

SAFAVID PERSIA  
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of an Islamic Society

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Although precisely dated and accurate observations are rare, we may note a considerable evolution in dramatisation at the end of Safi I's reign (1629-42). In 1641, de Montheron describes what may appear, according to the modern sense of theatre, a kind of dramatic performance given on the Isfahan maidan. The solemnity of the festival was established, from the outset, by two separate introductory mourning assemblies under the direction of preachers, at opposite ends of the maidan. The court and grandees were accommodated in the 'Ali Qapu and the common people at the bazaar's gate. These preliminaries, meant to condition the mourners, were followed by the representation of a *tamāshā* or "spectacle de douleur". Like mediaeval European passion plays (of the Oberammergau type), it was divided into episodes of lively sketches performed in sequence by 'players' irrupting onto the maidan or in circumambulating processions. The diversity of dramatised ritual was probably emphasised by the participation of groups of penitents from several Persian towns [see Appendix].

'Abbas II (1642-66), who succeeded his father Safi I under the age of ten, has generally been considered the most capable Safavid ruler after his great-grandfather, whom he resembled in many ways. Through such achievements as his building activities or his reconquest of Qandahar, his reign was considered with nostalgia as a kind of 'Indian summer' preceding the degeneration and fall of the Safavid state. However, this optimistic view, mostly found in accounts of European observers who praised his tolerance at least towards Christians, has been challenged recently. Being at first under the influence of his tutors, he was a powerful ruler from adolescence to his early twenties, till the end of the vizierate of the 'ālim Khalifa Sultan (1645-54), instigator of the anti-Jewish campaigns generally attributed to the sole initiative of his successor the grand vizier Muhammad Beg (1654-61) to whom 'Abbas II relinquished most of the administration of state affairs.<sup>76</sup>

Like most Safavid kings, 'Abbas II had tendencies towards cruelty, immoderate drinking and sexual pleasures. This negative image has to be tempered by his interest in religious, intellectual and artistic life (he was himself a practising artist like some other Safavid rulers and princes). He was apparently very fond of hunting, watching polo games and festivities such as *chiragan* and *atash-bazi*, which were displayed on many occasions: lavish receptions of official guests; Persian solar festivals; and in connection with newly-built or enlarged monuments (such as Chihil Sutun; Pul-i Khwaju; 'Ali Qapu's *tālār*).<sup>77</sup>

Along with this taste for festivities, 'Abbas II was probably interested in promoting Shi'ī rituals. However, the lack of precisely-dated and substantial testimonies does not allow us to appreciate to what extent they evolved under his reign. Camel sacrifice was celebrated with great

ceremonies [Thévenot, Chardin]. Persistence of factional strife and mimicry, and rivalry over preparing adorned coffins may have further developed martial and spectacular aspects of Muharram rituals [du Mans, de Chinon]. For his own pleasure, he summoned the town quarters groups to come to the palace with men and children dressed according to their fancy, to express better the action which they performed under his direction [du Mans].

Although it was probably an independent regional evolution, theatrical displays in Muharram rituals were observed at Tabriz by Evliya Chelebi.<sup>78</sup> The Ottoman traveller notes in 'Ashura mourning organised by the governor on the polo ground (maidan) that, as soon as the preacher pronounced the words: "the oppressed Imam Husain was thus martyred by the accursed Shemr", mock representations of Husain's head and body and of his dead children were taken out of the martyrs' tent and brought to the field. Upon seeing this spectacle, there rose such an uproar of screams and wailings that all attendants were in a state of ecstasy (*mast o madhūsh*). The lamentations of the faithful were soon joined with bloody mortifications of hundreds of Husain's devotees (deep incisions with razors in chests and arms; the names of Hasan and Husain branded into the flesh was also observed). After the mock martyred bodies had been removed from the field, Husain's mourning (*maqal al-husaini*) was completed.

Safi II (1666-94), re-crowned as Sulaiman (1668), and Sultan Husain (1694-1722) have been almost unanimously considered as pure products of a life of strict confinement in the harem, a policy initiated by 'Abbas I. Without wishing to discuss the merits and defects of both rulers, they should not merely be dismissed as being respectively an incapable drunkard (Sulaiman) or a devout bigot ("Mulla" Husain), pushed by influential Imami clerics towards increasing intolerance which greatly contributed to the Safavids' fall.<sup>79</sup>

As has been noted, Sulaiman appreciated the arts, especially painting and the works of miniaturists. The pomp and splendour of the court continued to be at least as brilliant as before. Lavish festivities have been reported in an increasing, although unbalanced, number of testimonies. From the beginning of his reign, more spectacular features appeared in religious festivals (camel sacrifice; Muharram ceremonies; Ghadir Khumm). These reached the point where participation in Muharram festivals tended to shift from pure (devotional assemblies) to public entertainments in which displays of social influence were part of the show.

Travellers' observations mainly concentrate on the great Muharram ceremonies that took place at Isfahan in June-July 1667. Chardin, who saw the festival seven or eight times in Persia, insists on its exceptional

character. The Shah, still Safi II, gave specific orders for its pompous celebration; he had never seen it, being secluded by his father in the harem.<sup>80</sup> There were elaborate processions, pageantry and lavish receptions and invitations. Foreign visitors were officially invited to watch the ceremonies, such as Tavernier and the Dutch Melton, who both described this particular feast,<sup>81</sup> and probably Chardin, who however does not mention whether he had an official invitation.

From the lengthy observations given by Chardin and Tavernier (often cited or quoted *in extenso* in non critical works), one may retain a great number of costumed or naked characters marching in procession, mounted on horses, camels or elephants, or carried on litters by many men. In processions organised during the ten days, Chardin observed various ways to represent Imam Husain: a naked man, covered with blood, with pieces of arrows and lances attached to the skin "as if they had transperced his body"; Husain's "representation" in a great cenotaph carried by eight men. Some cenotaphs prepared by the wards contained men representing the Saint (Husain) in a state of death. Others contained little boys representing Hasan and Husain. In others, all provided inside and out with a profusion of weapons, there was a boy armed from head to foot, ready to fight. In nocturnal processions, there were marching men armed to the teeth wearing armour or going naked.

