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LONDON, JULY 1984

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Because of the size of this volume it has been decided not to publish the Autumn issues 1985 and 1986 of this journal.

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PREFACE

This special number of *Al-Serāt* contains papers which were either presented at, or, in some cases, subsequently submitted in longer written form to, the International Conference on the Imam Ḥusayn held in London from the 6th to the 9th of July, 1984. The event was jointly organized by the Muhammadi Trust of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Muhammadi Islamic Centre, Toronto, Canada, to commemorate the 1400th *hijrī* anniversary of the birth of Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, the third Shʿī Imam and grandson of Muḥammad, the prophet of Islam, in 4 AH. Further details of the conference and speakers can be found in: Maryam Wdlings, 'Report on the International Seminar on Imam Ḥusayn. peace be upon him', *Al-Serāt* X/2 (Autumn, 1984), 3-12.

The papers have been arranged thematically under three headings, and within these headings the order is alphabetical, according to author. Given both the variety of ways in which the subjects were treated in the papers themselves, and the different backgrounds of the contributors, only an absolute minimum of uniformity has been imposed by the editors, and, while it is hoped that consistency has been maintained within each paper, such consistency should not be looked for between them. Dates, for example, usually appear in their *hijrī* form, but in some places they are given according to the Christian calendar, or in both forms; it should be clear from the context which system is being used. Qur'ānic quotations have been given throughout in the form of, e.g., 2:156. without further indication. The transliteration of Arabic names and terms follows the usual style of *Al-Serāt*, but in the case of other languages the editors have generally retained the transliterations given by each author.

The Muhanimadi Trust would like to thank the contributors and organizers for their cooperation and assistance, and for their kind patience in awaiting the delayed publication of these papers. In particular, they would like to thank Mahmoud Ayoub and Azim Nanji for their help and advice in the preparation of this volume, and Lynda Clarke for her translation of Professor al-Janhānī's contribution.

INTRODUCTION

This publication of the proceedings of the conference to commemorate the 1400th *hijra* anniversary of the birth the the Sayyid al-Shuhadā', the Imam Ḥusayn, peace be upon him, gives me the opportunity to say a few words of introduction about the Muhammadi Trust and the Muhammadi Islamic Centre for those whose do not already know about their operations and activities. The Muhammadi Trust was established in the United Kingdom in 1973, with its registered office in London, for the purpose, *inter alia*, of encouraging Islamic studies and disseminating knowledge of Islamic teachings: and its sister organization, the Muhammadi Islamic Centre of Canada, was set up in 1979, with the additional aim of awarding fellowships to students and scholars of Islam, and it has recently been registered under the name of the Muhammadi Islamic Foundation so as to allow it greater freedom and independence in its activities. Both organizations are anxious to strengthen unity among all Muslims, and, in particular, the youth. In pursuit of these objectives, the Trust has published a number of books and booklets in the English language. Some of these are translations of Arabic books on religious themes and topics, written by renowned scholars, and some are original works by scholars of international repute who have contributed to the study of Islam. The Trust also publish a journal, *Al-Serāt*, which prints articles on religious topics by eminent writers. Those who are familiar with this journal know that the utmost importance is given to the quality and standard of the articles, and, at the same time, full freedom to express views is allowed the writers so as to permit the publication of articles propounding diverse views with which the publishers may not necessarily agree. This effort of the Trust is directed towards the dissemination in English of knowledge concerning Islam in all its aspects.

Although a large body of literature on Islam exists in oriental languages such as Arabic, Persian, and Urdu, there is, in contrast, a dearth of such literature in English. Yet English is the only language with which our younger generation living in the Western world is familiar.

