CHAPTER 6

Bāzār-e Shām (The Damascus Market)

مگر میان شما یک نفر مسلمان نیست اگر که هست مسلمان چاره بجز این نیست
زنم به فرق خود این لحظه از حمیت سنگ بالتماس روم سوی ایلچیان فرنگ[1]

Is not one person among you a Muslim? If there is a Muslim present, is there no remedy but this? Right now I strike my head with a stone in indignation! And go pleading to the ambassadors of Europe.

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Bāzār-e Shām treats the arrival of the Karbala survivors in Damascus. They are made a terrible spectacle as battered, bound and exposed they are paraded through the market, together with the severed heads of their martyrs. The macabre cavalcade is then taken to Yazīd's court for his inspection. This play is markedly different from the others treated in this book, both in terms of spatial and temporal setting. Yazīd's court is a sharp contrast to the besieged camp and battlefield at Karbala; the urban environment allows for the appearance of a diverse range of characters, from Yazīd himself to a European ambassador, a foreign doctor, members of the royal harem, and humble townsfolk. It plays amid the aftermath of Ḥusain's death, as opposed to during the build-up. At the exposition the unthinkable has already happened. The audience now witness the much foretold tribulations of the womenfolk after the loss of their male protectors.

1 Words spoken by Zainab at Yazīd's court in *Bāzār-e Shām*. CP: MS 512 (Mashhadī Ḥusain Tafreshī; Mīrzā Muḥammad b. Mīrzā Ḥasan Ta'ziyeh-khān-e Jāsebī, Kashan 1327/1909–10 and 1369/1949–50); and (with minor variations) the Zand and Darbandsar renditions; MS 405; MS 661 (Mīr-e 'Azā; Mīrzā 'Alī Ṭehrānī; Murtażā Bābājān; and Shaikh Zain al-'Ābedīn Mahdaviyān, Qom, 1369/1949–50 & 1329 SH/1950–51); and MS 662 (Mīrzā Ghūlām-'Alī Darvīsh; Muḥammad Reżā Hūshmand; and Nūr Muḥammad 'Abbās, Rasht, 1342/1923–24 & 1311 SH/1932–33).

FIGURE 9 Performers playing Shemr, Zain al-ʿĀbedīn, Zainab and the Karbala survivors, Garmaseh, Isfahan Province, 13th Muḥarram 1439/2017

1 Script Sources, and Tracing the Narrative

My study of this episode is based on nine renditions of the script. The gap of a century between the earliest version amongst my sample and the next available rendition complicates the matter of tracking the play's development. Fortunately, Il'ya Berezin's 1259/1843 (Tehran) spectator account gives a detailed scene by scene description of this episode, providing an invaluable point in the timeline.[2]

My analysis of this play will look closely at the figure of the Īlchī Farangī (the European Ambassador): the origin of his story; how he reflects perceptions of foreign visitors to Iran during the Qajar period; and how the dramatists take the surprising step of turning him briefly into a storyteller. I will look at the unusual technical aspects of this episode's composition, and examine the forced exposure of the women as a theme. In looking at the episode's historical

2 Bérézine, *Voyage*, 256–60.

TABLE 4 Script sources for *Bāzār-e Shām*

Rendition	Date	Origin	Author or copyist
Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī, Zand Collection[a]	1184/1770–71	Unknown	Āqā Bābā
Pelly Collection[b]	*c.*1873	Shiraz/ Bushehr	Anon
Ṣāleḥī Rād Collection[c]	Late 19th cent.	Darbandsar	Anon
Cerulli Persiani, MS. 405	End 19th cent.	Mazandaran	Anon
Cerulli Persiani, MS. 512[d]	1327/1909–10 & 1369/1949–50	Kashan	Mashhadī Ḥusain Tafreshī; Mīrzā Muḥammad b. Mīrzā Ḥasan Taʿziyeh-khān-e Jāsebī
Cerulli Persiani, MS. 43	1335/1916–17 & 1324 SH/ 1945–46	Unknown	Mashhadī Ghulām Ḥusain b. Mullā Sharīf
Cerulli Persiani, MS. 662	1342/1923–24 & 1311 SH/ 1932–33	Rasht	Mīrzā Ghūlām-ʿAlī Darvīsh; Muḥammad Reżā Hūshmand; Nūr Muḥammad ʿAbbās
Cerulli Persiani, MS. 661[e]	1369/1949–50 & 1329 SH/ 1950–51	Qom	Mīr-e ʿAzā; (Mīrzā ʿAlī Ṭehrānī; Murtażā Bābājān; Shaikh Zain al-ʿĀbedīn Mahdaviyān)
Cerulli Persiani, MS. 908	1372/1952–53	Shiraz	Ghulām Ḥusain b. Mullā Sharīf

a Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar 11*, 17–82

b Pelly's collection of prose translations does not include *Bāzār-e Shām* (The Damascus Market) as a single play. Rather, it includes three shorter episodes that together contain content corresponding closely to that of *Bāzār-e Shām*, including many of its dialogues. See "Scene XXX-Arrival of Husain's Family at Damascus"; "Scene XXXI-Conversion and Murder of the Ambassador from Europe"; and "Scene XXXII-Death of Rukayyah the Daughter of Husain". Pelly, Miracle Play, 2, 202–257

c Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles*, 2, 111–34

d This manuscript is in *tak-nuskheh* form and includes two copies of Zain al-ʿĀbedīn's script. I have referred to the older one that corresponds to the *fehrest*.

e The script is cited as the Mīr-e ʿAzā version, the acting sides bear the signatures of three people.

development I discuss the integration of a *gūsheh*, a prologue, in which Yazīd is treated by a foreign doctor, and consider its satirical potential.

This episode not only gives a graphic portrayal of the abhorrent treatment of the captives; it also demonstrates the bravery and eloquence of the women and girls of Ḥusain's house as they speak out against oppression. We find clear inspiration for all of this in historical accounts of the Karbala survivors being taken first to Kufa and then Damascus. The *taʿziyeh* composers have clearly drawn heavily from the stories of the survivors' ordeal transmitted in such sources. To inform our understanding of the composers' work, I begin the discussion of *Bāzār-e Shām* by showing where these influences are discernible within the episode. However, I also identify a key area in which the *taʿziyeh* differs from much historiography – the treatment of the caliph, Yazīd.

The majority of the episode's action plays in Yazīd's court and concerns him receiving news of the outcome of the battle, inspecting the heads of the martyrs, and interacting with the captives. These events are covered by al-Ṭabarī and in Balʿamī's Persian version of his work, by al-Mufīd, Safavid historians Mīrkhānd and Khāndamīr, and in Kāshefī's *Rawżat*, amongst other works.[3] They present Zainab as a powerful rhetorician; in her debates with Ebn-e Ziyād in Kufa, and Yazīd in Damascus she is shown not only to have the higher moral ground but the superior wit. Zain al-ʿĀbedīn is also presented speaking eloquently against their captors, and in a number of sources his execution is ordered as a result; he only escapes death because of the fierce intervention of the womenfolk.[4] In the *taʿziyeh*, this scene came to provide the main peak in *Bāzār-e Shām*'s action.

These sources also include accounts of a number of individuals (usually old men) who refuse to remain silent in the face of the injustices perpetrated against the Karbala survivors; they speak out, provoking Ebn-e Ziyād's or Yazīd's ire, and some pay with their lives.[5] In the *taʿziyeh* we do see benevolent members of the crowd in Shām opposing the treatment of the captives, but the most prominent onlooker to speak out is the Īlchī Farangī. He is an important character, functioning as an external witness and attempting to intercede

3 Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, 169–76; Balʿamī, *Tārīkh-nāmeh*, 4, 714–15; Mufīd, *Irshād*, 341–43; Mīrkhānd, *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, 3, 2270–73; Khāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-siyār*, 2, 60; Kāshefī Sabzevārī, *Rawżat*, 505–13.

4 Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, 166–67; Balʿamī, *Tārīkh-nāmeh*, 4, 713; Mufīd, *Irshād*, 339–40; Mīrkhānd, *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, 3, 2267. These sources record this happening in Kufa and Ebn-e Ziyād being the one who gives the execution order. In *Bāzār-e Shām* the setting is Damascus, the order given by Yazīd. Kāshefī gives both accounts, *Rawżat*, 479 and 512.

5 Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, 167–68; Mufīd, *Irshād*, 340; Balʿamī, *Tārīkh-nāmeh*, 4, 713; Mīrkhānd, *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, 3, 2267–68.

when Zain al-ʿĀbedīn's life is under threat. His is, indeed, an old story. Whilst it is not included in al-Ṭabarī's account, the presence of a Byzantine ambassador at Yazīd's court is recorded in certain manuscript versions of Balʿamī's Persian *Tārīkh-nāmeh-ye Ṭabarī* (one of which is dated to the 6th/12th century), a point to which we will return.[6]

Another narrative detail, important in the *taʿziyeh*, that is rooted in historical accounts is that Yazīd dishonours Ḥusain's severed head by poking his mouth with a wooden stick. This and other similarly irreverent acts serve in *Bāzār-e Shām* to depict Yazīd's behaviour as anathema, portraying him as thoroughly deplorable. Intriguingly, although this story is recounted in many significant works of historiography,[7] the historians often give Yazīd a nuanced, even relatively sympathetic portrayal. Al-Ṭabarī, Balʿamī, al-Mufīd and Mīrkhānd all recount Yazīd displaying remorse upon hearing of Ḥusain's death, and cursing Ebn-e Ziyād, claiming that he himself would have pardoned Ḥusain.[8] They also recount his having treated the captives in Damascus with respect, providing dignified dwellings for them. Al-Ṭabarī even cites a report that they were lodged in Yazīd's own house, that his womenfolk mourned with them, and that he restored to them their plundered possesions. He goes further, including a quote from Sakīneh, stating that she never knew a better *kāfer* (infidel) than Yazīd![9] Even Kāshefī's *Rawżat* includes a story of Shemr tricking someone else into claiming to be Ḥusain's killer, for fear of Yazīd's anger, and Yazīd ordering this man's execution.[10] This is very much at odds with the caliph's behaviour as portrayed in the *taʿziyeh*: gloating over Ḥusain's murder, rewarding Shemr, publicly humiliating the captives, and lodging them in a ruin. Why is this?

The historians' work consisted largely of organising the available witness accounts of an event into a narrative: it was commonplace for them to cite conflicting accounts, and they made little pretence of being able to provide

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6 Peacock cites this figure as being mentioned in two manuscripts, one held in Mashhad (Āstān-e Quds 129), and one in Cambridge (Add 836). The former, dated to the 6th/12th century, originates from Erzincan (present day Turkey). The latter is an Arabic translation of Balʿamī's work, dated 876/1471, the colophon indicating that it is a direct descendant of a manuscript dated 442/1050. Andrew C.S. Peacock, *Mediaeval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy: Balʿamī's Tārīkhnāma* (London: Routledge, 2007), 132, 139. For Peacock's full discussion of Add. 836, including questions relating to its dating see pp. 66–75.

7 Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, 176; Balʿamī, *Tārīkh-nāmeh*, 4, 714–15; Mīrkhānd, *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, 3, 2270–71; Kāshefī Sabzevārī, *Rawżat*, 506.

8 Balʿamī, *Tārīkh-nāmeh*, 4, 714–15; Mufīd, *Irshād*, 341–43; Mīrkhānd, *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, 3, 2270.

9 Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, 174–76. Mīrkhānd gives this same quote but from Zainab. Mīrkhānd, *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, 3, 2273.

