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Shiᶜi Rituals and Power
II. The Consolidation of Safavid Shiᶜism: Folklore and Popular Religion

Jean Calmard*

Although for a long time obscured by the scarcity of sources and reliable research, the circumstances of the imposition of Twelver Imami Shiᶜism by Shah Ismaᶜil and his motives are now somewhat better known. As I have shown in the first part of the present research,[1] this imposition of Shiᶜism on a Persian population then widely of Sunni obedience was relatively easier in the territories previously under Aq-Qoyunlu control than in the former Timurid realm based on Herat. The Shah and his Persian notables and Qizilbash had to be more cautious there, notably when implementing the proclamation of the Shiᶜi *khuṭba* and the ritual cursing of the first two or three caliphs.[2] Despite their brutality, the measures of intimidation or retaliation seem to have been less efficient in Khurasan than in Iraq (central Persia). As in the case of Tabriz, where the local elite could always flee to the Ottomans, former Timurid officials or other members of the Herati intelligentsia found rewarding prospects in Uzbek-controlled Central Asia and mostly in Timurid-Mughal India. The main Persian trend of emigration was directed to India. Although it had begun long before Safavid times, it was, from the middle of the 16th century, considerably increased. Discontented or persecuted opponents, or those who merely sought better living conditions, left for India from all parts of the Safavid realm. This included even Shiᶜis (laymen and ᶜulama) and many features of Persian Shiᶜi ceremonies influenced local Indian indigenous rituals, both in their Sunni and Shiᶜi environments. Some of these features, being perpetuated by tradition, remained as a vivid

* I thank Charles Melville for his precious help in reading the draft of this article. In compliance with his advice, the transliteration has been simplified and harmonised with the rest of the volume.

testimony of Shiᶜi rituals, as they were performed in Safavid times, whereas in Persia they developed along different lines.

Since a large-scale conversion to Shiᶜism could not be obtained only by intimidation or coercion, various devices were utilised to enforce and propagate the officially proclaimed Imamism. Although it did not prevent crypto-Sunnis from infiltrating the higher offices, officially approved religious authorities and notables were set in place. Imami theologians, initially taught in *madrasa*s according to the traditional curriculum perpetuated in the *ᶜatabāt* ("sacred thresholds" of Iraq), were brought in, or placed themselves at the service of the Safavids. Their main function was to re-elaborate, teach and propagate the Imami doctrine to fit the new situation created by the existence of an officially Shiᶜi state. But contrary to what has been said and generally accepted, there was no "clerical migration" of Arab Twelver ᶜulama to Iran. The Syrian-Lebanese *mujtahid* of Jabal ᶜAmil, ᶜAli al-Karaki (d. 940/1534), who joined Shah Ismaᶜil soon after his capture of Tabriz and proclamation of Shiᶜism (907/1501), was for many decades the only Arab Imami mujtahid who associated himself with the Safavid court. His support of Safavid Shiᶜism and his position concerning the expansion of the role and authority of the *faqīh* in the absence of the Hidden Imam were strongly criticised by Shiᶜi clerics from Arab Iraq, the Gulf and the Hejaz.[3] Clerical notables, such as the *ṣadr*, were in fact seldom appointed to propagate Imamism in the Safavid realm.[4] This role was generally devolved upon the mujtahids who also acted as a sort of censor of moral conduct regarding every aspect of spiritual and temporal life.

By the time of the imposition of Twelver Shiᶜism, popular literature was propagated by various storytellers (sing. *maddāḥ, qissa-khwān, daftar-khwān, ᶜāshiq*, etc.) generally known under the generic name of *maᶜraka-gīrān*. Besides Shah Ismaᶜil / Khata'i's Divan, *Abū Muslim-nāma*s and related epico-religious texts, sometimes re-arranged to enhance Safavid pretensions as apocalyptic avengers of Imam Husain's blood, continued to be told or sung to propagate ritual devotion both to Abu Muslim and the Safavids. Some Imami ᶜulama, starting with al-Karaki, strongly reacted against the *Abū Muslim-nāma*s and other epics which they banned, lumping them together with reproved Sufi practice.[5] A study on this and other epico-religious literature, including sagas of authentic or so-called avengers of Husain's blood, such as Mukhtar or Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyya, as well as non-Islamic literature and storytelling (of the *Shāh-nāma* and Kuroghlu's epic) will be published separately. That will also include the *maqtal-nāma*s as well as elegiac poetry specifically dedicated to Shiᶜi mourning. My attention here is mainly focused on the respective attitudes of royal and religious authorities towards popular religion and devotion. An attempt will also be made to retrace some

aspects of rituals, mostly connected with Muharram ceremonies and other communal celebrations, which have never been properly described in their historical setting. Far from being exhaustive, this research will require further investigation taking into account recent studies on ritual theory and practice.

SHIᶜI COMMEMORATIONS AND RITUALS: AN OVERVIEW

Whereas canonical religious obligations of the Shiᶜis are more limited than those of the Sunnis (three daily prayers instead of five; Friday prayer tending to take a facultative character or to be simply forbidden in the absence of the Hidden Imam), their periodic ceremonies are rich in all kinds of celebrations. The liturgical Islamic year is punctuated by ritual mourning (*ᶜazādārī*) of the Ahl-i bait and the Imams, and also by joyful gatherings (Ar. *ᶜīd*, Pers. *ᶜaid*) marking the anniversaries of their births, or other events celebrated by the Shiᶜis, such as the Ghadir Khumm (commemoration of ᶜAli's designation by the Prophet at the farewell pilgrimage) on 18 Zu'l-Hijja. The birth of the Prophet is celebrated together with that of the sixth Imam (Jaᶜfar al-Sadiq), on 17 Rabiᶜ al-avval (the Prophet's birth, *mīlād,* is celebrated on 12 Rabiᶜ al-avval by the Sunnis). The feast of the sacrifice (*ᶜaid- i qurbān*) was also an important socio-religious gathering much celebrated from the Safavid period and Nauruz remained the Iranians' greatest festival (see below). Many Persian feasts (*jashn*) or rites (*āᶜīn*) were also celebrated according to the lunar calendar.

