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## TA'ZIYAH ISLAMIC THEATRE: THE WAY TO EUROPE

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**The purpose of the article** is to trace the origins, evolution and modern cross-cultural transformations of the *ta'ziyah* Islamic theatre. The path of traditional *ta'ziyah* Islamic theatre is comprehensively traced in the article as a special genre from its inception in the 7<sup>th</sup> century as a component of Muslim ritual culture to current European theatrical practices. **The research methodology** is mainly based on historical-analytical and comparative-art approaches, which involves cultural and anthropological study of the evolution of Arab theatre, in particular the ways of formation and development of *ta'ziyah* Islamic theatre. **Scientific novelty.** As a result of historical and art studies, the evolution of *ta'ziyah* Islamic theatre from its origins as a component of the Islamic cult rite to the current forms as a component of European theatrical culture was traced for the first time in a comprehensive and well-argued way with the involvement of various factual material. **Conclusions.** Despite Sunni reservations, the phenomenon of the *ta'ziyah* remains the only indigenous theatrical genre that can be confidently regarded as both profoundly Islamic and intensely dramatic. It is, however, a *sui generis* tragic drama, which many believe cannot be presented outside its immediate cultural universe without severe distortion of its meanings, which are fully apprehensible only by the Shi'ite communities of the Middle East. Even in that context, the *ta'ziyah* and its associated mourning rituals remain controversial among the clergy. Can such a phenomenon be introduced to non-Shi'ite audiences? Can it cross the cultural divide and find appreciation in the West? It seems that it can, though not without some loss of religious significance. Mohammad Ghaffari and Kiarostami have shown the way, although their work has provoked strong criticism. The *ta'ziyah* should be regarded as a cultural resource of great value, to be treated with the utmost respect but not confined by ideology to a narrow interpretation of its significance.

**Keywords:** *ta'ziyah* Islamic Theatre; Imam Hussein; Muslim religion; Islamic drama; Husseinyya; Abbas Kiarostami; Mohammad Ghaffari

**Problem statement**

*Ta'ziyah* is a special theatrical genre, often translated as "Shiite mystery". *Ta'ziyah* is a kind of performance in memory of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (7<sup>th</sup> century), the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, the third imam. Every year Shiites mourn Hussein, who was killed on 10 October, 680. This mystery takes place in a poetic and

theatrical form in the holy month of Muharram, during which the anniversary of the death of Imam Hussein is celebrated. Performances can be long or short, but usually, the whole action takes a full day and is accompanied by traditional music.

When studying the thesis, it is worth quoting Nasr's opinion that the *ta'ziyah* "can have efficacy and meaning only in the traditional context for which it was meant" (Nasr, 1987, p.79). Nasr's argument is powerful, but others have taken a different view and have presented performances in Europe and the United States. We will discuss some of them later, but the attempts to introduce the drama to Western audiences show that the isolation of Arabic or Islamic drama is not inevitable, even though Arabic drama generally is scarcely known in the West outside academic circles. It is an unfortunate situation, given the pressing need for dialogue. As we shall see, however, opinions differ greatly about the quality and the nature of the Western audiences' response to the *ta'ziyah*. We cannot avoid the question, is a phenomenon such as the *ta'ziyah* bound to remain an exotic curiosity in the West, when even more apparently accessible works, such as Wannous's late plays, have hardly ever been produced there? How we think about this question will be affected by the disparity between the cultural influence of the West – particularly the USA – on the developing world and the negligible cultural impact of the developing world on the West. It is also undeniable that what impact there has been mediated through the cinema and music, rather than through literature (despite some notable exceptions) or theatre, which even in the West remains a minority interest. Moreover, it should be remembered that theatre in the Arab world currently means commercial theatre, serious drama being confined to marginal activity and productions mounted by academies and at festivals of drama and that the *ta'ziyah* itself is regarded with suspicion by Sunni Muslims and remains controversial even within the Shi'ite community, especially among the clergy.

It is impossible to understand the importance the *ta'ziyah* has for the Shi'ite community without some knowledge of the historical circumstances that gave rise to it. It does not mean that a non-Shi'ite audience cannot appreciate its dramatic qualities. Still, it will be useful here to explain the context and shed light on the Shi'ite audience's intense emotional involvement. We shall also discuss the development of the *ta'ziyah* but shall confine our presentation to the Middle East. However, it is worth mentioning that some form of Muharram procession occurs among Shi'ite communities in the Indian subcontinent and the West Indies.

### Analysis of the previous researches and publications

Researchers from the Middle East, Europe and the United States have turned to the topic of the evolution of Islamic theatre. Tawfiq Al-Hakim Al-Hakim (1983) and M. M. Badawi (1987) explored 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century Egyptian theatre; Mohamed Al-Khozai studied Ways of Formation of Arab Drama (1984); Ali Al-Ra'i (1980) studied the role of theatre in the development of culture in the Arab world; Jom'ah Qajah (2001) traced the influence of Arab theatre on the formation of Arab identity; Mohammed Aziza and Rafiq Al-Saban (1997) explored the links between Islam and theatrical art; M. M. Badawi turned to an in-depth study of early Arabic drama. T. Putensiva and Toufiq Al-Mu'azin (1981) comprehensively covered the history of Arab theatre. S. Nua'man

(1973) studied the study of Arabic literature and its connections with theatre. Kamran Scot Aghaie (2005) traced the origins of the relationship of the Sunni-Shia split and origin of the tradition *tazi'yi*. Johan G. V. ter Haar (1993) wrote about the peculiarities of *ta'ziye* as a ritual theatre in Shiite Iran. N. Zibdawi historical experience of the origin and theatrical art development of a region such as the Arab East as a whole and Lebanese theatre in particular, in the era of the Arab national identity rise that followed the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the cultural Western influence strengthening on the countries of the Arab East (2019, pp.139-152).

Special attention in the context of studying the traditions and modern practices of *ta'ziyah* Islamic theatre deserves a special issue of "*Ta'ziyah*" magazine TDR: The Drama Review edited by *Peter J. Chelkowski*. It contains articles in which the issues of history, theory and modern practice of *ta'ziyah* are studied in different planes. It is also worth noting that the author of this publication has previously addressed the study of some issues of the origins of the *ta'ziyah* Islamic theatre, in particular in the context of the history of early Arab drama.

Based on the proposed brief review of the sources identified by the author, it can be argued that today in art history lacks a comprehensive study, where the path of traditional *ta'ziyah* Islamic theatre from its inception as a component of a cult rite among the Muslim peoples of the Middle East to the current forms of European theatrical culture would be consistently and comprehensively traced.

**The purpose of the article** is to trace the origins, evolution and modern cross-cultural transformations of the *Ta'ziyah* Islamic theatre.

### Main material

To understand the essence of Islamic Thesis Theatre, it is necessary to trace the prehistory of its origin.