10 Kāshefī Sabzevārī, *Rawżat*, 505.

certainty. Nonetheless, their own political or religious convictions, and those of their patrons, will have had some bearing upon the organisation of the narrative. In an interesting discussion of al-Ṭabarī's and Balʿamī's works, Andrew Peacock assesses the political leanings (pro-Umayyad or Shiʿi) of those reporting Yazīd's reaction to learning of Ḥusain's death, and how each historian presents these accounts. He concludes that Balʿamī's "translation" of al-Ṭabarī's work, as observed in certain manuscript versions, cites contradictory accounts in such a way as to show Yazīd "… cynically feigning horror at Ḥusayn's death for the sake of public opinion, while privately delighted."[11] He argues that throughout his coverage of Ḥusain's death Balʿamī subverts al-Ṭabarī's Sunni sources, adding his own Shiʿi ones that undermine al-Ṭabarī's account. Peacock suspects that Balʿamī's intention was to present his audience with a work from an authoritative Sunni source that included a heavily Shiʿi slant, and that this creative licence would have gone largely undetected by his audience.[12]

Peacock may well be correct, but we do not see this view of Yazīd stated openly in the Persian historiography until Khāndamīr's *Ḥabīb al-siyar* (*c.*935/1538–9) by which time the Safavid dynasty ruled Iran and Shiʿism had become Iran's religion of state. In contradiction to the writings of his grandfather, Mīrkhānd, Khāndamīr asserts that although it is reported that Yazīd became enraged with Shemr and his accomplices upon hearing of Ḥusain's death, this was simply an outward show of aggression feigned because the people were cursing Ḥusain's killers. Therefore, Yazīd sought to shift the blame for ordering Ḥusain's killing to Ebn-e Ziyād.[13]

For our discussion of the *taʿziyeh*, it is intriguing that none of the sympathetic portrayal of Yazīd reached the dramatists' depiction of these events. He does not feign the slightest remorse upon seeing Ḥusain's head. Later in the cycle they do treat Yazīd's repentance, and we do begin to see him feel remorse in *The Martyrdom of Rukaiyeh* (that can be played as an epilogue to *Bāzār-e Shām*). However, in the body of *Bāzār-e Shām* Yazīd is the antagonist par excellence, publicly revelling in the suffering of Ḥusain and his family.

In chapter 1 I showed that by the middle of the 11th/17th century we see the *taʿziyeh* tradition evolving towards its scripted form, and indeed, our earliest extant script, dating to 1136/1724, affirms that the tradition had taken root during the second half of the 17th century. By this time, Shiʿi rituals as large-scale public events were widespread, and included not only the performance of mourning for the martyrs, but also a tradition of the ritual cursing of their

11 Peacock, *Balʿamī's Tārīkhnāma*, 138.

12 Ibid., 139.

13 Khāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-siyār*, 2, 60.

enemies which included the first three Sunni caliphs, but in particular ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 12–23/ 634–44).[14] It thus appears that any inhibitions around the legitimacy or permissibility of giving a Sunni caliph a thoroughly negative portrayal had been long shaken off. The dramatists could do as they wished with Yazīd. Further to this, we must consider the form in which the stories of Karbala circulated at a popular level. It is most probable that during the early Safavid period, as these events were narrated by dervish storytellers, in a process similar to that described with regards to Shemr in chapter 5, Yazīd developed into an icon of his type, a merciless and sinful villain.

2 Skeleton of *Bāzār-e Shām* and Function of Its Sections

Although this episode can conclude with the death of Rukaiyeh as an epilogue, this is not strictly a martyrdom narrative and it does not conform to the "martyrdom composition-scheme" discussed in chapter 2 and relevant to the episodes analysed above. Unlike those episodes, there is no distinct forward momentum towards a particular event. It is composed of a string of short, relatively self-contained scenes that consistently feature either Yazīd or the Karbala captives interacting with a particularly diverse range of characters. I thus refrain from labelling the sections as belonging to an arch plot structure, which would be an artificial imposition. What can be said is that the theme of humiliation, eliciting a sense of outrage in the audience, runs throughout these scenes, culminating in Zain al-ʿĀbedīn confronting Yazīd and nearly being executed, a scene that is as close as the play comes to having a climax.

2.1 *Section 1 – Yazīd Awaits Word from Karbala*

Yazīd is introduced through a scene where he converses with his vizier, ʿAmr-e ʿĀṣ as he nervously awaits news from Karbala. He is shown to be afraid. In some renditions, at ʿAmr-e ʿĀṣ' advice Yazīd summons a scribe and dictates a letter to the commander(s) at Karbala, urging the drawing of blood.[15] In others, the caliph and vizier try bibliomancy with the Qur'an, but give up after a couple of attempts fail to bring the reassurance craved.[16] Yazīd is physically sick with anxiety as he waits for word from Karbala. Renditions from Nāṣer al-Dīn's reign

14 This included a ritual in which an effigy of ʿUmar was burned. For collated historical accounts of the symbolic performance of ʿUmar's killing in the late 1600s see Floor, *Theater*, 204–205.

15 Zand rendition; CP: MS 43; and MS 908.

16 Darbandsar rendition; CP: MS 43; MS 512; MS 661; and MS 908.

onwards commonly feature a European doctor being summoned to treat him: upon making his diagnosis, the doctor orders a long list of absurd ingredients to prepare a nonsense remedy;[17] Yazīd declares that his only remedy is wine and the blood of Ḥusain.

2.2 *Section 2 – News of Victory*

A messenger, or Shemr, enters with news that the deed is done, Ḥusain and his supporters have been killed, and his family taken captive.[18] Yazīd celebrates, ordering that the city be decorated, wine poured and music played. Renditions in which the news arrives in the form of a letter can include an orator reading it from the pulpit, and a singer lauding Yazīd's victory over Ḥusain.[19] Shemr is congratulated and rewarded. The celebratory atmosphere is in cynical contrast to Yazīd and Shemr's conversation in which Yazīd demands details of the slain. This is a lengthy dialogue, providing an opportunity to list the names of Ḥusain's broader group of supporters.[20] As the list progresses to his relatives and most prominent followers Yazīd wants to know how they were killed. Shemr obliges with graphic accounts. Designed to provoke outrage, in this scene not only do the audience relive the martyrdoms of their heroes but hear them recited with glee.[21] In the continuation of the chapter I will discuss how the versification of this section supports the portrayal of Yazīd as a blood-thirsty tyrant. Interestingly, through this and other accounts given by Shemr in this episode, we get the antagonists' perspective of what happened at Karbala.

2.3 *Section 3 – Captives Paraded through the Market*

The prisoners are humiliated at Yazīd's behest; with music and festivities, they are paraded through the market on camels, bare-headed and in chains, accompanied by the heads of their martyrs, atop spears. When they ask what the people are celebrating Shemr tells them that Yazīd has organised a party for them. Many townspeople throw stones at them. The family decry the injustice, asking Ḥusain's blood-dripping head to look upon their suffering. They beg fruitlessly for mercy on the grounds of being Muslims and the descendants of the Prophet. Different renditions of the play do have benevolent characters

17 Among my sample, only the Zand and Pelly renditions do not feature this scene.

18 In CP: 908 a slave who had been dispatched with Yazīd's letter meets Shemr and returns to bring the news.

19 Darbandsar rendition; CP: MS 512; and MS 661.

20 The Zand rendition includes only the close family members.

21 The Pelly rendition of events and CP: MS 662 omit this dialogue.

appear here. "*Zan-e Ṣāleḥ*" (the virtuous woman) comes offering bread (and water) to the captives, asking that they pray for her sick son.[22] An anonymous local girl asks Umm Lailā about Akbar's head, allowing her to tell their story. The girl fetches water and gives it to Sakīneh.[23] Sahl-e Sāʿedī, who had been a companion of the Prophet, approaches Zain al-ʿĀbedīn, and gives Zainab an old cloak with which to cover herself.[24] Unlike the refusals of help that we saw in the climactic episode, the family accept these gestures. In some renditions Zainab silences the market crowd and makes a lengthy speech decrying what has been done to them and stressing the importance of their bloodline.[25] The terrible procession ends with them being housed in a ruin.

2.4 *Section 4 – Hendeh Takes Pity on the Captives*

Many renditions of this episode now feature the arrival of the Īlchī Farangī. However, in some later versions the prisoners are now summoned to Yazīd's court and a *gūsheh* is played in which one of his wives, Hendeh, takes pity on them.[26] She too is summoned to court and, like the more privileged women of the *taʿziyeh* audience, she views the proceedings from behind a gauze curtain. A conversation with her aunt, or her *kanīz*, establishes that she is a supporter of Ḥusain; she is distressed to hear that the captives are from Medina. She feels sorry for Zainab and wants to go to her, but her companion persuades her to sit on a golden chair instead, allowing a harsh contrast in how these two women are treated. However, upon hearing Zainab lament and realising her identity Hendeh rushes out to her, bare-headed in solidarity. She is scolded by Yazīd for shaming him. He sends her to the *haram* (women's quarters) and flippantly orders that wine be brought instead.

2.5 *Section 5 – Arrival of the Īlchī Farangī*

A European ambassador enters and describes what he sees. He is astonished by the combination of festivities and lamentations and senses that something has gone terribly wrong. Horrified by the cruel treatment of the captives, he wonders as to their identity.[27] He arrives at court bearing an array of gifts, which

22 CP: MS 43; MS 662; and MS 908. In MS 662 her intervention comes after the arrival of the European Ambassador, described below.

23 CP: MS 405.

24 CP: MS 43.

25 CP: MS 43; MS 908.

26 Darbandsar rendition; CP: MS 512; and MS 661. This character's name in Arabic is "Hend" but in Persian she is "Hendeh".

27 CP: MS 662 is unique amongst my sample in that during his entrance the European Ambassador converses with a member of his entourage (referred to as his vizier) who

Yazīd gladly accepts, and is seated on a throne next to the caliph's and poured a glass of wine. This is an example of the "Arrival of a Stranger" type-scene, in this case played out over the course of the episode.[28] During his entrance we have the initial elements of the scene as the foreigner observes the prisoners and the heads of the martyrs without knowing their identity. Whilst he is greatly dismayed by their desperate state, he is drawn to their resplendence, sensing their holy nature. As in other examples of this type-scene, his opening speech serves to narrate the tribulations of the family as seen from outside. At this point, he is a witness. His arrival, simultaneous with that of the captives, again creates a contrast. The foreigner is honoured: the family of the Prophet are degraded.

2.6 *Section 6 – Sakīneh a* Kanīz*?*

Yazīd summons his daughter to the court, she is honoured and seated beside him.[29] Her entrance brings Ḥusain's daughters to the centre of the action, providing a counterpoint to their fatherless and forlorn state. Yazīd has stichomythic conversations with Fāṭemeh-ye Ṣughrā and Sakīneh, in which he questions them and they recount their woes. He takes pity on Sakīneh and decides that he will make her his daughter's *kanīz*. The scene ends with Zainab (or Kulṣūm) speaking out against a child of the Prophet's line becoming a slave.[30] Sakīneh's fate still unresolved, Yazīd turns his attention turns to Zainab.[31] This section is brought to a close with Zainab making a defiant speech about her lineage and the women's role as intercessors, and decrying their mistreatment. There is always an allusion to her eloquence – a trait inherited from her father. She herself warns, in a manner not dissimilar to the male heroes' initial threats to their warrior opponents, that she has a tongue like *Ẕū-l-feqār* (her father's sword).[32] Yazīd retorts, at best, that he gave her brother ample chance to swear allegiance. But his more common response is to tell her to hold that tongue.

