

# **A MONASTERY OF EUROPEAN MONKS, An Anonymous Persian**

Translated and Adapted by Frank J. Morlock C 2003 From the French of Alexandre Chodzko (1878)

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# A MONASTERY OF EUROPEAN MONKS, An Anonymous Persian Play

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Alexandre Chodzko (1878)

Etext by Dagny

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This play is dedicated to Mimi Arbabi

Special thanks to Amy Kimball for  
helping me obtain this and other rare works

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## CHARACTERS:

THE HEAD OF THE IMAM HUSSEIN

THE IMAM ZEINULABEDINE

SON OF HUSSEIN, a child

ZEINEB, his sister

SEKINA, his niece, a child

FATIMA, widow of Prince Kassem

KULSOUM, sister of Hussein

IBN SEAD, head of Yezid's Army

CHEMR, Arab officer, under the command of Ibn Sead

THE PRIOR OF THE MONASTERY

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A MONK

A MESSENGER

HATEF, a public crier

HADEDJA, wife of Mohammed

FATHEME, his daughter

JESUS CHRIST

MOSES

MOHAMMED

ALY

HASSAN

EVE

AGAR

RACHEL

THE DAUGHTER OF JETHRO

THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY

MOTHER OF MOSES

ADAM

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The stage represents an arid desert in the hottest heat of summer. The army of Yezid after having won a victory over the troops of the Imam Hussein, is escorting the prisoners to the city of Damascus. Everybody is mounted on horses or camels; while the cavalcade marches around the stage the actors talk and sing without halting or dismounting.

**THE IMAM ZEINULABEDINE:** (singing) God! I see myself a stranger here, deprived of aid and assistance. True believers! behold me here prisoner in the hands of rogues, without comfort, without friends, captive of the army of a cursed people. They've cut off the head of Hussein before my eyes; I saw his cadaver in a sea of blood. Pity my fate, prisoner of Koufiens that I am, the butt of infamous insults from these cruel miscreants!

**ZEINEB:** (singing) True believers! Have you ever seen someone more wretched than me? I am Zeineb, I am enduring numberless pains and tortures from the injustice of these miscreants. Before my own eyes I saw Hussein massacred, drowned in his blood! I am the prisoner of these tyrants who are leading me to Damascus and insulting me. Alas!

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**SEKINA:** (singing) Friends! they killed my father. I am overwhelmed with outrages! Behold me, friends, Sekina, daughter of the king of martyrs, I have eyes drowned with tears. My brother Aly Ekber succumbed; he was rolling in a mud made of his blood. I became captive of Koufiens. Ah! Lord, crushed under the weight of a hundred opprobriums and a thousand sufferings, I cry out: God have pity on me!

**FATIMA:** (singing) Muslims! my betrothal was converted into mourning. My nuptial house has become a house of mourning; my fiancé, Kassem, has fallen martyr under the sword of Koufiens, after having endured frightful tortures. Ah! my Kassem! Friends, have you ever seen a betrothed widow like me? In the midst of the path which was leading me to the object of my desires, behold I am kidnapped and thrown under the wheels of pitiless fortune! Friends, have you ever seen a fiancée as wretched as I?

**KULSOUM:** (singing) Muslims! I shiver, deprived of all aid, cut off from all that I most cherish, alas! a thousand sorrows! I am Kulsoum, broken by misfortune. The cruelty of my enemies leaves me alone and suffering. Destiny delivers me to the mercy of foreigners; it made me submit to a thousand frightful reversals. The light of my eyes, my poor Hussein, fell martyr on the arid plains of Kerbela.

**IMAM ZEINULABEDINE:** (singing) Muslims! Me! unfortunate Zeinulabedine, I am suffering day and night from the persecutions of these iniquitous rogues. They cut off the heads of my father and my brother in my presence; they cut off the two arms of my uncle Abbas. Separated from you, my father, I feel my soul sad and discouraged: do you see from on high how abandoned and without succor I am, o my father, o my excellent father!