Husayn ibn Ali is the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, the son of Ali ibn Abu Talib of Fatima. After the death of his elder brother Hassan in 669, he became the head of the Alid family and returned from Kufa to Medina, but for a long time did not play a significant political role in society. After the death of Caliph Muawiya in 680, the anti-Umayyad opposition in Iraq intensified. Shiites from Kufa, who recognised Hussein as their imam, asked him to lead an uprising against Caliph Yazid, promising widespread support. Responding to the call of the Kufi, Hussein made a small detachment from Mecca, having previously sent to Kufa his cousin Muslim ibn Aqil, to prepare for the rebellion. Thousands of Kufa residents swore allegiance to Hussein before Muslims. However, the Kufi rebellion was suppressed at the very beginning, in September 680. Muslims were captured and hanged. Hussein received this sad news on the way to Kufa, but he did not listen to the persuasions of relatives and did not want to return. Meanwhile, the new governor of Kufa, the energetic Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad, set up posts on all roads to Iraq, one of which was encountered by a small detachment of Hussein (40 infantry and 32 cavalries, mostly his relatives and close friends). They encamped in the area of Ninava, where the city of Karbala later emerged. A four-thousand-strong detachment of the caliph, led by Umar ibn Saad, soon approached.

On the morning of 10 September 680, Hussein and his small detachment went out to meet the enemy. At first, none of the caliph's warriors dared to attack him, not wanting to take responsibility for the bloodshed of his grandson Muhammad. However, then one of them (according to Malik ibn al-Nusayr) struck Hussein with a sword on the head, after which everyone attacked him, and later all his men were killed. Hussein died in battle, receiving dozens of stab and chopped wounds. The heads of those killed were sent to the caliph in Damascus. The last publicly expressed regret over the incident.

The tragedy in Karbala made a strong impression on contemporaries. Hussein was recognised as the "greatest martyr", and Karbala became one of the shrines and a place of pilgrimage for Shiites. All Shiites celebrate the day of Hussein's death as mourning (ashura).

The death of Hussein, the granddaughter of the Prophet Muhammad, caused outrage among the people, which led to a new uprising in Mecca, led by Abdullah ibn Zubayr. Gradually, the Shiites gave Hussein an image of a mythical character, endowed him with supernatural abilities to predict the future, to work miracles. Over time, the story of his birth, life and death has become overgrown with numerous legends.

Hussein's death contributed to the religious and political unification of the Ali clan. Hussein became a symbol of the Shiite movement (a number of Shiite demonstrations were held under the slogan "revenge for Hussein's blood"). Today, he remains a prominent figure in the entire Islamic world (Ali-zadeh, 2007, p.285).

It is worth emphasising that a key element in understanding the philosophy and psychology of both Shi'ism and the *ta'ziyah* is *shahadah* (martyrdom), which drove Hussein, his family and his followers towards their tragic destiny. Hussein knew he had no chance of defeating Yazid's forces, yet he willingly consented to protect Islam's basis. His death has made him a living symbol of righteous self-sacrifice and a role model for those who seek truth and strive for justice. His actions show that he was aware of the temporary nature of military victory, but that "a victory achieved through suffering and sacrifice is everlasting and leaves permanent imprints on man's consciousness" (Husain, 1979, p.202).

In Persian language and culture Hussein's name has become synonymous with martyrdom, self-sacrifice, purity and justice; he is regarded as a religious, national and mythical hero. As Crone (2004, p.24) remarks, his martyrdom became to Shi'ites "an event of almost the same importance (though not the same meaning) as the crucifixion of Jesus to Christians".

In this study, we deliberately bypassed the analysis of the religious dispute between the Sunni and Shiite branches of Islam. However, in the research context of the history of *ta'ziyah*, it should be emphasised that the particular nature of Shi'ism continues to develop, and this, together with an emphasis on protest, revolt and martyrdom, none of which have been salient in Sunni Islam, combined to make of the *ta'ziyah*, especially in Iran, a "holy theatre" that "has been able to address the metaphysical and psychological needs of Shi'a believers to this day, reflecting not only the religious but also the cultural and political life of the country" (Malekpour, 2004, p.29).

The origin and development of the *ta'ziyah* are fascinating in themselves, and deserve a brief discussion here. "*Ta'ziyah*" is a verbal noun derived from the Arabic verb

"azza", meaning "to mourn", "to console", or "to express sympathy with", and so means "consolation" or "offering condolences". While the *ta'ziyah* did not attain the form we know today until the mid-eighteenth century, it seems that the expression of guilt and grief began almost immediately after returning the women and children of Hussein's household to Kufa. Caliph Yazid had allowed them to leave his court in Damascus shortly after their arrival there, presumably because he did not consider them a threat to his power. The Kufans, confronted by the suffering of these women, and especially by the dignity in the grief of Shahrbanu and Zaynab, Hussein's wife and sister, responded by demonstrating their penitence in an extreme version of "azza", including displays of physical self-punishment. This demonstration developed into the annual ritual of the *ta'ziyah* can partly be attributed to the social status of the women and their relationship to the Prophet (Knio, 1994, p.10).

Following the battle of Karbala, elegies for the martyrs were composed and recited (Aghaie, 2005, p.45). However, poetic compositions were not the only reaction; many of those who had invited Hussein to Kufa soon sought to avenge his murder. Because they wished to atone for their sin through action, they were known as *tawwabun* ("Penitents"). In 684, they attempted to make a stand against the Umayyads, but their revolt was easily crushed by the forces of Caliph 'Abd al-Malik. Before undertaking their doomed rebellion they visited the grave of Hussein at Karbala, "where they gave themselves up to wild and unprecedented expressions of grief, weeping and wailing for the suffering and tragic death of the grandson of the Prophet" (Husain, 1979, p.231). Their suicidal mission and the elegies composed for the martyr show that the tragedy of Karbala very soon acquired a religious and devotional significance (Johan G.V. ter Haar, 1993, p.159).

It took almost three centuries, however, before this significance became institutionalised into some form of ritual commemoration, partly because it looked that long for Shi'ism to develop into a coherent body of dogmas, practices and values. During this period, Sunnism also evolved, largely in response to Shi'ism and other heterodox movements of the late Umayyad and early Abbasid periods. By the mid- Abbasid period the caliph's power was limited in geographical extent and largely nominal, and power was exercised in Iran and Iraq by the Buyids (932-1062), under whose protection Shi'ism flourished and was able to develop. In 963, the Buyid ruler Mu'zzu'd Dawla ordered that Hussein's martyrdom should be officially commemorated during the first ten days of Muharram. The next year the mourning included the recital of elegies, the beating of the head and the face, and the bringing of mourning processions into the streets. Still, no recitation or dramatic presentation of the events of Karbala had yet evolved. However, the mourning ritual continued until the fall of the Buyids (Haar and Barfoot eds., 1993, p.159; Aghaie, 2005, p.45).

Little is known about the development of such rituals over the next few centuries since it took place in isolated communities under the patronage of local Shi'ite rulers. Then, in 1501, the Safavid dynasty established a powerful Shi'ite state centred on the Iranian plateau. It was to prove a turning point since it provided the conditions in which the *ta'ziyah* could be developed as a form of ritual drama. The initial cultural impetus was provided by the book written by the religious orator Hussein Vaiz Kashi, *Rawzat al-Shuhada (The Garden of Martyrs)*. This seminal work, written in the first

years of the Safavid period, synthesised "historical accounts, elegiac poems, theological tracts, and hagiographies into a chain of short narratives that together formed a much larger narrative". The book also articulated a complex set of canonised doctrines, which "stressed the courage, piety and sacrifice of Hussein and his followers of Karbala" (Aghaie, 2005, p.45).