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explains what has happened at Karbala, including the divinely ordained nature of Ḥusain's mission.

28 See my discussion in chapter 2.

29 This scene is in all renditions amongst my sample except CP: MS 662. In MS 43 it is played after the identifying of the heads, and in MS 908 after Yazīd dishonouring Ḥusain's head (described below).

30 Kulṣūm in the Pelly rendition.

31 The Zand rendition includes elements of this scene that fell away through time, including Yazīd's daughter slapping Sakīneh and rallying the children of Damascus to throw stones at her, and it being Shemr to whom Yazīd promises Sakīneh as a slave. This scene was likely inspired by certain historical sources that record a Damascene man having sought ownership of Fāṭemeh-ye Ṣughrā. Ṭabarī, *History*, XIX, 171; Mufīd, *Irshād*, 342–43.

32 Zand and Pelly renditions.

2.7 *Section 7 – Identifying the Heads: Ten Blows Decapitate Ḥusain*

Yazīd calls for the heads of the martyrs to be brought forth for display. This scene provokes lament and outrage afresh. He eagerly inspects the heads, as if for entertainment, with Shemr happily confirming their identities.[33] This is a chance to list, again, the names of the martyrs. As Yazīd goes through them he becomes agitated, fearing that Ḥusain's head is missing. Then, Shemr has it brought in on a silver platter.

Yazīd demands to hear of Ḥusain's murder, in particular the removal of his head. Shemr recounts using a *sāṭūr* (meat cleaver), insinuating that Ḥusain was butchered like an animal. Furthermore, Shemr tells of how it took ten blows to sever his head and of Ḥusain making an utterance with each one. The dramatists take full advantage of the distressing potential of these strikes, making each one deal a literal blow to the audience.[34] With the first few Ḥusain called out the names of his family members, on the ninth he uttered, "God forgive my people" and on the tenth, he begged for a drop of water. "Did you give him some?" asks Yazīd. "No," Shemr replies, "I kicked him in the mouth with my boot." Shemr recounts that Ḥusain then expired, and the ground and heavens trembled. Yazīd orders more wine.

2.8 *Section 8 – Yazīd Defiles Ḥusain's Head: Zain al-ʿĀbedīn Speaks Out*

Yazīd gloats over his victory and dishonours Ḥusain by pouring wine into his mouth and hitting it with a wooden stick. The family cry out in objection. In some renditions Ḥusain's head starts to sing, making a short Qur'anic recitation and then comforting Sakīneh and Zainab.[35] Zain al-ʿĀbedīn confronts Yazīd, saying that his hands should be cut off. Yazīd tries to silence him but he is undeterred, proudly alluding to his prophetic ancestry. Yazīd demands that Zain al-ʿĀbedīn acknowledge him as the rightful leader. He refuses, saying that in killing Ḥusain Yazīd has done far more than he understands. He asserts the purity of his own lineage and calls Yazīd the seed of adultery, in response to which Yazīd calls for the executioner – enter Shemr.

As Zain al-ʿĀbedīn bids his family farewell Zainab calls to the Muslims present: will no one come to their aid? She finally turns to the Īlchī Farangī. During

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33 Before Yazīd surveying the heads a *faqareh* featuring Ṣudaif, Akbar's slave blinded by grief, can be played. He mourns, chastises Yazīd and demands an end to the captives' mistreatment. CP: MS 662 and MS 43.

34 Such was the effect of this scene as I witnessed it in performance. For *Bāzār-e Shām* in performance see Deacon, "*Taʿziyeh-khani* in Iranian Communities," 175–76.

35 This singing features in CP: MS 662 and Pelly's "Conversion and Murder of the Ambassador from Europe". The initial verses concern the story of The Companions of the Cave. For commentary see Pelly, *Miracle Play*, 2, 233.

this speech she strikes her own head with a stone in grief.[36] In some renditions it is Sakīneh and Fāṭemeh-ye Ṣughrā who speak these lines and go to the foreigner for help,[37] in others he intervenes of his own accord.[38] This is a highly emotive scene, demonstrating the heroism of all family members and inciting a feeling of guilt in the Muslim audience.

2.9 *Section 9 – Ambassador's Intervention and the Appearance of ʿAlī*

The ambassador denounces what a Muslim king is doing to his fellow Muslims, appealing fruitlessly to Shemr and then Yazīd. Zainab desperately implores Yazīd to show mercy; she calls to her father for help. As Shemr wields his dagger in readiness, ʿAlī's ghost appears and orders him to stop. This is an example of the "Apparition from Beyond the Grave" type-scene (but with a significant variation that I will go on to discuss).[39] Shemr is terrified and tells Yazīd that Ḥaidar (ʿAlī), holding *Ẕū-l-feqār*, appeared from the direction of the *qeblah*, and that he shook so much that he dropped his dagger.[40] Yazīd hisses at him to be quiet and not dare say such a scandalous thing in public.[41] Attention then shifts back to the Īlchī, who is drawn to Ḥusain's head and wondering at a prophetic identity. As Yazīd informs him that this is Ḥusain b. ʿAlī there is a distinct shift in tempo and in the ambassador's manner, as he begins to tell a story.

2.10 *Section 10 – Īlchī Farangī as a Storyteller, His Conversion (and Martyrdom).*

The foreigner recounts that, once upon a time, when serving as an envoy for "*Yūḥannā-Shāh*" (a fictional "King John"), he went to Medina to meet Muḥammad and saw Ḥusain as a child. He tells various stories of Ḥusain's childhood that affirm his exceptionalness, his closeness to God, and the predestined nature of his martyrdom. This is a curious interlude, with the ambassador

36 Her script mentions this and Berezin reports the *Zainab-khān* in Tehran performing the action. Bérézine, *Voyage*, 259.

37 Darbandsar rendition and CP: MS 661. In CP: MS 405, the women of the family act as a chorus in Zainab's appeal.

38 CP: MS 43; and MS 908.

39 The ambassador's intervention and ʿAlī's apparition feature in all renditions among my sample, except CP: MS 405 that omits the apparition.

40 In the Zand rendition Shemr reports Muḥammad appearing from one direction (the *qeblah*) and ʿAlī from another. In the Darbandsar rendition he simply cites the apparition of a masked figure.

41 In Pelly's collection, the episode "Arrival of Husain's Family at Damascus", which has corresponded closely with the content of *Bāzār-e Shām* until this point, ends after the apparition of ʿAlī. His subsequent episode "Conversion and Murder of the Ambassador from Europe" covers the remainder of *Bāzār-e Shām*'s narrative.

taking on the function of a storyteller. The digression ends with him cursing Yazīd for what he has done and Yazīd ordering his execution. The play then rapidly closes with the foreigner (at his own request) being converted to Islam by Zain al-ʿĀbedīn. It is then intimated that he is executed. Importantly, mirroring Ḥusain, his last wish is for water. In the ambassador's case it is granted, constituting a further call for indignation as a foreigner is given what Ḥusain was denied.

2.11 (*Section 11 – Martyrdom of Ruqaiyeh*)

It is relatively common for a *gūsheh* concerning Ḥusain's young daughter Ruqaiyeh to be played as an epilogue.[42] Yazīd orders that Ḥusain's head be taken to the ruins, that his grieving daughter might see it. Ruqaiyeh converses with her father's head, recounting the hardship she has suffered on their journey, beatings, humiliation, hunger, thirst and the threat of being sold as a slave. She asks if he knows, if he can see. She then expires with grief. Zainab and Zain al-ʿĀbedīn mourn for her and lay out her body, her feet towards the *qeblah.* Shemr tells Yazīd that the child has died and for the first time expresses regret, also rebuking Yazīd for his cruelty. Yazīd sorrows too and orders that a washer of the dead bathe Ruqaiyeh's body, that she be shown respect in death.[43] As the washerwoman looks over the girl's body, she questions Zainab about how she sustained each injury, acting as a witness to Ruqaiyeh's mistreatment. The scene closes with Zainab, sometimes accompanied by the family, calling to Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā to help them, and decrying the cruelty of fate.[44]

3 Diplomacy through the *Taʿziyeh* Lens: The European Ambassador

3.1 *Tracing His Story*

As I have mentioned, the *taʿziyeh* character Īlchī Farangī reflects a Byzantine ambassador, present at Yazīd's court and sympathetic to the Karbala captives, who is described in certain manuscript versions of Balʿamī's *Tārīkh-nāmeh-ye*

42 Darbandsar rendition, CP: MS 512; MS 661; and the Pelly Collection's "The Death of Rukayyah".

43 In CP: MS 512 he also orders her burial; in MS 661 he sends flowers for her body.

44 The Pelly rendition of Ruqaiyeh's death is more elaborate. It omits the washerwoman but includes Yazīd's daughter who first taunts the prisoners but then takes pity on Ruqaiyeh, bringing her Ḥusain's head. Yazīd's daughter is likely to have featured in other renditions of this scene. In CP: MS 661 she makes a last interjection, mourning Ruqaiyeh's death.

Ṭabarī, one of which dates to the 6th/12th century.[45] This is a fascinating example of an old and little-known story being conserved in the *taʿziyeh*. This character is not present in the other historical sources used in this study. Peacock comments that he has not been able to trace the scene involving this figure to other early sources, but acknowledges its presence in the *taʿziyeh*. He states that this character was not introduced to the *taʿziyeh* until the 19th century. This should be revised to the mid-18th century (at latest): the ambassador is mentioned in Carsten Niebuhr's spectator account of a *taʿziyeh* performed by the Shiʿa of Kharq Island in 1179/1765 (discussed in chapter 1), and the Zand rendition of *Bāzār-e Shām* includes a script for the ambassador from 1184/1770–71.[46] Comparison with later renditions of the play show that the content of the scene involving this character remained stable from that point onwards. Thus, although interaction with European visitors was a prominent feature of the reign of the Qajars, this scene bears the influence of an earlier period.

A Byzantine ambassador at Yazīd's court does feature in Kāshefī's *Rawżat* but the story told about him differs markedly from that in the *taʿziyeh* which, intriguingly, is closer to the Balʿamī version. Balʿamī records the Byzantine speaking out against Yazīd's abhorrent treatment of his Prophet's grandson, then converting to Islam and being executed. In Kāshefī's rendition the foreigner does chastise Yazīd but does not convert in this scene: in fact, he tells Yazīd that he had already converted to Islam decades earlier after meeting Muḥammad in Medina, and he and his family have been living secretly as Muslims ever since.[47] Yazīd does become furious, but simply ejects the ambassador from his court rather than ordering his execution, expressing frustration that he cannot punish an envoy of Caesar's. The *taʿziyeh* does borrow the idea of the ambassador having visited Muḥammad in Medina, but the dramatists elected to have him convert on meeting the Karbala survivors, and usually close the scene with his execution. They thus follow the plot of the older narrative, transmitted by Balʿamī, which indicates that they received this story from a source additional to Kāshefī. Their electing to recount this version of events may well have been because it better fitted the format that they customarily applied to treating the interactions of benevolent foreigners with the *ahl-e bait* and their kin: the stranger becoming overwhelmed by their presence to the

45 Peacock, *Balʿamī's Tārīkhnāma*, 139. For the details and dating of these manuscripts see footnote 11 of this chapter.

46 Niebuhr, *Reisebeschreibung*, 2, 199–201; Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar II*, 17–82.

47 Kāshefī Sabzevārī, *Rawżat*, 508–09.

FIGURE 10 Performer playing the European Ambassador, Garmaseh, Isfahan Province, 13th Muḥarram 1439/2017

extent of converting and sacrificing himself for them – the Arrival of a Stranger type-scene.