Muharram ceremonies are poorly documented during the 27 remaining years of Sulaiman's reign. Bedik and Kæmpfer's observations are too sketchy. Kæmpfer was impressed, as others, by the terrible shouts of devotees and the particular rythmical pace of the sina-zans beating the ground with their feet while smiting their breasts with their fists. Regional performances could develop independent features. Struys observed an evolution in dramatisations at Shamakhi. On the day of 'Ashura, he observed several pageants. He clearly mentions a large litter on which there was a man feigning death to represent Husain. He had been given a narcotic beverage to play his part for the whole day. There was another vessel, which was filled with blood, in which two children were seated with their heads just above [the blood].<sup>82</sup>

Along with spectacular aspects of Muharram rituals, there was apparently a further development of their devotional aspects. Forty days after 'Ashura, on 20 Safar, the feast of arba'ain or sar o tan (head and body) was meant to celebrate both the pilgrimage of the surviving Ahl-i bait at Husain's grave and the miraculous junction of his head and body.<sup>83</sup> However, Muharram celebrations were not to be performed till the 20th or the end of Safar, as it was to be in Qajar times. But their increasingly spectacular aspects practically eclipsed those commemorating 'Ali's martyrdom that remained celebrated with limited processional rituals, as observed by Thévenot at Shiraz. This disappearance of pageantry was

compensated by an increase in devotional practice towards 'Ali. His investiture at the Ghadir Khumm continued to be commemorated with rejoicing, together with a rite of fraternisation till our days.<sup>85</sup> Under Shah Sulaiman, lavish banquets were given on that occasion (see below).

From the outset of Sultan Husain's reign, less than one month after his coronation, Muharram ceremonies were observed at Isfahan by Gemelli Careri (August-September 1694). From his brief but precious account, we may infer that, after the exceptional festival of 1667, dramatisations had either stagnated or regressed. Some of their martial and spectacular aspects were however maintained on the day of 'Ashura, the feast being observed by the Shah, the dignitaries and ambassadors invited to the 'Ali Qapu. This impression of limited elaboration of the festival may be confirmed by Gaudereau's letter of the next year, although he says that mourning lasted 15 days. This rather imprecise account (erroneously dated) contains, however, some useful information about street rituals.

Uncertainty remains about spectacular aspects of Muharram ceremonies under Sultan Husain till the exceptional festival described by de Bruin at Isfahan in 1704. Very impressive and realistic scenes were represented in sequence, notably on big chariots or wheeled platforms drawn by men. Some of these floats were covered with blood-stained sand with real or mock bodies, heads, cut members of the martyrs etc. Acting penitents had been given narcotics to feign death throughout the whole day. Husain was represented in various ways in parades: (i) - by a kind of mobile giant animated by a hidden man; (ii) - by a man all covered with blood holding a sword in his hand, and (iii) - probably also as a dead man. Many children embodied various characters, such as Husain's sons 'Ali Asghar and 'Ali Akbar, Hasan and Husain, probably sacred women 'played' by men, etc.

De Bruin's account shows Safavid Muharram ceremonies in their most elaborate form. He saw it again on the next year (1705) and says that celebrations were the same, although one may always find some difference.<sup>86</sup> Such representations on wheeled platforms continued to be performed, as they were observed over 30 years later, in 1737, under Nadir Shah.<sup>87</sup>

After Shi'a passion plays had emerged from Muharram ceremonies, vivid sketches and scenes continued to be performed in pageants. Sequential performances such as those observed from de Montheron's account may have been preserved in the lengthy and elaborate mobile ta'ziya represented till recently at Arak.<sup>88</sup>

## IV. Curses and scapegoat rituals

As already stated in the first part of the present research, polemics about the persistence of ritual cursing of the two or three first caliphs (and others of the Ahl-i bait's enemies) remained a political and diplomatic problem in Safavid relations with neighbouring Sunni powers.<sup>89</sup> Although at the Peace of Amasya (962/1555) between the Ottomans and Safavids (Suleiman Qanuni and Tahmasb I) it was agreed that official cursing should be discontinued, the practice probably persisted.<sup>90</sup> Isma'īl II (1576-8) decreed a ban on ritual cursing and the official public execrators, the *tabarrā'iyān* (*ṭabaqa-yi tabarrā'ī*) who derived their livelihood from this occupation.<sup>91</sup> This was accompanied by measures of retaliation against some 'ulama and others, who were particularly zealous in their cursing practice. This entailed further dissent among the Qizilbash and strong opposition from Shi'ī clerics. However, although cursing remained in usage there was to my knowledge no further mention of the *tabarrā'iyān* as official agents after Isma'īl II's decree. Their effectiveness may, however, be measured by the well-spread practice of cursing which, taken over by preachers and Shi'ī devotees, remained for centuries a common feature of Persian Shi'ism. Although Safavid Shahs continued occasionally to express their hatred for the enemies of the Ahl-i bait in their correspondance with Sunni powers,<sup>92</sup> they generally were more cautious and even friendly when they received Ottoman or Uzbek envoys, although they had difficulties in controlling popular intolerance, for which they were initially responsible, together with the religious establishment (see below).

Apparently from 'Abbas I's reign, cursing of the two or three first caliphs became concentrated on 'Umar, who was vilified in many different ways. This gave the background to the ritual murder of 'Umar, a feast originally intended to celebrate his Persian murderer, the 'miller' Abu Lu'lu', also called Firuz or "Baba Chugea el din" [Baba Shuja' al-Din] who, according to du Mans, gave the name of the feast celebrated each year.<sup>93</sup> Thévenot mentions "la fête d'Omar Koschodziazadé" [*kushandagī* / *kushanda-zada*?] which could have been another name of the feast later known as *'aid-i 'Umar-kushān*. Legendary accounts of this 'miller' are reported [Olearius, du Mans, Kæmpfer]. Very few details are given on the feast celebrated on 9 Rabi' I [Kæmpfer; Thévenot: 10 Rabi' I, certainly an error], the wrongly supposed anniversary of 'Umar's death.<sup>94</sup> This feast continued to be celebrated by rejoicing and the burning of 'Umar's effigy at night.<sup>95</sup>

According to du Mans and Chardin, among the first three caliphs, 'Umar was the most hated by Persians. Ritual cursing on him, *la'nat bar 'Umar*, was constantly uttered by them in public and private life. This

practice could endanger the life of Sunnis, such as Uzbek envoys who reacted violently to it.<sup>96</sup> When Persian pilgrims performed the *hajj* at Mecca, the Ottomans forced them to pronounce praises on the first caliphs, but instead of saying "salem aleik Omer tassdik" [*salām ʿalaik ʿUmar taṣḍīq*, i.e. the truthful] they would say between their teeth "Omer zindik" [*zindīq*, i.e. the heretic] "with a thousand precautions".<sup>97</sup> ʿUmar was further vilified in many anecdotes, saying that he was born incestuously, that he ill-treated Fatima and dispossessed her as well as all the Prophet's parents whom he endeavoured to eliminate, that he forbade temporary marriage of pleasure (*mutʿa*) and so on.<sup>98</sup> Chardin asserts that he could write a whole book about what all the Persians do to manifest their execration of ʿUmar. In addition to their curses on him they add such defamatory epithets as "fils de p[ute], de tyran, d'exécration".<sup>99</sup>

