e Saʿd.

30 In Pelly's rendition Akbar and Qāsem are not mentioned as they are already dead.

31 Zainab and Sakīneh feature consistently. Kulṣūm only features in the Chodzko, Litten and Pelly renditions and CP: MS 416.

32 Darbandsar rendition; CP: MS 51; MS 513; and MS 622.

33 CP: MS 513; and MS 51.

34 In the Chodzko rendition, the sisters' remonstrations include them offering that their young sons be martyred in ʿAbbās' place. Although Zainab then tells her children to go

This scene depicts the intense bond between ʿAbbās and his female relatives, not only those present at Karbala but also those in Medina. It also sees his resolve to fulfil his father's wish for him to be martyred at Karbala tested once more, this time by the begging of his womenfolk who act as an earthly bind. By appointing them to take care of his remains, ʿAbbās achieves release to carry out his divinely ordained duty. Sakīneh's cries for water act as a bridge, underscoring the fact that maintaining the status quo is not an option.

2.7 *Section 7 – Mission to the Euphrates: Loss of Hands and Death* (*Climax and Denouement*)

This section is subject to an important variation in content. Usually, ʿAbbās heads to the Euphrates alone, yet in a significant number of renditions Ḥusain accompanies him in a joint mission.[35] The floating scene where ʿAbbās requests water from Ebn-e Saʿd is at times played as he is to the Euphrates.[36] In the scene variant portraying the brothers entering the battlefield in unison, after the enemy succeed in separating them, each returns to camp searching for the other. A brief return to camp during the final battle is a feature of the martyrdom composition-scheme. When ʿAbbās' solo mission is played this element is omitted.[37]

Irrespective of these perturbations in content, ʿAbbās always reaches the river alone. Filling the *mashk* he often sings to the Euphrates. Where does it come from? Does it not feel ashamed to show its face at Karbala before the thirsty-lipped Ḥusain? Sakīneh's calls for water maintain the pressure for him to return. The enemy rain arrows upon ʿAbbās. The *mashk* is pierced and the precious liquid pours on to the ground. Angels tell Ḥusain that ʿAbbās has lost his right hand. The flag falls. Shemr often appears here, challenging ʿAbbās who ridicules him for being braver now that his opponent is maimed. Ḥusain searches for ʿAbbās and is told by an angel (or ʿAbbās' own voice) that his left hand too has fallen. In accordance with the martyrdom composition-scheme Ḥusain reaches the mortally wounded hero.

Delirious and breathing his last breaths, ʿAbbās asks Ḥusain if he is satisfied with his servant. Ḥusain says that indeed he is and praises his brother, his

onto the battlefield (without stage directions) it is unclear whether they do so; it seems unlikely as there is no dialogue indicating their engagement with the enemy and no mourning for them. The martyrdoms of Zainab's two young sons feature elsewhere in the cycle.

35 Pelly and Darbandsar renditions and CP: MS 51.

36 Interestingly, the renditions that include a joint mission do not play ʿAbbās' petition to Ebn-e Saʿd in this position, unanimously featuring it as the play's second section.

37 The origin of the discrepancy between a solo or joint mission will be examined below.

refuge, his flag-bearer. Contented, ʿAbbās expresses his last wish. As dictated by the composition-scheme, he asks not to be taken back to the camp while alive, in this case because he would be ashamed to face Sakīneh without water. He declares that he is going to the Prophet, says the *shahādah* and dies in his brother's arms. Ḥusain says that his back is broken. Mourning begins.

As with other episodes, the build-up to the hero leaving camp is extended but treatment of his final battle and death relatively short. Despite its brevity, this section contains a synopsis of the episode's main themes. The enemy's lack of mercy and honour, ʿAbbās' bravery, pride and sense of duty, his intense connection with Ḥusain and Ḥusain's reliance on him, are all demonstrated. Furthermore, with the loss of the hero's two hands we see his two essential duties rendered impossible. This is also symbolised by the piercing of the *mashk* and the falling of the flag, the objects representative of his two fundamental roles. Thus, the fate of the besieged party is sealed. There will be no relief, no rescue. The continuation of the cycle will see their fortunes spiralling downwards.

3 The Night-Time Encounter: A Test of Loyalty, Evidence of Character

Featuring a confrontation between Ḥusain's greatest supporter and his soon-to-be-killer, this scene is highly important. The lack of witnesses, suggestion of betrayal and fast pace of the exchange create tension and excitement. It allows for intensive characterisation of ʿAbbās, showing him being tested and proving incorruptible, his rebuffs of Shemr's slippery advances depicting his moral framework. Shemr is constructed as treacherous, greedy, godless and caring only for earthly goods whilst ʿAbbās displays the inverse qualities. This diametric opposition is achieved partly through basic narrative content. Having approached ʿAbbās while he is alone on guard, Shemr offers not only safe passage, due to their maternal kinship tie, but also rank and riches in exchange for betrayal, claiming that ʿAbbās will be made a commander of the enemy armies and given material rewards if he abandons Ḥusain. This simply depicts Shemr's own preoccupations while ʿAbbās is characterised by his immediate and furious rejection of this suggestion.[38]

The difference between them is also illustrated through a plethora of zoomorphic references, particularly prevalent in our earliest example of the script. Such references also summon the imagery of the epics, supporting the

38 It is noteworthy that al-Ṭabarī's report of ʿAbbās being offered safe-conduct due to his blood-tie to Shemr does not include him being offered material rewards.

portrayal of ʿAbbās as a hero of legendary proportion. Indeed, the very format of the scene evokes epic. The rhetorical challenge that precedes one-to-one combat, in which each warrior boasts of his lineage and prowess in battle and warns of the havoc he will wreak with his weapons – known as *rajaz-khānī* – is common in the *taʿziyeh*. It is recognised as a feature inherited from epic literature, particularly Ferdowsī's *Shāh-nāmeh*.[39] The night-time encounter is an extended example of such an exchange, becoming a veritable verbal duel. Such duels have been identified within the epic traditions of various cultures, demonstrations of eloquence being used to depict certain characters as superior in wit.[40] In the *taʿziyeh* application of the verbal duel format to the meeting of Ḥusain's champion and his killer, it is not clear that one contender is a superior rhetorician; however, it is certain that ʿAbbās is superior in wisdom and morality.

Below I examine not only the composers' use of metaphor but also of metre in crafting this duel, and how these strategies developed through time. The theme of lineage over-arches this exchange. It finds expression in three ways: discussion of maternal lineage; ʿAbbās' warrior credentials being affirmed by his ancestry; and the prophetic lineage of the *ahl-e bait*, shown through Qur'anic references.

3.1 *Zoomorphism and Invocation of the Epic*

Zoomorphism is infrequent in the Muḥarram cycle, except that a man of the Holy Family is often referred to as a *shīr* (lion), a common warrior metaphor but significant due to the sobriquet of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb *shīr-e khudā* (lion of God). Conversely, an antagonist is often deemed a *sag* (dog), a common Persian insult. Unusually, the night-time encounter scene in the Zand period rendition of *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās* employs a wide variety of animal metaphors that both evoke the epic genre and illustrate the fundamental differences between the two combatants. This is worthy of examination before we turn to zoomorphic imagery in later renditions.

In the Persian epics, heroes are often praised as being akin to wild beasts or triumphing over them. Ferdowsī's *Shāh-nāmeh* abounds in such analogies, with

39 Parviz Mamnoun, "Ta'ziyeh from the Viewpoint of Western Theatre," in Chelkowski ed. *Taʿziyeh: Ritual and Drama*, 166; Nāṣerbakht, *Adabiyāt-e īrānī*, 238.

40 Richard P. Martin, *The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance in the Iliad* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1989), 89–145. Also see Olga M. Davidson, "Epic as a Frame for Speech-Acts: Ritual Boasting in the Shâhnâma of Ferdowsi," in *New Methods in the Research of Epic/ Neue Methoden der Epenforschung*, ed. Hildegard L.C. Tristram (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1998).

the warrior described as a *palang* (leopard), *nahang* (crocodile), *babr* (tiger), *shīr* or *hezabr* (lion) or, indeed, a *gurg* (wolf), and the enemy as a *rameh* (flock). Rustam, the book's great hero, is frequently praised with such metaphors; one of his sobriquets is *pīl-tan* (elephant-body). Of course, because a significant difference between the epics and the *taʿziyeh* genre is that the *taʿziyeh* has no narrator, any such appellation in the *taʿziyeh* must be voiced by a character. In the Zand period rendition of the scene, as Shemr attempts to turn ʿAbbās he warns him of the overwhelming odds against Ḥusain, describing the enemy warriors in zoomorphic terms and making direct reference to the champions of epic:

شمر:
بیا بشنو نصیحت از وفا تندی مکن با من　　پی قتل حسین آماده لشگرها ز هر مسکن
چه لشگر هر یکی دستان‌فشان و رستم عهدی　　پلنگ‌انداز گرگ‌آثار ببرآئین و شیراوژن[41]

Shemr: *Come, for the sake of loyalty, listen to my advice and don't be sharp with me. Troops from all regions are ready to kill Ḥusain. What an army! Each one like Zāl, Rustam of his age, a hurler of leopards, lupine, with the ways of a tiger, a slayer of lions.*[42]

Confident of his superiority, ʿAbbās is unmoved. When Shemr links himself to Abū Lahab and Abū Sufyān, the enemies of the Prophet Muḥammad from amongst the Quraish tribe, ʿAbbās gives a furious and lengthy response about his lineage and his father ʿAlī's warrior attributes, ending with a zoomorphic declaration of his own ferocity:

عباس:
این همه لشگر با سرورشان　　وین همه عسگر با مهترشان
همهٔ شان رمه و من شیرم　　شیرم و شیر خدا را پسرم[43]

ʿAbbās: *All of these armies with their prince, all of these troops with their commander, they are all herds and I a lion. I am a lion and the son of the lion of God.*

41 Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 11*, 279.

42 Zāl is Rustam's father, he is mentioned here by his sobriquet, Dastān.

43 Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 11*, 282. The script's editors note that the third *meṣraʿ* features in the section of the script in *baḥr-e ṭavīl* form (discussed below) as performed today.

When Shemr persistently raises the issue of their shared maternal lineage, ʿAbbās declares that just as his mother was Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā's *kanīz* (maid servant) he is proud to be Ḥusain's slave. He resorts to animal analogy to stress the difference between Shemr and himself, and assert that their blood bond is meaningless:

عباس:
ای ستمگر با توام کی نسبتی بود مام را   نیست با روباه پیر آمیزشی ضرغام را
نسبت خویشی تو عار من است ای کج‌نهاد   پایه خود را ببین آهسته‌تر نه گام را[44]

> ʿAbbās: *O tyrant, when has there been a relationship between my mother and you? The wild lion does not mix with an old fox. My relation to you is a source of shame to me, you reprobate: take a look at yourself and tread more carefully.*[45]

In fact, in response to the insinuation that he and Shemr are of the same kind, the dramatists of the Zand rendition have ʿAbbās refer to the animal kingdom to aggrandise himself not only in the fashion of the heroes of epic, but also in the language of proverb. Through this type of speech they demonstrate his wisdom, showing him to have the more profound understanding of the true nature of things. He compares Shemr's thinly veiled trickery to the trap of a hunter who has lost his wit. He likens Shemr appearing at their camp to a beetle crawling on the lawn of the king of martyrs, a bat seeking to present itself as a bird before the sun. Could they ever be allies? Impossible! Like a fly and the Sīmurgh, they will never be equal. As for Shemr, they have him liken himself to an owl, dwelling amongst the ruins.[46] The owl is a bad omen in Persian culture and it is likely that this analogy was intended as a harbinger, the arrival of the ruin-dwelling creature foreshadowing the burning of the camp and the ruined building in which the Karbala captives will be held in Damascus (part of the setting of *Bāzār-e Shām*).

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44 Ibid., 278.

45 The idea of the lion and the fox as a pair is a metaphor for the illogical, common in the epics. For example, in Ferdowsī's *Shāh-nāmeh* Rustam uses this amongst his analogies of things that are fundamentally impossible when rejecting the prince Esfandiyār's request that he allow himself to be brought in chains before the king. Abu'l Qasem Ferdowsi, *Shāhnāmeh*, ed. Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, 8 vols., vol. 5 (Costa Mesa, California and New York: Mazda in association with Biblioteca Persica, [*c*.1010] 1987), 326. Verse 413.

46 For these metaphors in context see Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 11*, 277–81.

As Shemr, undeterred, continues his advances, ʿAbbās is desperate to establish the dichotomy between them and, stressing his allegiances, makes threats that assert his heroic beast-conquering prowess:

عباس:
تو دشمن حسینی و من چاکر حسین — تو خصم بر حسینی و من نوکر حسین
می‌دان یقین اگر که کشم تیغ از غلاف — از بیم می‌نهد به زمین پیل چرخ، ناف[47]

ʿAbbās: *You are Ḥusain's foe and I his minion. You are an enemy to Ḥusain and I am his servant. Know for certain that if I draw my sword from its sheath, the celestial elephant would be rendered prostrate in fear.*

In his last retort as the altercation escalates towards physical blows ʿAbbās quotes a proverb to express the idea that they are fundamentally incompatible, of different essential natures.

عباس:
مگر نشنیده‌ای در دار دنیا — کند همجنس با همجنس پرواز
کند خو در زمانه زاغ با زاغ — کبوتر با کبوتر باز با باز[48]

ʿAbbās: *Have you not heard that in this world like always flies with like? In time, the crow takes it as its habit* [to be] *with the crow, the pigeon with the pigeon, the falcon with the falcon.*[49]

What is achieved in the Zand rendition of this scene through heavy recourse to zoomorphic references – highlighting ʿAbbās' heroic qualities whilst showing his moral wisdom and the dichotomy between him and Shemr – is achieved in later renditions through a more diversified metaphor system. It could be that, even for its time, this particular example of *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās* was unique in its dense application of animal symbolism. Nonetheless, this topos did endure to an extent; many later renditions of the scene are peppered with zoomorphic imagery. For example, in Cerulli MS 513, in boasting of his dastardly characteristics, Shemr delivers a section of verse featuring the *radīf* "*māram*" (I am a snake).[50] Furthermore, in the Litten rendition (1830s), in the prelude to the night-time encounter as Ebn-e Saʿd warns Shemr of ʿAbbās'

47 Ibid., 283.
48 Ibid., 284.
49 A Persian proverb equivalent to "Birds of a feather flock together."
50 CP: MS 513.

great strength he makes an almost identical allusion to that made by ʿAbbās himself in the Zand rendition.

ابن سعد:
کشد گر ز کین تیغِ خاراشکاف نهد بر زمین ضیغمِ چرخ ناف[51]

Ebn-e Saʿd: *If in enmity he draws his stone-splitting dagger, the celestial lion would be rendered prostrate in fear.*

Whilst there was continuity in the structure of this scene, and to an extent in its imagery, a marked change in rhythm took place over time. Long interjections by both ʿAbbās and Shemr using the *baḥr-e ṭavīl* form were integrated into their verbal duel. Before looking at this new verse and indeed how the allusions that I have discussed here found expression in this new rhythm, the clever use of metre in the Zand period version of this scene merits discussion.

3.2 *Metrics of the Zand Period Version of the Night-Time Encounter*

An essential aspect of the work of the *taʿziyeh* dramatists is to compose versified dialogues. In doing this they have recourse to a wide range of metres.[52] It is not uncommon for the metre to change with each interjection, nor is it uncommon for one character to answer another using the same meter in which s/he has been addressed, but this is not usually a sustained pattern and the Zand version of the night-time encounter stands out in this respect. The composer (or composers) of the Zand period night-time encounter used metrics to support the idea of a duel in this scene. A game is set up whereby Shemr uses a new metre each time he speaks and ʿAbbās always answers echoing his metre. Indeed, the metrical game serves to create the impression that ʿAbbās is more than capable of meeting any challenge – rhetorical or other – Shemr might throw his way. Prior to the discovery of the Zand collection, scholars had asserted that the metrics of early *taʿziyeh* plays were simple (the same metre often being repeated) and that the verse became more sophisticated over time.[53] The scene that I describe here shows that the anonymous composer of this rendition of the episode had a clever command of poetic metre. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that in the aforementioned *sukhanvarī* contests staged by Selseleh-ye ʿAjam, one contender begins the contest by asking his challenger a question in verse with a metre of his choice, and the other must

51 Esmāʿīlī, *Teshneh*, 388.

52 For use of metre in the *taʿziyeh* see Sutton, "Literary Sources," 168–71.

53 Shahidi, "Developments," 48.

answer in the same metre.[54] It is possible that the composer of the scene under discussion knew of this tradition and may even have been a participant.

As Shemr approaches the camp, using the slow *hazaj* metre (*baḥr-e hazaj-e musamman-e sālem*), he girds himself for meeting ʿAbbās.[55] He speaks of the sleeping family and the fates that await them. ʿAbbās then interjects: echoing Shemr's metre and indeed using the same *radīf*, *emshab* (tonight), he speaks of hearing a voice and investigates whether it originates from amongst his family, but finds them asleep. As Shemr then asks for an audience with ʿAbbās, he switches to the metre *baḥr-e mużāreʿ-e musamman-e akhrab-e makfūf-e maḥzūf*; ʿAbbās echoes this as he questions the stranger's identity. During the next five interjections of each character, Shemr speaks first using a variant of the *ramal* metre, and each time ʿAbbās rebuffs him echoing his metre (at times adding a syllable at the end of the last foot). The tempo of their back and forth is varied by their alternations (not individually but as a pair, ʿAbbās always echoing Shemr) between slow and fast variations of the *ramal* metre. They employ the fast *baḥr-e ramal-e musamman-e makhbūn-e maḥzūf*, where the initial syllable of each foot has been changed from long to short (thus giving two consecutive short syllables and upping the pace), and alternate it with the slow simple version of this metre *baḥr-e ramal-e musamman-e maḥzūf*.[56] In terms of content, this section covers Shemr trying to gain ʿAbbās' confidence by flattery, his zoomorphic boasting, and his attempt to forge a bond with his opponent on the pretext of a maternal blood tie and feigned concern for ʿAbbās.

Then, as things get heated and ʿAbbās becomes angry (adamant that his mother is being insulted), Shemr switches persuasion tactic to focus on how ʿAbbās' status could be elevated from servant to commander; he also switches metre, using *baḥr-e rajaz-e musamman-e makhbūn-e muraffal*. This variant of the *rajaz* metre keeps up the pace whilst allowing for longer interjections, as not only is the first syllable of each foot changed from long to short but also an extra long syllable is added to the end of each foot (making for twenty syllables per hemistich). His overtures fail to placate ʿAbbās, who, echoing his opponent's metre, expresses his pride at being Ḥusain's servant. As if trying to calm the pace of the exchange, Shemr then switches back to the *hazaj-e*

54 Floor, *Theater*, 118; Najm, *Naqqālī*, 113.

55 I identify these metres according to their classification in Finn Thiesen, *A Manual of Classical Persian Prosody* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1982).

56 During this section there is one instance when Shemr does not change the metre between interjections. Rather, he twice consecutively addresses ʿAbbās using the metre *ramal-e musamman-e maḥzūf*. Nonetheless this is not yet a break from the pattern in that ʿAbbās answers him using the same metre, the subsequent change of metre still being initiated by Shemr. See Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 11*, 277–78.

muṣamman-e sālem (in which the scene had opened) as he speaks in zoomorphic terms of the ferocity of the enemy and the insurmountable odds against Ḥusain. Echoing his metre ʿAbbās rebuffs him with the same type of allusions, warning of his family's superiority as warriors and threatening Shemr with violence. In response Shemr snaps back to the fast *baḥr-e ramal-e muṣamman-e makhbūn-e maḥẕūf*, which ʿAbbās echoes. Then, the game reaches a crescendo as in his next interjection Shemr deploys the same metre but quickened further as he drops a foot. ʿAbbās echoes this but then breaks with the game. Each character has three more interjections, changing his metre with each one but not echoing that of his opponent. There is no obvious reason for ʿAbbās dropping the game, although by this point the tension is escalating and it is possible that this break was accompanied by some change in the physical action.

All in all, this metrical game not only gives the impression of a duel that shows ʿAbbās as more than capable of matching his opponent in rhetorical skill, the suggestion of a contest and varying of rhythm make the meeting of Ḥusain's arch enemy and his champion a high point in the performance without the need for battle action. The narrative pretext for this scene is simple – Shemr trying to trick ʿAbbās into switching sides and ʿAbbās refusing – and thus the content of the exchanges soon becomes repetitive but monotony is avoided by the constant change of metre. The anonymous author of this early rendition of the play was an accomplished master of metrics. This metrical tit for tat is not found in the later versions subject to this study.[57] However, in many later versions it was replaced by the two opponents showing their skill in rhetoric by using the *baḥr-e ṭavīl* form.

3.3 **Baḥr-e ṭavīl** – ***A Change of Rhythm in the Duel in Verse***

Baḥr-e ṭavīl is a relatively young verse form, known only from the Timurid period (9th/15th century) onwards; a definition will serve as a useful introduction to the discussion of the employment of *baḥr-e ṭavīl* in the night-time encounter:

> BAḤR-E ṬAWĪL, a type of Persian verse generally consisting of the repetition of a whole foot (*rokn*) of the metre *hazaj* (ᴗ - - -) or of a whole foot of the metre *ramal* (- ᴗ - -) or of permissible variations of the two. The difference between *baḥr-e ṭawīl* and other metrical poetry, such as the *robāʿī* (quatrain), *qaṣīda* (ode), *ğazal* (lyric), *mosammaṭ* (stanzaic verse), *maṯnawī* (rhymed couplets), etc., is that in the latter types, the

57 The Litten rendition of the scene uses many of the same metres described above and does have a section where three times ʿAbbās answers Shemr in the same metre but this is little compared to the Zand rendition where he echoes Shemr over eleven interjections.

> poet is permitted to use four or six or at most eight feet per line, while a line of *baḥr-e ṭawīl* can contain up to twenty or even more feet. Another basic difference is that the number of feet in *baḥr-e ṭawīl* varies from line to line of a particular poem, whereas in other forms of rhythmic verse the number of feet in the first line has to be maintained throughout the entire poem.[58]

With the exception of the Darbandsar rendition, this form does not feature in the versions of this play amongst my sample until the 14th/20th century.[59] This innovation was clearly successful as the *baḥr-e ṭavīl* exchange between Shemr and ʿAbbās has remained an important element of the night-time encounter as played in modern day Iran.[60] The introduction of sections of *baḥr-e ṭavīl* ups the pace of the contest, again supporting the impression of a duel, each contender showing his skill.[61] It is noteworthy that *baḥr-e ṭavīl* was commonly employed by contenders in the *sukhanvarī* contests, the duels in rhetoric, staged by Selseleh-ye ʿAjam.[62]

The following interjection by Shemr from the Darbandsar rendition demonstrates how the theme of insurmountable military odds and references to the menace of the enemy, reminiscent of the epic genre and present in this scene from as early as the Zand rendition, found expression in the new verse form:

شمر:
ای علمدار حسین، ای که توپی سرور من، نور دو عین ترِ من، نیک ببین لشکرِ من آمده از سوی ختا و ختن و چین و ز ما چین، ز مصر و حلب و شام، ارومیه و بسطام، همه لشکر جرار، کمان‌دار و زره‌دار، مهیای زدن، کشتن، پیکار؛ همه درپی کشتار بجنگند، به دریا چو نهنگ

58 Muḥammad Dabīrsīāqī, "Baḥr-e Ṭawīl," *Encyclopædia Iranica* III/5 ([1988] 2011). Available online at: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bahr-e-tawil-type-of-persian-verse (accessed June 17th, 2024).

59 However, the metre was not new to the *taʿziyeh*. It features in renditions of *Bāzār-e Shām* from as early as 1184/1770–71, in that context for the purpose of embedding a long tale (discussed in chapter 6). *Baḥr-e ṭavīl* features in the night-time encounter of CP: MS 51; MS 513; MS 617; and the Darbandsar rendition.

60 This video shows part of the *baḥr-e ṭavīl* exchange between Shemr and ʿAbbās from the night-time encounter, as performed in 1439/2017 at the Ḥusainiyah-ye Abū'l-Fażl, a huge modern *tekiyeh* in Qudejan, Khansar, Isfahan Province: "Baḥr al-ṭawīl Shemr va ʿAbbās Taʿziyeh-ye Qūdejān," Āpārāt, uploaded by Ṭanīn-e taʿziyeh, (accessed June 17th, 2024). https://www.aparat.com/v/lkuG3.

61 For *baḥr-e ṭavīl* as a means of increasing the pace of an exchange see Jāber ʿAnāṣerī, "Baḥr-e ṭavīl khānī," in *Shabīh-khānī ganjīneh-ye namāyesh-ha-ye āyīnī-ye mażhabī*, ed. Jāber ʿAnāṣerī (Tehran: Markaz-e hunar-ha-ye namāyeshī-ye Vezārat-e Farhang va Ershād-e Eslāmī, 1372 SH), 165–86.

62 Maḥjūb, "Sukhanvarī."; Najm, *Naqqālī*, 110–13; Floor, *Theater*, 118.

و همه در کوه پلنگ و همه چالاک و زرنگند، به ابرو زده چین و همگی داده به دل کین، همه لامذهب و بی‌دین، همه از نسل شیاطین لعین، دامن همت به کمر بر زده و نیزه و خنجر زده، آمده به صحرا که ببرند سرِ زادهٔ زهرا پسر شیر خدا.[63]

Shemr: *O Ḥusain's flagbearer, O you are my prince, the light of my two wet eyes. Look well at my troops that have come from Khatā and Khutan* (Tartary) *from Chīn-u-Māchīn, from Egypt, Aleppo and Damascus, from Urūmiyeh and Bastām. All are abundant armies, archers, armoured, ready to strike, to slay, for battle. All fight to kill, like crocodiles in the water, leopards on the hill. All are agile and clever. They have furrowed their brows and given their hearts completely to rage. All are heathens and infidels. All are of the line of abominable devils. They have hitched up the robe of ambition* [in readiness], *ceased their spears and daggers and have come to this desert to take the head of the offspring of Zahrā, son of the lion of God.*

At times, the allusions to the epic genre in sections of *baḥr-e ṭavīl* are direct, with Shemr describing the enemy as having the skills of Rustam ("*Rustam-fann*") and his list of their origins often including Tūrān. This was the name, in the *Shāh-nāmeh*, of the land beyond the Oxus River, and northeast of Khurasan with which, like China (and sometimes Māchīn), Iran was frequently at war in the epics.[64]

Indeed, the list of the origins of the enemy troops varies across renditions, and Constantinople and Mecca are often mentioned. Since the siege is set in Karbala (modern Iraq), the idea of troops coming from Egypt, China, Anatolia, Syria and the Hijaz indeed gives the impression of the protagonists being surrounded on all fronts. However, curiously, in addition to these distant lands, some renditions also list cities in Iran. For example, Cerulli MS 51 lists the enemy as having come from Semnan, Gilan, Zanjan, Kashan, Hamadan, Tabaristan (an old name for Mazandaran), Kerman, Gorgan, Isfahan, Shiravan, Tehran, and more. It is unlikely that this sought to imply that Persians were amongst Ḥusain's enemies at Karbala. Rather, apart from the obvious play with the rhyme of the '*ān*' ending of these place names, the listing of these locations will have created the impression of being surrounded for the audience in Iran, at the location of the performance.

63 Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles*, 1, 412.

64 CP: MS 51. Reference to the enemy having come from Tūrān still features in this exchange as performed in modern day Iran. *Māchīn* is a legendary place name often mentioned in Persian literature in combination with China as "*Chīn u-Māchīn*".

So, how do these later versions of the night-time encounter compare with the Zand period rendition's creation of a verbal duel in which the two contenders echo each other's metre? It is evident that the echo game is not strictly present in the later versions of the play, but some aspects of it endured. In the versions in which the characters echo each other with lengthy interjections in the *baḥr-e ṭavīl* form, they subsequently break into stichomythia. Thus, they converse through single hemistich interjections, sharing couplets and therefore, inevitably, metre. With this in mind, we can assert that whilst the scene changed through time, the efforts of the early composers at using metre to give this scene the structure of a contest did influence the way in which it evolved.

3.4 *Qur'anic Precedents, and the Prophets of Old*

The citing of Qur'anic examples and references to former prophets are further prominent aspects of the night-time encounter. Like the allusions to the heroes of epic and the attention to metre in this scene, they stood the test of time. In general, ancient prophets such as Ādam, Nūḥ (Noah), Mūsā (Moses), Ebrāhīm (Abraham), ʿĪsā (Jesus) and Yaḥyā (John the Baptist) are frequently mentioned in the *taʿziyeh*. One of the purposes of the invocation of these figures is to underscore the spiritual genealogy of the *ahl-e bait* and it is used to this effect in the night-time encounter. Whilst prophets sometimes appear as characters in the *taʿziyeh*, they are also summoned through references. Such references often involve the listing of their names and attributes to give the impression of a continuing line, stretching from Ādam, past the ancient prophets to Muḥammad and on to Ḥusain and his family at Karbala. The same effect is sometimes achieved by the scripts drawing a narrative connection between the experience of a prophet and the situation of a character at Karbala. In the night-time encounter we find ancient prophets and Qur'anic precedents invoked in the latter two ways.

In the Zand period rendition, as Shemr attempts to turn ʿAbbās with flattery, praising his warrior prowess and physical beauty, he compares ʿAbbās to his father, calling him *shebh-e asad-allāh* (likeness of The Lion of God), but also refers to him as *Kalīm*-e *s̱ānī* (a second Mūsā).[65] In addition, he says that ʿAbbās has a white hand, a reference to the white hand of Mūsā that is one of the marks of his prophethood. He likens ʿAbbās to *māh-e kanʿān* (the moon of Canaan), one of Yūsuf's sobriquets, and says that he is of the line of ʿEmrān (Mūsā's father).[66]

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65 Kalīm-Allāh, meaning "the one spoken to by God", is Mūsā's sobriquet.

66 Zand rendition, Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 11*, 275–76.

As the play develops, we find a further distinct series of Qur'anic allusions, and narrative connections to the experiences of former prophets, repeated across a significant number of renditions. First, as Shemr makes his entrance to Karbala, surveying the scene and Ḥusain's dormant camp, the dramatists use his commentary to demonstrate that this is no ordinary site. Even someone as godless as Shemr is overwhelmed by the fragrant earth and senses the holiness of this place:

شمر:
به‌به از این خفتگان وادی حسرت — بی‌خبر از ظلم چرخ و کینهٔ عدوان
یوسف مصری مگر فتاده در این چاه! — یا مگر اینجا بساط چیده سلیمان!
بَه چه زمین است این زمین معطّر — وه چه بساطی است در میان بیابان
نافهٔ آهو مگر فتاده در این جا — چونکه وزد بوی مُشک و عنبر و ریحان[67]

> Shemr: *Praise be to these sleepers of the valley of rue, unaware of the injustice of fate and the rage of the enemy! Did the Egyptian Yūsuf fall into this well? Or, here, did Sulaimān lay out his carpet? O what ground this is, this perfumed earth. O what a camp in the midst of the desert. Perhaps a musk deer dropped its navel here, how the scent of musk, ambergris and aromatic plants wafts!*

The idea of the earth smelling of musk appears to be an allusion to a Shiʿi hadith, one that connects Ḥusain to his prophetic ancestry. Indeed it is said that both ʿĪsā and ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb had passed through Karbala and, smelling the sweet droppings of gazelles that had grazed the plants of that fragrant earth, had wept for the tragedy that would take place there.[68]

Further to this, also in the later renditions of the night-time encounter, there are a series of allusions to Qur'anic examples of fraternal betrayal. In response to Shemr stressing the blood tie between him and ʿAbbās through their maternal line, ʿAbbās asserts that while he, himself, is like Hābīl (Abel), Shemr is doing the deed of Qābīl (Cain). His servitude to Ḥusain is a great source of pride; following the model of Esmāʿīl he is willing to be sacrificed for his noble brother. He shuns Shemr's lack of knowledge of the Qur'an, to which Shemr

67 The Darbandsar rendition, Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles*, 1, 406. In this edition the word concluding the first hemistich of the second couplet reads جاه (position). This is almost certainly a typo, or copyist's error, and has been edited here to چاه (well). Variations of this speech also feature in CP: MS 51; MS 513; and MS 617.

68 For further details see Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 237–38.

retorts, citing Qur'anic precedents of brotherly friction, that the bond of fraternity is not always a beneficial one.

شمر:
ای علی‌صولت مگر نشنیدی این تفصیل را   پشه چون پر شد ز پا اندازد آخر پیل را[69]
میکنی فخریّه جّد اطهر او احمد است   آوری شاهد برایم سوره تنزیل را
حضرت موسی مگر پیغمبر بر حق نبود   از چه ره جاری نکرد او آب رود نیل را
یوسف از دست برادر کم مشقت‌ها کشید   یا نکشت از کینه قابیل دغا هابیل را[70]

> Shemr: *O you with the ferocity of ʿAlī, have you not heard this detail? When a gnat becomes a swarm, it will overcome an elephant. You boast that his most pure grandfather is Aḥmad* (Muḥammad) *and bring evidence from the revealed scriptures* (the Qur'an). *Was Mūsā not a righteous prophet? Why did he not cause the waters of the river Nile to flow? Was Yūsuf's suffering light at the hands of his brothers? Did the treacherous Qābīl not kill Hābīl in enmity?*

The reason for Shemr citing Yūsuf's suffering at the hands of his brothers and the fratricide of Qābīl and Habīl is clear, as he tries to distance ʿAbbās from Ḥusain. The pretext for mentioning Mūsā in this context is slightly less obvious. Rather than being part an example of brotherly tension, it appears to be connected to the sentiment expressed at the beginning of the interjection, where Shemr sneers at the idea that prophethood can protect you from harm. In the Darbandsar rendition of the play this reference is more specific as Shemr asks why Mūsā did not cause the Nile to flood the Pharaoh's palace. In fact, a parallel is being drawn here between Mūsā and Ḥusain, as Shemr is incredulous as to why, if someone has special powers from a connection with God, he would not use them to destroy his enemy. ʿAbbās retorts that Shemr has not understood these stories and their lessons about God's will.

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69 The second *meṣrāʿ* is from Saʿdī's *Gulestān* (composed 656/1258). In its original context, as here, it warns that the great can be defeated by the small if the latter come together:

پشه چو پر شد بزند پیل را   با همه تندی و صلابت که اوست
مورچگان را چو بود اتفاق   شیر ژیان را بدرانند پوست

When a gnat becomes a swarm it will overcome an elephant, regardless of his might and virulence. When ants move as one body, they tear the hide from a furious lion.

See Musharref-al-Dīn Muṣleḥ Saʿdī, *Gulestān*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAlī Furūghī (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Qaqnūs, [1258 CE] 1362 SH), 110.

70 CP: MS 51. MS 513; MS 617; and the Darbandsar rendition also feature this interjection with slight variations.

Whilst this exchange serves to depict ʿAbbās as superior in terms of religious understanding (just as he is morally superior), the issue of lineage is also underscored. Beyond his parentage, ʿAbbās is being linked to a spiritual ancestry that includes great figures such as Mūsā, Ebrāhīm and Yūsuf. Conversely, the dramatists have Shemr make references of the opposite sort about himself, portraying him as a representative of the malign forces. As we saw in Shemr's *baḥr-e ṭavīl* interjection, he described the enemy as being *az nasl-e shayāṭīn-e laʿīn* (of the line of abominable devils). In the Zand rendition he describes his troops as *badtar az Eblīs u Ahrīman* (worse than Satan and Ahriman, the latter being the spirit of destruction according to Zoroastrian belief).[71] In Cerulli MS 513 Shemr says that he and his troops have come to do the work of *dīvān* (demons), going so far as to describe himself as a *murshed-e Shaytān* (guide or instructor to Satan). There are many more such examples. This is the celestial battle of good against evil; the two opponents in this verbal duel, Shemr and ʿAbbās, are icons of each side.

4 Historical Development

4.1 *A Joint Mission? Sources of Narrative Variation and the Influence of Print*

Many of the variations in content between renditions of a single *taʿziyeh* episode can be identified as innovations that took place during the Qajar period, whilst the genre was at the height of its popularity. However in the case of the dramatization of ʿAbbās' martyrdom, there is a discrepancy so fundamental that it cannot be attributed merely to innovation. Instead, it is better explained as a relic of the early stages of the genre's development. Furthermore, it is evident that the advent of print in Iran, in the 1830s, played a role in diffusing certain little-known plot details.

There are two divergent *taʿziyeh* treatments of ʿAbbās' martyrdom. The first features the night-time encounter where ʿAbbās is tested by Shemr and ends with him mounting a solo raid on the Euphrates (the earliest example being the Zand period rendition). Crucially, the second treatment does not feature the night-time encounter. Instead, it gives considerable attention to the fact that Ḥusain and ʿAbbās attempt to reach the river together, and are only vanquished once separated. The only rendition in my sample that clearly displays the second set of features (without compromise) is Pelly's 1290/1873 translation.

71 Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar II*, 279.

Ṣādeq Humāyūnī has deemed these two treatments separate plays. In his list of 152 *taʿziyeh* plays he lists the first as *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās* or *Abū al-Fażl* (no. 35) and the second as *ʿAbbās-Emām* (no. 92).[72] Conveniently, he provides an edited version of *ʿAbbās-Emām* from amongst his own collection.[73] The script is undated but its similarity to the rendition translated by Pelly (both in plot and verse) is unmistakable.

What is left undiscussed by Humāyūnī is that we see an amalgamation of these two plays over time. The night-time encounter between ʿAbbās and Shemr (featuring in nine of the ten renditions in my sample) clearly became an integral feature of the *taʿziyeh* treatment of these events. The alternative treatment, focussing on the joint mission and defeat only after separation, listed by Humāyūnī as *ʿAbbās-Emām*, found less popularity and remained a marginal rendition.[74] However, certain aspects of the *ʿAbbās-Emām* version were disseminated. The Darbandsar version of *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās*, and Cerulli MS 51 (Ghulām Ḥusain b. Mullā Sharīf, 1371/1952) include the night-time encounter followed by Ḥusain and ʿAbbās launching a joint expedition, thus amalgamating the detail of plot-strands belonging to the two play types.

This provokes two questions. First, were the composers of Darbandsar and MS 51 inspired to include the brother's joint mission through exposure to the *ʿAbbās-Emām* play type, or did they garner this detail from literary sources external to the *taʿziyeh*? Second, why did the dramatists of the *ʿAbbās-Emām* play type omit the night-time encounter, which, as we have seen, is the play's centrepiece and provides not only a great display of rhetorical skill but excitement and tension?

It is of course possible that knowledge of the *ʿAbbās-Emām* play type was disseminated amongst *taʿziyeh-khānān* from diverse geographical locations during the genre's heyday, as they travelled to perform in the cities during Muḥarram. However, we find evidence within the verse of the scripts that strongly indicates a shared literary source. All of the renditions of the play in my sample that feature the joint mission share sections of verse included in (if not originating from) Jawharī's *Ṭūfān al-bukā'*, which, as discussed, is a lithograph of the *rawżeh-khānī/maqtal* genre. So, in fact, in the dissemination of this plot detail what we see is a concrete example of how the introduction of print contributed to the development of the *taʿziyeh* repertoire.

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72 Humāyūnī, *Taʿziyeh dar Īrān*, 364, 381.

73 Ibid., 473–504. This rendition appears to originate from Humāyūnī's home city of Shiraz.

74 In his introduction to his *ʿAbbās-Emām* script, Humāyūnī himself comments that this rendition of ʿAbbās martyrdom is rare and that many *taʿziyeh* performers and specialists are unaware of it. Ibid., 475.

Curiously, *Ṭūfān* includes two separate renditions of ʿAbbās' martyrdom, one in which he makes a solo raid on the Euphrates and the other featuring a joint mission with Ḥusain. Neither version includes his night-time encounter with Shemr. Jawharī first gives a colourful account of ʿAbbās' solo raid on the Euphrates.[75] Then, after a number of other stories, he returns to the topic of ʿAbbās' martyrdom. Beginning by saying that a story has been discovered that has seldom been heard, but that is *bī-shak u raib* (not to be doubted), he narrates the brothers' joint mission.[76] It is from this story that the composers of the Darbandsar rendition of *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās*, the version translated by Pelly, and Cerulli MS 51 have borrowed verse. In all three, prior to their entering the battlefield, Ḥusain makes a rousing address to his brother; the similarity between the lines he utters is striking. In Pelly's translation the interjection is longer yet if we observe the opening and concluding sections, it corresponds directly to the Darbandsar rendition. Pelly presents Ḥusain as saying:

> O, my sympathising friend, my noble standard-bearer … I am like Ebrāhīm, and this field is my altar, and thou, being my offering, must accompany me whither I would. Dye thou thy hand and sword with the enemy's blood, and fight back to back with thy brother against them.[77]

The Darbandsar verse, clearly of the same source, is as follows:

امام:
ای علمدار و سپه‌دار رشید   از تو نتوان ای برادر دل بُرید
من خلیل این دشت قربانگاه من   ای ذبیح من بیا همراه من
دست خود از خون دشمن رنگ کن   پشت در پشت برادر جنگ کن[78]

> Ḥusain: *O courageous standard-bearer and commander, O brother the heart cannot be severed from you. I am Ebrāhīm and this field my altar. O my offering* (Esmāʿīl)*, come, accompany me. Dye your hand with the enemy's blood. Fight back to back with your brother.*[79]

Cerulli MS 51 contains a shorter variation:

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75 Jawharī, *Ṭūfān*, 205–09.
76 Ibid., 241–44.
77 Pelly, *Miracle Play*, 2, 26.
78 Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles*, 1, 416.
79 Ebrāhīm is referred to by his sobriquet Khalīl (meaning "friend"). In this context the word *ẕabīḥ* (offering) is clearly an abbreviation of Esmāʿīl's sobriquet Ẕabīḥ-Allāh (God's offering).

امام:
ای برادر ای علمدار رشید　　اذن جنگ از من مدار اکنون امید
دست تیغ از خون دشمن رنگ کن　　پشت بر پشت برادر جنگ کن[80]

Ḥusain: *O courageous standard-bearer, do not expect permission to fight from me ... Dye the handle of your sword with the enemy's blood. Fight back to back with your brother.*

In Jawharī's rendition of the brothers' joint mission after affectionately addressing his standard-bearer, Ḥusain makes the same allusion to Ebrāhīm and invitation to fight together:

من خلیل ایندشت قربانگاه من　　ای ذبیح من بیا همراه من
دست و تیغ از خون دشمن رنگ کن　　پشت بر پشت برادر جنگ کن[81]

I am Ebrāhīm and this field my altar. O my offering (Esmāʿīl)*, come, accompany me. Dye your hand and sword with the enemy's blood. Fight back to back with your brother.*

So, it appears that the detail of the brother's joint mission made its way, together with some verse, from *Ṭūfān* into certain renditions of *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās* that also feature the night-time encounter.

There remains the question of why the composers of the *ʿAbbās-Emām* play type chose to omit the night-time encounter. It could be that the composer of this version was working from *Ṭūfān* and stuck closely to the detail of the second story recounted by Jawharī. But another explanation is that the composer(s) of the *ʿAbbās-Emām* play omitted this scene because they were unaware of it and that, in fact, is an artefact of an early endeavour at dramatizing ʿAbbās' martyrdom.

To achieve an understanding of the development of the Muḥarram cycle, we cannot only consider evolution through time, but must contemplate the early origins of these episodes. It is improbable that the main episodes of the Muḥarram cycle are descended from a single original work. Rather, it is likely that when the tradition was emerging there existed a first generation of treatments, the early endeavours of different authors, unaware of each other, at dramatizing the same events. These treatments would have been based on

80 CP: MS 51. The words دشمن رنگ کن are written دوشمن رنکن in the manuscript, which contains many spelling mistakes due to words being written phonetically.

