

Ashura Poems in English

Explained and Annotated

Volume 1
Second edition

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Dedicated as the *least* mark of devotion, servitude, and reverence to:

The Prince of Martyrs, Imam al-Ḥusayn,
those who willingly sacrificed their lives
for God's satisfaction in his cause on Ashura,
and all those who profoundly respect him
and aspire to be his adherents and pilgrims.

Foreword

Praise is all to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds. Praise and salaams are to the Prophet Muḥammad b. ʿAbdullāh and his noble and infallible *Ahl al-Bayt*. Denunciation and curse are to their foes forever until the Judgment Day. Amen!

Elegy is a literary technique which enables the poet to compose fine pieces of poetry. In elegy, the mind and soul of the poet get elevated, for he finds himself confronted with the mysterious phenomenon of death. Faced with the mysteries of life and the vicissitudes of times and fate, he tries to find a justification for that eternal silence.

As is well known, elegy is an important element in the literature of the adherents of the *Ahl al-Bayt* school of thought. It is here that in elegy deep sorrow gets commingled with fierce wrath, leading to a type of sentimental literature. In like manner, it may also be regarded as a type of political literature, because this wrath, sometimes discernible therein, is indicative of political thought which has found expression in this manner.

It can hardly be forgotten that beyond the martyrdom of Imam al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī there were political reasons which can never be severed from the incentives and the bloodshed in favor of the religious convictions. Here, the relation signifies the same firm relation which ties the hearts of the staunch

believers with the holy Prophet Muḥammad and his honorable *Ahl al-Bayt*.

Among the first who elegized Imam al-Ḥusayn was Bishr b. Ḥidhlam. It happened when Imam ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, then the leader of the caravan of the survivors of the Karbala massacre, en route home, sent him on a mission to hasten toward the city and inform the inhabitants of Medina of the martyrdom of Imam al-Ḥusayn. Wearing a black turban and pulling his horse with a piece of black rope, he entered the city and imparted to them the ominous news of the martyrdom of Imam al-Ḥusayn. There he composed an elegy of which the following lines are famous:

O Inhabitants of Yathrib! Why are you sitting still,
While [Imam] al-Husayn was martyred,
Hence I am shedding tears.
His corpse is left at Karbala,
While his head is shown around and across the towns.
O Inhabitants of Yathrib, come and see your leader and Imam.
Isn't there anybody among you who is zealous and eager?

In like manner, Sulaymān b. Quttah al-ʿAdwī is reportedly the first to compose an elegy to the memory of Imam al-Ḥusayn, as Sulaymān happened to pass by the

Karbala battlefield. Leaning on his horse, he expressed his lament in the following manner:

I passed by the homes of the progeny of Muhammad,
But found them not as before.
Haven't you noticed that the sun got sick,
And the land trembled at the loss of al-Husayn?
Those who were sometime the abodes of hope
Are now affected by the grave afflictions.
May God not take me away from those homes and their inhabitants,
While they have turned uninhabited, despite my desire.
The Martyr of Ṭaff belongs to the Banī Hāshim,
Though his martyrdom causes Muslims to be ashamed.

Elsewhere, it is reported that the first elegy on Imam al-Ḥusayn was composed by Bahil al-Jumhi, who expressed himself as follows:

Drowsy and drunkard are the Umayyads' eyes,
While the Ṭaff incident never lets the friends sleep a wink.

Ever since the Karbala tragedy, there have been innumerable poets who gained the grace of composing an elegy in praise of and in memory of Imam al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, or the heartbreaking and woeful Karbala tragedy and its mournful consequences. Such a line of devotional literature has never stopped and will never cease.

The tradition of elegizing Imam al-Ḥusayn and the Karbala tragedy has by no means been confined to the Arab or Arabic-speaking, poets; poets of other languages have also made significant contributions as well.

In the Urdu language, there is a long list of poets who gained fame and reputation for their elegies on Imam al-Ḥusayn. Among them are Mīr Babr 'Alī Anīs (1801-1874), Mīrzā Salāmat 'Alī Dabīr (1803-75), Muḥammad Bāqir, the founding father of Urdu journalism (d. 1857), Shams al-Ulama Mawlana Muḥammad Ḥusayn Āzād of Delhi (d. 1910), the poet Mawlana Ḥasan Razā Khan (d. A.H. 1326/ 1908) and the poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz (d. 1984).

In Persian, a great host of poets are known for their poetry and elegies on Imam al-Ḥusayn. Mulla Ḥusayn Vā'ez Kashefī of Sabsevār (northeast Iran) (d. A.H. 910/1532) included many such poems in his work *Rawḍat al-Shuhadā*.

Of Persian poets who elegized Imam al-Ḥusayn, the most well-known is Muḥtasham of Kāshān (d. A.H. 996/1588), who used to serve at the court of the Safavid Shah Tahmāsb. Others in the same line include Abulmajd Majdūd Sanāyī (d. A.H. 1131/1719), Adīb al-Mamālek (d. A.H. 1308), Maḥmūd Khan Malek al-Shu'arā (d. A.H. 1311), Ṣafī 'Alī Shah (d. A.H. 1316/1890), the author of *Erfan al-Haq*, *Bahr al-Haqaeq*, and *Mizan al-Ma'refah*, and Yaghmayī, a professor of Persian literature at Dār al-Fonūn College in Tehran.

In Turkish, quite a good number of great poets have composed poems in memoriam Imam al-Ḥusayn b. Ali and the heartbreaking incidents of the Ashura tragedy. Among them, mention must be made of the following: Lameie (d. 1531), Ḥayratī (d. 1535), Fuḍūlī of Baghdad (d. 1555), Ābidī (d. 1572), Safī (d. in the 16th century), Shamsi Pasha (d. 1580), and Ṣabūhī (d. 1647).

In line with the above, English-speaking poets, whether Muslim, Christian, Hindu, etc., have also made significant contributions to produce elegies for Imam al- Ḥusayn and the Karbala tragic incidents.

It has been the grace of the Almighty to our friend and brother, Dr. Muhammad-Reza Fakhr-Rohani – currently professor of English at the University of Qom – that he has anthologized a fine collection of such English poems in the present book, bearing the title *Ashura Poems in English*. He showed keen interest and an inclination to have his book published in the series of the books published by, and with the emblem of, the Library of Imam al-Ḥusayn's Sacred Sanctuary; the curatorial council of the Library consented to this request. With the publication of this book, we wish Dr. Fakhr-Rohani more success and graceful opportunities to render services to the *Ahl al-Bayt* and to throw light on the afflictions they endured throughout history.

Muhammad al-Hassoun

1st Ramadan 1427/25th September 2006

Preface to the Second Edition

It has been my great honor to be credited with being the forerunner in the brand new field of Ashura literature, especially poetry, in English. I am particularly delighted to see that Ashura literature in English has started drawing the attention and keen interest of several scholars, Muslim and non-Muslim. I am delighted to see that the book has reached its second edition within the first year of its publication.

For the second edition, I have corrected the misprints which crept into the first edition, added a few explanatory notes, and unified the sections which are mine. The texts of the poems are left intact. Needless to say, I have been lucky to have the first edition published by Imam al-Ḥusayn's Sacred Sanctuary in Karbala, Iraq.

I ought to express my thanks to Mr. Yadollah Sa'di for his cooperation. I am grateful to my close friend Mr. Hamed Akhyani for his technical help and suggestions. Needless to say, my beloved wife deserves special thanks for her cooperation, patience, and understanding.

Preface to the First Edition

The prime reason and motive for compiling the following anthology of devotional poems on Imam al-Ḥusayn is to record and mark my humblest degree of reverence and devotion to the unimaginably high status of Imam al-Ḥusayn, and then to provide readers with a range of such poems so far composed in English.

When my colleague Mr. Abdul-Hosseyyn Tale'i suggested me to embark on such a task, it hardly seemed practicable; however, it has been certainly by the Divine grace that I have been able to gradually come up with such poems here and there and to produce the first volume of this anthology. Considering that this is my first endeavor to take a step toward collecting and anthologizing Ashura literature in English, I wish to request each and every esteemed reader to provide me with additional poems of the nature collected here. This is just to work out a further revised and enlarged edition. Surely anybody who contributes to this collection they will receive the divine grace and will benefit from the favor of Imam al-Ḥusayn.

The poems are anthologized in this collection just as they appear on websites or in the sources from which they are taken.

I would sincerely appreciate any comment, suggestion, contribution, or reminder. I can be reached at the following

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Muhammad-Reza Fakhr-Rohani, Ph.D.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I am thankful to Allah Who provided me with this opportunity to carry out the present task as the least cultural service to those who have got to know, or learned to love, Imam al-Ḥusayn (May Divine grace and salaams be bestowed upon him). No doubt, it is a gratifying and blessed work which, I hope, will be recognized as a mark of my humblest service to the divine status of Imam al-Ḥusayn which is beyond conjecture. I simply hope to receive his graceful favor for such a humble task.