**ZEINEB:** (singing) Me, Zeineb, who saw all the friends of my Hussein killed in the plain of Kerbela, I also had the sorrow to see, extinguished in his own blood, the light of my eyes. Yes, friends, at a few paces from me, Hussein was martyred by the cruelty of a traitorous enemy; he bled from all his body. O my brother, exterminator of gallant knights, where are you? Why were you separated from me, o my brother?

**IBN-SEAD:** My soldiers, devoted to me heart and soul, listen attentively to all that I command you. Our halting place today is still far off, comrades. My body is burning under the extreme heat of the sun. It's prudent to dismount here, to drink fresh water and to rest ourselves a bit; erect your tents, we will bivouac peacefully here for the whole night.

**CHEMR:** To the orders you've given, behold, we are obsequiously submitting. You are our emir, and we wait on your good pleasure, like true servants. Halt there, soldiers! dismount on this plain. Profit by the moments of rest that are granted to you. Erect your tents and your sheds. Quick, to work and then go take your nap. As for these prisoners, no pity; let them remain without shade, exposed to the sun, let their complaints and their moans reach the seventh heaven.

**ZEINULABEDINE:** (to Zeineb) Let me be your victim, o my poor and sorrowful aunt! a burning fever is consuming me. See me, as my emaciated and feverish body has no more strength to retain its soul ready to take flight. Tell me, how shall I think about it, my poor aunt? I am burning to death with the fires of fever, with thirst!

**ZEINEB:** May I serve as your ransom, my unfortunate Zeinulabedine. Don't weep, although you are without friends and without resources. What can I do for you? Patience, my friend, and confide ourselves to God: he remains to us the only one who can remedy so many ills; pray, that will comfort you.

**SEKINA:** May I be sacrificed for you, my aunt with an angel's face. Don't they have a few drops of water in this desert? Let's search for some, for the love of God, for I am choking with heat and thirst.

**ZEINEB:** Come, rest on my breast, my child. Your uncle loves you very tenderly, and if the river Euphrates made as much of it, he would come himself to make you the sacrifice of his limpid soul. Have patience, my daughter.

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Dry your tears, I cannot see them shed. Alas! I don't have any other water to offer you than the water of my eyes: me too, I am thirsty!

**SEKINA:** God! how I am suffering! have pity on my tortured body. The pains of thirst are breaking my entrails. I would much prefer to see the whole earth crumble over me. My aunt, all my soul for a single drop of water! I am burning, I am burning! help! I am dying! but who will staunch my thirst, there remains no one down here for me other than you, my aunt.

**ZEINEB:** Come, Sekina, sit by my side. For a moment rest your head on my knees. Don't weep, light of my eyes. You are tearing the heart out of me. Take patience, don't think of water. Here, drink from my eyes. A little hour of calm will comfort you. Truce to all these sighs.

**SEKINA:** Since you have no water, darling aunt, tell me what I ought to do, poor orphan that I am? When my father went to deliver himself to the place of his martyrdom, he called me to him. You remember with how many tears and prayers, he commended me to your care? Darling father! He's gone, and now he no longer exists, I have only you. Come, I'm staggering; sustain me with your hands, my aunt; prey to the ardors of thirst, I'm burning like a roast on the spit. Why, it's a burning furnace this desert! Yes, like food on hot coals, I'm consuming myself!

**ZEINEB:** These words are really very sad, o light of my eyes! Suffering is tearing them out of you, and each of them is going to resound to the marrow of my bones, but how to comfort you, my little Sekina? Calm yourself, perhaps God will deign to deliver us from this cruel test.

**SEKINA:** If I were to have a thousand lives, a thousand souls for myself alone, I would have willingly offered them to please you. How to find water in these sandy plains? Ah, my poor body, how suffering consumes it! My very soul is evaporating in this atmosphere enflamed by the igneous rays of the sun. O my aunt with an angel's face, the flames of the sun are burning my bones!

**ZEINEB:** Well, stay here, my unfortunate child, I am going to find this cursed Ibn Sead; I shall condescend to the point of addressing a demand to him. God will not abandon us, he will give us shade and water.

(Zeineb enters under the tent of Ibn Sead and speaks to him.)