81 Jawharī, *Ṭūfān*, 241.

details transmitted in historical and religious sources, fleshed out into episodes by the composers. The content of their renditions would have depended greatly on the sources available to them. We cannot prove definitively that *ʿAbbās-Emām* is a relic of an early dramatization of ʿAbbās' martyrdom, prior to the night-time encounter becoming well-known as its centrepiece. However, it is noteworthy that of the two play types that we have, one concurs broadly with al-Ṭabarī's account of ʿAbbās' martyrdom, featuring him being offered (and refusing) safe passage by Shemr and then alone leading a raid on the Euphrates. By contrast, *ʿAbbās-Emām* concurs with al-Shaikh al-Mufīd's account; he does not mention Shemr's offer and rather recounts the brothers endeavouring to reach the river together.[82]

In attempting to disentangle the process that led to the discrepancy over a joint or solo mission, we have seen the influence of print on the development of the Muḥarram cycle. With respect to the inclusion or omission of the night-time encounter scene, I strongly suggest that, rather than resulting from innovation, this difference has descended from a first generation of disparate treatments. We could consider these vying narratives yet such is the degree of amalgamation over time that they are better seen as contributions, with the most successful elements enjoying further diffusion.[83]

4.2 *Narrative Innovations: a Trench, a Fire, a Test, and the Appearance of a Ghost*

We will now turn our attention to content innovations. A striking difference between the earlier and later renditions of *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās* is that, whilst the broad format of the play endured, *gūsheh-hā* (scenes featuring a short, self-contained narrative) were inserted, three in total. In the first of these Ḥusain's party dig a defensive trench, and a fire breaks out in the camp. In the second (and most frequently occurring) addition Akbar conducts a successful raid on the Euphrates and on his return to camp is challenged by a masked ʿAbbās, who seeks to test the young warrior's mettle. In the third scene, whilst alone and on guard, ʿAbbās is visited by the ghost of his father, ʿAlī.

82 Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, 107–8 and 11–12; Mufīd, *Irshād*, 334. With the likely provenance of Humāyūnī's version of the script being Shiraz and Pelly's coming from Shiraz or Bushehr, the *ʿAbbās-Emām* rendition of the water-bearer's martyrdom may well have originated in the south.

83 *The Martyrdom of Ḥurr* from the Zand collection is potentially an example of an early and somewhat obscure rendition. It differs greatly from later versions, with Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī commenting that it is unknown to modern-day *taʿziyeh* players. *Daftar 11*, 205.

4.2.1 The Trench and the Fire

When played, this scene is inserted directly after the exposition.[84] Ḥusain summons ʿAbbās and tells him to gather everyone and to dig a defensive trench around the camp. While ʿAbbās, ʿAlī Akbar and Qāsem are digging, the enemy light a fire around the *haram* (women's tents). Zainab cries to her brothers for help. The scene is rather strange and inserted somewhat clumsily. The urgency of the fire brings a potential sharp rise in drama early in the episode, but this is not exploited. Rather, the fire is rapidly put out and either Ḥusain, or the trio of ʿAbbās, Akbar and Qāsem, tell Zainab that she should not panic and that she and the other women must be quiet.[85] With that, the scene comes to an abrupt end and the focus of the episode moves on.

Since the effects neither of digging the trench nor of the fire are developed, one wonders why these elements have been included. However, there is a historical pretext. Al-Ṭabarī, al-Mufīd and Mīrkhānd all record Ḥusain's party digging a defensive trench at Karbala and filling it with cane and firewood that they set alight so that they can only be attacked from one side.[86] Al-Ṭabarī also records a further incident involving fire. He tells of Ebn-e Saʿd ordering a group of soldiers to enter the camp to pull down and torch some of the tents. Some amongst Ḥusain's party tried to extinguish this fire but Ḥusain told them to leave it, seeing it as a potential obstacle for the enemy. Al-Ṭabarī also narrates that when Shemr reached Ḥusain's tent he asked for fire so that he could torch it with the women inside. They rushed out screaming. Shemr was chastised by his companions for the thought of killing women, and backed off.[87]

I have only found this scene in renditions of the play dating to the 1950s. Perhaps, as a wider range of sources became available due to the spread of print materials, the composers became aware of further details from historical accounts and sought to integrate them into the structure of existing episodes. Fire as a stunt will have been popular with the *taʿziyeh* audience and thus favoured by the performers. In the absence of stage directions we cannot be sure that fire was lit during this scene but its use on stage is common in the *taʿziyeh*.[88] In dramatizing this scene, the only themes even mildly explored are those of hierarchy and protection. Ḥusain's first-in-command (unsurprisingly) is ʿAbbās, with ʿAlī Akbar and Qāsem as his subordinates. The women

84 It features in CP: MS 51; MS 513; and MS 617.

85 CP: MS 51 does not mention the fire directly but after the men digging the trench Ḥusain hears a commotion from the *haram* and orders that the women be hushed. It is probable that the fire was played on stage but is not mentioned explicitly in the dialogue.

86 Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, 120–22; Mufīd, *Irshād*, 323; Mīrkhānd, *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, 3, 2236.

87 Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, 140–41.

88 Author's observation, Muḥarram 1439/2017.

are shown to be under the men's protection as while digging the trench each of them states that his intention is to protect a female relative. Zainab is clearly the leader amongst the women and messages to them from the menfolk are relayed through her. All characters are shown as unquestioningly obedient to Ḥusain.

4.2.2 Akbar's Test

The second new scene is much more interesting. It has two variants. In one, Akbar sets out to bring water for the children from the Euphrates at Ḥusain's order.[89] In the other, this mission is driven by the cries of Shahrbānū, Ḥusain's wife.[90] In the latter variant, Akbar hears Shahrbānū sobbing and goes to investigate. Her baby son, ʿAlī Aṣghar, is crying incessantly, weak with thirst. She fears that he will die. It is clear that without water, she herself has no milk. Making an allusion to a well-known anecdote from the story of *Khusrow u Shīrīn*, Akbar tells her not to worry, he, like the hero Farhād will bring *shīr-e shīrīn* (sweet milk). Then, despite her remonstrations about the danger involved, he makes for the Euphrates.[91] Having reached the river, Akbar confronts the enemy and has a brief fight with Shemr but nonetheless successfully fills the waterskin and heads back to camp. Meanwhile, ʿAbbās finds out about Akbar's mission and dons a mask, deciding to test the young hero upon his return (the test features regardless of whether Akbar sets out at Ḥusain's order or to help Shahrbānū).

ʿAbbās ambushes and challenges Akbar, pretending to be a foe seeking to prevent water from reaching the camp. Akbar is unintimidated. Proudly stating his family's warrior credentials, he prepares to fight the masked assailant. At this point ʿAbbās reveals his identity, and they happily return to camp together. What is interesting about this scene is that it is again reminiscent of the epic genre, the influence of which we have seen in other areas of this episode, and which often uses such tests as elements of plot. For example, in the anonymous *Bānū-Gushasp-nāmeh*, Rustam's son and daughter, Farāmarz and

89 CP: MS 51 and the Darbandsar rendition.

90 CP: MS 513; MS 617; and MS 622. Regardless of how Akbar's mission begins, this scene is normally inserted immediately after the digging of the trench and the fire, and before the night-time encounter.

91 Farhād, a Parthian prince and warrior-hero is mentioned in epic literature. However, he is best known as the honourable rival to Sasanian king Khusrow Parvīz II in his love for the Armenian princess Shīrīn. The most famous treatment of this story is Neẓāmī Ganjavī's narrative poem dating to the late 6th/12th century. In his devotion to Shīrīn, Farhād carves a stone channel from the pasture to her palace to bring her fresh milk. Akbar alludes to this in all of the renditions of the play featuring his dialogue with Shahrbānū.

Bānū-Gushasp, go hunting. Rustam becomes concerned about their safety and decides to teach them a lesson. He dons a disguise and challenges them in a series of combats, at the end of which his identity is disclosed.[92]

4.2.3 Apparition of the Ghost of ʿAlī

In the third new scene whilst ʿAbbās is alone guarding the camp (prior to his encounter with Shemr) he is visited by the ghost of his father, who he initially takes for a stranger.[93] This is a classic instance of the *taʿziyeh* type-scene "An Apparition from Beyond the Grave" (defined in chapter 2). As discussed, an element of this type-scene is that, preceding the apparition, the protagonist calls for a member of the Holy Family in heaven to look upon his/her fate. As an example of the fashion in which the dramatists have ʿAbbās unwittingly summon his father, in Cerulli MS 51, prior to testing Akbar, ʿAbbās laments that tomorrow the desert will be *lālehgūn* (tulip red) with his blood and, making a reference to his two parents, he asks the *ṣabā* (the easterly breeze) to take the news of his impending martyrdom to Najaf and to Umm al-Banīn.

Although this is a routine example of the type-scene in question, it is noteworthy that in this context (due to being on guard) ʿAbbās initially challenges the stranger, threatening him with his sword. This is significant in that all of the renditions of *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās* to which his encounter with ʿAlī's ghost have been added also feature both Akbar's test and the night-time encounter between ʿAbbās and Shemr. Whilst there are obvious differences between these scenes, they have a certain narrative similarity. In each case they feature a hero, alone outside the camp, who is approached by someone whom he knows but does not initially recognise, and in each case his first instinct is to protect his family. On a narrative level there is nothing surprising here. However, the addition of the apparition of ʿAlī and Akbar's test change the play's structure to include a series of three encounters. This is intriguing in that a similar trend is evident in other areas of the cycle.

92 *Bānū-Gushasp-nāmeh*, ed. Rūḥāngīz Karāchī, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Pazhūheshgāh-e ʿulūm al-ensānī u muṭālaʿāt-e farhangī, 1393 SH), 71–107. For more see Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Gošasb Bānu," *Encyclopædia Iranica* XI/2 ([2002] 2012). Available online at https://iranicaonline.org/articles/gosasb-banu (accessed June 17th, 2024).

93 This scene features in CP: MS 51; MS 513; MS 617; and the Darbandsar rendition. The ghost of ʿAlī does appear in the Zand rendition, but does not interact with ʿAbbās. Rather, ʿAlī, Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā and Prophet Muḥammad converse in heaven and decide to visit Karbala. They simply look upon the family as they sleep, lamenting their fates. CP: MS 51 shows remnants of this rendition, introducing ʿAlī's appearance before ʿAbbās with he and Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā discussing visiting Karbala and looking upon the sleeping family.

We will see when examining the climactic play (chapter 5) that during its development scenes were added to create a trilogy of encounters, which in that case act as forms of trial for Ḥusain. The "set of three" is a device widely used in folkloric, dramatic and religious literature; this number of repetitions is the smallest necessary in order to demonstrate a pattern. It is nonetheless interesting that as the central *taʿziyeh* episodes developed the dramatists appear to have become inclined towards series of three repetitions. This included repeating series of scenes that were of a similar nature. The insertion of type-scenes, to echo elements already present in a play's structure, was one way in which they achieved this.

5 Conclusion

In this close look at *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās*, we have seen that whilst much of the episode's narrative content is rooted in detail transmitted in historical sources, the dramatists used tropes of the epic genre to evoke notions of the great warrior heroes to whom ʿAbbās is equal if not superior in calibre. We should expect *taʿziyeh* plays, like much Persian literature, to include references to the great epic tradition; these are deeply embedded cultural references. However, this episode makes these allusions consistently and through a variety of methods. It stands out amongst other episodes of the Muḥarram cycle in this respect. We saw in the earliest extant rendition of the play, from the Zand period, that the dramatists created a verbal duel between the hero and his greatest rival as the centrepiece of the play. This was a duel reminiscent of those that precede the physical conflict between heroes of epic, with each contender boasting of his lineage and his prowess on the battlefield. Furthermore, it is rife with allusions to the epics, zoomorphic and otherwise. As the play developed, fewer animal references were included in the verbal duel. Nonetheless, the highlighting of ʿAbbās' warrior attributes continued and we see the insertion of a scene where he dons a disguise to test his nephew, again attesting the influence of the epic genre. All of this is very much a Persianization of the Karbala narrative and its Arab protagonists, the invocation of the epics pointing to the influence of traditional Iranian storytelling, *naqqālī* and *pardeh-dārī*, on the *taʿziyeh* genre.

In all renditions, the dramatists expound the special nature of the bond between Ḥusain and ʿAbbās and in doing so they make of them a king and his champion. Despite his great strength, ʿAbbās does not have the exaggerated self-opinion often associated with the heroes of epic. Rather, he is humble in his servitude to Ḥusain, "Khusrow-e dīn" (Khusrow, or king, of religion)

as is his *taʿziyeh* sobriquet, and is shown to be of incorruptible moral calibre and accepting of God's will.[94] Frequent allusions to ʿAbbās' lineage, as a son of the Lion of God whose spiritual genealogy extends to the ancient prophets, depict him not only as a hero of epic proportion but one appointed to protect the divinely ordained order; in his willing to sacrifice his life he is likened to Esmāʿīl. Maternal lineage is also important as he seeks to emulate his mother's unwavering devotion to Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā in his service to Ḥusain.

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94 Whilst "Khusrow" can simply mean "king", this denotation began with the Sasanian monarch Khusrow I Anūshīrvān (r. 531–79 CE). The use of this sobriquet for Ḥusain may well be an allusion to this figure, who was famed for his promotion of justice and for having the ideal qualities of kingship. See Oliver Nicholson, Matthew Canepa, and Touraj Daryaee, "Khosrow I Anoshirvan (531–79)," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity*, ed. Oliver Nicholson (Oxford University Press, 2018).

CHAPTER 4

The Martyrdom of Qāsem

بیا ای کفن خلعت شادیم	بیا ای کفن رخت دامادیم
جوانان شما چون عروسی کنید	ز ناکامی من بیاد آورید[1]

Come O shroud, my robe of joy. Come O shroud, my bridegroom's attire. O youths when you wed, remember me and my disappointment.

Set during the siege at Karbala, *Shahādat-e Ḥażrat-e Qāsem* (The Martyrdom of Qāsem) treats the marriage of the adolescent Qāsem, son of Ḥusain's deceased older brother, the Second Imam of Shiʿi Islam, Ḥasan b. ʿAlī, to Ḥusain's daughter Fāṭemeh-ye Ṣughrā. The groom is then martyred before the consummation of the marriage. Whilst not grounded in historical sources, the story of this endogamous battlefield wedding pre-dates the existence of the *taʿziyeh* tradition. Here I examine how the composers developed it into a drama with various poignant levels, intriguing because, more than any other episode portraying the events prior to Ḥusain's death, it explores the perspective of the women at Karbala.

1 Script Sources, and Tracing the Narrative

My analysis of this episode is based on the ten renditions listed in Table 2. They are mainly from the north of Iran simply because of what is available. Francklin's early spectator account, that recalls this episode being part of the Muḥarram commemorations in Shiraz in 1202/1787, shows that it has also long

1 Couplets sung by Qāsem as he leaves his *ḥejleh* (nuptial tent) ready for martyrdom, CP: MS 487 (Isfahan, 1350/1931). Quotes in this chapter have largely been drawn from this manuscript due to it being a good example of what came to be the episode's standard form and the way in which its dialogues have been versified.

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FIGURE 4 Qāsem Does Battle, painting on tile, anonymous artist, Tekiyeh-ye Muʿāven al-Mulk, Kermanshah

been performed in the south.[2] However, it appears to have proliferated more in the north, where it has certainly been subject to a larger number of renditions.[3]

The discussion below will first examine the play's themes. Although it features a wedding, the suffering of the mother of the martyr emerges as the most prominent theme; the dramatists foreground the tragedy of her plight. We will also see how they invoked an existing archetype of beauty and gave the tropes of this description a bitter slant to characterize Qāsem as the idealised *shahīd-e nākām* (virgin martyr). I explore their portrayal of his inner torment and of how a special connection between Qāsem and his older cousin, ʿAlī

2 Francklin, *Observations*, 100–01.

3 The Cerulli Collection includes three further renditions of the script (MS 594, MS 672 and MS 1026), they are also from the north of Iran and are either similar in date to those used in this study, or later.

TABLE 2 Script sources for *The Martyrdom of Qāsem*

Rendition	Date	Origin	Author or copyist
Chodzko MS (XVIII)[a]	1249/1833	Tehran	"Shūr"[b]
Gobineau[c]	1281–82/ 1865	Unknown	Anon
Pelly Collection[d]	*c.*1873	Shiraz/ Bushehr	Anon
Ṣāleḥī Rād Collection[e]	Late 19th cent.	Darbandsar	Anon
Hāshem Fayyāż Collection[f]	Late 19th cent. (copied 1325 SH/ 1946–7)	Kashan/Tehran	Mīr-e ʿAzā-ye Kāshānī/ Mīr-e Mātam
Cerulli Persiani, MS 404	End 19th cent.	Mazandaran	Anon
Cerulli Persiani, MS 27	1369–1371/ 1949–1952	Unknown	Ghulām Ḥusain b. Mullā Sharīf
Cerulli Persiani, MS 476	Beg. 20th cent. & 1332 SH/ 1953	Mazandaran	Anon
Cerulli Persiani, MS 487	1350/ 1931	Isfahan	Anon
Cerulli Persiani (MS 671)	Beg. 20th & 1325 SH/ 1946	Rasht	Anon

a BnF, Supplément Persan 993, 166–177
b This is one of the aforementioned 14 entries in Chodzko's manuscript to bear a discrete reference to an author or scribe. On the play's first page is written "*neveshteh-ye Shūr*" (Shūr's writing). Six of the manuscript's other plays are also attributed to Shūr.
c French prose translation. Gobineau, *Les religions*, 405–37
d English prose translation. Pelly, *Miracle Play*, 1, 1–17
e Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles*, 1, 435–49
f Kāẓemī, *Mīr-e ʿAzā*, 459–79

Akbar, is created – one young man becoming the reflection of the other. This includes the theme of *nākāmī*, disappointment or lack of fulfilment, which I will show pertains not only to the fact that Qāsem died before the consummation of his marriage, but also to strands of narrative embedded in the wider cycle. Following the exploration of themes, in tracking the play's historical development I identify a major innovation in content that greatly expanded the focus on the female experience, and that I argue was the result of the dramatists responding to their audience – most of whom were women.

It is useful to begin with consideration of how Qāsem b. Ḥasan has been treated in historical sources and hagiographical literature. Al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh* includes an account from Abū Mekhnaf of Qāsem's martyrdom. He describes Qāsem as a youth with a shining face who entered the battlefield in Ḥusain's

defence, recording that the strap of his left sandal was broken and that he was surrounded by the enemy and struck on the head with a sword. As he fell he called for his uncle, who ferociously fought his way to Qāsem's side. It is recounted that, as the dust settled, Ḥusain expressed great sadness at Qāsem's death and was seen taking his body to lie it next to that of his own adolescent son, ʿAlī b. Ḥusain.[4]

Balʿamī's Persian version of al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh* elaborates slightly. He describes Qāsem as a ten-year-old boy, and records that when he came out of the camp with a drawn sword Ḥusain said, "Go back, you are a child." The boy answered, "Oh uncle, for the sake of the Prophet, let me be!" and went forward. A horseman attacked him, splitting his head in two with a sword.[5] Al-Shaikh al-Mufīd's *Ketāb al-Ershād* gives an account of Qāsem's martyrdom almost identical to that of Abū Mekhnaf, including the broken sandal and Ḥusain's distress, and adds the detail of the boy's head being split in two.[6] We will see how details such as Ḥusain's reluctance to see Qāsem fight, the boy's determination and tender beauty, and Ḥusain rushing to his dying nephew's side are expressed and embellished in the work of the *taʿziyeh* dramatists. However, it is noteworthy that none of these historians mentions Qāsem's wedding.

Qāsem and Fāṭemeh's wedding does not appear in literary sources until the dawn of the Safavid period. In fact, what is likely to be the first literary mention of this marriage is found in Kāshefī's *Rawżat al-shuhadāʾ*.[7] The *taʿziyeh* portrayal of the young hero's marriage and martyrdom bears a great resemblance to Kāshefī's rendition of the story but there is also an intriguing narrative discrepancy between them, a point to which we will return.

2 Skeleton of *The Martyrdom of Qāsem* and Function of Its Sections

The *taʿziyeh* of *The Martyrdom of Qāsem* is a goal-driven narrative and follows an arch plot structure, with two main peaks in action. Set during the siege, it shares with the other central episodes the mounting pressure caused by the merciless encroachment of the enemy and the ticking bomb placed over the

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4 Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, 152–53, 80.

5 Balʿamī, *Tārīkh-nāmeh*, 4, 709–10. Balʿamī refers to him as Qāsem b. Muḥammad.

6 Mufīd, *Irshād*, 332–33.

7 Kāshefī Sabzevārī, *Rawżat*, 429–39; Karen. G Ruffle, "Karbala in the Indo-Persian Imaginaire: The Indianizing of the Wedding of Qāsim and Fātima Kubrā," in *Muslim Cultures in the Indo-Iranian World During the Early-Modern and Modern Periods*, ed. Denis Hermann and Fabrizio Speziale (Berlin: K. Schwarz; Teheran: Institut Francais de Recherche en Iran, 2010), 183.

lives of the family by the denial of water. However, Qāsem's anguish at the death of his cousin ʿAlī Akbar and his desire to prove himself worthy as a warrior, despite his shame at being fatherless, are what drive the action. Ḥusain's initial refusal of permission to fight is overturned by Qāsem's father Ḥasan's last will and testament, which begins a separate branch of action by stipulating not only that Qāsem should be martyred at Karbala, but that he should first wed Ḥusain's daughter Fāṭemeh. The organisation of the wedding constitutes much of the episode's action, with tension created by the juxtaposition of marriage and mourning, represented by the female characters. The distinctly Persian nature of both the nuptial and lamentation rituals reinforces the connection between the Iranian audience and the Arab protagonists.[8] I now outline the play's skeleton, its essential components, stable over time. It breaks down into six or seven sections (one being an optional *gūsheh*). As with *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās*, despite featuring narrative material specific to Qāsem, it follows the martyrdom composition-scheme (described in chapter 2).

2.1 *Section One – Ḥusain's Protection Diminished, His Final Battle Immanent (Exposition)*

Within the *taʿziyeh* chronology of the events at Karbala, Qāsem's martyrdom follows the deaths of both ʿAbbās and Ḥusain's son ʿAlī Akbar. Thus, at the beginning of this episode, apart from the Imam himself and Zain al-ʿĀbedīn (who is too ill to fight), the adolescent Qāsem is the oldest male remaining in the besieged camp. This is expounded in the opening section when, making the typical opening prayer, Ḥusain and Zainab lament the deaths of their loved ones. Again, true to the martyrdom composition-scheme, in the opening scene not only are the deaths of the martyrs recounted in chronological order but the fates of those who are still alive are recited, including the fact that Qāsem will be the next martyr and that Zainab and Sakīneh will be taken as prisoners to Shām. The typical enemy challenge, from Shemr or Ebn-e Saʿd, often in combination with Sakīneh complaining of thirst, sees Ḥusain prepare to enter the battlefield.[9]

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8 Ṣādeq Humāyūnī, "An Analysis of the Ta'ziyeh of Qasem," in Chelkowski ed. *Taʿziyeh: Ritual and Drama*, 19–20; Rebecca Ansary Pettys, "The Ta'zieh: Ritual of Renewal in Persia," vol. 1 (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1982), 219.

9 The Mīr-e ʿAzā/ Mīr-e Mātam rendition is an exception among my sample in that it features a short wine-drinking scene in the enemy camp as a prologue. In contrast to Ḥusain and his entourage, who are without so much as a drop of water, Ebn-e Saʿd and Shemr repeatedly call upon the *sāqī* (cup-bearer) to pour them wine and the *muṭreb* (musician) to play. See Kāẓemī, *Mīr-e ʿAzā*, 461–62. Wine-drinking in the *taʿziyeh* is unambiguously a negative trait and is used to show the antagonists as debauched. CP: MS 404 (Mazandaran, End 19th Cent.) is also exceptional in that the opening section does not feature an enemy challenge.

2.2 *Section Two – Qāsem Requests and Is Denied Permission to Fight* (*Exposition-Rising Action*)

Qāsem is introduced through a conversation either with his mother or younger brother ʿAbdullāh, or speaking to himself. He is shown to suffer great anguish at witnessing his uncle unprotected. This is compounded by grief at the recent loss of his cousin and companion Akbar. Full of adolescent zeal he approaches Ḥusain for permission to fight yet, grief-stricken due to Akbar's recent death, the Imam refuses on account of Qāsem's youth. Humiliated, Qāsem cries to his mother and she gives him (or he finds inside a talisman attached to his arm) his father's last will and testament. Ḥasan's will is the impetus for the beginning of the rising action. Qāsem proudly takes it to Ḥusain who responds that he must respect his brother's wishes. Ḥusain's initial rejection of Qāsem's petition to do battle, the subsequent emotional torment suffered by the willing martyr, and Ḥusain's decision being overruled by the wishes of a senior relative are true to the martyrdom composition-scheme. But in this case there is the catch that Ḥasan's will also contains his marriage wish for Qāsem. Although he initially objects to the wedding, his attention being fixed upon martyrdom, hierarchy prevails and Qāsem concedes. A discussion about the nature of the dowry ensues between the bridegroom and father of the bride. In all renditions Qāsem offers the gory goods of his own martyrdom, the verse cleverly combining the imagery of wedding gifts with that of a bloody death. Ḥusain accepts and charges Zainab with gaining the bride's consent.[10]

2.3 *Section Three – Nuptial Negotiations* (*Rising Action*)

Female characters and their agreement to the celebration are the focus of this section. Zainab is mourning for her own two sons and distraught at the loss of Akbar. She is bitterly reluctant to celebrate a wedding but ultimately obeys her brother's command and approaches Fāṭemeh. The young bride also initially objects due to her grief for her brother, Akbar, but Zainab persuades her to obey her father's will.[11]

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10 The Mīr-e ʿAzā/ Mīr-e Mātam rendition omits this negotiation but has Ḥusain tell Zainab that if the bride requests a dowry, she should be offered the hands of ʿAbbās and head of Akbar.

11 The Gobineau rendition calls the bride "Zobeydèh". He believes that "Zobeydèh-Fathemèh" (the bride) is different from Fāṭemeh-ye Ṣughrā, when in fact she is one and the same. Gobineau, *Les religions*, 423. This confusion is understandable as in *The Martyrdom of Imam Ḥusain* Fāṭemeh-ye Ṣughrā is shown to have remained in Medina due to illness. This discrepancy is testament to the fact that the *taʿziyeh*'s Muḥarram cycle is comprised of a patchwork of stories, originating from different sources and not necessarily consistent with each other.

Qāsem's mother requests that, despite the circumstances, the appropriate rituals be followed and her fatherless son not shamed. The couple should be decorated with henna and a *ḥejleh* (nuptial tent) be mounted. Ḥusain gives her permission to organise a celebration, assuring her that where henna is lacking, there will be blood, a *kafan* (shroud) will be her son's wedding attire and the grave will be his *ḥejleh*. Qāsem's mother is adamant that Umm Lailā, still grieving over her son Akbar's newly slain body (present on stage), must participate in the wedding celebrations.[12] There is a long dialogue between the two women, a poignant scene contrasting one mother grieving her son's death with another preparing her son's wedding. Umm Lailā is portrayed as inconsolable, beside herself with grief. No one can persuade her to celebrate. Instead, she demands that nuptial rites also be carried out for unmarried Akbar's corpse; Ḥusain agrees to her request and a *ḥejleh* is also set up for Akbar.[13]

2.4 *Section Four – Wedding* (*Rising Action*)

With Fāṭemeh's consent, and a compromise in place with Umm Lailā through the mirroring of ceremonies for Akbar, the wedding can now go ahead. The preparations include Qāsem being dressed and preened by the women. This serves simultaneously as him being prepared for the battlefield,[14] an essential part of the martyrdom composition-scheme, although the final element of that preparation, in which he is dressed in a *kafan*, is reserved for the subsequent section when he bids goodbye to the family.

The celebration of Qāsem and Fāṭemeh's union goes ahead to the backdrop of Umm Lailā's laments. There is an atmosphere of derangement as Lailā begins to speak for Akbar, telling Qāsem that he gives his congratulations. The dramatists show Ḥusain's intense grief by having him drawn into this hysteria, berating Akbar's headless body for not responding to his greeting. Qāsem's mother tries to command an air of celebration regardless. The wedding scene itself has little dialogue, but a procession, the throwing of rice, and the bride and groom entering the *ḥejleh*. In the Gobineau rendition, stage directions describe Qāsem riding in a cavalcade of caparisoned horses, accompanied by musicians playing flute and tambourine, the women showering him with flowers. Behind him march other musicians, playing funerary music and carrying a bier draped

12 The Chodzko rendition is an exception amongst my sample in that it does not feature Umm Lailā. I analyse the significance of this discrepancy below.

13 In some versions Ḥusain has the women sing a dirge for Akbar at this point, but it is not explicitly stated that a second *ḥejleh* is mounted. CP: MS 671 (Rasht, Beg. 20th Century & 1325 SH/ 1946); MS 27 (Ghulām Ḥusain b. Mullā Sharīf, 1370/1951); and the Darbandsar rendition.

14 For example, in the Gobineau rendition he is sprinkled with rosewater and adorned with jewellery. A special robe is often mentioned and, in CP: MS 487, a turban.

in black, ready for Akbar's corpse. Whilst the wedding provides the spectacle, the juxtaposition of celebration and mourning provides the dramatic tension. The transition from festivities to farewells is initiated by the arrival of Shemr and Ebn-e Saʿd at the camp. Having heard the sounds of celebration they come on the pretence of offering their congratulations and sweets for the wedding. But instead they issue a battle challenge that sees the interruption of the ritual.

2.5 *Section Five – Saying Goodbye, Qāsem's Resolve Tested* (*Rising Action*)

Qāsem must leave his bride before the consummation of the marriage; he promises her that the conclusion of their union will be on the day of resurrection. Fāṭemeh passionately begs him not to go. These familial farewells are an essential element of the martyrdom composition-scheme and true to that scheme we see Qāsem impart his *vaṣiyyat*, entrusting his wife and mother to each other and often both of them to Zainab. Also true to the composition-scheme is that Qāsem's resolve is tested as he is torn between his divinely ordained duty – to be martyred for Ḥusain – and his earthly obligation to protect his womenfolk. The dramatists have expressed this in a particularly interesting way in this episode. In a number of renditions they have the *houris* (virgins of paradise) calling Qāsem to them and competing with the attraction of staying with the bride. Qāsem is torn between the *houris*' call of *biyā* (Come!) contrasted with Fāṭemeh's cries of *marow* (Don't go!).[15] Thus, the heavenly and earthly pulls are represented by potential female companions. Qāsem's mother's pleas are added to Fāṭemeh's, further intensifying the situation.[16] Nonetheless, Qāsem's duty to the divine design wins out. He is dressed in a *kafan*, the final and irreversible stage of martyrdom preparation. His horse and weapons are brought forward and a repeated enemy challenge sees him head into battle.

2.6 *Section Six – First Battle: Qāsem Fights Azraq-e Shāmī and Sons* (*Rising Action-First Climax*)

Qāsem enters the battlefield and calls for Ebn Saʿd. He either demands water for the family (as dictated by the composition-scheme), or simply berates and challenges his opponent. His request is denied and he draws his sword. Sometimes, it is merely implied that in his first battle Qāsem vanquishes

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15 CP: MS 27 and the Darbandsar rendition. In MS 487; MS 671; and MS 476 (Mazandaran, Beg 20th Cent. & 1372/1953) the calls of the *houris* are mentioned but they have no lines. In MS 404 when Qāsem is lying wounded on the battlefield the *houris* call him to paradise, mirrored by Fāṭemeh calling him to return to camp.

16 In the Mīr-e ʿAzā/Mīr-e Mātam rendition the bride does not have any lines at all; Qāsem being torn in this section is expressed entirely through a dialogue between the hero and his mother.

multiple adversaries. However, a more elaborate battle scene, in which he fights and kills the Damascene commander Azraq and his four sons, often features here.[17] In this scene, Ebn-e Saʿd orders Azraq to slay Qāsem. Azraq is reluctant on account of the hero's youth so sends one of his four sons (who he boasts are like Rustam-e Zāl).[18] Qāsem kills the first son with ease. Azraq sends his second son, and so on until all four sons have been killed. Then Azraq faces Qāsem. This marks a first climax as Ḥusain himself is afraid for Qāsem, and the family pray for him. Nevertheless, Qāsem triumphs. It is often suggested that he cuts Azraq in half. This story features in Kāshefī's *Rawżat*, so was not an innovation of the dramatists. Rather, it is a *gūsheh* affirming Qāsem's battle prowess, the insertion of which is optional.[19] Apart from providing a first peak in the drama, it does not alter the plot.

2.7 *Section Seven – Qāsem's Final Battle and Return to Camp* (*Second Climax-Denouement*)

Qāsem returns to camp in what marks a brief lull in the forward momentum of the plot (and is also a feature of the martyrdom composition-scheme). He is desperately thirsty and begs Ḥusain for water as a prize for his triumph. Whilst always responding that he has no water, Ḥusain offers an alternative. He either: seeks to quench Qāsem's thirst by putting the Prophet Muḥammad's signet ring into his mouth;[20] attempts to give Qāsem water from his own mouth;[21] or tells Qāsem that his thirst will be quenched by Sāqī Kowsar (a sobriquet of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb), which implies after death.[22] A further variation is that, citing his desperation, Qāsem asks for permission to wet his lips with his own blood.[23] Ḥusain replies that this is forbidden and offers one of the aforementioned alternatives.

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17 CP: MS 476; MS 671; MS 27; and the Mīr-e ʿAzā/ Mīr-e Mātam and Darbandsar renditions.

18 CP: MS 27; and the Mīr-e ʿAzā/ Mīr-e Mātam and Darbandsar renditions.

19 CP: MS 487, is a good example of the optional nature of this scene. It is in *tak-nuskheh* form; the *fehrest* does not include Qāsem fighting Azraq and sons. However, the set includes two scripts for Qāsem: one with his lines for the whole play and corresponding to the *fehrest*, and another that includes only his lines for the encounter with Azraq and sons (should the scene be played). A script for Azraq and an additional script for Ebn-e Saʿd are also included.

20 CP: MS 476; and the Chodzko and Pelly renditions.

21 CP: MS 27; MS 671; and the Gobineau and Darbandsar renditions. This detail is, again, reminiscent of Balʿamī's account of Ḥusain relieving Akbar's thirst at Karbala with his own tongue. Balʿamī, *Tārīkh-nāmeh*, 4, 709.

22 CP: MS 404; MS 487; and the Chodzko rendition. Sāqī Kowsar means "cup-bearer of the Kowsar" (a river of heaven).

23 CP: MS 487 and the Gobineau rendition.

Bidding a final farewell, Qāsem returns to the battlefield and is subject to a massive collective attack. It is implied that he is overcome only because drastically outnumbered. The play reaches its climax as Qāsem falls from his horse mortally wounded (either by Shemr or an anonymous enemy group). True to the martyrdom composition-scheme, and indeed the historian's accounts, Ḥusain rushes onto the battlefield. He finds Qāsem's trampled body. In some renditions Qāsem, like ʿAbbās, asks not to be taken back to the camp before death, in this case because he is ashamed to be seen by his wife and mother.[24] As he passes away in his uncle's arms, Qāsem's inner struggle is resolved as his goal of martyrdom is reached. A new status quo is established as the bride becomes a widow, her golden wedding veil exchanged for black robes of mourning. The *ḥejleh* is also draped in black. The tension between the situation of the two mothers is also resolved as Qāsem's mother joins Umm Lailā in bereavement.[25]

3 "After You I Sit amongst the Ashes" Foregrounding the Bereaved Mother

The hero of this episode is the virgin martyr, an idealised youth cut off in his prime. Although it narrates the preparations for a wedding, in the *taʿziyeh* rendition of this story the central dramatic theme is the loss of an adolescent son. The nuptial rites create a spectacle and allow the composers to play with the replacement of the symbolism of marriage with that of a gory death. However, in the arc of the plot the wedding is merely an obstacle between Qāsem and his goal of martyrdom.[26] Ḥusain's distress over the death of his son ʿAlī Akbar is treated, but the dramatists have foregrounded the suffering of the bereaved mother.

Although Qāsem's mother initially supports her son's petition for permission to do battle, the bereaved mother is already present in the figure of Umm

24 CP: MS 27 and MS 404.

25 A note regarding the Mīr-e ʿAzā/ Mīr-e Mātam rendition: The plot corresponds to the majority of my sample, yet the edition features some erroneous labelling of the mature female characters. The interjections by Qāsem's mother are sometimes labelled as belonging to his "aunt". Meanwhile, Umm Lailā is mentioned by name and addressed as *mādar-e Akbar* (Akbar's mother), but the lines that she usually speaks are attributed to Zainab. Given that the lines are so similar to the usual format but belong to the wrong characters, and that this issue is present in a number of places, it is unlikely that the episode was ever performed like this. Rather, it is the result of confusion in the copying or editing process.

26 Ansary Pettys, "The Ta'zieh," 226–227.

Lailā. Gobineau's spectator account from the 1860s shows that even at that stage, grief at ʿAlī Akbar's death was a central element of this episode: throughout the performance the audience were reminded of it by the presence of the beheaded body and mourning mother on one side of the stage.[27] Even as the audience witness Qāsem's mother making the wedding preparations, the distraught Umm Lailā is a constant reminder of what awaits her sister-in-law. The fragility of the position of a woman who loses her son is underscored. The audience know that Qāsem is his mother's oldest son. The fact that she is a widow is constantly reiterated by Qāsem bemoaning the loss of his father. She tells him that she had been relying on him to be her "cane in old age."[28] Likewise, speaking to her son's corpse, Umm Lailā asks Akbar if he has forgotten his promise; she cared for him as an infant so he should have looked after her when elderly. She expresses her own desperate grief and says that she will become destitute.

امّ لیلا:
به بندم چشم خود دنیا نبینم　　ز بعدت روی خاکستر نشینم
عصا گیرم بکف در بینوائی　　روم در کوچها بهر گدائی[29]

> Umm Lailā: *I'll close my eyes not to see the world. After you I will sit amongst the ashes. In my destitution I'll go, stick in hand, begging in the alleys.*

The suffering of other characters pales in comparison: Ḥusain's lamentations at the bitterness of his fate are not dissimilar to his expressions of suffering in other episodes; the pain of the widow-bride at being separated from her groom is too hastily constructed to be truly moving; the mother's loss of a son is the main theme through which this episode provokes lament. It has been said that women in the *taʿziyeh* and similar literature have an essential role as the educators of the next generation of martyrs,[30] we do not see this here. Instead we see the torment experienced by the mother of the martyr.

In exploring this, the juxtaposition of the situations of the two mothers has great dramatic potential and it is all about contrast; the very woman destined to move from celebration to mourning requests of her contemporary that she make the opposite transition. After the negotiation of the dowry, the scene in which Qāsem's mother begs Umm Lailā to participate in the celebrations

27 Gobineau, *Les religions*, 402.
28 Gobineau, *Les religions*, 433. Translation from French.
29 CP: MS 671.
30 Aghaie, "Gender Dynamics," 54.

allows the dramatists to include further verse contrasting the motifs of marriage and death. A golden headscarf proffered by Qāsem's mother, which she asks Umm Lailā to don in place of her black robes of mourning, is a visual symbol of the attempted imposition of happiness.

مادر قاسم:
بیا خواهر سیاهت گیرم از سر

Qāsem's Mother: *Come sister, I will take the black from your head.*

امّ لیلا:
چه تکلیف است این الله اکبر

Umm Lailā: *For the greatness of God, what kind of command is this?*

مادر قاسم:
بیا بر رخ گلاب افشان نمایم

Qāsem's Mother: *Come, let me sprinkle rosewater on your face.*

امّ لیلا:
گلابم هست اشک دیده هایم

Umm Lailā: *My own tears are my rosewater.*

مادر قاسم:
بیا بر کف حنا بربند خواهر

Qāsem's Mother: *Come sister, let's paint your hands with henna.*

امّ لیلا:
حنا بندان کنم از خون اکبر

Umm Lailā: *I will be painted with the henna of Akbar's blood.*

مادر قاسم:
مکن خواهر دل زارم فسرده

Qāsem's Mother: *Sister, do not dismay my poor heart.*

امّ لیلا:
نبینی جوانم تازه مرده

Umm Lailā: *Do you not see my son has just died?*

مادر قاسم:
بعشرت خانه ی من پای بگذار

Qāsem's Mother: *Please come to my place of celebration.*

امّ لیلا:
برو خواهر تو از من دست بردار[31]

Umm Lailā: *Go sister, leave me in peace.*

Qāsem's mother, however, does not leave Umm Lailā in peace. In a protracted scene she moves from trying to console Umm Lailā in her grief to haranguing her about Qāsem's right to have a proper wedding, with *everyone* in attendance. She appeals on the grounds of him being an orphan, and the discourse between the two women commonly concludes with a variation of the following exchange:

مادر قاسم:
ببین قاسم پدر بر سر ندارد

Qāsem's Mother: *Look! Qāsem has no father.*

امّ لیلا:
ببین اکبر به پیکر سر ندارد[32]

Umm Lailā: [You] *Look! Akbar has no head!*

In a different literary context, one would consider this a form of dramatic irony, as a character (in this case Qāsem's mother) moves unwittingly towards a fate which is nonetheless crystal clear to the audience. The aim is to create in the observers a sense of anxiety, as they wish to warn the character to choose a different path. However, in the *taʿziyeh* genre everything is known to

31 CP: MS 487.
32 CP: MS 487.

all protagonists, as is frequently demonstrated by the fates of Ḥusain's family members being foretold in detail by the characters themselves. They are acting out a predestined scenario in which each is bound to play her or his part. Even within this episode it is clear that Qāsem's mother knows that her son's wedding will be followed by his martyrdom and her bereavement, yet she dutifully fulfils her role as organiser.

Of course, the *taʿziyeh* aims to provoke the shedding of tears. It is clear that the scene between the two mothers aims to extend the space for apprehension of Qāsem's martyrdom. Instead of crying for Qāsem's death in retrospect, the audience are made to cry in anticipation of his martyrdom, the grief and destitution of his mother, and in solidarity with poor Umm Lailā. Indeed such scenes, in which a painful moment is drawn out to allow time for the tears of the audience, are common in the central episodes.

3.1 *Oblivious to Hierarchy: Derangement in Grief*

Indicating further that motherly bereavement as personified by Umm Lailā is essential to this episode, she is shown breaking from a fundamental behaviour of all *taʿziyeh* characters: obedience to hierarchy. As a general feature of the Muḥarram cycle, all characters are shown to submit to the hierarchical order, even obeying commands that are against their most fundamental wishes. There are a series of such examples in the early sections of *The Martyrdom of Qāsem*, demonstrating that everyone is bound by tradition and everyone bows to hierarchy, except Umm Lailā. Qāsem obeys Ḥusain's initial refusal of permission to fight, despite burning frustration. Zainab, although opposed to the idea of a battlefield wedding, surrounded by the dead, ultimately obeys the Imam's command and makes the necessary arrangements. When Ḥusain tells her the plan her answer begins with the traditional expression of obedience, but then she questions his decision.

زینب:
لبیک فدات ای برادر　　قربان صدات ای برادر
گفتی که عروسی است و شادی　　صد داغ بسینه‌ام نهادی
ما تعزیه‌دار نیله پوشیم　　بر عیش و نشاط چون بکوشیم
هر کس که دو طفل مرده دارد　　بر دست حنا نمی‌گذارد[33]

Zainab: *I am your sacrifice and here to help O brother! I am a slave to your voice O brother! You spoke of happiness for your wedding O brother and*

33 CP: MS 487.

placed a hundred miseries upon my breast. We wear dark robes in mourning. How can we attempt revelry for a wedding? Anyone who has two dead children, does not paint her hands with henna.