I am grateful to Mr. Abdul-Hoseyn Tale'i for his initial suggestion to compile such an anthology. Next, my sincere thanks go to Sheikh Ali al-Fatlawi, presently the Curator of the Library of Imam al-Ḥusayn's Sacred Sanctuary in Karbala for his permission to let us have the honor of indicating Imam al-Ḥusayn's Sanctuary as the publisher of the present volume. This will certainly remain an everlasting honor for all those who have been involved in producing this book. I cannot forget Sheikh Muhammad al-Hassoun for his kind and sincere help. Indeed, Sheikh Muhammad al-Hassoun's cooperation makes me indebted to him forever; he suggested to me to have this book published in the series of the publications of Imam al-Ḥusayn's Sacred Sanctuary. Also Sayyid Hashim al-Milani, the Curator of the Library of Imam 'Alī's Sanctuary in Najaf deserves my sincere appreciation for this support.

I express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Ali Afkhami and Dr. Ali-Muhammad Haghshenas-Lari, distinguished professor of linguistics at the University of Tehran, and his family for having read the final draft of the present volume and the suggestions they made.

My thanks go to His Grace Archbishop Sebouh Sarkissian, Sheikh Muhammad Sadiq Muhammad al-Karbasi, the editor of the London-based *Imam al-Husain Encyclopedia*, Sheikh Muhammad Kalbasi, Dr. Ali-Reza Babazadeh, and Mr. Kamal al-Sayyid.

Among my university students, Mr. Hamed Akhyani deserves my profound and special appreciation. He has always expressed keen academic interest as well as devoutly religious fascination and rendered his substantial assistance while the present volume was in gestation. I am, and will always remain, appreciative of his effective and invaluable cooperation and crucial help.

I cannot forget the assistance I received from my good friends in New Delhi in the summer of 2006. Among a long list of friends who proved cooperative, I ought to mention the following: Mr. Morteza Shafi'i-Shakib, Mr. Mohammad-Hosseini Mozaffari, Dr. Syed Quayam Hussain, all at Iran Culture House in New Delhi, Mrs. M. Vijayalakshmi, Librarian of Sahitya Akademi (National Academy of Letters), New Delhi, Prof. Makarand Paranjape of Jawaharlal Nehru University, Mr. Mortaza Danesh Husaini and her eminent mother, Dr. Bilquis Fatimah Husaini of the University of Delhi, Dr. Nonica Datta, professor of history at the University of Delhi as well as at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Dr. Shah Muhammad Waseem of Aligarh, Prof. Abdur Rahim

Kidwai and Dr. Syed Faiz Zaidi both of Aligarh Muslim University. I am also grateful to Prof. Richard Parmentier of Brandeis University, and Dr. Tabish Khair of the University of Aarhus, Denmark, for contributing one of his poems to this collection. They helped me in many ways and made my short research trip to India as pleasant and fruitful as possible. May God reward them all.

Dr. Mahmoud Mahdavi-Damghani of Mashhad, Iran, Dr. Farideh Mahdavi-Damghani and her eminent father, Dr. Ahmad Mahdavi-Damghani (presently at Harvard University) showed great interest and encouraged me to go along with the project. I also thank my French friend Dr. Mouslim Fidahoussen and the famous Lebanese Christian literary figure, Dr. Georges Gordak, widely renowned for his scholarship on the life of Imam 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, for their moral support.

Last but not least, I offer my most heartfelt thanks to my wife for her patience and understanding and for creating a fitting environment for the accomplishment of this task.

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Abbreviations

A./rabīc
b., Arabic *ibn*, son (of)
E./nglish
L./line
Lit./eral(ly)
Ll., lines
P./ersian
s.v., Latin *sub verbo*, under
Var./iant, various

Permission (*to fight*) is given unto those upon whom war is made for they have been oppressed, and verily, to help them, God is Most Potent; Those who have been expelled from their homes unjustly save that they say: “Our Lord is God!”

The Holy Quran, 22 [al-Hajj]. 39-40.

And say not of those who are slain in God’s cause, “They are dead”: nay, they are alive, but you perceive it not.

The Holy Quran, 2 [al-Baqara]. 154.

God loves whoever loves [Imam] al-Ḥusayn.

The Prophet Muḥammad

The place where [Imam] al-Ḥusayn is buried has been one of Paradise Gardens since he was buried therein.

Imam Ja’far al-Ṣādiq

Once God wishes to do a favor to someone, He makes them love [Imam] al-Ḥusayn.

Imam Ja’far al-Ṣādiq

In a distant age and climate the tragic scene of the death of Hussain will awaken the sympathy of the coldest reader.

Edward Gibbon,
The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire

The best lesson which we get from the tragedy of Karbala is that Husain and his followers were the rigid believers of God, they illustrated that numerical superiority does not count when it comes to truth and falsehood. The victory of Husain despite his minority marvels me.

Thomas Carlyle,
Hero and Hero-worship

Introduction

There is something quite strange yet intriguing with the name ‘Imam al-Ḥusayn’. One of the most charming and pleasing names, the name ‘Imam al- Ḥusayn’ implies noble characteristics and most admirable qualities. Yet, it mysteriously inspires his adherents and admirers to carry out their most sincere duties and modes of servitude, simply for the sake of meeting his satisfaction. The compiler of the present volume simply aspires to be regarded as one such person.

Throughout history, the purest and noblest forms of art, literature, architecture, and so forth have been associated with either religion itself, or figures closely associated with God and/or religion. Hence, the most sincere feelings of devotion are crystallized in the form of poetry, regardless of the language used. The impact of Imam al-Ḥusayn on poets is highly evident in such languages as Arabic, Persian, Urdu, or Turkish, being the dominant languages of Muslim populations. Such poems reveal the extent and depth of the impression the Imam has since exerted on the culture of the language in question. By the same token, it is interesting to examine such devotional poems in English. Indeed, such poems only express the poet’s most sincere feelings or reflections about the admirable figures in question.

The bulk of ziarat¹ texts, poems, prose pieces, laments, sermons, and *tazia* (Shiite version of passion play)² scripts devoted to the Ashura tragedy collectively make up what can generally be called Ashura literature.³ Granted that such forms of Ashura literature necessitate redefinition of “literature proper” simply to cover literary and linguistic manifestations of the whole event, Ashura literature is by no means limited to the Islamic era, beginning specifically from the very day of Ashura.

¹ According to *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd ed., 20 vols. [1989], s.v. “ziarat”), the word “ziarat” is defined as “A Muslim place of pilgrimage, a shrine; a pilgrimage to such a place.” This is one sense of the word “ziarat” as used in Arabic and Persian. Although not recorded in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, there is still another sense of the word which concerns prescribed and often-recommended texts, of various lengths, to be read while paying such a visit. “Ziarat texts” deal with the second sense noted here; they signify a religious meeting, far beyond the bounds of time and place, with a mostly monologue type of talking.

² *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (5th ed., 2 vols. [2002]) defines it in this way: “A play commemorating the suffering and death of Husain, performed esp. on the anniversary of the event each year.”

³ In Arabic, it is called *Adab al-Ṭaff* (lit. Karbala Literature). *Ṭaff* is another designation of Karbala. See, for example, J. Shubbar, *Adab al-Ṭaff*, 10 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Murtada, 1409 AH/1988). In Persian, the following works must be mentioned as examples: H. Gol-Muhammadi, ed., *Ashura va Sheʿr-e Farsi* [Ashura and Persian Poetry] (Tehran: Atlas, 1366 Sh/ 1985) and M.-A. Mojāhedī, *Shokuh-e Sheʿr-e Āshurā dar Zabān-e Fārsi* (Qom: Shahid Mahallāti Institute, 1379 Sh/1999).

Ashura literature dates back to the pre-Islamic period. According to an account related in *Maḥāṣin al-Jinn*,⁴ following the Safwān prayer, Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq remarks, through the chain of authorities indicated therein, that the text of the Ashura Ziarat was initially composed and issued by the Almighty. (Supposing that there had not been any praise for Imam al-Ḥusayn except the very account indicated here, this single account itself proves well indicative of the magnificence and significance of the Ashura incident and the unique personality of Imam al-Ḥusayn.) If such an authoritative text as the Ashura Ziarat could provisionally be put aside on the basis of the fact that its source of production was God the Almighty, the first human-produced work in the rest of the common heritage of Ashura literature dates back at least to the very first elegy which the Christian apostle Zachariah composed on the Ashura incident^{5,6} several centuries ahead of its taking place.

⁴ *Maḥāṣin al-Jinn* is a collection of prayers for recitation, non-obligatory, recommended rituals, and so forth anthologized by the late Sheikh Abbas Qommi. Although the explanations were originally phrased in Persian, the whole text later on appeared in Arabic and Urdu translations. Various editions and selections of the book are widely available.