**ZEINEB:** Hear me, Sead, man without faith! respect at least for a moment, the sacred laws of the prophet Mohammed; we are his descendants, we belong to the tribe of Hachem, you know it, to the very noble family of Mohammed of Arabia. Then as for you, you are then not Arabic; for these are your feelings of honor and loyalty? Where are your Arabic virtues, what example have you given us of them? Listen, at the present time you can be useful to us; profit by it; employ benevolence towards us.

**IBN SEAD:** (ironically) What are you demanding of me, then, noble Zeineb? What is it that procures me the honor of the visit of a princess! Let me know the service that it would be possible for me to render you; tell me of what you are in need.

**ZEINEB:** What I want, perverse man, is for you to have pity on us. Without shade, without water, exposed to the ardors of the sun, we are suffering from thirst. See these disheveled women, these children in tatters! Sekina is dying scorched by the fires of the dog days. The talon of sorrow is shooting through all the members of the poor child; to expose her longer in full day would be to aggravate her situation; let your self soften. From respect for the memory of the Prophet of two worlds, of my grand father, have erected for our use, at least some shreds of an old tent.

**IBN SEAD:** Sister of the rebellious imam, learn, learn, from sure science, that you will see nothing else from me but ignominy and unkindness on my part. Yes, grill in the sun, receive from it intense heat on your naked heads,

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howl and weep at your ease!

**ZEINEB:** Cursed miscreant! I am not asking you anything for myself, only have compassion for the orphans of Hussein. We are women, and we have nothing with which to veil ourselves from the shameless stares of your unruly soldiers of Koufa, who won't leave us a secluded corner of the encampment. Would you have the cowardice to suffer the eyes of a foreigner to see my disordered hair?

**IBN SEAD:** I won't hide from you, daughter of the illustrious Fatima, that it is the premeditated plan we've made to expose your unveiled heads to whoever really wants to see them. Yes, we've re clothed you in rags, as the butt of the amusement of the unruly soldiers. It's the right that a conqueror employs towards his vanquished enemy. Don't be surprised, slave of sorrow; you haven't had anything but the first test, Zeineb, worse will come and powerful humiliations therewith, don't doubt it!

**ZEINEB:** God, refuse him all grace in the two worlds. In the presence of the cadaver of Hussein, strike this tyrant with shame and misery. Listen, cursed myrmidon, you cannot refuse us the ground; at least assign us a solitary place in some corner of this frightful desert, leave us alone. There, perhaps, a breath of wind, more humane than you, will come to loan us its hospitable freshness.

**IBN SEAD:** Zeineb, curtail the words, woman with a broken heart; otherwise I will have you killed instantly. Go sit in the burning sun and steep your soul in bitterness. Silence! wretched woman. Get out of my sight!

**ZEINEB:** (withdrawing) God, come to the aid of the niece of your envoy; grant the prayer that my lips withered with thirst are addressing to you. It's the sister of Hussein that invokes you. Grant the unfortunate innocents who cry out in the midst of this desert, placed between opprobrium and slavery, on one side and the anguishes of thirst on the other. God, you know that I am a bird with broken wings; harken to me!

**KACID:** (a foot messenger who's just arrived) (1) My reverence to you, Ibn Sead, born under a good star. Hear my respectful tale, o master! Know that a troupe of white and black knights, being gathered with purpose of avenging the blood of the Imam Hussein, is in ambush, to fall unexpectedly on your camp tonight. They say, After having punished the army of Yezid, we will recapture the heads of the martyrs of the immaculate family of the Prophet. They are awaiting nightfall hidden hereabouts. Don't let them surprise you, glorious chief!

**IBN SEAD:** Hola! Chemr, it's you I'm talking to, good-for-nothing. A thousand blasphemies on you, vile dog; what new ruse have you plotted? Is it at your instigation that a number of friends and partisans of Aly have encircled us on all sides, so as to attack us here, this very night? They want to recapture from us, all our prisoners, to snatch from us all those heads, illuminated with haloes of martyrs. Say what expedient will you find in your guile to get us out safe and sane from this trap.