But from the imposition of Shiᶜism, the general mood is given by ritual mourning of Imam ᶜAli's martyrdom (21 Ramazan) and, above all, the commemoration of the death of Imam Husain and other martyrs of Karbala during, at least, the first ten days of the month of Muharram. These ceremonies provide the canvas for the development of all Shiᶜi rituals. After their elaboration in their original Arabian environment and their diffusion in the Turko-Persian area (among all communities: Sunnis, Shiᶜis, *ghulāt* or other heterodox movements), these rituals underwent a further evolution under the Safavids. They constituted a sort of catalyst of emotive feelings of persecution, widely spread in popular Shiᶜism, which could always be utilised in some way to fulfil political aims.

As it is evident that there exists a profound dichotomy between doctrinal Imamism and ritual practices of the various socio-religious groups performing Shiᶜi ceremonies, my analysis will limit itself to presenting what may be known about the general character of these rituals and the attitude of political and religious authorities regarding

them. Persian sources being generally vague or even silent on this subject, the main available sources remain essentially the accounts or testimonies of European travellers. Both Persian and European sources being particularly discreet about ceremonies held in private (such as some rauza-khwanis), I will of course be unable to treat this subject. Although the pressure of religious leaders on the conscience of the faithful may be strong, political and religious power had little influence on this form of inner piety.

Available documentation covers the reigns of the Safavid Shahs unequally. I will, however, endeavour to follow the chronological order. The main observations on Safavid Muharram ceremonies by European travellers are assembled in a Table.[6] Abridged details given in the Table from these often lengthy accounts of the ceremonies will be discussed hereafter and in the commentary of the document presented in the Appendix.

I. Shiᶜi rituals before Shah ᶜAbbas I

Apart from imprecise indications of Qizilbash rituals, we know very little about Shiᶜi ceremonies under Shah Ismaᶜil. Features of mourning ceremonies, which probably existed before in the Turko-Persian area, had already penetrated into *ᶜĀshūrā* rituals. The same year when Shah Ismaᶜil took the power in Tabriz (907/1501), on the day of ᶜAshura in Damascus some "rascals from Iran and Qalandars" (*aubāsh al-ᶜajam wa'l-qalandariyya*) gathered themselves, proclaimed that they were "heretical" Shiᶜis (*rawāfiż*), mangled their faces and did other similar things. Some people, scandalised by their behaviour, complained to the temporary governor who sided with these "heretics" and blamed their detractors.[7] While Safavid Shiᶜism was being outlawed by the Ottomans and the Uzbeks, such "rafizi" practices seem to have spread rapidly throughout Iran. According to a European testimony, towards the middle of the 16th century, in the island of Hurmuz, Muslims of the Shiᶜi minority held their Muharram ceremonies in the great mosque of Jalalabad, located at the margin of the town. Every year, they cut themselves with knives (*navālhās, sic*) "for the love of Mohammad".[8] Such mortifications persisted both in ᶜAshura rituals and private mourning held in honour of deceased persons.[9] Grief mixed with remorse forming the basis of the Husainid cult, in addition to such practices as dishevelling the hair, beating chest and forehead with the fist (attested at least from the Buyid and Saljuqid periods), these bloody rituals were progressively introduced into Shiᶜi mourning. Besides the above-mentioned wounds to the forehead with large knives and swords, there are also early 17th-century

accounts of burning and scorching in various parts of the body [Kakash], of self beating with chains [Kotov] etc.

The first substantial European account of Safavid Shiᶜism is provided by the Venetian (whose family was settled in Cyprus), Michele Membrè, who was sent on a mission to Persia under Shah Tahmasb. What he observed on canonical cursing of the caliphs and Qizilbash rituals is of primary importance.[10] Although we do not know when the usage was established, the Husainid "passion", which is called "achiur" then lasts ten days. This is obviously the custom followed by Imami Shiᶜis, for the Qizilbash and related heterodox movements seem to have celebrated Muharram for twelve days in honour of the twelve Imams.[11] Mourning is then held in black. Violet and blue are however attested in later accounts, along with black or other dark colours. Young men colour their skin black. Some penitents bury themselves to the head on the "begun" [Begum] square. In the evening, all the ladies go to their mosques and attend a sermon on the passion of Husain and weep bitterly.

Theatrical aspects, self-inflicted violence and bloody clashes between celebrants are absent from Membrè's observations at Tabriz. Apart from factional strife at Qazvin, we have no clear mention of Shiᶜi rituals as observed by travellers till the beginning of the 17th century.

II. Shah ᶜAbbas I and Shiᶜi rituals

Despite his achievements as a restorer of Safavid authority and state, Shah ᶜAbbas remains rather puzzling in his attitude towards religion. After having first favoured the Nuqtavi heresy, which he may have considered as a new ideological basis to replace Qizilbash ideal, he crushed the movement when it endangered his own power.[12] He appeared so tolerant towards non-Islamic religions that some Catholic missionaries pretended he intended to become a Christian.[13] In search with more direct links with his Persian subjects, he favoured popular religion by such acts of devotion as his pilgrimage on foot to the sanctuary of the Imam Riza at Mashhad.[14] But the main features of his conception of power, rulership and royal prerogatives may be seen at work in his policy towards Shiᶜi mourning rituals. Under his rule, Muharram ceremonies, which had until then been apparently rather limited to their devotional and folkloric aspects, became a great festival, both civil and religious. The same may be said about the commemorations of ᶜAli's martyrdom, on 21 Ramazan. Although it was less elaborate, its celebration became so similar to Muharram rituals that both ceremonies were sometimes confused.[15] There were also mutual influences between Muharram ceremonies and other religious and non-religious festivals

(see below). Besides mourning and lamentation assemblies, processional rituals developed considerably. But, at least for a foreign observer, self-inflicted or mutual violence remained one of the main features of Shiᶜi mourning from that time. Despite the often imprecise character of the available documentation, I'll endeavour to trace briefly Shah ᶜAbbas's actions respecting these Shiᶜi mourning rituals.