Although the caliph ʿUmar did constitute the ideal scapegoat in the intolerant and closed socio-religious system imposed by Safavid Shiʿism, more traditional enemies of the Ahl-i bait, essentially connected with Muharram rituals, remained the target of popular piety. Whereas we are poorly informed about the Safavid ʿUmar-kushan festival, the accursed caliph was also often mistaken for another ʿUmar, Ibn-i Saʿd b. Abi Waqqas, who was among the villains responsible for Husain's murder.<sup>100</sup> Manikins burnt in connection with commemorations of ʿAli and Husain's martyrdoms are meant to represent effigies of various personages:

- Della Valle was told that on the night preceding the ʿAshura several "statues" of ʿUmar were publicly burnt on the Isfahan maidan.

- According to Kotov, before the biers carried in procession, a manikin made of fur stuffed with straw was led mounted on a donkey. It had a mock quiver with arrows made of wooden splints, and a bonnet with a tassel on its head. It was meant to represent the murderer of Husain and his bloodied children. People held it up on its sides. They insulted it and spat on it. At the end, this straw manikin was taken to a field, outside the city walls, where it was burnt with straw and naphta.

- According to Herbert, every year an effigy of Husain's murderer ("Chuse a Slave to Mnavi (or Mavi)", i.e. Shemr a slave of Muʿawiya) was hurried to the streets in a hurly-burly of a thousand people. After a pathetic sermon by the Qazi, through "a train of gun powder", this "deformed Image whose face is black, his nose pierced thorow with a Dart, and clad in straw" was burnt. The following night was spent in merriment.

Further accounts are less detailed. Olearius notes the burning of ʿAli's murderer, Ibn Muljam, at Shamakhi.<sup>101</sup> According to Bedik, Yazid and Ottomans were cursed in processions and Yazid's effigy burnt with a



list of his misdeeds. These curses on Yazid in procession are also attested by Chardin.<sup>102</sup> According to Gemelli Careri, on 3 Muharram, they took a straw manikin mounted on a donkey throughout all the quarters of Isfahan. It was meant to represent 'Umar or "Abumurgian" [Ibn Muljam]. At the end they killed in a fury the poor donkey and burnt both murderers under the same straw figure.<sup>103</sup> Some time before the 'Ashura, de Bruin observed that straw manikins, meant to represent Husain's murderer, 'Umar, were burnt at night in several places in town.

#### POWER SYMBOLS AND ATTITUDES OF THE SHI'Ī COMMUNITY

It is quite obvious that such elaborate commemorations as Muharram ceremonies could not have been set up without an important participation of the different socio-religious strata and official encouragement or patronage. In the logic of the Husainid cult, connected above all with redemptive suffering, it is sufficient to promote or organise a mourning gathering to accomplish a meritory and rewarding action. The biggest patrons of these ceremonies are consequently the rulers and those who are close to power and socio-economic influence. They also had the means of keeping order and coercion to control outbursts of violence in public places, the most crowded, turbulent and noisy processions being held at night. But whatever may have been the sincerity of men in power, they could, through their patronage, increase their prestige and influence. As we have seen, at Isfahan and in the provinces, foreign envoys together with notables were invited to these ceremonies, increasingly sumptuous and solemnised by various kinds of displays of riches and spectacles.

As it is evident that these rituals of participation involved society as a whole, the respective attitudes of various socio-religious groups regarding them deserves a thorough study. Only some aspects of this issue, and particularly those that have been neglected, unnoticed or misinterpreted, are outlined here.

#### I. Royal authority and munificence

As we have seen, there is no evidence that either Isma'īl I or Tahmasb I ever patronised Shi'ī rituals, on which we possess very little information in the 16th century. The same could have been true of 'Abbas I's reign, had we been deprived of the travellers' accounts resulting from his policy of opening his realm to foreign influence. From his personal attitude towards various rituals (Muharram ceremonies on military campaigns,

factional strife, camel sacrifice) we may infer that he may have promoted Muharram ceremonies. When (according to de Gouvea), Allah Verdi Khan, his governor in Shiraz, accompanied Muharram processions, we may wonder whether he was following the example of his ruler, who had been seen siding with a faction, maybe in some processional ritual [della Valle].

In my opinion, 'Abbas I's major contribution to solemnisation and dramatisation of Shi'ī ritual was the construction of the 'Ali Qapu, on the (former *bāgh*) Maidan-i Naqsh-i Jahan. The maidan, a central point of rituals discussed here, was a polyvalent space. Besides its utilisation for Shi'ī rituals, it was used for various activities and displays: horse racing, polo playing, target practice, military parades, public executions, sporting competitions and animal fights. Provided with its upper *tālār* (see below), the 'Ali Qapu became the architectural symbol of both royal and religious power. From that dominating position, the king, surrounded by his dignitaries and leading 'ulama, could ceremoniously present himself to his subjects on various occasions, and notably when they were performing Shi'ī ceremonies on the maidan.

'Abbas I was often travelling or resident out of Isfahan. Between 1612 and 1629, Ashraf and Farahabad may be considered as effectively the new capitals.<sup>104</sup> At least for this particular reason, contrary to what has sometimes been said, he was not present at Isfahan when Muharram ceremonies were observed by travellers [della Valle; Figueroa; Kotov; Herbert]. Since we do not know how these ceremonies were performed in his Mazandarani capitals, we must be cautious about the extent of their elaboration at his own initiative.