The *Rawzat* initiated a genre of pious narratives which were read aloud in mourning rituals called *rawza-khani* by specially trained speakers, whose objective was to move the audience to tears through their recitation of the tragic events of Karbala. This ritual continues today and has been viewed by Shi'ites as a means of achieving salvation; through it, the mourner develops what might be called a spiritual empathy with, and sympathy for, the martyrs - hence the often-repeated sentiment "Anyone who cries for Hussein or causes someone to cry for Hussein will go directly to Paradise". In the early years of the *rawza-khani* many mourners would leave the mosques after the recitation, singing lines from the poems and beating their chests. Malekpour argues that "this para-theatrical event, with its use of voice and movement, was the first theatrical representation of the Karbala stories" (Malekpour, 2004, p.52; Aghaie, 2005, p.46).

The *ta'ziyah* as a passion play evolved from the amalgamation of the *rawza-khani* and the mourning processions. A number of writers developed the language of the stories from Kashefi's original, whose form was already close to the dramatic and theatrical. The elegiac style became richer in visual imagery and colloquial language, which became important elements of the *ta'ziyah*. By the nineteenth century, a form of poetry had been developed, notably by Qa'ani (1807-1853), that was highly theatrical and needed only to be spoken by separate characters rather than by a single narrator to become "theatre" in the full sense:

"What rains down? Blood! Who? The eye! How? Day and Night! Why?  
From grief! What grief? The grief of the Monarch of Karbala!  
What was his name? Hussein! Of whose race? Ali's!  
Who was his mother? Fatima! Who was his grandsire? Mustafa!  
How was it with him? He fell a martyr! Where? In the plain of Mariya!  
Karbala!". (Malekpour, 2004, p.53)

At first the *rawza-khani* was purely an act of devotion, but gradually the performers became professionals, and performances became commercial enterprises as well as religious events. The form also changed: at the end of each *rawza* a *maddah* or eulogist would sing religious verses relating to Hussein's martyrdom and be answered by the mourners in a "call and response" pattern. The evening processions of mourners noted above, began to include symbolic props such as coffins, flags and animals, including a man in a lion skin beating his head in mourning, indicating that the king of the beasts grieved for the martyr. The lion was the emblematic animal of Iran, and so this demonstration symbolised the mourning of the entire country as well as the natural world. The processional form became even more dramatic through the introduction of actors impersonating the central characters of the Karbala story. For example, "Hussein" and "Shimr" would ride their horses the length of the procession, brandishing their swords and challenging each other (Malekpour, 2004, pp.55-57).

The *rawza-khani* was not the only form of story-telling to influence the developments of the *ta'ziyah*. In the Safavid period there were two main groups of story-teller: the

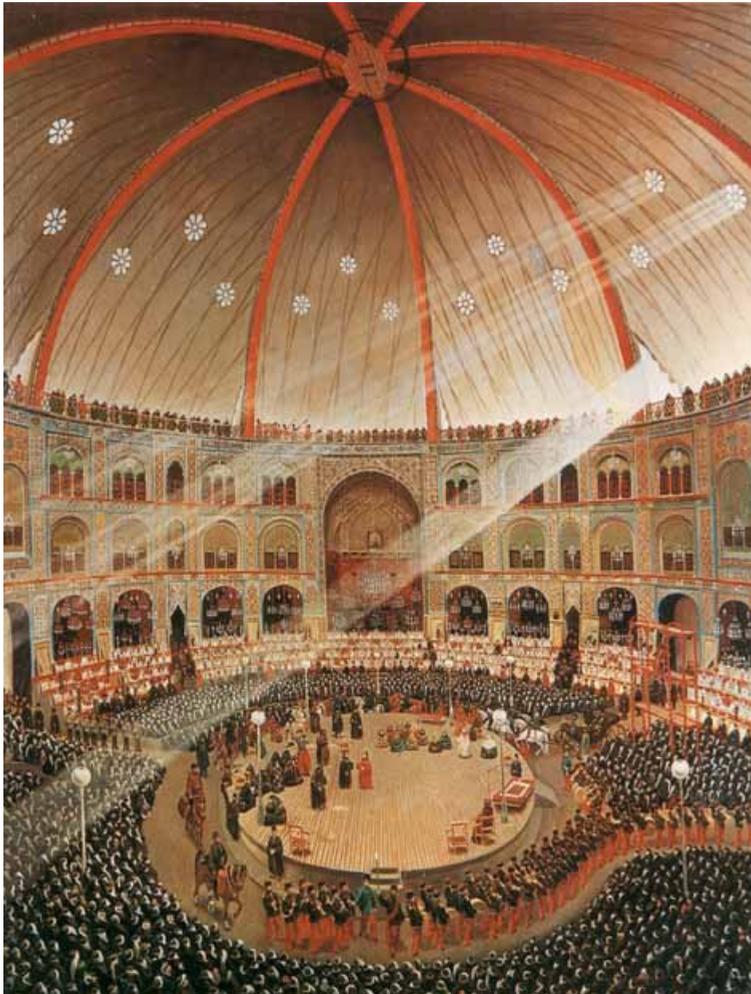
*hamla-khan*, who told of the battles of Ali, Hussein's father; and the *Shah nameh-khan*, who recounted the epic stories of Ferdawsi's *Shah-nameh (Book of Kings)*. Ferdawsi's epic has been compared with the *Iliad*, and one of the stories included in it was the death of Siavush, which some scholars have claimed was important in prefiguring the passion of Hussein. We cannot examine this argument here (Malekpour, 2004, pp.38-51), but it is certainly possible that some elements of the *ta'ziyah* were derived from pre-Islamic rituals performed in Iran which had certain features in common with other rituals performed in ancient Mesopotamia. Siavush is related to Tammuz (Greek Adonis), the god of spring and flowers, green plants and young animals of the herd. The mourning ritual for the Babylonian god's death and the celebration of his resurrection involved procession and recitation, two elements important in the *ta'ziyah* (Malekpour, 2004, p.38).

Another ritual of death and resurrection that incorporated theatrical elements but never developed into drama proper was the ancient Egyptian *Abydos Passion Play*, which was performed in honour of Osiris. His Mysteries were performed once a year at Abydos, and although little is known about the rituals, he is another figure martyred by a scheming adversary. In Osiris' case, the rival is Seth, the god of darkness; Siavush is killed by Garsivaz, and Hussein is martyred by Yazid. It is difficult to deny the resemblance between Siavush and Hussein. Both are innocent victims; both are symbols of goodness and mercy; both are brought low by a jealous antagonist, defeated in battle and decapitated. Malekpour is sympathetic to the argument that the *ta'ziyah* as a ritual mourning festival has clear precedents in pre-Islamic Persia: "The passion of Siyavush bears too close a resemblance to the Ta'ziyah of the Imam in ritual, imagery and emotive understanding to be ignored in an explanation of the emergence of the genre" (Yarshater, 1988, p.3).