(i) *Factional strife : sticks, stones, swords and firearms*

Urban and even rural factionalism between various socio-religious groups has been a recurrent phenomenon in Iran, reported at least from the 4th/10th century. From Safavid times, most cities of Iran were divided into rival groups, the *Ḥaidarī* and *Niᶜmatī* factions. Since they are seldom identified under these names in European sources, there have been misinterpretations about their origins. The Niᶜmatis take their name from the sufi Shaikh Shah Niᶜmat-Allah Vali Kirmani (d. 834/1431), founder of the Niᶜmat-Allahiyya. His spiritual and material heritage was divided into Persian and Indian branches of the order. Although it entertained good relations with Safavid power, its influence in Persia declined from Shah ᶜAbbas's reign and disappeared as an organised sufi order until its restoration on a different basis in the 18th century.[16] A rather well known dervish community called Haidari had gathered around the sufi Shaikh Qutb al-Din Haidar Tuni, also called Zava'i (d. 618/1221). After his death, Zava was renamed Turbat-i Haidariyya. Because of their excessive ascetism and seclusion, the number of these Haidaris gradually decreased, although some groups did subsist, notably in India.

Many Persian sources have mistaken this Haidar Zava'i with the correct eponym of the Haidari party under the Safavids, a certain Qutb al-Din, Sultan Mir Haidar Tuni (d. 830/1427), a member of the Qalandariyya order who lived and had his followers in Tabriz.[17] Some other authors (such as the Qajar writer Iᶜtimad al-Saltana, partly following Chardin, or Fasa'i, in his *Fārs-nāma-yi Nāṣirī*) wrongly thought the Haidariyya were named after Sultan Haidar Safavi.[18]

It has been surmised that the origin of the Haidari-Niᶜmati conflict was rooted in 8th/14th century Shiᶜi-Sunni sectarian and doctrinal disputes, Mir Haidari Tuni being a Shiᶜi (according to Shushtari's *Majālis al-mu'minīn*), and the Niᶜmat-Allahiyya being Sunnis before their gradual conversion to Shiᶜism under the Safavids.[19] Although this factionalism was witnessed, at different times, in the three successive Safavid capitals (Tabriz, Qazvin, Isfahan), the gradual polarisation of old feuds under Haidari and Niᶜmati banners remains poorly documented in the 16th century. The only substantial account is provided by the Venetian Vincentio d'Alessandri, who visited Tabriz and Qazvin in Tahmasb's reign.

According to him, the nine wards of the city of Qazvin were divided into two factions, the "Nausitai" and the "Himicaivartu", five for the one and four for the other. They had been permanently feuding for over 30 years and "nor could the king or any other put a stop to it".[20]

The very origin of Haidari-Niᶜmati division has been attributed by the later traveller in Safavid Persia, Father Krusinski (1675-1756), to Shah ᶜAbbas's policy of *divide et impera*. He says that he created in each town artificially-opposed parties called *Pelenk* and *Felenk*. He even tried to impose this policy at Qandahar. Opponents were given permission to fight, only with stones and sticks, during Muharram ceremonies.[21] Although ᶜAbbas I did not create *ex nihilo* the Haidari-Niᶜmati factions, under whatever name, he surely encouraged this factionalisation for political reasons, as did other rulers or governors after him. Instead of turning itself against political power, socio-political discontent and dissent could thus be expressed in relatively controlled outbursts of violence. Factional strife, which lost its doctrinal aspects and was rooted in popular fanaticism, reached its climax in Muharram ceremonies and was observed in other religious rituals (mourning for ᶜAli, *ᶜaid-i qurbān*) or festive occasions such as cock-fights or other sports.[22] Although it cannot be ascertained whether all Muharram penitents belonged to either of these factions, according to most testimonies, violent clashes between the opponents were meant to represent the great turmoil in which Imam Husain perished. According to a widely spread belief, those who die in these commemorations directly enter the gates of Paradise.

Shah ᶜAbbas's taste for spectacles such as gladiatorial displays has been observed.[23] Some months after he had crushed the Nuqtavi movement, one day after his arrrival at Qazvin, on 20 Jumada I, 1003/2 March 1595, he organised by decree a battle between Niᶜmatis and Haidaris on the Maidan-i Saᶜadat. The Mir Haidar party won and a similar fight was also decreed at the shrine of Shahzada Husain.[24] Della Valle, who was acquainted with Shah ᶜAbbas's astronomer Mulla Jalal and describes at length the Shah's participation in festivities and ceremonies, says in his account of mourning rituals for ᶜAli's martyrdom on 21 Ramazan in the year 1026/1617, that, when he is in town, the king in person accompanies the procession of one of the two congregations which he wants to favour. Despite precautions to preserve order, entrusted to the vizier of Isfahan and the king's treasurer, fights over precedence often entailed the death of several persons. The Shah often took pleasure in siding with one of the parties. After having brought them to blows, he would go and sit at a window to watch the dismal issue of the battle.[25] Such a Machiavellian attitude in manipulating the factions was also observed in later rulers.[26]