**CHEMR:** Don't worry about it, noble Ibn Sead. On the other side of this mountain is found a convent of Christian monks. Banish sadness from your heart. We will get there soon to set up our bivouacs; we will spend the night in the precincts of the citadel of the convent, at the approach of morning we will be free to pursue our march,

**IBN SEAD:** So be it! put yourself en route to the monastery, where we will stay peacefully tonight. (to prisoners) You, too, dwellers in the castle of sorrows, drag your miseries there, they will escort you there forthwith.

**ZEINULABEDINE:** Shameless Koufiens! To what degree will you molest us? Infamous ones, think of the day of the last judgement. Ah! by God! for the love of the Prophet, diminish your cruelties. Misfortune! misfortune.

(They arrive before the monastery.)

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**CHEMR:** Dweller in the Christian monastery! You who are completely obedient to the law of Jesus, could you admit us into your walls for a single night? We will enter there as true friends.

**THE PRIOR OF THE MONASTERY:** Who are you, and where are you coming from with this army? Explain to us your secret intention. What have you to do in the midst of monks, chief of warriors? If you have business with one of ours, tell us his name.

**CHEMR:** This army that you see composed of whites and blacks, is marching under the flags of Caliph Yezid. An Arab, having had the fantasy of becoming Caliph, our sovereign ordered us to let him know what he thought of it. He sent me with all his army, and the edge of my dagger decided the rest. Know that the false pretender gnawed the dust, a few days ago, thanks to my valour. We are bringing his head to Damascus, as a gift to the Caliph. All the members of his family are fallen into our hands. We are returning triumphant and joyful to Damascus. Surprised by night in your oasis, we demand the hospitality of a single night under the roof of your monastery. Don't refuse the shelter of it to our soldiers who are tired by a long march.

**THE PRIOR:** Our monastery is not spacious enough to receive all this army. Nonetheless, it can establish its bivouacs outside the enclosure of the convent, but hear me, you can confide your prisoners to us, we will take care of them. Also, give us those heads with resplendent haloes; only to see them, I feel my heart taken with affection for them.

**CHEMR:** So be it! Take these heads then, brave monk. They are the heads of rebels of the family of the prophet Mohammed. Carefully guard these usurping skulls; but take especial care of the self proclaimed head of the religion. (he leaves)

**THE PRIOR:** (taking from a lance the head of the Imam Hussein) God! this beautiful head has the effect on me of a freshly blossomed tulip! The eyes of the terrestrial globe will become red from weeping for his death. Lord God, from where does this head come from, full of noble blood, that's coagulated, of the same as my own blood, which I feel flowing in my suffering heart? To what zodiac does this star belong? God! from what oyster has come this royal pearl, Lord! All these captives, who are they then? And that young man down there, whose wailings and tears make my heart bleed? who is he?

**THE HEAD OF THE IMAM HUSSEIN:** (speaking in Arabic) Don't think that God pays no attention to the injustices committed by wrongdoers. (Koran, xiv, 43)

**THE PRIOR:** Ah! my God, did I really hear? Where's that voice coming from that burns my entrails! Earth and heaven resonate with its melodious ring. It slid in the ear of my spirit. Could it be a dream? But, I'm awake, so what is it, my God? Could it be the angel Esrafil sounding the trumpet of the day of resurrection?

**THE HEAD RECITES:** Those who deliver themselves to iniquity will one day see to what deplorable fate their conduct leads. (Koran, surate XXVI, 228)

**THE PRIOR:** Brothers of the convent, run, come! tell me have you heard this voice? say, for the love of God from where this plaintive melody is coming to us? It absorbs my intelligence, and the calm of my heart is abandoning me. One would say these wails are coming from on high.

**A MONK:** Be persuaded, lord prior, that these sighs and these wails are coming from this cut-off head. The lips move in repeating the verses of Pentateuch, they are explaining to us the mysterious sense of the Evangelist. But no, when I listen more attentively, strange phenomenon, the movements of this tongue of marvelous eloquence are piously spelling out the verses of two chapters of the Koran, that of Kehf, as well as that of Touhid.



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**PRIOR:** For the love of God, answer me, head! to what man's soul did you belong? Faded rose, in whose garden were you plucked? The light of eternal salvation radiates in your cheeks. Tell me, head! of what sovereign's feast are you the torch? Ah! if Jesus Christ had left us a son like you, in this world! Soul of the universe, who are you? Embloodied skull, reply to my questions? You know everything. From the midst of the garden of faith, called by its name, the bird of my spirit. Would you then be Moses, or the miraculous breath of Jesus? Open your mouth eloquent with marvels, explain to me this prodigy.