The parallels between Tammuz, Osiris, Siavush and Hussein are indeed fascinating and deserve further study, which may reveal that the *ta'ziyah* has very ancient roots (the Zoroastrian mourning rituals for Siavush were held by early Islamic scholars to be based on myths three thousand years old). As for the *ta'ziyah* as an Islamic drama, it had developed into a fully theatrical form by the beginning of the Qajar period (1796-1925). History has not been kind to the Qajar shahs, but they were great supporters of the *ta'ziyah* and enabled it to expand rapidly in scope and popularity. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the original subject-matter, Hussein's martyrdom at Karbala, had been elaborated and broadened. The plays were increasingly performed not in the open air but in a purpose-built theatre known as a *takiya* or *Husseiniyya*, which encouraged the development of stagecraft. Shah Nasir al-Din (1848-98) was inordinately fond of the *ta'ziyah* and sponsored many performances. The genre's popularity increased, and every small town had at least one *takiya*; Tehran had over 200 (Haar and Barfoot eds., 1993, p.165).

The most famous *takiya* of all was the *Takiya Dawlat (Royal Takiya)* (Fig. 1), a huge and magnificent circular playhouse built by Nasir al-Din after he had seen the Royal Albert Hall while on a visit to London in 1873. The building was some 25 metres high and 60 metres across, topped by a large dome. Ordinary spectators sat on the ground around the raised circular stage, 18 metres in diameter, and were separated from it by space 4 metres wide. The Shah, his court and other dignitaries occupied three stories

of boxes. A pulpit was used in the *rawza-khani*. Other theatres were much simpler, having evolved from the caravanserai; many were constructed in the courtyards of houses, with a temporary stage built over the pool. The immense popularity of the *ta'ziyah* in the latter half of the nineteenth century is attested by the enormous number of these theatres – even moderately large villages would have one – but the twentieth century saw a sharp decline in the fortunes of the *ta'ziyah*.



(Fig. 1). Dawlat Hall. Painting by Kamal-ol-molk in 1892.  
(File: Takiya Dowlat by Kamalolmolk.jpg, 1982)

While the people saw the *ta'ziyah* as means of fulfilling their religious duties, the government and aristocracy saw it as a tool they could use to protect their power and control the people. The association of the *ta'ziyah* with the corrupt rule of a despised autocracy led to its decline, which continued after an alliance of Iranian nationalists,

intellectuals and bourgeoisie overthrew the Qajars in the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 and established the first National Parliament. In 1925 they supported the installation of the Pahlavi regime, which combined nationalism with a pro-Western stance. The new regime adopted a policy designed to transform Iranian society on the European model radically, and it and its allies desired to weaken the country's religious traditions, which they regarded as reactionary and primitive. For this reason, the first Pahlavi monarch, Reza Shah, discouraged the *ta'ziyah* and the *rawza-khani* in 1928 and a few years later banned them altogether (Haar and Barfoot eds., 1993, p.173; Malekpour, 2004, p.156).

Although the Royal Takiya fell into disrepair and was demolished in 1948, the *ta'ziyah* did not disappear completely. Performers sought support from the lower classes, who still had faith in the religion and its traditions, and found it in the small towns and villages, where the police were sympathetic and unwilling to enforce the law. The *ta'ziyah's* survival was more seriously threatened during the 1960s, when the Shah, with the support of the United States, implemented a policy of rapid westernisation. The work of Western playwrights dominated Iranian theatre, and few paid any attention to the traditional and folk forms. In 1967 a *ta'ziyah* performance, *Hurr*, was presented at the first Festival of Arts in Shiraz owing to Peter Brook's petitioning of the Queen, but in the opinion of many this performance, directed by a well-known television director, was not a success. It seemed as if the *ta'ziyah* was in terminal decline and was doomed to extinction (Malekpour, 2004, p.157; Haar and Barfoot eds., 1993, p.173).

Its fortunes were revived by the Islamic Revolution of 1979, which established a regime that promised the Iranian people the creation of a society based on Islamic values. The new government started to support the *ta'ziyah* through the Dramatic Arts Centre of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and other organisations, despite the reservations of some of the clergies who disapproved of music and the performing arts, and especially of the extreme displays of grief that were a feature of the mourning processions. The regime realised that the popularity of the *ta'ziyah* could not be ignored and decided to use it to publicise the Shi'a faith and to aid in the mobilisation of the people during the war with Iraq (1980-1988). Needless to say, Saddam Hussein was identified with Yazid, and "the heroism depicted in the *ta'ziyah* was enlisted to increase the fighting spirit of the Iranian combatants and to bring solace to those who had lost their loved ones". Today, throughout Iran and in other Shi'ite communities in the Middle East, it is possible to see *ta'ziyah* performances during the month of Muharram as well as at the many festivals held throughout the year.

As Mohamed al-Khozai (1984, p.25) notes, the *ta'ziyah* is more than the dramatic representation of the events of Karbala, as it comprises the *majalis at-ta'ziyah* (mourning assemblies), the *mawakib al-"azza"* (mourning processions) and *mashahid "Ashura"* (presentations of *Ashura*). The first of these are held twice a day, every morning and evening, throughout the first ten days of Muharram. In these assemblies, as we noted above, a *Qari* (reciter) narrates the story of the martyrdom of Hussein and his companions in a dramatic manner designed to move his audience to tears. The processions are essentially demonstrations of grief during which the mourners may chant lamentations, beat their chests with the palms of their hands, lacerate their backs with chains, or cut their foreheads and allow the blood to flow freely. Parts of the *Ashu-*

ra drama may be enacted in pageants. The presentations of *Ashura* are the various productions of the passion plays, and it is these with which our discussion is mainly concerned.

We know very little about the authors of the *ta'ziyah*, since they considered their involvement an act of devotion and hence preferred to remain anonymous; nor do we have a good estimation of how many were composed, or even how many are extant. We can say, however, that all the plays "share a basic plot which depicts the conflict between good and evil" (Malekpour, 2004, p.73). The confrontation takes place between "Olya", the good characters, and "Ashghya", the evil ones. The plays can be divided into four groups on the basis of structural features and subject matters: prologues, episodes, sub-episodes and comic episodes. Prologues (*pish-vagheh*) do not have independent or complete plots and are often connected to episodes, which are always about a Karbala event, although prologues need not be. The connection is made through a digression (*guriz*) from the Karbala event (Malekpour, 2004, pp.74-76).

The episodes (*yagheh*) are the main plays of the *ta'ziyah*; in them the plot and characters are connected to the Karbala events, and they are mainly concerned with the migration of Hussein and his family from Medina; the murder of his delegation to Kufa; the capture of his youngest sons; the surrounding of his camp at Karbala; the cutting off of access to water; the martyrdom of Abbas when he goes to fetch water for the women and children; the martyrdom of Qasim immediately after his marriage to Hussein's daughter; the martyrdom of Hussein's eldest sons; the martyrdom of his 72 followers; the martyrdom of Hussein himself; and the capture and deportation to Damascus of the women and children. Other characters may take centre stage; we have noted the performance of *Hurr* at the 1967 Shiraz Festival. All these plays are usually performed during the first ten days of Muharram, and in no particular order, the exception being *The Martyrdom of Imam Hussein*, which is always performed on the tenth, Ashura, since it was on that day that Hussein was martyred (Malekpour, 2004, pp.76-78).