Even Ḥusain himself defers to hierarchy in his response. Sending Zainab to obtain Fāṭemeh's consent he states that he is bound to obey his older brother's will, implying that carrying out that duty is painful for him.

امام حسین:
برو تو اذن طلب کن ز دختر زارم کن این مقدّمه از هر دو دیده خون بارم[34]

Imam Ḥusain: *Go and request the consent of my grief-stricken daughter. Tell her first that my two eyes are full of tears.*

Zainab goes to Fāṭemeh, obeying Ḥusain's order but acting against her own wishes, as is clear from the conversation that follows featuring the refrain *sharmandeh-ām* (I am ashamed).[35] She is ashamed to ask Fāṭemeh to marry at this time and Fāṭemeh is ashamed to accept:

زینب:
خواهد ببندد این زمان عقد تو ای آرام جان به قاسم شیرین زبان ای عمه جان شرمنده‌ام

Zainab: *O calm of my soul, he wishes at this time to have you married to sweet-voiced Qāsem. O niece, I am ashamed.*[36]

فاطمه:
بنگر به نعش اکبر افتاده است اندر رزم خاک دو عالم بر سرم ای عمه جان شرمنده‌ام[37]

Fāṭemeh: [But] *look at Akbar's body, fallen in battle. May the dirt of both worlds be on my head. O dear aunt, I am ashamed.*[38]

34 CP: MS 487. In the manuscript the letter و is omitted from the word خون.

35 The conversation between Zainab and Fāṭemeh features this refrain in all renditions of the play among my sample.

36 Zainab technically refers to Fāṭemeh as *ʿameh* (aunt), such inversions of title are common in affectionate addresses in colloquial Persian.

37 CP: MS 487.

38 Throwing earth onto the head is an old Persian mourning custom.

FIGURE 5 Performers playing ʿAlī Akbar and Umm Laila, Tekiyeh-ye Ḥusainī-ye ʿĀẓam, Armaghankhaneh, Zanjan Province, 8th Muḥarram 1439/2017

The conversation is lengthy, Zainab cajoling and Fāṭemeh resisting. She eventually consents but rather than expressing will for the marriage to take place, she states obedience to her father's order:

فاطمه:
خجالتم مده ای عمه جان برای خدا   برو بگو به حسین ناز پرور ز مرا
که حجُت احَد و وصی کردگار توئی   به آتش ار تو بری صاحب‌اختیار توئی[39]

> Fāṭemeh: *Dear aunt for the sake of God do not embarrass me further. Go and say from me to Ḥusain, who cherishes tenderly, "You are the proof, the emissary of God. Even if you take* [*me*] *into the fire, you are the authority."*[40]

So, four key family members in turn have bowed to tradition and the hierarchical, patriarchal order. However, following Fāṭemeh's consent, despite Qāsem's

39 CP: MS 487.

40 A drastic statement of obedience from Fāṭemeh is always present, she cites willingness to be burned if her father so wishes in CP: MS 27, the Gobineau, Darbandsar and Chodzko renditions.

mother's petitions and Zainab often bringing the order to celebrate directly from Ḥusain, Umm Lailā refuses to leave her lament and her dead son's side.[41] She breaks the mold of obedience and submission to hierarchy and is thus depicted as genuinely deranged; the suffering of the martyr's mother is sufficiently intense to cause a complete loss of reason.

Umm Lailā's delusional state having been established, she haunts the stage as the embodiment of grief. The power of this grief trumps even hierarchy itself: nobody can draw the grieving mother out of her delusional behaviour, and Ḥusain is drawn into it. For example, he berates Akbar's corpse for not replying to his greeting,[42] and indulges Umm Lailā's request that parallel wedding rites be carried out for it.

4 A Full Moon over the Battlefield: Physical Characterisation of Qāsem

The tragedy of Qāsem's death is compounded by the emphasis placed on his innocent beauty and adulthood lost. We know that ʿAlī Akbar is dead by the opening of *The Martyrdom of Qāsem* but within the earlier plays of the cycle a strong connection is suggested between Qāsem and Akbar (who is around four years his senior). The cousins are depicted as a duo. There are many examples of Qāsem following Akbar, repeating his deeds as if he were Akbar's shadow. This is significant and will be discussed further below. When we examine Qāsem's physical attributes and the literary devices employed to achieve this depiction, a further connection between the two emerges. Thus, analysis of Qāsem's physical characterisation will benefit from simultaneous consideration of that of Akbar.

The *taʿziyeh* dramatists use the metaphors for human beauty standard in classical Persian poetry, and descriptions of young heroes of epic, to describe the two adolescent combatants. They have moon-like faces, are spruce or cypress-like in stature – a host of further botanical metaphors are employed. However, such metaphors are also used to describe other members of the family. In fact, it is in the application of a further metaphor system, the sensory imagery prevalent in *ghazal* love poetry, that Qāsem and Akbar receive a

41 Ansary Pettys remarks briefly upon the fact that everyone is opposed to the marriage but is persuaded to go along with it, except Umm Lailā. Ansary Pettys, "The Ta'zieh," 214.

42 CP: MS 671; MS 27; and the Darbandsar and Mīr-e ʿAzā/ Mīr-e Mātam renditions.

special treatment that underscores their youthful beauty and the tragedy of their loss.

The adolescent boy is considered the epitome of earthly beauty in the Persian *ghazals* and is often the *maʿshūq* (beloved), the figure praised by the lover poet.[43] The figure of the beloved is not only endowed with a moon-like face and spruce or cypress-like stature but has other distinct physical attributes such as dark, musk-scented curly hair with a *kākul* (forelock), a ruby-like mouth topped with a *khāl* (mole or beauty spot) and a *nowkhaṭṭ* or *khaṭṭ*, the faint line of a budding moustache.[44] This figure of the beloved is not only an archetype of human beauty, but in the more mystical *ghazals*, typified by their ambiguity, is also a figure of transcendental beauty through whom the Divine can be contemplated.[45] In the *taʿziyeh* we find the topos of the beloved invoked in descriptions of both Qāsem and ʿAlī Akbar.

With regards to hair, in both the Darbandsar and Gobineau renditions of *The Martyrdom of Qāsem* as the young hero approaches his uncle to ask permission to fight, Ḥusain speaks of the *ṣabā* bringing the scent of musk from Qāsem's curls and calls upon the breeze to carry the perfume as an offering to Ḥasan's grave.[46] In the Darbandsar rendition of *The Martyrdom of ʿAlī Akbar* Ḥusain also comments on the musky scent of his son Akbar's curls as he draws near.[47] There are frequent allusions throughout the *taʿziyeh* repertoire to Qāsem and Akbar's dark curls and in particular, the stunning blackness of Akbar's tresses. In the *ghazals*, the curls of the beloved are treacherous, acting as a lasso with which to ensnare the lover poet.[48] In the Darbandsar version of Akbar's martyrdom, in justifying to Umm Lailā his need to enter the battlefield to defend his father, we see Akbar apply this metaphor reflexively.

43 For the beloved in Persian poetry see: Ehsan Yarshater, "The Theme of Wine-Drinking and the Concept of the Beloved in Early Persian Poetry," *Studia Islamica*, no. 13 (1960): 48–52; J.T.P De Bruijn, "Beloved," *Encyclopædia Iranica* IV/2 (1989). Available online at https://iranicaonline.org/articles/beloved (accessed June 18th, 2024).

44 Annemarie Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade: The Imagery of Persian Poetry* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, [1992] 2004), 232–33.

45 For elaboration of this concept see: Leonard Lewisohn, "Prolegomenon to the Study of Hafiz," in *Hafiz and the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 43–49.

46 Gobineau, *Les religions*, 407; Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles*, 1, 439.

47 *Majāles*, 1, 423.

48 De Bruijn, "Beloved". It merits comment that Kāshefī has Shemr describe Qāsem in the terms of the beloved when warning his fellow soldiers how dangerous the boy is, and advising against single combat. *Rawżat*, 433.

علی اکبر:
مادر نگر به کرب و بلا شور و محشرست عالم به پیچ و تاب چو زلفین اکبرست[49]

ʿAlī Akbar: *Mother, look at this anguish and affliction* (Karbala). *It is the turmoil of the resurrection. The world is twisting and curling like this Akbar's locks.*[50]

Describing the world as contorting like curls conjures a visual image of the chaos of the battlefield, thronging with enemy troops. Through the association of the curve of the beloved's curl with danger, the peril of the situation is also implied.[51] Furthermore, Akbar is described as having a forelock. In Cerulli MS 476 (*The Martyrdom of Qāsem*), in a macabre fashion, Umm Lailā offers her dead son's forelock to Qāsem as a wedding gift instead of flowers. As for the *khāl* (mole), Qāsem having a facial mole is also mentioned in number of plays of the wider cycle.[52] The *khaṭṭ* of both young men also receives frequent mention and appears to have found a specific significance in its *taʿziyeh* context.

4.1 *The* Nowkhaṭṭ*: Symbol of an Adulthood Lost*

Both Qāsem and Akbar are undergoing a transition into adulthood, an adulthood that they will not experience. In the Persian *ghazals*, whilst the *khaṭṭ* (emergent moustache) is considered a sign of beauty, its appearance provokes in the lover poet a sense of foreboding. It is a symbol of impending loss, signalling that his smooth-cheeked beloved will soon become a bearded man and thus his perfect beauty will be lost.[53] Meanwhile, in the *taʿziyeh* the presence of the *khaṭṭ* signifies that the youths are old enough to fight and can be seen as a symbol of the adulthood that they will forfeit.

Protagonists and antagonists alike use the *topos* of the beloved to describe Qāsem and Akbar. However, interestingly, in the scripts studied here, the vast

49 Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles*, 1, 423.

50 The words *karb* and *balā*, meaning "anguish and affliction", are used to denote Karbala.

51 As further similar examples, in the Mīr-e ʿAzā/ Mīr-e Mātam rendition of *The Martyrdom of Qāsem*, Qāsem twice uses the beloved's black curls as a metaphor for darkness, once when discussing the downward turn in his fortunes and again when asking for dark tulips to be brought to his grave. Kāẓemī, *Mīr-e ʿAzā*, 463–64.

52 For an example see "The Lamentations of Ḥusain and His Family for the Loss of the Martyrs in Karbala," Pelly, *Miracle Play*, 2, 75.

53 Julie Scott Meisami, "The Body as Garden: Nature and Sexuality in Persian Poetry," *Edebiyât*, no. 6.2 (1995): 271; Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley, California; London: University of California Press, 2005), 15.

majority of the references to Qāsem or Akbar's *khaṭṭ* are made by either the characters' mothers or the young men themselves. For example, amongst the Cerulli Collection renditions of *The Martyrdom of Qāsem* Akbar's mother refers to her son's *nowkhaṭṭ* when mourning his loss, as does Qāsem's mother when begging her son not to go onto the battlefield.[54] In addition to this, in the opening scene of Pelly's rendition when Ḥusain predicts that Qāsem will be the next martyr, Zainab decries the fact that she should suffer more loss after the martyrdoms of her own two sons whom she describes as "new-moustached youths".[55] Before going into battle, Umm Laila insists that Qāsem bid farewell to Akbar's corpse: as he does so he himself mentions Akbar's *nowkhaṭṭ*:

قاسم:
پسر عموی دل‌افگار من خداحافظ جوان نوخط ناشاد من خدا حافظ
یک آرزو بدلم ماند تا صف محشر به حجله رفتن دامادیت علی اکبر[56]

> Qāsem: *Farewell my cousin of the wounded heart. Farewell my newly-moustached unhappy youth. One wish remains in my heart until the resurrection, for you, ʿAlī Akbar, to go to the nuptial tent and be wed.*

It is indeed fitting that Qāsem mentions Akbar's *nowkhaṭṭ* in connection with the longing to see his wedding, an earthly rite pertaining to adulthood that his cousin has forfeited. The impending loss signified by the *khaṭṭ* in classical Persian poetry finds a new level of meaning in the *taʿziyeh*. As a line between childhood and maturity, the appearance of the *khaṭṭ* signifies the wearer's candidacy for martyrdom and that he will pass, not into adulthood, but onto the battlefield – a loss felt most acutely by his mother.

A clever allusion to the *khaṭṭ* as proof of readiness for battle features in the Mīr-e ʿAzā/ Mīr-e Mātam rendition of Qāsem's martyrdom. When he presents Ḥusain with Ḥasan's will, deeply moved by his older brother's handwriting, Ḥusain exclaims, "O let me be a sacrifice for your dear *khaṭṭ* my noble brother."[57] *Khaṭṭ* literally means "line" (hence its reference to the moustache), but it also means "script" and in this case should be read as the latter (Ḥasan being a senior figure whose protection Ḥusain misses and not one with a nascent moustache). Then, following a trend in the *ghazals* of having this word

54 CP: MS 404 and MS 671 respectively.

55 Pelly, *Miracle Play*, 2, 2.

56 CP: MS 487. The *eẕāfeh* after the words افگار and ناشاد is written with the letter ه in the manuscript and آرزو is spelled آرضو.

57 This also features in CP: MS 487; MS 671 and the Chodzko, Darbandsar renditions.

simultaneously describe calligraphy and allude to the beloved,[58] Qāsem uses it ambiguously:

قاسم:
عمو بنگر به خط مهربانم بده رخصت به میدان دل‌کبابم[59]

This can be read as either:

> Qāsem: *Look at my merciful script uncle. Give me permission to go onto the battlefield, I am broken-hearted.*

Or:

> Qāsem: *Look at my tender moustache uncle. Give me permission to go onto the battlefield, I am broken-hearted.*

By allowing for the second reading, the poet has in fact provided for a third level of meaning. Not only can it be read as Qāsem appealing to his uncle's affection for his youthful beauty but the *khaṭṭ* as a marker of the approach of adulthood is crucial here. Qāsem's initial request for permission to fight has been refused on account of his young age. Now, as he hands Ḥusain the will, by drawing attention to his emerging moustache he is saying, "Look uncle, I am old enough." Indeed, whilst the general application of the depiction of the beloved of the Persian *ghazals* to both Qāsem and Akbar in the *taʿziyeh* emphasizes their youthful beauty, compounding the tragedy of their loss, the *khaṭṭ* becomes the symbol of an adulthood that will be sacrificed.

5 Qāsem's Inner World and the Theme of *Nākāmī*

Closely connected with the idea of an adulthood sacrificed is the theme of *nākāmī*, meaning disappointment or lack of fulfilment. It is more complex than first meets the eye. To appreciate that complexity, we must first understand how Qāsem's inner world has been constructed. Like Akbar and ʿAbbās, he is shown to feel great camaraderie with his male companions and to be devoted to Ḥusain. Whilst this is relatively predictable, the dramatists have successfully endowed Qāsem with adolescent characteristics, showing him as

58 Schimmel, *Two-Colored Brocade*, 232–33.
59 Kāẓemī, *Mīr-e ʿAzā*, 466.

self-conscious, reckless in his desire to prove himself, and fuming with frustration at initially being told that he is too young to fight. His motivations are portrayed quite clearly and simply: he fears being shamed as fatherless; he feels guilt at surviving the deaths of ʿAbbās and particularly Akbar; he desires recognition of his worth, especially from Ḥusain. He sees martyrdom as the obvious solution; it would result in being proved worthy, following in his dear Akbar's footsteps, and being reunited with his father.

All of this is encapsulated in the scene where he initially requests permission for battle. In this petition he mentions his fatherless state and what has happened to Akbar (and often ʿAbbās). When Ḥusain refuses, ordering him to return to the women and children, Qāsem's frustration is shown through a conversation with his mother. His response to her asking why he is crying summarises his feelings well:

قاسم:

امان مادر غم دل بی‌شمار است	یتیمان حرفشان بی‌اعتبار است
برفتم گردن کج نزد عمو	که گیرم اذن جنگ از حضرت او
بنزد هم‌سران شرمنده‌ام کرد	بمیرم من که از درنده‌ام کرد[60]

> Qāsem: *Comfort me mother, the sadness of my heart is boundless. The words of orphans are worthless. I went and bowed down before my uncle to gain permission to fight from his majesty. He shamed me among my companions. I will die, for he treated me as a mere beast.*

As we know, his mother will produce his father's will that remedies the situation but throws the obligation of marriage into the mix.

In contrast to the desire Qāsem shows for martyrdom, he never shows enthusiasm for marriage. He is known as the "*shahīd-e nākām*". This literally means "the disappointed or unfulfilled martyr", but there is a further level of connotation. The term "*nākām*" (unfulfilled) seems to refer to Qāsem's marriage not being consummated before his death. He is the virgin martyr. However, he is also frequently referred to as "*nadīdeh murād*" (one who did not see his wish). Therefore, the idea of Qāsem more generally as someone who did not see his desire fulfilled is certainly present. However, it is somewhat incongruous to describe him in this way when, in fact, we do see the fulfilment of Qāsem's main and burning desire – martyrdom. The very negotiation of the dowry ensures that the marriage will see the groom's earthly body torn apart.

60 CP: MS 487. In both cases the *eżāfeh* in the manuscript after the word نزد is written with the letter ه.

What Qāsem offers varies between renditions but always includes the gory goods of his own death. It is common for him to begin by offering four jewels, *jawhar-e jān* (the jewel of his soul or life), *jawhar-e del* (the jewel of his heart), *jawhar-e hūsh u ḥavās*) the jewels of his intelligence and senses). This could, of course, be understood metaphorically but the bloody nature of his offer is made more explicit:

قاسم:
بهر پا انداز پای اشرف از نطع بدن   پاره‌پاره لاله‌گون خارا مشجّر می‌دهم
بهر گردن بندش از خون گلوی نازنین   شده از یاقوت و از مرجان احمر می‌دهم[61]

> Qāsem: *I will give the skin of my body, torn to pieces and tulip-red, as a brocaded woven silk rug for* [her] *most noble feet. I will give her a necklace of rubies and red coral from the blood of my sweet throat.*

Thus, in agreeing to observe the nuptial formalities he guarantees that the marriage will involve his martyrdom and therefore that it will not reach earthly consummation. There could be no other outcome. Indeed, it is only when we take into account Qāsem's connection with Akbar that the idea of his, or rather their, *nākāmī* fully makes sense.

To the uninitiated, the tragedy that compounds Qāsem's untimely death may appear to be his wedding not reaching its conclusion. However, well acquainted with the wider *taʿziyeh* repertoire, the audience know that the real tragedy is that Qāsem experiences the wedding planned for ʿAlī Akbar. In *The Martyrdom of Qāsem*, there are a number of references to the fact that Akbar was to be married; Umm Lailā details the preparations she has made or would have made for him in Medina, including stitching his wedding garments. This idea has also been set up in earlier plays of the cycle. In Akbar's martyrdom episode, Ḥusain, Umm Lailā and Zainab all protest his intention to sacrifice his life on the basis that wedding plans are in place for him.[62] When (after lengthy remonstrations) he finally wins Ḥusain's permission to fight, as he is dressed in a *kafan,* he admits that he looked forward to his wedding.[63] Furthermore, other episodes mention that Akbar is promised in marriage: for example, in a rendition of *Haftād-u-du tan* in the Cerulli Collection, as ʿAbbās makes his last

61 CP: MS 671.Variations of the same lines feature in MS 487; MS 27 and the Darbandsar rendition.

62 For example, see the Darbandsar rendition of *The Martyrdom of ʿAlī Akbar*, Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles*, 1, 419–33.

63 Ibid., 428.

wishes he speaks to Zainab of his daughter in Medina who was destined to be Akbar's bride.[64] The idea that Akbar was to be betrothed to ʿAbbās' daughter is also mentioned in a number of renditions of *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās*,[65] one of which even features a conversation in which Qāsem tells Akbar that he himself should be martyred first, since Akbar has a named bride.[66]

Indeed, the theme of Qāsem following in Akbar's footsteps runs through the cycle. We have already seen examples of this in *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās*, for example when Qāsem follows Akbar in digging the defensive trench, and arrives to help ʿAbbās during the escalation of his night-time encounter with Shemr. As Qāsem follows Akbar in martyrdom, but not before participating in the marriage rites anticipated for his cousin, we see the culmination of this theme: Qāsem's *nākāmī* is Akbar's *nākāmī*.

This makes the situation of Umm Lailā all the more bitter: she watches young Qāsem seated in the *ḥejleh* that should have been Akbar's, which adds a layer of woe and is likely to have been highly effective in eliciting lamentation. It testifies to the very nature of these plays as episodes inextricably linked to the wider cycle. It also suggests that, while the stories treated may have originated from different sources, once dramatized they developed within the context of the Muḥarram cycle, and the dramatists were able to rely on their faithful audience's familiarity with the other episodes.

6 Historical Development

Fluctuations in the content of this episode are few when compared to *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās*, perhaps because historical sources engage less with Qāsem on account of his youth. There is, however, one striking innovation that is likely to have taken place between the early 1840s and the 1860s. For all the importance of the juxtaposition of Akbar's funerary rites with Qāsem's wedding, Akbar's corpse and the grieving Umm Laila do not appear to have been on stage during this episode before the 1840s. Consequently, the highly evocative scene contrasting the situation of the two mothers did not feature before that point.

In our earliest example of the play, the Chodzko manuscript from 1249/1833 (Tehran), while Fāṭemeh, Zainab and others initially object to the wedding because of Akbar's recent death, his body does not appear to have been on

64 CP: MS 699.

65 CP: MS 51; MS 622; MS 513; and the Darbandsar rendition.

66 CP: MS 51.

stage, and Umm Laila does not feature. The first rendition of the script to include both Laila grieving over Akbar's body and the scene between the two mothers is Gobineau's 1865 translation: the eight later renditions of the play amongst my sample unanimously feature those details. Of course, it is possible that the Chodzko script was exceptional for its time in omitting this content, but this seems unlikely since these eye-catching details are absent from spectator accounts prior to the 1840s. Furthermore, when we trace spectator accounts mentioning Qāsem we find that by the early 1840s there existed a proto-version of his episode, juxtaposing his and Akbar's wedding and funerary rites, and featuring Umm Lailā.

Niebuhr records that Qāsem's martyrdom featured in the rendition of *Haftād-u-du tan* on Kharg Island in 1179/1765, but makes no mention of a wedding;[67] however, Qāsem's wedding did feature in the martyrdom episode witnessed by Francklin in Shiraz in 1202/1787. Francklin tells of the bride attended by the womenfolk, and the consummation thwarted by the groom's martyrdom, yet does not recall the bodies of any other martyrs featuring in the performance. He remarks that one scene had a particularly strong effect on the audience – it was not the anguish of the martyr's mother but the farewell between the martyr and his bride as she dressed him in a "burial vest" (the familiar *kafan*).[68] William Ouseley, who saw a performance of *The Martyrdom of Qāsem* in Tehran in 1227/1812 (including the wedding), again mentions the bridal couple's farewell as a prominent feature. He also tells of the women lamenting over the hero's "mangled corpse" when it was returned from the battlefield but says nothing of any other bodies being on stage, or of a particular focus on the mother of the martyr.[69] Berezin records in detail *The Martyrdom of Qāsem* as performed in Tehran in Muḥarram of 1259/1843, at Ḥājjī Mīrzā Āqāsī's *tekiyeh* – a *tekiyeh* that he describes as at the forefront of Tehran's vibrant *taʿziyeh* circuit.[70] Crucially, Berezin gives the earliest account of ʿAlī Akbar's body being present on stage during this episode. However, in this performance Akbar's was not the only body; rather, it was one of four bodies brought onto the stage!

Berezin recalls a wedding procession complete with musicians and sweets in which the bride was followed by a funerary cortege. First came Akbar's

67 Niebuhr, *Reisebeschreibung*, 2, 199–200. However, *Haftād-u-du tan* would come to feature Qāsem's matrimony, it features in two of the three Cerulli Collection versions of said play: CP: MS 699 and MS 915.

68 Francklin, *Observations*, 100–01.

69 William Ouseley, *Travels in Various Countries of the East: More Particularly Persia*, 3 vols., vol. 3 (London: Rodwell and Martin, 1823), 164–65.

70 Bérézine, *Voyage*, 252–55.

headless corpse, carried under a high canopy with arrows protruding from his chest, his weeping mother walking behind him. This was followed by ʿAbbās' body, carried beneath a lower canopy and accompanied by a mourning woman whom Berezin describes as his wife but is likely to have been his sister Kulṯūm.[71] Then, under a further canopy, were carried the bodies of Zainab's two sons, beheaded and with arrows and the blades of broken swords piercing their chests, their mother behind them. When the procession stopped, the mourning women sat down next to their respective corpses; they cried, and Ḥusain cried and ordered that the wedding begin.[72] This account is fascinating firstly because it is an example of a prominent aspect of Muḥarram pageantry, the carrying of symbolic biers graphically displaying likenesses of the wounded bodies of the martyrs, being incorporated into a static performance for dramatic effect. Secondly, and more importantly for our purposes, this account shows that by the 1840s the dramatists were experimenting with the juxtaposition of nuptial and funerary rites and had begun to use ʿAlī Akbar's body as a focus for lamentations. Also interesting is that each bier was accompanied by a female mourner; whilst the other corpses would be written out, Akbar's would become a permanent feature and the experience of the mother of the martyr would be highlighted in Umm Lailā.

Berezin's description goes on to feature Qāsem's mother crying together with Umm Lailā over Akbar's corpse. When the enemy challenge sees Qāsem head for the battlefield, Umm Lailā reproaches him for not saying goodbye to Akbar, and he tearfully obliges. "ʿAbbās' wife" follows suit and so does Zainab, with Qāsem bidding farewell to all of the corpses. Qāsem's farewell to Akbar, and Umm Lailā insisting that her dead son be treated as the living, would become part of the episode's standard form.

All things considered, this appears to be an account of the play at a moment when the dramatists had begun to experiment with creating a tragic counterpoint to Qāsem's wedding, not only by mentioning the other martyrs, but by taking the drastic step of placing their corpses on stage. They had also begun to focus on the loss experienced by the women. Berezin's account shows that this innovation process had begun by 1259/1843; by the time of Gobineau's 1281–82/1865 translation, it had been honed. While some elements had been

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71 As discussed in chapter 3, in *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās* the hero asks his sisters and niece to mourn over his body as he has no wife or mother at Karbala. Mistakes regarding the identities of female characters are common in the accounts of foreign spectators.

72 Bérézine, *Voyage*, 253; Jean Calmard and Jacqueline Calmard, "Muharram Ceremonies Observed in Tehran by Ilya Nikolaevich Berezin (1843)," in *Eternal Performance: Ta'ziyeh and other Shiite Rituals*, ed. Peter J. Chelkowski (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2010), 62.

dropped, the simultaneous nuptial and funerary rites had become a stable feature. Umm Laila embodied the pain of the martyr's mother, and the contrast between her and Qāsem's mother had been exploited for its full dramatic potential. I will now show that when we consider the sources used by *taʿziyeh* dramatists we find further evidence that making Akbar and Lailā a point of focus in Qāsem's martyrdom narrative was their own innovation, and that this took place in the time period that I have specified.

6.1 *Qāsem's Martyrdom in* Rawżat al-shuhadāʾ*: a Major Narrative Discrepancy*

The *taʿziyeh* of *The Martyrdom of Qāsem* and Kāshefī's account of Qāsem's marriage and martyrdom in *Rawżat al-shuhadāʾ* are very similar: the shared details indicate that the *taʿziyeh* dramatists were heavily influenced by Kāshefī's version of Qāsem's story. Kāshefī's rendition has the same structure and almost all of the same elements as the earliest extant *taʿziyeh* script of this episode, although he wrote more than 300 years earlier.[73] He begins with Qāsem's request for permission to do battle denied; Ḥasan's will trumps Ḥusain's refusal and contains the wedding wish; exchanges between the hero, his mother, and his bride are like those of the *taʿziyeh*; an enemy challenge sees the groom leave before consummating the marriage, and his resolve is tested by his wife's pleas for him to remain. Qāsem's initial triumph over Azraq and his sons is also present, as is his return to the camp asking for water. The denouement is again similar; Ḥusain goes to the wounded Qāsem on the battlefield and he dies in his uncle's arms. But one crucial element of the *taʿziyeh* plot is missing – Akbar's death, mourned by Umm Lailā, is not mentioned at all in Kāshefī's version of Qāsem's story.

In fact, the chronology of the martyrdoms at Karbala differs in Kāshefī's *Rawżat* and in the *taʿziyeh*. Crucially, in Kāshefī's rendition of events, Qāsem is martyred before ʿAlī Akbar, which is particularly curious given the importance of Akbar's recent death in the *taʿziyeh*'s *Martyrdom of Qāsem*. Kāshefī's story unambiguously presents Akbar as alive when Qāsem is martyred: chapter nine of *Rawżat* is a long chronological account of the martyrdoms of different members of Ḥusain's party; each martyr reacts to the fate of his predecessor, and there are seven martyrs between the story of Qāsem's marriage and martyrdom and the demise of ʿAlī Akbar. The order in which Kāshefī recounts these deaths is not random, as Akbar has a role in the martyrdom story immediately prior to Qāsem's.

73 Kāshefī Sabzevārī, *Rawżat*, 429–39.

In *Rawżat*, the martyr preceding Qāsem is his younger brother ʿAbdullāh, whose death spurs Qāsem's petition for permission to fight. Shortly before the beginning of Qāsem's story Akbar is alive and well as ʿAbbās passes him the flag in order to go to the aid of the wounded ʿAbdullāh.[74] Thus, despite clearly having made use of the plot of Qāsem's story from *Rawżat*, including the wedding, the *taʿziyeh* dramatists opted for a different ordering of the martyrdoms and in so doing made Akbar's recent death a central element of their episode about Qāsem – an intriguing decision indeed.

It must first be considered that the alternative order of the martyrdoms may not have originated with the *taʿziyeh* dramatists but rather in sources other than *Rawżat*. In fact, al-Ṭabarī does cite ʿAlī b. Ḥusain (ʿAlī Akbar) as the first martyr of the Banū Abī Ṭāleb at Karbala,[75] clearly placing Akbar's martyrdom before Qāsem's. Balʿamī's version of al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh* conserves this order and al-Shaikh al-Mufīd's account also has ʿAlī Akbar die before Qāsem. However, as has been discussed, none of these sources include Qāsem's wedding. Furthermore, Safavid historians Mīrkhānd and Khāndamīr, whose works are much closer in date and origin to the *taʿziyeh*, agree with Kāshefī in placing the deaths of both ʿAbbās and ʿAlī Akbar firmly after Qāsem's in the Karbala chronology.[76]

Of course, it is also possible that the change in the order of the martyrdoms was an innovation that had taken place in the way that the stories were told at a popular level during the three centuries between Kāshefī writing *Rawżat* and our earliest *taʿziyeh* script of the play. We know that during this period the stories circulated orally, told by the *rawżeh-khānān* and the *pardeh-dārān*. As they embellished their accounts, they may indeed have compromised on formal detail (such as the order of martyrdoms) in favour of adding emotive layers to the plot.[77] However, Jawharī's *Ṭūfān al-Bukāʾ*, completed in 1250/1834 and thus coinciding in date with the Chodzko manuscript, presents the Karbala martyrdoms in the same order as Kāshefī's *Rawżat*.[78] In chapter 3 we saw evidence that the *taʿziyeh* dramatists drew directly from *Ṭūfān*. Thus, even if Akbar's death coming before Qāsem's had become the popular way of telling the story

74 Ibid., 428.

75 Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, 150.

76 Mīrkhānd, *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, 3, 2251–53; Khāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-siyār*, 2, 52–54.

77 A *pardeh* (story-teller's canvas) featuring a variety of prominent scenes from Karbala, and likely to date to the Zand period, depicts Qāsem in battle lifting Azraq's oldest son by the hair. For the full canvas and expansion of the Qāsem detail see Figures 13 and 14 in Marzolph, "Visual Culture," 147–149.

78 For the martyrdom narratives of the figures in question beginning with ʿAbdullāh and ending with Akbar see Jawharī, *Ṭūfān*, 193–218.

by the 1830s, it was not the only version of events in circulation and the *taʿziyeh* composers were aware of the alternative chronology. What's more, they had used it themselves.

The Zand collection unfortunately does not include a rendition of *The Martyrdom of Qāsem* but it does include a version of *The Martyrdom of ʿAlī Akbar* dating to 1206/1792 in which, surprisingly, Qāsem is already dead. Akbar and Ḥusain express grief at his loss.[79] Of course, there may have existed regional variations in the way that the events at Karbala were understood.[80] Due to the varying accounts in different sources, there may have even been some flexibility in the martyrdom chronology. Perhaps the order of the martyrdoms was not always considered important, but the *taʿziyeh* dramatists certainly made it important as they developed the plot of *The Martyrdom of Qāsem.* As the scripts among my sample have shown, by the 1860s the plot had reached a standard form that foregrounded Akbar's recent death and the suffering of Umm Lailā.

Why was Akbar dying before Qāsem their preferred version of events? Why not adhere to Kāshefī's chronology that they otherwise followed closely and that was repeated in *Ṭūfān*? Why settle on an alternative order? The decision may initially have been arbitrary. In the Chodzko rendition, whilst Akbar's recent death provides a tragic background to Qāsem's wedding, we have seen that neither his corpse nor his grieving mother are on stage, and no attention is given to the idea that he was to be married. However, I venture that, as the episode's characters and the themes developed, the irony of Qāsem marrying when such an experience should have been Akbar's, the connection between Akbar and Qāsem and their *nākāmī*, and the contrasting situation of their two mothers, proved ripe dramatic material. None of this would have been possible with ʿAbdullāh as the character whose martyrdom preceded Qāsem's; he was too young to marry and had the same mother as Qāsem. Therefore, the order of the martyrdoms was settled.

6.2 *Expansion of Focus on Women: a Response to the Female Audience*

We have seen that contrasting the situation of the two mothers in this episode was important to the *taʿziyeh* dramatists. They treated the perspective of the mother of the martyr intensively through long sections of inter-female dialogue. What's more, they settled on portraying the martyrdoms in a particular order, differing to that found in their major sources, at least in part to allow

79 Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 12*, 9–54.

80 The editors of the aforementioned script identify the presence of words in the dialect of the Arak area in Markazi province, indicating its origin. Ibid., 11.

the development of this scene. This is rendered more intriguing by the fact that these dialogues are examples of cross-gendered verse that, with the exception of women-only private gatherings, were performed by men. What was the motivation for foregrounding these senior female characters?

I argue that the aim was to increase the emotional participation of the female audience members, whose tears and affective responses were (and still are) important to the *taʿziyeh* ritual as a whole.[81] As the scene between the two mothers was extraneous to formal accounts of the events at Karbala, if it was important to the *taʿziyeh* dramatists, it must have been important to their audience. We cannot analyse these plays as we would an authored piece of theatre; it is always difficult to be certain of authorial contexts and intentions, but it is especially difficult in the case of (multiple) anonymous composers. However we can use accounts of *taʿziyeh* such as those of Gobineau, a regular spectator in the early 1860s, as evidence of the important effect that the audience had on the evolution of the plays. He observes the fluctuating content of the plays: he describes plays treating a particular Karbala scene as changing from year to year, and theorises that the sections that had the most influence on the audience were kept, whilst others were dropped. Gobineau argues that each play, "… far from being the work of a single author, is the result of a considerable number of modifications, arriving at a sort of perfection based on public approval."[82] It indeed appears that the development of the Muḥarram cycle has been something of a democratic process, a symbiotic work of actors and audience. This is supported by what is observable when looking at a range of historical scripts of the same episode. We see creative "dead ends", innovations in content that appear in certain renditions but do not gain traction and later disappear: we also see successful innovations integrated into versions from across the country and, within a couple of decades, becoming permanent features. The scene between the two mothers is a strong example of this, and reveals much about the nature of the audience and the contract between its members and the *taʿziyeh* performers and composers.

In chapter 1 we heard through the accounts of multiple witnesses how women constituted a highly important, if not the most important, contingent of the *taʿziyeh* audience in the cities of Qajar Iran, outnumbering their male counterparts and participating vocally and enthusiastically. We heard from Mary Sheil, who spectated at *taʿziyeh* in Tehran in 1266/1849, that "women of

81 During my 1439/2017 participation as a *taʿziyeh* audience member the senior women were often the first to cry and vocally lament, triggering a similar reaction from the wider audience. See Deacon, "*Taʿziyeh-khani* in Iranian Communities."

82 Gobineau, *Les religions*, 368. Translated from French.

humble condition" were present "in great numbers."[83] Seated in the centre of the traditional *tekiyeh* around the *sakū*, women were the main direct audience to whom the *taʿziyeh-khānān* delivered their performances. To be truly moved by the plays, these women needed to see their own experiences, fears and aspirations represented. An episode that featured a marriage, an occasion when senior females traditionally play an important role as organisers, was an ideal opportunity to foreground the experience of the aging mother and ensure the emotional investment of an important sector of the audience. The fact that the dramatists responded to the reaction of these "women of humble condition" (women of higher social class being seated in loggias behind heavy gauze curtains), and sought to secure their participation, speaks of these women's agency, and the power they exercised within the *tekiyeh*. They were important to the ritual. Their important contribution was recognised, their needs as an audience catered to.

There is an interesting parallel here with the manner in which Qāsem's marriage and martyrdom is told, and indeed resonates, amongst the Shiʿi community of Hyderabad (India), as discussed in the work of Karen Ruffle. The medium is not devotional drama, rather *marsiyeh* (lament poetry), and the narrations given by orators in mourning assemblies (similar to Iran's *rawżeh-khānī* sittings).[84] As with the "Persianization" of the story when told in the Iranian context, the characters and marital customs are made Indian, the bride and groom portrayed as idealised Deccani Muslims.[85] Importantly, Ruffle argues that due to the Hindu taboo associated with widow remarriage, the tragedy of the death of the bridegroom has resonated particularly strongly with the Hyderabadi Shiʿa.[86] She gives Mīr ʿAlam's *Dah Majles* (composed in 1196/1781) as an example of a rendition of Kāshefī's *Rawżat al-shuhadāʾ*, not only translated from Persian into Urdu, but adapted for a local audience. Reminiscent of the *taʿziyeh* interpretation of Qāsem's wedding story, Ruffle observes that Mīr ʿAlam narrates the story largely through the voices of the women and, interestingly, that he includes dialogues between the older women that show their perspective. However, in this case, it is not the suffering of the mother of the martyr, but the tragic nature of Fāṭemeh the bride's impending plight as a widow and social outcast that is brought to the fore. Ruffle concludes that the author sought to encourage the audience to connect with Fāṭemeh on more

83 Sheil, *Glimpses*, 126–27. See chapter 1 "Women as Audients, Patrons, Performers and Copyists."

84 There is evidence that some *taʿziyeh-khānī* performances were staged at the court of Āṣaf al-Dawlah in Lucknow in the late 12th/18th century. However, this tradition seems not to have taken root in India. Bulūkbāshī, *Taʿziyeh*, 28–29.

85 Ruffle, "Indo-Persian Imaginaire," 189–191.

86 Ibid., 182.

than a religious level, rather as if she were a real local character.[87] In the context of the Iranian *taʿziyeh*, the foregrounding of the suffering of the martyr's mother is likely to have the same effect, the plight of Umm Laila and Qāsem's mother resonating strongly not only with women who had lost their own sons but with their communities, and those who feared such a loss.

7 Conclusion

We have seen that the story of Qāsem and Fāṭemeh's wedding, in circulation from as early as the composition of Kāshefī's *Rawżat al-shuhadāʾ*, was given new poignant levels as a *taʿziyeh* episode. The archetypal beauty of the beloved of the Persian *ghazals* was invoked by the dramatists describing Qāsem, allowing them to depict his adolescent charm and compounding the tragedy of his loss. The nascent moustache, *nowkhaṭṭ*, a trope of the beloved, took on a new significance in the Karbala context and became the tragic motif of an adulthood sacrificed, unfulfilled. Qāsem's cousin ʿAlī Akbar was similarly presented. The dramatists developed a special connection between these two, one becoming the reflection of the other. They not only gave Qāsem's bloody unconsummated marriage a further tragic twist by portraying it as the wedding planned for Akbar, but they placed Akbar's body on stage throughout the proceedings as a constant reminder of the bridegroom's fate, uniting the cousins in their *nākāmī*.

Throughout all of this, they foregrounded the suffering of the young martyr's mother, exploring the tragedy of her situation, the depth of her grief leading to derangement. The intensive engagement with this figure was the result of a major innovation that took place between the 1840s and 1860s – the introduction of Umm Lailā and Akbar's body to the play. This allowed not only the development of the aforementioned connection between Qāsem and Akbar, but also the juxtaposition of the situations of their mothers: one mourning her son's death, the other preparing her son's wedding. Creating this contrast was clearly important because to facilitate it the dramatists settled on an understanding of the order of the Karbala martyrdoms significantly different to that found in some of their major sources. Those composing and performing the play made these changes in response to their audience, the largest contingent of whom were female: the developments are testament to the importance of the women of the *tekiyeh*.

87 Ibid., 192–197. Ruffle recalls the orator to whom she listened in a Hyderabad mourning assembly in 2005 also encouraging this connection.

CHAPTER 5

The Martyrdom of Imam Ḥusain

اگر به خویش نپوشم کفن، من ای خواهر   اگر تنم نشود پاره‌پاره از خنجر
اگر سرم نرود از جفا به نوکِ سنین   چسان شفاعتِ امّت کند به حشر حسین؟[1]

O sister, if I myself do not don a shroud, if my body is not torn apart by the dagger, if my head is not placed atop the point of a lance in malice, how will Ḥusain intercede for the ummah (*Muslim community*) at the resurrection?

The Third Imam, Ḥusain b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb, is a greatly revered figure whose significance within Shiʿi Islam cannot be overstated: his Martyrdom, *Shahādat-e Ḥażrat-e Emām Ḥusain*, is the climactic episode of the *taʿziyeh*'s Muḥarram cycle. The events represented in previous episodes have led inexorably to this point. With even the adolescent boys from amongst his supporters gone, there can be no more delay before Ḥusain himself joins the battle. This is the dramatization of an event of great eschatological importance: not merely the unjust killing of a much loved leader, but the fulfilment of Ḥusain's covenant with God, to sacrifice his life on the plain of Karbala in order to become an intercessor for the sins of the Shiʿi community on the Day of Judgement. The *taʿziyeh*'s colourful rendition of Ḥusain's martyrdom narrative largely follows historical sources, but incorporates *jinn* (genies), dervishes and foreigners.

1 Script Sources

The ten renditions of this episode shown in Table 3 provide the sources for my analysis.

1 Ḥusain in conversation with Zainab in the Litten Collection rendition of this play. Esmāʿīlī, *Teshneh*, 470.

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TABLE 3 Script sources for *The Martyrdom of Imam Ḥusain*

Rendition	Date	Origin	Author or copyist
Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī, Zand Collection[a]	1204/1790	Markazi Province[b]	Anon
BNF, Chodzko MS (XXV.)[c]	1249/1833	Tehran	Mīrzā Mafākher[d]
Litten Collection[e]	1830s	Unknown	Anon
Pelly Collection[f]	*c.*1873	Shiraz/ Bushehr	Anon
Ṣāleḥī Rād Collection[g]	Late 19th cent.	Darbandsar	Anon
Cerulli Persiani, MS 726[h]	Beg. 20th cent.	Tafresh	Anon
Cerulli Persiani, MS 938	Beg. 20th cent.	Shiraz	Anon
Cerulli Persiani, MS 583	1351/1932	Isfahan	Anon
Cerulli Persiani, MS 539	1353/1934	Rasht	Muḥammad Khān Taʿziyeh-Khān
Cerulli Persiani, MS 576	Mid-20th cent.	Tehran	Anon

a Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 11*, 157–98
b The place of writing is cited on the script as "Farfāhūn", ibid., 153–54. This is likely to denote the small village of Farfahan in southern Markazi Province.
c BnF, Supplément Persan 993, 207–222. For an edited version see Eqbāl and Maḥjūb, *Jung-e shahādat*, 169–211.
d This is one of the 14 entries in Chodzko's manuscript to bear a discrete reference to an author or scribe. A small note in the upper margin of the play's first page reads "Mīrzā Mafākher".
e Esmāʿīlī, *Teshneh*, 439–506
f Pelly, *Miracle Play*, 2, 81–103
g Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles*, 1, 369–93
h The collector has recorded that Cerulli MS 726 dates to the beginning of the 20th century CE. However, the script is in *tak-nuskheh* form. Of the sixteen acting sides in the set, only that of Feżżeh is dated. The date is 1256 (1840–41). It is different in appearance to the others, appearing older

The *taʿziyeh* treatment of this momentous event has two central themes. First, Ḥusain's steadfast commitment to his covenant is underscored by the running theme of his refusal of help: while he prefers a peaceful solution to the conflict, and is deeply troubled by the idea of leaving his womenfolk and children unprotected, he rejects any form of assistance that would equate to evading his fate. The other important theme is the transition of leadership. After Ḥusain's death, someone must succeed him as Imam, a divinely ordained infallible spiritual leader for the community. Zain al-ʿĀbedīn will be invested with this role but, as he is incapacitated by illness, practical leadership of the group will be assumed by another – Zainab.