This inclination for displays of socio-religious violence was

tempered by a pragmatic sense of the need to maintain order. In these ritual fights, Shah ᶜAbbas authorised factions to use only long sticks. This also applied to various socio-religious corporate bodies (artisan guilds, quarters, ethnic groups etc.), for there were often old rivalries between them, mostly about precedence. De Gouvea, our first 17th-century observer, says that most of the penitents were armed only with sticks, five or six feet long, painted in various colours. Although participants were later seen carrying swords, pikes, knives etc., sticks remained in use. They are described as: long and thick staffs [della Valle]; "gros bastons" [de Montheron]; golden staffs made on purpose for that feast [Gaudereau]; staffs looking like levers [Tavernier]. Under Shah Sultan Husain (1704), de Bruin says that some were armed with painted staffs, well gilded, ten feet long. Others had an unsheathed sword in one hand and a shield in the other. He observed that the chief of police (*dārūgha*) took great care to maintain order. He was accompanied by more than a thousand horsemen; soldiers equipped with firearms were placed in the narrow streets. This enabled order to be maintained on that occasion. But outbursts of violence could not always be prevented. Ten years later, 300 persons were killed by repression on the Isfahan maidan [Krusinski]. Populations in the Caucasus were particularly turbulent in Muharram ceremonies. At Shamakhi, under Shah Sulaiman, on the third day of the feast penitents were allowed to fight with swords, which they did to the point of mutilating or killing each other [Struys]. Under Shah Sultan Husain, Haidari and Niᶜmati factions at Shamakhi, usually armed with staffs half a pike's length and slings, "began some years ago to use fire arms, so that the battle does not end without bloodshed." Despite their endeavours to stop these disorders, governors could not prevent the youths showing their bravery in these fights.[27] Obviously, self-inflicted or mutual injuries seem to have been more violent in northern areas. According to Olearius, among the welcome cortege preceding the ambassador's train entering Ardabil, there were men stripped to the waist. Although the skin of their arms and breasts was pierced with stilettos, they did not seem to suffer any pain, which made Olearius think they were under the influence of some charm. In a procession meant to represent Husain's funeral, held in the early morning (following the ᶜAshura), Olearius saw young lads cutting themselves above the elbow and clapping the wounds with their hands, making the blood spurt out all over their arms. They did this in remembrance of the effusion of Husain's innocent blood and as a way to expiate their own sins.[28]

There is no evidence that Shah ᶜAbbas I ever authorised factions to use stones in their fights. As is the case with unsheathed swords (an instrument used to express remorse or protest when turned against themselves by the penitents), stones, as well as pieces of wood or bones

knocked rythmically together by black or red-coloured young beggars [della Valle], belonged primarily to mourning rituals which were later called *sang-zanī* and the penitents *sang-zan* (see below). Men would go through the town, in groups of two penitents, besmeared with black naphta, "black as negroes", only their teeth being visible. Each one held a stone in one hand. They knocked these stones against one another and kept saying *"ksen ksen tausen ksen"* [Husain Husain Hasan Husain?] for ten days [Kotov]. Under Shah Safi, these sang-zans were poor begging boys who, during the feast, lay at night in the ashes brought out of the Shah's kitchen. With their black shining skin, rubbed over with soot and naphta, they looked like little devils [as already observed by della Valle]. They were called "Tzaktzaku" [from their 'leitmotiv', *Shāh Ḥusainam kū?*]. They knocked little stones one against the other and sometimes smote their breasts with them, to express their sorrow for the death of Husain [Olearius]. Chest smiting with heavy stones was also observed [Bedik] as well as stone-knocking, with further details. Strange contortions and grimaces of the sang-zans were noticed by Struys. Penitents knocking stones as one does with castanets were also noticed by Chardin. He also observed black-coloured men knocking stones, hanging out their tongues and screaming with all their strength "Hossein! Hassen!". He explains that these meant to represent Husain's thirst, whereas those tinted with blood meant to represent Husain being drenched in blood [a similar observation by della Valle]. These penitents were rascals begging throughout the town on that occasion.

Although testimonies remain rather vague, fighting with stones was noticed from Shah Safi and ᶜAbbas II's time [Sainte-Trinité; Poullet], with apparently a further evolution under Shah Sulaiman. Fights with stones and sticks were less strictly repressed when the Shah was not in town, since the great provost (*dārūgha*) derived great profit from them.[29] According to Kæmpfer, all the cities in Persia were split into two factions, Haidari and Niᶜmati. Annual contests between the two camps, with a large participation of young men and ordinary people ended in pitched battles with fists, staffs or clubs. These contests were apparently organised independently of the religious calendar, but reached their climax in the annual commemoration of Husain's death. These battles with staffs, stones sometimes propelled with slings, as well as other weapons, were observed or reported by hearsay under Shah Sultan Husain (see above).

(ii) *Martial and spectacular aspects of rituals*

As has been shown, Shah ᶜAbbas's energetic action to restore Safavid authority was accompanied by extensive travels, with often a large entourage, for military campaigns, hunting or seasonal trips between his