Whatever the source, in their interpretation of this character the dramatists brought him into their own time. They modernised his story. A Byzantine ambassador visiting Yazīd's court was not historically implausible: in fact, Syria had been taken from the Byzantines during the Muslim conquests of the 630s, but the *taʿziyeh* dramatists were not historians. Whilst Kāshefī was clear that he was Byzantine, in their imagining of this foreign envoy they made of him a European, the type who visited Iran during the Safavid, Zand and Qajar periods. They turned him into a recognisable character of their own time and in doing so give us a glimpse of the composers' impression of "the European".

3.2 *Modernising the Foreigner*

The modernisation of the Īlchī Farangī is perhaps most evident in his dress. The memoires of European visitors to Iran include numerous accounts of their clothes being borrowed to costume this character. This practice had clearly already begun by the time of Niebuhr's spectator account: he describes the ambassador as dressed in European clothes and a gilded hat (a minor flaw being that he lacked socks). In this case Niebuhr does know that the character is supposed to be a Byzantine; he calls him a Greek, and comments on the

incongruence of this identity with his attire.[48] In his account of visiting Iran in 1835–36 Lieutenant Charles Stuart speaks of *taʿziyeh*, discusses the European Ambassador's conversion and martyrdom, and tells of lending clothes to costume this character. Cocked hats were particularly in demand for costuming foreigners, and he recalls that in the year in question the ambassador would be appearing in "the uniform of His Majesty's 4th Light Dragoons".[49] Captain Richard Wilbraham was again asked to lend elements of his uniform, and his chairs as props, for a performance of *Bāzār-e Shām* in 1254/1838.[50] There are many such accounts.

The idea of the ambassador being Byzantine appears to have been dropped relatively quickly in the *taʿziyeh* context. Whereas in Kāshefī's *Rawżat* he is the envoy of "*Qaiṣar-e Rūm*" (the Caesar of Rome, or Byzantium),[51] in the *taʿziyeh* scripts he consistently describes himself as representing *Pādeshāh-he Farang*, the "King of Europe". This is also attested by spectators. In Francklin's 1202/1787 account from Shiraz he is described as "an Ambassador from one of the European States".[52] Stuart and Wilbraham, who lent their uniforms for this character, certainly saw him as European. Sheil uses her own initiative whilst spectating in Tehran in 1266/1849 to deduce that he must have originally been "a Greek" but tells of how "with immense contempt of chronology" he is generally referred to as the "Elchee Inglees" (English Ambassador).[53] By contrast Carla Serena, spectating at Tekiyeh Dawlat in 1295/1878, describes him as French.[54] The exact nature of his European identity was not important; he was a representative of his kind – the Western visitor. This appears to have been understood by the audience. Spectating in 1259/1843, Berezin tells of how the women in the *tekiyeh* often looked towards the loge where he and other foreigners were sitting when the ambassador was speaking.[55]

Indeed, not only his dress but the foreigner's speech and material offerings to Yazīd portray him as a European of the composers' own time. From our earliest example of the script, despite using Persian verse to describe what he sees as he enters, the ambassador's initial address to Yazīd is in a sort of gibberish, showing the composers' impression of the incomprehensibility of his tongue. This gibberish contains a mix of languages and nonsense words but with just

48 Niebuhr, *Reisebeschreibung*, 2, 200–01.

49 Charles Stuart, *Journal of a Residence in Northern Persia and the Adjacent Provinces of Turkey in 1835–36* (London: Richard Bentley, 1854), 295–96.

50 Calmard, "Ceremonies and Diplomacy," 217.

51 Kāshefī Sabzevārī, *Rawżat*, 508.

52 Francklin, *Observations*, 99.

53 Sheil, *Glimpses*, 126.

54 Serena, *Hommes et choses*, 193.

55 Bérézine, *Voyage*, 261.

enough Persian to indicate the topic, and to bring certain ideas to mind. We see this in the following example of the ambassador's greeting, from the Zand rendition, which includes the words "*farang*" (Europe) and "*barāye Yazīd*" (for Yazīd): the words "*yaqmā*" (plunder or booty), "*kām*" (palate), "*gelū*" (throat),[56] and "*rabūs*" (glutton) contained within the lines are possibly deliberate allusions to Yazīd's unchivalrous and debauched character.

فرنگی:
اجاق چونق چقی یزید اجفاری
اچل چاچی میر فرنگ یغماری
کام کلوس کال مفی ربوس رفتی رفتی
قنقیس قنقیس کاس من یاس حدس
حدس ولی واپس ورمینا از برای یزید[57]

Whilst this version of the greeting from the Zand period contains elements of Arabic and Persian (possibly Turkish too if we count the loan word *yaqmā*), later versions of this nonsense greeting, from the late 19th century and beyond, also include French, showing the diversification in the foreign influences of the composers' surroundings. In such renditions the ambassador ends his gibberish greeting with:

فرنگی:
بانژور موسیو یزید[58]

European [Ambassador]: *Bonjour Monsieur Yazīd*.

Thus, he is no longer a Byzantine but, on this occasion, a Frenchman.

Yazīd replies:

یزید:
مگو زبان فرنگی بگو زبان دگر که واضحم بشود ای جوان نیک‌سیر[59]

Yazīd: *O virtuous young man, do not speak that foreign tongue! Speak another language that will be clear to me.*

56 If we are to read the *kaf* at the beginning of the second word in the third line as a *gaf*.

57 Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar II*, 43.

58 CP: MS 661. In MS 512 and the Darbandsar rendition he also says "Bonjour Monsieur".

59 CP: MS 43; MS 662; MS 908; and (with some variation) MS 405; MS 512; MS 661; and the Darbandsar rendition.

The ambassador responds in Persian and offers an array of gifts. The modern nature of certain items separates this character from his Byzantine origins.

فرنگی:
سلام من به تو ای پادشاه بافرهنگ منم یکی ز وزیران پادشاه فرنگ
قلیل پیشکش داده پادشاه فرنگ ز من قبول کن این تحفه های رنگارنگ
دو دوربین دو ساعت دو قبضه شمشیر برای پیشکش ای امیر خیبرگیر[60]

> Foreigner: *O cultured king, my greetings to you. I am one of the ministers of the King of Europe. The King of Europe has made you a humble offering. Accept these various gifts from me, two telescopes* (or cameras),[61] *two wristwatches and two scabbards are proffered O prince, conqueror of the Khaibar*.[62]

The succinct offering of telescopes (or cameras), watches and scabbards that we see in the quotation above feature frequently across my sample of renditions of the play, perhaps owing to what appears to have been a relative standardisation of the verse at this section.[63] Certain other scripts have him offer gifts in vast numbers: in the Zand period version he offers 1000 cannons and muskets, 1000 slave children, 1000 [gold and jewel] encrusted swords, sugar, jewels and scents, 1000 full purses of gold, 1000 weights of satin and the same of brocade; Cerulli MS 405 (Mazandaran, late 19th cent.) has him offer watches and scabbards, not two, but 400 of each, along with vast numbers of other gifts including horses, pearls, fabrics and weapons. Interestingly, in this version the ambassador says that his king would offer military support against Yazīd's enemies should he need it.

Indeed, the characterisation of the ambassador has strong military overtones. Whilst some of his gifts, such as the pearls and textiles, are goods that

60 CP: MS 43. In the manuscript پادشاه is written پاده شاه and پیشکش as پیش کش.

61 The word *dūrbīn* denotes a camera in modern Persian but, while the camera did arrive in Iran during Nāṣer al-Dīn's Shāh's reign it is probable that the composers intended the older meaning – telescope. However, we cannot rule out their awareness of the camera having arrived from Europe. Many photographs were taken of performances at Tekiyeh-ye Dawlat, and the performers themselves posed for the photographers. See, for example, "Performers of Ta'ziyah" *Women's Worlds in Qajar Iran*, available online at: http://www.qajarwomen.org/en/items/15156A99.html (accessed June 17th, 2024).

62 He alludes to the triumph in battle of the early Muslim community over the Jews of the oasis of Khaibar.

63 The couplets in which these gifts are proffered, feature not only in CP: MS 43 but (with minor variations) in MS 512; MS 662; MS 908; and the Darbandsar rendition.

may have been being brought to Iran from South Asia by traders, weapons and gadgets feature most consistently amongst these offerings, with firearms being a relatively common element.[64] In the Zand rendition shots are fired to announce his arrival. Berezin describes military style music being played as the ambassador approaches and his procession of gifts including ten trays, a pair of pistols (or another arm) on each.[65] Sheil, whose husband's clothes were borrowed for this character, tells of how "the costume of his Excellency should be European and military."[66]

The combination of the foreigner's attire and gifts with the dialogue of his initial meeting with Yazīd not only pull him distinctively into the composers' time of writing, but also give an idea of the composers' perception of what European visitors had to offer: in the foreigner modernised we see a military man, speaking a strange tongue, bringing gadgets and firepower. Whilst naturalistic portrayal is not usually a concern for the *taʿziyeh* players, the picture that they paint here is, perhaps, not unrealistic. There is a remarkable similarity between the gifts offered by the Īlchī Farangī, and those described by William Ouseley who recounts having delivered gifts to Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shāh Qājār when acting as an envoy for the British Ambassador – including telescopes, wrist watches, and guns.[67]

Given that the ambassador, who is very positively portrayed, came so much to resemble a foreign visitor of the period contemporary to the performances – performances attended by many foreign visitors – one wonders at the reception to this story, and its political significance. Indeed, it has been suggested by Calmard that performances of *Bāzār-e Shām* ceased during two periods of the Qajar dynasty's reign, when relations with European visitors became strained.[68] The first of these periods covers the latter years of the reign of Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shāh (d. 1250/1834), and the aftermath of Iran's military defeat by the Russians and the treaties of Gulistan (1228/1813) and Turkamanchay (1243/1828) that saw heavy territorial losses and major economic and political concessions on the Iranian side. The second period was the 1860s, when foreign diplomats' attendance at *taʿziyeh* was prohibited by an edict, issued in 1271/1855, which appears to have aimed to quell domestic political tensions, particularly the grievances of the *ʿulamāʾ* (Muslim clerics, scholars and jurists).[69] The edict was

64 Firearms feature in the Zand rendition; CP: MS 662; MS 405; and MS 908.
65 Bérézine, *Voyage*, 257.
66 Sheil, *Glimpses*, 126.
67 Ouseley, *Travels*, 172.
68 Calmard, "Ceremonies and Diplomacy," 215–23.
69 Ibid., 220–22.

relaxed by the late 1880s: many foreigners did attend the performances during the interim period, although perhaps not by official invitation.