⁵ See the annotated English translation of the Holy Quran produced by S.V. Mir Ahmed Ali (1st US ed., Elmhurst, NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qurʾan, 1988), s.v. the Quranic mysterious letters KĀF, HĀ, YĀ, ʿAYN, SĀD in the first verse of the Sura Maryam (viz. Mary), p.242f, 1309.

⁶ Viewed from this broad perspective, one may come up with a classificatory scheme of Ashura literature. That is, it may be classified as a) pre-Islamic vs. b) post-Islamic accounts of lament on Imam al-Ḥusayn.

(There are some outstanding and high-ranking Shiite ulema [clerics] who have written various accounts⁷ of the similarities observable between the attributes and fates of the Christian apostle John [Arabic *Yahyā*] and Imam al-Ḥusayn.) Such literary forms are entirely devoted to revealing the purest and noblest kinds of sincere feelings of their composers as well as

While of the former there are just some reports in certain hadith-based exegeses (*tafsīrs*) of the Holy Quran, the latter can (conveniently and irrespective of the language used) be subdivided into poetic prose pieces, lectures and sermons, and poems, all focusing on the captivating personality of Imam al-Ḥusayn, his speeches, addresses, the poems (ascribed to him), and particularly the hardships he and his matchless adherents endured. As such, Ashura literature proves to be one of the most interesting literary genres not only far beyond the frontiers of Islam but signifying a linking thread between (at least) such Abrahamic religions as Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Unfortunately, such an archetypal and symbolic tragedy seems not to have received the due attention it deserves in most Western or Islamic literary circles. Needless to say, Ashura literature cannot logically be restricted to any predetermined languages and genres, nor to the faith and denomination of anyone who composes such a devotional piece of literature.

⁷ See, for example, J. Shūshtarī, *Damʿ al-ʿAyn ʿalā Khasāʾis al-Ḥusayn*, Persian title [*Ashk-e Ravān bar Amir-e Kāravān*], trans. Sayyed Muhammad Hosseyn Shahrestani (first lithographic ed., 1313 AH/1895; 9th ed., Qom: Dar al-Ketab, 1381 Sh/2002), pp. 439-443, and pp. 423-450, for Imam al-Husayn's similarities with other prophets and apostles; cf. the Arabic original under the title of *Al-Khasāʾis al-Ḥusayniyya: Khasāʾis al-Ḥusayn wa Mazāyā al-Mazlūm*, ed. Sayyed Jaʿfar Bāqir al-Husainī (Qom: Anwār al-Hudā, 1425 AH/ 2004), pp. 496-503, on the similarities between Imam al-Ḥusayn and the Apostle John; the entire Chapter 10, pp. 475-515, is concerned with the similarities between Imam al-Ḥusayn and other prophets and apostles.

serving as accounts of the hardships and afflictions Imam al-Ḥusayn's front suffered and endured in the Ashura tragedy.⁸ In the Islamic period, since the Ashura tragedy onward, almost every devout belletrist, author, or researcher, however amateur or proficient, has produced (at least) a work, literary or scholarly, chiefly to mark his or her reverence and tremendous respect for Imam al-Ḥusayn. Such works are by no means limited to Shiite literary figures; rather, quite a lot of Sunnite, even Christian, Jewish, and Hindu figures have shown and continue to show their respect and reverence by composing such pieces.⁹ Truly amazing is the fact that Ashura literature transgresses beyond all bounds of religion, political leaning, or language in that almost nothing can stand on a par with it as so penetrating and moving and, at the same time, smoothing. The more a person reads or writes about it, the more eager they feel to go on with it. It makes one ponder, feel aflame, produce a

⁸ Undoubtedly, the earliest piece of Ashura lament (viz. *nawha*) was produced by Lady Zaynab, Imam al-Ḥusayn's sister, beside the Imam's decapitated body on the Karbala battlefield of Ashura.

⁹ See, for example, A. Bara, *Al-Ḥusayn fī al-Fikr al-Masīhī* (2nd ed., Beirut, 1979; Qum: Fadak, 1426 AH/2005); A. al-Nāblusī, *Alāqah al-Masīhīyyīn bi Ahl Bayt al-Nabīyy* (Beirut: Dār al-Hādī, 1422 AH/2001). Here mention must be made of Archbishop Sebouh Sarkissian's work "The Events of Karbala: A Survey of Some Classical Sources: al-Ya'qubi, al-Tabari, and al-Mas'udi" (Unpublished thesis, University of Birmingham, 1981), and Kamāl al-Sayyid, *Boules Salāmah: Shā'ir al-Ghadīr wa Karbalā fī al-Zaman al-Akhīr* (Beirut: Dar al-Ghadir, 1425 AH/2004). Part of the last work (pp. 46-76) focuses on the Ashura incident as mirrored in the poems of Boules Salamah, a famous Lebanese Christian poet.

work,¹⁰ feel satisfied for having done his or her duty, and then find it far from expressing their true feelings and pathos they experience, let alone to reflect the smallest degree of the depth and wide horizons of the event! In a nutshell, fatigue does not make sense here for this is a true instance of a labor of love.

Ashura literature in its entirety is not, and should by no means, be restricted to the main languages of the Muslim population. Such literature has been either translated into major European languages or produced directly in such languages as English, French, and so forth. As long as Ashura is remembered and devoutly commemorated, its literature will remain and survive, for Ashura has been an incident far beyond the bounds and confines of the precise day of Ashura, the plain of Karbala, and the religion of Islam. It will remain imbued with invaluable and perennial lessons, moral, religious, and educational for all humanity.

Ashura will always remain a never-ending lesson. It has since vociferated the voice of the perennial battle between right and wrong, darkness and light, and it continues to mark the oppression of pure religious thought and noble human characters. In this way, it reverberates the voice of religious nobility as exemplified and crystallized in the Ashura battle. Throughout the ages, Imam al-Ḥusayn, the mourning

¹⁰ This encompasses any type of work colored and minted with a sincere sense of devotion, be it drawing an artistic work, e.g. the contemporary Iranian painter Maestro Farshchiyan's famous painting 'Asr-e 'Ashūrā [The Ashura Afternoon].

ceremonies held for him, and even going on pilgrimage to humbly pay visitation to his sacred tomb and sanctuary, and even paying a visit to those who have been on pilgrimage to Karbala, have not been altogether devoid of political implications for those who have realized the inherent political force behind the belief in the personality of Imam al-Ḥusayn as well as the spiritual and religious rewards and virtues recorded in the authoritative and canonical hadith texts.¹¹ To these, one must add the innumerable biographies¹², *nawhas* (viz. dirges),

¹¹ The bulk of hadith literature in this regard is legion and amazingly abundant, thought-provoking, and awe-inspiring. See, for example, the hadiths recorded in such texts as Jaʿfar b. Muhammad b. Qūlawayh al-Qummī, *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt*, ed. ʿAbdul Ḥusayn al-Amīnī ([lithographic ed.] Najaf: al-Murtadawīyya, 1356 AH/1937), ʿAbdul Ḥusayn al-Amīnī, *ʿAdab al-Zāʾir Liman Yamamm al-Hāʾir*, ed. Najāh Jābir Salmān al-Ḥusaynī ([orig. lithographic ed.] Najaf, 1362 AH/1943; repr. Beirut: al-Balagh, 1424 AH/2003); Muhammad b. ʿAlī b. al-Hasan al-ʿAlawī al-Shajārī, *Fadl Ziyārat al-Husain ʿAlayh al-Salām*, ed. Sayyid Ahmad al-Husainī (Qom: Ayatollah Marʿashī Public Library, 1403 AH/1982) which contains eighty-nine hadiths on this topic.

¹² A huge number of volumes of bibliographies have been compiled on the biographies of Imam al-Ḥusayn. The bulk of biographical accounts is legion and incalculable. Certainly no other figure can match Imam al-Ḥusayn as the subject of so many books, treatises, theses, dissertations, and biographical accounts, short or long, published or unpublished, in history. Excluding manuscripts and essays on his biography, compiling a bibliography of the published books dealing with the life of Imam al-Ḥusayn would turn into a voluminous work. There is a short list of 103 important Arabic books on Imam al-Ḥusayn in M.-A. al-Amīnī al-Najafī’s thirty-two page Introduction to *Maqṭal al-Imam al-Ḥusayn* of M.-R. al-Tabasī al-Najafī (Qom: Muhibbin, 1382 Sh/ 2003), pp. 9-20. See also the

marthiyas (viz. elegies), and dramas,¹³ produced in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu, to mention just a few.¹⁴

The present book is by no means the first and last volume collected in this field. Contrary to an initial anticipation, it seems that Ashura literature in English will occupy at least five volumes of books. Hence, readers and critics are requested to contribute to this collection by providing the compiler with poems not included in the large corpus so far collected.

