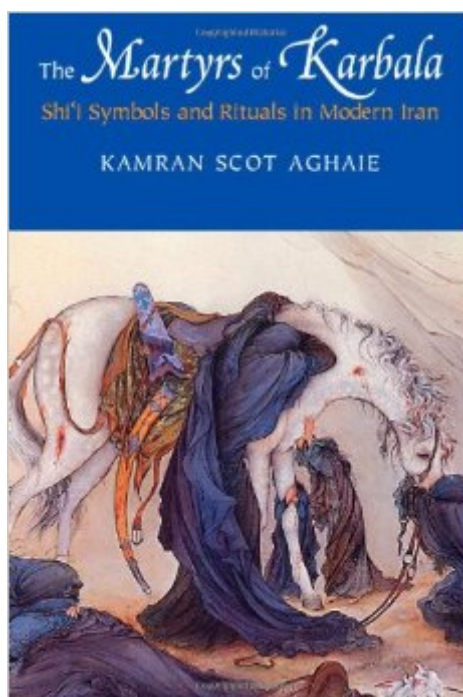


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The Martyrs Of Karbala: Shi'i Symbols And Rituals In Modern Iran



Synopsis

This innovative study examines patterns of change in Shiâ™ symbols and rituals over the past two centuries to reveal how modernization has influenced the societal, political, and religious culture of Iran. Shiâ™s, who support the Prophet Mohammadâ™s progeny as his successors in opposition to the Sunni caliphate tradition, make up 10 to 15 percent of the worldâ™s Muslim population, roughly half of whom live in Iran. Throughout the early history of the Islamic Middle East, the Sunnis have been associated with the state and the ruling elite, while Shiâ™s have most often represented the political opposition and have had broad appeal among the masses. Moharram symbols and rituals commemorate the Battle of Karbala in 680 CE, in which the Prophet Mohammadâ™s grandson Hoseyn and most of his family and supporters were massacred by the troops of the Umayyad caliph Yazid. Moharram symbols and rituals are among the most pervasive and popular aspects of Iranian culture and society. This book traces patterns of continuity and change of Moharram symbols and rituals in three aspects of Iranian life: the importance of these rituals in promoting social bonds, status, identities, and ideals; ways in which the three major successive regimes (Qujars, Pahlavis, and the Islamic Republic), have either used these rituals to promote their legitimacy, or have suppressed them because they viewed them as a potential political threat; and the uses of Moharram symbolism by opposition groups interested in overthrowing the regime. While the patterns of government patronage have been radically discontinuous over the past two centuries, the roles of these rituals in popular society and culture have been relatively continuous or have evolved independently of the state. The political uses of modern-day rituals and the enduring symbolism of the Karbala narratives continue today.

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Customer Reviews

The Tragedy of Karbala is a historical event which took place in 680 A.D. in Karbala, Iraq, where a grandson of the Prophet of Islam named Husayn (spelled variously as Husain, Hussein, etc.) was brutally killed by the orders of Yazeed, the Umayyad Caliph of the time, after having fought desperately with a handful of his companions. Since that time, the Tragedy is remembered as a solemn event by sad lamentations (popularly known as AZADARI), as an effort to protect the basic human rights by a lone crusader against a tyrannical despot, and as the struggle for true and pristine Islam against a debauch oppressor who had taken the garb of a Caliph. The Shi'a Muslims have taken that as a part of their religious duty and practice that lamentation mixed with some demonstrations. Iran being the majority Shi'a country, stands out for that practice. However, the Iranian general public has developed a custom of Tâ'âziyya to commemorate the tragedy which consists of street dramas which look like a celebration more than a solemn observation of a tragedy. Scholars who have written about the Tragedy have obviously been attracted to those dramas rather than to the true passion and the underlying philosophy of the great sacrifice presented by Husayn. A number of books have appeared describing the Tragedy. Kamran Scott Aghai's *The Martyrs of Karbala* is one such book. This book, as we mentioned, is also full of glossy pictures and describes the Iranian tradition of Tâ'âziyya. However, the main spread of the Karbala observance has happened in the wider world through the South Asian culture of India/Pakistan, so is true about the U.K. and the U.S.A.

This book is the premiere comprehensive analysis of how the battlefield death of the Shiite's third Imam Hoseyn/Hussain at Karbala, Iraq, led to the development of Shiite religious rituals that were used by the Shiite imams in influencing their successful dethronement of Iran's Mohammed Reza Shah in late 1978. This book is really about the historical development of Shiite symbols and rituals commemorating the martyrdom of Hoseyn, rather than an expansive history of the 1970s-era of student demonstrations against the shah of Iran. The battle resulting in Hoseyn's martyrdom occurred on 10 October 680 C.E. (Ahsura Moharram 352 A.H.). The author presented two reasons as to why Hoseyn started his ride towards his martyrdom. The author clearly opined that Hoseyn rode towards Damascus to at least upbraid the new Muslim caliph Yazid for being cruel and despotic to his Muslim minions. [Yazid's father, Muawiyah had moved the Muslim government from Mecca to Damascus in 661-662.] This makes Hoseyn's adventure look really unselfish, and even

highly moralistic. However, what is obliquely mentioned in the book (on pages 7 and 93), but not as clearly portrayed, is the contention that Hoseyn really rode forth in an armed coup attempt to unseat Yazid. Briefly, when the Muslim prophet Mohammad died, his successors were: (#1) caliph Bakr (Sunni), (#2) caliph Umar/Omar (Sunni), (#3) caliph Uthman/Othman (Sunni), and (#4) caliph Ali (while all Sunni respect Ali has the fourth caliph, as the Shiites regard Ali as the first proper successor to his uncle Mohammad, Ali is the first Shiite imam). As Ali attempted to consolidate his rule, he was opposed by the military-governor of Damascus: General Muawiyah/Moaviyeh (who had been appointed governor of Syria by #2 Sunni caliph Umar in 640).

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