winter and summer capitals, this activity in the field being pursued till the end of his life.[30] There is some evidence that on campaign, he continued to commemorate Husain's death. While engaged in a difficult fight against the Uzbeks, he celebrated ᶜAshura (10 Muharram 1011/30 June 1602) with his army on the banks of the Khatab River.[31] During the last phase of the conquest of the fortress of Erevan over the Ottoman Sharif Pasha (9-10 Muharram 1013/7-8 June 1604), on the eve of the ᶜAshura, the din of mourning performances coming from the Persian camp so impressed the besieged that they implored Sharif Pasha to negotiate the surrender of the place. On the day of ᶜAshura, when his envoy arrived at the Safavid camp, he found the Shah wearing, as was his custom, his mourning dress and commemorating with his amirs the murder of the Prince of Martyrs.[32] Shah ᶜAbbas was particularly fond of illuminations (*chirāghān, chirāghānī*), which he revived or reintroduced in Persia. Lights were burning for several days and nights when he arrived in a city, returned to the capital or simply ordered chiraghan to be made for his own household or his guests, or by merchants, at their own expense, in the bazaar. These illuminations, sometimes accompanied by fireworks (*ātash-bāzī*) were set up even in the sacred Islamic months.[33] In the month of Muharram 1018 (April-May 1609), from the 12th, chiraghan were held for eleven days and nights at Isfahan, in the Bagh-i Naqsh-i Jahan. About 1000 wretched Jalalis were inebriated with wine in this garden, but no one dared to express any objection aloud. Only the mujtahid Shaikh Baha'i found a way to show his disagreement by dating the event with the chronogram *ᶜAlī bibakhshad* (May ᶜAli forgive!).[34]

Although it entailed at least silent reprobation, such festivities were observed during the month of Muharram after the reign of Shah ᶜAbbas. According to Olearius, ambassadors of the Duke of Schleswig-Holstein were invited by the governor of Ardabil to watch nightly Muharram ceremonies, on the last day of the festival, with a profusion of illuminations. When mourning ceremonies were over, fireworks were set off in honour of the ambassadors.

As a result of Shah ᶜAbbas's foreign policy there was an increase in European visitors coming and sometimes settling for long periods in Persia. From the early 17th century, these travellers provided an unprecedented mass of observations on every aspect of Persian socio-cultural life. This rather unbalanced set of testimonies makes it difficult to appreciate the state of development of Shiᶜi rituals before Shah ᶜAbbas. Among the multiplicity of ethnographic and socio-cultural problems raised by these rituals, mainly those aspects which, as in the case of factional strife, could have been related to political or religious power or influence will be analysed briefly here.

However much their religious beliefs or motives may have been

manipulated, Muharram penitents obviously found in these ceremonies some way to express their inner feelings and to assert their social cohesion as well as their differences. As was observed from an earlier date (notably by della Valle), processions of religious groups or congregations looked like military parades, participants willing to show their fervour and eagerness to fight even to the death for Husain's cause. Volleys of arquebuses fired by a great number of men marching in front of coffins led in procession were observed by de Gouvea. Led horses, meant to represent ᶜAli or Husain's mounts, were richly covered with bards; bows, arrows, swords and shields were attached to their saddles; a turban was fixed on the saddle-bow. These things symbolised the martyred Imam's weapons. According to della Valle, the extraordinary lengths of the staffs of the standards (*ᶜalam*) carried in procession also meant to represent the weapons (or banners) of the martyred Imam, thus showing that he was a giant. Such gigantic standards as well as different kinds of ᶜalam were observed throughout the period (by Kotov, Olearius, Tavernier, Chardin, de Bruin, Gemelli).[35] These standards and various coffins and trophies carried by dancing penitents were accompanied by people singing and playing *naqqāras* (large kettle drums), fifes and cymbals [della Valle]. This display of military symbols in these warlike ceremonies was further enhanced by the playing on religious festivals of the royal military band, the *naqqāra-khāna*, positioned on balconies at the top of the royal bazaar (Qaisariyya) in Isfahan, as was observed under Shah Sulaiman.[36]

Although it is difficult to know whether it entailed any official initiative or patronage, there was some evolution in the dramatic aspects of Muharram rituals under ᶜAbbas I. According to de Gouvea (1603-4), they seem to have been limited to women mounted on camels with crying and bleeding children, their heads and faces having been wounded with arrows. More elaborate pageants were seen by della Valle (1618) with, notably, simulated dead bodies of children in coffins carried in procession. More realistic representations of martyred bodies were observed by Kotov (1623-4). Besides naked children with their heads and faces all besmeared with blood, he saw on another horse a naked man covered with a newly skinned sheepskin worn with the hair on the inside, an arrow being fixed on the skin, on the dorsal spine. This kind of theatrical artefact continued to be used, with variants, in these celebrations. However, the dramatisations evolved considerably after ᶜAbbas I (see below).

(iii) *Muharram ceremonies and other celebrations*

It is obvious that, at least from Shah ᶜAbbas's shift of the capital to Isfahan (progressively, from 1005/1596-7), Muharram rituals had become the

focus of socio-religious life in Persia. But their importance had been already enhanced by the extension of the commemoration of Husain's murder (ᶜAshura) to the first ten days of the month of Muharram, which was never the case or never clearly attested in pre-Safavid times.[37] Since we have no convenient explanation of this issue, I would suggest an influence of traditional Persian celebrations held according to the solar calendar. As was noticed by Masᶜudi (d. 956), the festival of Nauruz, widely celebrated in the Turko-Persian world and in many Islamic lands (Iraq, Syria, Egypt, East Africa), has no equivalent in the Islamic lunar year.[38] Originally rooted in royal ideology, Nauruz remained the most important annual festival for all the Iranians. Under ᶜAbbas I, it used to be celebrated for three to eight days and nights.[39] A further extension to two to three weeks was later observed by Kæmpfer. Nauruz was also given a further Shiᶜi tinge by connecting it with such important events as Imam ᶜAli's investiture by the Prophet (Ghadir Khumm) or his accession to the caliphate.[40] Problems arose whenever Muharram coincided with the month of Farvardin and Nauruz festivities. As we have seen, ᶜAbbas I celebrated chiraghan even in the month of Muharram. However, the first ten days and more specifically the ᶜAshura, was given precedence over Nauruz celebrations which had to be postponed, as was the case in 1020/1611. Muharram ceremonies were then followed, in the Shah's presence, by a great Nauruz party and chiraghan, given in the Bagh-i Naqsh-i Jahan, with the participation of large masses of people of all classes of society, including those from the provinces who happened to be at Iṣfahan.[41]