The first mention of the Shah being seated with the sadr and the main state ministers in the upper talar of the 'Ali Qapu, is provided by de Montheron (1641), at the end of Safi I's reign [see Appendix]. As was observed by du Mans, 'Abbas II had a particular interest in Muharram rituals, since he himself regulated performance of the 'actors' of the town quarters whom he summoned to the palace. He was then playing the part of the stage-manager, later called *ta'ziya-gardān*. At least the same interest was manifested by Safi II-Sulaiman. Every evening during the first ten days of Muharram, he summoned the town quarters to come in procession to perform their rituals at the "Salon de l'écurie" [the *tālār-i tavīla*, where he had recently been crowned as Safi II]. The palace and gardens were profusely illuminated. As soon as the Shah ordered it, the processions entered.<sup>105</sup> Every night of the ten days, he ordered suppers to be given to all processions, over 4000 persons, and sent food to the great mosque to be distributed to the poor.<sup>106</sup> Shah Sulaiman may also have been an active participant in Shi'ī rituals, since he was a supporter of the Haidari faction.<sup>107</sup>

Spectacular aspects of religious festivals were observed even before the exceptional Muharram festival of 1667. The camel sacrifice had been pompously celebrated (10 Zu'l-Hijja 1077/3 June 1667). At the place of immolation, all the officials were mounted on horses: the clerics on one side, the Shah and the grandees on the other.<sup>108</sup> This solemn presence of the Shah mounted on a horse at the camel sacrifice as well as the participation of all Isfahan wards and many people coming to watch the spectacle is mentioned by Kæmpfer.<sup>109</sup> Such opportunities to watch the Shah and grandees were greatly appreciated by the populace. At the beginning of his reign, once or twice a week, Sulaiman organised excursions with about 800 ladies of the harem (plus many guards, eunuchs and servants); all males were banned from the route of the royal train, on pain of death (*quruq*).<sup>110</sup>

Messianism or Mahdism remained a recurrent phenomenon in the Turko-Persian area, at least from Mongol times. Messiahs could appear here and there at different periods.<sup>111</sup> As is well known, militant messianism was prominent in bringing Shah Isma'īl to power. While Safavid royal authority, in the absence of the Hidden Imam, became increasingly challenged by Shi'ī doctors, the Safavids, like some of their predecessors (notably the Sarbadars of Khurasan), kept outstanding horses which, in my opinion, were connected with the expectation of the Mahdi. One example is the magnificent reception given by 'Abbas II at the 'Ali Qapu to all ambassadors and envoys (which included a display of elephants, various wild beasts and gladiators). On the maidan Chardin could see twelve splendid horses from the royal stables. Their harnesses, bridles, saddles, stirrups were all covered with gold and precious stones. Their "drinking fountains" as well as huge maces placed nearby were of solid gold and silver. These twelve horses were placed in two rows of six on each side of the great door of the palace, i.e. the 'Ali Qapu.<sup>112</sup> Sanson, who was constantly invited to receptions, attended a lavish banquet in celebration of Ghadir Khumm (September 1691) and gives a similar description of horses displayed on that occasion.<sup>113</sup>

Although the symbolic function of these horses is not indicated, their connection with messianism is highly probable. The sacred character of these horses contributed to the fact that royal stables and the 'Ali Qapu "cette porte impériale", were considered a place of sanctuary for those, criminals or others, who took refuge there.<sup>114</sup>

Through the favour of the Nazir, Tavernier and people from the Dutch company (and maybe Chardin) could watch Muharram ceremonies from a good place, opposite the Dela (talar) from where Safi II was presiding over the festival. He had given precise instructions to the "grand Prévôt" (the darugha) who acted as master of ceremonies. Muharram processions were preceded by soldiers presenting the Shah

with Uzbek heads carried as trophies on lances. Elephants offered as a gift to the Shah by Indian sovereigns were paraded and inspected when passing before the Shah so that he could see they were well looked after. Such elements among Muharram rituals further demonstrate the secular character adopted by the feast.

Unless some new testimony becomes available, the first European who provides a description of Muharram ceremonies observed from the 'Ali Qapu's talar may have been Gemelli Careri. As we have seen, his description of pageantry is very sketchy. The maidan was covered with tents to accommodate more than a thousand horses of the dignitaries who had come to the festival presided over for the first time by Sultan Husain. Gemelli Careri also notes the presence of the "sacred" horses and wild beasts (lions) in front of the 'Ali Qapu, thus confirming Chardin's observations.<sup>115</sup>

## II. Attitude of the Imami 'ulama

Shi'i clerics' attitude towards religious devotion seems to have been essentially dictated by pragmatism. Deviant beliefs and practices were often lumped together, as can be seen in the case of censorship against epico-religious literature linked with their struggle against sufism. A way to counteract heterodoxy was to adopt and utilise some of its practices. This seems to have been the case with the Qizilbash ritual of *chūb-i ʿarīq* administered by the mujtahids who thus took over the role of the khalifa.<sup>116</sup> The Qizilbash sufi organisation continued nevertheless to exist, on a reduced scale, till the end of the Safavid period.<sup>117</sup>

As we have seen, according to Chardin, the camel sacrifice was introduced (or re-introduced?) in Persia by 'Abbas I, acting on the advice of a Shi'i doctor. Although prominent 'ulama (and probably, at times, the *sadr*) were present when immolation took place, some mullas or other clerics soon objected to the improper way it was carried out [della Valle]. This camel meat, often salted and eaten the year after, was declared *ḥarām* by most Shi'i doctors.<sup>118</sup> According to the Koran and the Sunna, the camel had to be slain standing and not lying on the ground.<sup>119</sup>

As mentioned above, many Shi'i rituals took place at night with illuminations. At al-Karaki's initiative, special ceremonies, in which Shi'i books and prayers were read, the *Layāli mutabarraka* or *Ahyā* (called *Mahyā* in 'Abbasid times and later in Sunni countries) were organised at night during the month of Ramazan. These were held in places of worship till the end of the Safavid period. Muhammad Baqir Majlisi was particularly active in promoting these nocturnal prayers, which then attracted thousands of people.<sup>120</sup>

Such manifestations of public devotion may have been a counterpoise to Muharram ceremonies and their unorthodox rituals, on which we do not have any precise reaction from Shi'ī clerics. Polemics about flagellations or bloody mortifications came much later. As we have seen, from late Safi I's reign there had been an attempt in Muharram rituals to pass from the ambulatory phase (pageantry) to the static phase (dramatic acts performed apparently without substantial 'dialogues' in front of participants). One may wonder why Shi'ī 'ulama did not react to that innovation, which may have given birth to a real religious theatre. The same may be said about further elaborate spectacular pageants with their mimicry, embodiments of sacred persons by 'actors', and realistic shows of blood. In a different socio-religious environment, in the Indian sub-continent, Muharram rituals, with their indigenous features probably influenced by Safavid religious practice, remained at the stage of pageantry.