**THE HEAD:** I am the martyr of Kerbala, my name is Hussein, my profession, extirpating the enemies of God. My grand-father is Mohammed, my father, Aly, the best of women gave me birth. My name is Hussein, my country is the city of Medina, my place of rest, the sands of the desert of Kerbala. Rose newly blossomed in the garden of flowers of the true faith, my name is Hussein! My mother's named Fatima, daughter of Mohammed; withered by a thousand humiliations my name is Hussein! All these heads that you see were the lights of my eyes: my family. The same disaster has tread us all under its murderous heel. My name is Hussein!

**THE PRIOR:** Fruit of the tree of the orchard of Fatima! beautiful cypress, that the maternal hands of Fatima were so pleased to caress! Oh! eternally cursed be the one who separated it from your body. You who made the weeping eyes of Fatima shine with joy! Hear me, monks, everybody run and bring here some musk and flasks of rose water. It's a meritorious work to perfume these heads, I will perfume them all, but especially that of the light of the eyes of Fatima. Spread the amber, perfumes, and flowers on the tresses and on the temples of the heads of the family of Mohammed!

**A MONK:** Here, receive from our hands the musk and rose water, Prior. The adoration of these heads is an obligatory honor for us. Tomorrow, before God, they will intercede in our favor, plunged as we are up to our necks, in the quagmires of sins.

**THE PRIOR:** May I fall victim of each of the tresses of your hair, o Imam Hussein, martyr of the path of God, so that I may serve as ransom to your soul tortured by so many afflictions. Thanks to the light which radiates from your head, o elect of two worlds, our cell has become the object of jealousy of palaces in paradise. Where are you then, Fatima, come, come to the head of your cherished son, and hollow out your soul with torrents of tears. Where is she to wash the mud from these tresses with the waters of her eyes? Where is your illustrious grandfather, the envoy of God? where is your glorious sire, Aly, prince of mortals.

(Enter Hatef or a public crier.)

**HATEF:** Be attentive to the scenes of affliction which are going to roll out before your eyes. Here's the spirit of the first man created by God: he's coming down into this monastery to pay his visit of condolence to the head of the Imam Hussein. The prophet Adam is arriving here, eyelids moist.

**ADAM:** (entering) Martyr of Kerbala, light of the eyes of Mohammed, why is your head of light separated from your body? Could I fall victim of your noble head, o Hussein, victim of your eyes full of tears, o Hussein! Cut-off head, tell me, where is the body from which you are so cruelly severed? I salute you glory of two worlds! Martyr fallen on the path that guides us towards God! Glorious Imam, receive the homage of Adam, who would be proud to expiate the sufferings of your soul by those of his. Luminous head, you will shine henceforth on the breast of eternal felicity. Glory to your martyr, soul elected by God, you will appear in person before his throne, all pure and shining with whiteness!

**HATEF:** Behold the moment of the arrival of Abraham, friend of God. He's coming here with damp eyes, to pay his visit of condolence. He's uttering sighs, he's wailing. Run to meet the friend of the God of truth! Honor him! he's descending from on high, and all in tears, coming to present the tribute of his sorrow, to the deceased of glorious memory.

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**ABRAHAM:** (entering) As for me, the friend of God, I'm coming to see the head of the Imam Hussein, to see it with these same eyes, which, from weeping, are stained with blood. I, who constructed the sanctuary of Kaba, I who first placed this angular stone where night and day all the looks, all the hopes of true believers are directed toward it. I salute you, pride of two worlds, martyr to iniquity, lying down dead on the divine way! I salute you, joy of the maternal breast of the best of women! To serve as ransom for your luminous head, to die for you, embloodied torso, would be a true joy for Abraham. Unfortunate Prince, what felony could you have committed to have paid with your head? Is this indeed your place, this frightful desert of Kerbala? Infamous rogues! Denuded of feelings of shame and gratitude toward their prophet, they murdered you!