Sub-episodes (*gusheh*), like episodes, have complete plots, but present both religious and non-religious subjects and characters taken from history, mythology, literature and daily life. Particularly after the fall of the Qajars, the *ta'ziyah* developed secular and even comic subjects, although it did not give rise to a separate secular genre. Most sub-episodes mix reality and fantasy, past and present, and tragedy and comedy. Subjects include Cain and Abel, Job, Joseph and his brothers, Layla and her obsessed lover Majnun, Timur (Tamburlane) and Nasseredin Shah (a contemporary character). One of the most famous sub-episodes is *Moses and the Wandering Dervish*, which was adapted for a performance in 1988 at a small New England college, Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. We shall consider this production in due course, together with some others mounted outside the Middle East. Comic episodes grew out of the mockery of Ashghya (Hussein's enemies), and while they refer to the events of Karbala the emphasis is on humour. Here the subjects include the jests of Ali's sly and cynical Ethiopian servant, Qanbar, and the wedding of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Interestingly, the latter includes masked actors impersonating animals, with whom Solomon discusses details of his wedding (Malekpour, 2004, pp.84-85; Haar and Barfoot eds., 1993, p.170).

The most elaborate plays were written during the Qajar period by a number of collaborating, anonymous authors, but these scripts were often substantially modified during the performing process, by poets (both professional and amateur), copyists and performers, and above all by the Master of the Ta'ziyah, the person in overall charge. How were (and are) these plays performed? We should bear in mind that they were constantly changed by performers who responded to particular situations and audiences, and that as they are essentially performance pieces, they "need to be seen rather than just read if we are to understand their true worth and power" (Malekpour, 2004, p.94).

The *ta'ziyah* developed from ritual mourning processions, and even when it moved into enclosed or roofed spaces and became more elaborate, it did not lose the powerful interaction between stage and audience since it was able to retain its ritualistic qualities and impose its own "open space" style on the architecture of the playhouse. The use of open space not only determines the style of performance but also has an effect upon every element of the production since the focus is on the living relationship between actors and audience. The style is (or has been until very recently) anti-illusory. As Malekpour remarks, the players

"[...] distance themselves from a detailed psychological approach to the characters and create a stylised method by which they can communicate the essential elements of their characters to a huge number of spectators in an immediately recognisable fashion. This type of theatre asks actors to create the essence of their characters quickly, [...] and to distance themselves from their roles in a manner that allows them to participate in the performances not only as players but also as spectators. This makes it possible for the actor playing Shimir, the killer of Imam Hussein, to cry for his victim, since he is, at one and the same time, an actor and a spectator. The audience is able to distinguish between these two elements of the stage performance". (Malekpour, 2004, pp.102-103)

The anti-illusory character of the acting is most manifest in the behaviour of the director, the Master of the Ta'ziyah, who is prominently visible on stage during the whole performance. He will regularly interrupt the action in order to draw the audience's attention to a particular scene or encourage them to voice their sorrow and grief. He carries the script of every role and directs the action, and the actors also carry their own scripts, which they consult without concealment, even when they know the role by heart. This style emphasises movement and gesture over the words of the text, though these are by no means unimportant. There is no need for realistic scenery or props, since this is symbolic theatre. The action is preceded by an address by the narrator or *rawza-khan*, who recounts the tragic events to be portrayed by the actors. The actors are, as we have mentioned, divided into Olya and Ashghya: the former present their characters in a serene and dignified manner, both in their facial expressions (where these can be seen, since they are not visible when the male actor is playing a veiled female) and their gestures. They sing their parts in the classical Persian modes, while the antagonists speak theirs. All parts, whether heroic or villainous, are in rhymed prose. The Ashghya declaim their lines in an extremely histrionic way, often making clear that they are not to be identified with their characters; this is necessary

for reasons of personal safety, and has not always been effective in preventing violence. All the actors remain on stage, even during scenes in which they have no part.

Everything in the production is directed towards the realisation of a communal religious performance. For this reason the style of presentation is minimalist and symbolic. The actors indicate the glare of the Sun by placing a hand over the eyes, and darkness by moving slowly and carefully. The Euphrates is represented by a bowl of water, a grove of palms by a branch. An awning stands for the encampment; a riderless horse is always a sign of its master's death. When a protagonist drapes his shoulders with a white cloth representing a shroud (*kafan*), the gesture indicates that he is prepared to become a martyr and will soon be killed. Hussein's death and decapitation are symbolised by the freeing of a dove. Historical accuracy is not taken into account in the design of costumes. The male actors playing women are enveloped in baggy black garments and are veiled; as for the male characters, the Olya dress predominantly in green, symbolising Paradise, the family of the Prophet and Islam, while the Ashghya wear red, indicating bloodshed, cruelty and oppression. Hussein and the male members of his family may wear white costumes with green accents, while his enemies may wear sunglasses to emphasise their villainy. Music is provided by drums, cymbals, trumpets and other brass instruments, and *nay* (reed flutes). Throughout the performance the audience participates vigorously, calling out, striking their chests, weeping, and waving green banners at key moments; as we have mentioned, physical attacks on the leading Ashghya are not unknown. The unified expressions of grief shared by the actors and the spectator-performers and the flexibility of representation serve to reinforce the connection between the action and everyday life and emphasise that between the Karbala tragedy and contemporary political conflicts. Thus during the Iran-Iraq war Saddam Hussein was identified with Yazid, and in Lebanon the Shi'ites of Mount 'Amil identify their Palestinian neighbours with Hussein and Israel with Yazid's oppressive rule (Malekpour, 2004, p.103; Haar and Barfoot eds., 1993, p.171; Knio, 1994, p.13; Gibb, 1960, p.407).

Attitudes to the *ta'ziyah* have varied widely both within and outside the Islamic world. As al-Khozai (1984, p.28) remarks, it "is practised by one sect only and for sectarian reasons it is ignored by the majority of Muslims, who take the passive part of unwelcome onlookers". Within Shi'ite communities, and especially within Iran, a distinction should be made between the ordinary people, who are generally devoted to Hussein and the rituals of the *ta'ziyah*, and those who view the mourning rites, and particularly their more extreme manifestations, as retrogressive. There is also the question of the attitude of the Iranian clergy, which we mentioned earlier. Besides being opposed to music and theatre generally, many religious critics condemned the public portrayal of imams on the stage and, after 1979, sought to impose their views on the Islamic government and the public. They may yet succeed in suppressing the *ta'ziyah* (Malekpour, 2004, p.18). Badawi's (1988, p.9) view is that "in the study of the Arabic theatre the *ta'ziyah* remains of very limited relevance", an opinion that al-Khozai would endorse. Badawi claims that "the form did not develop beyond the stage of crude and disorganised representation" and that it should "more properly be viewed as an extension of religious ritual than as drama". He acknowledges, however, that it is a dramatic spectacle of a tragic nature and emphasises that "it explodes the commonly held

fallacy that Islam as such, and not "puritan" Islam, is incompatible with dramatic representation" (Badawi, 1988, p.10).