Despite their rulings against popular literature and religion, Shi'ī clerics could not prevent popular feelings from remaining attached to their traditional devotional literature which owned nothing to doctrinal Imamism. The liturgy of Muharram ceremonies remained essentially based on the recitation of Kashifi's *Rauzat al-shuhadā* or various *maqalat-nāmas*, and the singing of dirges on Muhtasham Kashani's *Haft band* on the martyrs of Karbala. Both of these authors were court poets and literati. Kashifi's 'Shi'ism' remained, at the most, within the limits authorised in Timurid Herat. Muhtasham (d. 996/1588 or 1000/1592) enjoyed both Safavid and Mughal protection. Even after Tahmasb had ordered him to compose praises on the Imams rather than on royal persons, his production of non-religious poetry remained important. This included a skilful chronogram on Isma'īl II's accession. Despite his panegyrics dedicated to Shi'ī holy figures, Muhtasham cannot be considered as a fanatic Shi'ī. His imitators or followers were probably more involved in Safavid Shi'ism. Devotional Shi'ī poetry remained largely composed by professional or 'amateur' poets. Textual elaboration of Shi'ī commemorations was however completed by Majlisi's encyclopaedic bio-hagiographical work. Despite his vast contribution to Shi'ī culture, he was criticised, even in his lifetime, for his interpretation of traditions (drawn from various sources), or his political attitude during the Occultation.<sup>121</sup>

The extent of Shi'ī clerics' tolerance towards extravagant acts of popular devotion was probably the price they had to pay to enforce adhesion to Shi'ism. As to the result of their role in inciting the furtherance of these rituals, Chardin keenly observed that the songs and screams of participants always ended with imprecations against the enemies of religion.<sup>122</sup> It is also obvious that Shi'ī clerics derived from these rituals their spiritual and economic influence. Elaborating Imami

tradition, composing devotional text-books and preaching were profitable occupations for all of them, i.e. from "les petits moulins, ou pédants de ABC" [du Mans], to prominent mujtahids such as Muhammad Baqir Majlisi. As we have seen, between the two major observations of Muharram ceremonies, in 1667 (Chardin) and 1704 (de Bruin), there was probably some regression in the degree of elaboration of rituals. These events happen to have occurred before Majlisi's full attainment of authority through his appointment by Sulaiman as Shaikh al-Islam (1098/1686) and after his death (1110/1698).

As mentioned above, there was apparently a reassessment of Safavid messianic expectation by the end of 'Abbas II's reign. This period coincided with the time when a certain Mulla Qasim was preaching with popular success against the Safavids' right to rule, saying that power was to be entrusted to "another pure branch of the Imams". When Chardin arrived at Isfahan (1666), this mulla had just been eliminated.<sup>123</sup> However, 'ulama of the higher strata were bound to cooperate with Safavid rulers. They even needed promotion in return, if they did not want to lose their influence altogether. While their respective positions regarding the 'just ruler' remained a subject of discussion, Majlisi reasserted, on a very limited scale, the nature of the clerics' support by declaring in an essay that Shah Isma'il's coming heralded the re-appearance of the Mahdi himself.<sup>124</sup>

### III. The community of the faithful and limits of participation

As has been universally observed in ritual practice, the very principle of Shi'i commemorations, and more particularly Muharram ceremonies, is to bring together, in an unanimous emotional impetus, individuals from different social backgrounds. While social ranks and status remained, in what has sometimes been called a patrimonial form of domination, they were minimised or temporarily abolished in ritual participation. Although there was some disapproval or even contempt in some of the views expressed by travellers about these ceremonies, it is through their observations that, perhaps for the first time, we may globally perceive or visualise Persian society with its contrasts, inner contradictions, violence, chains of solidarity, etc. Whereas the upper strata of that society were fairly well known to us, at least from Mongol times, a clearer vision of marginal disadvantaged or impoverished social groups emerges from travelogues of the Safavid period. Among descriptions of Muharram penitents, there are recurrent references to people from the scum of the populace (rascals, vagabonds, toughs, beggars). They were often trouble-makers who could animate or spoil ritual commemorations or merely

derive profit from them. Courtesans and prostitutes found a redeeming prospect in their demonstrations of grief and their generosity towards the mullas with whom they were otherwise in contact, at least to establish their contracts of temporary marriage of pleasure (*mut'ā*). But the most important factor for the perpetuation of Shi'ī rituals was the system of votive offerings (*nazr*, pl. *nuzūr*). From early infancy, children could be dedicated by their mother, sometimes after a vow made to obtain their recovering from illness, to become a 'sacrifice' (*nazr*) to a Karbala martyr. Their role could be limited to play a part in pageants or in communal rites (such as distributing water). They could also perform various kinds of mortification.

Once the religious norms or pattern had been established, everyone amongst the faithful had to play his part in rituals. The patron of the feast (the Shah, the governor, another dignitary or wealthy man), sacralised by the presence of religious men such as preaching mullas or rauza-khwaīs, would set up the model by weeping, smiting his breast, tearing his garment. Through a reversal of the situation, rather common in rituals but generally unnoticed, the desperate fate of the thirsty ones besieged at Karbala was commemorated by a large consumption of various foods and drinks appropriate to the feast. Grandees and wealthy men would keep temporary or permanent 'water-carrier' fountains provided with iced water, which they would distribute themselves to the faithful, or give suppers to the poor (later known as *shām-i gharībān*). On the other hand, signs of allegiance to sacred or royal authority were demonstrated by devotees, notably through their answers (*amIn*) to the preachers' blessings. Processions would stop or accelerate when passing in front of the Shah's lodge or religious sanctuaries.

The degree of participation in Muharram rituals of socio-professional groups, quarters, professional guilds (*ṣinf*, pl. *aṣnāf*), members of the *futuwwa* / *futuwwat* (*javān-mardān* trained at the *zūrkhāna*, ritual gymnasium), seems to have increased at least from 'Abbas II's reign. Rituals observed by Chardin at Safi II's accession show much more than competitions about adorning cenotaphs or making standards or other properties and costumes for pageantry. Two additional extraordinary processions were made "pour l'amour du roi": one by the sufis (the Qizilbash of the royal guard, i.e. the Qurchis); another one, the most magnificent, by Shi'ī Indian Muslims. Communal participation went a step further under Sultan Husain with the development of pageants on wheeled platforms and increased nocturnal mourning, observed by de Bruin. However, we remain rather uninformed about the rate of communal or private contributions to the expenses involved in Muharram ceremonies until the years preceeding the crumbling of the Safavid monarchy and the sweeping away of its 'cesaro-papist' structure by the Afghan tribal

invasion. Some figures provided by the religious endowment (*vaqf-nāma*) concerning the madrasa Maryam Begum of Isfahan show that, in the month of Muharram, and particularly on the day of 'Ashura, wealthy pious men widely contributed to the expenses of rauza-khwanis, which included specific stipends of the rauza-khwanis and those who performed mourning at the foot of the *minbar*.<sup>125</sup> This, together with some observations made by the travellers, seems to indicate that in various places of worship the organisation and expenses of Shi'ī mourning assemblies had been taken over by the guilds or guild leaders.<sup>126</sup>

