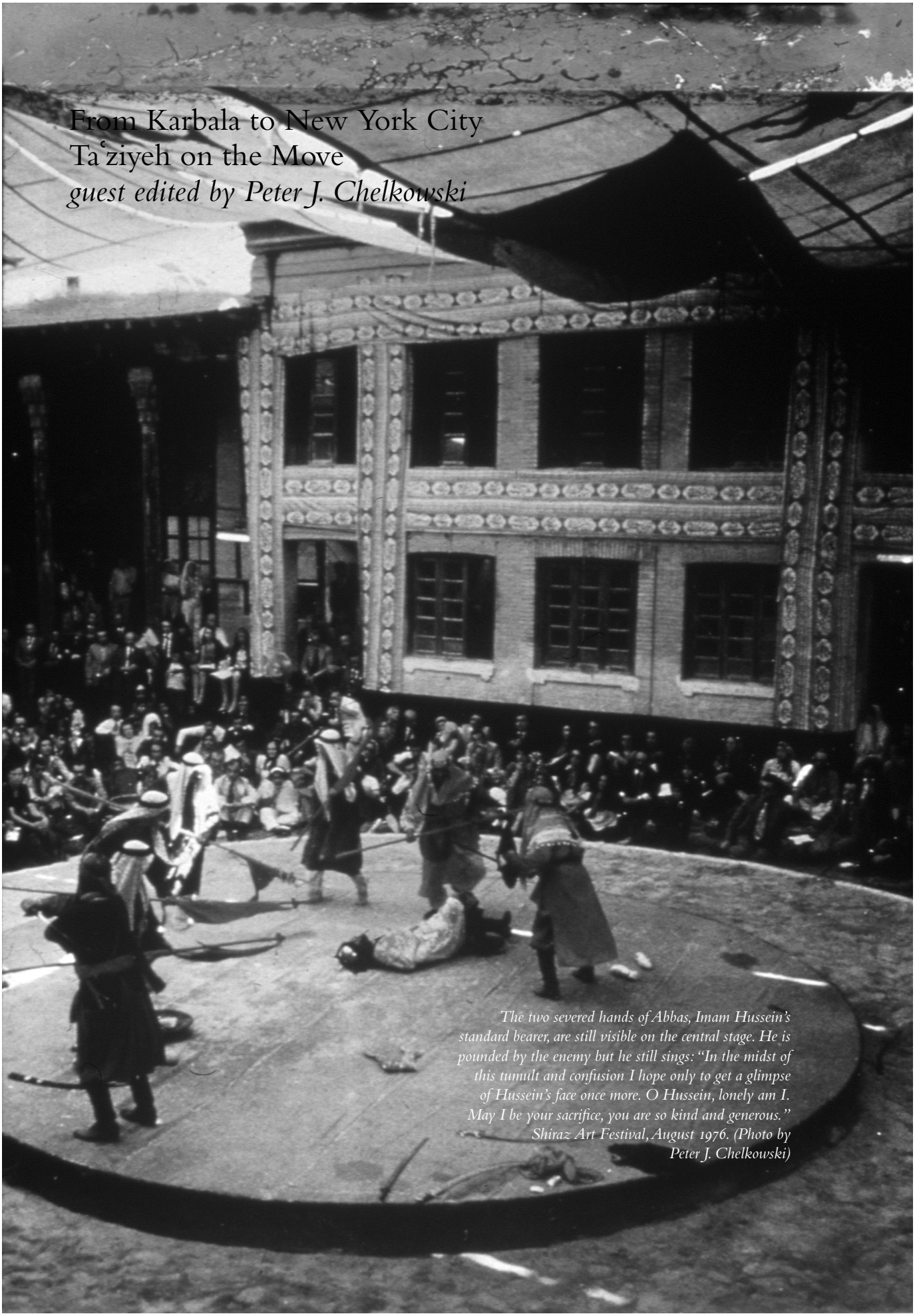
From Karbala to New York City
Taʿziyeh on the Move
guest edited by Peter J. Chelkowski



The two severed hands of Abbas, Imam Hussein's standard bearer, are still visible on the central stage. He is pounded by the enemy but he still sings: "In the midst of this tumult and confusion I hope only to get a glimpse of Hussein's face once more. O Hussein, lonely am I. May I be your sacrifice, you are so kind and generous." Shiraz Art Festival, August 1976. (Photo by Peter J. Chelkowski)

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Taʿziyeh on the Move

Peter J. Chelkowski

Nineteenth-century traveler to Iran and famous man of letters, Count de Gobineau, was fascinated with the Shiite Iranian passion play called *taʿziyeh*. So was his contemporary Matthew Arnold, the great English poet and writer, though he never saw an actual taʿziyeh performed. So too such giants of the 20th-century theatre as Peter Brook and Jerzy Grotowski. They were all intrigued by the form of taʿziyeh production, which was different from anything else. But none of them would ever have imagined that taʿziyeh could leave its native environment, which is steeped in popular Shiite rituals and beliefs, and be successfully performed in the West. Yet it happened. This volume traces taʿziyeh from its origins in Karbala in Iraq through its development as a serious dramatic form in Iran, its adaptation in Lebanon, India, and the Caribbean, and its powerful debut on Western stages, culminating in a 2002 performance at Lincoln Center in New York City. By coincidence, Karbala has become one of the major preoccupations of the Western media since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003. An examination of taʿziyeh reveals many of the historical, cultural, religious, and political paradigms that have made Karbala the touchstone for Shiite Muslims everywhere.

"Taʿziyeh" is a verbal noun from an Arabic verb, *ʿazza,* meaning "to mourn," "console," "express sympathy with." In some countries it denotes a Shiite passion play; in others, any ritual devoted to the suffering and passion of Hussein; and, yet in others, it represents an imaginary copy of Hussein's mausoleum.

This special issue of *TDR* grew out of "Taʿziyeh: Performing Iran's Living Epic Tradition," a day-long symposium on taʿziyeh presented by the Asia Society in New York on 13 July 2002 in tandem with the 12–21 July Lincoln Center performances. A few of the articles that follow are revisions of essays that have been available on the Asia Society website for that symposium, <http://www.asiasociety.org/arts/taziyeh/>. Rabeah Ghaffari's film *The Troupe* documents the taʿziyeh performers' journey to New York and the Lincoln Center production. For information on the film, contact Ghaffari at <rabeah@taziyeh.com> or see <www.taziyeh.com>.

Note on Transliteration

Technical terms related to the taʿziyeh come from Arabic and Persian, and also from Turkish. The transliteration of terms from these languages into English has

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always created an insurmountable problem since there are many different systems of transliteration for each language. In this volume, we have tried to simplify the transliteration by writing ta'ziyeh vocabulary as closely as possible to the way in which it is pronounced and by following the usage style of the *New York Times.* Variations in spelling may occur in proper names or in quotations. While we attempted consistency throughout, we also respected individual authors' requests within each article.

Peter J. Chelkowski *is Professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at New York University. He is the editor of* Ta'ziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran *(New York University Press and Soroush Press, 1979), which up to the publication of this volume of* TDR*, was the major research work on ta'ziyeh in English. His most recent publication (coauthored with Hamid Dabashi), which deals indirectly with ta'ziyeh, is* Staging a Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran *(New York University Press, 1999).*

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