An attempt has been made to facilitate the readers’ tasks. Where a person, a concept, a term, or an event is

bibliographies of such short accounts as M. T. al-Samāwī, *Ibsār al-ʿayn fī Ansār al-Husain*, rev. ed., ed. A. J. al-Hasanī (Beirut: al-Balagh, 1424 AH/2003), and M.-B. Pour-Amini, *Chehrehā dar Hemāse-ye Karbalā* (Qom, Iran: Boustān-e Ketāb, 1382 Sh/ 2003). The Persian books and monographs on the subject are almost innumerable. The present author has not had access to a list of such biographies and research monographs written particularly in English; however, it is not illogical to guess that quite a great number of such accounts must have been produced in Muslim countries where English is the lingua franca.

¹³ For instance, A. Al-Sharqawī, *Ḥusayn the Martyr: A Play in Six Scenes*, trans. A. Abdul-Razzak (Chicago, Ill.: The Open School, 1997).

¹⁴ See, for instance, the articles “Anīs”, “Marthiya”, and “Muṭṭasham-i Kāshānī” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960-). I should here like to mention a research project on the Turkish heritage of Ashura literature, currently under development by Dr. Amir al-Khaledi at the University of Kufa in Najaf, Iraq (personal communication).

mentioned in a poem, the reader may refer to the endnote indicated, geared to its proper line number. This is for the reader's ease of reference to the lines in which they appear. Just after each poem, there are some explanations to save the readers' time, and to provide them with some basic information to comprehend the fragment(s) in question.

The present introductory essay can hardly be regarded as a true introduction to a poetic collection on Ashura. It merely serves as a text *by way of* introduction. And, no doubt, any introduction to the life and afflictions of Imam al-Husain will prove far from adequate in respect of the greatest tragic incident in the world.¹⁵ After all, who dares, or may even claim, to adequately describe the life of Imam al-Husayn whom God honored with martyrdom?¹⁶ Any attempt to describe such a great incident would be like an ant's description of the Prophet Solomon's kingdom.

The present introductory discourse ends with a fragment of a poem by the Iranian poet Seyyed Ali Musavi-Garmarudi:

¹⁵ Take note of the following phrase quoted from the Ashura Ziarat "*musībatan mā 'a'zamuḥā wa 'a'zama razīyyatuhā fī'l-islām wa fī jamī' al-samāwāt wa'l-ard*" [an agony for which there is nothing comparable in Islam and even in the whole world].

¹⁶ Consider the fragment of the 'Arba'īn Ziarat which reads "*akramtahū bi al-shahāda*" [you, viz. God, respected and honored him [Imam al-Husayn] with martyrdom].

"Here the word ends/ Where I reach an end/ At you no end bends."

May God the Almighty consider and accept the present humble attempt. Amen!

Ashura

*<http://www.harismind.com/poems.html#Ashura>

Vale of Sorrow

*Khurshed, ed., *Imam Husain*, 2nd ed., p. 157

L. 8 “Kafir” refers to “infidel, unbeliever, or pagan”.

Ameen Khorasaneer:

Husain of Kerbala

Men weep for you today in many lands,
And on their breasts in bitter anguish beat,
And in sad, mournful tunes, the tales repeat of how you
lost your family upon the sands.
You nobly spurned the tyrant's base demands and chose 5
Death to prevent your soul's defeat,—
Became a martyr with unflinching feet—
For these well may one weep who understands.
This sorrow at your death, despite the years is still as
fresh,
Which Time has failed to quell. 10
In every heart this day new pain appears
And of your sufferings men each other tell.
They see a vision through slow falling tears of that lone
Battle where athirst you fell.*

*Lalljee, *The Martyrdom of Imam Husain*, p. 60.

Sarojini Naidu:

The Night of Martyrdom

Blackrobed, barefooted, with dim eyes that rain
Wild tears in memory of thy woeful plight,
And hands that in blind, rhythmic anguish smite
Their bloodstained bosoms to sad refrain
From the old haunting legion of thy pain, 5
Thy votaries mourn thee through the tragic night
With mystic dirge and melancholy rite,
Crying to thee — Husain! Husain!

Why do thy myriad lovers so lament?
Sweet saint, is not thy matchless martyrhood 10
The living banner and brave covenant
Of the high creed thy Prophet did proclaim,
Bequeathing for the world's beautitude
Th' enduring loveliness of Allah's name?*

* Naidu, *The Feathers of the Dawn*, p. 6.

Sarojini Naidu:

The Imam Bara

I

Out of the somber shadow,
Over the sunlit grass,
Slow in a sad procession
The shadowy pageants pass
Mournful, majestic, and solemn, 5
Stricken and pale and dumb,
Crowned in their peerless anguish
The sacred martyrs come.
Hark, from the brooding silence
Breaks the wild cry of pain 10
Wrung from the heart of the ages
Ali! Hassan! Hussain!

II

Come from this tomb of shadows,
Come from this tragic shrine
That throbs with the deathless sorrow 15
Of a long-dead martyr line.
Love! Let the living sunlight

Kindle your splendid eyes
Ablaze with the steadfast triumph
Of the spirit that never dies. 20
So may the hope of new ages
Comfort the mystic pain
That cries from the ancient silence
Ali! Hassan! Hussain!*

Imam Bara. “Imambara, Imaumbara, Eemaumberra = A building maintained by the Shia Muslims for the express purpose of celebrating the Muhurram ceremonies, to which they bring their Tazias and Taboots.” in Lewis, *Sahibs, Nabobs, and Boxwallahs: A Dictionary of the Words of Anglo-India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991.

* Naidu, *The Sceptred Flute: Songs of India*, pp. 152-153.

* Khurshed, ed., *Imam Husain*, 2nd ed., p. 158.

W. C. Tailor

An Ode

Tell me friends what shall you say
On the awful Judgment Day
When Mohammad asks you where
Are those trusted to you care?
Dearer than a thousand lives? 5
Bound by many a fastening chain
Some in dungeons dark remain,
On Kerbala's barren strand
Others lie, a reaking band.
Torn with wounds and stain'd with mud 10
Weltering in their own heart's blood.
When before the Judgment seat
You the Holy Prophet meet,
He shall ask. If thus you show
The gratitude you justly owe, 15
For all the benefits bestow'd
By whom whose bounty freely flow'd.*

Anonymous:

Vision of Kerbala

Here's the tale of my nightly trance
The Vision of Karbala in a deathly dance
When a Martyr great faced the lance,
Of shameful Shimr for Islam to enhance,
No war of weapons or battles' sound 5
Equals this tragedy all world round,
No hero hooked to holiness stood
With such head held high without shelter or food.
His trumpet spake not to an armed throng
But to seventy-two saints, the celestial strong 10
They all sang their heavenly song
Giving their all to avenge a wrong.
Satanic sceptres arranged with awful eye
This orgy of blood without a sigh
While our Sovereign Lord was passing by 15
In scorching sand to answer people's cry.
For Islam's unity he surrendered his head
With his darling children he nobly fed
The starving Ummat on its death-bed
Because through sacrifice are nations made!* 20

* Khurshed, ed., *Imam Husain*, 2nd ed., p. 156.

L. 4. “Shimr”, full name “Shimr b. Dhī al-Jawshan”, was the most notorious figure in the Ashura incident. His real name was Shurahbīl b. ‘Amr b. Mu‘āwīyyah. He symbolizes cruelty and atrocity because he was reportedly the person who decapitated Imam al-Ḥusayn. He instigated and dispatched his men to attack and plunder the tents on Imam al-Ḥusayn’s front.

L. 10. Although “seventy-two saints” refers to the widely-accepted number of martyrs of the Ashura battle; however, the number of martyrs listed inside Imam al-Ḥusayn’s sacred shrine amounts to some one-hundred martyrs (personal observation).

L. 19. “Ummat”, var. *umma*, means “The Muslim community”.

H. Wells:

Imam Husain

Pitched upon the scorching desert, The tent of Husain lay, Encompassed round with Satan’s hounds Upon that black sad day. They numbered less than eighty strong, Women and children too, While Yazid’s thousands stood around, Awaiting the fiend’s might. Driven away from the cooling stream, His children waiting for water.	5 10
Awaiting with patience extremely sublime Like sheep for the butcher’s slaughter. Oh! How valiantly fought that pitiful few, Against Yazid’s wild murderers, Fought with a courage unequalled in Time Fought with a fierceness that was surely Divine. The earth quaked and trembled as noon drew near. But still the survivors knew no fear But fewer grew that pitiful band, For Islam, God, and Husain they stand.	 15 20

At last, all were dead, the devil had won,
 Blood red sank down the merciless sun,
 Trampled and torn lay the gallant Husain,
 For Islam, God, and the faithful were slain.*

* Khurshed, ed., *Imam Husain*, 2nd ed., pp. 141-142.
 Tabish Khair:

Poem from Outside a Muharram Procession

The clash of arms, the clasp of armour
 (Ya Hassan, Ya Hussain):
 This is not sorrow, this is something else.
 This is defeat

That's more than victory, this is 5
 The past that's passed by father to son
 As a trinket heirloom without price,
 This is the inheritance of pain.

There they whirl, bleeding, bleeding
 (Ya Hassan, Ya Hussain) 10
 From wounds inflicted on other bodies
 And in another century.