Calmard's suggestion that the character of the Īlchī Farangī found a more or less favourable reception depending on the political climate, seems reasonable, but the evidence upon which he bases the assertion about the two periods in question is flawed. His conclusion with regards to the 1820s–30s rests on the assumption that the collection of plays that Chodzko purchased in Tehran in 1249/1833 represented a sort of official repertoire during the last years of the reign of Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shāh. Calmard finds it highly significant that *Bāzār-e Shām* is not included. It is true that the manuscript does include most of the prominent Karbala martyrdom narratives in chronological order. However, it does not feature the arrival of the captives in Kufa or Damascus: not only does the Īlchī Farangī not feature, neither does Yazīd. This would be significant if we were to draw conclusions based on the idea of this being an official repertoire; but there is not much reason to believe it was. While the collection features many important episodes, it also features one fragment and two renditions of two particular plays, so it is better to see the contents of the manuscript as a selection of the plays in the possession of Ḥusain ʿAlī Khān (the director from whom Chodzko made his purchase).[70] If we are to read anything into why he did not include *Bāzār-e Shām*, he may have politely omitted to sell his foreign envoy customer a play in which a foreign envoy is executed. Furthermore, despite not owning a copy of the script of *Bāzār-e Shām*, Chodzko had seen the episode. In the introduction to his French translation of certain plays from his manuscript, while discussing the welcome of Europeans at the *tekiyeh*, he mentions the scene involving the European Ambassador.[71]

There is further firm evidence against the case for *Bāzār-e Shām* having fallen out of fashion during the 1860s. Calmard claims that in the 1860s the story of "La fille chrétienne" (*Majles-e zan-e naṣrānī*) eclipsed the episode featuring the European Ambassador as an important play foregrounding a Christian character.[72] The only source given here is Gobineau's spectator account, but, while Gobineau does give a detailed description of a performance of *Majles-e zan-e naṣrānī*, nowhere does he say that it became more popular than *Bāzār-e Shām*: furthermore, whilst not mentioning it by name, he does indeed discuss

70 Entry 17 is an untitled 19-couplet fragment concerning a letter being sent to Ebn-e Ziyād in Kufa. Entries number 14 and 15 are both versions of *Rāh gum kardan-e Emām Ḥusain* (Imam Ḥusain Loses his Way) and entries 32 and 34 are both versions of *Majles-e dairānī-ye farangī* (The European Monk).

71 Chodzko, *Théatre persan*, xxiii.

72 Calmard, "Ceremonies and Diplomacy," 221.

Bāzār-e Shām, mentioning the European Ambassador's sympathy, Yazīd's mistreatment of the captives and other key narrative details.[73] Gobineau was certainly familiar with the contents of *Bāzār-e Shām*, indicating that it was indeed being played during his stay in Iran (between the mid-1850s and mid-1860s).

The reception of the foreign ambassador character is an intriguing topic. Calmard raises the important question, but further research is needed before conclusions can be drawn. It may well be that, despite him wearing the garb of a contemporary European visitor, the *taʿziyeh* audience's relationship with this character ran deeper than their perceptions of 19th century Europeans. Certainly the scripts do not satirise or lampoon the ambassador. This, as we will see below, is in contrast to the scene involving the foreign doctor.

3.3 *The Foreigner as a Narrator and Storyteller: Ḥusain's Childhood Recounted*

Modernisation aside, a further and somewhat surprising way in which the *taʿziyeh* dramatists added new levels to the character of the Īlchī Farangī was by giving him a distinct narrator function. To an extent, this is in keeping with the "Arrival of a Stranger" type-scene that gives the format to the *taʿziyeh* treatment of his story, the "stranger" always initially assuming a narrator's voice. Here we will see the importance of this initial presentation but, also, how later in the play the dramatists press this function in a curious way that is quite unique to this episode.

The captives are marched through the market onstage, but it is the words of the foreigner that fully communicate the disturbing cruelty of the scene.

فرنگی:

باز این چه اخگر در سینه پیداست　　باز این چه آزار در دل هویداست
از دشنه غم پشت زحل خم　　شمشیر ماتم بر فرق جوزاست
قومی بگلشن مزمار و دف‌زن　　جمعی بسرزن با شور و غوغا است
باشد همانا زین کوس و کرنا　　یا عید نوروز یا عید اضحا است[74]

Foreigner: *What are these embers I find glowing in my chest? What is this vexation apparent in my heart? The poignard of sadness has doubled Saturn's back. The sword of grief is upon Gemini's head. One group are in a flower garden playing flute and drum: another party beat their heads*

73 Gobineau, *Les religions*, 442–44.

74 CP: MS 661. A version of this entrance speech, with much overlap in verse, features in all of the renditions of the play among my sample. The above are short extracts, it is typically around 20 couplets long.

in passionate uproar. For drums and horns it looks as if it were Nowrūz (Persian New Year), *or ʿĪd-e ʾAżḥā* (Eid al-Adha).[75]

یا رب کیانند این خیل خوبان بسته به زنجیر از فرق تا پا
یا رب نباشند اینها نصارا کز دیدنشان رفت از تن اعضا
ایداد و بیداد از دست جلاد کین سروران افکنده از پا[76]

Foreigner: *O Lord, who are this cavalcade of good people bound in chains from head to toe!?*[77] *O Lord, let them not be Christians, for to see them shakes one's very organs* [literally, causes them to leave the body]. *Woe the injustice of the executioner who struck these princes from their feet!*

He goes on to describe the heads of the key protagonists, Ḥusain, Akbar, Qāsem, Aṣghar and ʿAbbās – their beauty and the suffering evident in their faces, and he senses their tender relationships with the womenfolk. Apart from his preoccupation that the captives are not Christians, the ambassador's own identity is secondary when performing this part of his role.

Later in the play, after Zain al-ʿĀbedīn has narrowly escaped execution, the ambassador becomes a narrator once more, initially picking up from his opening speech, but this time going much further. Crying, he stares in awe at Ḥusain's head; he recognises holiness and considers the different Abrahamic prophets to whom the head may belong. He becomes angry at Yazīd: how could he have treated these people in a way that no unbeliever would treat an unbeliever? He demands to know the head's identity. When told it is Ḥusain, the European has the strongest reaction, at which Yazīd demands to know their connection. In answering, the European adopts the *baḥr-e ṭavīl* form: the change of metre marks a change in the ambassador's role as he goes beyond simply narrating what he sees and becomes a storyteller, narrating episodes from the distant past. Whilst he initially features in the story that he tells, his own character is temporarily overtaken by his function as a bard, or more precisely, a *naqqāl*.

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75 Mention of *Nowrūz*, telling of the Persianate environment within which the dramatists worked, is not unique to the ambassador. In CP: MS 662 Sakīneh asks Zainab the cause of the festivities as they are led through the market, she answers that the people of Shām are celebrating Ḥusain's killing as if it were *Nowrūz*.

76 CP: MS 661. The word اعضا is spelled ازا in the manuscript.

77 I translate the word کیانند as "… who are they?". However, given that the foreigner wonders at the captives' majestic resplendence (and the allusions elsewhere to the epics) there is also a chance that it should be read "… are they Kayanians?", referring to the ancient line of Persian kings.

He recounts having met Muḥammad in Medina when sent as an envoy for *Yūḥannā-Shāh.* He describes Ḥusain as a resplendent child, and records that, crying and kissing the boy's neck, Muḥammad told him how Ḥusain's head would be cruelly taken at Karbala. Asking who would be responsible, the ambassador was told "Yazīd". He berates Yazīd for not comprehending Ḥusain's identity, and says he will tell him something to make him understand. He then narrates a series of stories – to all intents and purposes, embedded narratives. We have not seen anything like this scene in the episodes discussed up until now.

The ambassador as a storyteller at this point features in all renditions of the play among my sample. The stories told vary somewhat; however, they all show Ḥusain as chosen by God, and adored by Muḥammad and indeed the whole of creation. One of the most commonly recited stories concerns a gazelle. One day, a fawn gets caught in a hunter's trap: the hunter gives it to Muḥammad who gives it to Ḥasan, and when Ḥusain sees Ḥasan's fawn he goes to his grandfather (in the mosque), cries and says that he also wants a fawn. Such is his distress that Muḥammad goes to the mother gazelle, tells it of Ḥusain's identity and his tears, and asks it for a fawn for Ḥusain. The gazelle brings another fawn to the al-Aqṣā Mosque.[78]

A further story, commonly repeated across renditions of this scene, is of Muḥammad and the boy Ḥusain travelling together to a house where they will be guests. A cloud appears and rains down fire and water. Ḥusain tries to go to his mother. Afraid of harm coming to him the Prophet turns his face to the sky and asks the Almighty to stop the rain.[79] There are also stories about Ḥusain's birth being honoured by angels, and of Muḥammad receiving news of Ḥusain's divinely ordained mission. For example, the Zand rendition includes the story of Fuṭrus, the once fallen angel (mentioned in chapter 5), who was pardoned by God and whose wings were restored upon Ḥusain's birth. Throughout these stories, in place of Ḥusain's name, the ambassador/storyteller frequently refers to "the owner of this head". This prevents the audience from becoming absorbed in the narrated world of Ḥusain's childhood, instead causing them to remember, at once, the resplendent child and his cruel death. The storytelling interlude is brought to a close by the end of the *baḥr-e ṭavīl*.

As an outsider the European has a particular narrative viewpoint, but it is curious that the *farangī* – with his pistols and wristwatches – is the one who knows Ḥusain's childhood anecdotes; a seemingly unlikely vehicle, the

78 The Zand and Darbandsar renditions; CP: MS 43; MS 512; MS 662; and MS 908.

79 CP: MS 661.

composers use him to insert the narratives about Ḥusain that are likely to have been recounted by the storytellers. Indeed, in chapter 2 I discussed how the storytelling practices present in the environment of the emergent *taʿziyeh* tradition influenced the structure of the plays themselves. Whilst broadly following the detail of the main events at Karbala as they had received it, we have seen that the dramatists included many shorter stories, *gūsheh-hā*, within the episodes. Like the sections of narrative material that form a storyteller's repertoire, these *gūsheh-hā* can be added to extend the performance, or omitted if need be.[80] In the role assumed by the European, we catch a glimpse of the storytellers who were part of the environment in which the *taʿziyeh* took shape.

There is also a possible direct allusion to these storytellers when the European begins his narration of Ḥusain's past with "*be-shenū*" (Hear!), a formula used by professional storytellers to indicate the opening of a new narrative chapter.[81] Furthermore, the story of the fawn exists as an independent sub-episode among the Zand collection, and features the *takhalluṣ* of the composer Nāṭeq.[82] As I have discussed above, Nāṭeq is said to have been a *sukhanvarī* participant, thus meaning that he belonged to the ʿAjam dervish order, who specialised in religious storytelling. The story of the fawn is likely to have been part of their repertoire.

It should, however, be noted that giving this role to the ambassador was not entirely a *taʿziyeh* innovation. Whilst the dramatists crafted the scene, using the shift into *baḥr-e ṭavīl* to separate it from the rest of the play's action, in Kāshefī's account of the Byzantine ambassador's encounter with Yazīd he also tells a story from Ḥusain's childhood. Unlike in the *taʿziyeh*, he does not tell story after story, but only one single story. While the only rendition of *Bāzār-e Shām* amongst my sample to feature this particular story is the Pelly translation,[83] the European Ambassador as a storyteller is surely rooted in Kāshefī's treatment of the Byzantine, albeit rendered an anachronism by his 18th–19th

80 Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī, *Mabānī-ye shabīh-khānī*, 46–52; Nāṣerbakht, *Adabiyāt-e īrānī*, 231–36.

81 Ulrich Marzolph, "A Treasury of Formulaic Narrative: The Persian Popular Romance Hosein-e Kord," *Oral Tradition* 14, no. 2 (1999): 287–88.

82 For the play with an opening note from the editors see Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar II*, 117–46.

83 The Pelly translation is also unique amongst my sample of renditions of *Bāzār-e Shām* in showing, in another way, a direct link to Kāshefī's version of events. Kāshefī gives the ambassador's name as ʿAbd al-Shams and that he was renamed ʿAbd al-Vahhāb by Muḥammad. On a single occasion Pelly labels the ambassador's interjection as "'Abd al-Shams, the Emperor's envoy", noting that there is nothing in the text to further identify this figure. Pelly, *Miracle Play*, 2, 224.

century depiction, and the scene elaborated to incorporate a variety of stories familiar to the composers.