It is always difficult to appreciate the degree of sincerity of participants in any ritual. Whatever may have been its socio-religious or psychological background or motivation, the cathartic effect sought by Shi'ī devotees could lead to acts of extreme violence. Playing or embodying (*tashbih / tashabbuh*) the villains could be more dangerous to one's life than inflicting on oneself spectacular bloody injuries which, in most cases, remained limited or kept under control. On the other hand, joy mixed with grief was observed in Shi'ī mourning [de Gouvea; Chardin; Tavernier]. Demonstrations of grief mixed with joyful outbursts were observed on Thursday evening visits made by women to cemeteries [du Mans]. Insincere spectacular grief among women was also attested in Muharram pageants.<sup>127</sup> As usual, professional female mourners used onions to provoke tears in private funerals [Herbert]. Various aids could be used, such as grilled seeds of millet, lentils and rice, in order to provoke or increase weeping in rauza-khwanis.<sup>128</sup> Passage from ritual to ordinary life could be made without a transition. Manifestations of loud weeping and screaming in women's mourning assemblies could stop or be resumed nearly instantly.

In a society practising sexual discrimination and segregation, these rituals provided a rare opportunity for individuals of opposite sexes to see each other. Nocturnal sessions constituted the best occasion for women to give appointments to their lovers [Tavernier]. Besides their devotional motivation, spectacular infliction of injuries by young men were also a means of demonstrating their bravery to women peeping through their veils.

Within the closed system of ideological and cultural hegemony elaborated under the Safavids, which permeated the whole social process, unless some new information comes to light, it remains difficult to know whether there has been any attempt to express social dissent or protest through Shi'ī ritual practice. Dissent being always carefully concealed under totalitarian regimes, only some tepid or reluctant participation in Shi'ī rituals could be observed. Politico-religious concepts of sovereignty, or the need for justice during the Great Occultation, remained expressed by Shi'ī doctors in theological terms.



Times and mentalities were not ripe for Shi'ī mourning to become revolt and revolution. Although temporal oppressors may have been considered the Yazid of the Age from pre-Safavid times, much more oppression and hardships had to be endured by Persian society before similar attacks could be launched against Qajar and Pahlavi rulers.<sup>129</sup> In the meantime, Haidari-Ni'fati factionalism and Muharram rituals remained a powerful, although double-edged, device which could be used by the state or local rulers to control and channel popular devotional feelings and aspirations.

## APPENDIX

Extract of a letter from Mr. de Montheron, kept at the Bibliothèque universitaire de Montpellier, section Médecine, Ms. H100, fols 59a- 64a [the original orthography, often defective or incoherent, has been preserved].\*

D'Ispahan le 26. Avril 1641.

[60b]...«Il ne sera pas hors de propos que je vous entretienne maintenant d'un autre spectacle profane et ridicule qui se fait tous les ans en cete Ville que iāy vēu [61a] du quel aiy remarqué les part.<sup>tez</sup> dont voicy l'histoire; Mahomet ayant marié sa fille avec Alli son neveu et son success<sup>r</sup>, cet Alli eut un filz entre les autres qui luy succeda nommé Hassan, contre lequel un Prince Arrabe qui s'apeloit Makhavia se rebella et le contraignit de s'enfuir en Médina ieu de la naissance de Mahomet, et ou est son sepulchre; Makhavia estant décédé son filz appelé Hisidde, pour s'asseurer des Royaumes dont il estoit en poss<sup>on</sup> trouva moyen de fer empoisonner Hassan par sa propre [ādded in the margin: femme, par la mort duquel son frere nommé Hussein luy] succéda, le quel les peuples de Babilonne appelèrent pour estre leur Rōy. Ce Hussin allant prendre possess<sup>on</sup> du Royaume de Babilonnie, Les Babiloniens par trahison le firent cruellement mourir à 3. iournées de la Ville avec sa femme, ses enfans, et toute sa famille, en mémoire de la quelle cruauté, les Persiens qui tiennent ce Hussin pour un de leurs plus grandz Pontifixes et plus grand Saint, font en toutes les Villes de Perse a pareil iour que cette trahison ariva [61b] et particulièrement en cete Ville d'Ispahan capitale du Royaume, un spectacle public qu'ils appellent Thahmachaa y Maodisa, qui veut dire, spectacle de douleur, avant lequel, l'espace de dix iours, ils ne s'apliquent a aucun ouvrages des

\* I am very grateful to Francis Richard who provided me with the precious document presented here and relevant information on de Montheron.

mains, en sorte que nous n'avons pas peu mesmes trouver personne pour nous razer sous nostre Turband, et ne s'amusement qu'à faire iō et nuit par les rues mille sortes de demonstraōns estranges de douleur, qu'ilx concluent en fin le dix<sup>me</sup> iour, le quel s'est rencontré ceste année (selon le calcul de Louis Lionis) le dimanche sis de ce moys d'Avril, dans la grande place de ceste Ville, la plus belle qui soit en l'Azie, et en l'Europe qui a plus de 400 toises ou canes de long sur presque 200 de large acompagnée tout à l'entour de bastimens de mesme architecture, mais petit, ornée a un bout de la grande Mosquée, et a une des faces du principal portal du palais du Roy, sur le haut du quel tout enrichi de dorures et pintures couvert [62a] contre l'incommodité du soleil d'un grand voile de brocat d'or, estoit le Roy vestu d'une veste noire avec le Tulbant noir en teste (ce qui ne se porte iamais qu'en ceste occasion) acompagné seulem<sup>t</sup> de son portier supresme; à costé sous une arcade a main droite estoient le Sadre (qui est commē leur Pape) avec les principaux ministres de l'Estat; et dans celle de main gauche, les Eunuques du Roy blancs et noirs, au nombre d'environ une centaine; et en bas dans la place estoit sez prin<sup>l</sup> Mulas (qui est le premier de ses docteurs) sur un echafaut élevée de 5. ou 6. pieds, assiz dans une chaise racontant a haute voix les particularitez de la mort de ce Hussin (qu'ilz ont en une extreme vénération) y meslant quelques fois les louanges et prières pour le Roy présent aus quelles le peuple respond, amin; Ceste espèce de prédication qui dure plus d'une heure, se faisant ainsy devant le Roy, il s'en fait une semblable a un des boutz de la place pour le menu peuple par un autre Moulas, [62b] devant le quel 5. ou sixcens femmes acroupies, couvertes et cachées d'un grand linceul blanc de cotton, qui ne montrent rien que les yeux, pour les conduire (comme ils sont ordinairement icy) a l'entour des quelles toute la population esloignée d'une grande espace se range a leur mode; crians et pleurans, principalement les femmes cōme si on les vouloit écorcher. Ces deux prédications estant finies, les premiers de ce Thahmasha entrent en la place pour commencer ce spectacle qui sont les Arrabes en grand nombre, représentans les Arrabes de Medina crians, heut sej nem Khou, heut sej neut jet uounam Khou, qui veut dire, Ou est mon Hussin, ou est mon ieune Hussin, En suite ilx lachent une vingtaine de Chevaux sellez, bridez, et armez de fleches couvertz de peaux de Leopardz qui courent confusément de ça et de la représentant les Chevaux de Hussin qui s'enfuyrent lors qu'on le [63a] massacroit, ensuite autant de chameaux quelques uns peintz de noir chargez de Coffres, et de personnes nudz qui se battoient et crioient cōme desesperez, reputans son bagage devalisé, après paroissoient plusieurs machines ou tombeaux entourez de trophées, d'arcz, de Carquouois pleins de flèches, de rondaches, de cimēteres, de plumes, et d'autres ornemens semblables, entourez d'un grand nombre d'hommes tous nudz (exepté leur honte)