The diffusion and dissemination of knowledge is. according to the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, the religious duty of every Muslim, man or woman. The Prophet of Islam has enjoined us to acquire knowledge from the cradle to the grave. As Sa'dī said,

پئے علم چوں شمع باید گداخت کہ بے علم نتواں خدا را شناخت

'*to kindle the light of knowledge, one must necessarily melt like a candle; for how can one understand the divine Being without the glow of learning.*'

I will now say just a few words as my humble tribute to the great Imam whose memory we have honoured in this conference. As a gem of the purest rays, serenest sparkles and reflected light, the life of the Imam Ḥusayn mirrors the light of guidance through its every facet. It is no wonder that the Imam Ḥusayn is looked upon as an ideal by all who believe in righteous causes, who believe that no sacrifice is too great for the achievement of a noble aim, who believe that death for a righteous cause is the very acme of noble living and far preferable to a life of ignominy and degredation based on compromising principles. How rightly Kawar Mchandra Singh Bedi has said:

جی کے مرنا تو سب کو آتا ہے مر کے جینا سکھا دیا تو نے

'*Everybody knows that after life there is death;*
but it is you [O Ḥusayn] who has taught how to live by dying.'

As Thomas Carlyle, in his *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, has put it: 'The best lesson which we get from the tragedy of Karbala is that Husayn and his followers were rigid believers in God: they illustrated that numerical superiority does not count when it comes to truth and falsehood. The victory of Husayn, despite his minority, marvels me.'

On the plains of Karbalā', Ḥusayn showed what *jihād* stands for in Islamic terminology. He taught us, as no one else could have done,

that it does not mean aggrandisement or the flamboyant display of valour which cries out: 'One crowded hour of glorious life is worth an age without a name.' He showed, as none else could have done, that to remain firm and steadfast in the hour of trial and tribulation, to surrender to the will of Allah with complete resignation is the zenith of martyrdom and *jihād*. He showed us that even the death and destruction of his dearest ones cannot deter a person from the performance of the appointed task, from the fulfillment of the ordained purpose, without the least hesitation, without the least demur, without a word or murmur of complaint. Who else but Ḥusayn could have prayed to Allah for the salvation of Muslims without any rancour or bitterness under the dagger of the assassin. And all this with the utmost serenity and calm which comes from supreme resignation to the will of Allah and complete submission to His divine purpose. As Yagana says,

ڈوب کر پار اتر گیا اسلام آپ کیا جانیں کربلا کیا ہے

Only after drowning did Islam survive. How is it possible for anyone to comprehend the meaning, message, and significance of Karbalā'?

Secretary to the Muhammadi Trust.

ELEGY (*MARTHĪYA*) ON ḤUSAYN: ARABIC AND PERSIAN

Lynda Clarke
University of Toronto

I propose to give here an account neither of the development, nor of the themes, of the elegy on Ḥusayn — in Arabic or Persian — nor of the outstanding poets of elegy — the literature in both these languages is too vast for that, and spread out over too great a period. Rather, I would like to give some idea of the place of these *marāthī* in literary and religious tradition, while giving in translation some examples of elegy on Ḥusayn which should serve for those unfamiliar with these languages to form an idea of the beauty and effectiveness of this type of poetry.

I should warn English-speakers that my translations, in one essential respect, do not bear much resemblance to the originals. The Arabic and Persian poetical traditions, at least until very recently (only a few decades ago), required adherence to strict rhyme patterns — often monorhyme — and strict quantitative metre. These things are not only nearly impossible to reproduce in our English language, but also undesirable. It is necessary to imagine that the examples I give had in their original a very regular rhythm, a rhythm which could also be important for ritual purposes, for instance, in religious processions. If the conceits used are sometimes also a little difficult for us to understand immediately, the ideas expressed, and the effect, are, I think, universal.

The tradition of elegiac poetry known in Arabic as *marthīya* had its roots, as regards themes as well as form, in pre-Islamic times. The Arabic elegy, in the sometimes lengthy monorhyme *qaṣīda* form, was like all pre-Islamic poetry highly conventionalized. The virtues of the deceased and the loss of the mourner are described, which then provides an opportunity to dwell on the pathos of this transitory life in the face of fate, always unalterable. Often the mourner curses the

enemy and calls for vengeance. While the pre-lslamic elegy was conventionalized, it was also highly specific, or occasional: reflections on mortality only serve to frame a threnodic tribute to a specified personality.