4 Technical Anomalies

4.1 *Variation of the Type-Scene as a Dramatic Device*

In this episode we see an example of a further important compositional phenomenon. A type-scene, a structure with which the audience will be familiar, diverges significantly from its usual format to communicate the exceptional nature of a situation. I do not mean to suggest that the *taʿziyeh* audience would have recognised a type-scene as a compositional technique, but they would have been familiar with certain scenarios that recurred in the plays of the repertoire, and would have built up expectations of how they would unfold. Variation of the elements of a type-scene as a subtle means of communicating a message to a well-versed audience is a phenomenon identified by Robert Alter (discussed in chapter 2). The *taʿziyeh* audience were certainly well-versed: participation, year after year, would have forged a strong understanding among composers, performers, and audience. I have already argued for the intensity of this relationship being such that the audience had a major influence on the development of the central episodes. With reference to my current point what is important is that the conditions were ideal for the setting of conventions that when broken would create a strong impression.

In *Bāzār-e Shām* we see the conventions of a type-scene broken in the apparition of the ghost of ʿAlī and his frightening Shemr into dropping his knife, thus preventing Zain al-ʿĀbedīn's execution. This is an example of the "Apparition from Beyond the Grave" type-scene, of which we have seen other instances in the episodes discussed above. Normally, the visitor offers comfort and mourns with the hero or heroine, but no matter how drastic the situation, does not intervene to alter the course of events. For example, when Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā appears to the dying Ḥusain, she does not attempt to save his life; rather, she laments, provides moral support and then disappears, leaving him to Shemr's knife. Likewise, when we saw ʿAlī appear before ʿAbbās in the latter's martyrdom episode, he did not bring water to save his son from his fateful raid on the Euphrates, instead simply offering reassurance. Such is the pattern of this type-scene. However, in this episode that convention is broken by ʿAlī acting to save Zain al-ʿĀbedīn. This break from the familiar highlights the vital importance of this moment. Zain al-ʿĀbedīn is Ḥusain's only remaining son. Were he to be executed, the light of the imamate would be extinguished. The gravity of such an eventuality is emphasized in ʿAlī's own words to Shemr:

FIGURE 11 The Family of the Prophet enter Yazīd's Court, painting on tile, anonymous artist, Tekiyeh-ye Muʿāven al-Mulk, Kermanshah

علی غائب:

مکش مکش که سماوات سرنگون گردد مکُش مکُش که دل اهل بیت خون گردد

مکش مکش که غریبند خواهران حسین مکش مکش که صغیرند دختران حسین[84]

Ghost of Alī: *Do not kill, for the heavens will be brought down! Do not kill, for the heart*[s] *of the ahl-e bait will be turned to blood. Do not kill, for Ḥusain's sisters are strangers* [in a foreign land]*! Do not kill, for Ḥusain's daughters are small!*

84 CP: MS 512. The same couplets with minor variations appear in all of the versions of this scene amongst my sample.

The idea of the heavens being brought down expresses the unthinkable situation of the world being without a living Imam, something that cannot be allowed to happen – and this necessitates intervention.

Whilst Shemr is frightened into dropping his dagger, ʿAlī's exchange with his grandson follows the usual format of such apparitions. They have a short conversation in which Zain al-ʿĀbedīn asks his grandfather to look upon his sorry state, broken and enchained, in response to which ʿAlī reassures him that his suffering is necessary for them to intercede for the sins of the community on the Day of Judgement. As a whole, the scene makes clear that while Zain al-ʿĀbedīn's suffering is part of a grand celestial plan, it is not yet time for his martyrdom. That had to be prevented at all costs.

The breaking of the conventions of this type-scene is extremely rare, reserved for exceptional occasions. An example of a further instance is found in *Ghaṣb-e bāgh-e Fadak* (The Usurpation of the Garden of Fadak), portraying injustice inflicted upon the *ahl-e bait* after the death of the Prophet. As Fāṭemeh-ye Zahrā's inheritance rights are being usurped, Muḥammad speaks to ʿAlī from beyond the grave and gives him his ring, a symbol of his seal of approval being placed on ʿAlī and his and Fāṭemeh's line as successors.[85] This, like Zain al-ʿĀbedīn's survival to continue the imamate, was an issue of vital importance.

4.2 *Rapid Fire Dialogue:* Chahār-pāreh

We have already seen examples of the composers using changes of metre for dramatic effect. Metrical changes support the idea of a verbal duel (in *The Martyrdom of ʿAbbās*) and in *Bāzār-e Shām* the shift into *baḥr-e ṭavīl* allows the European Ambassador to switch into what we might term "storyteller mode", and out again. Similarly, *Bāzār-e Shām* includes an interesting use of form to support the characterisation of Yazīd in his initial conversation with Shemr. In the opening scene we have seen Yazīd sick with desire for news of the outcome of the battle, in particular for word of Ḥusain's death. Upon Shemr's arrival from Karbala he devours the details of the massacre: he is a blood-thirsty tyrant, hungry for news of the slaughter, and his dialogue with Shemr is delivered in what *taʿziyeh* performers term *chahār-pāreh* (or *ṣad-pāreh*). This is a conversation in rhyming prose, with each speaker giving very short, even single word interjections, creating a staccato, rapid fire exchange:[86]

85 For an edition of the Chodzko rendition of the play see Eqbāl and Maḥjūb, *Jung-e shahādat*, 67–97.

86 The quote that follows is from the Darbandsar rendition. Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles*, 2, 114. However, the same exchange in *chahār-pāreh*, with some variation, features in CP: MS 43; MS 512; MS 661; MS 662; and MS 908.

Shemr: *Greetings Sultan of the City of Shām*	شمر: سلطان شهر شام، سلام
Yazīd: *Greetings*	یزید: السّلام‌ها!
Shemr: *I've brought news.*	شمر: آورده‌ام خبر
Yazīd: *From where?*	یزید: زکجا؟
Shemr : *The plain of Karbala*	شمر: دشت کربلا
Yazīd: *Is it victory or defeat?*	یزید: فتح است یا شکست؟
Shemr: *To the shah's good fortune, victory!*	شمر: به اقبال شاه، فتح!
Yazīd: *Praise be to the Lord that God has satisfied our desire! Was the Sultan of Religion martyred?*	یزید: حمد خدای را که خدا داد کام ما! سلطان دین شهید شد؟
Shemr: *Yes! He pulsated in blood.*	شمر: آری به خون تپید
Yazīd: *Did no one help him on the field of anguish?*	یزید: کس یاری‌اش نکرد به دشت بلا؟
Shemr: *Yes they did!*	شمر: چرا!
Yazīd: *Then who helped him there?*	یزید: که کرد یاری اش مگر آنجا؟
Shemr: *His brother.*	شمر: برادرش
Yazīd: *What was his name?*	یزید: نامش چه بود؟
Shemr: *His majesty, the loyal ʿAbbās*	شمر: حضرت عباس باوفا
Yazīd: *Was ʿAbbās killed?*	یزید: عباس کشته گشت؟
Shemr: *Yes! He was martyred. In enmity his two hands were separated from his body.*	شمر: بلی او شهید شد از کینه هر دو دست شد از پیکرش جدا

As the conversation continues Yazīd speaks in imperatives and interrogatives. For example, "*dīgar kī*?" (Who else?), or after a morsel of information "*dīgar begū*" (Tell me more!), with Shemr firing back responses. As he lists those killed, Yazīd accelerates, wanting to know more, and more. In the manuscript versions it is not uncommon for an entire page of the booklet containing Yazīd's lines to be filled with repetition of the word: *dīgar*? *dīgar*? *dīgar*? (What else? What else? What else?). It is clear that in performance this would have upped the pace, showing Yazīd as frenzied, anxious for details. He is not sated until Shemr has recounted Ḥusain's murder and the capture of his family. This shift of form is an effective manner in which to depict Yazīd's thirst for Ḥusain's blood.

This dialogue in *chahār-pāreh* is commonly featured in the scripts amongst my sample from the late 13th/19th century onwards: the same scene in the Zand rendition of the script is in stichomythic verse, but it is difficult to know whether the use of *chahār-pāreh* was indeed an innovation of the high point of the *taʿziyeh*'s patronage (the 1840s to the 1870s being the period within which we have seen many important evolutions in dramatic content). The

Pelly version does not include this scene; spectator accounts do not help. The Zand script is our only early example. The question of when the scene adopted this form is of particular interest due to the similarity between this dialogue in *chahār-pāreh* and certain works of prominent Qajar poet Mīrzā Ḥabīb-Allāh Shīrāzī, better known by his pen name "Qā'ānī" (b. 1223/1808; d. 1270/1854). The similarity is demonstrated by the following extract from Qā'ānī's famous elegy about Karbala, constructed as a dialogue:

> بارد. چه؟ خون. که؟ دیده. چسان؟ روز و شب. چرا؟ از غم. کدام غم؟ غم سلطان اولیا.
> نامش که بد؟ حسین. ز نژاد که؟ از علی. مامش که بود؟ فاطمه. جدش که؟ مصطفی[87]

> *It's raining. What? Blood. Who? The eye. How? Day and night. Why? From sorrow. What sorrow? Sorrow for the sultan of the awliyā'* (defenders or friends).[88] *What was his name? Ḥusain. What about lineage? Of ʿAlī. Who was his mother? Fāṭemeh. Who's the grandfather? Muṣṭafā* (Muḥammad).

Based on this resemblance, Shahidi has suggested that Qā'ānī's work influenced the *taʿziyeh* composers' adoption of *chahār-pāreh* for certain dialogues.[89] However, the content of the earliest extant *taʿziyeh* script, *Ghārat-e khaimeh-hā*, dated 1136/1724 (the edited version published after Shahidi's time of writing), calls this into question. Indeed, it gives reason to believe that in the case of *chahār-pāreh* the influence may well have been in the other direction, Qā'ānī's verse being inspired by the rapid fire dialogues of certain *taʿziyeh* plays. The script includes a dialogue between Ebn-e Saʿd and Shemr in *chahār-pāreh*.[90] It is short but similar in tone to the *Bāzār-e Shām* example. In the exchange in question Shemr is anxious that the order be given to raid Ḥusain's camp, and urges Ebn-e Saʿd to that effect. This shows that, in fact, the *taʿziyeh* composers were using this form around a century before Qā'ānī's time.

It is speculative, but nonetheless worthy of comment, that it may well have been the very dialogue between Yazīd and Shemr from *Bāzār-e Shām* that inspired Qā'ānī's elegy. Not only is the form similar but the poem's themes coincide with this episode's content. Having begun with Ḥusain's killing, Qā'ānī

87 Mīrzā Ḥabīb-Allāh Shīrāzī, "Qā'ānī", *Dīvān-e Ḥakīm-e Qā'ānī-ye Shīrāzī*, ed. Muḥammad Jaʿfar Maḥjūb (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, [1858–59] 1336 SH), 948. Punctuation, my own. For the full poem see pp. 948–949.

88 The term *awliyā'* can denote the Shiʿi Imams, who are considered friends of God. In the *ta'ziyeh* all of Ḥusain's supporters are termed *awliyā'*.

89 Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh-khānī: dowreh-ye Qājār*, 589–91. Also see Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar II*, 15.

90 *Daftar 13*, 31–32.

treats the injustices inflicted upon the rest of his family but, interestingly, moves quickly past the martyrdoms to focus on the plight of Zain al-ʿĀbedīn and the family in Damascus. Then, he finishes by denouncing the fact that it was a Muslim, and not a follower of any other religion, who was responsible. This is a major concern of *Bāzār-e Shām*, the sympathetic figure of the Christian European Ambassador driving home Yazīd's cruelty and hypocrisy.