This is not war, this is women wailing
 After the battle is over, after
 The head is severed, mitred on a lance. 15
 This is the knowledge of death

Passed on from mother to daughter
 (Ya Hassan, Ya Hussain).
 This is not religion, this
 Is the exchange of unwrapped 20

Presents. This is a young boy feeling
 With his father's heart, this is
 A pony-tailed girl speaking
 With the voice of her mother.
 This is not anger, not even passion: 25
 (Ya Hassan, Ya Hussain)
 This is dancing with the wound of time.
 This is my studied failure to feel.*

* Khair, *Where Parallel Lines Meet*, pp. 9-10.

L. 2. "Ya", an Arabic vocative or attention-getter, almost
 equivalent to English *O*, *Oh*, or *Lo*. Imam al-Ḥasan, here
 mentioned as Ḥasan, was Imam al-Ḥusayn's elder brother.

Anonymous:

On the Morn of Muharram

Wake up my friends; for the morn of
Qiyama has arrived

It is the month of Muharram

The crescent of grief has appeared

The month of mourning has arrived

5

Muharram is the month of tears

Muharram is the month of blood

Bodies are shredded

And the desert is a garden of blood

The crescent of grief has appeared

10

The month of mourning has arrived

The creation is sad and in mourning

It is the month:

When Husain was martyred

When the eyes of 'Ali shed blood

15

The crescent of grief has appeared

The month of mourning has arrived

Husain sacrificed for thee path of Islam

His head is on the spear

His body is on the ground

20

The crescent of grief has appeared

The month of mourning has arrived

The

arms of 'Abbas were cut in this month

The three-edged arrow settled in the

parched throat of little Asghar

25

The crescent of grief has appeared

The month of mourning has arrived

Zainab

will hug the dust of thee dungeon

in this month

Thee innocent face of Sakina will be

30

Bruised in this month

The crescent of grief has appeared

The month of mourning has arrived.*

* http://www.dartabligh.org/months/muharram/8_3.asp

L. 2. "Qiyama" (correct form *qiyāmah*) means the Resurrection Day.

L. 15. "Ali" refers to Imam 'Alī, the first Infallible Imam.

L. 23. "Abbas" refers to 'Abbās b. 'Alī, Imam al-Ḥusayn's step-brother, who was martyred at the Karbala Battle on Ashura.

L. 25. "Asghar" refers to 'Alī al-Asghar, Imam al-Ḥusayn's six month baby.

L. 28. "Zainab" was Imam al-Ḥusayn's sister.

L. 29. "Sakina" was Imam al-Husayn's beloved daughter.

Farah Yeganeh:

A Shaped Elegy for Karbala

Where do you reside now?	Where you
reside?	Where you?
Where?	Where
have the rainbows perished to?	5
Where rainbows perished?	Where
rainbows?	Where?
Why does the city look so dark?	Why city
dark?	10
Why dark?	Why?
I've lost the orange and the violet of the rainbow.	Orange
and violet of rainbow.	Lost rainbow.
Lost. What should be done with the silent confusion?	What
with silent confusion?	With silent
confusion?	What?
20 I used to stand under the big tall tree.	
Stand under big tall tree.	Stand

under tree.	Stand.
And wonder at the magic of the colors.	25
Wonder at magic of colors.	Magic of
colors.	Magic.
What have they done to the echoes?	
What done to echoes?	30
What to echoes?	What?
Have they eventually dissolved in nothingness? Eventually	
dissolved in nothingness?	Dissolved in
nothingness?	35
Nothingness?*	

*Ms. Farah Yeganeh herself contributed this poem to this volume.

Ethel M. Pope:

Tragedy of Moharram

Gold moonbeam shed their misty light
O'er a saddened world;
To sound of deepest funeral dirge.
Islam's banner is unfurled,
With slow and measured step, 'tis borne, 5
Aloft amid the throng,
The emblem of a mighty hand
E'er raised to right a wrong,
In by-gone days its silken folds,
Waved proudly in Iran; 10
From Continent to Continent,
The Arab symbol ran.
Its path was marked by victory,
The triumph of the right;
Till darkest Africa's heathen hands, 15
Were bathed in purest light.
That day of happiness is gone;
No more in ecstasy borne,
The banner heads a sobbing throng;
Whose duty is to mourn. 20
The loss of him beloved by all
A hero without stain,
Whose noble sacrifice has made

The world ring with his name
With open hand he gave his all; 25
His little children dear
Brothers, friends – helpless women too,
Cling to him in fear,
Unflinchingly, nor moved nor wept,
Secure in his just cause, 30
He nobly fought and nobly died,
To save Islam's great laws.
All the memory of martyrdom
A new the passions rise;
A bitter, sobbing, wailing cry, 35
Goes up unto the skies;
With each new year the latent grief,
Pent up, breaks out again,
And Heaven returns the impassioned cry,
Husain, Husain, Husain!* 40

* Khurshed, ed., *Imam Husain*, 2nd ed., pp. 153-154

Justice A. D. Russel:

The Martyr of Karbala

From age to age, on Virtue's age,
Shall live the deathless story,
His loss remain the Martyr's gain,
His shame the Martyr's glory;
Till truth shall lie, and Honor die,
And time itself be hoary. 5
"Arise Husain, arise,
Chief of the Prophet's seed;
Fling broad thy banner to the skies,
And come with utmost speed, 10
Or ere the throne of the All-Wise
Usurped be by foul Yazid".
He's donned his armour bright,
His father's sword girt on;
The sword of Ali, as the might 15
Of the Destroyer's own:
And he is off ere morning light
Across the desert wide and lone,
"Now, Kufa, keep thy word!
To the good cause be true; 20
Yazid has sent a giant horde

To march thy province through;
The hirelings of his father's hoard,
Who grace or mercy never knew."
They bore his god-like head aloft, 25
His mouth struck with their whips.
"O mouth, that I have seen so oft,
A-teem with angel quips,
In baby-kisses, warm and soft,
Pressed to the Prophet's lips!" 30
O body, trampled, fouled, disdained,
Which charmed the gazer's eye,
The blood from out thy veins that drained
Was heaven's electuary;
No horses hooves were ever stained 35
In so divine a dye.
O barren plain of Karbala,
With herb, nor yet with sod
Be clad eternally; for ah!
There, overwhelmed, down-trod, 40
The holy son of Fatima
Gave up his soul to God!*

* Khurshed, ed., *Imam Husain*, 2nd ed., pp. 136-140.

L. 19. Kufa, or al-Kufa (Arabic al-Kūfa), is a town on western bank of the Euphrates. It is now quite close to al-Najaf. Al-Kufa served as a seat of Imam 'Alī's government, hence a refuge and center for the Shiites. Just prior to the Karbala incident, several of its inhabitants wrote letters of invitation to

Imam al-Husayn; however, most of them betrayed him and participated in the unbalanced war against him in Karbala.

Mariam Rizvi:

Untitled Poem

Peace, with sception and hope, I seek,
(congruity's scope I know is bleak)
To mend I crave (rather than kill)
To spill blood, abhor I will.

Intend I do, no force to use (If sense in you I can infuse)⁵ But
the rules, supreme, of the divine faith
Resolved I am, to defend till death.
Face your hostile moves I will.

Thought accord I covet, seek peace still.
A holy war it means indeed 10
If waged to crush the devil's creed.
No rancour, 'against you,' I hold
But faith do cherish - as I told.

Islam I will resolutely shield
Burnt will stand and never yield. 15

Would welcome death (and make it tame)
Would rather die than live in shame.

Your Prophet's scion I'm - you know
At least some regard to his name show.
His singular dictum is my creed: 20

"Universal good" I adore, indeed.
Ali, the paragon, the seraphic Imam
Champ of the faith, the shield of Islam
Inimitable, impeccable: I am his son
His peerless attributes I have won. 25

My heart is virtues' abode and nest
Blessedness harbours in my breast.

Muhammad came in the kingdom of God,
as a messenger of peace as the master of creed.

He influenced the world with Ali's help, 30
and all the sons from his daughter's breed.

Fatima the lady of God's paradise,
Ali the warrior, the leader, the wise.
Hassan, the heir of eternal lore,
Hussain, the martyr, the heaven's door. 35

Call Ali in the trouble, Almighty says,
because in his presence the evil decays.

He's the lion of God, he's the sword of God,
and all his believers are one righteous squad.

Islam's prosperity is the gift of Hussain, 40
In the way of God, he sacrificed his clan.
He gave his head but not his grace,
His martyrdom is a slap on the devils face.

The grandson of prophet decided to fight, 45
to unveil the Satan, and bring him in light.

The food was banned, the water was stopped,
but on his mind the triumph had topped.

Zainab was with her brother all the time,
and participated as much to demolish the crime.

Her surety was Abbas, the holder of the flag, 50
Whose hand on the emblem is the victory's tag.
The thirst was a menace, the hunger a threat,
an example for all the mankind was set.