The *ta'ziyah* was virtually unknown in the West until recently; although the processions of self-lacerating mourners in Iran and Lebanon have been occasionally seen on television screens since 1979, few Westerners have witnessed, or even heard of, the *ta'ziyah* as a form of dramatic representation. In the centuries before 1970 only two Europeans paid it serious attention. The Comte de Gobineau saw a performance in the mid-1860s and considered it to be "a great and serious affair, engaging the heart and life of the people who have given birth to it". This quotation is taken from Matthew Arnold's translation of Gobineau, which he included in a lecture published as one of his *Essays in Criticism* in 1871. Arnold disagreed with Gobineau's argument that the *ta'ziyah* should be ranked with Greek drama, comparing it instead to the Ammergau Passion Play (Malekpour, 2004, p.3; Badawi, 1988, p.9). After Arnold's essay, which is not without Victorian prejudices concerning Islam, the *ta'ziyah* disappeared from the view of Western scholars for a century.

In the twentieth century, theatre pioneers such as Artaud and Brecht look interested in Oriental theatre, but this did not extend to the theatre of the Middle East. Indeed, interest generally centred on China, Japan, and South Asia. One reason for the attention paid by pioneers and scholars to non-Western forms and traditions has been their belief that the vital element of the close and interactive relationship between spectators and performers, evident in Greek and Elizabethan theatre, had been weakened by the introduction of the proscenium arch and the advent of naturalism. Influential twentieth-century theatre artists such as Artaud, Grotowski and Brook have called for the re-establishment of this relationship. Malekpour argues that the *ta'ziyah* is always performed in an empty space, whether inside or outside a *takiya*. Its form of theatre in the round reminds us of its origin in ritual:

"This round empty space creates a sense of holiness for the Ta'ziyah that cannot be achieved in a formal space that divides the audience from the performers. This is holy emptiness has been created in the Ta'ziyah to reflect the atmosphere and the architecture of the Islamic mosques, which, unlike Christian churches, have very little decorative embellishment". (Malekpour, 2004, p.113)

Malekpour (2004, p.115) emphasises that this empty space "is filled with the creativity and imagination of both the players and the spectators, and this in turn reflects the sacred nature of the *Ta'ziyah*". He agrees to some extent with Nasr in being sceptical that a theatre that exhibits such a unity between players and performers can retain its power and significance outside its original religious context. Nasr argues that a sceptical audience "destroys that unity between performer and onlooker that belongs to the very essence of the *ta'ziyah*" (Nasr, 1987, p.80). Nasr is fearful that such performances may relegate the *ta'ziyah* to the realms of the merely exotic and "interesting". Similarly, Malekpour (2004, p.157) considers that the performance of *Hurr* given at the 1967 Shiraz festival "had a negative effect on the Ta'ziyah and hindered its revitalisation". This, he argues, echoing Nasr, was because it "was performed in a Western-style festival for an audience who did not share the faith that is required to experience fully this kind of tragedy" (Malekpour, 2004, p.157).

If Nasr and Malekpour are right, it follows that performances presented in a secular or alien context must diminish the power and meaning of the *ta'ziyah*. And yet Malekpour praises Peter Brook for "introducing the Ta'ziyah as a form of theatre to Western theatre scholars and, more importantly, to theatre performers" (Malekpour, 2004, p.3). Brook was profoundly affected by Iranian culture and directed Mahin Tajadod's *Orghast*, based on ancient Zoroastrian religious writings, at Shiraz in 1971. He was also directly and indirectly responsible for bringing the *ta'ziyah* to Western audiences. The open space of the *ta'ziyah* resonated with his conception of the "empty space" in which truly creative theatre can occur, and he was forcibly struck by the ways in which the performance brought out the mystical nature of the *ta'ziyah* through a simple yet totally effective *mise en scene*. After attending a performance of a *ta'ziyah* in Avignon in 1991, Brook recalled his first experience of *ta'ziyah* performance in a village setting.

Brook implies that it would be difficult but not impossible to create a theatre that would be "the mirror of the invisible". But it does not follow that the *ta'ziyah* itself can be presented to Western audiences, or even to non-Shi'ites, without a damaging loss of "the fire of life between actors and spectators". Seeking to present this apparently culture-bound theatrical phenomenon to Westerners, a number of individuals have mounted productions, which are documented in an issue of *The Drama Review* devoted to the *ta'ziyah* (Chelkowski ed., 2005). The number is guest edited by Peter J. Chelkowski, an authority on the *ta'ziyah*. The articles discuss a variety of topics, including the few performances presented in the West in the last twenty years. Although some of these productions were generally agreed to be successful, the public profile of the *ta'ziyah* was virtually unaffected, despite Brook's advocacy.

The key figure in the presentation of the *ta'ziyah* to the Western audience has not been Brook himself but his associate, the Iranian director Mohammad B. Ghaffari. He became interested in theatre as a boy, and later worked with the Theatre Workshop of Tehran. He first met Brook in 1969 and took him to see a *ta'ziyah* in a village in his native province of Khorasan. After the 1967 *ta'ziyah* performances at Shiraz had been judged failures, there was a universal feeling in the mid-1970s in Iran that the *ta'ziyah* was moribund if not actually dead. Ghaffari, however, believed that it was still alive in remote villages and travelled all over the country for a year, at the end of which he brought performers who had retained a knowledge of the art of *ta'ziyah* to Shiraz, to prepare to perform at the 1976 Festival. Ghaffari trained and rehearsed the performers intensively for three months, and the result was acclaimed by the media and created a sensation among *ta'ziyah* performers throughout Iran, who believed that the Shiraz performers had been extravagantly rewarded. Ghaffari himself strongly believes that the seven 1976 performances saved the *ta'ziyah* (Ghaffari, 2005, pp.113-117).

After the success of Shiraz, Ghaffari was awarded a scholarship to travel to the United States. He met Chelkowski in New York and worked at Michigan, but after nine months, the Islamic Revolution occurred in Iran and he decided to stay in the USA, eventually returning to New York to work at Columbia. After some years there he was asked to teach and direct a play at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. This was to be the first production of a *ta'ziyah* outside the Middle East, or perhaps it should be called a play based on a *ta'ziyah*, since Ghaffari, inspired by the ideas of his mentor Peter Brook, departed from tradition in several ways (Ghaffari, 2005, pp.117-118).

Ghaffari was invited to direct a *ta'ziyah* at Trinity by Milla Cozart Riggio, Professor of English at the College, in the spring of 1988. Riggio, a medievalist, wished to change Trinity's practice of performing a Christian medieval play every year and to step outside the Christian tradition. Ghaffari chose the sub-episode (*gusheh*) *Moses and the Wandering Dervish*, which contains a digression (*guriz*) from the Karbala story. When performed separately, the emphasis is on the Sufi aspect of the *gusheh*. The Trinity play was based on a text from northern Iran, but much of this was replaced by lines by Rumi, the great Persian mystic poet of the thirteenth century. The play concerns a dervish living in a desert hermitage who cannot reconcile the existence of Hell with the notion of a compassionate and merciful God until Moses shows him, through a *guriz*, the tragedy of Karbala. The play was staged in English and the *guriz* showed not only the Karbala scene but an image from the Vietnam War (Ghaffari, 2005, p.118).