Many features of Nauruz and other Persian folkloric rituals have been observed in Muharram ceremonies. Pieces of cloth or dresses were given by women to the preachers [Figueroa]. Robes of honour (*khilᶜat*) and money were also bestowed by the Shah or governors on the preachers. But these being given as alms, the recipients did not have to kiss the Shah's feet according to custom [Chardin]. During the first ten days, the Shah changed his robe (*qabā*) every day and gave it to his barber [du Mans]. Although their antecedents and original motives remain difficult to trace, beliefs and practices typical of fertility rites and of a Carnival or Saturnalia festival are abundant in Muharram ceremonies.[42] Besides ritual dances and mimicry of the penitents reported by most travellers, joy mixed with grief was also observed [de Gouvea] as well as burlesque practices related with scapegoat rituals (see below).

Many pre-Islamic beliefs and practices are also connected with the day of ᶜAshura, initially the Yom Kippur of the Jews, regarded by early Muslim tradition as an auspicious occasion, associated with many beneficial events. But for the Shiᶜis, it is obviously not a day of blessing, but of chaos, disorder, ill-omen and grief.[43] Hadith literature asserts that the first ten days of Muharram possessed a special sanctity and fasting on

the 10th was early observed by Muslims, although it tended to be superseded by the institution of Ramazan.[44] This sanctification may also have influenced the extension of mourning to ten days. However, the fact that Muharram ceremonies were not apparently given any specific name remains puzzling. Some observers [della Valle; Olearius; Chardin] assert that the word ᶜAshur, a variant of *ᶜashūrā* (tenth), was then used to designate the first ten days, and hence the whole festival of Muharram.[45] However, a differentiation between the two words belongs to a very distant cultural area. In the Maghreb, ᶜAshur designates the whole month of Muharram and ᶜAshura the 10th day celebrated by joyful carnivalesque rituals.[46] The Turkish word *bairam* (feast), used by some authors [della Valle; Olearius; Kæmpfer] to designate the Feast of Sacrifice is also applied to Muharram ceremonies called Bayram ᶜAshur [Kotov]. But the Arabic *ᶜīd*, usually pronounced *ᶜaid* in Persian, and widely used for various festivities, sometimes as an alternative to Persian *jashn*, may also have been applied to the Feast of Husain [Herbert] or to the Feast of Hasan and Husain [Tavernier; Gemelli; Krusinski]. According to early Shiᶜi tradition, the two brothers (sometimes referred to as "twins": Hasanain) have been designated by the Prophet himself as "the two masters of the Youths of Paradise".[47] Many devotional popular works are devoted to them. Although Imam Hasan's martyrdom is celebrated on 28 Safar, his tragic fate is constantly remembered in Muharram ceremonies. The leitmotiv of the penitents, "Hasan! Husain!" or "ya Hasan! ya Husain!", vociferated in processions has given, through successive distortions, the famous expression "Hobson-Jobson" used by the British soldiers to designate Muharram wailing in India.[48]

This Anglo-Indian expression may also derive from another plausible name of the feast, "Shah Husain", often given with variants in spelling (generally "Sausen"). This term was already used by the Russian merchant Nikitin who collected it by hearsay when passing though Ray in 1475, with however no allusion to any specific ritual.[49] "Shah Husain! Vāh Husain!" was another leitmotiv of the penitents. The expression "Shah Husaini" was later used to designate, with a pejorative touch, Muharrram rituals and their bloody and violent aspects, particularly in Azarbaijan and the Caucasus, under the variant "Shakhse Vakhse".

The extension of the feast to ten days, as well as other features of Muharram rituals, may have influenced the annual Islamic Feast of Sacrifice, (*ᶜīd* or *bairam al-aẓḥā / al-qurbān / al-kabīr*), celebrated by all Muslims on 10 Zu'l-Hijja. Establishment of the custom of publicly slaughtering a camel on this occasion in all royal cities was attributed by Chardin to Shah ᶜAbbas I, who was advised by a famous doctor that it belonged to the king to proceed to the sacrifice as the first successor of Muhammad did.[50]

Despite a rather large number of testimonies, some particulars of this camel sacrifice remain unclear. Della Valle calls it a small feast (*piccolo bayram*), a name generally given to the *ʿīd al-fiṭr*, ending Ramazan fasting. For three days, a "she-camel" decorated with flowers was paraded through Isfahan in processions, accompanied by people playing naqqara and fifes, a preaching mulla, and protected by men armed with big sticks to prevent people from molesting the camel (by pulling up its hair, by superstition) to avoid its premature death. On bairam's day, the camel was solemnly brought to the place of sacrifice, two miles beyond the city walls. In the king's absence, his chamberlain Haidar Sultan proceeded with a lance to the sacrifice. The vizier of Isfahan and the *malik al-tujjār* (chief of merchants) were also present. The camel was cut into pieces which, as a rule, had to be distributed equitably between the different wards, the head being sent to the king's gate. But there were fights with sticks between factions competing to take the best pieces back to their quarters. Meat of camel thus sacrificed was eaten for its blessing (*baraka*), a part being preserved in salt all the year and given to the sick.