Qāʾānī would certainly have been familiar with the *taʿziyeh*. He was a court poet under both Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shāh, and Muḥammad Shāh Qājār, and became poet laureate to Nāṣer al-Dīn after his coronation in 1264/1848.[91] He lived and worked in a time when the *taʿziyeh* had begun its great flourishing, and would no doubt have attended performances. As we have seen above, there were many performances of *Bāzār-e Shām* during this period. While we have no evidence of Yazīd's interrogation of Shemr being in *chahār-pāreh* by then, we do know that *chahār-pāreh* had been used by the composers long before. The idea of Qāʾānī being influenced by the *taʿziyeh* rather than vice versa, as suggested by his famous elegy reflecting *Bāzār-e Shām* in both theme and form, is interesting as a potential example of high culture – court culture – being shaped by what had not long since been an art form of the masses.

5 The Theme of Exposure

The concept of *nāmūs* (honour) is central to the *taʿziyeh*'s Muḥarram cycle. With Ḥusain refusing to capitulate, Yazīd, and those who side with him, seek dominance over Ḥusain's house by killing the menfolk and dishonouring the women, who in the *taʿziyeh* are forcibly exposed. Not only are their tents burned but their veils are torn from their heads and it is suggested that they are left little with which to cover their bodies. This theme reaches its culmination in *Bāzār-e Shām*, provoking the audience to feel moral outrage at the cruelty of the antagonists, but also allowing the depiction of the women's strength and stoicism.

The exposure of the womenfolk has been repeatedly foretold in earlier plays of the cycle. The family attempt to prepare for it. For example, in Cerulli MS 726, *The Martyrdom of Imam Ḥusain*, Zainab asks Ḥusain what they should do. He tells them to put on old garments beneath their clothes, to avoid being exposed when the enemy pillage their possessions. In Cerulli MS 27, *The Martyrdom of*

91 For more on Qāʾānī see Alyssa Gabbay, "Qāʾānī," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online version (2016). Available at: https://iranicaonline.org/articles/qaani-poet (accessed June 19th, 2024).

Qāsem, when making his *vaṣiyyat*, Qāsem asks his mother to protect his bride when the enemy raid the camp and not to let them take the chador from her head, exposing her face. In anticipation of such a threat, in the Litten rendition of the climactic episode, as Ḥusain sleeps and the enemy approach the camp, Zainab calls the women to her and tells Fāṭemeh the bride to sit quietly at her side.

In *Bāzār-e Shām* the women speak of being beaten but it is through exposure that we see them humiliated. Without the protection of their veils, they are paraded through the market. Their temporary dwelling place after this ordeal is a ruin, repeatedly described as being without door or roof, thus again, without cover. Still in their exposed state they are filed into Yazīd's court before a host of *nāmaḥram*, men from outside their own household, by whom (according to the norms governing *nāmūs*) they should not be seen uncovered. The fact that the woman are "*bī meʿjar*" (without a head covering), is stated so often in the verse of this play as to become conspicuously repetitive. However, we must take into account that in performance, these exposed women are played by men, covered from head to toe, their heads and faces very much veiled.

In the court setting the outrage of the women being exposed is amplified through the inclusion of the scene involving Yazīd's wife Hendeh. That Hendeh is seated in court behind a curtain while the female descendants of the *ahl-e bait* are exposed underscores the contempt with which they are treated. Furthermore, when Hendeh becomes aware of Zainab's identity and rushes out to her, bare-headed in solidarity, Yazīd's hypocrisy is evident as he scolds of her:

یزید:
بی‌حیا زوجه تبه‌کارم کرده‌ای شرمسار حضارم
بارگه پر بود ز نامحرم سر عریان بیرون شدی ز حرم[92]

> Yazīd: *You are without shame my reprobate wife! You have publicly disgraced me. With the court full of male strangers you came bare-headed out of the women's sanctuary.*

He then rebukes her for making him a laughing stock, demonstrating the deliberate nature of his degradation of the captives. It would have been enough to leave the audience to see this hypocrisy for themselves, but the composers leave nothing to chance. They have Hendeh rebuke Yazīd, spelling out

92 CP: MS 512; MS 661; and the Darbandsar rendition.

the dichotomy between what he desires for his own women and those of his Prophet's house.[93]

Amongst the wider repertoire, there is also an example of female forced exposure as revenge. It occurs in the play *Amīr Tīmūr* (Prince Timur). This is about the historical figure Tīmūr (ruler of the Timurid empire 771–807/1370–1405, also known as Tamerlane) attacking Damascus. Tīmūr's capture and sacking of Damascus is a real historical event that took place in 803/1400 when the city was under Mamluk rule. However, seen through the *ta'ziyeh* lens, it takes on a special significance. The fictional Tīmūr's desire to attack Damascus is motivated by the wish to avenge Ḥusain and his house. When he arrives, the terrified governor offers Tīmūr gifts, which he refuses – until the governor offers his daughter's hand in marriage. Tīmūr asks that the bride be decorated and then brought to him so that they can converse, but he does not marry her: rather, when she is presented to him, he humiliates her by having her golden robes ripped off, the veil pulled from her head and her earrings torn from her ears.[94] This is tit for tat exposure and pillaging; the women of Ḥusain's family had their possessions looted at Karbala and they were forcibly exposed in Damascus, so Tīmūr avenges them by dishonouring the Damascene governor's daughter. Undeterred by the huge lag in time, not to mention the change of ruling dynasty, the composers have simplified things, equating the rulers of Damascus with the oppressors' clan.

In *Bāzār-e Shām*, Zainab remains defiant in the face of the indignity forced upon her. Despite being uncovered against her wishes, she does not hide. Rather, she publicly denounces her oppressors. Fearlessly speaking out against Yazīd in his court, she refers directly to her exposed state:

زینب:
بی‌پرده میان خلقم امّا روح‌القدس است پرده‌دارم[95]

Zainab: *I am without veil amongst the masses, but the Holy Spirit holds a veil for me.*

93 Exposure as a form of degradation applies largely to the women, but not exclusively so. In CP: MS 43 when being paraded through the market Zain al-'Ābedīn complains of how he is bound, and his body naked "like a black slave".

94 For the Litten Collection rendition of this play see Esmā'īlī, *Teshneh*, 861–72. For discussion of a Cerulli Collection version of it see Iraj Anvar, "Peripheral Ta'ziyeh: The Transformation of Ta'ziyeh from Muharram Mourning Ritual to Secular and Comical Theatre," in Chelkowski ed. *Eternal Performance*, 110–121.

95 Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles*, 2, 125; Nematollahi Mahani, *Holy Drama*, 74, 93.

Because of her higher religious understanding, Yazīd's attempt at earthly humiliation is useless. He can steal her veil but her dignity is untouchable.

Nematollahi Mahani discusses the fact a ban on the hijab during the Pahlavi period gave additional weight to the forced unveiling in the *taʿziyeh*, and that Zainab as a chaste and pious revolutionary model, speaking out against oppression, inspired women during the 1357 SH/ 1978–79 revolution.[96] The women of the Qajar audience would not have shared the experience of having their veiling practices proscribed. However, in terms of the revolutionary model, given that the Constitutional Revolution (1323–29/ 1905–11) took place towards the end of the time period covered by this study, it would be reasonable to ask whether Zainab provided an inspiration for the women involved in those calls for reform. However, to address this question would require a separate study.[97]

6 Historical Development

Given the early *taʿziyeh* tradition's close connection to processional rituals, the humiliation of the captives paraded through the market is likely to have been one of the earliest aspects of the experience of those at Karbala to be re-enacted. Despite not centring on the martyrdom of a prominent family member, the processional aspect of this episode is as old as the genre itself. Nevertheless, the renditions of *Bāzār-e Shām* among my sample are strikingly similar to each other, sharing much more in terms of verse than the episodes discussed above. This suggests that in this case the composers were redacting and embellishing copies of one particular original work, rather than amalgamating the early efforts of different authors to dramatize the same events (a phenomenon discussed in chapter 3).

In keeping with the trends observed throughout this study, while female characters have always featured heavily in this play their number increases through time. Hendeh is one of the added characters but the others are generally of humble origin: the virtuous woman and local girl who try to help the

96 Nematollahi Mahani, *Holy Drama*, 73–75.

97 During the decades prior to the Constitutional Revolution Iranian thinkers had begun to invoke the idea of the homeland as a woman, and the concept of *nāmūs* in their insistence on the people's duty to protect her (particularly against the incursion of foreign powers). This may have affected the reception to plays such as *Ghārat-e khaimeh-hā* and *Bāzār-e Shām*. However, the extent to which this conceptual campaign reached a mass audience is unclear. For further discussion see Afsaneh Najmabadi, "The Erotic Vatan [Homeland] as Beloved and Mother: To Love, To Possess, and To Protect," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39, no. 3 (1997).

captives in the market, and the washer of the dead (included when the play ends with the martyrdom of Ruqaiyeh). However, the scenes involving these characters are very brief and do not constitute major changes to the play. The one significant development in content was the incorporation of the prologue in which Yazīd is treated by a European doctor.

6.1 *Towards Satire: Introduction of the Foreign Doctor*

Yazīd's treatment by a European doctor appears to have become part of the play during Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh's reign. The Zand and Pelly renditions of *Bāzār-e Shām* are the only ones amongst my sample not to feature this scene, although it may well have been played by the time Pelly assembled his collection (the early 1870s). In the three shorter plays of Pelly's collection covering the events of *Bāzār-e Shām*, Yazīd awaiting word of the outcome of the battle is not treated and the events in Damascus begin with Shemr's arrival. The Zand rendition suggests that the play's original structure was ripe for the insertion of a physician character. In its initial scene Yazīd complains of anxiety, loss of appetite, insomnia and an accelerated pulse. He demands that wine be poured to relieve his vexation. Although there is no doctor, there is allusion to illness. Then, Berezin's 1259/1843 spectator account tells of the play opening with Yazīd in his sickly state and being attended by not one, but a group of three doctors![98] However, there is no suggestion that they are foreign. Sheil's 1266/1849 spectator account makes no mention of a European doctor, and since the European Ambassador had certainly caught her attention, had she seen one she would have been likely to comment. Serena's spectator account of *Bāzār-e Shām* from Tekiyeh-ye Dawlat in 1295/1878 does indeed open with Yazīd being treated by a doctor who is definitely foreign.[99] Thus, by this point the *gūsheh* was being played as we find it in the scripts among my sample.[100]

The source of inspiration for a European doctor character is not difficult to imagine. There were many European physicians accompanying the different missions in Iran during this period and indeed Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh himself had a French doctor, Dr Ernest Cloquet (who had also attended Muḥammad Shāh before him).[101] However, what is interesting is that this innovation may well have made its way into the *taʿziyeh* from the lithographs of the *rawżeh-khānī*/

98 Bérézine, *Voyage*, 256–57.

99 Serena, *Hommes et choses*, 190–91.

100 Yazīd being treated by this doctor can also be played as a separate sub-episode entitled *Bīmār shudan-e Yazīd* (Yazīd Becomes Ill). Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh-khānī: dowreh-ye Qājār*, 273–74.