But the righteous fought, and died on the faith, 55
and the right won, against the evils wraith. *

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<http://www.shianews.com/hi/articles/islam/0000071.php>

L. 34. Imam al-Ḥasan was the elder son of Imam ‘Alī and the second infallible imam. He was the elder brother of Imam al-Ḥusayn.

L. 48. Zainab, or Zaynab bint ‘Alī, was Imam al-Ḥusayn’s younger sister who accompanied Imam al-Ḥusayn from Medina to Karbala. She married her cousin ‘Abd Allah b. Ja‘far and had four sons and a daughter. Two of her sons, ‘Awn (var. Aun) and Muḥammad, were martyred on Ashura in Karbala. She bravely acted as the leader of the survivors of the Karbala incident and eloquently acted as the disclosing voice of the Karbala revolt to reveal the real face and unjust character of Yazīd.

L. 50. ‘Abbās (var. Abbas) b. ‘Alī was Imam al-Ḥusayn’s step-brother. He typifies and symbolizes bravery, religious zeal, chivalrous politeness, and absolute obedience toward Imam al-Ḥusayn.

Syed Ahmed Ali Mohani:

The Hero of Kerbala

Many, many years ago,
On bloody field of Kerbala,
A noble hero faced his foe,
As champion of God's Faith and Law.
Ov'erhead there was a scorching sun, 5
There were no shady trees,
Beneath a burning sandy plain,
With no refreshing breeze.
A scion of Hashim's noble line;
Of Heroism a model, 10
Son of Ali, the Lion of God,
Grandson of God's Apostle.
His comrades few but loyal and brave,
Some young and some advanced in age,
The record of whose actions gave, 15
To history its brightest page.

Of worldly comforts they had none,
No couch nor rosy bed,
To comfort their afflicted hearts,
The Holy Word of God they read. 20
Three days they every distress bore,
Deprived of drink and food,
The world does still wonder at,
Their unexampled fortitude.
They fell around him one by one, 25
Firm in their righteous ways,
And for their loyalty have won,
From friend and foe a world of praise.
His friends with loving grief he eyed,
Lying dead in sun's scorching rays, 30
To justify his aim he tried,
To deal with foes in peaceful ways.
He brought in arms his baby son,
Asked them to give him water,
Said he, "The babe no harm has done, 35
To die of thirst or slaughter."
Stones they threw and arrows shot,
Obedient to Yazid's behest,
And in their fury spared not,
Ev'n life of baby at the breast! 40
A little before his enemies were,
For water sorely passed,
Relief he gave them then and there,
And could not see even foes distressed.
He humbly prayed and praised the Lord, 45
The Giver of Spiritual beauty,

And though midst danger never failed,
 To do his sacred duty.
 Wickedness can no further go,
 Cruelty needs no greater proofs, 50
 His sacred body, after death,
 Was trampled under horses' hoofs!
 Victory, though mean, they gained, but still,
 No bounds knew their ire.
 Orphans and widows they captives made, 55
 And set their tents on fire.
 The captives saw with choking grief,
 And eyes dimmed with tears,
 The tragic sight of Martyrs' heads,
 Uplifted on spears!* 60

* Lalljee, *The Martyrdom of Imam Husain*, pp. 63-65.

L. 2. "Kerbala" is a variant spelling of "Karbala" or "Karbela", correct Arabic pronunciation "Karbalā", English spelling "Karbala".

L. 9. Hashim, or Hāshim b. 'Abd Manāf, was the great-grandfather of the Prophet Muḥammad.

L. 11. "The Lion of God" is an honorific title for Imam 'Alī signifying his bravery. Its Arabic original is *Asad Allah* with a Persian equivalent as *Shir-e Khoda*.

Anonymous:

A Journey

It was peak of the mischief and virtues in chains;
 Just laws were sacked with rules insane;
 As the tyrants on the rise, and mass confused,
 offered lust with lies, and faith abused.

Thus the signs indicated, and time dictated. 5
 Some souls elevated as al-Husain (A.S.) navigated;
 a seed of the Prophet (P) and the sight of his Parents
 (A.S.) that
 time in deluge, he was ark so apparent.

In the Name of God, for the sake of Islam;
 for the freedom of life and soul of Islam; 10

gave greatest sacrifice, but not his hands,
with the members of his kin and many of his friends.

Hur, Muslim and the friends those hearts so pure;
they offered their lives as shield and cure;
thus tyrants came forth from the curtain way old; 15
then peace was bought and lives were sold.

And daring in the manners were the two young brothers;
in the boldness of their moves were the teachings of a
mother

Shone Aun and Muhammad with the valor known as
Haider (A.S.);
Those children were slain not the feeling of the mother.20

With a message from his father was Qasim bin Hassan
(A.S.); a
radiant jewel of Islam was this glowing young son;
but Qasim into pieces with a bride day old;
on the sand in heat it was savage and cold.

Then the pride of the Hashims rode back from
the river; 25
And the tyrants made sure that he did not deliver;
they cut off his arms, but spirit was set;
till an arrow hit the bag, only eyes got wet.

Fell Abbas (A.S.) from the horse, with no hands for
resort;

then al-Husain (A.S.) rushed to shore for a brother's end
resort; 30

those children who waited with the patience were told;
and thirst in the camp was three days old.

Soon Akbar cam down with spear in his chest;
which a father had to pull so severe was the test;
He was image of the Prophet (P), and the life of al-Husain
(A.S.); He
was vision of a mother and the eyes of al-Husain (A.S.)

Now the Leader was alone as he called for the help,
then a baby fell down; a response from the crib!
This thirsty, pure, infant was a son of Imam,
Who, acknowledged his father and the call of Imam. 40

Thus al-Husain (A.S.) brought him for some water in the
field,
and showed them baby's dried lips and appealed;
but the six months old got an arrow so thick,
that turned him over and tore his neck.

Ali Asghar went to sleep, with his father and no fear; 45
with the cradle on the fire, and their head on spear;
and the mother's empty hand, with the tear dried eyes,
who looked for the baby to sing lullabies.

And a sister by the camp saw the horror of this trip;
as a knife tore the neck, where the Prophet (P) put his

lips; 50
 Earth in grief, roared heavens and mourned,
 Sand turned red when al-Husain (A.S.) was torn.

And a child full of tears with her tiny bleeding ears,
 bruises on her face and her thirst so severe;
 She ran for her father who laid beheaded, 55

and cried for the uncle for help she needed;

Syeda Zainab (A.S.) looked for her in the sadness of that
 night;
 did inquire every soul in the land of the plight;
 but Sakina was sleeping on the chest of a body;
 with the love of the father, from the fragrance of his
 boy. 60

Then the camp pushed down, while flames went up;
 little children rushed out, as their dresses lit up;
 it was night full of cries and the innocent quests;
 shattered were the dreams and broken were the nests.

All defenses laid to rest, after trials and the tests; 65 left
 to face, one Imam, even history would detest,
 who fainted with the illness faced torture and torment;
 a Master of the pious and devotees' ornament.

Lashes on his back heavy chains on Imam;
 but ladies were the prisoners, was the wound of Imam; 70 No

chador for them but their rope tied arms;
 and grief soared high from Kufa to Shaam.

But, the daughter of Ali (A.S.) challenged, miseries with the
 messages;
 with the families in bazaars, and deadly courts of savages;
 With the depth of the patience and the Zenith of Braver
 Bravery;
 Islam was rescued for ever from the slavery.*

* <http://al-islam.org/history/history/marsiyya.html>

L. 6. "A.S." is the abbreviated form of an originally Arabic honorific and prayer-like sentence. "Alayhi al-salām" for males, or "Alayha al-salām" for females are basic forms used to express one's reverence and high respect for the dignitaries mentioned. Although widely-used in Islamic, particularly Shiite, devotional and religious texts produced in English, the abbreviation "A.S." has not been recorded as such in English dictionaries.

L. 13. Hurr was a commander who blocked Imam al-Ḥusayn's way; however, he got aware of his grave fault and joined Imam al-Ḥusayn's army on the morning of Ashura. He sacrificed his life in the cause of the Imam.

L. 19. Aun and Muhammad are two sons of Lady Zaynab who was martyred in Karbala.

L. 19. “Haider” is a title of Imam ‘Alī.

L. 21. Qāsim was son of Imam al-Ḥasan, Imam al-Ḥusayn’s elder brother. Qāsim fought the enemy and was martyred in defense of his uncle, viz. Imam al-Ḥusayn.

L. 25. “[T]he Hashims” refers to the Hāshimids who were present at Karbala, viz. Imam al-Ḥusayn and those of the Hāshimid dynasty.

L. 29. ‘Abbās (var. Abbas) b. ‘Alī was Imam al-Ḥusayn’s step-brother. He typifies and symbolizes bravery, religious zeal, politeness, and entire obedience toward Imam al-Ḥusayn.

L. 33. “Akbar”, lit. ‘elder’, is a title of ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, the elder brother of the fourth Infallible Imam. Akbar is used here as a shortened form. On Ashura, he was the first of the Hāshimids who went to the battlefield, fought the enemy, and was martyred.