qui dansoient al'entour, crians et se battans; la plus part tous ulcerez au front et en plusieurs endroits du corps, d'ou sortoit une abondance de sang, les autres encor plus affreux, nudz couvertz de cendre, tous entourez d'un nombre comme infini de personnes armez de gros bastons criant, et courant en furie comme s'ils vouloient entretuer. Aucuns de ses tombeaux ou machines portoient de petitz cerceuilz et des enfans artificielem<sup>t</sup> accomodez de peaux nouvellem<sup>t</sup> ecorchees persez de fleches et couverts de sang, un autre accompagnée de femmes eche[63b]velées montees sur des mules noires; toutes ces fantaisies reprntant la mort d'Hussin, et de toute sa famille avec luy, qui ont fait crier et pleurer tant d'hommes et des femmes, et qui ont duré trois ou 4. Heures à passer devant le Roy; se pouvant appeller avec raison un vray spectacle de douleur; le quel s'est fini la nuit de ce dix<sup>me</sup> iour par un combat de ses gens les uns contre les autres, où il en est demeuré 5. de mortz sur la place, et septante de bien blessés. Le Roy ayant commandé aux habitans de plusieurs Villes de Perse de ioindre encor leurs ceremonies avec celles cy qui se font différem<sup>t</sup> par tout, Je v<sup>ous</sup> ennuyerois trop de vous en faire la relation...»

## TRANSLATION\*

From Isfahan, 26 April 1641 (= 14 Muharram 1051).

1. [60b]... It would not be inappropriate if I now entertained you with another profane and ridiculous spectacle which is performed every year in that town, which I saw and [61a] whose particulars I noticed, the story of which runs as follows. After Muhammad had married his daughter with 'Ali, his nephew and successor, this 'Ali had, among others who succeeded him, a son named Hasan, against whom an Arab prince named Mu'awiya rebelled and compelled him to flee to Medina, birthplace of Muhammad, and where is his sepulchre. After Mu'awiya's death, his son named Yazid, to secure the realms which he possessed, found the means to have Hasan poisoned by his own wife, [and] through the latter's death, he was succeeded by his brother named Husain whom peoples from Babylon called to become the king. While this Husain was on his way to take possession of the kingdom of Babylon, by treason, the Babylonians had him cruelly murdered three days from the town, with his wife, his children and all his family.

2. In memory of that cruelty, the Persians, who consider that Husain as one of their greatest Pontifixes [pontiff] and their greatest saint, make in all the cities of Persia, on the same day as this treason occurred [61b] and

\* The faulty spelling of proper names has been corrected in the translation.

more particularly in this town of Isfahan, capital of the kingdom, a public spectacle which they call Thahmachaa y Maaodisa [*tamāshā-yi muḥāditha / mā ḥadatha*], which means spectacle of grief, before which, within the span of ten days they do not dedicate themselves to any manual work, so that we could not even find anyone to have ourselves shaved under our turbans. Night and day, they amuse themselves doing along the streets a thousand sorts of strange demonstrations of grief.

3. They finally conclude it on the tenth day, which happened to be this year (according to the calculation of Louis Lionis) on Sunday the sixth of this month of April, on the great square of that town, the most beautiful which exists in Asia and in Europe, which is over 400 "toises" or "cannes" in length on nearly 200 in width. [It is] provided all around with buildings similar in architecture but small, adorned at one end with the great mosque and at one of its sides, with the main portal of the king's palace. At its top, all enriched with gildings and paintings, [and] covered [62a] against the inconvenience of the sun with a great veil of gold brocade, [was] the King dressed with a black vest, wearing a black turban (which one does wear only on this occasion) accompanied only by his Great Chamberlain. On the side, under an arcade on the right hand, was the Sadr (who is like their Pope) together with the main ministers of the state. In the left hand [arcade were] the King's eunuchs, white and black, about one hundred in number. Down, in the place, was his principal mulla (who is the first of his doctors), on a scaffold raised 5 or 6 feet high, seated in a chair, narrating in a loud voice the circumstances of the death of this Husain (whom they hold in an extreme veneration), mixing it sometimes with the praises and prayers for the present King, to which the people answers amin. This sort of predication, which lasts over an hour, is made in that way before the King. A similar one is made, at another end of the square for the common people, by another Mulla [62b], in front of whom [were] five or six hundred crouching women, covered and hidden with a great white cotton shroud, which shows nothing but the eyes, to allow them to guide themselves (as they are usually [made] here). Around them, all the population, distant at a great space, accommodate themselves in their fashion, [all of them] screaming and weeping as if one were wanting to skin them.

4. These two predications being over, the first ones of this Tamasha enters 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" [*Husainam kū, Husain javānam kū*] which means "where is my Husain, where is my young Husain?". Then they let go a score of horses, saddled, bridled and armed with arrows, covered with leopard skins, confusedly running here and there, representing Husain's horses which fled when he was [63a] massacred.

