

RAM: Yazd --Fischer version.

z, 16 March 1970 (Eve of 9th Moharram). As darkness fell, a double line of dressed in black shirts came into the Husseineya from the direction of the id-e Jomae with zangir (chains) flagellating themselves on alternate shoulders chanting something about this being the 9th day of Moharram: they went into little mosque and formed a double line there to continue the flagellation. went into watch but became too much of a distraction for the younger boys. We then taken by our guide to "my masjid" where things had not started yet: so not a chance to measure by rough pacing the height of the alams: about 30 feet; carriers wear their turbans around their waist as a support. This masjid was main one, small with white walls except for a picture of Ali and a set of flags:

A - black flag

B,C,D - green flags

C,D - with white inscription: يا فضل



was served: Mike and I first. The place gradually filled, women in the back, in front--cigarettes as well as tea passed out during the ceremony. The first step to the mike was a young mullah apprentice; he was followed by a village "Gantry" mullah from the mountain village of Ardekan (?); the former read, latter after drinking something from a brown bottle got up and sang, later led by a second mullah at the mike doing the dasteh in 4/4 time. The next mullah chanted from a paperback while the previous two had tea and then left for next masjid. The procedure seems to be that these performers get about 1-2 tomans their performance and make the rounds of masjids; each masjid's festivities are scored by one man each night, in this case an office worker who was sitting with black western style hat and appeared as the most mournful of the mourners. The performer was a greybeard who sat on the stairs and told the story of Hussein: he had only 72 followers; how they had no water; he eventually looked at his hand, concluded and left. Then an old man sang, and a younger one sang from the top w/o the mike while an older man got onto the top-but-one step to sing and lead. A new mulla came in from the outside and sat down near the steps after singing ground and nodding to all around. Then the younger man who had just sang the floor got up and sang: we were told he gets one toman; followed by an old man with a dramatic scratchy voice (also a one toman performer): he orated and said something about us coming, and then sang apparently a real tear-jerker: women began to weep, men hit their foreheads; he ended by saying I'm very poor and took a collection which we contributed--he counted the money, thanked us, halved the money, giving the following poet (neither of these were mullahs) who sat on the lowest step--(ripple). After the performers were through, a procession was formed of a dual line of young men who took off their jackets under which they wore black shirts and did the dasteh in time to a chant of tonight is the 9th of Moharram. The procession went to the Friday Mosque where many people were already gathered, and singing ahun was in the chair; he was a high school teacher from Teheran, had studied music--supposedly he was being paid 22 tomans; he talked about Islam being democratic. This was followed by an inaudible mullah from Yazd who supposedly was getting 50 tomans.

17th (Eve of 10th Moharram): Zarch chasme. Mike Bonine and I went to a tented Husseineya to watch a passion play--began with the dasteh and preaching by a group of ahuns. Then men in Shia green and Syrian red re-enacted the Tragedy. This was followed by a parade of floats--horseback, camel-back, scooter-back: a lion weeping and eating the killed Hossein; Imam Hossein on a camel; Ali, Yezid, etc.; scenes of trying to get water.

18th (ASURA). Mike Bonine, Peter Sinton, Aram Ga'amagmi and I drove out to Mehriz. The naql was all decorated with mirrors on the front, black draped sides and back and a stylized painting of a mosque on the back. A bit of flak when Mike and I took pictures of the naql.

As it turned out, the lifting of the naql was not til the afternoon, so decided to go to Zarch, where a police official secured us the best seats in house. The Hosseineya was a large oblogg affair below a ruined citadel, we sitting on the second story with a magnificent view of the throngs below bringing mind the romance of the Imperial Roman colleseum.

The Tazia began with Shemr (the lt. to Yezid's general) dressed in red going up and leading away two boys dressed in green (boys of Islam). Then a flock of black clad children ran after a black-cloaked man with a white Arab headcloth, clapping their hands to their head in grief, chanting and running, kneeling, singing. They gathered round the tent which changed somehow from white to black when it was burned. Dasteh group came thru. And there was a procession lake last night of camel-and-horse carried Imam Hosseins, Gen. Yezid, Gen Shemr, and the body of Hossein. This was followed by a series of floats: a man in white who held the body of Hossein and alternatively polished it with a rag and clapped his hand to his thigh and mouth in a gesture of disbelieving grief; he came around the second time with binoculars looking off to see Hossein and with a camera which pointed at the crowd; the third time around he had 2 heads in a pan. Another float had a man with a cup at a well; another was a big pan of water. Another float had a dead body stained in blood being picked over by a lion and some live pigeons sitting on him; this float was followed by a gang of men in white-blood stained dresses with red-painted faces and hands, clapping their hands to their head. After the floats, about 150-200 men carried the naql from one end of the Husseineya to the other chanting 'Hossein, Hossein, Hossein'. At each end they set it down for a moment; carried it from end to end 3 times. We were told 15 sheep were sacrificed: a though we did not see the actual slaying we saw the blood of one sheep.