FIGURE 6 Performer playing Ḥusain b. ʿAlī, Ḥusainiyah-ye ʿĀẓam, Baraghan, Alborz, 10th Muḥarram 1439/ 2017

I will examine how this transition is portrayed. In my outline of the play's skeleton I show how in the application of the martyrdom composition-scheme we see Zainab assuming functions normally served by Ḥusain; I will go on to look in detail at how she begins to take on a leadership role. The expression of the theme of refusal of help changed through time and will be analysed together with the episode's historical development. Ḥusain's martyrdom has been the subject of many *taʿziyeh* renditions; the dramatists embellished their portrayals year after year, which resulted in considerable fluctuations in the episode's content. We will see that by the time its content had settled, around 1318/1900 (corresponding broadly with the end of the reign of Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh Qājār, d. 1313/1896), one of the most interesting developments that had taken place was in the identity of the benevolent outsiders attempting to come to Ḥusain's aid at Karbala.

2 Imam Ḥusain's Martyrdom Transposed: From Historiography to the *Taʿziyeh*

Ḥusain's life and deeds are widely documented in historical and hagiographical sources. I begin examination of this episode with brief consideration of

the sources' treatment of his martyrdom, particularly elements likely to have given rise to the *taʿziyeh*'s plot detail. Due to its importance, this event is covered much more intensively in such sources than the martyrdom narratives discussed above. It thus provides a particularly good example from which to make general observations about how their content has been translated into dramatic material.

Indeed, much of this episode's narrative corresponds with the account of these events given in al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh*. This tells of Ḥusain's honourable and pious nature, and of how, although he had been betrayed by the Kufans (whose letters had summoned him), he sought a peaceful solution. He met at night (alone) with Ebn-e Saʿd to negotiate. Al-Ṭabarī records that most sources hold that Ḥusain proposed three solutions during these negotiations: he would return to Medina; he would retreat to one of the border stations of the Muslim lands and live quietly; or he would put his "hand in the hand of Yazīd," for Yazīd to make his own judgement about what should happen between them.[2] He records that the nature of these offers is debated by one source, yet all of them have made their way into the *taʿziyeh*.[3] His bid for peace proving unsuccessful, al-Ṭabarī records, Ḥusain requested and was granted respite.[4] This respite provides the temporal framework both for the "night of goodbyes" that we saw in *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās* and a section of the climactic episode in which Ḥusain takes extended leave of his family.

Furthermore, al-Ṭabarī's account contains material relating to the *taʿziyeh* episode's theme of refusal of help. Refuge in a foreign land is among the offers of help that became fixed elements of the climactic play. Neither this offer nor the others that become permanent features of the play are traceable to historical sources. Nonetheless, al-Ṭabarī records that, while on the road near Kufa, having just received news that the Kufans had abandoned his cause and an army was assembled to march against him, Ḥusain was offered refuge in the mountains of Ajā, and the protection of the tribe of Ṭayyi'. He declined, saying that he must continue until the situation reached its final outcome.[5]

Al-Ṭabarī also gives information about members of Ḥusain's family who are important protagonists in the climactic episode. He tells of the Ḥusain's young child being shot by an enemy arrow whilst on his knee.[6] The child is unnamed but in the *taʿziyeh* this becomes a poignant scene – the martyrdom

2 Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, 108–09.

3 Abū Mekhnaf gives one transmitter as emphatically claiming that the aforementioned offers were never made and that instead Ḥusain asked to be left to wonder the land until seeing "how the people's affair develops". Ibid., 109.

4 Ibid., 113–14.

5 Ibid., 99–100.

6 Ibid., 154.

of ʿAlī Aṣghar. He also tells of how, when Ḥusain had been wounded and his martyrdom was imminent, his young nephew ran out onto the battlefield to defend him and was killed.[7] The boy is again unnamed; however, this is clearly ʿAbdullāh b. Ḥasan, whose martyrdom features shortly before Ḥusain's in the climactic episode.[8]

Al-Ṭabarī also mentions ʿAlī b. Ḥusain, referred to in the *taʿziyeh* by his honorifics Zain al-ʿĀbedīn or Sajjād, and Zainab bint ʿAlī. The mention of Zain al-ʿĀbedīn is succinct. It is simply recorded that after Ḥusain's death, when the enemy plundered the camp, he was found lying ill in bed. Shamer b. ẕī al-Jawshan (Shemr) and some others wanted to kill him, but he was spared because of his youth and the subsequent arrival of Ebn-e Saʿd, who ordered that no one should enter the women's tents or disturb Zain al-ʿĀbedīn.[9]

Treatment of Zainab is much more extensive. Giving ʿAlī b. Ḥusain as the source for this account, al-Ṭabarī records her desperate remonstrations against her brother being killed, and the tender relationship between them.[10] This, and the instructions that al-Ṭabarī has Ḥusain give her concerning what to do upon his death, are echoed in the *taʿziyeh*. Furthermore, al-Ṭabarī notes Zainab's bravery, recalling that when Ḥusain (already injured) was fighting multiple opponents she came out of the camp and chastised Ebn-e Saʿd,[11] another detail portrayed in the *taʿziyeh*.

Much of the version of events given by al-Ṭabarī is echoed in other sources. However, there is a significant area of discrepancy. Whilst all accounts tell of Ḥusain fighting valiantly and being finally brought down by a mass enemy attack, they differ with regards to the identity of his killer, and who takes his head. In the *taʿziyeh* retelling of this event it is certainly Shemr who does both deeds. In the climactic episode much is made of Ḥusain acknowledging, and having had foreknowledge of, his killer's identity. Also, in the scripts of *Bāzār-e Shām* (chapter 6) we will see Shemr give Yazīd a graphic account of the process of removing Ḥusain's head, leaving no room for ambiguity.

Shemr features in al-Ṭabarī's account as a ruthless commander who advocates showing no mercy, and indeed orders the final attack in which Ḥusain is brought down, yet al-Ṭabarī names Senān b. Anas b ʿAmr al-Nakhaʿī as the one

7 Ibid., 158.

8 In a different section of his account al-Ṭabarī does include ʿAbdullāh b. Ḥasan's name on list of the Banū Hāshem killed at Karbala. Ibid., 180.

9 Ibid., 161–62. Balʿamī tells the same story but takes it further, having Ebn-e Saʿd arrive in response to the women's cries to find Shemr with sword drawn, ready to kill Zain al-ʿĀbedīn. Balʿamī, *Tārīkh-nāmeh*, 4, 711.

10 Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, 117–18.

11 Ibid., 160.

who stabs and kills Ḥusain and takes his head.[12] Al-Mufīd also cites Senān b. Anas as Ḥusain's killer, but names Shemr as the taker of his head.[13] Balʿamī's Persian version of al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh* also attributes responsibility for taking the head to Shemr, but only after a soldier named Zurʿah had caused Ḥusain's death by stabbing him in the back with a weapon and then pulling it out through his chest.[14]

By the early Safavid period, historians show some awareness of this discrepancy. Mīrkhānd cites the accounts of different sources. In one version, that he attributes to Dīnavarī, Senān stabs Ḥusain from behind and kills him, and his head is taken by Shebl b. Yazīd (brother of Khawlī b. Yazīd al-Aṣbaḥī, infamous for transporting Ḥusain's head to Kufa and hiding it in his oven).[15] He also gives an account transmitted by al-Khwārezmī, in which (encouraged by Shemr) Zurʿah and Senān kill Ḥusain, but adds a brief reference to the fact that some say it was the leprous Naṣr b. Khowshah who killed him, and that others say it was Shemr. The names of these same assailants are repeated in the work of Mīrkhānd's grandson, Khāndamīr.[16] Kāshefī, writing in the early Safavid period but from Timurid Herat, also shows knowledge of the discrepancy. In his *Rawżat*, he acknowledges two of these versions of Ḥusain's killing, one in which Senān strikes the fatal blow but Khawlī's brother takes his head, and the other in which Shemr is guilty of both deeds.[17]

What can be made of these discrepancies and the fact that the *taʿziyeh* dramatists settled on the personage of Shemr as unequivocally responsible for Ḥusain's murder? Indeed, a major difference between the accounts of the aforementioned sources and the *taʿziyeh* rendition of these events is that the *taʿziyeh* focuses far less on the perspective of the antagonists. Whereas in these sources the names of many Kufan and Damascene soldiers are mentioned (and conversations between them recorded), in the *taʿziyeh*'s central episodes the number of antagonists who receive individual treatment has been reduced essentially to the personages of Shemr and Ebn-e Saʿd, with a handful of others making very brief interventions. Ḥarmalah, who features consistently in the climactic play as the one who fires the arrow that kills ʿAlī Aṣghar, is an example of one of these others, as is Murrah b. Munqeẕ al-ʿAbdī who often features

12 Ibid., 160–61. For futher comment on the difference between al-Ṭabarī's and the *taʿziyeh* telling of Ḥusain's murder also see Nematollahi Mahani, *Holy Drama*, 101.

13 Mufīd, *Irshād*, 336.

14 Balʿamī, *Tārīkh-nāmeh*, 4, 710–11.

15 For a *taʿziyeh* rendition of this story about Khawlī from the Litten collection see Esmāʿīlī, *Teshneh*, 511–34.

16 Mīrkhānd, *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, 3, 2258–61; Khāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-siyār*, 2, 56.

17 Kāshefī Sabzevārī, *Rawżat*, 468–70.

in ʿAlī Akbar's martyrdom episode as his killer. However, it is not unusual for Munqeẕ to be replaced by Shemr.[18] In the event of practical constraints, such as the availability of performers or costumes, it seems that in the *taʿziyeh* Shemr can always be the killer, a representative of all other killers.

A similar phenomenon is observable with regards to the identities of the slain infants from amongst Ḥusain's party. The sources discussed above include a number of different accounts of male infants being mercilessly slain at Karbala. Their names and the details of the killings vary, yet in the *taʿziyeh* they are all represented by ʿAlī Aṣghar.[19] While, as I have shown, stories are often embellished as they are retold, this is rather the opposite process. Different stories have been amalgamated and condensed, to create solid recognisable protagonists and antagonists about whose innocence or guilt there can be no doubt. While there is evidence to suggest that Shemr was widely viewed as a villainous figure long before the first *taʿziyeh* performances,[20] the sources of the early Safavid period show that he must have become the undisputed executioner par-excellence shortly before, or simultaneously with, the *taʿziyeh* tradition's emergence.

We must take into account that the *taʿziyeh* genre took shape during the Safavid period, when Twelver Shiʿism had become Iran's religion of state. As the faith spread at a popular level, it is likely that it became more important to identify Husain's killer, a key player in one of the core narratives. In chapter 1 I mentioned the role of dervish storytellers in the propagation of Shiʿism under the Safavids and the birth of the *pardeh-dārī* tradition. It is likely that the consolidation of Ḥusain's killer into the personage of Shemr took place during this period, as figures like Shemr and ʿAlī Aṣghar became icons on the storytellers' canvases, representatives of their kind, and in turn influenced the *taʿziyeh* treatment of Karbala.

As the *taʿziyeh* tradition took root, it too became a widespread part of popular piety and influenced the understanding of these important religious stories among the masses. In its earlier phases, there was some variation in

18 For example, Shemr is Akbar's killer in the Darbandsar rendition of his martyrdom episode.

19 The *taʿziyeh* story of Aṣghar's murder corresponds relatively closely to that given by Kāshefī (*Rawżat*, 457–58). For varying renditions, including different details of the child's identity and circumstances of death see Mufīd, *Irshād*, 333; Balʿamī, *Tārīkh-nāmeh*, 4, 710; Mīrkhānd, *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, 3, 2254–57; Khāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-siyār*, 2, 55.

20 Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī's *Maṡnavī*, composed in the 7th/13th century includes a specific reference to Shemr as responsible, together with Yazīd, for the suffering of the *ahl-e bait* and their kin. Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Maṡnavī-ye maʿnavī* (Tehran: Chāp-e Shaqāyeq, [13th Cent. CE] 1371 SH), 1063.

FIGURE 7 Performers playing Ḥusain b. ʿAlī and ʿAlī Aṣghar, Ḥusainiyah-ye ʿĀẓam, Baraghan, Alborz, 10th Muḥarram 1439/2017

the detail portrayed. For example, the oldest extant *taʿziyeh* script (*Ghārat-e khaimeh-hā*, dated 1136/1724) features a conversation between the antagonists in which they brag of their evil deeds and Khawalī tells of having cut off the head of *Sulṭān-e Yasreb* (Ḥusain).[21] As the repertoire became consolidated, a discrepancy over such a key issue was clearly problematic, and responsibility for the heinous deeds of murdering Ḥusain and taking his head was laid definitively with Shemr. However, a nod to the ambiguity over Ḥusain's murderer does remain in the climactic play, which sometimes features Senān b. Anas in the type-scene "The Unwilling Killer" (discussed in chapter 2).

3 Skeleton of *The Martyrdom of Imam Ḥusain* and Function of Its Sections

This episode has an arch plot structure: however, there is almost no falling action and the denouement is extremely brief (a short interjection by a surviving family member, confirming the new status quo). The martyrdoms of Ḥusain's infant son Aṣghar and his nephew ʿAbdullāh constitute peaks in the action prior to the climax. The episode is composed of three thematic segments: the first concerns Ḥusain's preparations for the separation from his family; in the second he encounters a series of benevolent strangers while alone on the battlefield and, through his refusal of their help, demonstrates his commitment to fulfilling his destiny. In the third and final segment the family are once again the centre of the action, as we see his separation from them and his martyrdom. Each segment is composed of shorter sections, there are twelve in total.[22] The episode includes all the elements of the martyrdom composition-scheme, but with some interesting twists. This is the skeleton of what had come to be the play's standard form by around 1317/1900.

3.1 *Section One – Ḥusain Unprotected, the Enemy Encroaching* (*Exposition*)

The play opens with Ḥusain and Zainab praying and decrying the cruelty of fate (*charkh*).[23] They recount the misfortunes of the martyrs and foretell the

21 Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 13*, 23.

22 This is a very long episode, the playing of which can last over five hours. For its performance at the *tekiyeh* of Baraghan (Alborz) on ʿĀshūrāʾ of 1439/2017 see: Deacon, "*Taʿziyeh-khani* in Iranian Communities," 161–68.

23 Some renditions include a prologue featuring Mūsā showing a desert dwelling dervish a vision of the events at Karbala. This will be discussed below.

suffering to be endured by the survivors. Shemr and Ebn-e Saʿd issue a battle challenge. Knowing that his martyrdom is imminent Ḥusain asks to put his head in Zainab's lap, and sleeps. Meanwhile, the enemy approach the camp: Shemr arrives and demands that Zainab wake Ḥusain. Complaining at being awoken, Ḥusain describes a pleasant dream in which he saw his grandfather, father, mother and brother Ḥasan (or a least two of them) in paradise and was told that tomorrow he would be their guest. This is the floating scene described in chapter 2 (and also featured in ʿAbbās' martyrdom episode). Ḥusain then attempts to negotiate with Ebn-e Saʿd: stressing their lineage he requests water and asks to be allowed to return to Medina or even to retreat to beyond the lands of the Arabs. The answer is no, he must swear allegiance to Yazīd or fight and die. He will not swear allegiance and is granted respite to take leave of his family.

The dream scene is thus integrated into an opening scene typical of the martyrdom composition-scheme, of which the opening prayer, enemy challenge and foretelling of fates are all essential elements. However, this time, because Ḥusain himself will be the next martyr, the foretelling also initiates the idea that a monumental transition must take place – that of leadership of the group. The hero's attempt at negotiating with Ebn-e Saʿd is again an essential part of the composition-scheme, yet is also a floating scene; its position within the chronology of the action varies among renditions.[24]

3.2 *Section Two – Familial Farewells: Acquiescence Equates Permission* (*Rising Action*)

Ḥusain bids farewell to his relatives one by one and expresses his *vaṣiyyat.* Extended farewells between the hero and his family are a standard element of the martyrdom composition-scheme: in this episode they are particularly drawn out, because they serve additional important functions. In the other plays that we have examined, and that conform to the scheme, the episode's hero asks Ḥusain's permission to do battle and is initially refused. This slows the action's forward momentum – towards the battlefield – allowing for an emotional build-up. We have seen this initial refusal of permission overruled by the wishes of a senior relative (those of the hero's father in the cases of both ʿAbbās and Qāsem). In the climactic episode it is Ḥusain himself who will do battle and there is no one above him in the hierarchy at Karbala from whom

24 CP: MS 539 (Rasht, 1353/ 1934); MS 576 and the Darbandsar rendition play the scene here. Whilst MS 938; MS 583; MS 726; and the Zand rendition play it later, as part of Ḥusain's final battle. The Chodzko and Litten renditions feature it twice, both here and in the later position (Pelly's version omits it).

he must ask permission. However, such is the extent of the womenfolk's resistance to his departure that it stalls his progress towards the battlefield, serving a function similar to that of Ḥusain refusing other heroes permission to fight. Zainab, Kulṣūm, Sakīneh, Umm Lailā, Shahrbānū and others all vehemently protest his leaving.[25] They decry being left unprotected and facing humiliation in a foreign land. Zainab is overwhelmed by the idea of separation from Ḥusain; she wishes for her own death and often collapses with grief. As other heroes cited their father's wishes in order to overturn Ḥusain's denial of permission for battle, Ḥusain too defers to hierarchy in justifying to the women the need for him to fight. He cites his covenant with God, to sacrifice his life in order to become an intercessor, and that his grandfather had taught him of this duty. The women's eventual acquiescence is a form of permission. The Chodzko rendition illustrates this particularly clearly when, after a very extended farewell and begging Ḥusain not to go, Zainab finally says "*burow*" (Go!).[26] He is thus released and heads onto the battlefield.

All of this considered, this section covers three essential elements of the martyrdom composition-scheme: the hero requesting and initially being denied permission to fight; contesting that decision based on the wishes of a senior relative; and taking his leave of his family and expressing his *vaṣiyyat*.

3.3 *Section Three – Ḥusain Prepared for Martyrdom and* **Vaṣiyyat** *Continued* (*Rising Action*)

After their final tacit acceptance of his parting, the women ready Ḥusain for battle, and the farewells and last wishes of the hero continue throughout the preparations. Zainab is the one tasked with dressing her brother in a *kafan*, a symbolic moment that always marks the irrevocable progress of events towards the character's martyrdom. Ḥusain dressing in preparation for this moment is shown in additional ways across renditions of the play. He asks Zainab to bring him an old shirt; she protests that a king should not wear such a rag but he explains that he will wear it beneath his clothes so that when the enemy plunder his body, stripping it of any garment of value, it will be left to protect his modesty.[27] Elsewhere, Ḥusain requests that Feżżeh, Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā's elderly *kanīz*, bring him a special garment that he wishes to wear for martyrdom.[28]

25 Zainab and Sakīneh feature consistently; the other women to feature vary according to the rendition.

26 Eqbāl and Maḥjūb, *Jung-e shahādat*, 197.

27 Zand and Pelly renditions. CP: MS 726, has Ḥusain speak, on the battlefield, of wearing such a garment. This has some grounding in literary sources; al-Mufīd tells that, in preparation for martyrdom, Ḥusain ripped his Yemeni trousers in the hope that they would not be plundered, but to no avail. His body was left naked. Mufīd, *Irshād*, 335.

28 CP: MS 539; MS 583; MS 726; and MS 938.

Ḥusain also gives practical instructions about what should be done after his death. He gives the women three orders: they should not go out of the camp, nor scratch their faces and pull their hair, nor cry in a way that the enemy will hear.[29] He also gives them three signs by which they will know when he has been killed: the ground will tremble when he falls from the saddle; the sun will go dark and blood will rain from the sky; his horse, Ẕuljanaḥ, will return to camp with his forelock full of blood.[30]

The women now ready Ẕuljanaḥ, help Ḥusain into the saddle, and walk with them to the edge of the battlefield. This is an important scene featuring in all renditions of the episode. It shows not only disruption of the usual order of things but also the transition of roles, as the women take on tasks that would normally have been done by men. In some versions, angels hear of what is going on. Seeking to redress the imbalance, they rush to Karbala to help ready the horse and lead Ḥusain into battle.[31]

3.4 *Section Four – Martyrdom of ʿAlī Aṣghar* (*Rising Action-First Peak*)

Shahrbānū is heard crying because her milk has run dry and her suckling son ʿAlī Aṣghar is desperate with thirst.[32] Ḥusain takes the child in his arms and goes out to implore the enemy to grant water yet, at Ebn-e Saʿd's order, Ḥarmalah shoots an arrow that pierces the child's throat. Ḥusain is devastated. Some renditions include a heart-wrenching scene in which he dresses the baby in a *kafan* and digs a grave for him.[33] This is the only occasion in the Muḥarram cycle when a character is dressed in a *kafan* after death. The other martyrs don the *kafan* as a symbol that they are willing to sacrifice their lives. By contrast, Aṣghar cannot consent to being killed. His death is portrayed as a most cruel murder, punctuated by the *kafan*. It is a highly evocative scene, not least because Aṣghar is often represented by a real baby in performances.

This scene only features in the later renditions from amongst my script sample.[34] However, it was not an innovation of the dramatists. As we have seen, historians record the murder of infants at Karbala, and Kāshefī's *Rawżat* includes Aṣghar's story. In the position that it came to occupy in the climactic

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29 CP: MS 539; MS 583; and the Darbandsar rendition. For al-Ṭabarī's mention of these instructions see *History*, XIX, 117–18.

30 CP: MS 583; and the Darbandsar rendition. In MS 539 he mentions the first two signs, and also Ẕuljanaḥ returning riderless to camp.

31 CP: MS 576; MS 583; MS 938; and the Chodzko and Litten renditions.

32 In the renditions amongst my sample Aṣghar's mother is named as Sharbānū but in some versions she is Rabāb. See Kāẓemī, *Mīr-e ʿAzā*, 194.

33 CP: MS 539; MS 583; and the Darbandsar rendition.

34 CP: MS 726; MS 583; MS 539; MS 576; and the Darbandsar rendition. In the Zand rendition of the episode Aṣghar's murder is discussed but not performed.

play, his martyrdom constitutes the climax of the first thematic segment, concerning Ḥusain preparing to leave his family.

3.5 *Section Five – Arab Brings a Letter from Fāṭemeh-ye Ṣughrā* (*Rising Action*)

A messenger, identified as an Arab, arrives with a letter from Ḥusain's daughter Fāṭemeh-ye Ṣughrā who was left behind in Medina due to illness.[35] Upon his approach Ḥusain senses that he comes from the Hijaz, saying that he carries the scent of his own people. Ḥusain asks for news of Ṣughrā. The Arab recounts coming across her in Medina's narrow streets; she is ill with sadness from missing her father.[36] Her letter asks for news of her brothers and when Ḥusain will send for her, or return. Different renditions include a range of emotive details such as her asking whether Aṣghar is talking yet, or saying that she has stitched clothes for him.[37] The Imam answers that their reunion will be at the Resurrection. This is a familial farewell by proxy, the medium of the letter allowing Ṣughrā's voice to be heard at Karbala and the presence of the messenger allowing Ḥusain to respond: it belongs thematically to the play's first segment but is not always played in this position. In the plays' second thematic segment, which I will now detail, Ḥusain is alone on the battlefield and has a series of encounters with benevolent strangers. The arrival of Ṣughrā's messenger can feature between these encounters.[38]

3.6 *Section Six – Encounter with the Dervish of Kabul* (*Rising Action*)

A dervish from Kabul arrives. He is on a pilgrimage to the tomb of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb at Najaf and, having heard a child crying with thirst, has filled his *kashkūl* (beggars bowl) with water and come to help. Ḥusain is grateful but tells him that water is not unobtainable for them, ordering him to pour it onto the ground. A miracle occurs: as the water runs through the Imam's fingers the parched plain of Karbala is momentarily transformed into an ocean.[39] Having

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35 This appears to be a later addition featuring in CP: MS 726; MS 583; MS 539; and the Darbandsar rendition. As previously discussed, it contradicts the idea that she married Qāsem at Karbala.

36 In most renditions Ṣughrā's meeting with the messenger in Medina is simply recounted. But it is sometimes performed. See CP: MS 726, and Mīr-e Azā's rendition of the play from Hāshem Fayyāż's collection. Kāẓemī, *Mīr-e ʿAzā*, 191.

37 The Darbandsar rendition and CP: MS 539 respectively.

38 CP: MS 583 and MS 539 play it after Ḥusain's encounter with the Dervish of Kabul. In MS 726 it comes after his encounter with Zaʿfar, king of the *jinn.*

39 This miracle is reminiscent of a story in Rūmī's *Maṡnavī*, when pilgrims are amazed by a desert-dwelling ascetic from whose hands and face water pours forth and who summons

learned of Ḥusain's identity the dervish asks to be martyred for him; the dervish confronts Ebn-e Saʿd and does not speak again. This is an example of the type-scene "The Arrival of a Stranger" (outlined in chapter 2).[40]

3.7 *Section Seven – Encounter with Zaʿfar, King of the* Jinn (*Rising Action*)

Next, Zaʿfar, king of the *jinn*, arrives. Ḥusain asks who he is and why he has come: he replies that he is of a line of *jinn* loyal to Ḥusain's family and that his father was converted to Islam and given the rank of monarch by ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb.[41] He has heard of Ḥusain's terrible plight and has come with a vast army of *jinn* warriors. If Ḥusain grants permission, they will destroy his opponents. Ḥusain is grateful but says that it would be unchivalrous to allow *jinn* to fight for him as they are invisible to the enemy. Zaʿfar suggests that they assume human form to do battle but Ḥusain still refuses, instead telling Zaʿfar to go and mourn for him.

3.8 *Section Eight – Encounter with Sultan Qais* (*Rising Action*)

With his final battle imminent, true to the martyrdom composition-scheme, many renditions of the play now show Ḥusain making a last attempt to negotiate with Ebn-e Saʿd. He seeks a peaceful solution, asking that they be allowed to retreat abroad, to beyond the lands of the Arabs – a particularly significant request at this point as the next stranger to offer help will indeed offer refuge in a foreign land.

The battle begins but suddenly the play's action jumps to India where a certain Sultan Qais and his vizier go hunting in the wilderness and are assailed by a lion.[42] They call to Ḥusain for help (their initial dialogue having established that they are Shiʿi). Ḥusain arrives just in time and saves them by pacifying the lion, reminding it that by his father's decree the flesh of his followers is forbidden to wild beasts. When Qais enquires about Ḥusain's bloodied state he

rain to quench their thirst. Rūmī, *Maṡnavī*, 399–400. The Pelly rendition differs here. It alludes to a miracle that may, or may not have been played: Ḥusain makes a hole in the ground with his spear stating that he could cause water to gush from it should he wish, but that he chooses to die parched to fulfill his covenant.

40 This scene features in CP: MS 726; MS 583; MS 539; MS 576; and the Pelly and Darbandsar renditions.

41 Kāshefī's *Rawżat* tells of Zaʿfar's apparition at Karbala, and of his father's conversion having taken place after a skirmish inside a well named *Beʾr-e ʿalam*. He features in all renditions amongst my sample except the Zand version, and CP: MS 576.

42 This scene is included in CP: MS 726; MS 938; MS 583; MS 539; MS 576; the Darbandsar rendition; and, as a separate sub-episode, in Pelly's collection.

is told of the situation at Karbala and offers refuge in India.[43] Ḥusain responds that there is no use for him in surviving his beloved Akbar. He instructs Qais to go home and set up a mourning ritual for him. Qais' story completes an important trilogy of scenes in which, as Husain repeatedly refuses help, his commitment to his duty to be sacrificed at Karbala is emphasized. This trilogy was a 13th/19th century innovation.

3.9 *Section Nine – Covenant Foregrounded: Ḥusain Ready for Martyrdom* (*Rising Action*)

In the play's third thematic segment there are no more interventions from strangers and, during the escalation towards the climax attention returns to Ḥusain's interactions with his family, and aggressors. Having digressed considerably in the second segment, the dramatists once again bring the reason for Ḥusain's martyrdom to the fore. Often Jebraʾīl (Gabriel) appears to Ḥusain and speaks to him of his covenant.[44] Or, Ḥusain talks to God about being prepared to die for the absolution of the sins of the *ummah*.[45] The message at the core of the *taʿziyeh* that connects the audience to these events is stressed. It is for *their* sake that Ḥusain makes this sacrifice. Despite his resolve Ḥusain's internal struggle is shown through a variety of conversations with non-human helpers. He lies down and embraces the earth, asking the sands of Karbala to mother him in the absence of Zahrā,[46] or to take word of his plight to his father at Najaf.[47] Some renditions feature Ḥusain speaking to his sword, *Ẕū-l-feqār*, remembering its deeds in the hands of his father, or conversing with his horse, ordering him to take news of his death to the camp.[48] Such addresses also highlight the absence of human helpers at this point.

3.10 *Section Ten – Unwilling Killers* (*Rising Action*)

Ḥusain is overpowered by the vast enemy army and, badly wounded, falls from his horse. Ebn-e Saʿd gives the order that he must be killed yet many renditions delay the climax by inserting a type-scene here, "The Unwilling Killer".

43 In the Pelly sub-episode and CP: MS 576 instead of offering refuge, Qais offers military help.

44 CP: MS 539; MS 583; MS 576; and the Darbandsar and Zand renditions. There is even the suggestion that Jebraʾīl brings the written *ʿahd-nāmeh* (covenant) with him but Ḥusain tells him to take it away, he knows what must be done.

45 CP: MS 938.

46 CP: MS 938; MS 539; MS 583; MS 576; and the Litten and Pelly renditions.

47 Darbandsar rendition.

48 CP: MS 539 includes all three of these addresses; MS 726 only the sword and horse; and the Darbandsar rendition only the sword and earth.

Someone is ordered to take Ḥusain's head and sets out to do so, but cannot. Two varieties of this scene can be played here: in one the unwilling killer is a Christian from amongst the enemy troops; in the other he is Senān Ebn-e Anas.[49] Whether the scene is played or not, ultimately Shemr presents himself as the one who will be Ḥusain's killer and sets out to take his head.

3.11 *Section Eleven – Martyrdom of ʿAbdullāh* (*Peak in Action*)

Despite Zainab trying to hold him back ʿAbdullāh b. Ḥasan rushes onto the battlefield to defend his uncle (it is sometimes suggested that Shemr is sitting on Ḥusain's chest at this point).[50] He berates Shemr but the arch-antagonist mercilessly dismisses the boy, saying that his mouth still smells of milk. When ʿAbdullāh persists, he kills him. This martyrdom is a last peak in action before the climax. It is stable feature of this episode, underscoring the ruthlessness of Ḥusain's killer.

3.12 *Section Twelve – Martyrdom of Ḥusain* (*Climax and Denouement*)

Ḥusain tells Shemr that he is thirsty but water is denied. In some renditions, he sees a mark on Shemr's chest that fits his grandfather's description of his killer.[51] Whilst accepting Shemr as his murderer Ḥusain asks him to hold back as he is waiting for someone. Who? His mother. There follows a short type-scene "An Apparition from Beyond the Grave". Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā appears, in some renditions accompanied by the Prophet Muḥammad.[52] She and Ḥusain mourn those who have fallen and lament the fates of the survivors. Ḥusain asks her to close his eyes and place his feet towards the *qeblah* (direction of prayer). They comfort each other. He tells her to go, that he is coming right behind her.

The covenant is always recalled here, reminding the audience again that Ḥusain's sacrifice is for their sake. He often makes a final prayer, praying for forgiveness for the Shiʿa.[53] In the martyrdom composition-scheme, as we have

49 For discussion see chapter 2 "*Taʿziyeh* Type-Scenes."

50 Zand and Litten renditions.

51 CP: MS 539; and the Chodzko and Darbandsar renditions. In the Chodzko rendition the Prophet had predicted that his killer would have *baraṣ-e bī shumār* (innumerable marks of leprosy) on his chest. Shemr invites him to look and Ḥusain confirms seeing this sign. MS 539 features an interesting variation. After seeing the sign Ḥusain reminds Shemr of the Battle of Siffin where he was taken prisoner and brought before ʿAlī. Ḥusain took pity on him, intervened on Shemr's behalf and secured his release. MS 583 features a brief version of the same story.

52 In CP: MS 576; the Zand, Chodzko, Litten, Pelly and Darbandsar renditions Fāṭemeh appears alone. In, CP: MS 938 and the Pelly rendition she is accompanied by Muḥammad (in MS 576 she does not speak).

53 CP: MS 539; MS 726; MS 576; and the Chodzko rendition.

seen it applied across other episodes, Ḥusain rushes across the battlefield to the hero's side at the moment of his death. Now, as he himself is about to die, it is Zainab who comes to his side.[54] This is significant to the theme of transition in leadership, with Zainab taking on Ḥusain's role. Like the other heroes who, taking their last breaths, asked Ḥusain to spare their womenfolk from seeing their injured bodies, Ḥusain tries to send Zainab away so that she will not see his murder. He says the *shahādah*. We hear that the ground is trembling and that the sky has gone dark.[55] Shemr declares the deed is done and demands his reward.

4 Transition of Leadership, Spiritual and Physical

The martyrdom of Ḥusain b. ʿAlī is not only an event of great eschatological importance within Shiʿism, it is also a moment of transition. His earthly role must be assumed by another, or indeed others. In Twelver Shiʿism the gift of being a spiritual guide is transferrable between generations (or brothers in the case of Ḥasan and Ḥusain). After Ḥusain's death the imamate will pass to Zain al-ʿĀbedīn; he will become the Fourth Imam. We would thus, perhaps, expect him to become the new leader of the group and, given that the cycle's main protagonist is about to be martyred, that the dramatists would begin to bring Zain al-ʿĀbedīn into focus as a major character. However, this is not what happens. Zain al-ʿĀbedīn is given only very brief treatment and, certainly for the duration of this episode, is tasked solely with surviving in order that the light of the imamate not be extinguished.[56] Meanwhile, Zainab effectively takes on leadership of the group. In the following chapter we will hear much about how women – in particular Zainab – become the spokespeople for the cause once the party arrive in Damascus. However, given the strongly hierarchical structure of the group (emphasised throughout previous episodes of the cycle), a transition is required to show Ḥusain's earthly mantle being passed on, and this must happen before his martyrdom. We will now examine how the dramatists have managed this transition and illustrated the importance of the protagonists involved.

54 Whilst this is clear in most renditions CP: MS 726 and MS 938 omit this detail.

55 In CP: MS 539 and the Darbandsar rendition Zainab describes these phenomena in the final scene. In MS 938 she and ʿAbdullāh feel the ground trembling when Ḥusain is wounded and speaking to the earth.

56 For the special nature of the Imams according to Shiʿi tradition, their being imbued with divine light, and the survival of a living Imam as imperative for the continuation of all life, see Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 54–57.

4.1 *ʿAlī b. Ḥusain: Zain al-ʿĀbedīn*

Characterization of ʿAlī b. Ḥusain, referred to most commonly as Zain al-ʿĀbedīn or Imam Sajjād, represents something of a challenge. He is the Fourth Imam of Shiʿi Islam and a highly revered figure, yet in the plays of the Muḥarram cycle the dramatists cannot make him a hero, as they have done with the other men and adolescent boys of Ḥusain's family, as they must portray him as being too weak with illness to fight at Karbala. In constructing his character they must portray him both as exceptional and vulnerable. Indeed, in some cases the dramatists appear to have evaded this tricky issue by not treating him at all, omitting him as a character from the climatic play.[57] Those renditions that do treat Zain al-ʿĀbedīn tend to adhere broadly to Kashefī's account of his experience at Karbala, in which he is determined to defend his father despite his illness: struggling and weak, he shakily makes for the battlefield but is ordered back to camp by Ḥusain, who says that he must survive as Imam and beget future generations so that their hereditary line should continue until the resurrection.[58] Some *taʿziyeh* treatments of Zain al-ʿĀbedīn offering to be martyred have Ḥusain replying explicitly that he must stay alive in order to take on the imamate.[59] Importance is also placed on his surviving as the male protector of the women and girls. Regardless of the justification, in Zain al-ʿĀbedīn's case the refusal of permission to fight will not be repealed.

In some renditions, the dramatists have developed the theme of sickness, showing Zain al-ʿĀbedīn to be delirious. As Ḥusain enters his tent to say farewell, dazed, he believes his father to be ʿAbbās, Qāsem, Akbar,[60] or even Muḥammad, ʿAlī, Ḥasan, or Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā.[61] In the Litten Collection rendition, when Ḥusain visits Zain al-ʿĀbedīn's tent on his return to camp during battle, the composer makes a colourful allusion to Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār's famous Sufi poem *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*. He is stuck with so many arrows that due to their feathered quills the feverish one initially sees him as a giant bird, commenting that he looks like the mythical simurgh, and wondering is it the hoopoe? Or Jebraʾīl himself? The dramatists also highlight Zain al-ʿĀbedīn's intense frustration at not having strength to fight, some showing him adamant that he should be martyred, insisting on making for the battlefield, and held back or taken

57 The Zand and Pelly renditions and CP: MS 583.
58 Kāshefī Sabzevārī, *Rawżat*, 458–59.
59 The Chodzko rendition; CP: MS 539; MS 726; and MS 938.
60 Darbandsar rendition and CP: MS 539.
61 Litten rendition.

back to camp by Kulṯūm or Zainab.[62] In this sense, as with Umm Lailā, Zain al-ʿĀbedīn's refusal to obey Ḥusain is connected with delirium.

The special nature of Zain al-ʿĀbedīn's identity is underscored in the climactic episode by the attention given to his mother, Shahrbānū. Although with very little basis in historical accounts, popular tradition holds that she was a daughter of the last Sasanian king Yazdegerd III.[63] Shahrbānū's union with Ḥusain infuses the imamate, through Zain al-ʿĀbedīn and his descendants, with royal Persian blood, creating an inextricable link between Iran and Shiʿism. With such lineage, the light not only of the imamate but also of the "*farr*", the glorious light of age-old Persian kingship, will live on in Zain al-ʿĀbedīn.[64] Shahrbānū's distinctive identity is brought to the fore in the climactic episode as, while the other survivors will be taken to Shām, a significant number of renditions feature Ḥusain arranging her escape. He tells her that upon his death, when Ẕuljanaḥ returns to camp covered in blood, she should mount and release the reins. The horse will take her where God wants her to go and she will be saved from captivity.[65] She will escape to Ray and thus, it is intimated, will carry the news of the events at Karbala to Persia. Her flight itself is dramatized in a separate sub-episode.[66] While that episode does not feature her arrival in Iran, the audience are likely to have been familiar with the popular narrative concerning her return, and the existence of her shrine (founded in the 9th/15th century) on Mount Tabarak at Ray on the outskirts of Tehran. Popular tradition holds that on that site, pursued by her enemies, she called to God for help and the mountain opened to offer her refuge.[67] Shahrbānū's journey creates for the audience a physical connection between the distant sands of Karbala and their homeland. Ḥusain's provision for her escape in the climactic episode provides the fulfilment of a tangible local legend; it evokes her royal Persian lineage and with it that of their son, Zain al-ʿĀbedīn.

62 In the Chodzko rendition and CP: MS 938 by Kulṯūm, in the Litten rendition and CP: MS 726, Zainab.

63 Shahrbānū is recorded as Zain al-ʿĀbedīn's mother by al-Mufīd and Khāndamīr, including reference to her Persian royal lineage. Mufīd, *Irshād*, 353; Khāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-siyār*, 2, 61.

64 Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, "Šahrbānu," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online version (2005). Available at https://iranicaonline.org/articles/sahrbanu (accessed June 18th, 2024).

65 The Chodzko and Litten renditions and CP: MS 938. In the Litten and Pelly renditions Shahrbānū has been amalgamated with Umm Lailā and is also portrayed as Akbar's mother.

66 See Pelly, *Miracle Play*, 2, 136–50.

67 This shrine, Bībī Shahrbānū, is only open to female pilgrims (and male descendants of the Prophet). Ali Amir-Moezzi, "Šahrbānu"; Mary Boyce, "Bībī Šahrbānū," ibid. IV/2 (1989). Available online at https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bibi-sahrbanu (accessed June 18th, 2024).

Besides tasking the frail Zain al-ʿĀbedīn with staying alive in order to assume the imamate, Ḥusain invests him with his *vaṣiyyat*. He instructs him to tell the Shiʿa that when they drink cold water they should remember Ḥusain's thirst at Karbala.[68] Ḥusain also tells him that he should look after the family, but it is clear that this will not be possible for some time. The responsibility for practical leadership of the group must, indeed, fall to Zainab.

4.2 *Zainab: Readying Ḥusain's Horse*

I have demonstrated above that the very structure of the play works to support the idea of Zainab taking on Ḥusain's mantle. According to the Muḥarram cycle's martyrdom composition-scheme, where the hero of the episode would normally seek Ḥusain's permission to sacrifice his life, Ḥusain himself speaks with his female kin – in particular Zainab. He debates with her at length and invokes (in the form of the covenant) the will of God, and of his grandfather the Prophet, in order to finally win her agreement. Then, as Ḥusain is gasping his last breaths, it is Zainab who comes to his side in the way that in other episodes Ḥusain arrives to accompany the other dying heroes of his house, ʿAbbās, Akbar and Qāsem. Ḥusain directly states his wish for Zainab to take care of the family as he makes his *vaṣiyyat*; the scene in which the women ready Ḥusain's horse for battle is important in showing Zainab taking over responsibility for the group.

The preparation of the horse is an integral part of this episode. It highlights the injustice at Karbala by showing a situation so dire that the women must undertake men's jobs. It seeks a sense of outrage from the audience and always features one or more characters decrying this state of affairs: for example Ḥusain, in the Litten rendition exclaims:

امام حسین:
ببین به حالِ حسینِ علی، تو یا الله　　نمانده بر منِ دل خسته جز تو پشت و پناه
کنند زینب و کلثوم بهرِ من یاری　　یکی علم به کف او، آن دیگر جلوداری
سکینه غاشیه‌کش گشته از برای حسین　　تمامِ اهل و عیالم همه به شیون و شین[69]

Ḥusain: *O Allāh, look upon the state of ʿAlī's Ḥusain! Except you no backing nor refuge remains for broken-hearted me. Zainab and Kulṡūm are helping*

68 CP: MS 938; MS 539. Indeed, this is a hadith attributed to Zain al-ʿĀbedīn. The Litten rendition features a similar instruction but it is the thirst of Ḥusain's children that should be remembered when drinking, the suffering of Qāsem's bride at a wedding, and Zain al-ʿĀbedīn when seeing someone in chains.