**HATEF:** Get back, monks, make way for Jesus who's arriving to weep for the illustrious offshoot of the prophetic stump. He wants to pay his visit of condolence to the son of the prince of the universe. Here he is, child of Mary who, from the height of the seventh heaven, is descending here with Moses.

**JESUS:** (entering) I am Jesus, spirit of God (Roukh-ukllah) eyes big with tears, I am coming here to acquit myself of the last duties owed to the head of Hussein. Rose of Aly's flower garden, light of his two eyes, joy of the best of women, I salute you! Victim of iniquitous men, fallen in the desert of misfortune, receive my homage! Ah! may all the meritorious works through which Jesus, persecuted like you was really deserving of God, serve as your ransom, noble head! May I be sacrificed to your head crowned with a halo, to your immaculate head! What faithless traitor dared to commit this unheard of sacrilege? How to lay a hand on this innocent head! Come orator of God, (2) approach, contemplate these features of the Shah of religion, this blessed existence, in which are depicted this ray which emanates from the eye of the mercy of two worlds.

**MOSES:** Greetings, skull filled with blood of Hussein! May I fall sacrificed in honor of these decomposed and unrecognizable features of the king of two worlds! What demon of a man was able to defile himself with such a crime? A thousand maledictions on the impious one who beat down the slender palm of your princely stature, o Hussein.

**HATEF:** Prophets of God, I summon you all such as you are. Come respectfully to contemplate the remains of the prince of mortals. Let each of you, after having crossed two hands on his breast in a sign of reverence and humility, come here, so that for this act to be agreeable to God, you can be paid in cash with eternal happiness. Behold that, to visit the head of Hussein, king of two worlds, is coming his grandfather, Mohammed, Mohammed the Arab, the advocate of humanity before the tribunal of last judgement. He's coming to honor this head, heart full of bitterness.

**MOHAMMED:** Why didn't I succumb in your place? Where are you! Make me hear your voice, and may I fall victim to the melody of that cherished voice! Where are you luminous head? My child, my soul, speak, speak, fruit of my entrails!

**THE HEAD:** Prophet of God, if you are seeking Hussein, come here. I greet you, sire blessed by Hussein. Come contemplate the autumn of your spring, your Hussein. Come take in the cross of your hand, cherished father, and see all they have done to your people. Examine my severed head; left in the middle of a convent of Christians; count one by one all the stigmata of wounds and ignominies.

**MOHAMMED:** Decapitated martyr, I salute you! Joy of the maternal breast of the best of women, I salute you! Martyr of the path of God, you grandfather brings you envy. He would repurchase the miseries of your existence at the price of his own. Brother of beloved Hassan, I salute you! I have trouble recognizing you, my poor lad? Tell me, young tree, who cut you down? O most beautiful cypress of my nursery, what ax, what hand of an infamous executioner cut you and rumpled in the mud with the blood of your young shaft! This head which, like my soul, had my breast for its resting place, what tyrant severed it?

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**THE HEAD:** I have so much to complain of over the bad procedures of a part of your people, o prophet of God! Your pretended friends have trampled under their feet all the sacred laws of loyalty and gratitude. Your nation, see what it has made of me. It cast to the wind the shrub of my being, after having broken over our heads a thousand weight of miseries and ignominies! See, I have no hands to entwine your neck, and to ask your pardon.

**MOHAMMED:** May I be sacrificed for your soul, my poor Hussein, the same as your radiant head, my young scion of Spring. Why are your tresses moist with blood? Speak, tell me what sacrifice must be made to forget what you have suffered. These tresses, whose perfume I used to love to smell, how could I calmly contemplate the disorder and dust that tarnishes them? Lord, where are your brothers, what fell to the share of your sisters? Recount, to your afflicted grand-father all that happened to you, for my eyes, after having exhausted the source of tears at your decease, are weeping blood.