This ritual was described by many travellers. From Kotov's observations, the Shah being present at Isfahan, the feast called *"bairam kurban"* was celebrated during the first ten days of Zu'l-Hijja with parades of the camel ending with its sacrifice on the 10th. The role of the sacrificer was devolved upon the darugha (acting as a substitute of the Shah? : see below). This feast continued to be called bairam, sometimes in combination with qurban, under various spellings [Olearius; Thévenot; Sanson; Kæmpfer]. Sanson, du Mans, Kæmpfer and de Chinon also mentioned it under its Persian name *ʿaid-i qurbān* or *qurbān*. A distinction was made between *ʿaid-i qurbān*, Arabic *ʿīd / ʿaid al-aẓḥā* and Turkish *büyük bairam* by Chardin.[51] More specific expressions such as *shutur-qurbānī / shutur-kushān* are not attested and *shāh-i shutur-qurbānī* (a mock temporary ruler) apparently only appeared in post-Safavid rituals.[52]

The sacred character of the camel was emphasised by its origin. According to Herbert, it was sent from Mecca to Isfahan, and was welcome by many thousand Muslims as a holy present. This Meccan origin is later noted by Sanson.[53] Most travellers noticed the royal prerogatives attached to the sacrifice. The camel was usually chosen among those kept in the royal stables [du Mans; Chardin; Sanson]. It had to be healthy and of the best breed [Kæmpfer]. It was taken out on the first day and traditionally entrusted to the people of the quarter "Kerron" (= Karān, the "deaf") and lodged at night by a family of that quarter. It was decorated with flowers and garlands and paraded every day through the streets, accompanied by a mob of that quarter and other parts of the town and by a din of drums and wind instruments and vivid acclamations. This camel had the privilege of entering the harems of the

khans and dignitaries. The camel's attendants were given alms (money and food). Devotees gave the camel some grass, pulled out tufts of its hair and children climbed on its back [Chardin; du Mans; Sanson]. On the day of sacrifice, in the early morning, it was richly decorated and common people of different quarters, each one with a big stick in hand, and with their drums and respective banners, together with civil and religious officials, brought it in procession to the *qurbān-gāh*, place of sacrifice.[54] After it had been prepared for immolation, appropriate prayers were recited by one or several mullas. Although it was theoretically incumbent upon the Shah to give the initial sacrificial blow with a lance, whenever he was present, this function was generally devolved upon the darugha.[55] As soon as this official had given the blow, "men of the scum of the populace" would throw themselves with axes on the immolated camel. They cut it into preassigned pieces, one for each ward. These were dragged with ropes by large numbers of men armed with axes, clubs and big sticks, brought with much uproar to their respective quarters and remitted to the heads of the families who had the privilege and obligation of offering a banquet to all this mob [Chardin]. In the processions and the great turmoil which followed the sacrifice, there were often large-scale fights between Haidari and Niᶜmati factions, often with many casualties [Thévenot].

Although it has been claimed that the camel sacrifice was among the ceremonies "conducted solely by the guilds",[56] this adaptation, together with spectacular evolutions of the feast (including minstrels, dancers, acrobats, etc.), not clearly attested in Safavid times, is probably a later development. Much remains to be known about relationships between factions, quarters and guilds, as well as the chronology of their respective roles in communal affairs. As regards connections with Muharram ceremonies, it has been noted that the camel immolation (or its "re-enactment"?) could take place immediately after ᶜAshura rituals. According to information collected by Figueroa, the camel sacrifice was then (1618-19) celebrated only at Isfahan, because it was the capital city, and not in Shiraz which he also visited. This was a purely pagan ceremony celebrated on the last day of the feast (ᶜAshura) to let the Shiᶜis express their feelings of revenge against the Sunnis by directing their rage against the camel. This singular account should not be completely overlooked. It may at least confirm that, under ᶜAbbas I, this sacrifice was used as a means to propagate the official creed. Della Valle keenly observed (Zu'l-Hijja 1025/December 1617) the presence in the procession of a mulla who sang "the words of confession of faith". This Shiᶜi propaganda in such popular gatherings was maybe part of a policy to counteract opposition from various parts of society as expressed in coffeehouse discussions. ᶜAbbas I frequented some of these coffeehouses

to enjoy storytelling and particularly *Shāh-nāma-khwānī*. He also appointed Shiᶜi clerics to preach and conduct prayers in these convivial places of entertainment.[57] Mention of sacrifice some time after "la fête de Hussein et de Hocen" by Tavernier is probably an interpolation of dates. Contemporary ceremonies confirm that it was then duly celebrated in the first ten days of Zu'l-Hijja. Although it appears to be a late occurrence, the presence of taᶜziya 'actors' in camel sacrifice processions, one month before their 'performance' in Muharram ceremonies, confirms the tendency of connecting these two "ten days" festivals.[58]

III. Shiᶜi rituals after Shah ᶜAbbas I

As we have seen, under ᶜAbbas I mourning ceremonies dedicated to the Imams ᶜAli and Husain had become a big communal feast, comprising an increasing number of dramatic elements – often very realistic – in pageants incorporated into processional rituals. Although uncertainties remain about his policy regarding these rituals, such initiatives as fostering and regulating factional strife were to be followed by his successors. Martial and spectacular aspects of Muharram ceremonies, as well as other Islamic and non-Islamic festivities, observed under his reign were also a starting point for further developments of rituals. Observations on these developments became so numerous and detailed that only some aspects connected with political or religious influence will be outlined here.