101 Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, 89, 205.

maqtal genre. Yazīd attended by a European doctor features in *Musayyeb-nāmeh*, a martyrology of anonymous authorship concerning the uprising of Mukhtār-e Saqafī and Musayyeb b. Qaʿqāʿ-e Khazāʿī to avenge Ḥusain and his followers. It was first printed in 1265/ 1848–49,[102] before the first evidence of the European doctor featuring in the *taʿziyeh*. Even if it was not their invention, the *taʿziyeh* dramatists scripted this scene and it certainly appealed to them and their audience, attested by its prevalence amongst later renditions. It was a successful innovation. But what its purpose? Why make Yazīd's doctor a European?

Scholars have commented on the comical nature of this *gūsheh*,[103] and indeed its scripting suggests the farcical. After giving Yazīd a physical examination, the doctor prescribes a nonsense remedy. In addition to seeds and flowers, the list of its ingredients commonly includes items such as chicken fat, sodium bicarbonate, and dozens of tortoise eggs, with some renditions including more colourful additions such as mouse or rabbit droppings,[104] a kind of laxative,[105] and even pig excrement.[106] But who were the audience to laugh at? Simply Yazīd, and his self-indulgence being rewarded with this noxious potion? Of course, we have seen other examples of the enemies of the *ahl-e bait* being ridiculed, as exemplified by the pagan women of the Quraish in *ʿArūsī raftan-e Ḥażrat-e Fāṭemeh* (discussed in chapter 1). And indeed, some versions of the European doctor episode go further in their mockery than the nonsense remedy. In the Darbandsar rendition Yazīd describes having aching bones, being short of breath and unable to sleep on his side, having strange tastes in his mouth, a burning thirst, a cough and a sore head. The doctor examines him and upon looking inside his mouth reports seeing "*kūft*", which can simply mean a bruise or blow but is also the common name for syphilis. Yazīd's aggressive dismissal of this idea reflects an understanding of this connotation:

طبیب: بحمدالله به حلقت کوفت افتاد
یزید: مگو بیهوده بر من، زشت‌بنیاد![107]

> Doctor: *For the love God, there is a blemish* (sign of syphilis) *in your throat.*
> Yazīd: *Don't speak this nonsense to me you scoundrel!*

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102 Marzolph, "Persian Popular Literature in the Qajar Period," 225.
103 Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar II*, 15; Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh-khānī: dowreh-ye Qājār*, 274.
104 CP: MS 43 and MS 662.
105 CP: MS 662 and MS 908.
106 CP: MS 43.
107 Ṣāleḥī Rād, *Majāles*, 2, 112.

Perhaps for fear of Yazīd's ire, the doctor simply continues with the examination and upon concluding tells the vizier, ʿAmr-e ʿĀṣ, that the diagnosis is pneumonia. The audience may well have enjoyed the suggestion of Yazīd having a venereal disease and this would be in keeping with his portrayal as hedonistic and debauched. Meanwhile, his burning thirst (a symptom commonly described across versions of this scene) can be seen as divine punishment for the thirst he inflicts upon those at Karbala. The idea of him being afflicted with an awful disease such as syphilis also suggests divine retribution. Indeed, in the historiography relating to Karbala, the idea of those who did harm to Ḥusain being punished with a physical ailment is common.[108] However, to ridicule Yazīd in this way would not necessitate the physician being a foreigner. His identity as such is worthy of further consideration.

It has been suggested that the Qajar era composers who added this character were influenced by Nāṣer al-Dīn having a European doctor.[109] If this is so, then what are we to make of the fact that the *taʿziyeh* composers created a mirror of their king and great patron in one of the principal antagonists? Were they laughing at the king and his practice, perhaps considered frivolous, of employing a European physician? Did this scene aim to allow the audience to giggle at the seemingly nonsensical practices of their Western visitors? While it is unlikely that the dramatists would openly deride their patrons, those involved in *taʿziyeh* performance would not have been without their opinions: as I have touched upon in my discussion of the Īlchī Farangī, there were periods during which the relationship with the foreign powers present in Iran became strained. Satire of the foreigner, and moreover the reliance of the elite upon him, need not have been openly or blatantly disrespectful. Max Harris, a scholar well acquainted with folk theatre and ritual, reminds us that:

> Religious festivals are rarely, as official records may misleadingly suggest, monological displays of power. Rather, they are enacted dialogues, implicit negotiations between dominant and subordinate groups, between the hierarchical powers of the church (or state) and the unwritten but no less articulate power of the street.[110]

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108 For example, Mīrkhānd and Khāndamīr both tell of individuals from amongst the group who stole the clothes from Ḥusain's body becoming afflicted with leprosy. Mīrkhānd, *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, 3, 2262; Khāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-siyār*, 2, 57.

109 Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Daryāī, *Daftar II*, 15.

110 Max Harris, *Carnival and Other Christian Festivals: Folk Theology and Folk Performance* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 77–78.

In Harris' own work concerning Christian festivals he provides fascinating insight into the complex relationships between ruling establishments and folk performers and the multi-levelled character of the expression that takes place during performance rituals. He discusses their great potential as a space for veiled critical discourse, in particular allowing those in subordinate positions a platform to covertly criticize those in power. I am not suggesting that the *ta'ziyeh* performers represented a repressed social group but, as we saw in chapter 1, whilst their performing talents may have given them a certain status during the mourning season, they belonged to the ranks of the common people. Some expression of the opinions of those people will survive in their works; for reasons of piety they are more likely to be evident in episodes not concerning a prominent martyrdom.

It is known that the performance of *Bāzār-e Shām* was popular towards the end of Nāṣer al-Dīn's reign. The staging of Yazīd's court was an opportunity to display the monarch's wealth; precious jewels and cloths were lent by the women of the royal harem for the costuming and set of performances of this episode at Tekiyeh-ye Dawlat.[111] However, I venture that in the *gūsheh* of the foreign doctor, under the guise of ridiculing Yazīd, the composers found a little room for subtle criticism of the dominant figures of the time, both the monarch and the European. Europeans and Christians are generally sympathetic characters in the *ta'ziyeh*. Their acknowledgement of the special nature of the *ahl-e bait* and their kin frequently serves as a counterpoint to the ignorant cruelty of the Muslim antagonists. We have seen a number of examples of this during the course of this study (the Christian Lady and her maid, the European Monk, the Christian as "Unwilling Killer", and *Bāzār-e Shām*'s Īlchī Farangī): however, there are exceptions.

The play *Qatl-e Mīrzā Taqī-Khān Amīr Kabīr* (The Killing of Mīrzā Taqī-Khān "Amīr Kabīr") features one such exception. Amīr Kabīr, renowned as a highly efficient and innovative statesman, was chief minister to Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh during the first four years of his reign. He implemented a wide and astute programme of reforms aimed at improving living conditions and the economy, and strengthening central government, which implied curtailing the influence of the British and the Russians. However, he also had enemies within the ruling establishment and a plot against him (including accusations of treachery) saw him out of favour with the king and killed, at Nāṣer al-Dīn's order, in Kashan

111 Serena, *Hommes et choses*, 190.

in 1268/1852. The play concerning his death, in itself an example of *taʿziyeh* as political criticism, features an English diplomat as a villainous figure.[112]

The foreign doctor is a potentially neutral character. There is no narrative detail that predetermines his portrayal as necessarily good or bad (unlike the majority of the foreigners mentioned above, he does not come into contact with the *ahl-e bait* or their wider family, try to help them, or convert). His attitude towards Yazīd and the events at Karbala seems to have been relatively open to interpretation, and the very manner in which this figure is first mentioned is somewhat ambiguous. This exchange follows Yazīd's complaint to his vizier that his agitation for news from Karbala is accompanied with physical pain:

یزید:
بمیرم من از این دورنگی

عمرو عاص:
بیارم از اطبای فرنگی[113]

Yazīd: *I am dying of this duplicity.*
ʿAmr-e ʿĀṣ: *I will bring* [you] *one of those European doctors.*

The balancing of *durangī* (duplicity) with *farangī* (European) under the cover of the convenience of the rhyme is potentially satirical, equating the European with the duplicitous and implying that malaise arising from treacherousness is something that one of those European doctors would know how to treat. Whilst this is only a small hint of satire, certain versions contain something more.

The doctor is usually portrayed as siding with Ḥusain and his house but this is not always clear. In his entering speech the doctor is often shown to be heavy-hearted and to tarry in approaching Yazīd: in some cases he is sorrowing for the Alids,[114] but in others he says that he cannot explain the way that he is feeling.[115] Then, two renditions among my sample have him make a curious statement in his last address to Yazīd. He insults the monarch but also

112 For the play with discussion by the editors see Dāvūd Fatḥ-ʿAlī Baigī and Mehdī Daryāī, "Sharḥī bar majles-e shabīh-he Qatl-e Mīrzā Taqī-Khān Amīr Kabīr," in *Daftar-e pazhuhesh 2* (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Namāyesh, 1394 SH).

113 CP: MS 661 اطبای is spelled عطبای in the manuscript. The same couplet with minor variations appears in MS 43; MS 512; MS 908; and the Darbandsar rendition.

114 CP: MS 43 and MS 908.

115 CP: MS 661 and the Darbandsar rendition.

seems to kowtow to his ambition to hold unrivalled leadership of the Muslim community:

حکیم:
ایا سلطان اورنگ فخامت تو را زیبد حقیقت این امامت
گروهی را که پیغمبر تو باشی خدا لعنت کند بر آن جماعت[116]

> Doctor: *O Sultan of the mighty throne, this imamate certainly befits you. God curses the group to whom you are the prophet.*[117]

One of the versions in question is attributed to Mīr-e ʿAzā (MS 661), the other is signed by less well-known hands but is from Kashan, thus probably influenced by Mīr-e ʿAzā's rendition.

The small details that I have quoted from the scripts could be records of subtle criticism, not only of Yazīd but of the European and the shah. However, above and beyond the script, the very scenario of the self-indulgent monarch and his somewhat silly foreign helper has much satirical potential in performance and, of course, there is much scope (and safety) in the unwritten medium of movement on stage. Indeed, the *gūsheh* of the European doctor at very least leaves much room for ambiguity.

7 Conclusion

Despite its royal patrons, the *taʿziyeh* is essentially a folk art form but this is not to say that its practitioners lacked the sophistication to make the kind of subtle satirical comment described above. Some of their tactics are rather predictable and repetitive, the frequent use of contrast in this episode to show the injustice endured by the captives being such as example. Nonetheless, close analysis of their work shows their deep understanding of their craft and their crowd. Changes of rhythm being essential to a captivating live performance, in this episode we have seen adept use of tempo and metre to delineate certain scenes and support characterisation. We have also seen the composers' clever manipulation of the conventions established with their audience to

116 CP: MS 661. The same couplets feature in MS 512 but with a minor variation.

117 I translate حقیقت as "certainly". Normally to give this meaning it should read با حقیقت or در حقیقت. However, the preposition seems to have been dropped to conserve the (*hazaj*) metre.

convey a particular message, exemplified by ʻAlī's ghost intervening to save Zain al-ʻĀbedīn.

The dramatists understood and exploited the concerns of their society. To provoke a sense of outrage their strategy was simple – invoke the concept of *nāmūs* by stressing the forced exposure of the women. In fact, the popular nature of the *taʻziyeh* as a genre appears to have freed the composers from the self-consciousness of a more refined art form. They represented what they wished without being confined by concerns over historical accuracy, or even continuity. In their interpretation of the Byzantine ambassador's story, itself testament to the power of folk tradition to conserve cultural heritage (in this case narrative material), they freely created a sympathetic caricature of their contemporary European visitors, whilst unabashedly developing for him a digression as a storyteller versed in the events of the Medina of Ḥusain's childhood. That digression is telling of one of the genre's major sources of influence.