**THE HEAD:** Hear me, grandfather crowned by eternal glory; cast one of your glances on the misfortunes and humiliations I have endured. The cadavers of all my allies and friends strew the path of God, martyrs to the scoundrelous impieties of rebels! The remains of your noble family find themselves prisoners in the hands of the enemy. In his hate, he has joined the arms of sick women; at the end of his lance, he murdered their orphan heads! My poor Sekina also is captive, that very faithful child! The young Fatima goes, daily, from door to door begging her bread. Abandoned prisoner, thirsty, mendicant, without either father or mother, with livid cheeks, all bruised by blows from the brutal hand of Chemr, that's what my poor child Sekina is reduced to!

**HATEF:** Prophets, be on your guard! I see coming here the lion of God, the cup-bearer of the miraculous waters of Kouser, the illustrious Aly, with eyes drowned in tears to honor the mortal remains of his son, Hussein, he's advancing, he's weeping. Eyes damp, both hands beating his breast, the lion of bravery is approaching!

**ALY:** I am Aly, my title is: Sovereign of the divine power who is obeyed and honored, from the summit of the highest mountain of the globe unto the abysses of the Ocean that is haunted by whales' skeletons. Where is your luminous head? o freshness of my eyes! Make yourself heard, I beg you, tender shaft of my tree?

**THE HEAD:** Greetings to you, o my blessed father! Come and may this head without a torso roll at your feet to honor your arrival here. What bounty not to be forgotten by your best friend! This favor, granted to the place in which I find myself, rends it rival of by the groves of Paradise, jealous of your preference. Unfortunate that I am, I no longer have my feet to run joyously to meet you, nor my soul to pour treasures on the road that leads you towards me.

**ALY:** Decapitated martyr, I salute you. Hussein, abandoned by all who loved you most, I salute you! Soul of my father, in what condition do I find you? What do these disfigured features of your beautiful head mean? Why do I see this severed throat burned by thirst? Since our separation I wept blood thinking of you my son. And you, how do you feel after being severed from the love of your own? Could there then be enemies amongst my faithful inhabitants of Koufa, who would dare to lay hands on your persons? What has become of your brother, Abbas, where is Aly Ekber? where is Kassym, the betrothed? where is our Aly Asgar? What will happen to your unfortunate sons that I don't see?

**THE HEAD:** May I be your victim, my beloved father, whose sight gratifies my heart with the gift of joy, and made my eyes shine! For what reason didn't you come to help me in the desert of Kerbela? Why didn't you deign to have pity on us at the moment Chemr was cutting my throat? Yet, the sad Zeineb sent you many sighs and complaints. If you had wanted to aid us, it would have been easy for you to deliver us. Father, my cadaver lies forgotten in the sand of the desert for three days, for such was the delay necessary to the vengeance of Ibn Sead, that fearless rogue. By the shores of the Euphrates, the sword of injustice cut the two arms of my brother Abbas; father! my Aly Akbar was hacked to pieces; my Kassem had hands and feet reddened with blood.

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**ALY:** Just God! could you really have permitted these traitors to decapitate Hussein? O my son! Let me place a kiss on your throat gorged with blood!

**HATEF:** Behold the Imam Hassan, this healthy balm for all aching souls; the sweet chief of nations is coming here sobbing. He too wants to see the head of the King (Seid) of men and nations.

**HASSAN:** I am Hassan, cypress from the plantation of Mohammed the Arab. As for me, whose heart was locked by the key in the hand of pain, locked to the access of all terrestrial joy! After convincing myself of the inconstancy of things down here, I threw into the mouth of fate the debris of my heart. It's I whose drinking cup was poisoned, and I have drunk the lees of misfortune to the depths! I salute you, embloodied head of Hussein; it would be sweet to me to die for this beautiful and noble body that it once crowned. Why did they pitilessly decapitate it? Grant me a moment of conversation, o my brother!

**THE HEAD:** Hassan, see what has become of your Hussein; contemplate his mouth streaming with blood, o light of my eyes! You fell martyr to poison, as for me, martyr to the sword. Two brothers, two cadavers on the path to salvation.

**HASSAN:** Ah! rather enshroud my head under black ashes than see yours separated from its torso! Still some words, my brother; they are falling from your lips one by one like so many pearls and rubies. Tell me, our Kassem, who I loved so much, that flower from my rose bush, that cypress by the shore of my stream, where is he?