D'Ispahan le 26. Avril 1671  
Extract of a letter  
from Mr. de Montheron

SHI'Ī RITUALS AND POWER

Then [they let go] as many camels, some painted in black, loaded with coffers, and naked persons who struggled and screamed as if [they were] in despair, saying his baggage [had been] plundered. After, there appeared several machines or biers surrounded with trophies, bows, quivers full of arrows, shields, scimitars, feathers and other similar ornaments. [These were] surrounded by a great number of men, all naked (excepting their privy parts), who danced around screaming and struggling, most of them [being] wounded at their foreheads and at several places of their bodies, where from blood was gushing abundantly. The others, still more frightful, [were] naked, covered with ashes, all surrounded by an apparently infinite number of persons armed with big sticks, screaming and running in a fury as if they wanted to kill each other. Some of these biers or machines carried small coffins and children artificially attired with hides [of animals] newly skinned, pierced with arrows and smeared with blood. Another [was] accompanied by dishevelled [63b] women mounted on black mules.

5. All these fancies representing the death of Husain and all his family with him, which made weep and scream so many men and women, and which lasted 3 or 4 hours passing before the King, may be called with reason a true spectacle of grief. It was finished in the night of this tenth day by a fight of these people in which five of them remained dead on the square and 70 [were] seriously wounded. The King had ordered to the inhabitants of several Persian towns to join their ceremonies with these [for] they are made differently everywhere. I would bother you too much if I would relate them to you...

COMMENTARY

De Montheron was a lay companion of the Carmelite Mgr. Bernard de Sainte-Thérèse, Bishop of Babylone [Baghdad] who was sent on a mission to Persia (1640-2) after having been appointed by Rome to the "vicariat apostolique d'Ispahan".<sup>130</sup> De Montheron accompanied him all through his voyage, his stay at Isfahan and return via Baghdad and Aleppo.<sup>131</sup> In a letter, he provides very useful information about the house bought by Mgr. de Sainte-Thérèse at Isfahan.<sup>132</sup> The present letter (with no mention of the addressee) deals mainly with the ceremony of baptism of a young Persian of 22, who was given the name Paul Armand. While his Muslim name remains unknown, it is mentioned in another source that this Persian had three times seen the vision of Christ and was regarded as a saint among the "Pères francs".<sup>133</sup> Despite his gifts and intelligence (he was familiar with seven or eight languages) and the high esteem he enjoyed at court, he had given preference to the hopes of

eternal life over worldly satisfaction. De Montheron was accommodated by him in one of the most convenient houses on the square (i.e. the maidan). He could watch with him these Muharram ceremonies (fol. 63b). To facilitate the comments, the translation has been divided into paragraphs.

§1. *Origins of Husain's commemoration*

Although it comes from a Roman Catholic, the negative opinion about this "spectacle profane et ridicule" could also be found in other European accounts. Besides obvious errors (Muhammad's birthplace was Mecca, not Medina), somewhat more precise information is collected from Shi'ī sources: Hasan's poisoning instigated by Yazid (in fact, by Mu'awiya); the invitation of people from Babylon (i.e. Baghdad, standing for Kufa) to Husain to come to be their king; further treason of the Kufans.

§2. *Mention of dramatised ritual*

Besides the very brief mention of ten days and nights of abstinence, mortification and mourning, the most interesting reference is the name given to the public spectacle held on the tenth day. In its original sense, *tamāshā* has a special connotation of walking (Arabic *mashā/i*) abroad to watch a show, an entertainment or spectacle. The second part of the expression used "*muhāditha*" or "*mā hadatha*" is less easily identifiable. It is apparently connected with the Arabic "*hadatha*", to happen, and more especially to the word "*hāditha(t)*", tragic event. It could have been *mā hadatha*, i.e. "what unfortunately happened", a possible use of Arabic in a Persian context. De Montheron, who probably lived for some time at Baghdad, was maybe more familiar with Arabic than Persian. It should be noted that the word used in the terminology of ta'ziya-khwani is *vāqi* for the event and *pīsh-vāqi* for its prologue, which eventually evolved into separate plays. The notion of grief understood by this traveller is probably a misunderstanding or an extrapolation for an expression meaning spectacle, show or representation of the tragic event.

§3. *Sermons for grandees and common people*

The date given for the 'Ashura is erroneous (6 instead of 22 April 1641). At the official sermon, held at the top of the Palace gate, the Sadr and main state ministers sat at the king's right. The sermon before the king was made by the head of the mullas (the Shaikh al-Islam?) seated in an elevated chair, on the maidan. It was mixed with prayers for the king supported by the people's "amin". Another sermon, probably at the entrance of the great bazaar (Qaisariyya), delivered by another mulla, was attended by veiled women, the male population being kept at a distance.

Mention of Safi I's solemn presence at the top of the main portal of the royal palace is quite interesting. It might be the first available description of the open portico, or talar supported by columns surmounting that monument. Before its construction the roof of the building was probably used as a terrace. From literary and historical evidence, the proposed date of construction of this talar is 1053/1643, i.e. in 'Abbas II's reign, about two years after de Montheron's observation.<sup>134</sup>

§4. *The tamasha*

Although sketchy and rather vague, this account contains new and interesting details when compared with Olearius' observations four years earlier at Shamakhi and Ardabil. Sequences of the stage-setting of the ritual spectacle are well indicated with the successive entries of (i) the "Arabs" (probably acting penitents with turbans) desperately looking for Husain; (ii) simulated Husain's horses; (iii) simulated Husain's camels and plundered baggage, with naked despairing penitents around; (iv) machines or biers surrounded (or covered?) with trophies, some of them being apparently similar to the boxes carried by men on their heads observed by Olearius. "Bloody" penitents (real blood here) and blackened penitents, dancing, screaming and struggling are surrounded by a mass of warring persons armed with staffs or clubs. Some "machines" (carried on men's shoulders?) contained small coffins and children simulating martyrs. Animal hides worn with the hair inside and the skin outside, pierced with arrows, were already observed by Kotov (see above). Dishevelled women mounted on black mules are apparently a new occurrence.

§5. *Other particulars and final battle*

The importance of this "spectacle" (three or four hours parading, before the king) may have been enhanced by the fact that Safi I had ordered the inhabitants of several unnamed Persian towns to join their ceremonies to those held in the capital. What seems to be an exceptional occurrence under the Safavids was to become a more common feature in Qajar Iran.<sup>135</sup> This additional participation probably added to the diversity observed in the rituals, although the traveller discarded a specific description of provincial ceremonies. The final deadly battle between factions takes place at night, after the common people had left the maidan.