69 Esmāʿīlī, *Teshneh*, 475.

me, one with a flag in her hand, the other as jelūdār (groom who leads the horse). *Sakīneh has become a saddle-bearer for Ḥusain. All of my kith and kin are weeping and wailing.*

While the call for outrage is clear, and the scene incites lament for the lost menfolk, it also elicits pride in the women. Furthermore, this moment marks an important change in their situation. We have seen that in previous plays of the cycle the perspective of the women and girls at Karbala does receive treatment and that, indeed, that treatment increased as the plays developed. We have also seen that to the martyr heroes the womenfolk are precious and must be guarded, but providing this protection is an earthly obligation that must be forgone in order that they fulfil their divinely ordained duty to sacrifice their lives. The women and girls are in many ways synonymous with the camp, a closely guarded territory to which the heroes go between their forays onto the battlefield. This is about to change: the camp will be burned and with their male protectors gone the women will face the enemy directly. Zain al-ʿĀbedīn will survive but it will be largely the women and girls who remain to represent Ḥusain's house and, as we will see in chapter 6, to protect Zain al-ʿĀbedīn.

The scene in which they ready the horse marks the moment at which, with Zainab as their leader, the women begin to take over from their menfolk. In the Zand and Chodzko renditions, before asking her to bring his horse Ḥusain tells Zainab that she now stands in place of his male helpers:

حسین:
ای نور دو دیده من زار ای خواهر مبتلای افکار
من مونس و یاوری ندارم فرزند و برادری ندارم
الحال تویی برادر من هم قاسم زار و اکبر من[70]

Ḥusain: *O light of my two eyes in my sorrow, O unfortunate burdened sister, I have no companion, no helper. I have no son, no brother. Now, you are my brother and also my afflicted Qāsem and my Akbar.*

The same sentiments are echoed in later renditions. Ḥusain then asks Zainab to bring him his horse: she will be his *jelūdār* in place of Akbar. In some versions, it is Zainab alone who fulfils all tasks associated with readying the horse for battle, including carrying Ḥusain's saddle, holding the stirrup for him to mount

70 The Zand rendition, Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 11*, 179. The Chodzko rendition features the same three *baits* with a slight variation, the words فرزند و ('son and') in the fourth hemistich being replaced with امروز (today).

and raising the flag.[71] In others, the women of the family help her: Kulṡūm typically acts as flag-bearer in place of ʿAbbās; Sakīneh, Feżżeh, Shahrbānū and Ruqaiyeh take on a variety of tasks including passing Ḥusain his sword.[72] The women form a veritable army, and some dramatists have Ḥusain refer to them as such in his farewell to the sickly Zain al-ʿĀbedīn:

زین العابدین:
مگر لشکر نداری من فدایت

امام حسین:
ندارم لشکری جُز عمه‌هایت[73]

> Zain al-ʿĀbedīn: *Do you not have an army? I am a sacrifice for you.*
> Ḥusain: *I have no army except your aunts.*

Zainab then calls upon the women to come out of the camp and to line up in rank, in order that it not be said that Ḥusain is without an army. That the women take on such roles is portrayed as a grievous disruption to the natural order, but their bravery and loyalty is celebrated here. In Cerulli MS 539, Zainab gives a long and rousing speech as she instructs them individually on the tasks they should undertake; she ends by ordering them to shout in unison "*Yā ʿAlī*!". In performance this is no doubt a highpoint in the action and it is likely that the audience (particularly the female contingent) joined them in making this cry.

In the Chodzko rendition Zainab ensures that Ḥusain will have an army in a different way. After readying the horse, rather than rallying the women she calls for a message to be taken to ʿAbbās' corpse; she instructs him and the other martyrs to rise and line up on two sides, raising the flag to welcome their king to the battlefield. But whichever way the scene is played, it ends with either Jebraʾīl or Zainab calling upon the Shiʿa to mourn; Ḥusain is going into battle and will be martyred – for them. Such calls are addressed to the audience: they are common in the climactic play (usually made by Jebraʾīl or Zainab as opposed to other characters), serving to pull the audience into the drama through their vocal participation. They should now lament loudly in anticipation of Ḥusain's death; the new order, that will be established in its

71 CP: MS 583; MS 726; the Zand, Chodzko and Darbandsar renditions.

72 CP: MS 938; MS 539; MS 576; the Litten and Pelly renditions.

73 The Darbandsar rendition Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles*, 1, 375. A variation also features in CP: MS 539 (Rasht, 1353/ 1934).

aftermath, has been prepared. The women, under Zainab's leadership, are taking up the banner.

In Persian epic literature, that as we have seen influenced the characterisation of the *ahl-e bait* and their kin, women are important players and can also be heroic warriors.[74] However, despite the allusions of this scene, the women of Ḥusain's house will not take up arms: rather, as the cycle continues, their voices will be their weapons. Nonetheless, it merits comment that the wider *taʿziyeh* repertoire includes at least one story of women doing battle. According to Islamic tradition women acting as warriors is not permitted; the play in question, *Durrat al-Ṣadaf*, is likely to have been inspired by the tales of female warriors from Persian literature.[75] It is the eponymous story of a girl from Aleppo whose father is one of the city elders and whose family are supporters of Imam Ḥusain. Upon hearing of his martyrdom and the arrival of the cavalcade of captives, she rallies a group of 72 female warriors from amongst her kin and sets out to ambush the party, to help the prisoners and to take revenge on Ebn-e Saʿd and Shemr.[76] In some renditions these combatants are martyred, whilst in others the play closes before the conclusion of their battle.

Despite it being of great interest that the *taʿziyeh* repertoire includes such material, notably, those women are not from among Ḥusain's house. When treating Zainab and the other women of the family the dramatists were under certain constraints: not only the need to adhere (at least minimally) to records of their deeds in historical sources, but also the need to show them exemplifying the behaviour expected of pious women. Indeed, the heroism of Zainab and her female kin is not that of warriors but of fortitude in suffering and in raising their voices against injustice. This portrayal may also have its roots in Persian literature. In her study of the morphology of Persian "fairy tales", by applying Vladimir Propp's theory of functions Pegah Khadish argues that women are subject to different types of trial to men.[77] Theirs are usually tri-

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74 The aforementioned Bānū-Gushasp, a formidable warrior and daughter of Rustam, is an example of such a figure. For further discussion of female characters of the epics see Djalal Khaleghi Motlagh, *Women in the Shāhnāmeh: Their History and Social Status Within the Framework of Ancient and Medieval Sources*, trans. Brigitte Neuenschwander (Costa Mesa California: Mazda, 2012); Dick Davis, "Women in the Shahnameh: Exotics and Natives, Rebellious Legends, and Dutiful Histories," in *Women and Medieval Epic*, ed. Sara S. Poor and Jana K. Schulman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

75 Esmāʿīlī, *Teshneh*, 658.

76 For the Litten collection rendition of this play dated 1255 (1839) see ibid., 663–712. Humāyunī cites a variation of the play in which Durrat and Ṣadaf are two cousins as opposed to one person. *Taʿziyeh-khānī*, 57.

77 Pegah Khadish, "The Morphology of Persian Fairy Tales," *Fabula* 50, no. 3/4 (2009): 284. For Propp's theory of functions see Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans.

als of patience and endurance, rather than problem-solving (like their male counterparts).[78] Indeed, although Zainab takes over an active role as leader of the group and does raise her voice, the *taʿziyeh* remains true to this principle in that her strength is shown through her dignified endurance. Thus, while a woman takes on a leadership role, the social status quo is not challenged but reinforced.

4.3 *"If Not You, Then Who …?" Salvific Importance of Zainab's Role*

Characterised in the *taʿziyeh* as the ideal Shiʿi woman – generous and self-sacrificing, with impeccable qualities of mother and sisterhood, submissive to God's will yet fearless in speaking out against injustice – Zainab is also shown to have transcendental qualities. In *Ghārat-e khaimeh-hā*, the episode in which the enemy plunders the camp after Ḥusain's death, she curses and briefly paralyses Shemr. She is also shown, like Ḥusain (and their father before them), to have dominion over the natural world; in the same episode, at her command a wild lion comes to protect the bodies of the martyrs from being trampled.[79] Moreover, the *taʿziyeh* firmly asserts the importance of Zainab's role in the predestined events that must unfold in order for the Shiʿi community to achieve salvation. Not only must she carry out specific acts, but the suffering that she must endure is more than incidental.

The *taʿziyeh* highlights her role as a preserver of the "*amānāt*", key relics that represent the tribulations endured by the Prophet's family in the righteous path, and which it is believed will be important in the intercession that Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā will make on the Day of Judgement.[80] At Karbala, like the male martyrs who are offspring of the *ahl-e bait*, Zainab is shown to have been invested with special instructions and to be acting in accordance with wishes of a late and senior relative. Immediately prior to Ḥusain going into battle she kisses his throat, which Shemr's knife will cut. She explains that it was their mother's wish that she should do this (in her place) at Karbala.[81] This kiss is an important symbolic element of their heart-wrenching farewell. It sees her

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Laurence Scott and Louis A. Wagner, 2nd ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, [1928] 1968), 25–65.

78 Khadish, "Morphology," 291.

79 This request is taken to the lion in Zainab's name by Feżżeh, Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā's maid servant. Darbandsar rendition, Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles*, 2, 53–55. Nematollahi Mahani, *Holy Drama*, 38. For further valuable analysis of Zainab's characterisation see ibid., 73–96.

80 Ibid., 38, 84.

81 The Litten and Darbandsar renditions, CP: MS 938; MS 726; and MS 583. In MS 539 she touches rather than kisses his throat.

release Ḥusain and, freed from the constraints of his earthly duties, he heads onto the battlefield to fulfil his divinely ordained duty.

Special attention is given to the predestined nature of Zainab's role in the scripts. For example, in the Chodzko and Litten renditions of the climactic episode, when she laments her great pain at having lost so many family members, seeming to doubt that she will be able to carry on, Ḥusain encourages her on the basis of the importance of her predestined role:

امام حسین:
نباشی ار تو بگو کی اسیر می‌گردد   به دست لشکر کین دست گیر می‌گردد
اگر چنانچه نباشی که می‌رود در شام؟   سر برهنه که پا می‌نهد به مجلس عام؟[82]

> Ḥusain: *Tell me, if not you, who will become a captive, taken prisoner at the hands of the army of hatred? If not you, then who will go to Shām? Who will set foot bareheaded in the public court?*

According to this understanding, just as Ḥusain does not wish to evade his martyrdom, the event enshrined in his covenant, she should not evade what she must endure. Framing her captivity and humiliation in this way implies that it is not merely a consequence of Ḥusain's death. Rather, it is an essential part of the sacrifice made by the descendants of the Prophet for the Shiʿi community. Whilst showing that Zainab lived to return to Medina, her treatment in the *taʿziyeh* affirms that the sacrifice she made was of an importance equal to that of the Karbala martyrs. Zainab is undoubtedly a figure of great importance in Shiʿi traditions relating to Karbala and in the *rawżeh-khānī/maqtal* telling of these events, yet the degree to which the *taʿziyeh* plays highlight her role is in keeping with the trend that we have seen across other episodes. The female perspective and contribution is given special attention.

5 Historical Development

5.1 *A Trilogy of Trials, and the Angel Who Became a Dervish*

The theme of Ḥusain's uncompromising submission to God's will, demonstrated by his refusal of any form of help, had existed in popular narratives concerning the battle of Karbala for centuries prior to our earliest *taʿziyeh* script.

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82 The Chodzko rendition Eqbāl and Maḥjūb, *Jung-e shahādat*, 182. The Litten rendition features the same couplets with a very minor variation, اگر چنانچه in the third hemistich being replaced with بگو اگر تو.

FIGURE 8 Performer playing the Dervish of Kabul, Ḥusainiyah-ye ʿĀẓam, Baraghan, Alborz, 10th Muḥarram 1439/2017

In such narratives, Ḥusain rejects offers of assistance (water or military might) made by supernatural beings, *jinn* and angels – demonstrating his forbearance. In the interest of making the same point, the *taʿziyeh* composers built such offers into the climactic episode, where Ḥusain's steadfast commitment to his covenant is a prominent theme.[83]

Here, I will examine how during the reigns of Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shāh, Muḥammad Shāh and Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh Qājār (coinciding broadly with the 19th century CE), the heyday of the genre's popularity, the dramatists explored the idea of refusal of help through a variety of different *gūsheh-hā*. These are short, self-contained stories, in each of which a benevolent outsider attempts to come to Ḥusain's aid. As they refined their craft, the dramatists created of these encounters a trilogy of trials for the Imam that showed him resisting three diverse opportunities to evade his fate. Furthermore, they replaced certain offers of help made by supernatural beings with offers made by humans, representatives of living social groups. I will begin by discussing the trilogy of trials and will go on to break down its elements, asking where they came from

83 For further discussion of this theme see Ansary Pettys, "Martyrdom of Hussein," 28; "The Ta'zieh," 244–49; and Beeman, *Iranian Performance*, 128–29.

and what the motivation was for including these particular characters in this, the most important *taʿziyeh* episode.

By the end of Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh's reign (1313/1896) the content of *The Martyrdom of Imam Ḥusain* had settled; renditions from across Iran had become relatively consistant both in the scenes that they included, and in their structure. We have seen in my outline of the play's skeleton that its central segment, after Ḥusain taking leave of his family and before the crescendo towards his martyrdom, had come to be composed of a series of three encounters with benevolent strangers. The Dervish of Kabul arrives offering water, Zaʿfar, king of the *jinn* appears offering military might, and, after rescuing Sultan Qais from a lion, Ḥusain is offered refuge in India. He is thus offered, but refuses, solutions to the three essential problems that he and his party face at Karbala: deprival of water; being militarily outnumbered; and lack of refuge or the opportunity to escape. Given his desperate situation and his anguish at witnessing the suffering of his family, refusing these offers constitutes a trilogy of trials for Ḥusain. His fortitude shows his commitment to fulfilling his duty and underscores his infallibility. Importantly, the trilogy transmits the message that he was not vanquished at Karbala. Rather, he understood the higher purpose of his and his family's sacrifice.

This trilogy is not only interesting in that it shows the work of the *taʿziyeh* dramatists becoming more sophisticated over time; its elements are testament to the evolutionary path of the genre. Whereas Zaʿfar's story is present in relatively early *taʿziyeh* episodes, the other two characters were new, their addition a mid-19th century innovation.[84] The story of Zaʿfar is an example of the *taʿziyeh*'s potential to preserve and popularise old and otherwise little-known stories. Meanwhile, the stories of the Dervish of Kabul and Sultan Qais are indicative of the *taʿziyeh* composers' societal connections, their influences and sources, and the potential of the genre to broaden the popular understanding of the Karbala narrative by absorbing new protagonists.

How had the theme of Ḥusain's refusal of any form of help been explored in the *taʿziyeh* during the decades, or perhaps even centuries, before the creation of this trilogy? Indeed, the earliest evidence of a *gūsheh* relevant to this theme featuring in the climactic play is the apparition of Zaʿfar and his powerful *jinn* army in a rendition by the composer Nāṭeq, dated 1217/1802–3.[85] Ḥusain's encounter with Zaʿfar is likely to have been known to the *taʿziyeh* composers from Kāshefī's *Rawżat*, but it draws on much older sources. The *maqtal* genre

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84 For the integration of these characters into the climactic episode see Deacon, "Curious Addition."

85 For Nāṭeq's rendition see Daryāī, *Daftar 14*, 15–85.

features many stories of the *jinn* appearing at Karbala; Ebn Ṭāwūs' 7th/13th century Arabic work *Luhūf* (Sighs of Sorrow) is an early example.[86] Furthermore, in Zaʿfar's dialogue with Ḥusain he mentions his father being converted to Islam by ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb; al-Shaikh al-Mufīd's 4th/10th century *Ketāb al-Ershād* includes an account of ʿAlī securing the conversion of *jinn*.[87] The narrative of Zaʿfar and his army coming to Ḥusain's aid was indeed rooted in old folklore relating to Karbala. In this case, the *taʿziyeh* dramatists would not change or replace Zaʿfar's story: this early exploration of the theme of refusal of help was played by the end of Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh's reign much as it had been a hundred years earlier. The dramatists devised a prologue, only played in certain renditions, showing Zaʿfar abandoning his own wedding to go to Karbala upon hearing of Ḥusain's plight. Otherwise, they stuck closely to his story as told by Kāshefī.[88]

There is much greater variation in the other *gūsheh-hā* that express this theme. By the 1830s the dramatists had begun to include further examples of refusal of help, in addition to Zaʿfar's. In the Chodzko rendition Fuṭrus, a once fallen angel, indebted to Ḥusain because pardoned on his birth, arrives offering the aid of a powerful angelic battalion. The Litten rendition also features such an offer but from an army of unnamed angels, as does Berezin's 1259/1843 spectator account. Thus, a scene involving an offer of military help from angels appears to have been a stable element of the climactic play as performed in the 1830s and 1840s (at least in Tehran). Fuṭrus' story is told in Kāshefī's *Rawżat*, and the idea of angels coming to Ḥusain's aid is not, in itself, surprising.[89] However, what happened next is indeed curious.

The *gūsheh* featuring the Dervish of Kabul became part of the climactic episode between 1256/1840 and 1290/1873. That of Sultan Qais was beginning to be played by 1259/1843 and by 1318/1900 (at latest) it had been fully integrated.[90] Of the seven renditions of the climactic play amongst my sample that are later than the 1840s, only one (CP: MS 938) features angels offering help, and not in a separate *gūsheh* but as Ḥusain is leading his horse into battle. This strongly suggests that by the end of the genre's heyday, the angels' offers had largely

86 Esmāʿīlī, *Teshneh*, 435.

87 Mufīd, *Irshād*, 240–42.

88 This prologue features in the Mīr-e ʿAzā and Tehran renditions from amongst Hāshem Fayyāż's collection.

89 Kāshefī Sabzevārī, *Rawżat*, 268.

90 Deacon, "Curious Addition." Maḥjūb, Bulūkbāshī, and Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī have commented that these characters were likely to have been incorporated into the episode after the 1840s Eqbāl and Maḥjūb, *Jung-e shahādat*, 23; Bulūkbāshī, *Taʿziyeh*, 168–69; Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 11*, 155.

been written out in favour of the scenes involving the Dervish of Kabul and Sultan Qais.

So, where did these new characters come from? And why were they integrated into the most important *taʿziyeh* episode in place of celestial beings? Unlike Zaʿfar and Fuṭrus, the Dervish of Kabul and Sultan Qais did not come from Kāshefī's *Rawżat*: rather, they made their way into the *taʿziyeh* from the *pardeh-dārī* tradition and are indeed testament to the tight web of influences between the traditions of *pardeh-dārī*, *taʿziyeh-khānī* and the lithographs of the *rawżeh-khānī/maqtal* genre. The stories of both characters appear in such lithographs at around the same time as they first appear in the *taʿziyeh*: that of Sultan Qais in Jawharī s *Ṭūfān al-Bukāʾ* (1250/1834), and that of the dervish in Muḥammad Ḥusain Ebn-ʿAbdullāh Shahrābī's *Ṭarīq al-bukāʾ* (first published in 1273/1856–57).[91] With regards to the story of Sultan Qais, I have argued elsewhere that the *taʿziyeh* composers initially worked directly from the *Ṭūfān* version of this narrative, adapting its details through time as they integrated it into the fabric of the climactic episode.[92] However, before the 1830s advent of print in Iran the stories of both of these new characters were told in the narrations of the *pardeh-dārān*: both are depicted on an extant *pardeh* dated to the Zand period.[93] Interestingly, the same canvas also shows Ḥusain being offered water by an angel, which brings us to an intriguing matter concerning the story of the dervish.

Despite not featuring in Kāshefī's *Rawżat*, the dervish's story, albeit with a narrative twist, had circulated in the *rawżeh-khānī* recitals during the Safavid period. Jean Chardin recalls a recital on the 10th of Muḥarram of 1085/1674 in Isfahan that featured the story of an angel who appeared to Ḥusain at Karbala in the guise of a hermit, offering him a bowl of water. Ḥusain rejected the offer and, saying that if he wanted water he would receive it, touched the ground with one finger – and a great fountain spurted forth.[94] This is unmistakably the same story as is told about the Dervish of Kabul in the *taʿziyeh.* There are other reports of witnesses hearing versions of this story more than a century before the *taʿziyeh* rendition. Salmons and Van Goch report a *rawżeh-khānī* recital in Muḥarram of 1150/1737 in which the same story is told, only the angel does not disguise himself as a hermit.[95] The appearance of both the water-bearing

91 See Jawharī, *Ṭūfān*, 239–41; and Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī, *Mabānī-ye shabīh-khānī*, 83.

92 Deacon, "Curious Addition," 214–15.

93 ʿAnāṣerī, *Sulṭān-e Karbalā*, 38–39. For the canvas in question see Figure 13, Marzolph, "Visual Culture," 147.

94 Jean Chardin, *Voyages du chevalier Chardin en Perse, et autres lieux de l'Orient*, 10 vols., vol. 9 (Paris: Le Normant, 1811), 52–5.

95 Salmons and Van Goch, *Die heutige Historie*, 81–82.

dervish and angel on the Zand period *pardeh* indicates that both of these narratives were in circulation by then. However, as this story found its way into the climactic episode the identity of this water-bearing, miracle-witnessing stranger would become fixed as the Dervish of Kabul.

Another dervish character had long been a feature of the climactic play. Indeed, the earliest extant version (the Zand rendition dated 1204/1789–90) features the *gūsheh* of *Mūsā va Darvīsh-e Biyābānī* (Moses and the Desert-Dwelling Dervish). This is often described as a prologue but can act more as a frame, its characters not only opening the play but (despite remaining external to the action) interjecting a number of times during its course to comment on what is happening.[96] In this *gūsheh* a dervish, unable to reconcile the idea of a merciful creator with the existence of hell, experiences a crisis of faith and reproaches God. Jebra'īl hears him and sends Mūsā to remedy the situation. To justify the necessity of a hell Mūsā holds up two fingers, telling the dervish to look between them, and shows him a vision of the atrocities committed at Karbala. The play begins. In this case, the dervish acts as a witness and in his conversation with Mūsā, almost as a narrator. This *gūsheh* continued to be played but became marginal, largely superseded by the Dervish of Kabul.[97]

So, as the content of the climactic episode was honed during its great enjoyment of popularity, not only did the angel become a dervish, but the dervish as an external witness became a helper who conversed directly with Ḥusain shortly before his martyrdom, and in most renditions is even martyred for him.[98] Furthermore, the dervish in the climactic play was no longer an anonymous desert-dweller, but had become a figure associated with a particular order. As I have discussed above, the Khāksār trace their spiritual lineage to a dervish from Kabul who had met Ḥusain at Karbala.[99] The *gūsheh* that entered the climactic *taʿziyeh* episode is a clear adaptation of that story, the founding myth of the Khāksār dervishes. This was the order with whom Selseleh-ye ʿAjam – major participants in the *pardeh-dārī* tradition – were closely associated (if not synonymous). In chapter 1 I showed a connection between the *taʿziyeh-khānān* of the Qajar period and Selseleh-ye ʿAjam. This connection

96 For further discussion see Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar II*, 155.

97 In my sample, the *gūsheh* of Mūsā and the dervish only features in the Zand rendition and CP: MS 938.

98 It is always intimated that the Dervish of Kabul is martyred, but in CP: MS 726 his script is especially elaborate and he is even dressed in a *kafan* by Ḥusain, an honour reserved for family members and the most prominent supporters.

99 Mudarresī Chahārdehī, *Khāksār*, 7; Partuv Beyżā'ī Kāshānī, *Tārīkh-e varzesh*, 43.

and the strong influence of *pardeh-dārī* on the *taʿziyeh* explain the insertion of the founding myth of the Khāksār into the *taʿziyeh*'s most important episode.[100]

The story of Sultan Qais does not appear to be traceable to a particular figure. However, taking into account that upon rejecting Qais' offer of help Ḥusain orders the sultan to return home and set up a mourning ritual for him, this can be considered a type of founding myth – explaining the existence of a culture of lament for Ḥusain in India. One reading of the Qais *gūsheh* sees him as a (fictional) Mughal ruler, to save whom Ḥusain transcended not only space but also time, appearing in India on the day of ʿĀshūrāʾ around a millennium after Karbala. However, in the scripts among my sample this is not the intended reading: they explicitly locate Ḥusain's apparition in India on the day of the battle, some renditions including, in the introductory conversation between Qais and his vizier, an explicit statement that it is the 10th of Muḥarram and that 61 years have passed since the *hijra* (migration of the Muslim community from Mecca to Medina and beginning of the Islamic calendar).[101] These characters are shown in that same conversation to be believers, calling for Ḥusain when in peril. Some versions attempt even to explain how this can be so: in CP: MS 539 the vizier asks Qais why he and everyone around him are in a state of agitation; Qais answers that a dervish came from the Ka'ba with a picture of Ḥusain, with which they have fallen in love; they are being driven crazy by separation from him.[102] This proselytising dervish gives the impression of being a *pardeh-dār*, and, since Qais' story made its way from the *pardeh-dārī* tradition into the *taʿziyeh,* such a character explaining how knowledge of Ḥusain reached India could even represent the author inserting himself into the play.[103]

In sum, whilst the offers of help from angels and *jinn* allowed the demonstration of Ḥusain's commitment to his covenant, the addition of benevolent outsiders who were representatives of living social groups – the Khāksār dervishes and the Shiʿa of India – broadened the narrative scope. It tied these groups to a crucial moment in sacred history. Like the story of Shahrbānū, these narratives weave believers of different stripes firmly into the tapestry of the Shiʿi community. The absorption of such narratives into the climactic episode not only

100 Deacon, "Curious Addition," 216.

101 The Darbandsar rendition and CP: MS 726.

102 This story exists as a separate sub-episode (with a slight variation in that the image is of the Prophet) CP: MS 900 *Qais-e Hendī; Āvardan-e darvīsh shamāyel-e Ḥażrat-e Rusūl az barāye Sulṭān Qais va ʿāsheq shudan-e Qais beh shamāyel-e Ḥażrat-e Rusūl* (Mīr-e ʿAzā, Khurasan, Beg. 20th Cent).

103 For the *pardeh-dārān* and proselytization see chapter 1 "Connection to the Storytelling Traditions of *Naqqālī* and *Pardeh-dārī*". For their visual props see Floor, *Theater*, 121–22.

allowed a demonstration of Ḥusain's fortitude but also asserted the breadth of his following.

5.2 *Feżżeh and the Garment: Expansion of the Humble Female Role*

We have already seen the special attention given to Zainab in this episode: in addition, the episode came to include a plot element foregrounding senior female characters, a similar phenomenon to that discussed in *The Martyrdom of Qāsem*. In the case of the climactic episode this is a scene involving Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā's *kanīz*, Feżżeh, interacting with Zainab, and includes substantial sections of inter-female dialogue. Not as elaborate and rounded as a *gūsheh*, this is a *faqareh* (a short and relatively self-contained section of action including a few scenic movements and/or a dialogue). It demonstrates Zainab's suffering at the impending loss of her brother and reminds the audience of his prophetic lineage, but more interestingly, it honours Feżżeh greatly.[104]

The scene in question belongs to the section of the composition-scheme where Ḥusain is prepared for martyrdom. He converses discreetly with Feżżeh and gives her with a secret instruction – to bring him a special garment from the bundles of the caravan. Distressed, she struggles to find the garment, and is interrupted by Zainab, who demands to know what she is doing. Through loyalty to Ḥusain, Feżżeh tries to conceal her mission, but Zainab catches sight of the garment and becomes inconsolable, knowing that it signifies Ḥusain's imminent death. She collapses with grief. In one rendition the others think that she is dead and she is only revived after her recently martyred relatives come one by one from the battlefield to rouse her.[105]

The garment in question is described as a *jāmeh* (robe) but also as a *pīrhan-e kuhan* (an old shirt); either way, this will be his *kafan*. It is used as a symbol of Ḥusain's prophetic ancestry: in one rendition, Zainab calls it the silk shirt of Khalīl (Ebrāhīm);[106] in another, it is said to have come from paradise and to have been passed down a line of ancient prophets – Ādam, Nūḥ, Mūsā, Yaḥyā – to Muḥammad, who entrusted it to Zahrā (for Ḥusain). In this same version Zainab stores this garment in a *yakhdān* (chest) amongst the *amānāt*, the key relics representing the tribulations endured by the Prophet's family, of which she is the guardian: once stained with Ḥusain's blood this garment will become one of them.[107] As always with the appearance of a *kafan*, when it is brought at

104 The scene features in CP: MS 539; MS 583; MS 726; and MS 938.

105 CP: MS 938.

106 CP: MS 539.

107 Said rendition, CP: MS 938, is also an exception amongst my sample in that Ḥusain orders Feżżeh to get the garment from Zainab (who says that Feżżeh can have anything that she wants, until she finds out what it is).

Husain's request it signals that his martyrdom is nigh. Feżżeh is charged with bringing it to him where it is suggested that Zainab will struggle to do so.

Whilst some earlier renditions of this episode did feature Feżżeh as a marginal character and saw her praised affectionately by Ḥusain in the familial farewells,[108] my script sample does not show her tasked with bringing the garment as a regular feature until around 1317/1900. However there is an intriguing discrepancy in the dating of one version that could indicate it being played earlier. The collector has recorded that Cerulli MS 726 dates to the beginning of the 20th century, yet the script is in *tak-nuskheh* form and the acting side for Feżżeh bears the date 1256 (1840–41). Both the hand and paper are different to the other acting sides; it looks older. This appears to be a copy of her script inserted from a different (and earlier) rendition. If the date is reliable, then it shows that this *faqareh* existed in some form by the early 1840s.

This scene not only allows long sections of inter-female dialogue, but also honours Feżżeh from multiple angles. She is Ḥusain's confidante, able to carry out his command where the group's soon-to-be leader Zainab would struggle, and carrying Ḥusain's martyrdom robe – one of the *amānāt* – in her hands. Thus, we see considerable attention being focused on an elderly woman of servant class who is given an exceedingly sympathetic portrayal. Like Umm Lailā and Qāsem's mother, Feżżeh is the type of figure to whom the female audience (the majority of whom were women of the lower classes) could relate. Her expanded treatment in the climactic episode is likely to have been for their benefit.

6 Conclusion

The climactic episode pivots around two themes: Ḥusain's tested and unwavering commitment to fulfilling his duty to be martyred; and, with Ḥusain's death imminent, the transmission of leadership of the group, and indeed the community, to another. It is clear that Zain al-ʿĀbedīn will become the next spiritual leader of the Shiʿa and that his survival is of paramount importance. Due to his illness his treatment remains marginal yet his royal Persian heritage is remembered through the prominence given to his mother Shahrbānū, which in turn creates a direct connection between the Iranian audience and the protagonists at Karbala.

108 The Litten and Pelly collection renditions (and also Nāṭeq's 1217/1802–3 rendition).

Whilst Zain al-ʿĀbedīn will become the spiritual leader, Zainab will take on the immediate leadership of the group. She fulfils functions in the martyrdom-composition scheme usually performed by Ḥusain and the scene in which she (and the other women) ready his horse sets up what will be the new status quo, with women at the forefront of the defence of the Prophet's house. We have seen in the analysis of the play's development the addition of a scene that also celebrated the contribution of a woman – moreover, one with a profile to which a large contingent of the audience could relate. Yet while this episode exalts the bravery of the women, the scene involving them readying the horse allowing a fleeting vision of them as warriors, it does not elicit any transgression of the cultural mores of the traditional society in which the women of the audience lived. We see female heroism demonstrated through forbearance, strength of endurance and adherence to duty.

The theme of refusal of help also celebrates forbearance – that of Ḥusain. I have shown that the idea of him refusing help at Karbala had been important to the composers from early in the Qajar period. However, as the genre flourished and the climactic play was subject to more renditions and embellishments, the identity of those who offered help (and to some extent the nature of the offers) changed. Benevolent *jinn* and angels were joined, or replaced, by representatives of living social groups. These new stories were forms of founding myth that connected these groups to Karbala. They also reinforced Ḥusain's legitimacy as rightful leader by affirming the diverse nature of his following.

CHAPTER 6

Bāzār-e Shām (The Damascus Market)

مگر میان شما یک نفر مسلمان نیست　　اگر که هست مسلمان چاره بجز این نیست
زنم به فرق خود این لحظه از حمیت سنگ　　بالتماس روم سوی ایلچیان فرنگ[1]

Is not one person among you a Muslim? If there is a Muslim present, is there no remedy but this? Right now I strike my head with a stone in indignation! And go pleading to the ambassadors of Europe.

Bāzār-e Shām treats the arrival of the Karbala survivors in Damascus. They are made a terrible spectacle as battered, bound and exposed they are paraded through the market, together with the severed heads of their martyrs. The macabre cavalcade is then taken to Yazīd's court for his inspection. This play is markedly different from the others treated in this book, both in terms of spatial and temporal setting. Yazīd's court is a sharp contrast to the besieged camp and battlefield at Karbala; the urban environment allows for the appearance of a diverse range of characters, from Yazīd himself to a European ambassador, a foreign doctor, members of the royal harem, and humble townsfolk. It plays amid the aftermath of Ḥusain's death, as opposed to during the build-up. At the exposition the unthinkable has already happened. The audience now witness the much foretold tribulations of the womenfolk after the loss of their male protectors.

1 Words spoken by Zainab at Yazīd's court in *Bāzār-e Shām*. CP: MS 512 (Mashhadī Ḥusain Tafreshī; Mīrzā Muḥammad b. Mīrzā Ḥasan Taʿziyeh-khān-e Jāsebī, Kashan 1327/1909–10 and 1369/1949–50); and (with minor variations) the Zand and Darbandsar renditions; MS 405; MS 661 (Mīr-e ʿAzā; Mīrzā ʿAlī Ṭehrānī; Murtażā Bābājān; and Shaikh Zain al-ʿĀbedīn Mahdaviyān, Qom, 1369/1949–50 & 1329 SH/1950–51); and MS 662 (Mīrzā Ghūlām-ʿAlī Darvīsh; Muḥammad Reżā Hūshmand; and Nūr Muḥammad ʿAbbās, Rasht, 1342/1923–24 & 1311 SH/1932–33).

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FIGURE 9 Performers playing Shemr, Zain al-ʿĀbedīn, Zainab and the Karbala survivors, Garmaseh, Isfahan Province, 13th Muḥarram 1439/2017

1 Script Sources, and Tracing the Narrative

My study of this episode is based on nine renditions of the script. The gap of a century between the earliest version amongst my sample and the next available rendition complicates the matter of tracking the play's development. Fortunately, Il'ya Berezin's 1259/1843 (Tehran) spectator account gives a detailed scene by scene description of this episode, providing an invaluable point in the timeline.[2]

My analysis of this play will look closely at the figure of the Īlchī Farangī (the European Ambassador): the origin of his story; how he reflects perceptions of foreign visitors to Iran during the Qajar period; and how the dramatists take the surprising step of turning him briefly into a storyteller. I will look at the unusual technical aspects of this episode's composition, and examine the forced exposure of the women as a theme. In looking at the episode's historical

2 Bérézine, *Voyage*, 256–60.

TABLE 4 Script sources for *Bāzār-e Shām*

Rendition	Date	Origin	Author or copyist
Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī, Zand Collection[a]	1184/1770–71	Unknown	Āqā Bābā
Pelly Collection[b]	*c.*1873	Shiraz/ Bushehr	Anon
Ṣāleḥī Rād Collection[c]	Late 19th cent.	Darbandsar	Anon
Cerulli Persiani, MS. 405	End 19th cent.	Mazandaran	Anon
Cerulli Persiani, MS. 512[d]	1327/1909–10 & 1369/1949–50	Kashan	Mashhadī Ḥusain Tafreshī; Mīrzā Muḥammad b. Mīrzā Ḥasan Taʿziyeh-khān-e Jāsebī
Cerulli Persiani, MS. 43	1335/1916–17 & 1324 SH/ 1945–46	Unknown	Mashhadī Ghulām Ḥusain b. Mullā Sharīf
Cerulli Persiani, MS. 662	1342/1923–24 & 1311 SH/ 1932–33	Rasht	Mīrzā Ghūlām-ʿAlī Darvīsh; Muḥammad Reżā Hūshmand; Nūr Muḥammad ʿAbbās
Cerulli Persiani, MS. 661[e]	1369/1949–50 & 1329 SH/ 1950–51	Qom	Mīr-e ʿAzā; (Mīrzā ʿAlī Ṭehrānī; Murtażā Bābājān; Shaikh Zain al-ʿĀbedīn Mahdaviyān)
Cerulli Persiani, MS. 908	1372/1952–53	Shiraz	Ghulām Ḥusain b. Mullā Sharīf

a Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 11*, 17–82

b Pelly's collection of prose translations does not include *Bāzār-e Shām* (The Damascus Market) as a single play. Rather, it includes three shorter episodes that together contain content corresponding closely to that of *Bāzār-e Shām*, including many of its dialogues. See "Scene XXX-Arrival of Husain's Family at Damascus"; "Scene XXXI-Conversion and Murder of the Ambassador from Europe"; and "Scene XXXII-Death of Rukayyah the Daughter of Husain". Pelly, Miracle Play, 2, 202–257

c Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles*, 2, 111–34

d This manuscript is in *tak-nuskheh* form and includes two copies of Zain al-ʿĀbedīn's script. I have referred to the older one that corresponds to the *fehrest*.

e The script is cited as the Mīr-e ʿAzā version, the acting sides bear the signatures of three people.

development I discuss the integration of a *gūsheh*, a prologue, in which Yazīd is treated by a foreign doctor, and consider its satirical potential.

This episode not only gives a graphic portrayal of the abhorrent treatment of the captives; it also demonstrates the bravery and eloquence of the women and girls of Ḥusain's house as they speak out against oppression. We find clear inspiration for all of this in historical accounts of the Karbala survivors being taken first to Kufa and then Damascus. The *taʿziyeh* composers have clearly drawn heavily from the stories of the survivors' ordeal transmitted in such sources. To inform our understanding of the composers' work, I begin the discussion of *Bāzār-e Shām* by showing where these influences are discernible within the episode. However, I also identify a key area in which the *taʿziyeh* differs from much historiography – the treatment of the caliph, Yazīd.

The majority of the episode's action plays in Yazīd's court and concerns him receiving news of the outcome of the battle, inspecting the heads of the martyrs, and interacting with the captives. These events are covered by al-Ṭabarī and in Balʿamī's Persian version of his work, by al-Mufīd, Safavid historians Mīrkhānd and Khāndamīr, and in Kāshefī's *Rawżat*, amongst other works.[3] They present Zainab as a powerful rhetorician; in her debates with Ebn-e Ziyād in Kufa, and Yazīd in Damascus she is shown not only to have the higher moral ground but the superior wit. Zain al-ʿĀbedīn is also presented speaking eloquently against their captors, and in a number of sources his execution is ordered as a result; he only escapes death because of the fierce intervention of the womenfolk.[4] In the *taʿziyeh*, this scene came to provide the main peak in *Bāzār-e Shām*'s action.

These sources also include accounts of a number of individuals (usually old men) who refuse to remain silent in the face of the injustices perpetrated against the Karbala survivors; they speak out, provoking Ebn-e Ziyād's or Yazīd's ire, and some pay with their lives.[5] In the *taʿziyeh* we do see benevolent members of the crowd in Shām opposing the treatment of the captives, but the most prominent onlooker to speak out is the Īlchī Farangī. He is an important character, functioning as an external witness and attempting to intercede

3 Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, 169–76; Balʿamī, *Tārīkh-nāmeh*, 4, 714–15; Mufīd, *Irshād*, 341–43; Mīrkhānd, *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, 3, 2270–73; Khāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-siyār*, 2, 60; Kāshefī Sabzevārī, *Rawżat*, 505–13.

4 Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, 166–67; Balʿamī, *Tārīkh-nāmeh*, 4, 713; Mufīd, *Irshād*, 339–40; Mīrkhānd, *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, 3, 2267. These sources record this happening in Kufa and Ebn-e Ziyād being the one who gives the execution order. In *Bāzār-e Shām* the setting is Damascus, the order given by Yazīd. Kāshefī gives both accounts, *Rawżat*, 479 and 512.

5 Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, 167–68; Mufīd, *Irshād*, 340; Balʿamī, *Tārīkh-nāmeh*, 4, 713; Mīrkhānd, *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, 3, 2267–68.

when Zain al-ʿĀbedīn's life is under threat. His is, indeed, an old story. Whilst it is not included in al-Ṭabarī's account, the presence of a Byzantine ambassador at Yazīd's court is recorded in certain manuscript versions of Balʿamī's Persian *Tārīkh-nāmeh-ye Ṭabarī* (one of which is dated to the 6th/12th century), a point to which we will return.[6]

Another narrative detail, important in the *taʿziyeh*, that is rooted in historical accounts is that Yazīd dishonours Ḥusain's severed head by poking his mouth with a wooden stick. This and other similarly irreverent acts serve in *Bāzār-e Shām* to depict Yazīd's behaviour as anathema, portraying him as thoroughly deplorable. Intriguingly, although this story is recounted in many significant works of historiography,[7] the historians often give Yazīd a nuanced, even relatively sympathetic portrayal. Al-Ṭabarī, Balʿamī, al-Mufīd and Mīrkhānd all recount Yazīd displaying remorse upon hearing of Ḥusain's death, and cursing Ebn-e Ziyād, claiming that he himself would have pardoned Ḥusain.[8] They also recount his having treated the captives in Damascus with respect, providing dignified dwellings for them. Al-Ṭabarī even cites a report that they were lodged in Yazīd's own house, that his womenfolk mourned with them, and that he restored to them their plundered possesions. He goes further, including a quote from Sakīneh, stating that she never knew a better *kāfer* (infidel) than Yazīd![9] Even Kāshefī's *Rawżat* includes a story of Shemr tricking someone else into claiming to be Ḥusain's killer, for fear of Yazīd's anger, and Yazīd ordering this man's execution.[10] This is very much at odds with the caliph's behaviour as portrayed in the *taʿziyeh*: gloating over Ḥusain's murder, rewarding Shemr, publicly humiliating the captives, and lodging them in a ruin. Why is this?

The historians' work consisted largely of organising the available witness accounts of an event into a narrative: it was commonplace for them to cite conflicting accounts, and they made little pretence of being able to provide

6 Peacock cites this figure as being mentioned in two manuscripts, one held in Mashhad (Āstān-e Quds 129), and one in Cambridge (Add 836). The former, dated to the 6th/12th century, originates from Erzincan (present day Turkey). The latter is an Arabic translation of Balʿamī's work, dated 876/1471, the colophon indicating that it is a direct descendant of a manuscript dated 442/1050. Andrew C.S. Peacock, *Mediaeval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy: Balʿamī's Tārīkhnāma* (London: Routledge, 2007), 132, 139. For Peacock's full discussion of Add. 836, including questions relating to its dating see pp. 66–75.

7 Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, 176; Balʿamī, *Tārīkh-nāmeh*, 4, 714–15; Mīrkhānd, *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, 3, 2270–71; Kāshefī Sabzevārī, *Rawżat*, 506.

8 Balʿamī, *Tārīkh-nāmeh*, 4, 714–15; Mufīd, *Irshād*, 341–43; Mīrkhānd, *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, 3, 2270.

9 Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, 174–76. Mīrkhānd gives this same quote but from Zainab. Mīrkhānd, *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, 3, 2273.