L. 45. Ali Asghar, Arabic title ‘Alī al-Asghar, is ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn. [Asghar means the youngest.] When Imam al-Ḥusayn lost all his companions, he got back to the tents and found him suffering from intense thirst. To prevent his baby from dying of thirst, Imam al-Ḥusayn brought him to the enemy so as to get him some water. Imam al-Ḥusayn requested some water

from the enemy soldiers to save him from certain death, but a wicked and cruel soldier shot an arrow and slew the baby in the Imam’s arms.

L. 57. Syeda Zainab. ‘Syeda’ (lit. Lady, Miss, or Mrs.) is the feminine form of ‘Syed’, itself the Indian-Subcontinent English variant form of ‘sayyid’ which means ‘Mr.’ or ‘Sir’. Regarding Zainab, or Zaynab bint ‘Alī, she was Imam al-Ḥusayn’s younger sister who accompanied Imam al-Ḥusayn from Medina to Karbala. (*Bint* means “daughter of”.) She married her cousin ‘Abd Allah b. Ja‘far and had four sons and a daughter. Two of her sons, ‘Awn (var. Aun) and Muḥammad, were martyred in Karbala on Ashura. She bravely acted as the leader of the survivors of the Karbala incident and eloquently acted as the disclosing voice of the Karbala revolt to disclose the real face and unjust character of Yazīd.

L. 59. Sakina (Sakīna bint al-Ḥusayn), was Imam al-Ḥusayn’s daughter.

L.71. The word “chador” symbolizes formal and religious covering for women and girls when they get out. Already a loan word in English, it signifies women’s high social status in Middle Eastern Muslim communities.

L. 72. Kufa to Shaam. Kufa, or al-Kufa (Arabic al-Kūfa), is a town on the western bank of the Euphrates. It is now quite close to al-Najaf. Al-Kufa served as a seat of Imam ‘Alī’s

government, hence a refuge and center for the Shiites. Just prior to the Karbala incident, several of its inhabitants wrote letters, inviting Imam al-Ḥusayn to move there; however, most of them betrayed him and participated in the unbalanced war against him in Karbala.

L. 72. “Shaam”, or “al-Shām” refers to the Levant that is a region presently comprising Syria, and the neighboring parts of Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan. It specifically refers to Damascus, the capital and seat of the Umayyad dynasty. In Shiite culture, it implies the hardest and most unbearable phase of captivity for the survivors of the Karbala incident.

A. K. Esmail:

The Conqueror of Kerbala

The tremendous surge from mid-deserts	
Had just reached the brink	
On its victorious onwards march	
And, there for a while it stopped.	
For a while it was touch and go	5
For a while it seemed	
Desert born desert contained.	
That was not to be	
It was not so decreed	
Muhammad’s own blood	10

Was there to answer the call.	
At Kerbala the faith was reborn	
And Husain’s martyred blood	
Blossomed forth and	
Lo, there was universal Islam.	15
To the last day—last minute	
Shall shine the immortal deeds	
Of Husain and his co-horts	
The Faithful Few	
Yes the Great one himself was on trial	20
The Last Prophet’s own blood	
His darling and his heir	
Husain himself had to fall	
Before the grand message spread.	
The mouths that had fed	25
Bit the hands that held	
The ungrateful serpent’s bite	
That was a Prophet’s reward.	
Bereft of gold, bereft of home	
Bereft of food and water itself	30
But full of Muhammad’s blood	
Full of pluck full of faith	
The Courageous led on.	
Led on the last seventy-two	
Seventy and two of the grand host	35
Spiritual ancestors of the like	
Who from ages keep the faith alive	
Those that do not quit.	
Thrones are usurped, gold stolen	
But not the thorny Crown	40

That always rests on the brows of a rare Jesus.
 That was Husain's heritage
 That went back of Christ
 A heritage to stand like rock
 To suffer to strive and to die 45
 To die and cease to be
 So that Truth for ever be.
 They don't die
 The heroes of Kerbala
 They who go through fiery furnaces and walk in the
 valley of shades
 For the end they emerge 50
 In shining armours radiating
 Light of truth for ever.
 In vain, in vain did Yazid foam
 In vain, did his armies storm 55
 field was theirs
 Who had their precious lives lain
 The conqueror of Kerbala was Husain.
 Here the unmatched became invincible
 Here the price for the perfect was paid
 What father had conceived 60
 The brave son had fulfilled.
 Ye, fields of Kerbala
 Stand us in need
 Muslims arise again on trial
 There is no Husain to lead. 65
 Ya, Muhammad Mustapha
 Grant us thy son's spirit
 Let Kerbala be our beacon

For we have only to repeat
 The original deed is done 70
 Can we not just repeat?
 Yazids are yet all about
 Within us and also without
 His tribe does not die
 Ye, waters of old lady Furat 75
 Tell us how Husain fought
 Tell us how he won
 For again have we to win
 And leave an example behind
 That the message of Muhammad 80
 The sacrifice of Husain
 Shall not be in vain
 Islam, Allah's noblest gift
 Has to be earned again and again.*

* Lalljee, *The Martyrdom of Imam Husain*, pp. 60-63.

L. 19. "The Faithful Few" refers to Imam al-Ḥusayn's companions who were relatively much less than the number of the enemy's army, which reportedly exceeded 30,000.

L. 21. "The Last Prophet" refers to the Prophet Muḥammad.

L. 53. Yazīd b. Mu'āwīyyah symbolizes a very notorious and detestable figure. He was the cruel monarch of the Umayyad

dynasty. Soon after his gaining power, he ordered his agent in Medina to gain Imam al-Ḥusayn's alliance by force. As this was all in contradiction to the contents of the peace treaty signed by Mu'āwīyah and Imam al-Ḥasan, Imam al-Ḥusayn rightly refused to recognize Yazīd as a Muslim ruler. Hence, the Imam left Medina for Mecca in defiance to the unjust force exerted. As the people of al-Kufa had invited Imam al-Ḥusayn, he intended to go there. En route to and near Kufa, it was at Karbala where Yazīd's agents and henchmen made Imam al-Ḥusayn stop. In fact, Yazīd ordered his forces to surrender, fight, and slay Imam al-Ḥusayn and his companions therein.

L. 66. "Ya, Muḥammad Mustapha". "Ya" is an Arabic vocative or attention-getter, corresponding roughly to English *O*, *Oh*, or *Lo*. Mustapha, or Mustafā, lit. chosen, selected, preferred, favorite, is another *laqab* (designation or appellation) of the Prophet Muḥammad.

L. 72. "Yazids" signifies those who are like Yazid in character. Although proper names are regarded as inherently definite, and non-count, in such secondary uses they qualify as a set-, or category-denoting noun, hence they may take a plural marker.

L. 75. Furat, or Furāt, [English Euphrates] is one of the two major rivers of Iraq where the city of Karbala is located on. It symbolizes the thirst Imam al-Ḥusayn and his companions endured as well as the battle occurred thereby at Karbala. According to numerous Islamic hadiths, it is regarded as a Paradise river imbued with virtues for whoever gets consecrated with it. Also recommended is to perform *ghusl*

[i.e., washing the whole body in a prescribed way for religious or ritual purposes] with its water prior to performing ziarat, viz. pilgrimage, to Imam al-Ḥusayn's sacred sanctuary. See Mohaddesī, *Farhang-e Āshūrā*, s.v. Furāt.

Sayyed Ali Musavi Garmarudi:

The Track of Blood

Trees I like them -
In your reverence they stand firm;
Likewise the water,
It's the dowry of your mother.
It's your blood brightened the honor, 5
It's your nobility the horizon does mirror.
The dusk is that niche,
In the morn by martyrdom you did pray.

In my mind thoughts about that valley flood
The soil of which sucked your blood. 10

No, indeed not, a vale so high I saw never.
It is you, only you, in a downfall dear,
Better from the vale itself hear!

A sword which at your throat did ply
Cut every thing into two under the sky. 15
Turned Hussaini whatever at your side
While Yazidi the other side.

Now rocks and we!
Waters and we!
Hills, canals, meadows, trees- 20

Some are Yazidis
Else, they are Hussainis.
Blood your neck irrigated
Everything under the sky into two divided -
Even the color 25
Resided in every particle
In a dazzling garish carbuncle.
Else, not Hussaini nor does concur.

Your death, lo, what a gage!
Laughed at life and vilified its stage 30
That to the death desired life to page.

Your blood stood there
and stood the Truth in its care:
One it is but a fare.
Determination stood a security; 35
Riveted the world into its guarantee.

Although false espouses the world
Truth in canopy of your name brides the world.