If we express '*marthīya*' as 'elegy', then it should be kept in mind that what we mean is not the elegy of Western tradition, which may designate any poem of a subjective kind, and one quite generally connected with the question of mortality. Most of even the earliest forms of the Greek elegiac couplet (from which the Latin and then Western languages take the genre and the name) do not display exclusively themes of death or loss.

If I bring up this point — which may seem somewhat distant from the question of elegy on Ḥusayn in Arabic and Persian — it is to emphasize that the literature of *marāthī* has but weak parallels in Western tradition. More particularly, it is not paralleled in Western Christian tradition, despite an extensive martyrology. Some of the social and attendant historical factors in this contrasting development may be surmised: for one thing, the influence of poetic tradition has been comparatively much stronger among the Arab-speaking peoples and among the once much wider circle of Persian speakers than in the West. What is of relevance here is that it has clearly been the event of Karbalā' which allowed this pre-Islamic Arabic tradition to continue into Islamic times and take its central place in the languages of the Islamic tradition. Any elegy (in the restricted sense in which we are speaking here) may strike a universal note — in fact that is one of the requirements of an elegy — but very few examples tend to survive as poetry or as something which would continue to evoke deep emotion. Practically our whole tradition of funeral elegy in English, for example, seems to be quite dead, in the poetical sense. In contrast to this, we have the tradition of Ḥusayn and those martyred with him: the sacrifice of Ḥusayn has provided a vital and meaningful subject for authors (both Shīʿī and Sunnī) for all of fourteen centuries (and into the future, God willing). Thus we see that even in Arabic, although the strong tradition of secular elegy continued into this century, that too has declined with

other forms and themes considered 'artificial' by modern movements, while *marthīya* on Ḥusayn and the other martyrs of Karbalā' continues in both formal and popular language.

Alongside this, the event of Karbalā' has provided a continuing ritual context for elegiac poetry. The *marthīya* in pre-Islamic times has a ritual function as a lamentation (*nawḥ*), often recited by women (and the best of its earliest practitioners known to us were women). Not only would the listener be invited to dwell in the virtues of the deceased, but the pathos of the situation was also revealed, and it may be assumed that those present were then moved to weep. Some of the earliest examples we have of *marthīya* on Ḥusayn are in fact simple poems of this type: lamentations by his wives and daughters. This piece attributed to Rabāb, beloved wife of Ḥusayn, is particularly moving. Rabāb said:

> He who was a light, shining, is murdered;
> Murdered in Karbalā', and unburied.
> Descendant of the Prophet, may God reward you well;
> May you be spared judgement on the day when deeds are weighed:
> For you were to me as a mountain, solid, in which I could take refuge;
> And you treated us always with kindness,[1] and according to religion.
> O who shall speak now for the orphans, for the petitioners;
> By whom shall all these wretched be protected, in whom shall they take refuge?
> I swear by God, never will I wish to exchange marriage with you for another;
> No, not until I am covered; covered in the grave.

And on another occasion Rabāb said:

> O Ḥusayn! Never shall I forget Ḥusayn!
> Pierced by the spears of his enemies,

1 *bi-'l-raḥm*: also, 'as one related to you'.

He whom they abandoned, in Karbalā'.
May God now never water the plains of Karbalā'![2]

And regardless of how well attested these pieces of elegy are as literary remains, I think we would have to say that the beauty and deep feeling here has something of the force of memory to testify to their authenticity. In many later elegies on Ḥusayn, the lament is put into the mouths of females of his family — Fāṭima, for instance, or Zaynab — and this recalls the pre-Islamic elegy.

In the Umayyad period poets were invited to compose laudations (*madḥ*) and *marāthī* for the rituals of the gatherings (*majālis*) of the noble members of the family of the Prophet. This narration concerning the sixth Imam shows the place of *marāthī* in these gatherings:

Jaʿfar b. ʿAffān came to al-Ṣādiq's residence and seated himself next to him, upon which the Imam said, 'Jaʿfar, I have been told that you recite poetry for Ḥusayn, peace be upon him, and that you do it well.' 'Yes, and may God make me a sacrifice for you!' replied the poet. 'Recite, then', said al-Ṣādiq, and Jaʿfar recited these verses:

He who weeps for Ḥusayn might well weep for Islam itself,
For the principles of Islam have been destroyed, and used unlawfully:
On the day when Ḥusayn became the target of spears,
When swords drank from him, busy with their work.
And corpses, scattered, were abandoned in the desert.
Great birds hovering over by night and by day …

And the Imam Ṣādiq wept and those around him with him, until his face and beard were covered with tears. Then he said, 'By God, Jaʿfar, the angels closest to God are witness here and they hear your words; they have wept as we have, and more …'[3]

2 Muḥammad Jawād Maghnīya, *Adab al-Taff aw Shuʿarā' al-Ḥusayn* (Beirut, 1388/1969), I, 61.

3 Hibat al-Dīn al-Ḥusayni al-Shahristānī, *Nahdat al-Ḥusayn* (Karbala, 1388/1969), p. 154.

At the end of the ʿAbbasid period, the reciter in these commemorative sessions was still known as a na'ih, a lamenter, or mourner.[4]

These *marāthī*, then, provided the germ for early gatherings of partisans of the House of the Prophet; they may also then be seen as the origin or earliest form of the *taʿzīya* as it is known today among Shīʿī peoples. The literary forms known as *taʿzīya* and *marthīya* in Arabic are related, the *taʿzīya* being a kind of extended lamentation which is also intended to comfort the hearer in the face calamity, as the root meaning of the Arabic — 'comforting' — suggests.[5] The 'ritual context' for elegy on Ḥusayn continues to be provided today not only by the developed *taʿzīya*, but also by various other gatherings within the ten days of Muḥarram in which *marāthī* are recited. In the Shīʿī area of Lebanon, for instance, there are many such gatherings held, and in both the Arabic- and Persian-speaking world gatherings are held exclusively for women.[6]

It was inevitable that once the force of memory receded, themes had to be introduced into elegy on Ḥusayn which would have the desired effect on the hearer by bringing forward the significance of his martyrdom; thus the elegy is linked with the issues surrounding his martyrdom. In the example we have already given by the poet Jaʿfar ibn ʿAffān al-Ṭāʿī (d. 150), Islam itself is put in the position of a martyr. This *marthīya* of the imam al-Shāfiʿī introduces, after protestations of personal sorrow,

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 159-160.

5 The *K. al-Taʿāzī wa al-Marāthī* of Muḥammad b. Yazīd al-Mubarrad (d. 282) explains the meaning of *taʿzīya* and gives examples (ed. Muḥammad al-Dibājī [Damascus, 1396/1976], pp. 4ff).

6 Waḍḍāḥ Sharāra, *Transformations d'une manifestation religieuse dans un village du Liban-Sud* (Beirut, 1968), pp. 43ff, As to the Arab 'Āshūrā' representation or *taʿzīya*, it seems that it has until now received too little attention. It may be that the actual dramatic form owes much to Iranian, and largely Ṣafavid, origins — for instance, it is received knowledge among the inhabitants of the chiefly Shīʿī town of Nabatīya in South Lebanon that it was Iranian immigrants at the beginning of the century who gave the *taʿzīya* there (the mere playing of which recently caused the occupying forces to fire on the participants) its present form. However, since the commemorative session itself began, of course, as an Arabic tradition, it would seem worthwhile to examine Arabic language *taʿzīya* separately for Arabic antecedents to the Persian.

and the image of the martyr, his declaration of love for the House of the Prophet overall. The imam Shāfiʿī said:

> My heart sighed, for my innermost being was in dejection;
> Sleep no longer came, and sleeplessness was bewildering.
> O who shall be the bearer of a message from me to Ḥusayn,
> (Though the hearts and minds of some may disapprove!)
> Slaughtered, though without sin himself,
> His shirt as if dyed through with crimson.
> Now the sword itself wails, and the spear shrieks,
> And the horse which once only whinnied, laments.
> The world quaked for the sake of the Family of Muḥammad;
> For their sake, the solid mountains might have melted away.
> Heavenly bodies sunk, the stars trembled,
> Oh veils were torn, and breasts were rent!
> He who asks blessing for the one sent from the Tribe of Hāshim,
> But attacks his sons;truly, that is strange!
> And if my sin is love of the Family of Muḥammad:
> Then that is a sin which I do not repent.[7]