10 Kāshefī Sabzevārī, *Rawżat*, 505.

certainty. Nonetheless, their own political or religious convictions, and those of their patrons, will have had some bearing upon the organisation of the narrative. In an interesting discussion of al-Ṭabarī's and Balʿamī's works, Andrew Peacock assesses the political leanings (pro-Umayyad or Shiʿi) of those reporting Yazīd's reaction to learning of Ḥusain's death, and how each historian presents these accounts. He concludes that Balʿamī's "translation" of al-Ṭabarī's work, as observed in certain manuscript versions, cites contradictory accounts in such a way as to show Yazīd "... cynically feigning horror at Ḥusayn's death for the sake of public opinion, while privately delighted."[11] He argues that throughout his coverage of Ḥusain's death Balʿamī subverts al-Ṭabarī's Sunni sources, adding his own Shiʿi ones that undermine al-Ṭabarī's account. Peacock suspects that Balʿamī's intention was to present his audience with a work from an authoritative Sunni source that included a heavily Shiʿi slant, and that this creative licence would have gone largely undetected by his audience.[12]

Peacock may well be correct, but we do not see this view of Yazīd stated openly in the Persian historiography until Khāndamīr's *Ḥabīb al-siyar* (*c.*935/1538–9) by which time the Safavid dynasty ruled Iran and Shiʿism had become Iran's religion of state. In contradiction to the writings of his grandfather, Mīrkhānd, Khāndamīr asserts that although it is reported that Yazīd became enraged with Shemr and his accomplices upon hearing of Ḥusain's death, this was simply an outward show of aggression feigned because the people were cursing Ḥusain's killers. Therefore, Yazīd sought to shift the blame for ordering Ḥusain's killing to Ebn-e Ziyād.[13]

For our discussion of the *taʿziyeh*, it is intriguing that none of the sympathetic portrayal of Yazīd reached the dramatists' depiction of these events. He does not feign the slightest remorse upon seeing Ḥusain's head. Later in the cycle they do treat Yazīd's repentance, and we do begin to see him feel remorse in *The Martyrdom of Rukaiyeh* (that can be played as an epilogue to *Bāzār-e Shām*). However, in the body of *Bāzār-e Shām* Yazīd is the antagonist par excellence, publicly revelling in the suffering of Ḥusain and his family.

In chapter 1 I showed that by the middle of the 11th/17th century we see the *taʿziyeh* tradition evolving towards its scripted form, and indeed, our earliest extant script, dating to 1136/1724, affirms that the tradition had taken root during the second half of the 17th century. By this time, Shiʿi rituals as large-scale public events were widespread, and included not only the performance of mourning for the martyrs, but also a tradition of the ritual cursing of their

11 Peacock, *Balʿamī's Tārīkhnāma*, 138.

12 Ibid., 139.

13 Khāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-siyār*, 2, 60.

enemies which included the first three Sunni caliphs, but in particular ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 12–23/ 634–44).[14] It thus appears that any inhibitions around the legitimacy or permissibility of giving a Sunni caliph a thoroughly negative portrayal had been long shaken off. The dramatists could do as they wished with Yazīd. Further to this, we must consider the form in which the stories of Karbala circulated at a popular level. It is most probable that during the early Safavid period, as these events were narrated by dervish storytellers, in a process similar to that described with regards to Shemr in chapter 5, Yazīd developed into an icon of his type, a merciless and sinful villain.

2 Skeleton of *Bāzār-e Shām* and Function of Its Sections

Although this episode can conclude with the death of Rukaiyeh as an epilogue, this is not strictly a martyrdom narrative and it does not conform to the "martyrdom composition-scheme" discussed in chapter 2 and relevant to the episodes analysed above. Unlike those episodes, there is no distinct forward momentum towards a particular event. It is composed of a string of short, relatively self-contained scenes that consistently feature either Yazīd or the Karbala captives interacting with a particularly diverse range of characters. I thus refrain from labelling the sections as belonging to an arch plot structure, which would be an artificial imposition. What can be said is that the theme of humiliation, eliciting a sense of outrage in the audience, runs throughout these scenes, culminating in Zain al-ʿĀbedīn confronting Yazīd and nearly being executed, a scene that is as close as the play comes to having a climax.

2.1 *Section 1 – Yazīd Awaits Word from Karbala*

Yazīd is introduced through a scene where he converses with his vizier, ʿAmr-e ʿĀṣ as he nervously awaits news from Karbala. He is shown to be afraid. In some renditions, at ʿAmr-e ʿĀṣ' advice Yazīd summons a scribe and dictates a letter to the commander(s) at Karbala, urging the drawing of blood.[15] In others, the caliph and vizier try bibliomancy with the Qur'an, but give up after a couple of attempts fail to bring the reassurance craved.[16] Yazīd is physically sick with anxiety as he waits for word from Karbala. Renditions from Nāṣer al-Dīn's reign

14 This included a ritual in which an effigy of ʿUmar was burned. For collated historical accounts of the symbolic performance of ʿUmar's killing in the late 1600s see Floor, *Theater*, 204–205.

15 Zand rendition; CP: MS 43; and MS 908.

16 Darbandsar rendition; CP: MS 43; MS 512; MS 661; and MS 908.

onwards commonly feature a European doctor being summoned to treat him: upon making his diagnosis, the doctor orders a long list of absurd ingredients to prepare a nonsense remedy;[17] Yazīd declares that his only remedy is wine and the blood of Ḥusain.

2.2 *Section 2 – News of Victory*

A messenger, or Shemr, enters with news that the deed is done, Ḥusain and his supporters have been killed, and his family taken captive.[18] Yazīd celebrates, ordering that the city be decorated, wine poured and music played. Renditions in which the news arrives in the form of a letter can include an orator reading it from the pulpit, and a singer lauding Yazīd's victory over Ḥusain.[19] Shemr is congratulated and rewarded. The celebratory atmosphere is in cynical contrast to Yazīd and Shemr's conversation in which Yazīd demands details of the slain. This is a lengthy dialogue, providing an opportunity to list the names of Ḥusain's broader group of supporters.[20] As the list progresses to his relatives and most prominent followers Yazīd wants to know how they were killed. Shemr obliges with graphic accounts. Designed to provoke outrage, in this scene not only do the audience relive the martyrdoms of their heroes but hear them recited with glee.[21] In the continuation of the chapter I will discuss how the versification of this section supports the portrayal of Yazīd as a blood-thirsty tyrant. Interestingly, through this and other accounts given by Shemr in this episode, we get the antagonists' perspective of what happened at Karbala.

2.3 *Section 3 – Captives Paraded through the Market*

The prisoners are humiliated at Yazīd's behest; with music and festivities, they are paraded through the market on camels, bare-headed and in chains, accompanied by the heads of their martyrs, atop spears. When they ask what the people are celebrating Shemr tells them that Yazīd has organised a party for them. Many townspeople throw stones at them. The family decry the injustice, asking Ḥusain's blood-dripping head to look upon their suffering. They beg fruitlessly for mercy on the grounds of being Muslims and the descendants of the Prophet. Different renditions of the play do have benevolent characters

17 Among my sample, only the Zand and Pelly renditions do not feature this scene.

18 In CP: 908 a slave who had been dispatched with Yazīd's letter meets Shemr and returns to bring the news.

19 Darbandsar rendition; CP: MS 512; and MS 661.

20 The Zand rendition includes only the close family members.

21 The Pelly rendition of events and CP: MS 662 omit this dialogue.

appear here. "*Zan-e Ṣāleḥ*" (the virtuous woman) comes offering bread (and water) to the captives, asking that they pray for her sick son.[22] An anonymous local girl asks Umm Lailā about Akbar's head, allowing her to tell their story. The girl fetches water and gives it to Sakīneh.[23] Sahl-e Sāʿedī, who had been a companion of the Prophet, approaches Zain al-ʿĀbedīn, and gives Zainab an old cloak with which to cover herself.[24] Unlike the refusals of help that we saw in the climactic episode, the family accept these gestures. In some renditions Zainab silences the market crowd and makes a lengthy speech decrying what has been done to them and stressing the importance of their bloodline.[25] The terrible procession ends with them being housed in a ruin.

2.4 *Section 4 – Hendeh Takes Pity on the Captives*

Many renditions of this episode now feature the arrival of the Īlchī Farangī. However, in some later versions the prisoners are now summoned to Yazīd's court and a *gūsheh* is played in which one of his wives, Hendeh, takes pity on them.[26] She too is summoned to court and, like the more privileged women of the *taʿziyeh* audience, she views the proceedings from behind a gauze curtain. A conversation with her aunt, or her *kanīz*, establishes that she is a supporter of Ḥusain; she is distressed to hear that the captives are from Medina. She feels sorry for Zainab and wants to go to her, but her companion persuades her to sit on a golden chair instead, allowing a harsh contrast in how these two women are treated. However, upon hearing Zainab lament and realising her identity Hendeh rushes out to her, bare-headed in solidarity. She is scolded by Yazīd for shaming him. He sends her to the *haram* (women's quarters) and flippantly orders that wine be brought instead.

2.5 *Section 5 – Arrival of the Īlchī Farangī*

A European ambassador enters and describes what he sees. He is astonished by the combination of festivities and lamentations and senses that something has gone terribly wrong. Horrified by the cruel treatment of the captives, he wonders as to their identity.[27] He arrives at court bearing an array of gifts, which

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22 CP: MS 43; MS 662; and MS 908. In MS 662 her intervention comes after the arrival of the European Ambassador, described below.

23 CP: MS 405.

24 CP: MS 43.

25 CP: MS 43; MS 908.

26 Darbandsar rendition; CP: MS 512; and MS 661. This character's name in Arabic is "Hend" but in Persian she is "Hendeh".

27 CP: MS 662 is unique amongst my sample in that during his entrance the European Ambassador converses with a member of his entourage (referred to as his vizier) who

Yazīd gladly accepts, and is seated on a throne next to the caliph's and poured a glass of wine. This is an example of the "Arrival of a Stranger" type-scene, in this case played out over the course of the episode.[28] During his entrance we have the initial elements of the scene as the foreigner observes the prisoners and the heads of the martyrs without knowing their identity. Whilst he is greatly dismayed by their desperate state, he is drawn to their resplendence, sensing their holy nature. As in other examples of this type-scene, his opening speech serves to narrate the tribulations of the family as seen from outside. At this point, he is a witness. His arrival, simultaneous with that of the captives, again creates a contrast. The foreigner is honoured: the family of the Prophet are degraded.

2.6 *Section 6 – Sakīneh a* Kanīz*?*

Yazīd summons his daughter to the court, she is honoured and seated beside him.[29] Her entrance brings Ḥusain's daughters to the centre of the action, providing a counterpoint to their fatherless and forlorn state. Yazīd has stichomythic conversations with Fāṭemeh-ye Ṣughrā and Sakīneh, in which he questions them and they recount their woes. He takes pity on Sakīneh and decides that he will make her his daughter's *kanīz*. The scene ends with Zainab (or Kulṡūm) speaking out against a child of the Prophet's line becoming a slave.[30] Sakīneh's fate still unresolved, Yazīd turns his attention turns to Zainab.[31] This section is brought to a close with Zainab making a defiant speech about her lineage and the women's role as intercessors, and decrying their mistreatment. There is always an allusion to her eloquence – a trait inherited from her father. She herself warns, in a manner not dissimilar to the male heroes' initial threats to their warrior opponents, that she has a tongue like *Ẕū-l-feqār* (her father's sword).[32] Yazīd retorts, at best, that he gave her brother ample chance to swear allegiance. But his more common response is to tell her to hold that tongue.

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explains what has happened at Karbala, including the divinely ordained nature of Ḥusain's mission.

28 See my discussion in chapter 2.

29 This scene is in all renditions amongst my sample except CP: MS 662. In MS 43 it is played after the identifying of the heads, and in MS 908 after Yazīd dishonouring Ḥusain's head (described below).

30 Kulṡūm in the Pelly rendition.

31 The Zand rendition includes elements of this scene that fell away through time, including Yazīd's daughter slapping Sakīneh and rallying the children of Damascus to throw stones at her, and it being Shemr to whom Yazīd promises Sakīneh as a slave. This scene was likely inspired by certain historical sources that record a Damascene man having sought ownership of Fāṭemeh-ye Ṣughrā. Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, 171; Mufīd, *Irshād*, 342–43.

32 Zand and Pelly renditions.

2.7 *Section 7 – Identifying the Heads: Ten Blows Decapitate Ḥusain*

Yazīd calls for the heads of the martyrs to be brought forth for display. This scene provokes lament and outrage afresh. He eagerly inspects the heads, as if for entertainment, with Shemr happily confirming their identities.[33] This is a chance to list, again, the names of the martyrs. As Yazīd goes through them he becomes agitated, fearing that Ḥusain's head is missing. Then, Shemr has it brought in on a silver platter.

Yazīd demands to hear of Ḥusain's murder, in particular the removal of his head. Shemr recounts using a *sāṭūr* (meat cleaver), insinuating that Ḥusain was butchered like an animal. Furthermore, Shemr tells of how it took ten blows to sever his head and of Ḥusain making an utterance with each one. The dramatists take full advantage of the distressing potential of these strikes, making each one deal a literal blow to the audience.[34] With the first few Ḥusain called out the names of his family members, on the ninth he uttered, "God forgive my people" and on the tenth, he begged for a drop of water. "Did you give him some?" asks Yazīd. "No," Shemr replies, "I kicked him in the mouth with my boot." Shemr recounts that Ḥusain then expired, and the ground and heavens trembled. Yazīd orders more wine.

2.8 *Section 8 – Yazīd Defiles Ḥusain's Head: Zain al-ʿĀbedīn Speaks Out*

Yazīd gloats over his victory and dishonours Ḥusain by pouring wine into his mouth and hitting it with a wooden stick. The family cry out in objection. In some renditions Ḥusain's head starts to sing, making a short Qur'anic recitation and then comforting Sakīneh and Zainab.[35] Zain al-ʿĀbedīn confronts Yazīd, saying that his hands should be cut off. Yazīd tries to silence him but he is undeterred, proudly alluding to his prophetic ancestry. Yazīd demands that Zain al-ʿĀbedīn acknowledge him as the rightful leader. He refuses, saying that in killing Ḥusain Yazīd has done far more than he understands. He asserts the purity of his own lineage and calls Yazīd the seed of adultery, in response to which Yazīd calls for the executioner – enter Shemr.

As Zain al-ʿĀbedīn bids his family farewell Zainab calls to the Muslims present: will no one come to their aid? She finally turns to the Īlchī Farangī. During

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33 Before Yazīd surveying the heads a *faqareh* featuring Ṣudaif, Akbar's slave blinded by grief, can be played. He mourns, chastises Yazīd and demands an end to the captives' mistreatment. CP: MS 662 and MS 43.

34 Such was the effect of this scene as I witnessed it in performance. For *Bāzār-e Shām* in performance see Deacon, "*Taʿziyeh-khani* in Iranian Communities," 175–76.

35 This singing features in CP: MS 662 and Pelly's "Conversion and Murder of the Ambassador from Europe". The initial verses concern the story of The Companions of the Cave. For commentary see Pelly, *Miracle Play*, 2, 233.

this speech she strikes her own head with a stone in grief.[36] In some renditions it is Sakīneh and Fāṭemeh-ye Ṣughrā who speak these lines and go to the foreigner for help,[37] in others he intervenes of his own accord.[38] This is a highly emotive scene, demonstrating the heroism of all family members and inciting a feeling of guilt in the Muslim audience.

2.9 *Section 9 – Ambassador's Intervention and the Appearance of ʿAlī*

The ambassador denounces what a Muslim king is doing to his fellow Muslims, appealing fruitlessly to Shemr and then Yazīd. Zainab desperately implores Yazīd to show mercy; she calls to her father for help. As Shemr wields his dagger in readiness, ʿAlī's ghost appears and orders him to stop. This is an example of the "Apparition from Beyond the Grave" type-scene (but with a significant variation that I will go on to discuss).[39] Shemr is terrified and tells Yazīd that Ḥaidar (ʿAlī), holding *Ẕū-l-feqār*, appeared from the direction of the *qeblah*, and that he shook so much that he dropped his dagger.[40] Yazīd hisses at him to be quiet and not dare say such a scandalous thing in public.[41] Attention then shifts back to the Īlchī, who is drawn to Ḥusain's head and wondering at a prophetic identity. As Yazīd informs him that this is Ḥusain b. ʿAlī there is a distinct shift in tempo and in the ambassador's manner, as he begins to tell a story.

2.10 *Section 10 – Īlchī Farangī as a Storyteller, His Conversion (and Martyrdom).*

The foreigner recounts that, once upon a time, when serving as an envoy for "*Yūḥannā-Shāh*" (a fictional "King John"), he went to Medina to meet Muḥammad and saw Ḥusain as a child. He tells various stories of Ḥusain's childhood that affirm his exceptionalness, his closeness to God, and the predestined nature of his martyrdom. This is a curious interlude, with the ambassador

36 Her script mentions this and Berezin reports the *Zainab-khān* in Tehran performing the action. Bérézine, *Voyage*, 259.

37 Darbandsar rendition and CP: MS 661. In CP: MS 405, the women of the family act as a chorus in Zainab's appeal.

38 CP: MS 43; and MS 908.

39 The ambassador's intervention and ʿAlī's apparition feature in all renditions among my sample, except CP: MS 405 that omits the apparition.

40 In the Zand rendition Shemr reports Muḥammad appearing from one direction (the *qeblah*) and ʿAlī from another. In the Darbandsar rendition he simply cites the apparition of a masked figure.

41 In Pelly's collection, the episode "Arrival of Husain's Family at Damascus", which has corresponded closely with the content of *Bāzār-e Shām* until this point, ends after the apparition of ʿAlī. His subsequent episode "Conversion and Murder of the Ambassador from Europe" covers the remainder of *Bāzār-e Shām*'s narrative.

taking on the function of a storyteller. The digression ends with him cursing Yazīd for what he has done and Yazīd ordering his execution. The play then rapidly closes with the foreigner (at his own request) being converted to Islam by Zain al-ʿĀbedīn. It is then intimated that he is executed. Importantly, mirroring Ḥusain, his last wish is for water. In the ambassador's case it is granted, constituting a further call for indignation as a foreigner is given what Ḥusain was denied.

2.11 (*Section 11 – Martyrdom of Ruqaiyeh*)

It is relatively common for a *gūsheh* concerning Ḥusain's young daughter Ruqaiyeh to be played as an epilogue.[42] Yazīd orders that Ḥusain's head be taken to the ruins, that his grieving daughter might see it. Ruqaiyeh converses with her father's head, recounting the hardship she has suffered on their journey, beatings, humiliation, hunger, thirst and the threat of being sold as a slave. She asks if he knows, if he can see. She then expires with grief. Zainab and Zain al-ʿĀbedīn mourn for her and lay out her body, her feet towards the *qeblah.* Shemr tells Yazīd that the child has died and for the first time expresses regret, also rebuking Yazīd for his cruelty. Yazīd sorrows too and orders that a washer of the dead bathe Ruqaiyeh's body, that she be shown respect in death.[43] As the washerwoman looks over the girl's body, she questions Zainab about how she sustained each injury, acting as a witness to Ruqaiyeh's mistreatment. The scene closes with Zainab, sometimes accompanied by the family, calling to Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā to help them, and decrying the cruelty of fate.[44]

3 Diplomacy through the *Taʿziyeh* Lens: The European Ambassador

3.1 *Tracing His Story*

As I have mentioned, the *taʿziyeh* character Īlchī Farangī reflects a Byzantine ambassador, present at Yazīd's court and sympathetic to the Karbala captives, who is described in certain manuscript versions of Balʿamī's *Tārīkh-nāmeh-ye*

42 Darbandsar rendition, CP: MS 512; MS 661; and the Pelly Collection's "The Death of Rukayyah".

43 In CP: MS 512 he also orders her burial; in MS 661 he sends flowers for her body.

44 The Pelly rendition of Ruqaiyeh's death is more elaborate. It omits the washerwoman but includes Yazīd's daughter who first taunts the prisoners but then takes pity on Ruqaiyeh, bringing her Ḥusain's head. Yazīd's daughter is likely to have featured in other renditions of this scene. In CP: MS 661 she makes a last interjection, mourning Ruqaiyeh's death.

Ṭabarī, one of which dates to the 6th/12th century.[45] This is a fascinating example of an old and little-known story being conserved in the *taʿziyeh*. This character is not present in the other historical sources used in this study. Peacock comments that he has not been able to trace the scene involving this figure to other early sources, but acknowledges its presence in the *taʿziyeh*. He states that this character was not introduced to the *taʿziyeh* until the 19th century. This should be revised to the mid-18th century (at latest): the ambassador is mentioned in Carsten Niebuhr's spectator account of a *taʿziyeh* performed by the Shiʿa of Kharq Island in 1179/1765 (discussed in chapter 1), and the Zand rendition of *Bāzār-e Shām* includes a script for the ambassador from 1184/1770–71.[46] Comparison with later renditions of the play show that the content of the scene involving this character remained stable from that point onwards. Thus, although interaction with European visitors was a prominent feature of the reign of the Qajars, this scene bears the influence of an earlier period.

A Byzantine ambassador at Yazīd's court does feature in Kāshefī's *Rawżat* but the story told about him differs markedly from that in the *taʿziyeh* which, intriguingly, is closer to the Balʿamī version. Balʿamī records the Byzantine speaking out against Yazīd's abhorrent treatment of his Prophet's grandson, then converting to Islam and being executed. In Kāshefī's rendition the foreigner does chastise Yazīd but does not convert in this scene: in fact, he tells Yazīd that he had already converted to Islam decades earlier after meeting Muḥammad in Medina, and he and his family have been living secretly as Muslims ever since.[47] Yazīd does become furious, but simply ejects the ambassador from his court rather than ordering his execution, expressing frustration that he cannot punish an envoy of Caesar's. The *taʿziyeh* does borrow the idea of the ambassador having visited Muḥammad in Medina, but the dramatists elected to have him convert on meeting the Karbala survivors, and usually close the scene with his execution. They thus follow the plot of the older narrative, transmitted by Balʿamī, which indicates that they received this story from a source additional to Kāshefī. Their electing to recount this version of events may well have been because it better fitted the format that they customarily applied to treating the interactions of benevolent foreigners with the *ahl-e bait* and their kin: the stranger becoming overwhelmed by their presence to the

45 Peacock, *Balʿamī's Tārīkhnāma*, 139. For the details and dating of these manuscripts see footnote 11 of this chapter.

46 Niebuhr, *Reisebeschreibung*, 2, 199–201; Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 11*, 17–82.

47 Kāshefī Sabzevārī, *Rawżat*, 508–09.

FIGURE 10 Performer playing the European Ambassador, Garmaseh, Isfahan Province, 13th Muḥarram 1439/2017

extent of converting and sacrificing himself for them – the Arrival of a Stranger type-scene.

Whatever the source, in their interpretation of this character the dramatists brought him into their own time. They modernised his story. A Byzantine ambassador visiting Yazīd's court was not historically implausible: in fact, Syria had been taken from the Byzantines during the Muslim conquests of the 630s, but the *taʿziyeh* dramatists were not historians. Whilst Kāshefī was clear that he was Byzantine, in their imagining of this foreign envoy they made of him a European, the type who visited Iran during the Safavid, Zand and Qajar periods. They turned him into a recognisable character of their own time and in doing so give us a glimpse of the composers' impression of "the European".

3.2 *Modernising the Foreigner*

The modernisation of the Īlchī Farangī is perhaps most evident in his dress. The memoires of European visitors to Iran include numerous accounts of their clothes being borrowed to costume this character. This practice had clearly already begun by the time of Niebuhr's spectator account: he describes the ambassador as dressed in European clothes and a gilded hat (a minor flaw being that he lacked socks). In this case Niebuhr does know that the character is supposed to be a Byzantine; he calls him a Greek, and comments on the

incongruence of this identity with his attire.[48] In his account of visiting Iran in 1835–36 Lieutenant Charles Stuart speaks of *taʿziyeh*, discusses the European Ambassador's conversion and martyrdom, and tells of lending clothes to costume this character. Cocked hats were particularly in demand for costuming foreigners, and he recalls that in the year in question the ambassador would be appearing in "the uniform of His Majesty's 4th Light Dragoons".[49] Captain Richard Wilbraham was again asked to lend elements of his uniform, and his chairs as props, for a performance of *Bāzār-e Shām* in 1254/1838.[50] There are many such accounts.

The idea of the ambassador being Byzantine appears to have been dropped relatively quickly in the *taʿziyeh* context. Whereas in Kāshefī's *Rawżat* he is the envoy of "*Qaiṣar-e Rūm*" (the Caesar of Rome, or Byzantium),[51] in the *taʿziyeh* scripts he consistently describes himself as representing *Pādeshāh-he Farang*, the "King of Europe". This is also attested by spectators. In Francklin's 1202/1787 account from Shiraz he is described as "an Ambassador from one of the European States".[52] Stuart and Wilbraham, who lent their uniforms for this character, certainly saw him as European. Sheil uses her own initiative whilst spectating in Tehran in 1266/1849 to deduce that he must have originally been "a Greek" but tells of how "with immense contempt of chronology" he is generally referred to as the "Elchee Inglees" (English Ambassador).[53] By contrast Carla Serena, spectating at Tekiyeh Dawlat in 1295/1878, describes him as French.[54] The exact nature of his European identity was not important; he was a representative of his kind – the Western visitor. This appears to have been understood by the audience. Spectating in 1259/1843, Berezin tells of how the women in the *tekiyeh* often looked towards the loge where he and other foreigners were sitting when the ambassador was speaking.[55]

Indeed, not only his dress but the foreigner's speech and material offerings to Yazīd portray him as a European of the composers' own time. From our earliest example of the script, despite using Persian verse to describe what he sees as he enters, the ambassador's initial address to Yazīd is in a sort of gibberish, showing the composers' impression of the incomprehensibility of his tongue. This gibberish contains a mix of languages and nonsense words but with just

48 Niebuhr, *Reisebeschreibung*, 2, 200–01.

49 Charles Stuart, *Journal of a Residence in Northern Persia and the Adjacent Provinces of Turkey in 1835–36* (London: Richard Bentley, 1854), 295–96.

50 Calmard, "Ceremonies and Diplomacy," 217.

51 Kāshefī Sabzevārī, *Rawżat*, 508.

52 Francklin, *Observations*, 99.

53 Sheil, *Glimpses*, 126.

54 Serena, *Hommes et choses*, 193.

55 Bérézine, *Voyage*, 261.

enough Persian to indicate the topic, and to bring certain ideas to mind. We see this in the following example of the ambassador's greeting, from the Zand rendition, which includes the words "*farang*" (Europe) and "*barāye Yazīd*" (for Yazīd): the words "*yaqmā*" (plunder or booty), "*kām*" (palate), "*gelū*" (throat),[56] and "*rabūs*" (glutton) contained within the lines are possibly deliberate allusions to Yazīd's unchivalrous and debauched character.

فرنگی:
اجاق چونق چقی یزید اجفاری
اچل چاچی میر فرنگ یغماری
کام کلوس کال مفی ربوس رفتی
قنقیس قنقیس کاس من یاس حدس
حدس ولی واپس ورمینا از برای یزید[57]

Whilst this version of the greeting from the Zand period contains elements of Arabic and Persian (possibly Turkish too if we count the loan word *yaqmā*), later versions of this nonsense greeting, from the late 19th century and beyond, also include French, showing the diversification in the foreign influences of the composers' surroundings. In such renditions the ambassador ends his gibberish greeting with:

فرنگی:
بانژور موسیو یزید[58]

European [Ambassador]: *Bonjour Monsieur Yazīd.*

Thus, he is no longer a Byzantine but, on this occasion, a Frenchman.
Yazīd replies:

یزید:
مگو زبان فرنگی بگو زبان دگر   که واضحم بشود ای جوان نیک‌سیر[59]

Yazīd: *O virtuous young man, do not speak that foreign tongue! Speak another language that will be clear to me.*

56 If we are to read the *kaf* at the beginning of the second word in the third line as a *gaf*.
57 Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 11*, 43.
58 CP: MS 661. In MS 512 and the Darbandsar rendition he also says "Bonjour Monsieur".
59 CP: MS 43; MS 662; MS 908; and (with some variation) MS 405; MS 512; MS 661; and the Darbandsar rendition.

The ambassador responds in Persian and offers an array of gifts. The modern nature of certain items separates this character from his Byzantine origins.

فرنگی:
سلام من به تو ای پادشاه بافرهنگ منم یکی ز وزیران پادشاه فرنگ
قلیل پیشکش داده پادشاه فرنگ ز من قبول کن این تحفه های رنگارنگ
دو دوربین دو ساعت دو قبضه شمشیر برای پیشکش ای امیر خیبرگیر[60]

> Foreigner: *O cultured king, my greetings to you. I am one of the ministers of the King of Europe. The King of Europe has made you a humble offering. Accept these various gifts from me, two telescopes* (or cameras),[61] *two wristwatches and two scabbards are proffered O prince, conqueror of the Khaibar*.[62]

The succinct offering of telescopes (or cameras), watches and scabbards that we see in the quotation above feature frequently across my sample of renditions of the play, perhaps owing to what appears to have been a relative standardisation of the verse at this section.[63] Certain other scripts have him offer gifts in vast numbers: in the Zand period version he offers 1000 cannons and muskets, 1000 slave children, 1000 [gold and jewel] encrusted swords, sugar, jewels and scents, 1000 full purses of gold, 1000 weights of satin and the same of brocade; Cerulli MS 405 (Mazandaran, late 19th cent.) has him offer watches and scabbards, not two, but 400 of each, along with vast numbers of other gifts including horses, pearls, fabrics and weapons. Interestingly, in this version the ambassador says that his king would offer military support against Yazīd's enemies should he need it.

Indeed, the characterisation of the ambassador has strong military overtones. Whilst some of his gifts, such as the pearls and textiles, are goods that

60 CP: MS 43. In the manuscript پادشاه is written پاده شاه and پیشکش as پیش کش.

61 The word *dūrbīn* denotes a camera in modern Persian but, while the camera did arrive in Iran during Nāṣer al-Dīn's Shāh's reign it is probable that the composers intended the older meaning – telescope. However, we cannot rule out their awareness of the camera having arrived from Europe. Many photographs were taken of performances at Tekiyeh-ye Dawlat, and the performers themselves posed for the photographers. See, for example, "Performers of Ta'ziyah" *Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran*, available online at: http://www.qajarwomen.org/en/items/15156A99.html (accessed June 17th, 2024).

62 He alludes to the triumph in battle of the early Muslim community over the Jews of the oasis of Khaibar.

63 The couplets in which these gifts are proffered, feature not only in CP: MS 43 but (with minor variations) in MS 512; MS 662; MS 908; and the Darbandsar rendition.

may have been being brought to Iran from South Asia by traders, weapons and gadgets feature most consistently amongst these offerings, with firearms being a relatively common element.[64] In the Zand rendition shots are fired to announce his arrival. Berezin describes military style music being played as the ambassador approaches and his procession of gifts including ten trays, a pair of pistols (or another arm) on each.[65] Sheil, whose husband's clothes were borrowed for this character, tells of how "the costume of his Excellency should be European and military."[66]

The combination of the foreigner's attire and gifts with the dialogue of his initial meeting with Yazīd not only pull him distinctively into the composers' time of writing, but also give an idea of the composers' perception of what European visitors had to offer: in the foreigner modernised we see a military man, speaking a strange tongue, bringing gadgets and firepower. Whilst naturalistic portrayal is not usually a concern for the *taʿziyeh* players, the picture that they paint here is, perhaps, not unrealistic. There is a remarkable similarity between the gifts offered by the Īlchī Farangī, and those described by William Ouseley who recounts having delivered gifts to Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shāh Qājār when acting as an envoy for the British Ambassador – including telescopes, wrist watches, and guns.[67]

Given that the ambassador, who is very positively portrayed, came so much to resemble a foreign visitor of the period contemporary to the performances – performances attended by many foreign visitors – one wonders at the reception to this story, and its political significance. Indeed, it has been suggested by Calmard that performances of *Bāzār-e Shām* ceased during two periods of the Qajar dynasty's reign, when relations with European visitors became strained.[68] The first of these periods covers the latter years of the reign of Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shāh (d. 1250/1834), and the aftermath of Iran's military defeat by the Russians and the treaties of Gulistan (1228/1813) and Turkamanchay (1243/1828) that saw heavy territorial losses and major economic and political concessions on the Iranian side. The second period was the 1860s, when foreign diplomats' attendance at *taʿziyeh* was prohibited by an edict, issued in 1271/1855, which appears to have aimed to quell domestic political tensions, particularly the grievances of the *ʿulamāʾ* (Muslim clerics, scholars and jurists).[69] The edict was

64 Firearms feature in the Zand rendition; CP: MS 662; MS 405; and MS 908.
65 Bérézine, *Voyage*, 257.
66 Sheil, *Glimpses*, 126.
67 Ouseley, *Travels*, 172.
68 Calmard, "Ceremonies and Diplomacy," 215–23.
69 Ibid., 220–22.

relaxed by the late 1880s: many foreigners did attend the performances during the interim period, although perhaps not by official invitation.

Calmard's suggestion that the character of the Īlchī Farangī found a more or less favourable reception depending on the political climate, seems reasonable, but the evidence upon which he bases the assertion about the two periods in question is flawed. His conclusion with regards to the 1820s–30s rests on the assumption that the collection of plays that Chodzko purchased in Tehran in 1249/1833 represented a sort of official repertoire during the last years of the reign of Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shāh. Calmard finds it highly significant that *Bāzār-e Shām* is not included. It is true that the manuscript does include most of the prominent Karbala martyrdom narratives in chronological order. However, it does not feature the arrival of the captives in Kufa or Damascus: not only does the Īlchī Farangī not feature, neither does Yazīd. This would be significant if we were to draw conclusions based on the idea of this being an official repertoire; but there is not much reason to believe it was. While the collection features many important episodes, it also features one fragment and two renditions of two particular plays, so it is better to see the contents of the manuscript as a selection of the plays in the possession of Ḥusain ʿAlī Khān (the director from whom Chodzko made his purchase).[70] If we are to read anything into why he did not include *Bāzār-e Shām*, he may have politely omitted to sell his foreign envoy customer a play in which a foreign envoy is executed. Furthermore, despite not owning a copy of the script of *Bāzār-e Shām*, Chodzko had seen the episode. In the introduction to his French translation of certain plays from his manuscript, while discussing the welcome of Europeans at the *tekiyeh*, he mentions the scene involving the European Ambassador.[71]

There is further firm evidence against the case for *Bāzār-e Shām* having fallen out of fashion during the 1860s. Calmard claims that in the 1860s the story of "La fille chrétienne" (*Majles-e zan-e naṣrānī*) eclipsed the episode featuring the European Ambassador as an important play foregrounding a Christian character.[72] The only source given here is Gobineau's spectator account, but, while Gobineau does give a detailed description of a performance of *Majles-e zan-e naṣrānī*, nowhere does he say that it became more popular than *Bāzār-e Shām*: furthermore, whilst not mentioning it by name, he does indeed discuss

70 Entry 17 is an untitled 19-couplet fragment concerning a letter being sent to Ebn-e Ziyād in Kufa. Entries number 14 and 15 are both versions of *Rāh gum kardan-e Emām Ḥusain* (Imam Ḥusain Loses his Way) and entries 32 and 34 are both versions of *Majles-e dairānī-ye farangī* (The European Monk).

71 Chodzko, *Théatre persan*, xxiii.

72 Calmard, "Ceremonies and Diplomacy," 221.

Bāzār-e Shām, mentioning the European Ambassador's sympathy, Yazīd's mistreatment of the captives and other key narrative details.[73] Gobineau was certainly familiar with the contents of *Bāzār-e Shām*, indicating that it was indeed being played during his stay in Iran (between the mid-1850s and mid-1860s).

The reception of the foreign ambassador character is an intriguing topic. Calmard raises the important question, but further research is needed before conclusions can be drawn. It may well be that, despite him wearing the garb of a contemporary European visitor, the *taʿziyeh* audience's relationship with this character ran deeper than their perceptions of 19th century Europeans. Certainly the scripts do not satirise or lampoon the ambassador. This, as we will see below, is in contrast to the scene involving the foreign doctor.

3.3 *The Foreigner as a Narrator and Storyteller: Ḥusain's Childhood Recounted*

Modernisation aside, a further and somewhat surprising way in which the *taʿziyeh* dramatists added new levels to the character of the Īlchī Farangī was by giving him a distinct narrator function. To an extent, this is in keeping with the "Arrival of a Stranger" type-scene that gives the format to the *taʿziyeh* treatment of his story, the "stranger" always initially assuming a narrator's voice. Here we will see the importance of this initial presentation but, also, how later in the play the dramatists press this function in a curious way that is quite unique to this episode.

The captives are marched through the market onstage, but it is the words of the foreigner that fully communicate the disturbing cruelty of the scene.

فرنگی:
باز این چه اخگر در سینه پیداست　　باز این چه آزار در دل هویداست
از دشنه غم پشت زحل خم　　شمشیر ماتم بر فرق جوزاست
قومی بگلشن مزمار و دف‌زن　　جمعی بسرزن با شور و غوغا است
باشد همانا زین کوس و کرنا　　یا عید نوروز یا عید اضحا است[74]

Foreigner: *What are these embers I find glowing in my chest? What is this vexation apparent in my heart? The poignard of sadness has doubled Saturn's back. The sword of grief is upon Gemini's head. One group are in a flower garden playing flute and drum: another party beat their heads*

73 Gobineau, *Les religions*, 442–44.

74 CP: MS 661. A version of this entrance speech, with much overlap in verse, features in all of the renditions of the play among my sample. The above are short extracts, it is typically around 20 couplets long.

in passionate uproar. For drums and horns it looks as if it were Nowrūz (Persian New Year), *or ʿĪd-e ʾAżḥā* (Eid al-Adha).[75]

یا رب کیانند این خیل خوبان	بسته به زنجیر از فرق تا پا
یا رب نباشند اینها نصارا	کز دیدنشان رفت از تن اعضا
ایداد و بیداد از دست جلاد	کین سروران افکنده از پا[76]

Foreigner: *O Lord, who are this cavalcade of good people bound in chains from head to toe!?*[77] *O Lord, let them not be Christians, for to see them shakes one's very organs* [literally, causes them to leave the body]. *Woe the injustice of the executioner who struck these princes from their feet!*

He goes on to describe the heads of the key protagonists, Ḥusain, Akbar, Qāsem, Aṣghar and ʿAbbās – their beauty and the suffering evident in their faces, and he senses their tender relationships with the womenfolk. Apart from his preoccupation that the captives are not Christians, the ambassador's own identity is secondary when performing this part of his role.

Later in the play, after Zain al-ʿĀbedīn has narrowly escaped execution, the ambassador becomes a narrator once more, initially picking up from his opening speech, but this time going much further. Crying, he stares in awe at Ḥusain's head; he recognises holiness and considers the different Abrahamic prophets to whom the head may belong. He becomes angry at Yazīd: how could he have treated these people in a way that no unbeliever would treat an unbeliever? He demands to know the head's identity. When told it is Ḥusain, the European has the strongest reaction, at which Yazīd demands to know their connection. In answering, the European adopts the *baḥr-e ṭavīl* form: the change of metre marks a change in the ambassador's role as he goes beyond simply narrating what he sees and becomes a storyteller, narrating episodes from the distant past. Whilst he initially features in the story that he tells, his own character is temporarily overtaken by his function as a bard, or more precisely, a *naqqāl*.

75 Mention of *Nowrūz*, telling of the Persianate environment within which the dramatists worked, is not unique to the ambassador. In CP: MS 662 Sakīneh asks Zainab the cause of the festivities as they are led through the market, she answers that the people of Shām are celebrating Ḥusain's killing as if it were *Nowrūz*.

76 CP: MS 661. The word اعضا is spelled ازا in the manuscript.

77 I translate the word کیانند as "… who are they?". However, given that the foreigner wonders at the captives' majestic resplendence (and the allusions elsewhere to the epics) there is also a chance that it should be read "… are they Kayanians?", referring to the ancient line of Persian kings.

He recounts having met Muḥammad in Medina when sent as an envoy for *Yūḥannā-Shāh*. He describes Ḥusain as a resplendent child, and records that, crying and kissing the boy's neck, Muḥammad told him how Ḥusain's head would be cruelly taken at Karbala. Asking who would be responsible, the ambassador was told "Yazīd". He berates Yazīd for not comprehending Ḥusain's identity, and says he will tell him something to make him understand. He then narrates a series of stories – to all intents and purposes, embedded narratives. We have not seen anything like this scene in the episodes discussed up until now.

The ambassador as a storyteller at this point features in all renditions of the play among my sample. The stories told vary somewhat; however, they all show Ḥusain as chosen by God, and adored by Muḥammad and indeed the whole of creation. One of the most commonly recited stories concerns a gazelle. One day, a fawn gets caught in a hunter's trap: the hunter gives it to Muḥammad who gives it to Ḥasan, and when Ḥusain sees Ḥasan's fawn he goes to his grandfather (in the mosque), cries and says that he also wants a fawn. Such is his distress that Muḥammad goes to the mother gazelle, tells it of Ḥusain's identity and his tears, and asks it for a fawn for Ḥusain. The gazelle brings another fawn to the al-Aqṣā Mosque.[78]

A further story, commonly repeated across renditions of this scene, is of Muḥammad and the boy Ḥusain travelling together to a house where they will be guests. A cloud appears and rains down fire and water. Ḥusain tries to go to his mother. Afraid of harm coming to him the Prophet turns his face to the sky and asks the Almighty to stop the rain.[79] There are also stories about Ḥusain's birth being honoured by angels, and of Muḥammad receiving news of Ḥusain's divinely ordained mission. For example, the Zand rendition includes the story of Fuṭrus, the once fallen angel (mentioned in chapter 5), who was pardoned by God and whose wings were restored upon Ḥusain's birth. Throughout these stories, in place of Ḥusain's name, the ambassador/storyteller frequently refers to "the owner of this head". This prevents the audience from becoming absorbed in the narrated world of Ḥusain's childhood, instead causing them to remember, at once, the resplendent child and his cruel death. The storytelling interlude is brought to a close by the end of the *baḥr-e ṭavīl*.

As an outsider the European has a particular narrative viewpoint, but it is curious that the *farangī* – with his pistols and wristwatches – is the one who knows Ḥusain's childhood anecdotes; a seemingly unlikely vehicle, the

78 The Zand and Darbandsar renditions; CP: MS 43; MS 512; MS 662; and MS 908.

79 CP: MS 661.

composers use him to insert the narratives about Ḥusain that are likely to have been recounted by the storytellers. Indeed, in chapter 2 I discussed how the storytelling practices present in the environment of the emergent *taʿziyeh* tradition influenced the structure of the plays themselves. Whilst broadly following the detail of the main events at Karbala as they had received it, we have seen that the dramatists included many shorter stories, *gūsheh-hā*, within the episodes. Like the sections of narrative material that form a storyteller's repertoire, these *gūsheh-hā* can be added to extend the performance, or omitted if need be.[80] In the role assumed by the European, we catch a glimpse of the storytellers who were part of the environment in which the *taʿziyeh* took shape.

There is also a possible direct allusion to these storytellers when the European begins his narration of Ḥusain's past with "*be-shenū*" (Hear!), a formula used by professional storytellers to indicate the opening of a new narrative chapter.[81] Furthermore, the story of the fawn exists as an independent sub-episode among the Zand collection, and features the *takhalluṣ* of the composer Nāṭeq.[82] As I have discussed above, Nāṭeq is said to have been a *sukhanvarī* participant, thus meaning that he belonged to the ʿAjam dervish order, who specialised in religious storytelling. The story of the fawn is likely to have been part of their repertoire.

It should, however, be noted that giving this role to the ambassador was not entirely a *taʿziyeh* innovation. Whilst the dramatists crafted the scene, using the shift into *baḥr-e ṭavīl* to separate it from the rest of the play's action, in Kāshefī's account of the Byzantine ambassador's encounter with Yazīd he also tells a story from Ḥusain's childhood. Unlike in the *taʿziyeh*, he does not tell story after story, but only one single story. While the only rendition of *Bāzār-e Shām* amongst my sample to feature this particular story is the Pelly translation,[83] the European Ambassador as a storyteller is surely rooted in Kāshefī's treatment of the Byzantine, albeit rendered an anachronism by his 18th–19th

80 Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī, *Mabānī-ye shabīh-khānī*, 46–52; Nāṣerbakht, *Adabiyāt-e īrānī*, 231–36.

81 Ulrich Marzolph, "A Treasury of Formulaic Narrative: The Persian Popular Romance Hosein-e Kord," *Oral Tradition* 14, no. 2 (1999): 287–88.

82 For the play with an opening note from the editors see Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 11*, 117–46.