The introduction of contemporary politics was not the only innovation; Brook's influence on Ghaffari was evident in the cosmopolitanism of the production. American gospel songs were performed by the angel Gabriel and by Moses, while a Korean singer and dancer played the dervish. Indian flute music was specially composed by the American Steve Gorn. Riggio comments that the play was thus "a parable of our times, possible only in a world that simultaneously encodes and erases identity, a world at once more global and more local than at any other point within modern memory" (Riggio, 2005, p.101). Ghaffari chose this *gusheh* to avoid a narrow religious interpretation and because production of a major *ta'ziyah* would have required specialist performers, especially singers (Ghaffari, 2005, p.119). For Riggio the main motivation was political; it was important to create a theatrical event that would take a stand against a world "where religious belief coalesces with and helps to create a sense of identity grounded in insularity and opposition. At Trinity in 1988, we found it impossible to separate aesthetics from politics" (Riggio, 2005, p.100).

The production appears to have been a success, despite Ghaffari's initial misgivings. He still believes that a non-Muslim audience "would miss the religious dimension of the drama" but argues that "theatrical forms are constant and have a great impact on the spectators" (Ghaffari, 2005, p.118). In the case of the Trinity production, however, the impact was not communal in the way it would have been in the Middle East. In Riggio's words, the traditional play designed for interactive performance was transformed into a modern drama celebrating the power of art and the role of the artist in a world characterised not by community but by the alienated isolation of exile [...] with each silent viewer isolated in a moment of private catharsis rather than raucous community (Riggio, 2005, p.106).

The Trinity production was to prove an exception in Ghaffari's involvement in bringing the *ta'ziyah* to Western audiences, since from then on his work in this area would be with Iranian performers staging major episodes. In 1991 a group of 20 musicians and actors gave three major *ta'ziyahs*, in Avignon, as part of a group of over 100 Iranian artists. Ghaffari was a guest director, and the Director of the Festival d'Avignon considered the event to have been a landmark: "The *ta'ziyah* was a great success in Avignon and the performers were able to build bridges with the audience. The French press wrote rave reviews" (Crombecque, 2005, p.18). Ghaffari's main reservation was that the Tehran performers contained only five good singers and were not skilled

horsemen: "I think it is very important for *ta'ziyah*, especially the epic *ta'ziyah*, to have horses – horses give a completely different dimension and life to the performance. Without horses, the play doesn't have the same power" (Ghaffari, 2005, p.119).

In 2000 the Festival d'Automne in Paris, under Alain Crombecque, who had been Director at Avignon in 1991, invited Ghaffari to direct Iranian performers in a *ta'ziyah*. He engaged some of those he had worked with in Shiraz in 1976; again about twenty actors and three musicians were involved. Five *ta'ziyahs* were performed, to good press reviews. Ghaffari prevented the use of microphones, which, together with electronic keyboards, have become common in Iranian performances:

"Nowadays in Iran they have a bad custom of using mikes which ruin the movements of the actors" (Ghaffari, 2005, p.120). Ghaffari explains this innovation as being due to the influence of television, and television and melodramatic films are also blamed for the corruption of the traditional anti-illusory acting style:

"Paradoxically too much exaggeration in the acting style will lessen the intended effect of the drama. The most evocative acting allows the spectator to inhabit the space between actor and role with his or her thoughts and emotions. Therefore the simplest style is nearly always the most effective, even if it is broadly drawn with large vocal and physical gestures. The finest actors achieve maximum effect from minimal materials". (Beeman and Mohammad, 2005, p.49)

The corrective for melodramatic overacting is to reinstate the values of *ta'ziyah* productions of the nineteenth and early twentieth century in order to re-establish the performing standards of an earlier, more disciplined time. Ghaffari succeeded in accomplishing this by taking a firm hand with some of the actors, and Crombecque as well as the press was enthusiastic: "The *ta'ziyah* proved that its theatricality and drama could overcome religious, linguistic and cultural differences" (Crombecque, 2005, p.18). The production transferred to Parma but poor public relations and bad weather resulted in low attendances. Lessons were learned, and when Abbas Kiarostami staged *The Martyrdom of Hussein* in Rome in 2003 the production – on one night only – was a great success, partly because Kiarostami had placed six enormous screens around the stage on which were shown black-and-white documentary footage of *ta'ziyah* spectators filmed in Iran by the director (Vanzan, 2005, pp.24-25; Chelkowski, 2005, pp.15-27).

Encouraged by the successes in Avignon and Paris, Ghaffari returned to New York, determined to bring the *ta'ziyah* to the Lincoln Centre, in a much bigger production than the one in France. He intended to use 35 actors and musicians, but after the 11 September attacks the budget shrank. Ghaffari returned to Iran, travelled around the country and chose the actors, and after a great many difficulties 18 men and children performed three *ta'ziyahs* in July 2002. Audience and critical reaction were extremely varied, but there were standing ovations and full houses every night. Ghaffari and the performers were moved and gratified, especially as they had not expected such a warm reception, which showed that New Yorkers were mature enough, even after 11 September, to differentiate between the martyrdom of Imam Hussein and the "martyrdom" of bin Laden's operatives (Ghaffari, 2005, pp.121-127).

The *ta'ziyah* cannot be separated from contemporary politics, and in the Middle East, as we have seen, direct comparisons are drawn between the key figures of the Karbala

events and individuals and nations acting in today's world. Some, ignoring the religion's quietist aspect, see Shi'ism as essentially a religion of protest, and for that reason argue that the *ta'ziyah* is essentially a mourning ritual, performed in a variety of forms, that expresses protest and cannot legitimately be used to consolidate the power of a repressive theocracy, as was done in Iran during the war with Iraq. According to this view, Shi'ism "can only speak truth to power and destabilise it. It can never be "in power". As soon as it is "in power" it contradicts itself. Shi'ism can never politically succeed; its political success is its moral failure" (Dabashi, 2005, p.91). Hamid Dabashi argues that Imam Hussein is essential "Hussein- e Mazlum" (Hussein who was wronged) and that his moral and political power lies in his passivity and his historical and cultural meaning as a figure of permanent revolution. In other words, his charisma depends on his deliberate refusal of political power. We cannot discuss Dabashi's development of this paradoxical argument here, but it leads him to anathematise not only the current Iranian regime ("a discredited state apparatus, held together by [...] militant repression [and] an entrenched clerical clique" (Dabashi, 2005, p.91) but also any attempt to present the *ta'ziyah* outside its Islamic and Shi'ite context, since it is located integrally "in the entirety of its immediate cultural universe" (Dabashi, 2005, p.93). This view leads him to identify the current Tehran regime with Yazid, and to characterise attempts to anathematise and theatricalise the *ta'ziyah* as corruptions of its essential nature. Needless to say he has little time for the Shiraz Festival or for Ghaffari's efforts to introduce the *ta'ziyah* to a wider audience, to "theatricalise" it. (Dabashi, 2005, pp.98-99).

However unjust Dabashi's judgments of Ghaffari's work may seem, it brings us back to the central problem of the *ta'ziyah*: is it ritual or drama? How is it to be understood? The answer seems to be that its power as drama is drawn from "the entirety of its immediate cultural universe"; that is, its drama is a ritual and its ritual is a drama, and both are deeply embedded in its nature as a Shi'ite cultural and political phenomenon. Others may appreciate its dramatic qualities, but it belongs to the Shi'ite masses and not to the state, however assiduously, the state may use it for its own purposes. This identification of the *ta'ziyah* with the revolutionary fervour of the oppressed is evident in the behaviour of the Shi'ites of the Mount 'Amil region of Southern Lebanon, and especially in Nabatiyya, an overwhelmingly Shi'ite city of some 35,000 people, where the mourning rituals feature self-flagellation and bleeding.