This *qaṣīda* of the imam Shāfiʿī is also notable in that it is, of course, a Sunnī production; the fact that he composed other such elegies is well attested, and apparently many other Shāfiʿītes (and Ḥanafites) in this early period did the same.[8] However, even the attestation by such a person as the imam Shāfiʿī of his love for the Family of the Prophet left him open in those dangerous times to accusations of 'unorthodoxy', as the following lines attributed to him suggest. The imam Shāfiʿī said:

> They said, 'You are a Rāfiḍī!', and I said, 'But no,
> Nor is my religion nor are my beliefs of that kind ...
> 'But if love of the viceregent of God be Rāfiḍīsm,
> Then I am the most Rāfiḍī of the servants of God!'[9]

Continuing on the subject of 'Sunnī' — or perhaps we should say 'non-

7 *Adab al-Ṭaff*, I, 214.
8 Dhabīḥ Allāh Ṣafā, *Tārikh-i Adabīyat dar Īrān* (Tehran, 2536), II, 195.
9 *Adab al-Ṭaff*, I, 217

Shīʿī — elegy about Ḥusayn, here is a strong piece from the *Ḥadīqat al-Ḥaqīqa* or 'Garden of Truth' of Sanā'ī, as a Persian example from the early twelfth century. I have abridged it in translation by about half; it is given the title 'Concerning Karbalā', and the fragrant air of that most glorious place of martyrdom'. Sanā'ī says:

> How excellent Karbalā' ! and that honour it received,
> Which brought to mankind the odour of Paradise as if on a breeze;
> And that body, headless, Iying in clay and dust,
> And those precious ones, hearts rent by the sword.
> And that elect of all the world, murdered,
> His body smeared with earth and blood;
> And those great oppressors, those doers of evil,
> Persistent in the evil they do.
> The sanctity of religion and the Family of the Prophet
> Are both borne away, both by ignorance and inanity;
> Swords are red like precious ruby with the blood of Ḥusayn,
> What disgrace in the world worse than this!
> And Muṣṭafā, his garments all torn,
> And ʿAliī, tears of blood raining from his eyes.
> A whole world has become insolent in its cruelty;
> The cunning fox has become a roaring lion.
> But still unbelievers at the start of the battle,
> Were reminded of the stroke of Dhū 'l-Fiqār.
> Yes, from Ḥusayn they sought satisfaction for their rancour, but that was not to be;
> They had to be content with their own malice and disgrace.
> And know that any who speak ill of those dogs [those murderers of Ḥusayn]
> Will be kings in the world to come![10]

In Arabic poems on Ḥusayn, the elegy — the *marthîya* proper — becomes very soon only part of a larger developed narrative in which the deeds and nobility of the martyrs of Karbalā' are described. This

10 *Ḥadīqat al-Ḥaqīqa*, ed. Mudarrisī Razavī (Tehran, 1950), pp. 270 271.

development of narrative can be seen already in the poetry of Di'bil b. 'Alī al-Khuzā'ī (d. 246) and in the large body of poetry composed by Ibn Ḥammād al-'Abdī (end of the 4th cent.). However, the *marthîya* form can still be seen intact within these longer *qaṣîdas*, and the lament for Ḥusayn still provides the emotional high point; it is often placed at the beginning of the composition. As another example from this early period we give a part of this well known elegy by al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 406), which he is said to have extemporized on the spot at Karbalā'. In this *qaṣîda* al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā pictures Ḥusayn calling out to his ancestors for aid, but they do not respond; the poet even seems to reproach God for the deaths of the martyrs. In fact, the 'reproach' is a common theme in elegy on Ḥusayn, of the hearer, of the dead relatives of the martyr, or even of God. The elegy for Ḥusayn then turns into a lament for all the Imams supposed to have been martyred, and ends with a call for revenge from the Prophet himself.