83 The Pelly translation is also unique amongst my sample of renditions of *Bāzār-e Shām* in showing, in another way, a direct link to Kāshefī's version of events. Kāshefī gives the ambassador's name as ʿAbd al-Shams and that he was renamed ʿAbd al-Vahhāb by Muḥammad. On a single occasion Pelly labels the ambassador's interjection as "ʿAbd al-Shams, the Emperor's envoy", noting that there is nothing in the text to further identify this figure. Pelly, *Miracle Play*, 2, 224.

century depiction, and the scene elaborated to incorporate a variety of stories familiar to the composers.

4 Technical Anomalies

4.1 *Variation of the Type-Scene as a Dramatic Device*

In this episode we see an example of a further important compositional phenomenon. A type-scene, a structure with which the audience will be familiar, diverges significantly from its usual format to communicate the exceptional nature of a situation. I do not mean to suggest that the *taʿziyeh* audience would have recognised a type-scene as a compositional technique, but they would have been familiar with certain scenarios that recurred in the plays of the repertoire, and would have built up expectations of how they would unfold. Variation of the elements of a type-scene as a subtle means of communicating a message to a well-versed audience is a phenomenon identified by Robert Alter (discussed in chapter 2). The *taʿziyeh* audience were certainly well-versed: participation, year after year, would have forged a strong understanding among composers, performers, and audience. I have already argued for the intensity of this relationship being such that the audience had a major influence on the development of the central episodes. With reference to my current point what is important is that the conditions were ideal for the setting of conventions that when broken would create a strong impression.

In *Bāzār-e Shām* we see the conventions of a type-scene broken in the apparition of the ghost of ʿAlī and his frightening Shemr into dropping his knife, thus preventing Zain al-ʿĀbedīn's execution. This is an example of the "Apparition from Beyond the Grave" type-scene, of which we have seen other instances in the episodes discussed above. Normally, the visitor offers comfort and mourns with the hero or heroine, but no matter how drastic the situation, does not intervene to alter the course of events. For example, when Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā appears to the dying Ḥusain, she does not attempt to save his life; rather, she laments, provides moral support and then disappears, leaving him to Shemr's knife. Likewise, when we saw ʿAlī appear before ʿAbbās in the latter's martyrdom episode, he did not bring water to save his son from his fateful raid on the Euphrates, instead simply offering reassurance. Such is the pattern of this type-scene. However, in this episode that convention is broken by ʿAlī acting to save Zain al-ʿĀbedīn. This break from the familiar highlights the vital importance of this moment. Zain al-ʿĀbedīn is Ḥusain's only remaining son. Were he to be executed, the light of the imamate would be extinguished. The gravity of such an eventuality is emphasized in ʿAlī's own words to Shemr:

FIGURE 11 The Family of the Prophet enter Yazīd's Court, painting on tile, anonymous artist, Tekiyeh-ye Muʿāven al-Mulk, Kermanshah

علی غائب:

مکش مکش که سماوات سرنگون گردد　　مکُش مکُش که دل اهل بیت خون گردد

مکش مکش که غریبند خواهران حسین　　مکش مکش که صغیرند دختران حسین[84]

Ghost of Alī: *Do not kill, for the heavens will be brought down! Do not kill, for the heart*[s] *of the ahl-e bait will be turned to blood. Do not kill, for Ḥusain's sisters are strangers* [in a foreign land]*! Do not kill, for Ḥusain's daughters are small!*

84 CP: MS 512. The same couplets with minor variations appear in all of the versions of this scene amongst my sample.

The idea of the heavens being brought down expresses the unthinkable situation of the world being without a living Imam, something that cannot be allowed to happen – and this necessitates intervention.

Whilst Shemr is frightened into dropping his dagger, ʿAlī's exchange with his grandson follows the usual format of such apparitions. They have a short conversation in which Zain al-ʿĀbedīn asks his grandfather to look upon his sorry state, broken and enchained, in response to which ʿAlī reassures him that his suffering is necessary for them to intercede for the sins of the community on the Day of Judgement. As a whole, the scene makes clear that while Zain al-ʿĀbedīn's suffering is part of a grand celestial plan, it is not yet time for his martyrdom. That had to be prevented at all costs.

The breaking of the conventions of this type-scene is extremely rare, reserved for exceptional occasions. An example of a further instance is found in *Ghaṣb-e bāgh-e Fadak* (The Usurpation of the Garden of Fadak), portraying injustice inflicted upon the *ahl-e bait* after the death of the Prophet. As Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā's inheritance rights are being usurped, Muḥammad speaks to ʿAlī from beyond the grave and gives him his ring, a symbol of his seal of approval being placed on ʿAlī and his and Fāṭemeh's line as successors.[85] This, like Zain al-ʿĀbedīn's survival to continue the imamate, was an issue of vital importance.

4.2 *Rapid Fire Dialogue:* Chahār-pāreh

We have already seen examples of the composers using changes of metre for dramatic effect. Metrical changes support the idea of a verbal duel (in *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās*) and in *Bāzār-e Shām* the shift into *baḥr-e ṭavīl* allows the European Ambassador to switch into what we might term "storyteller mode", and out again. Similarly, *Bāzār-e Shām* includes an interesting use of form to support the characterisation of Yazīd in his initial conversation with Shemr. In the opening scene we have seen Yazīd sick with desire for news of the outcome of the battle, in particular for word of Ḥusain's death. Upon Shemr's arrival from Karbala he devours the details of the massacre: he is a blood-thirsty tyrant, hungry for news of the slaughter, and his dialogue with Shemr is delivered in what *taʿziyeh* performers term *chahār-pāreh* (or *ṣad-pāreh*). This is a conversation in rhyming prose, with each speaker giving very short, even single word interjections, creating a staccato, rapid fire exchange:[86]

85 For an edition of the Chodzko rendition of the play see Eqbāl and Maḥjūb, *Jung-e shahādat*, 67–97.

86 The quote that follows is from the Darbandsar rendition. Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles*, 2, 114. However, the same exchange in *chahār-pāreh*, with some variation, features in CP: MS 43; MS 512; MS 661; MS 662; and MS 908.

Shemr: *Greetings Sultan of the City of Shām*	شمر: سلطان شهر شام، سلام
Yazīd: *Greetings*	یزید: السّلام‌ها!
Shemr: *I've brought news.*	شمر: آورده‌ام خبر
Yazīd: *From where?*	یزید: زکجا؟
Shemr : *The plain of Karbala*	شمر: دشت کربلا
Yazīd: *Is it victory or defeat?*	یزید: فتح است یا شکست؟
Shemr: *To the shah's good fortune, victory!*	شمر: به اقبال شاه، فتح!
Yazīd: *Praise be to the Lord that God has satisfied our desire! Was the Sultan of Religion martyred?*	یزید: حمد خدای را که خدا داد کام ما! سلطان دین شهید شد؟
Shemr: *Yes! He pulsated in blood.*	شمر: آری به خون تپید
Yazīd: *Did no one help him on the field of anguish?*	یزید: کس یاری‌اش نکرد به دشت بلا؟
Shemr: *Yes they did!*	شمر: چرا!
Yazīd: *Then who helped him there?*	یزید: که کرد یاری اش مگر آنجا؟
Shemr: *His brother.*	شمر: برادرش
Yazīd: *What was his name?*	یزید: نامش چه بود؟
Shemr: *His majesty, the loyal ʿAbbās*	شمر: حضرت عباس باوفا
Yazīd: *Was ʿAbbās killed?*	یزید: عباس کشته گشت؟
Shemr: *Yes! He was martyred. In enmity his two hands were separated from his body.*	شمر: بلی او شهید شد از کینه هر دو دست شد از پیکرش جدا

As the conversation continues Yazīd speaks in imperatives and interrogatives. For example, "*dīgar kī*?" (Who else?), or after a morsel of information "*dīgar begū*" (Tell me more!), with Shemr firing back responses. As he lists those killed, Yazīd accelerates, wanting to know more, and more. In the manuscript versions it is not uncommon for an entire page of the booklet containing Yazīd's lines to be filled with repetition of the word: *dīgar*? *dīgar*? *dīgar*? (What else? What else? What else?). It is clear that in performance this would have upped the pace, showing Yazīd as frenzied, anxious for details. He is not sated until Shemr has recounted Ḥusain's murder and the capture of his family. This shift of form is an effective manner in which to depict Yazīd's thirst for Ḥusain's blood.

This dialogue in *chahār-pāreh* is commonly featured in the scripts amongst my sample from the late 13th/19th century onwards: the same scene in the Zand rendition of the script is in stichomythic verse, but it is difficult to know whether the use of *chahār-pāreh* was indeed an innovation of the high point of the *taʿziyeh*'s patronage (the 1840s to the 1870s being the period within which we have seen many important evolutions in dramatic content). The

Pelly version does not include this scene; spectator accounts do not help. The Zand script is our only early example. The question of when the scene adopted this form is of particular interest due to the similarity between this dialogue in *chahār-pāreh* and certain works of prominent Qajar poet Mīrzā Ḥabīb-Allāh Shīrāzī, better known by his pen name "Qā'ānī" (b. 1223/1808; d. 1270/1854). The similarity is demonstrated by the following extract from Qā'ānī's famous elegy about Karbala, constructed as a dialogue:

بارد. چه؟ خون. که؟ دیده. چسان؟ روز و شب. چرا؟ از غم. کدام غم؟ غم سلطان اولیا.
نامش که بد؟ حسین. ز نژاد که؟ از علی. مامش که بود؟ فاطمه. جدش که؟ مصطفی[87]

> *It's raining. What? Blood. Who? The eye. How? Day and night. Why? From sorrow. What sorrow? Sorrow for the sultan of the awliyā'* (defenders or friends).[88] *What was his name? Ḥusain. What about lineage? Of ʿAlī. Who was his mother? Fāṭemeh. Who's the grandfather? Muṣṭafā* (Muḥammad).

Based on this resemblance, Shahidi has suggested that Qā'ānī's work influenced the *taʿziyeh* composers' adoption of *chahār-pāreh* for certain dialogues.[89] However, the content of the earliest extant *taʿziyeh* script, *Ghārat-e khaimeh-hā*, dated 1136/1724 (the edited version published after Shahidi's time of writing), calls this into question. Indeed, it gives reason to believe that in the case of *chahār-pāreh* the influence may well have been in the other direction, Qā'ānī's verse being inspired by the rapid fire dialogues of certain *taʿziyeh* plays. The script includes a dialogue between Ebn-e Saʿd and Shemr in *chahār-pāreh*.[90] It is short but similar in tone to the *Bāzār-e Shām* example. In the exchange in question Shemr is anxious that the order be given to raid Ḥusain's camp, and urges Ebn-e Saʿd to that effect. This shows that, in fact, the *taʿziyeh* composers were using this form around a century before Qā'ānī's time.

It is speculative, but nonetheless worthy of comment, that it may well have been the very dialogue between Yazīd and Shemr from *Bāzār-e Shām* that inspired Qā'ānī's elegy. Not only is the form similar but the poem's themes coincide with this episode's content. Having begun with Ḥusain's killing, Qā'ānī

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87 Mīrzā Ḥabīb-Allāh Shīrāzī, "Qā'ānī", *Dīvān-e Ḥakīm-e Qā'ānī-ye Shīrāzī*, ed. Muḥammad Jaʿfar Maḥjūb (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, [1858–59] 1336 SH), 948. Punctuation, my own. For the full poem see pp. 948–949.

88 The term *awliyā'* can denote the Shiʿi Imams, who are considered friends of God. In the *ta'ziyeh* all of Ḥusain's supporters are termed *awliyā'*.

89 Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh-khānī: dowreh-ye Qājār*, 589–91. Also see Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 11*, 15.

90 *Daftar 13*, 31–32.

treats the injustices inflicted upon the rest of his family but, interestingly, moves quickly past the martyrdoms to focus on the plight of Zain al-ʿĀbedīn and the family in Damascus. Then, he finishes by denouncing the fact that it was a Muslim, and not a follower of any other religion, who was responsible. This is a major concern of *Bāzār-e Shām*, the sympathetic figure of the Christian European Ambassador driving home Yazīd's cruelty and hypocrisy.

Qāʾānī would certainly have been familiar with the *taʿziyeh*. He was a court poet under both Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shāh, and Muḥammad Shāh Qājār, and became poet laureate to Nāṣer al-Dīn after his coronation in 1264/1848.[91] He lived and worked in a time when the *taʿziyeh* had begun its great flourishing, and would no doubt have attended performances. As we have seen above, there were many performances of *Bāzār-e Shām* during this period. While we have no evidence of Yazīd's interrogation of Shemr being in *chahār-pāreh* by then, we do know that *chahār-pāreh* had been used by the composers long before. The idea of Qāʾānī being influenced by the *taʿziyeh* rather than vice versa, as suggested by his famous elegy reflecting *Bāzār-e Shām* in both theme and form, is interesting as a potential example of high culture – court culture – being shaped by what had not long since been an art form of the masses.

5 The Theme of Exposure

The concept of *nāmūs* (honour) is central to the *taʿziyeh*'s Muḥarram cycle. With Ḥusain refusing to capitulate, Yazīd, and those who side with him, seek dominance over Ḥusain's house by killing the menfolk and dishonouring the women, who in the *taʿziyeh* are forcibly exposed. Not only are their tents burned but their veils are torn from their heads and it is suggested that they are left little with which to cover their bodies. This theme reaches its culmination in *Bāzār-e Shām*, provoking the audience to feel moral outrage at the cruelty of the antagonists, but also allowing the depiction of the women's strength and stoicism.

The exposure of the womenfolk has been repeatedly foretold in earlier plays of the cycle. The family attempt to prepare for it. For example, in Cerulli MS 726, *The Martyrdom of Imam Ḥusain*, Zainab asks Ḥusain what they should do. He tells them to put on old garments beneath their clothes, to avoid being exposed when the enemy pillage their possessions. In Cerulli MS 27, *The Martyrdom of*

91 For more on Qāʾānī see Alyssa Gabbay, "Qāʾānī," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online version (2016). Available at: https://iranicaonline.org/articles/qaani-poet (accessed June 19th, 2024).

Qāsem, when making his *vaṣiyyat*, Qāsem asks his mother to protect his bride when the enemy raid the camp and not to let them take the chador from her head, exposing her face. In anticipation of such a threat, in the Litten rendition of the climactic episode, as Ḥusain sleeps and the enemy approach the camp, Zainab calls the women to her and tells Fāṭemeh the bride to sit quietly at her side.

In *Bāzār-e Shām* the women speak of being beaten but it is through exposure that we see them humiliated. Without the protection of their veils, they are paraded through the market. Their temporary dwelling place after this ordeal is a ruin, repeatedly described as being without door or roof, thus again, without cover. Still in their exposed state they are filed into Yazīd's court before a host of *nāmaḥram*, men from outside their own household, by whom (according to the norms governing *nāmūs*) they should not be seen uncovered. The fact that the woman are "*bī meʿjar*" (without a head covering), is stated so often in the verse of this play as to become conspicuously repetitive. However, we must take into account that in performance, these exposed women are played by men, covered from head to toe, their heads and faces very much veiled.

In the court setting the outrage of the women being exposed is amplified through the inclusion of the scene involving Yazīd's wife Hendeh. That Hendeh is seated in court behind a curtain while the female descendants of the *ahl-e bait* are exposed underscores the contempt with which they are treated. Furthermore, when Hendeh becomes aware of Zainab's identity and rushes out to her, bare-headed in solidarity, Yazīd's hypocrisy is evident as he scolds of her:

یزید:
بی‌حیا زوجه تبه‌کارم   کرده‌ای شرمسار حضارم
بارگه پر بود ز نامحرم   سر عریان بیرون شدی ز حرم[92]

> Yazīd: *You are without shame my reprobate wife! You have publicly disgraced me. With the court full of male strangers you came bare-headed out of the women's sanctuary.*

He then rebukes her for making him a laughing stock, demonstrating the deliberate nature of his degradation of the captives. It would have been enough to leave the audience to see this hypocrisy for themselves, but the composers leave nothing to chance. They have Hendeh rebuke Yazīd, spelling out

92 CP: MS 512; MS 661; and the Darbandsar rendition.

the dichotomy between what he desires for his own women and those of his Prophet's house.[93]

Amongst the wider repertoire, there is also an example of female forced exposure as revenge. It occurs in the play *Amīr Tīmūr* (Prince Timur). This is about the historical figure Tīmūr (ruler of the Timurid empire 771–807/1370–1405, also known as Tamerlane) attacking Damascus. Tīmūr's capture and sacking of Damascus is a real historical event that took place in 803/1400 when the city was under Mamluk rule. However, seen through the *ta'ziyeh* lens, it takes on a special significance. The fictional Tīmūr's desire to attack Damascus is motivated by the wish to avenge Ḥusain and his house. When he arrives, the terrified governor offers Tīmūr gifts, which he refuses – until the governor offers his daughter's hand in marriage. Tīmūr asks that the bride be decorated and then brought to him so that they can converse, but he does not marry her: rather, when she is presented to him, he humiliates her by having her golden robes ripped off, the veil pulled from her head and her earrings torn from her ears.[94] This is tit for tat exposure and pillaging; the women of Ḥusain's family had their possessions looted at Karbala and they were forcibly exposed in Damascus, so Tīmūr avenges them by dishonouring the Damascene governor's daughter. Undeterred by the huge lag in time, not to mention the change of ruling dynasty, the composers have simplified things, equating the rulers of Damascus with the oppressors' clan.

In *Bāzār-e Shām*, Zainab remains defiant in the face of the indignity forced upon her. Despite being uncovered against her wishes, she does not hide. Rather, she publicly denounces her oppressors. Fearlessly speaking out against Yazīd in his court, she refers directly to her exposed state:

زینب:
بی‌پرده میان خلقم امّا   روح‌القدس است پرده‌دارم[95]

Zainab: *I am without veil amongst the masses, but the Holy Spirit holds a veil for me.*

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93 Exposure as a form of degradation applies largely to the women, but not exclusively so. In CP: MS 43 when being paraded through the market Zain al-ʿĀbedīn complains of how he is bound, and his body naked "like a black slave".

94 For the Litten Collection rendition of this play see Esmāʿīlī, *Teshneh*, 861–72. For discussion of a Cerulli Collection version of it see Iraj Anvar, "Peripheral Ta'ziyeh: The Transformation of Ta'ziyeh from Muharram Mourning Ritual to Secular and Comical Theatre," in Chelkowski ed. *Eternal Performance*, 110–121.

95 Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles*, 2, 125; Nematollahi Mahani, *Holy Drama*, 74, 93.

Because of her higher religious understanding, Yazīd's attempt at earthly humiliation is useless. He can steal her veil but her dignity is untouchable.

Nematollahi Mahani discusses the fact a ban on the hijab during the Pahlavi period gave additional weight to the forced unveiling in the *taʿziyeh*, and that Zainab as a chaste and pious revolutionary model, speaking out against oppression, inspired women during the 1357 SH / 1978–79 revolution.[96] The women of the Qajar audience would not have shared the experience of having their veiling practices proscribed. However, in terms of the revolutionary model, given that the Constitutional Revolution (1323–29/ 1905–11) took place towards the end of the time period covered by this study, it would be reasonable to ask whether Zainab provided an inspiration for the women involved in those calls for reform. However, to address this question would require a separate study.[97]

6 Historical Development

Given the early *taʿziyeh* tradition's close connection to processional rituals, the humiliation of the captives paraded through the market is likely to have been one of the earliest aspects of the experience of those at Karbala to be re-enacted. Despite not centring on the martyrdom of a prominent family member, the processional aspect of this episode is as old as the genre itself. Nevertheless, the renditions of *Bāzār-e Shām* among my sample are strikingly similar to each other, sharing much more in terms of verse than the episodes discussed above. This suggests that in this case the composers were redacting and embellishing copies of one particular original work, rather than amalgamating the early efforts of different authors to dramatize the same events (a phenomenon discussed in chapter 3).

In keeping with the trends observed throughout this study, while female characters have always featured heavily in this play their number increases through time. Hendeh is one of the added characters but the others are generally of humble origin: the virtuous woman and local girl who try to help the

96 Nematollahi Mahani, *Holy Drama*, 73–75.

97 During the decades prior to the Constitutional Revolution Iranian thinkers had begun to invoke the idea of the homeland as a woman, and the concept of *nāmūs* in their insistence on the people's duty to protect her (particularly against the incursion of foreign powers). This may have affected the reception to plays such as *Ghārat-e khaimeh-hā* and *Bāzār-e Shām*. However, the extent to which this conceptual campaign reached a mass audience is unclear. For further discussion see Afsaneh Najmabadi, "The Erotic Vatan [Homeland] as Beloved and Mother: To Love, To Possess, and To Protect," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39, no. 3 (1997).

captives in the market, and the washer of the dead (included when the play ends with the martyrdom of Ruqaiyeh). However, the scenes involving these characters are very brief and do not constitute major changes to the play. The one significant development in content was the incorporation of the prologue in which Yazīd is treated by a European doctor.

6.1 *Towards Satire: Introduction of the Foreign Doctor*

Yazīd's treatment by a European doctor appears to have become part of the play during Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh's reign. The Zand and Pelly renditions of *Bāzār-e Shām* are the only ones amongst my sample not to feature this scene, although it may well have been played by the time Pelly assembled his collection (the early 1870s). In the three shorter plays of Pelly's collection covering the events of *Bāzār-e Shām*, Yazīd awaiting word of the outcome of the battle is not treated and the events in Damascus begin with Shemr's arrival. The Zand rendition suggests that the play's original structure was ripe for the insertion of a physician character. In its initial scene Yazīd complains of anxiety, loss of appetite, insomnia and an accelerated pulse. He demands that wine be poured to relieve his vexation. Although there is no doctor, there is allusion to illness. Then, Berezin's 1259/1843 spectator account tells of the play opening with Yazīd in his sickly state and being attended by not one, but a group of three doctors![98] However, there is no suggestion that they are foreign. Sheil's 1266/1849 spectator account makes no mention of a European doctor, and since the European Ambassador had certainly caught her attention, had she seen one she would have been likely to comment. Serena's spectator account of *Bāzār-e Shām* from Tekiyeh-ye Dawlat in 1295/1878 does indeed open with Yazīd being treated by a doctor who is definitely foreign.[99] Thus, by this point the *gūsheh* was being played as we find it in the scripts among my sample.[100]

The source of inspiration for a European doctor character is not difficult to imagine. There were many European physicians accompanying the different missions in Iran during this period and indeed Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh himself had a French doctor, Dr Ernest Cloquet (who had also attended Muḥammad Shāh before him).[101] However, what is interesting is that this innovation may well have made its way into the *taʿziyeh* from the lithographs of the *rawżeh-khānī*/

98 Bérézine, *Voyage*, 256–57.

99 Serena, *Hommes et choses*, 190–91.

100 Yazīd being treated by this doctor can also be played as a separate sub-episode entitled *Bīmār shudan-e Yazīd* (Yazīd Becomes Ill). Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh-khānī: dowreh-ye Qājār*, 273–74.

101 Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, 89, 205.

maqtal genre. Yazīd attended by a European doctor features in *Musayyeb-nāmeh*, a martyrology of anonymous authorship concerning the uprising of Mukhtār-e Saqafī and Musayyeb b. Qaʿqāʿ-e Khazāʿī to avenge Ḥusain and his followers. It was first printed in 1265/ 1848–49,[102] before the first evidence of the European doctor featuring in the *taʿziyeh*. Even if it was not their invention, the *taʿziyeh* dramatists scripted this scene and it certainly appealed to them and their audience, attested by its prevalence amongst later renditions. It was a successful innovation. But what its purpose? Why make Yazīd's doctor a European?

Scholars have commented on the comical nature of this *gūsheh*,[103] and indeed its scripting suggests the farcical. After giving Yazīd a physical examination, the doctor prescribes a nonsense remedy. In addition to seeds and flowers, the list of its ingredients commonly includes items such as chicken fat, sodium bicarbonate, and dozens of tortoise eggs, with some renditions including more colourful additions such as mouse or rabbit droppings,[104] a kind of laxative,[105] and even pig excrement.[106] But who were the audience to laugh at? Simply Yazīd, and his self-indulgence being rewarded with this noxious potion? Of course, we have seen other examples of the enemies of the *ahl-e bait* being ridiculed, as exemplified by the pagan women of the Quraish in *ʿArūsī raftan-e Ḥażrat-e Fāṭemeh* (discussed in chapter 1). And indeed, some versions of the European doctor episode go further in their mockery than the nonsense remedy. In the Darbandsar rendition Yazīd describes having aching bones, being short of breath and unable to sleep on his side, having strange tastes in his mouth, a burning thirst, a cough and a sore head. The doctor examines him and upon looking inside his mouth reports seeing "*kūft*", which can simply mean a bruise or blow but is also the common name for syphilis. Yazīd's aggressive dismissal of this idea reflects an understanding of this connotation:

طبیب: بحمدالله به حلقت کوفت افتاد
یزید: مگو بیهوده بر من، زشت‌بنیاد![107]

Doctor: *For the love God, there is a blemish* (sign of syphilis) *in your throat.*
Yazīd: *Don't speak this nonsense to me you scoundrel!*

102 Marzolph, "Persian Popular Literature in the Qajar Period," 225.
103 Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 11*, 15; Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh-khānī: dowreh-ye Qājār*, 274.
104 CP: MS 43 and MS 662.
105 CP: MS 662 and MS 908.
106 CP: MS 43.
107 Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles*, 2, 112.

Perhaps for fear of Yazīd's ire, the doctor simply continues with the examination and upon concluding tells the vizier, ʿAmr-e ʿĀṣ, that the diagnosis is pneumonia. The audience may well have enjoyed the suggestion of Yazīd having a venereal disease and this would be in keeping with his portrayal as hedonistic and debauched. Meanwhile, his burning thirst (a symptom commonly described across versions of this scene) can be seen as divine punishment for the thirst he inflicts upon those at Karbala. The idea of him being afflicted with an awful disease such as syphilis also suggests divine retribution. Indeed, in the historiography relating to Karbala, the idea of those who did harm to Ḥusain being punished with a physical ailment is common.[108] However, to ridicule Yazīd in this way would not necessitate the physician being a foreigner. His identity as such is worthy of further consideration.

It has been suggested that the Qajar era composers who added this character were influenced by Nāṣer al-Dīn having a European doctor.[109] If this is so, then what are we to make of the fact that the *taʿziyeh* composers created a mirror of their king and great patron in one of the principal antagonists? Were they laughing at the king and his practice, perhaps considered frivolous, of employing a European physician? Did this scene aim to allow the audience to giggle at the seemingly nonsensical practices of their Western visitors? While it is unlikely that the dramatists would openly deride their patrons, those involved in *taʿziyeh* performance would not have been without their opinions: as I have touched upon in my discussion of the Īlchī Farangī, there were periods during which the relationship with the foreign powers present in Iran became strained. Satire of the foreigner, and moreover the reliance of the elite upon him, need not have been openly or blatantly disrespectful. Max Harris, a scholar well acquainted with folk theatre and ritual, reminds us that:

> Religious festivals are rarely, as official records may misleadingly suggest, monological displays of power. Rather, they are enacted dialogues, implicit negotiations between dominant and subordinate groups, between the hierarchical powers of the church (or state) and the unwritten but no less articulate power of the street.[110]

108 For example, Mīrkhānd and Khāndamīr both tell of individuals from amongst the group who stole the clothes from Ḥusain's body becoming afflicted with leprosy. Mīrkhānd, *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, 3, 2262; Khāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-siyār*, 2, 57.

109 Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 11*, 15.

110 Max Harris, *Carnival and Other Christian Festivals: Folk Theology and Folk Performance* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 77–78.

In Harris' own work concerning Christian festivals he provides fascinating insight into the complex relationships between ruling establishments and folk performers and the multi-levelled character of the expression that takes place during performance rituals. He discusses their great potential as a space for veiled critical discourse, in particular allowing those in subordinate positions a platform to covertly criticize those in power. I am not suggesting that the *taʿziyeh* performers represented a repressed social group but, as we saw in chapter 1, whilst their performing talents may have given them a certain status during the mourning season, they belonged to the ranks of the common people. Some expression of the opinions of those people will survive in their works; for reasons of piety they are more likely to be evident in episodes not concerning a prominent martyrdom.

It is known that the performance of *Bāzār-e Shām* was popular towards the end of Nāṣer al-Dīn's reign. The staging of Yazīd's court was an opportunity to display the monarch's wealth; precious jewels and cloths were lent by the women of the royal harem for the costuming and set of performances of this episode at Tekiyeh-ye Dawlat.[111] However, I venture that in the *gūsheh* of the foreign doctor, under the guise of ridiculing Yazīd, the composers found a little room for subtle criticism of the dominant figures of the time, both the monarch and the European. Europeans and Christians are generally sympathetic characters in the *taʿziyeh*. Their acknowledgement of the special nature of the *ahl-e bait* and their kin frequently serves as a counterpoint to the ignorant cruelty of the Muslim antagonists. We have seen a number of examples of this during the course of this study (the Christian Lady and her maid, the European Monk, the Christian as "Unwilling Killer", and *Bāzār-e Shām*'s Īlchī Farangī): however, there are exceptions.

The play *Qatl-e Mīrzā Taqī-Khān Amīr Kabīr* (The Killing of Mīrzā Taqī-Khān "Amīr Kabīr") features one such exception. Amīr Kabīr, renowned as a highly efficient and innovative statesman, was chief minister to Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh during the first four years of his reign. He implemented a wide and astute programme of reforms aimed at improving living conditions and the economy, and strengthening central government, which implied curtailing the influence of the British and the Russians. However, he also had enemies within the ruling establishment and a plot against him (including accusations of treachery) saw him out of favour with the king and killed, at Nāṣer al-Dīn's order, in Kashan

111 Serena, *Hommes et choses*, 190.

in 1268/1852. The play concerning his death, in itself an example of *taʿziyeh* as political criticism, features an English diplomat as a villainous figure.[112]

The foreign doctor is a potentially neutral character. There is no narrative detail that predetermines his portrayal as necessarily good or bad (unlike the majority of the foreigners mentioned above, he does not come into contact with the *ahl-e bait* or their wider family, try to help them, or convert). His attitude towards Yazīd and the events at Karbala seems to have been relatively open to interpretation, and the very manner in which this figure is first mentioned is somewhat ambiguous. This exchange follows Yazīd's complaint to his vizier that his agitation for news from Karbala is accompanied with physical pain:

یزید:
بمیرم من از این دورنگی

عمرو عاص:
بیارم از اطبای فرنگی[113]

Yazīd: *I am dying of this duplicity.*
ʿAmr-e ʿĀṣ: *I will bring* [you] *one of those European doctors.*

The balancing of *durangī* (duplicity) with *farangī* (European) under the cover of the convenience of the rhyme is potentially satirical, equating the European with the duplicitous and implying that malaise arising from treacherousness is something that one of those European doctors would know how to treat. Whilst this is only a small hint of satire, certain versions contain something more.

The doctor is usually portrayed as siding with Ḥusain and his house but this is not always clear. In his entering speech the doctor is often shown to be heavy-hearted and to tarry in approaching Yazīd: in some cases he is sorrowing for the Alids,[114] but in others he says that he cannot explain the way that he is feeling.[115] Then, two renditions among my sample have him make a curious statement in his last address to Yazīd. He insults the monarch but also

112 For the play with discussion by the editors see Dāvūd Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Mehdī Daryāī, "Sharḥī bar majles-e shabīh-he Qatl-e Mīrzā Taqī-Khān Amīr Kabīr," in *Daftar-e pazhuhesh 2* (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Namāyesh, 1394 SH).

113 CP: MS 661 اطبای is spelled عطبای in the manuscript. The same couplet with minor variations appears in MS 43; MS 512; MS 908; and the Darbandsar rendition.

114 CP: MS 43 and MS 908.

115 CP: MS 661 and the Darbandsar rendition.

seems to kowtow to his ambition to hold unrivalled leadership of the Muslim community:

حکیم:
ایا سلطان اورنگ فخامت تو را زیبد حقیقت این امامت
گروهی را که پیغمبر تو باشی خدا لعنت کند بر آن جماعت[116]

Doctor: *O Sultan of the mighty throne, this imamate certainly befits you. God curses the group to whom you are the prophet.*[117]

One of the versions in question is attributed to Mīr-e ʿAzā (MS 661), the other is signed by less well-known hands but is from Kashan, thus probably influenced by Mīr-e ʿAzā's rendition.

The small details that I have quoted from the scripts could be records of subtle criticism, not only of Yazīd but of the European and the shah. However, above and beyond the script, the very scenario of the self-indulgent monarch and his somewhat silly foreign helper has much satirical potential in performance and, of course, there is much scope (and safety) in the unwritten medium of movement on stage. Indeed, the *gūsheh* of the European doctor at very least leaves much room for ambiguity.

7 Conclusion

Despite its royal patrons, the *taʿziyeh* is essentially a folk art form but this is not to say that its practitioners lacked the sophistication to make the kind of subtle satirical comment described above. Some of their tactics are rather predictable and repetitive, the frequent use of contrast in this episode to show the injustice endured by the captives being such as example. Nonetheless, close analysis of their work shows their deep understanding of their craft and their crowd. Changes of rhythm being essential to a captivating live performance, in this episode we have seen adept use of tempo and metre to delineate certain scenes and support characterisation. We have also seen the composers' clever manipulation of the conventions established with their audience to

116 CP: MS 661. The same couplets feature in MS 512 but with a minor variation.

117 I translate حقیقت as "certainly". Normally to give this meaning it should read با حقیقت or در حقیقت. However, the preposition seems to have been dropped to conserve the (*hazaj*) metre.

convey a particular message, exemplified by ʿAlī's ghost intervening to save Zain al-ʿĀbedīn.

The dramatists understood and exploited the concerns of their society. To provoke a sense of outrage their strategy was simple – invoke the concept of *nāmūs* by stressing the forced exposure of the women. In fact, the popular nature of the *taʿziyeh* as a genre appears to have freed the composers from the self-consciousness of a more refined art form. They represented what they wished without being confined by concerns over historical accuracy, or even continuity. In their interpretation of the Byzantine ambassador's story, itself testament to the power of folk tradition to conserve cultural heritage (in this case narrative material), they freely created a sympathetic caricature of their contemporary European visitors, whilst unabashedly developing for him a digression as a storyteller versed in the events of the Medina of Ḥusain's childhood. That digression is telling of one of the genre's major sources of influence.

Conclusion

To immerse oneself in the plots of the central episodes of the *taʿziyeh*'s Muḥarram cycle, and, moreover, to witness how they changed through time, is to understand much about the dynamics of this vibrant tradition and its contributors. The physical environment of the *tekiyeh*, the experience of the performers and audience, and the close pact between them, have all left an impression on the scripts. The genre's compositional features, the innovations in dramatic content and poetic form, all have their story to tell. They tell of a tradition heavily influenced at its inception by Iranian storytelling. They tell of the exchange of dramatic material between performers from different regions, crossing in urban centres after the creation of a professional circuit. They tell of the toil of those players to bring fresh life to an old story, but of the imperative to remain true to its boundaries. They tell of those listening, of those composing and playing the likeness of the martyrs, of women, of dervishes, and of European visitors. To gain an overview, it is helpful to divide the conclusions into those concerning the tradition's inception, and then its development.

The trajectory of *taʿziyeh-khānī* shows a tradition periodically embraced by the ruling classes, but originating from, and sustained by, the devotion of the masses. Sponsorship of Shiʿi rituals under the Safavid dynasty greatly facilitated the emergence of this form of devotional drama. However, Kāshefī's *Futuvvat-nāmeh-ye sulṭānī* shows that, even prior to this, other types of performance were given to inspire remembrance of the *ahl-e bait*, and that they were considered valuable acts of piety. Thus, the ground was ripe. I have shown that the earliest scripted *taʿziyeh* plays in the form of *Haftād-u-du tan* (which portrays all of the most prominent Karbala martyrdoms consecutively) are likely to have emerged from re-enactments of the battle of Karbala staged amongst the common people, largely outside urban centres. The performance witnessed in Isfahan in 1051/1641 by M. de Montheron suggests that this custom existed by the 11th/17th century at the latest. Carsten Niebuhr's spectator account from Kharq Island in 1179/1765 provides an example of the form assumed by these performances as they gradually became more sophisticated.

While such performances were ongoing, the individual Karbala martyrdoms and events (such as the pillage of the camp) had begun to be treated in episodic form, as evidenced by the rendition of *Ghārat-e khaimeh-hā* dated 1136/1724. "Fanāʾī", this play's composer, was "late" by the time this copy of the script was made,[1] telling us that he was a Safavid era composer. Thus, the very

1 Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 13*, 13–14.

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first generation of episodes, early efforts at dramatizing the individual martyrdoms, will date to this period. Two oratory traditions will have influenced the performance of the Karbala narrative being divided into episodes. The *rawżeh-khānī* recitals, prevalent during the Safavid period, already divided the tribulations of the Karbala martyrs into a series of orations, told over the first ten days of Muḥarram; the *naqqālān*, professional storytellers, had long told the stories of the Iranian epics in daily instalments.

The scripts of the Zand collection show that the genre had already undergone considerable evolution by that time, and that its key compositional features were already in place. The composers of these scripts made adept use of poetic metre, and already embellished the Karbala narrative as transmitted in historical sources. The inclusion of the *gūsheh* featuring Mūsā and the desert dwelling dervish in the rendition of *The Martyrdom of Imam Ḥusain* dating to this period is a prominent example. Also, the use of what I have identified as the "martyrdom composition-scheme" is already evident in the episodes of this collection, and we have the inclusion of type-scenes. Therefore, these aspects of how the Karbala narrative would be dramatized in the *taʿziyeh* had already taken shape. Despite this evolution, the earliest witness account of *taʿziyeh* in episodic form as part of what appears to be an official programme of Muḥarram commemorations is Francklin's 1202/1787 account from the Zand dynasty's capital of Shiraz.[2] That "Fanāʾī" was active before the 1720s implies that the composing of scripted episodes had begun long before Francklin's account. Interesting questions remain open about the interim period. Where were the performances of the early to mid-18th century taking place? Who were these early script writers? Was their work simply a devotional act, or were they remunerated for their efforts? Comprehensively addressing these questions requires further research. But I can offer a small piece of the puzzle.

Taʿziyeh performances may have received patronage during the Safavid period but no evidence of this has come to light as of yet. During Nāder Shāh's reign it is doubtful that they received official support. Although the early scripts reveal the work of skilled poets, it is unlikely that there was a living to be made as a *taʿziyeh* composer or performer at this stage. Many of those involved in this emergent genre are likely to have honed their skills, even been professionals, in other oratory art forms – in particular the storytelling traditions of *naqqālī* and *pardeh-dārī*. The compositional features of the plays, the characterisation of Shiʿism's martyrs as heroes of epic, the shared narrative

2 Francklin, *Observations*, 100–01.

material, and connection between the *taʿziyeh* performers and ʿAjam dervish order – major participants in the *pardeh-dārī* tradition – all support this thesis.

Borrowing the concepts of the type-scene and the composition-scheme has illuminated greatly the way in which the main episodes of the *taʿziyeh* repertoire are structured. Of course, this is not how *taʿziyeh* composers and performers describe their own work: their terms, including *vāqeʿeh*, *pīsh-e vāqeʿeh*, *faqareh* and *gūsheh* are useful in discussing these works and their sections but, unlike the composition-scheme and the type-scene, they do not cover the repeating patterns that we see in the structure of the episodes, and the recurrence of certain shorter scenarios, that becomes evident when we zoom out and look at the features of the repertoire more globally. These compositional phenomena are typical of oral art forms, providing ready-made templates for the improvisations of the bards. Although *taʿziyeh* is a scripted tradition, transmitted largely through the copying, redacting and interpolating of written material, the presence of these structures speaks for its close relationship to storytelling. Furthermore, while the *taʿziyeh* composers did follow the Karbala narrative as transmitted in historical sources, they did not include the plethora of individuals named there. Instead, they feature characters who, like the icons on the storyteller's painted canvas, are representatives of their kind: symbols of innocence, heroism or malevolence.

The same storytellers who narrated the epics (the *naqqālān*) had moved into the telling of religious stories (*pardeh-dārī*) before the advent of the *taʿziyeh*: predominant amongst these proselytising storytellers were the predecessors of the ʿAjam dervish order. The *taʿziyeh* composer "Nāṭeq", active in the Zand period and whose work I have discussed, gives us a potential example of the link between practitioners of *pardeh-dārī* and *taʿziyeh-khānī* at this relatively early stage in the *taʿziyeh* tradition's trajectory. Nāṭeq is said to have been a *sukhanvarī* participant.[3] As discussed in chapter 1, *sukhanvarī* involved the staging of ritualized contests in verse, and was a tradition practiced by Selseleh-ye ʿAjam.[4] That Nāṭeq was a *sukhanvar* not only tells us that this is probably the arena in which he sharpened his poetic skill, but also connects him to the ʿAjam dervishes and religious storytelling, *pardeh-dārī*. The network of a group such as the ʿAjam, or their predecessors, would have helped to sustain the *taʿziyeh* as an art form during its early phases, facilitating the staging of performances before they became firmly part of the Muḥarram programme, enjoying widespread popular support, and later elite patronage.

3 Daryāī, *Daftar 14*, 9.

4 Mīr-ʿĀbedīnī and Afsharī, *Āyīn-e qalandarī*, 335; Floor, *Theater*, 117–18.

We also find evidence of a connection between the *taʿziyeh* tradition and the ʿAjam persisting over the next century. We have seen that *taʿziyeh-khānān* are recorded amongst the members of Selseleh-ye ʿAjam's *futuvvat* circle during the Qajar period. In addition, the founding myth of the Khāksār (with whom the ʿAjam were affiliated if not synonymous), the story of the Dervish of Kabul, was integrated into the *taʿziyeh*'s climactic episode.

Earlier scholarship has made much of the connection between *taʿziyeh* and *rawżeh-khānī*, recitals (largely by mullahs) of the tribulations of the Shiʿi martyrs, as told in Kāshefī's *Rawżat al-shuhadāʾ* and similar works. Indeed, the origins of *taʿziyeh* are often given as intrinsically linked to these recitals. Their importance is undeniable, and we have seen their impact on both the *taʿziyeh* repertoire's form and content. But considering this new angle – the influence of dervishes, who survived through their storytelling throughout the year, were often itinerant, and were members of brotherhoods that had their own practices involving the composition of verse – both illuminates and challenges our conception of the *taʿziyeh* tradition. It takes it further from Karbala as recorded in literary sources, and closer to the memory of the martyrs that lived through its performance in marketplaces and coffeehouses, and not only during Muḥarram. Moreover, in *pardeh-dārī*, as in other forms of religious recitation accompanied by imagery, the "human relation to the divine" is mediated by "a triangulation of speaker, listener, and image".[5] When the events at Karbala were performed in the *taʿziyeh* speaker and image became one, a material shift in the life of these narratives that can well be understood to give a more profound experience of contact with the sacred.

An experience of proximity to the sacred is likely to have been a major draw for the large and dedicated audiences that are attested in the multitude of sources pertaining to the Qajar dynasty's reign. The chapters above have tracked the developments in the content of the plays during this period, famed as a time of great flourishing for the *taʿziyeh*. Both the process through which these developments took place, and the nature of the innovations, are testament to the life of the tradition and its participants. More than half a century of consistent patronage, from towards the end of Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shāh's reign (the early 1830s) to the death of Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh (d. 1313/1896), provided favourable conditions under which the genre could develop. From the 1840s, a number of factors began to cause a rapid evolution in the content of the plays. The trend in elite patronage and wave of *tekiyeh* construction in the cities saw the

5 David Morgan, *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2012) 183.

genre housed and the establishment of a professional circuit for performers. In the enclosed environment of the *tekiyeh*, the performances became more stylised. What had once been pitched battles between riders in open spaces became equestrian choreographies confined to the sandy track surrounding the *sakū*. Moreover, the relationship that the *taʿziyeh* performers had with their audience intensified. They played to a seated crowd whose affective responses would have been very much apparent to them.