Peep into truth if to see you
And the grass when it is to grow, 40
The water in a drink when it's to flow,
The stone as challenges a throw,
Into a sword when it cuts into two
Or the lion when its roar the winds blow,
Into the horizon which is bloody, 45

In the smile of dusk which is ruddy.
In a stand,
In a demand.
You to be found in crevices,
To be smelled in roses 50
And the burning sun to be demanded,
The early morn to be commanded.
Should be opened heart of the night,
Seeds scattered the delight
And the winds carry your sight; 55
To be plucked from the bunches' height.

In God alone you to be seen,
Whosoever upon Truth if to lean,
Gory is he and his fingers beam
The glow of your blood and its sheen. 60
Eternity is the mirror
Hung before you for every viewer.
Alas, the sun, it is no better;

Hence, we wouldn't utter:
'It is your looks' glitter.' 65

In a cozy corner of history's conscience
Guarding the Truth stands he is vigilance.
In his smile tacts flow in mellifluence.
Strong, straight. Star striking-
Such the determinations are demonstrating 70

The elevations if to be viewed by a human being.
Lo, infancy of reason astonishes in a daze confusing.
It is the lake of your own blood-
A gateway of history where you have stood
Holding a jug of civilization for human good 75
To quench the caravan of mankind
In a martyrdom pacing onward pressing the hind.

Your name disturbs the sleep under moon
And deluges in water a Typhon,
Lo, rests the law in your tone. 80

To battle your determination only fools prone,
Your distinction is blood, only blood, blood alone.
O, you, not a divine but in divinity drown.
Death is vile in your hold
As a fly a plaything among children's fold 85
And Yazid, a pretext. An excuser if to be told,
As though a handkerchief before you unrolled
and you spited the filth of tyranny in its shroud
and threw into the history's dustbin for other to scold.

A huge blood sucker, 90
Not an entity but a liar;
Such was Yazid an idler.
Sins personified in him
And he to mankind a megrim.
Robbery of name it is it to name him 95

'A man' however the sense he claim.
O, you! O, Glorious victim!
Be upon you blessing!
Not because thirsty you met martyrdom
But your enemy is of such a sum. 100

Your death red
Broke Yazid's name into a shred,
And made the sense in the word tyranny dead.
Troops of words with barracks of description fled.
Indeed, defeated is every human toil; 105
Battle with you is foul and toil.
Freed are the lions in your coil.
Your blood overflows the expression's soil.
Beyond the words is the flow for history's turmoil.
Out of the track of time proceeds as a procession
Royal 110
O, "Zabeehullah"! Divinity in your blood flows;
You the "Ismayeel" of God, in you oneness glows.
"Abraham's vision" from a dream reality barrows,
Karbala where your appointment wallows,
Moharram the hour of love when the love loves. 115
And, lo, you are that sole person

Carried forty days the pilgrim's season.
 "And We have complete it in ten"
 Ah, burns me the desire of comprehension;
 The incomplete pilgrimage pawned in suspension, 120

 Gained in your kiss at the dagger its perfection;
 For the "BLACK STONE" virtual the best compensation.
 Begins the love's history,
 The red gains its entity,
 From your death-to life a treaty. 125

 Letter commences from your blood
 Religion found way the time you stood
 As you fell the truth stood
 And took the Right a mould good.
 Weakened the tyranny's base in your blood's flood. 130
 Autumn of your death delivered eternal spring,
 Grass and trees in a pleasant ring,
 And a blossom of red at every branch to swing,
 Else, a dry fuel wood it is to the trees cling.

 Secret of death you have opened. 135 No
 knot remained under your will's nail unopened.
 Wailing and weeping is the honor;
 You ahead and it entails you for ever.
 Beyond the manliness you are far and further. 140
 Prayers: you; intention: you;
 you; and the one you;
 Oh, the verdure, the ever green'
 Oh, the red that frills the green

Nobler than every pure and clean
 No human a parallel to you ever has been. 145

 O, sweet but staunch and staunch but sweet,
 Gapes wide history its mouth for you to spit.
 You an iron arm, you the scale of balance-
 You sense of the Book and you the Qur'an's essence.
 In your looks interpretation glow, 150
 And the paces to the earth dignity bestow.
 And become a gravity for galaxies on onward grow
 Divine verses lip and your lips utter-
 Wherever you be in you heavens glimmer.
 Wonder! Oh, wonder! you a wonder' 155
 My astonishment ends not if I to ponder
 Foolhardy it is to fathom oceans by a finger.

 Weep we-
 Gains your blood in our tears constancy
 Our tears a polish and sword in tendency 160 Its
 seat is in the arena of tyranny.
 You are a Qur'an in red
 Verses of your bravery wrote the blood
 In the desert as far as the sands scud
 Those sands turned into a field- 165

 Rich in red bunches as a shield.
 Blood is the crop, blood is the yield
 Its every branch is a sword, a dagger
 Uproots the tyranny in the noon of its summer.
 Hence, red is the field and shall he for ever. 170 O,

Tharallah!
 The garden of Eden; lo, what a mania!
 You planted in the burning desert of Karbala.
 With fruits red,
 Rivers bloody from bed to bed 175
 Buds to bloom martyrdom's red
 And trees in a row forming a green shade.
 Only loveful eyes see with looks in love fed.
 Akbar - you and in a quality bred;
 And the palm trees of consummate red. 180

Hurr — not a person but an attribute.
 At that side of the river to contribute:
 He parted the caravan and its plenitude.
 Bridges to a man your word, your look;
 Towards you he is in a hook 185
 As a food in a caravan for a cook.
 The brains in search of refuge
 Obtain from you light in a deluge.
 Desire for envy is a befitting subterfuge.
 Hurr's bleeding head and your skirt - a fate profuse! 190

Good is red after your martyrdom;
 Tears are daggers in your kingdom. Your pain is the
 pabulum
 For a journey - destination not datum
 The track of your blood is the way
 Terminates at the God's gateway. 195 You
 are from the blood's strain
 And we in your love mad remain.

Your blood sands were to sustain
 To gush from stones in a fountain.
 Oh, the fertile view- 200
 Tyranny has no enemy better than you,
 To a victim no acquaintance nearer than you.
 History gets brief in your class
 Hands do not meet at Karbala's pause,
 Galaxy of Existence there heats the brass;
 The worship moves round it, solarium draws. 205

Here the word ends,
 End too to end tends,
 At you no end bends.*

*First published in *Message of Thaqaalayn*, vol. 2, no. 1, and
 retrieved from
<http://www.alislam.org/mot/default.asp?url=TrackOfBlood.htm>.

L. 16. Hussaini, or Husaini, is an adjective, denoting
 association, or leaning, toward Imam al-Ḥusayn. The suffix –i
 is an adjective marker in both Arabic and Persian.

L. 17. Yazidi signifies association or inclination toward Yazīd
 (var. Yazid), or having some of his disgusting characteristics.

Ll. 21 and 22. The final –s in the words “Yazidis” and “Hussainis” is English plural marker.

L. 111. Regarding "Zabeehullah", or “Dhabīh Allāh”, “dhabīh” denotes “(blood) sacrifice or oblation”; consequently, “Dhabīh Allāh” means an entity presented as an oblatory sacrifice to the pleasure of Allah. Basically, the title was applied to Ismā‘īl (Biblical and English Ishmael; also Samuel), son of Ibrāhīm (Biblical and English) Abraham. In the Shiite culture, the term is used with a connotation to refer to Imam al-Ḥusayn.

L. 112. "Ismayeel" is a Persianized form of “Ismā‘īl” (explained above).

L. 115. “Moharram”, a variant form of “Muharram”.

L. 171. “Tharallah”, or “Thār Allāh” is a title of Imam al-Ḥusayn. Granted that ‘Thār’ literally means ‘blood revenge’, ‘vengeance’, or simply ‘retaliation’, it occurs frequently in the prescribed ziarat texts to be read for Imam al-Ḥusayn as one of the titles describing Imam al-Ḥusayn. In the ziarat contexts, it signifies ‘the person whose blood revenge will be taken by God’.

L. 172. “The garden of Eden” refers to the Paradise Garden. There are hadiths confirming that the precise site of Imam al-Ḥusayn’s burial chamber and sanctuary are indeed one of Paradise Gardens in this world.

L. 179. “Akbar” lit. “elder”, is a title of ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, the elder brother of the fourth Infallible Imam ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-‘Ābidīn. Akbar is used here as a shortened form. On Ashura, he was the first of the Hāshimids who went to the battlefield and achieved martyrdom.

L. 181. Hurr b. Yazīd al-Rīyāhī was a renowned man in Kufa. He met Imam al-Ḥusayn at a spot called Dhū Ḥaṣm, and prevented him from reaching Kufa. He did this on a mission from and at the command of Ibn Zīyād. However, on the day of Ashura, he realized the grave sin he had committed and decided to repent. To accomplish this, he left the army wherein he was a commander, and approached Imam al-Ḥusayn’s front. Having joined the Imam’s army and expressing his repentance, he asked Imam al-Ḥusayn if his repentance might be accepted to God. Afterwards, he sought permission from the Imam to fight the enemies and was martyred. He symbolizes last-minute repentance, eternal felicity, and salvation.

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