O Karbalā'! Ever is your name sorrow (*karb*) and tragedy (*balā*)!
O what you brought upon the family of Muṣṭafā!
How much blood flowed upon your soil when they fell,
And how many tears were shed there!
And how many a noble horse there was, weeping, its tears coursing,
Its cheek next to one perished of thirst,
Wiping the dust off its hooves
On the stain of a throat covered in blood!
These guests came to a barren plain,
And there was no food to be served them;
Nor did they taste water, until they gathered
At the edge of the sword, and the spring of death.
O murdered one, who struggled with death,
Without uttering an insult, without killing anyone!
And they washed him only with his own blood, shed by spears:
Shrouded him only with a shroud of dust.
Exhausted, he calls, while there is no help for him,
In the name of his benificent father, and his grandfather Muṣṭafā,

And in the name of a mother for whom God has raised a standard,
Not found among all the women of humankind.
And what father, what grandfather does he call!
O grandfather, grandfather, help me, O father!
O Messenger of God, O Fâṭima,
O Prince of the Faithful, ʿAlī, Murtaḍā!
How would God not hasten for their sakes,
To cause the earth to heave, the sky to rain stones!
And O Imams, mountains of the earth, most great, most high;
O moons of this earth, shining, brilliant!
The disaster which befell you
Brought to us deep grief and weeping, never ending.
I know that sorrow for you is not to be forgotten, nor grief for your sake comforted,
Though ages may pass;
For much time has passed since your deaths, and continues to pass,
Yet neither has grief abated, nor tears.
How far are you, O Imams, from him who hoped to achieve by you,
With the Apostle of God, victory and salvation;
On the day of the Great Encounter, when the Apostle
Will turn his face from those gathered, and say:
(Speaking to God against them,
And how could a generation thus accused prosper?)
ʿO Lord, on this day I am enemy to them;
I come as one wronged, and this is the day to judge.'[11]

The great impetus for the vast literature of elegy and dirge for Ḥusayn in the Persian language — a literature which is now much larger than the Arabic, which includes a much greater element of elegy on the other martyrs of Karbalā', and which has many more forms and recognized ritual uses than in the Arabic tradition — came with the establishment of the Ṣafavid dynasty and the consequent consolidation for Shiʿīsm of the larger part of the Persian-speaking world. Here as an example from

11 *Adab al-Ṭaff*, II, 206-208.

the beginning of the Ṣafavid period, is an elegiac *qaṣīda* (abridged in translation) by Muḥtasham-i Kāshānī, a favourite court poet. It shows some of the typical themes and imagery of the Persian genre, as well as imaginative expressions of the favourite elegiac theme of what later came to be known in Europe as 'pathetic fallacy'. Kāshānī says:

> The name of this land full of tragedy (*balā'*) is Karbalā'.
> O pitiless heart, where is your sigh of burning sorrow to burn the heavens?
> This desert is the place of the murder of a lord who died athirst.
> O tongue, it is the time for lamentation; O eye, it is time to weep!
> This space still bears the mark of the sighs ot ones wronged,
> So if the sky is become black through the smoke of our sights, it is fitting
> This spot which today is covered by the canopies of the bubbles of our tears,
> Was once the place where the tents of the People of the House were set up
> Here the ship of Ḥusayn's life foundered in disaster;
> Then why is the ocean of our tears, in such a maelstrom, stormless?
> Behold that dome filled with light from near and far;
> Its world-illuminating rays show the way to those gone astray
> Behold a grave most illumined, before which
> The casket of the horizons with its hundred thousand petals and precious stones is as without value.
> Behold beneath the earth, the cypress of the garden of the Prophet,
> For sorrow of whom the sky is arched, bent over.[12]
> Behold, one clotted with blood, the tree of roses in the garden of Fāṭima, a woman pure.
> For whose defeat of whom the garments of the houris are rent like the rose.

12 The cypress in Persian poetry is thought of metaphorically as a possessor of fair stature. Here the tall-standing and erect cypress is brought down below the ground, and is also in contrast to the sky, bent over in sorrow (the sky is thought of as an arc or dome).