Year after year the same episodes were played to the same audiences and the composers were challenged to find new ways to retell the Karbala narrative, not only familiar to their public but of great religious importance to them. The strong understanding between actors and audience is evidenced by the fact that we see some innovations in narrative content accepted and becoming lasting features, while others are dropped. We know that the audience were well acquainted not only with the individual episodes but with the Muḥarram cycle as a whole. We see certain ideas being built up across a number of episodes, showing that their dramatic content evolved within the context of the wider cycle. The portrayal of ʿAlī Akbar with Qāsem as his shadow is an example of this: it is introduced in earlier episodes and culminates with Qāsem having the wedding that should have been Akbar's. The fact that Akbar was to be married, whilst mentioned in *The Martyrdom of Qāsem*, had been established in previous episodes. The dramatists could rely on the audience knowing this.

The intensified demand for performances during the Qajar period not only gave the players the opportunity to hone their craft but led to creative exchange between performers from different regions, as they travelled to the new urban venues for work during the mourning season. In addition to this, from the 1830s the spread of lithography meant that the stories belonging to the *rawżeh-khānī/maqtal* genre became part of material culture to an extent that they had not been before. These books as sources for *taʿziyeh* dramatists again led to the diffusion of narrative detail and contributed to its standardisation.

The diffusion of new dramatic content within the main episodes shows that the performers were inspired by each other's work. Innovations such as the poignant scene contrasting Umm Lailā and Qāsem's mother, the addition of the Dervish of Kabul and Sultan Qais to the climactic episode, and of the foreign doctor to *Bāzār-e Shām* (all of which took place between the 1840s and the 1870s) soon became standard to renditions of these episodes from across Iran. Most of the substantial narrative innovations appear to have taken place by the 1870s, with the content of the main episodes generally settling by the end of the reign of Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh Qājār. However, while it is common for the versions of these scenes amongst my sample of plays to share short sections of

verse, the character's lines are by no means repeated verbatim. This suggests that such scenes were widely adopted not simply as the result of the swapping or selling of scripts, which no doubt took place, but as the result of the scenes being witnessed in performance.

Indeed, by the end of the stable period of patronage the main episodes had acquired a layer particular to how the Karbala narrative was imagined through the lens of Qajar Iran. We see in the *taʿziyeh* repertoire both the preservation and growth of narratives. A prime example is the Īlchī Farangī, simultaneously the story of a Byzantine ambassador at Yazīd's court, and a military man bringing gadgets and firepower, a reflection of the European visitors to Iran during the Qajar period. But while we see much innovation, it is noteworthy that the dramatizations did continue to adhere broadly to the Karbala reports transmitted in historical sources. The inclusion of characters or narrative material originating from outside such sources, in particular that which is not traceable to the *maqtal* tradition, predominantly Kāshefī's *Rawżat*, indicates issues of importance to the players and their audience. Otherwise, why would these elements be there?

In fact, it catches the eye that when new characters were added to the main episodes, they tended to be women, foreigners or other outsiders. This is explained partly by practical concerns. Whilst historical sources attest the womenfolk being present in the camp at Karbala and being taken captive, discussion of them is scant. In Kāshefī's work we see a little more treatment of their perspective, such as the farewells between Qāsem, his bride and mother. But there is nothing of great depth; there was certainly space for the *taʿziyeh* composers to further imagine the female experience.

To introduce foreigners, or to integrate stories about them from parallel traditions (such as Ḥusain's rescue of Sultan Qais, told by the *pardeh-dārān* and printed in Jawharī's *Ṭūfān*), would embellish but not contradict the core narrative. Practicalities aside, the incorporation of new characters who were foreigners or other outsiders could fulfil certain important functions. It was a means to affirm the religious legitimacy of Ḥusain and his family, by demonstrating the diverse nature of those who bore witness to their mantle. Sometimes these characters were representatives of living groups loyal to the Shiʿi cause, their inclusion in the Karbala narrative connecting them to a crucial moment in sacred history and affirming their place within the community, an assertion of pan-Shiʿism even.

Whilst historicity does not seem to have been a great constraint for the dramatists when innovating new content, they were constrained by the conventions of their genre. Although their well-versed audience may have relished

certain embellishments, these could not deviate too much from the known, or they risked being rejected. The structure of the type-scene was useful in this respect, allowing the insertion of new characters and short stories but moulded into a form that would feel familiar to the audience.

Together with the developments in dramatic content, some sophistication in the verse of the scripts is evident during the Qajar period. A growing concern with keeping up the forward momentum of the action seems evident – the characters' interjections becoming more succinct and stichomythic dialogues more frequent. The efforts of distinguished professionals, such as Mīr-e ʿAzā-ye Kāshānī, saw the composition of scripts with a higher quality of verse. Due to borrowing and copying being part of the genre's inherent character, some of this diffused into later renditions. Yet, while the composers benefitting from royal patronage contributed to the genre, it must be recognised that they wrote within the conventions that had been established through many decades, two centuries even, of the work of their often anonymous predecessors. They also borrowed from them in their versification of the episodes. Thus, no matter the *takhalluṣ* they bear, by as late in the genre's development as Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh's reign, the main episodes should be seen as the work of many hands.

Women should be counted among the owners of those hands, and to no small extant. Indeed, it is fitting to give the last word of this book to them. They flocked to the *taʿziyeh* performances of the Qajar period in vast numbers, numbers that significantly exceeded those of their male counterparts. Due to their seating position in the *tekiyeh*, the women of the less affluent classes constituted the vast majority of the audience to whom the *taʿziyeh-khānān* most directly performed. Sitting on the floor around the *sakū* (raised platform), they were the front row. Numerous witness accounts attest their highly active and vocal participation. Developments in content that concentrate on the experience of women other than those of the Prophet's bloodline (namely Zainab and Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā) reflect the composers responding to this important sector of the audience. Innovations such as the foregrounding of the plight of the mother of the martyr in *The Martyrdom of Qāsem*, and the addition of the scene highlighting the special status of the elderly *kanīz* Feżżeh in the climactic episode, are examples of this trend. Thus, the religious narrative, embodied by the performers (and audience) as it lived within the configuration of the *tekiyeh* was not static, it grew to encompass those who participated in its retelling.

We have seen that women were also active as *taʿziyeh* players in female-only environments during the Qajar period. Among such performers were female *rawżeh-khānān*, storytellers and other entertainers; they played both male and female characters, apparently taught their parts by eunuchs who had first been

coached by Muʿīn al-Bukāʾ (the royal *taʿziyeh* director).[6] It is likely that in the renditions of the main episodes destined for an exclusively female audience, the female roles were expanded. This may have been done by the male composers, or more likely by the female players themselves since these women were experienced, sometimes even professional, performers. The new material that was developed in this context had the potential to feed back into the mainstream renditions of the episodes that played to a mixed audience. Whilst this remains speculative, the existence of a women's performance tradition, hosted by wealthy female patrons, must have created a market for the composition of plays that focussed more on matters of concern to women.

We heard from Mūnes al-Dawlah, maid servant to Nāṣer al-Dīn's favourite wife Anīs al-Dawlah, that the performances hosted by such patrons included a number of plays about weddings. A prominent example of this trend is *ʿArūsī raftan-e Ḥażrat-e Fāṭemeh* (Fāṭemeh Goes to a Wedding), discussed in chapter 1. Mūnes al-Dawlah's account of this play in performance shows the humour of the female *taʿziyeh-khānān* as they experiment with the absurd in their ridicule of the enemies of the *ahl-e bait*.[7] The majority of its characters are women, the Prophet Muḥammad and Jebraʾīl being the only other figures to feature consistently.[8] In performance to a mixed audience the female characters would have been played by men wearing face veils. Convention also usually dictates that the faces of performers playing angels are veiled. Thus for *ʿArūsī raftan-e Ḥażrat-e Fāṭemeh* to be performed by men for a mixed crowd would mean the vast majority of the action taking place between performers whose faces were veiled – presenting a considerable challenge when engaging an audience! Indeed, it is likely that this episode and others similar to it were originally composed for, even by, the female players.

I have commented above that despite the climactic and most widely performed *taʿziyeh* episode showing the womenfolk at Karbala potent and vigorous as they ready Ḥusain's horse for battle, it in no way transgresses the norms and hierarchies governing the social order in which the female audience lived. Yet, in the lesser known *ʿArūsī raftan-e Ḥażrat-e Fāṭemeh*, staged for women in private spaces, we catch a glimpse of female performers who in their devotion play the likeness of none other than the Seal of the Prophets and most important of angels, whilst simultaneously pushing the boundaries of the *taʿziyeh*

6 Mūnes al-Dawlah, *Khāterāt*, 98.

7 Ibid., 99, 104.

8 There are a number of versions of this episode amongst the Cerulli Collection. For details see Rossi, Bombaci, and Cerulli, *Elenco*, 351.

as a form in their lampoon of the heroine's adversaries. Much remains to be investigated about the treatment of the feminine in *taʿziyeh* plays and the contribution of women to the tradition. In this book I have focussed my analysis on four of the Muḥarram cycle's main episodes. The wider repertoire includes many little-known plays foregrounding female characters and their experiences. We have a lot to learn from them.

Glossary of Persian and Arabic Terms

ʿahd-nāmeh covenant

ahl-e bait (literally "people of the house") used here according to the Twelver Shiʿi understanding: to refer to the Prophet Muḥammad, his daughter Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā, her husband, Muḥammad's cousin, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb, their sons Ḥasan and Ḥusain, and the rest of the Twelve Imams

amānāt key relics that represent the tribulations endured by the Prophet's family, in the righteous path, and believed to be important for the intercession that Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā will make on the Day of Judgement

ʿĀshūrāʾ the 10th of Muḥarram, understood to be the date of Ḥusain's death

awliyāʾ defenders or friends, can denote the Shiʿi Imams, who are considered friends of God. In the *taʾziyeh* all of Ḥusain's supporters are termed *awliyāʾ*.

ʿazādārī mourning

baḥr-e ṭavīl a form of Persian verse, for further explanation see chapter 3 section 3.3

chahār-pāreh (also ***ṣad-pāreh***) a conversation in rhyming prose, with each speaker giving very short, even single word interjections

faqareh (pl. ***faqareh-hā***) a short, relatively self-contained section of dramatic action that includes a few scenic movements and/or a dialogue

farangī European, foreigner, foreign

fehrest director's key, prompt sheet

futuvvat a type of spiritual chivalry practised amongst brotherhoods in the Islamic world, synonymous with the Persian *javānmardī*

ghazal Persian lyric poem

gurīz (literally "escape" or "digression") a dramatic device used to link diverse events and occurrences to the Karbala narrative and the subject matter of a main episode

gūsheh (pl. ***gūsheh-hā***) sub-episode; scene featuring a short, self-contained narrative that can be performed within the body of a main episode or as a prologue or epilogue to it. Also referred to as a ***taʿziyeh-ye farʿī*** when not within the body of a longer episode

haram women's quarters

ḥejleh nuptial tent

jinn genies

jung the script of a *taʿziyeh* play with the lines of all characters, in the order in which they are delivered, written into a single booklet

houris virgins of paradise

kafan shroud

kanīz maid servant

kashkūl beggars bowl

***maqtal* genre** body of works giving devotional accounts of the martyrdoms of Shiʿism's central figures

maʿrekeh (literally "battle") in Timurid Khurasan, a place of public gathering to watch diverse forms of display, from wrestling to oratory performances

mashk water-skin

meṣrāʿ hemistich; half of a *bait* (couplet)

Muḥarram First month of the Islamic calendar year; month during which the main commemorations of the Karbala martyrdoms take place

Muʿīn al-Bukā' director of the royal *taʿziyeh*; initially the name of a particular individual who directed performances at Tekiyeh-ye Dawlat, the venue commissioned by Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh, subsequently went into general usage for all who held this role

nākāmī disappointment; lack of fulfilment

nāmūs honour

naqqālī traditional Iranian storytelling

naqqāl (pl. ***naqqālān***) storyteller(s) of the *naqqālī* tradition

nowkhaṭṭ (also ***khaṭṭ***) emergent moustache of an adolescent youth

Nowrūz Persian New Year

nuskheh script

nuskheh-gardān (pl. ***nuskheh-gardānān***; also ***taʿziyeh-sarāyandeh***, pl. ***taʿziyeh-sarāyandegān***) script writer; composer

pardeh (literally "curtain") painted canvas backdrop used by storytellers

pardeh-dārī (also ***pardeh-khānī***, or ***shamāyel-gardānī***) devotional storytelling using a painted canvas backdrop

pardehdār (pl. ***pardehdārān***) storyteller of the ***pardeh-dārī*** tradition

pīsh-e vāqeʿeh prologue

qeblah Muslim direction of prayer (towards Mecca)

rawżeh-khānī recitals (largely by mullahs) of the tribulations of the Shiʿi martyrs, and stories from the lives of the *ahl-e bait*, as told in Ḥusain Vāʿeẓ Kāshefī's *Rawżat al-shuhadā'* and similar works

rawżeh-khān (pl. ***rawżeh-khānān***) orator in the *rawżeh-khānī* tradition

rawżeh-khānī/maqtal genre of lithographed books treating the tribulations of the Shiʿi martyrs

sakū platform in the centre of the *taʿziyeh* performance space from which the majority of the dialogue is performed

sāqī water-bearer, cup-bearer

shahādah Muslim declaration of faith

shahādat martyrdom

sīneh-zanī rhythmic chest beating forming part of Muḥarram commemorations

sukhanvarī a contest in rhetoric involving a lengthy duel in verse between two contenders

sukhanvar (pl. ***sukhanvarān***) a *sukhanvarī* participant

tak-nuskheh (also ***fard-nuskheh***) a form of *taʿziyeh* script in which the lines of each character are written into separate booklets, for use by the players in performance

takhalluṣ nom de plume, pen name

taʿziyeh-gardān (pl. ***taʿziyeh- gardānān***) *taʿziyeh* director(s)

taʿziyeh-khānī (abbr. ***taʿziyeh***, also ***shabīh-khānī***) Shiʿi devotional drama (Iranian)

taʿziyeh-khān (pl. ***taʿziyeh-khānān***) *taʿziyeh* performer(s)

taʿziyeh-ye zanāneh *taʿziyeh* performance delivered by women for female-only audiences

tekiyeh (also ***ḥusainiyah***) venue for *taʿziyeh* performances and other Muḥarram observances

ṭūmār prompt book or scroll

ʿulamāʾ Muslim clerics, scholars and jurists

ummah Muslim community

vāqeʿeh (also ***majles-e aṣlī***) full-length *taʿziyeh* play; main episode

vaṣiyyat last will and testament

zanāneh-khān male *taʿziyeh* performer specialised in playing female characters

Ẕū-l-feqār ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb's legendary double-headed sword

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Index

ʿAbbās b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb
in devotional narratives 62, 93–94
in historiography 91–94, 151
paintings of 94
taʿziyeh martyrdom episode 8, 72–73, 82–83, 86, 89–123, 147, 159
other *taʿziyeh* treatment 33, 129*n*10, 146–147, 149, 177
ʿAbbasid period 93*n*14
ʿAbdullāh b. Ḥasan
in devotional narratives 151
in historiography 159–160
taʿziyeh treatment 129, 171, 172*n*55
Abū Lahab 103
Abū-Muslem-nāmeh 55
Abū Sufyān 103
Ādam 6, 111, 187
ʿAin al-Salṭanah 48
ʿAjam order (Selseleh-ye ʿAjam) 57–60, 106–107, 185–186, 213, 231–233
Akbar, Mughal Emperor 70*n*15
Albert Hall 40
Alborz Province 44*n*65, 53, 158, 163, 164*n*22, 181
ʿAlī Akbar (b. Ḥusain)
in devotional narratives 87*n*65, 150–152
in historiography 151
paintings of 94
taʿziyeh martyrdom 83, 130–131, 141, 147–149, 152, 161–162, 198
other *taʿziyeh* treatment 52–53, 85–86, 98–99, 118–121, 128–150, 155, 176, 211, 234
ʿAlī Aṣghar (b. Ḥusain)
in historiography 159
paintings of 162
taʿziyeh martyrdom 161–163, 167–168, 211
other *taʿziyeh* treatment 76, 120, 168
ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb
in devotional narratives 122, 183
in Shiʿi belief 3*n*, 5–6
taʿziyeh treatment of 72–74, 102–103, 121, 132, 183, 201, 214–216
amānāt 179, 187–188
“Amīr Kabīr” Mīrzā Taqī-Khān 226–227
angels 100, 167, 180–187, 189, 212, 237–238
Anīs al-Dawlah 45, 50*n*89
“Āqā Bābā” 51, 192
Āqāsī, Ḥājjī Mīrzā 148
Arak 152*n*80
Armenia 73, 79
ʿArūs-e Ḥażrat-e Fāṭemeh (Fāṭemeh’s Bride) 46
ʿArūsī raftan-e Ḥażrat-e Fāṭemeh (Fāṭemeh Goes to a Wedding) 46, 224, 237–238
ʿArūsī-ye Belqais u Sulaimān (The Wedding of Belqais and Soloman) 46
ʿĀshūrāʾ 5, 27, 33–35, 38, 73, 92, 186
Asrār al-shahādah (Burūjerdī, Sarbāz) 21
Aubin, Eugène 57
Azraq-e Shāmī 131–132, 150, 151*n*77

Baghdad 27–28
Baḥīrā 77
baḥr-e ṭavīl 108–111, 211–213
Bānū-Gushasp-nāmeh 55, 120–121, 178*n*74
Bāzār-e Shām (The Damascus Market) 5–6, 9, 72, 74–76, 190–229
al-Bedāyah wa’l-nehāyah (“Ebn Kathīr” Esmāʿīl b. ʿUmar b. Kathīr) 27–28
beloved (*maʿshūq*) 141–144, 155
Berezin, Il’ya Nikolaevitch 39, 48, 148–149, 183, 191, 201*n*36, 205, 208, 223
Bible 70–71
de Bruin, Cornelis 30
Bushehr 14–15, 91, 118*n*83, 126, 157, 192
Buyid Dynasty 27–28
Byzantine ambassador. *See* European Ambassador

camels 35, 197
Cerulli, Enrico 16, 43
collection of *taʿziyeh* scripts 7, 10–11, 43, 51–52
collection process 16–19, 43
discussion of individual scripts 32*n*24, 90–91, 105, 110, 114, 116–117, 121, 125–126, 142, 146–147, 157, 177, 188, 207, 219–220
chahār-pāreh (*ṣad-pāreh*) 216–219

Chardin, Jean 184
Chodzko, Aleksander Borejko 12, 39, 49, 51, 52*n*107
  collection of *taʿziyeh* scripts 12–13, 51, 209
  discussion of individual scripts 79*n*47, 90–91, 95*n*17, 96*n*21, 99*n*29, *n*31 & *n*34, 126, 130*n*12, 147–148, 152, 157, 166, 176–177, 180, 183
Christian characters 75–81, 171, 209–210, 226. *See also* European Ambassador; European Doctor
Christian Lady, the episode of (*Majles-e zan-e naṣrānī*) 75–76, 209
coffeehouses 3–4, 56, 59, 70, 233
compositional features 23–24, 57, 65–88, 214–216, 230–232
composition-scheme (*Kompositionsschema*) 83–87, 94–101, 127–133, 164–172
Constitutional Revolution 42, 222
conversion to Islam 16, 46, 73*n*30, 75–81, 169, 183, 202–204
Cossack Brigades 42
cursing (ritual). *See tabarrāʾ*

Damascus 5, 9, 27, 34, 75, 110, 172, 221. *See also Bāzār-e Shām*
Darbandsar
  collection of *taʿziyeh* scripts 15, 19*n*, 22, 72*n*22
  discussion of individual scripts 73n28, 90–91, 109–110, 112–113, 115–116, 126, 141, 156–157, 162*n*18, 170*n*48, 191–192, 201*n*40, 206*n*58, 216–217, 224
Day of Judgement 6, 156, 179, 216
Dervish of Kabul (*Darvīsh-e Kābulī*) 58–59, 75, 78, 168–169, 180–187, 233–234
Dīnavarī, Abū Ḥanīfah 20*n*50, 161
Durrat al-Ṣadaf 13*n*26, 178
Dutch Empire 33

Ebn Saʿd, ʿUmar
  in historiography 87*n*65, 119, 159–160
  taʿziyeh treatment of 79–81, 85, 95–97, 100, 105–106, 128, 131–132, 161, 165, 167, 169–170, 178, 218
Ebn Ziyād, ʿUbaid-Allāh
  in historiography 5, 193–195
  in devotional narratives 193
  taʿziyeh treatment of 79–80, 97, 209*n*70
Ebrāhīm (Abraham) 111, 114, 116–117, 187
epic literature 3, 7, 55–57
  influence on the *taʿziyeh* 24–27, 85–86, 88, 93–94, 101–104, 109–110, 120–123, 178, 211*n*77
Eskandar-nāmeh 55, 57, 70
Euphrates 5, 8, 84, 89, 92–94, 100, 120
European Ambassador (Īlchī Farangī) 9, 34, 75–76, 78, 190–194, 198–199, 200–214, 219, 229, 235
European Doctor 9, 191–193, 196–196, 223–228
European Monk, the episode of (*Majles-e dairānī-ye farangī*) 75, 77*n*39, 209*n*70

“Fanāʾī”, Aḥmad Mullā Muḥammad ʿAlī Vāʿeẓ Khānsārī 51, 230–231
faqareh 67, 187–188, 200*n*33, 232
Farfahan 12, 157*n*b
Fāṭemeh-ye Ṣughrā (Fāṭemah bint Ḥusain)
  in devotional narratives 87, 127, 150, 154–155
  in historiography 199*n*31
  taʿziyeh treatment 8, 33*n*27, 124, 128–131, 133–134, 138–140, 147–148, 168, 199, 201, 220
Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā (Fāṭemah bint Muḥammad)
  in Shiʿi belief 3*n*, 5–6, 179
  taʿziyeh treatment of 46, 49–50, 72–73, 76, 121*n*93, 171, 173, 202, 214, 216
Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shāh Qājār 38–39, 41, 45–46, 49n85, 181, 208–209, 219, 233
Fayyāż, Hāshem 15, 51, 67
  collection of *taʿziyeh* scripts 15, 51
  discussion of individual scripts 15, 70*n*46, 126
Feżżeh 50, 157*n*h, 166, 177, 179*n*79, 187–188, 236
Francklin, William 38, 124–125, 148, 205, 231
Fuṭrus 183–184, 212

futuvvat 59–63, 93*n*14, 230, 233
Futuvvat-nāmeh-ye sulṭānī (Kāshefī, Ḥusain Vāʿeẓ) 59–63, 230

Garmaseh 1, 191, 204
Gawharī Khānum 47
gazelles 112, 212
Ghārat-e khaimeh-hā (The Plunder of the Camp) 29, 51, 73–75, 164, 179, 222*n*97, 230
Ghaṣb-e bāgh-e Fadak (The Usurpation of the Garden of Fadak) 216
Gheynar 51
Gobineau, Arthur de 14, 49, 52–53, 153, 209–210
 translation of *The Martyrdom of Qāsem* 14, 126, 129*n*11, 130–131, 134, 141, 148
guilds 60–61
gurīz 7
gūsheh
 definition 7, 66–67, 213
 examples 118, 131–132, 181–183, 185–187, 198, 202, 223–228

Ḥabīb al-siyar ("Khāndamīr", Ghiyās al-Dīn) 4*n,* 20, 92–93, 151, 161, 174*n*63, 193, 195, 225*n*108
Hābīl (Abel) 112–113
Haftād-u-du tan (The Seventy-Two People) 32–35, 63–64, 146–148, 230
Hamadan 47, 53
Ḥamzah-nāmeh 57, 70
Hānībāl, ʿAlī (Arkady) 16–18, 43–44
Ḥarmalah 161, 167
Hārūn al-Rashīd 79–80
Ḥasan b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb
 in devotional narratives 150
 in Shiʿi belief 3*n*, 6, 172
 taʿziyeh treatment 8, 82, 124, 128–129, 141, 143–144, 165, 173, 212
ḥejleh 130, 133
Hendeh 198, 220–221
Heraclius, Byzantine Emperor 77
Herat 20, 28, 60–63
Hezār afsān (A Thousand Stories) 67
Hezār-u-yek shab (One Thousand and One Nights) 66–67
Homer 68–71
horses 30, 33–35, 40, 45, 85, 92, 130–131, 167, 170, 174–177, 189, 207, 234
houris 46, 131
Ḥurr b. al-Yazīd al-Riyāḥī 79–80, 82, 86*n*64, 118*n*83
Ḥusain b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb
 childhood (*taʿziyeh* treatment of) 183, 212
 in devotional narratives 58, 77–78, 81, 112, 115–117, 150
 in historiography 4–5, 74, 77*n*39, 93, 118, 127, 194–195, 225
 paintings of 94
 in Shiʿi belief 3*n*, 4–6
 taʿziyeh martyrdom episode 8–9, 12–13, 26–27, 58, 72, 75–86, 156–189, 214, 219–220, 231, 235, 237
 other *taʿziyeh* treatment 9, 33, 73–75, 79–80, 82, 85–86, 89, 95–101, 114–120, 122–123, 128–130, 132–133, 137–138, 140–141, 143–146, 149, 190, 194, 197, 200–202, 224
Ḥusain, ʿAlī Khān 12–13, 51
Ḥusain, Ḥājjī Mullā 53
Ḥusain-e Kurd 69–70
Hyderabad 154–155

Īlchī Farangī. *See* European Ambassador
improvisation 23, 54, 56–57, 68, 232
India 58, 70*n*15, 75*n*33, 154–155, 169–170, 182, 186
intercession 1, 6, 9, 86, 156, 166, 170–171, 179, 199, 216
ʿĪsā (Jesus) 79–80, 111–112
Isfahan 1, 29–31, 34, 36, 41, 48, 59*n*128, 91, 109*n*60, 126, 157, 184, 191, 204, 230
Islamic Republic 44

Jaʿfar Khān Zand 38
Jameh Shuran 47
javānmardī. See futuvvat
Jebraʾīl (Gabriel) 170, 173, 177, 185
Jesus. *See* ʿĪsā
Jewish characters 75, 77–78
jinn 169, 181–183, 186, 189

Kara-Kirghiz 69
Karbala, Battle of
 events surrounding 4–5
 in Shiʿi belief 6
 treatment in *taʿziyeh* 5–6. *See also* ʿAbbās, Qāsem, and Ḥusain martyrdom episodes

Kashan 15, 41, 43, 79*n*46, 91, 126, 192, 226–228
Ketāb al-Ershād ("al-Shaikh al-Mūfīd", Abū ʿAbdullāh Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Nuʿmān) 4*n*, 19–20, 87*n*65, 92, 118–119, 127, 151, 161, 166*n*27, 174*n*63, 183, 193–194, 200*n*32
Khāksār dervish order 57–59, 63*n*146, 185–187, 233. *See also* ʿAjam order
Khānum ʿEzzat Nesā 47
Kharg 32–35
khaṭṭ (*nowkhaṭṭ*) 141–144, 155
Khawlī b. Yazīd al-Aṣbaḥī 161
Khur 72*n*26
Khurasan 28, 61
Khusrow u Shīrīn 120
Kufa 4–5, 95*n*18, 159, 161, 193, 209*n*70
Kulṣūm bint ʿAlī 96, 99, 149, 166, 174–177, 199

lion 58, 102–104, 106, 113*n*69, 169, 179
lithographs of *rawżeh-khānī/maqtal* genre 20–21, 23, 58, 81, 114–118, 184, 223–224, 234
Litten, Willhelm 13
  collection of *taʿziyeh* scripts 13–14
  discussion of individual scripts 91, 105–106, 108*n*57, 157, 173, 175*n*68, 180, 183, 220
London 40
Luhūf (Ebn Ṭāwūs) 182–183

Madraseh-ye Sulṭānī 31–32
Manṭeq al-ṭayr (Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār) 173
maqtal genre 19–20, 182–183
Maqtal al-Ḥusain (Abū Mekhnaf) 19, 74, 82, 126, 159*n*3
Maqtal al-Ḥusain ("al-Khwārezmī", Abū Muʾīd) 20*n*50, 161
Markazi Province 12, 51, 53, 152*n*80, 157
marsiyeh 154
Mātamkadeh ("Bīdel" Qurbān b. Ramażān al-Qazvīnī al-Rūdbārī) 21
Mecca 4, 110
Medina 27, 35, 99–100, 129*n*11, 146–147, 159, 165, 168, 180, 198, 201, 203, 212, 229
Mīr-e Anjem 51
Mīr-e ʿAzā, Sayyed Muṣṭafā Kāshānī 15, 51–52, 126, 128*n*9, 129*n*10, 131*n*16, 133n25, 142*n*51, 143–144, 167*n*32, 192, 227–228, 236
Mīr-e Gham 51
Mīr-e Mātam 15, 126, 128*n*9, 129*n*10, 131*n*16, 133n25, 142*n*51, 143–144
Mīrzā Abū al-Ḥasan Khān Shīrāzī 39
Mīrzā Muḥammad Taqī 51, 53
de Montheron, M. 34–36, 48, 230
Muʿezz al-Dawlah Ebn Būyah 27
Muḥammad (Prophet of Islam)
  in devotional narratives 74, 203
  in historiography 74, 77
  in Shiʿi belief 3*n*, 4–6
  signet ring of 132, 216
  taʿziyeh treatment of 72, 73*n*28, 103, 111, 121*n*93, 171, 173, 187, 201, 212, 213*n*83, 216, 237
Muḥammad Reżā Shāh Pahlavī 43
Muḥammad Shāh Qājār 15, 39, 219, 223
Muḥarram
  cycle of plays 1–2, 5–6, 7–9, 23, 65–87, 117–118, 129*n*11, 137, 147, 153, 156, 167, 175, 219, 230, 234
  mourning rituals 3, 18, 26–37, 42–43, 47–50, 54, 63*n*146, 149
Muʿīn al-Bukāʾ 45, 51, 236–237
Mūnes al-Dawlah 45–46, 49*n*85, 237
Munīr al-Salṭanah 46
Mūsā (Moses) 111, 113–114
  Mūsā va Darvīsh-e Biyābānī (Moses and the Desert-Dwelling Dervish) 164*n*23, 185, 187, 231
Mūsā b. Jaʿfar (Mūsā al-Kāẓem)
  taʿziyeh martyrdom episode 79–80, 88
music 45, 52, 128*n*9, 130–131, 148, 197, 208
Muslem b.ʿAqīl
  in historiography 5
  taʿziyeh treatment of 5, 72–73
Mustawfī, ʿAbdullāh 48, 53

Nāder Shāh Afshār 28–30, 37, 64, 231
Najaf 98, 121, 168, 170
nāmūs (honour) 219–222, 229
naqqālī (traditional storytelling) 3, 24–25, 36, 42*n*58, 54–59, 61*n*140, 64, 66–67, 70, 88, 94, 122, 210–214, 230–232
Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh Qājār 39–42, 45–46, 49*n*85, 51–53, 182, 207*n*61, 219, 223, 225–227, 233–234
  taʿziyeh martyrdom episode 42, 82–83
"Nāṭeq", Sayyed Mīr-Zain al-ʿĀbedīn 51, 60, 79, 81, 182, 213, 232
Nāẓem al-Bukāʾ 51

Negus, Emperor of Ethiopia 77
Neẓāmī Ganjavī 120*n*91
Niebuhr, Carsten 32–35, 38*n*42, 148, 203–205, 230
nuskheh. *See ta'ziyeh* scripts

Ottoman Empire 37
Ouseley, William 148, 208
Oxus river 25, 110

Pahlavi Dynasty, reign of 18, 23, 36*n*37, 42–44, 64, 222
pardeh-dārī (*pardeh-khānī*; *shamāyel-gardānī* storytelling with a painted canvas) 3–4, 54–59, 64, 88, 94, 122, 162, 184–186, 231–233
Pelly, Sir Lewis 14
  collection of *ta'ziyeh* scripts 14–15
  discussion of individual scripts 76, 91, 99*n*30, 114–118, 126, 143, 157, 168n39, 170*n*43, 174*n*65, 192, 200*n*35, 202*n*44, 213–214, 223
prohibition (and restriction)
  of foreigners' attendance at *ta'ziyeh* 208–209
  of *ta'ziyeh* performances 18, 33, 42–44
  of traditional storytelling 55*n*111

"Qā'ānī" Mīrzā Ḥabīb-Allāh Shīrāzī 218–219
Qābīl (Cain) 112–113
Qajar Dynasty, reign of 2–4, 23, 38–42, 44–54, 57, 64, 70, 181, 185–186, 189, 191, 203–204, 208, 219, 225, 233–238
Qais, Sultan of India 58, 73, 75*n*33, 169–170, 182–184, 186, 234–235
Qalat 47
Qamar al-Salṭanah 45–46
Qāsem b. Ḥasan
  in devotional narratives 127, 150–152, 154, 235
  in historiography 126–127
  paintings of 125
  ta'ziyeh martyrdom episode 8, 14–15, 38, 83, 86–87, 124–155, 219–220, 234
  other *ta'ziyeh* treatment 33, 53, 96, 98–99, 119, 173, 175*n*68, 211
Qāsem's mother 50, 129–131, 133–137, 139–140, 143–144, 147–150, 152–155, 234
Qazvin 17, 43, 53
Qom 32n24, 192
Qur'an 111–113, 196, 200

rajaz-khānī 102
Ramażān 59
rawżeh-khānī 3–4, 20, 28, 30–32, 34, 45, 47–49, 54, 60, 66, 151, 154, 184, 231, 233, 236
Rawżat al-ṣafā ("Mīrkhānd", Muḥammad b. Khāvandshāh b. Maḥmūd) 4n, 20, 81, 87*n*65, 92–93, 119, 151, 161, 193–195, 225*n*108
Rawżat al-shuhadā' (Kāshefī, Ḥusain Vā'eẓ) 3, 4*n*, 20, 60, 74*n*31, 77–78, 81, 87–88, 93–94, 127, 132, 141*n*48, 150–152, 154–155, 161, 162*n*19, 167, 169*n*41, 173, 182–184, 193–194, 203–205, 213, 233, 235
Ray 97, 174
Reẓā Shāh Pahlavī 42, 55*n*111
Rustam 56, 103, 104*n*45, 110, 120–121, 132

Ṣafar 41, 44, 47*n*75, 59
Safavid Dynasty, reign of 26, 28–32, 34–37, 48, 51, 54–55, 59, 63–64, 66, 127, 161–162, 184, 195–196, 204, 230–232
sakū 40–41, 48, 50, 154, 234, 236
Sakīneh (Sakīnah bint Ḥusain)
  ta'ziyeh treatment 33*n*27, 84, 95–96, 99–101, 128, 166, 176–177, 194, 198–201, 211*n*75
Salmons, Thomas 29–30, 37, 184
saqqāyān. *See* water-carriers
satire 9, 46, 223–228
Saveh 53
self-mortification 29–31, 35
Selseleh-ye 'Ajam. *See* 'Ajam order
Senān b. Anas 79–82, 160–161, 164, 171
Serena, Carla 40, 41*n*53, 50*n*89, 53*n*102, 205, 223
Shāh 'Abbās I, Safavid 71*n*15
Shāh-nāmeh (Ferdowsī, Abu'l-Qāsem) 25, 55, 85–86, 102–103, 104*n*45, 110
Shāh-Parvar Khānum 47
Shāhbānū Faraḥ Pahlavī 43–44
Shāh-cherāgh 43*n*60, 73*n*28
Shahrbānū 120, 166–167, 174, 177, 186, 188
Shahrud 32*n*24

Shariyʿatī Ẕawq ʿAlī-Shāh, Ḥusain 16, 18, 43
Sheil, Mary Woulfe 49, 50*n*89, 153–154, 205, 208, 223
Shemr (Shamer b. ẕī al-Jawshan)
in devotional narratives 141*n*48, 161, 194
in historiography 91–92, 160–161, 195
paintings of 162
taʿziyeh treatment of 1, 9, 33, 49, 52–53, 74, 82, 85, 94–101, 103–121, 128, 131, 133, 161–162, 164–165, 171–172, 178–179, 191, 194, 197, 199*n*31, 200–202, 214–219
Shiraz 15, 32n24, 38, 41, 53*n*106, 91, 118*n*82, 124–126, 148, 157, 192, 205, 231
Arts Festival 22–23, 43–44
Siffin, Battle of 97, 171*n*51
sīneh-zanī 49
al-Sīra al-nabawiyyah (Ebn Esḥāq; Ebn Heshām, ʿAbd al-Malek) 77, 80
Siyāvash 25–27
stock epithets 65–66
storytelling. *See naqqālī* and *pardeh-dārī*
Stuart, Charles 205
sub-episode. *See gūsheh*
Sufism 59. *See also* ʿAjam, and Khāksār dervish orders
sukhanvarī 59–60, 106–107, 109, 213, 232
Sulṭan Ḥusain, Shāh 31

tabarrāʾ 31, 195–196
tableaux vivant 3, 28, 30
Tabriz 13, 53
Taleqan 53
Taqī Nūrī, Muḥammad 51
Tārīkh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk (al-Ṭabarī, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr) 4*n*, 19–20, 27*n*5, 74, 81, 87*n*65, 91–92, 98, 101*n*38, 118–119, 126–127, 151, 159–161, 167, 193–195, 199*n*31
Tārīkh-nāmeh-ye Ṭabarī (Balʿamī, Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad) 4n, 19, 92, 95*n*17, 127, 132*n*21, 151, 160*n*9, 161, 193–195, 202–203
Tārīkh-e Sīstān 77*n*39
Ṭarīq al-bukāʾ ("Geryān" Ardestānī Esfahānī) 81*n*55
Tavernier, Jean-Baptiste 59*n*128
taʿziyeh-khānī (*shabīh-khānī*)
audience 1–3, 6, 40–41, 64–67, 71, 74, 78, 86, 88, 147–148, 177, 188–189, 210, 214, 230, 233–236. *See also* women as *taʿziyeh* audience members
composers and directors 13, 15, 45, 50–52, 58, 60, 66, 71, 106–107, 182, 209, 230–232
emergence 28–37, 61–64, 117–118, 230–232
performers 39, 41, 47, 49, 50–54, 59–64, 71, 153, 207*n*61, 214, 226, 230–232, 234, 236. *See also* women as *taʿziyeh* performers
repertoire 1–2, 7, 41–43, 46, 50, 53–54, 56–58, 88, 115, 146–147, 164, 209, 232, 235, 238
scripts 9–19
venues. *See tekiyeh*
taʿziyeh-ye kāravānī (*taʿziyeh-ye sayyār; taʿziyeh-ye dowreh*) 30
taʿziyeh-ye maidānī 35
taʿziyeh-ye zanāneh. See women as *taʿziyeh* performers
Tehran 12–13, 15–16, 23, 39–42, 48–49, 52–53, 79*n*46, 91, 126, 148, 153–154, 157, 183, 209
tekiyeh (*ḥusainiyah*) 26, 39–42, 44, 48–49, 64, 109*n*60, 148, 154–155, 163, 164*n*22, 230, 233–234, 236
Tekiyeh-ye Dawlat 39–42, 51, 223, 226
tile paintings 94, 125, 215
Tīmur (Tamerlane), *taʿziyeh* play treating 13, 221
Timurid period 20, 28, 60–63, 108, 221
Transoxiana 25, 110
Ṭūfān al-bukāʾ ("Jawharī", Mīrzā Ebrāhīm b. Muḥammad-Bāqer) 20–21, 81, 115–118, 151–152, 184
ṭūmār 57, 66
type-scene 66–82, 87–88, 121–122, 169, 170–171, 199, 201, 204, 214- 216, 231–232, 236

ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb 195–196
Umayyad period 4–5, 27
Umm al-Banīn 89, 99, 104, 121, 123
Umm Lailā 130, 133–143, 146–152, 155, 166, 198

Vāliyah Ḥusn Jahān Khānum 47
van Goch, Matthias 29–30, 37, 184

vaqf 31–32, 47
Vasīlat al-najāt (Muḥammad Ḥusain b. Muḥammad Reżā) 21
Vatican Library 10, 16
verbal duel 91, 97, 102, 106–111, 122

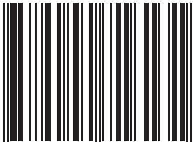
wagons 3, 28, 35
water-carriers (*saqqāyān*) 61–62, 63*n*146
Wilbraham, Richard 205
women
as composers or copyists of *taʿziyeh* scripts 46–47, 58
as *taʿziyeh* audience members 2, 47–50, 64, 153–155, 188–189, 198, 205, 236
as *taʿziyeh* patrons 45–47
as *taʿziyeh* performers 35, 45–46, 236–238
taʿziyeh treatment of 8–9, 44, 50, 84, 87–88, 133–140, 152–155, 175–180, 187–189, 193, 198–201, 219–222, 235–236

Yaḥyā (John the Baptist) 111, 187
Yazīd b. Muʿāwiyyah
in devotional narratives 162*n*20, 193, 196
in historiography 4–5, 193–195
paintings of 215
taʿziyeh treatment of 1, 9, 33–34, 73n29, 190, 193, 195–228
Yūsuf (Joseph) 111–114
Yūsuf u Zulaikhā 46

Zaʿfar (king of the *jinn*) 169, 181–183, 186, 189
Zainab bint ʿAlī
in devotional narratives 27, 193
in historiography 27, 160, 193
leadership role (*taʿziyeh* portrayal of) 86, 158, 172, 175–179, 189, 200–201, 221–222
salvific importance (*taʿziyeh* portrayal of) 179–180, 187–188
taʿziyeh treatment of 9, 22, 29, 50, 82–83, 86, 95–96, 98–99, 119–120, 128–129, 131, 137–140, 143, 146–149, 157–158, 164–166, 171–172, 174–179, 190–191, 198–202, 219–220
Zain al-ʿĀbedīn b. Ḥusain (Imam Sajjād;ʿAlī b. Ḥusain)
in devotional narratives
in historiography 5, 160, 193
in Shiʿi belief 3*n*, 157, 172
taʿziyeh treatment of 8–9, 34, 72, 74, 99, 128, 172–177, 188–189, 191, 193–194, 196, 200–202, 214–216, 221*n*93
Zand Dynasty, reign of 28–29, 37–38, 58, 231
Zand period *taʿziyeh* script collection 12, 21, 51, 60, 106, 231
discussion of individual scripts 58, 106–108, 111, 114, 118*n*83, 121*n*93, 122, 157, 169*n*41, 176, 185, 192, 199*n*31, 201*n*40, 203, 206–208, 212–213, 217, 223
Zan-e Zuhrī 46–47, 58
Zarēr, Memorial of 26–27
zoomorphism 101–108, 122
Zoroastrianism 25–27, 114
Ẕū-l-feqār 97, 170, 199, 201
Ẕuljanaḥ 167, 174, 175–179
Zuvvār-e Turkmān 52

"I am not Shemr, this is not a dagger, nor is this Karbala," recites the arch-antagonist as a *taʿziyeh* performance begins. Verisimilitude is not the endeavour; this is a devotional offering that stirs lament for the Shiʿi martyrs by representing events crucial to sacred history. But what does that retelling entail? Through study of four of its main episodes—from their long inter-female dialogues to the protagonists' encounters with *jinn*, dervishes, and foreigners—this book explores the *taʿziyeh* repertoire's compositional features. Combining a wide range of historical scripts, largely unpublished manuscripts, with witness accounts, it tracks the tradition's development from Safavid to Qajar Iran asking, *who* were its contributors? And, *how* have they left their mark?

Lucy Deacon (Ph.D. University of Edinburgh, 2022) is a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Fribourg. She has published on the emergence of the *taʿziyeh* tradition, its dramatic content, and present-day performances. Before studying Persian and Arabic she was a professional performer.



Studies on Performing Arts &
Literature of the Islamicate World, 15

ISSN 2214-6563

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