"Augustus Norton notes that these (predominantly male) rituals have proven to be remarkably persistent despite the disapproval of otherwise highly respected Shiite *mujtahids* (clerics qualified to independently interpret Islamic law). In addition, the ceremonies are an occasion for competing political organisations to contend variants of the rituals in order to exemplify piety and mobilise further support [...]. In this sense, the rituals offer no less than a public performance of ideology. For the past two decades or more, the rituals explicitly cast Israel in the role of Caliph Yazid [...]" (Norton, 2005, p.141)

The competing political organisations mentioned by Norton are Amal and Hezbollah, and in 2004 the latter emerged decisively victorious in the local elections. During Ashura the Karbala tragedy is presented with great intensity in Nabatiyya, where bleeding is an important aspect of the ritual for many of the participants, who consid-

er such practices *mustahhab* (commendable). Despite condemnatory *fatwas* by clerics of the highest rank, the blood rituals of Nabatiyya survive robustly. One resident told Norton in 2000 "What you see here is the real Islam. Islam is not found in books, it is here"; above him, banners proclaimed "Every day is Ashura and every land is Karbala" (Norton, 2005, pp.145-147).

**Scientific novelty.** As a result of historical and art studies, the evolution of Ta'ziyah Islamic theatre from its origins as a component of the Islamic cult rite to the current forms as a component of European theatrical culture was traced for the first time in a comprehensive and well-argued way with the involvement of various factual material.

### Conclusions

Despite Sunni reservations, the phenomenon of the *ta'ziyah* remains the only indigenuous theatrical genre that can be confidently regarded as both profoundly Islamic and intensely dramatic. It is, however, a tragic drama *sui generis*, which many believe cannot be presented outside its immediate cultural universe without severe distortion of its meanings, which are fully apprehensible only by the Shi'ite communities of the Middle East. Even in that context the *ta'ziyah* and its associated mourning rituals remain controversial among the clergy. Can such a phenomenon be introduced to non-Shi'ite audiences? Can it cross the cultural divide and find appreciation in the West? It seems that it can, though not without some loss of religious significance. Mohammad Ghaffari and Kiarostami have shown the way, although their work has provoked strong criticism. The *ta'ziyah* should be regarded as a cultural resource of great value, to be treated with the utmost respect but not confined by ideology to a narrow interpretation of its significance. As one Shi'ite admirer of Trinity College's unorthodox production of *Moses and the Wandering Dervish* told Milla Riggio, "the artist is free" (Riggio, 2005, p.110).

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## ИСЛАМСЬКИЙ ТЕАТР ТЕ'ЗІЄ: ШЛЯХ ДО ЄВРОПИ

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#### Анотація

**Мета дослідження** – простежити джерела, еволюцію та сучасні кроскультурні трансформації ісламського театру те'зіє. У статті комплексно простежено шлях традиційного ісламського театру те'зіє як особливого жанру від часу його зародження в VII столітті як складової мусульманської обрядової культури до нинішніх європейських театральних практик. **Методологія дослідження** переважно базується на історико-аналітичному та компаративістсько-мистецтвознавчому підходах, що передбачає культурно-антропологічне вивчення еволюції арабського театру, зокрема шляхів становлення та розвитку ісламського театру те'зіє. **Наукова новизна**. У результаті здійсненого історико-мистецтвознавчого дослідження вперше було комплексно й аргументовано, із залученням різновекторного фактологічного матеріалу простежено еволюцію ісламського театру те'зіє від джерел (як складову ісламського культурного обряду) до нинішніх форм (як складову європейської театральної культури). **Висновки**. Незважаючи на застереження сунітів, феномен те'зіє залишається єдиним первісним театральним жанром, який можна впевнено розглядати як глибоко ісламський, так і надзвичайно драматичний. Однак це самотутня трагічна драма, яку, на думку багатьох, неможливо представити поза її безпосереднім культурним контекстом без сильного спотворення її значення, яке цілісно сприймається виключно шіїтським громадам Близького Сходу. Навіть у цьому контексті те'зіє та пов'язані з нею ритуали трауру залишаються суперечливими серед духовенства. Чи можна таке явище представити не шіїтській аудиторії? Чи може це подолати культурний розрив і знайти розуміння на Заході? Здається, може, хоча і не без певної втрати релігійного значення. Мохаммад Гаффарі та Аббас Кіаростамі показали шлях, хоча їх робота викликала багато критики. Те'зіє слід розглядати як культурний ресурс, що має велику цінність, до якого слід ставитися з найбільшою повагою, але не обмежуючись ідеологією, лише вузьким тлумаченням її значення.

**Ключові слова:** ісламський театр те'зіє; Імам Хусейн; мусульманська релігія; ісламська драма; Хусейнійя; Аббас Кіаростамі; Мохаммад Гаффарі

## ИСЛАМСКИЙ ТЕАТР ТА'ЗИЙА: ПУТЬ В ЕВРОПУ

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### Аннотация

**Цель исследования** – проследить источники, эволюцию и современные кросс-культурные трансформации исламского театра та'зийа. В статье комплексно прослеживается путь традиционного исламского театра та'зийа как особого жанра от времени его зарождения в VII веке как составляющей мусульманской обрядовой культуры до нынешних европейских театральных практик. **Методология исследования** преимущественно базируется на историко-аналитическом и компаративистско-искусствоведческом подходах, предусматривает культурно-антропологическое изучение эволюции арабского театра, в частности путей становления и развития исламского театра та'зийа. **Научная новизна.** В результате проведенного историко-искусствоведческого исследования впервые комплексно и аргументировано, с привлечением разновекторного фактологического материала прослежена эволюция исламского театра та'зийа от источников (как составляющей исламского культового обряда) до нынешних форм (как составляющей европейской театральной культуры). **Выводы.** Несмотря на предостережения суннитов, феномен та'зийа остается единственным исконным театральным жанром, который можно уверенно рассматривать как глубоко исламский, так и чрезвычайно драматический. Однако это самобытная трагическая драма, которую, по мнению многих, невозможно представить вне ее непосредственного культурного контекста без сильного искажения ее значения, которое целостно воспринимается исключительно шиитским общинам Ближнего Востока. Но даже в этом контексте та'зийа и связанные с ней ритуалы траура остаются противоречивыми среди духовенства. Можно ли такое явление представить не шиитской аудитории? Может это преодолеть культурный разрыв и найти понимание на Западе? Кажется, может, хотя и не без некоторой потери религиозной составляющей. Мохаммад Гаффари и Аббас Киаростами показали путь, хотя их работа и вызвала сильную критику. Та'зийа следует рассматривать как культурный ресурс, имеющий большую ценность, к которому следует относиться с величайшим уважением, но не ограничиваясь идеологией, лишь узким толкованием ее значения.

**Ключевые слова:** исламский театр та'зийа; Имам Хусейн; мусульманская религия; исламская драма; Хусейнийя; Аббас Киаростами; Мохаммад Гаффари