This is the lamp to the eyes of mankind, and now by the sword of oppression,
Extinguished, as though merely a candle - a naked body, the head separated from the rest.
This is the joy of Zahrā's breast, and now by horses' hooves
His breast so full of wisdom trampled from all sides by tragedy (*balā'*)
This is Ḥusayn, son of ʿAlī, beloved of the Prophet,
Now pierced through by the blade of oppression at the hand of his murderer Sinān.[13]
Set foot with reverence in this place of martyrdom, for its carpet most illumed,
Is anemone colour with blood from the head of him who was the light of the eyes of ʿAlī, Murtaḍā.
And even if the eye of a friend should not weep bitterly with sorrow,
Still the cry 'O sorrow!' would be upon the tongues of enemies, a cry of regret!
Now night appears from the setting of the sun, for on the roof of the horizons,
The black standard of the People of the Cloak falls from the shoulder of ever-revolving time,
O viceregent of God, I, Muḥtasham, the beggar at your threshold,
Stand at the door of helplessness, empty, and empty-handed.
O how long since I tore my heart from my homeland for your sake!
And now after the long road it has taken, it enters in this palace.
Now the suppliant hand of my heart is raised in wretchedness to the sky,
And that which it seeks depends on your favour.
And though, O Ḥusayn, through the desires of the self, that lover of sin,
My heart sits at the banquet of sin, and astrlde the horse of error,

13 Or: 'the spear of the son of man', apparently implying the guilt of all humankind. Sinān b. Anos al-Nakhʿī, according to some accounts, was the murderer of Ḥusayn.

Yet since the plain of Karbalā' is become covered with dust, it would be fit
If you were to take away from this heart, the dust of sin.'[14]

Muḥtasham's *tarkīḥ-band,* a long strophic poem of twelve parts, is much more well known than any other of his numerous elegies on Ḥusayn, and was imitated for centuries after him. Each strophe ends with a refrain, which is particularly effective in elegy. As an example of a modern *tarkīḥ-band*, here is one strophe taken from a piece by a very popular contemporary poet, Anṣārī, 'Poet of the House of the Prophet'. It seems that the poet may have been inspired not only by the differing circumstances surrounding the martyrdoms of ʿAlī and Ḥusayn, but by the contrast between Najaf and Karbalā' as well (Najaf is fairly well watered, but Karbalā' is like a desert).

O breeze of morning, take to ʿAlī these words of the poet Anṣārī;
Say: Ḥusayn is fallen. Rise, then, go and see:
To Karbalā' from Najaf where you lie,
His body in a hundred pieces pierced by the lance, the dagger, the sword.
O ʿAlī! See who was once the light of your eyes,
Now the enemy around him like eyelashes around the eye;
And here you lie, in pleasant repose with Adam and Noah, at rest
While Ḥusayn has as his resting place the burning sand of Karbalā'!
Although you were made stranger to yourself by the stroke of the sword,
Around you were both stranger and kin, with refreshment and sweets;
While the body of your Ḥusayn is rent the whole length with wounds.
And would you know the number of those wounds? They are as many as the stars!
Wherever you turned your gaze, there stood a friend to see,

14 *Dīvān-i Muḥtasham*, ed. M. Gurgānī (Tehran, 1344/ 1965), pp. 299-300.

While Ḥusayn's eye falls only on the enemy.
ʿAlī, when you gave your life, your family was there beside,
But there on a desert plain far from daughter or sister Ḥusayn dies.
For you the Faithful Spirit, Gabriel, brought a shroud from heaven,
But Ḥusayn fell there on the earth without ablution, without shroud!
ʿAlī, since Ḥusayn in the last hour took your head on his lap to lie,
As kindness in return, then, lay his head on your lap ʿtil he dies.[15]

As an example of modern Arabic elegy in the traditional style, here is a piece from the great Lebanese Shīʿī scholar Muḥsin al-Amīn al-ʿĀmilī, taken from a collection of elegies he has made of his own and others' poems. Al-Sayyid Muḥsin al-Amīn died only recently; it should be mentioned that he was active not only in Shīʿī scholarship and especially biography, but also in Sunnī-Shīʿī *taqrīb* or rapprochement. This *qaṣīda*, in a lightweight metre and a simple style, was composed in 1353/1934-5 while the author was travelling in Iraq and Iran, and it might not be too much to see some allusions to the political situation of those areas in certain lines. Al-Sayyid al-Amīn says:

O Karbalā', you have brought upon us great sorrow;
You have excited sadness and grief.
Now the eye must let its tears flow
To water the grave of one who died thirsty in al-Ṭaff.
Glory, O Abu Faḍl, brother of Ḥusayn, for your ways have become
A lesson to the courageous; an example to the brave.
Your way, yes this is the way of brothers
(May the one not live who betrays his brother!)
Glory to you, O tribe of Hāshim, for you offered your lives freely
And your lives were sacrifice for the religion of God.
On that day you bought glory dearly:
Your precious lives were the price of glory!

15 *Dīvān-i Anṣārī*, ed. A. Uṣūlī (Qum, 1342/1963), pp. 343-344.

You gave your lives for little for the sake of the religion of Muṣṭafā, and by this
The measure of your lives is become more precious still - and who can equal your deeds after this?
You left your family and your children, despite your love for them;
And you exchanged them for the maidens and the youths of Paradise.
Though kings set on their heads crowns of gold,
Yet it is glory which you wear as your crown.
No sword or spear is truly unsheathed, after you;
No, after your deeds, no weapon has found a hand worthy!
Glory itself submitted to your loftiness, it dared not come near;
And others never attained your station: they did not even approach it.
In excellence all mankind is below you, without exception,
And they who called you low, have ended in shame.[16]

Elegy for Ḥusayn continues in Arabic in popular or dialect form as well, proof of the power of the martry to enter into and affect the life of the common people. The popular strophic form in Lebanese dialect known as *zajal* is used for many subjects, including political and nationalistic themes. Most villages (Muslim and non-Muslim) have their own *zajal* poet. A collection of some *zajal* compositions on the subject of the martyrdom of Ḥusayn has been made by the Shīʿī publishing house ‘Irfān’, but unfortunately I was unable to get the use of the book for this essay. Instead I offer this freely translated part of a piece by the Iraqi folk poet ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Umawī, entitled ‘The Revolution of Ḥusayn’. This modern folk poetry is particularly moving in its simplicity (sometimes naivety), and its closeness to the concerns of everyday and political life. As folk poetry often does, it has a great topicality. The poet says:

The revolution you made is holy, O Ḥusayn,
Illuminating political thought, O Ḥusayn;

16 *Al-Durr al-Naḍīd fī Marāthī al-Sibṭ al-Shahīd* (Karbalā’, n.d.), pp. 339-340.

Through it mankind is liberated;
Through it the earth is illuminated.
O Ḥusayn, religion is a pearl, O Ḥusayn
A precious pearl, and you protect it well, O Ḥusayn.
All men honest and men of good will follow your way
Each philosopher is fascinated by your mysteries;
Even Jesus the Christ spoke of you.
And we are proud of our allegiance to you, O Ḥusayn.
And famous Christian writers have recorded
The glory of your days and of your life, O Ḥusayn.
Your uprising is glory and nobility for Islam,
And the greatest school of religion, O Ḥusayn!
O Ḥusayn, all the stagnation, the apathy,
With which our society is afflicted, O Ḥusayn,
Came from the laws of the Umayyads, those despots
It is that which has brought us low, O Ḥusayn.
And when you saw corruption victorious
The law was brought to life again through your devotion,
The goals of the Qur'an were realized through your determination,
And your blood watered the garden of compassion …
And we are in awe of your deeds, O Ḥusayn,
Because of these Islam is spread
Spread as far as any modern advanced science.
Then after your partisans had all died,
ou offered up the beloved of your heart.
And your heart shook to its very depths
From the perfidious arrow which pierced it, Ḥusayn.
And when you saw the mutilated body of ʿAbd Allāh,
The tears of your love flowed forth, O Ḥusayn
His death overcame you with grief.
And your heart burst forth with hears,
The word, once wide, seemed as of it had become narrow:
O Ḥusayn, O Ḥusayn![17]

17 Anataly Kova;enko, *Le Martyre de Husayn dans la poesie populaire d'Iraq* (Geneve, 1979), pp. 220-222