(i) *Problems of Persian terminology*

The main difficulty when discussing Shiᶜi rituals under the Safavids arises from the fact that we have to rely mostly on European observers who were seldom aware of Persian terminology or did not feel the need to give it in their accounts. Obviously, such expressions as *dasta-gardānī* or *dasta-yi ᶜazādārī*, processions of groups (*dasta*) of penitents, may well have been in use.[59] The same could be said, with some reserve, about penitents and their ritual dances. On the model *sīna-zan / sīna-zanī* (chest smiter/ smiting) we have, with reference to stones, *sang-zan / zanī*; long or short swords, *tīgh/shamshīr* or *qama-zan / zanī*; chains, *zangīr-zan / zanī*, etc. On the other hand, there is, to my knowledge, no precise remnant Persian terminology for some penitents, such as those who buried themselves on the maidan, protecting their heads with earthern pots as observed by Thévenot. This custom apparently disappeared from Muharram rituals after the Safavids. Other expressions could have been used, such as *ḥijla* or *ḥijla-gāh* (lit. "bridegroom chamber"), a portable memorial to a young man died unmarried, with specific reference to the legend of the

betrothal of the young martyred Qasim b. al-Hasan with Imam Husain's daughter at Karbala. Such hijlas were richly decorated with mirrors, feathers, lamps, votive ribbons etc., carried on the head by a man, and a child could sit in it. As other ritual elements, this structure could have been ambivalent. At the commemoration of ᶜAli's death at Shamakhi, Olearius noticed "many men carrying on their heads little boxes covered with feathers and flowers, in which the Alcoran lay open". These may have been related to hijlas or an early form of them.[60]

Another conspicuous element in processions is a large wooden cenotaph called *nakhl* (date-palm tree) meant to represent Husain's bier. Legend says that his corpse was carried on a stretcher of date-palm to his burial ground. This structure, which could range greatly in size, was richly decorated when carried in procession, sometimes by many men.[61] Among temporary or permanent elements of the commemoration, *saqqā-khānas* (public votive fountains) were erected in memory of ᶜAbbas b. ᶜAli, Husain's half brother, his standard-bearer martyred at Karbala while fighting to get water for the thirsty besieged.[62] Permanent or temporary places where Muharram ceremonies were performed, such as *takyas* (*tekke/tekye*, originally a dervish convent which could be associated with various socio-religious groups), or more specifically *ḥusainiyyas*, largely unnoticed in European sources, are insufficiently documented in Persian sources. Scanty information is provided by Nasrabadi on Isfahan *takyas*.[63] On the Takya-yi Gulbandan, built at Isfahan under the Safavids and maintained by the guilds, information was recently collected by Keyvani.[64]

Another problem remains with the use of the term *rauża-khwān*, a preacher using as text-book Kashifi's *Raużat al-shuhadā* (as well as various *maqtal-nāmas*), from which Shiᶜi mourning assemblies (sing. *majlis-i rauża-khwānī*) were named from a still undetermined time.[65] A conjectural *Raużat al-shuhadā-khwān*, later abridged to *Rauża-khwān* has been proposed.[66] An early mention of a rauza-kwan appears in an inscription written towards the end of ᶜAbbas I's reign on the Dar al-Huffaz at Ardabil.[67] From an apparently late time, the rauza-khwans, as well as storytellers (*maᶜraka-gīrān*), seem to have belonged to the guilds exempted from taxation. They were administered by the *naqīb al-ashrāf* and used as spies and propaganda agents by the government.[68] Whereas some uncertainty remains about the earliest use of the *Raużat al-shuhadā* in Safavid Shiᶜi rituals, various *maqtal-nāmas* were utilised by preachers [Olearius, Evliya Chelebi, Chardin]. *Maqtal-nāmas* continued to be copied and composed, including in the Ottoman realm.[69] Olearius, who clearly mentions a "Machtelnamae" used by the "chatib" (mourning for ᶜAli at Shamakhi) would probably have noticed whether it was the *Raużat al-shuhadā* since he bought a recent copy of it, which might be the earliest

manuscript of the work brought to Europe and which incidentally contains some information about a rauza-khwan.[70] However, the term rauza-khwan is not given by travellers, even by Kæmpfer, who clearly mentions a *"mollā"* reading each of the ten days one of the ten chapters of the *"Raużat al-shohadā"*. Besides professional rauza-khwans, mullas continued preaching in rauza-khani assemblies till Qajar times and beyond, including women preachers for feminine mourning.[71] Secondary poets also appear to have been occasional Muharram mourning preachers.[72] From Shah Sultan Husain's time, some more information is available on rauza-khwans who received funds from religious endowments (see below).

(ii) *Evolution of dramatisation : a spectacle of grief*

As is well known, grieving over Husain's martyrdom was to give birth to the only indigenous form of dramatic art (tragedy) in the Islamic world, the *taᶜziya* or *shabīh-khwānī*, generally abridged to *taᶜziya*.[73] Divergences of interpretation remain regarding the moment when ritual mourning observance became ritual drama, the break-through being generally placed in the post-Safavid period.[74] But in my opinion, modern theatrical theories and experiences (such as resurgent spectacles of participation, whether deriving from rituals or not) are not really appropriate to analyse such dramatic manifestations as taᶜziya-khwani, in which there are, properly speaking, no 'actors' or 'spectators' but only a coherent community of Shiᶜi mourners.[75] The only 'spectators' are foreign observers or onlookers, i.e. our travellers who were rarely aware of the historical, hagiographical or legendary background of the commemorations. Whatever may have been the nature of their antecedents, Muharram rituals basically commemorate an idealised historical event as well as sanctified or accursed historical figures. The latter's attitudes provide proto-elements of ritual : the grief of the surviving Ahl-i bait at Husain's tomb; the remorse of the Kufans who had abandoned Husain and were bravely killed in attempting to revenge him (the Tawwabun); the terrible revenge of Mukhtar and Malik al-Ashtar etc. Shedding remorseful or revengeful tears and blood as well as various kinds of abstinence, self mortification, mimicry etc. are therefore intimately linked with the 'Karbala paradigm'.

During the long decline of Safavid power, in order to provoke and increase lamentation, weeping and self mortifications, more dramatic elements progressively appeared in Muharram ceremonies. When foreign guests were present, spectacular aspects of the commemoration could be enhanced by a display of luxury, illuminations, fireworks and a lengthy competition in elegy-singing between groups of local poets, singers and musicians performing their own compositions [Olearius].