**THE HEAD:** Listen, my poisoned brother, martyr with a broken heart, my entrails torn apart by the venom! Miscreant rogues, after having killed me, put me in this deplorable condition that you see: at the same time, for Kassem, they gave a banquet in the desert of Kerbela, joyous banquet! By a caprice of fortune, the preparations for his wedding were converted into funeral pomps and his nuptial couch into a hearse for the dead.

**HATEF:** Step to the side! For here's the mother of mortals; Eve is coming with dampened eyes to render a visit to the grandson of our Prophet. The illustrious companion of Adam is stepping forward to see the head of Hussein disfigured by thirst.

**EVE:** Please God that Eve fall victim to your luminous head, Hussein Light of eyes, what felony made you guilty to have been decapitated? This swan's throat, the favorite repose in the times of the Prophet, was severed by the hate of barbarians. I salute you, head of Hussein, overflowing with blood, receive the homage of our tears of blood. What murderer raised a sacrilegious hand on this halo crowned face? Instruct me: where are your sisters Zeineb and Kulsoun? Why don't I see here your sad orphans or your daughters? A single word of yours would make my heart quiver with delights!

**HATEF:** Make way! The mother of Isaac, the victim of God, is coming with dampened eyes; noble Agar, companion of the bed of Abraham, the friend of God. She's coming to weep over the head of Hussein, king of demons and men. Observe how she's suffering, how many sighs and lamentations agitate her breast.

**AGAR:** I am Agar, in prey to the most profound affliction, my eyes bleeding. Agar, separated from you, martyr, doesn't know how to do anything but deliver herself up to wailing and lamentations. I salute you, light of the eyes of Fatima, noble head of the asylum of mortals. I would willingly offer mine to save yours. Why then, did you thus renounce all hope of living longer? The dwelling place of angels and demons has become a seraglio of mourning since your death.

**HATEF:** The mother of Joseph, Rachel, is coming to wail over the head of Hussein, Imam of the age. She's murdering her breast with blows of her fists, tearing out her hair and breaking into tears. All this to honor the obsequies of the master of martyrs.

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**RACHEL** As for me, mother of Joseph, I am bringing my heart distressed with sorrow because of the sad end of Hussein, prince of the age. Rachel would be happy to have the opportunity to repurchase with her own person the torments dried by your breast covered with wounds. I salute you, head of Hussein, gorged with blood. My son, Joseph, is your devoted servant. May I fall victim of your face, pale like the moon! Curse on the murderer who insulted your mortal remains! O Hussein! Would that I were able to sacrifice my own head to save yours; yes, the soul of my soul to revive your inanimate body.

**HATEF**: This woman who's approaching sad and wailing is the daughter of Jethro. The great sorrow that she's experiencing is like a cloak torn apart in shreds. Behold her beating her head with both hands, weeping at the sight of the severed head of Hussein.

**THE DAUGHTER OF JETHRO**: A thousand times I would have sacrificed my soul for you, o Hussein, light of the world. I am the daughter of Jethro. Homage to your luminous head, o Imam Hussein! Head whose glitter cannot be tarnished by the blood which inundates it. All the Cherubin of Heaven are suffering over it even as I. I have no more strength to contemplate your severed head, and I would be offered as a burnt offering for a single glance from you.

**HATEF**: I see coming now the mother of Jesus; she's desolated, she's sighing, she's sobbing and covering with mourning ashes her floating hair. The more she approaches the head of Hussein, the more her lips are fecund in exclamations, her eyes in tears. She wants to honor duly, the death of the descendant of Aly.

**MARY**: As for me, Mary, struck by affliction, desolated and beside myself, I am covering myself with ashes of mourning on account of you. Ah! would that it had pleased God that Mary had been sacrificed in place of this cherished head; would that it had pleased God that the entire earth collapse in ruins, rather than having served as the theatre of a crime so atrocious! Poor Fatima, when she had learned what became of the light of her eyes, when she shall have seen that her son Hussein has been massacred by a vile, unruly soldiery, poor mother! Her screams will bring on to earth the day of last judgement. Receive my greeting, o light of the two eyelids of Fatima! I would be blind rather than find you in such a state, than rest my gaze on the glories of this severed head. O seventh heaven, I cast on you my screams, my maledictions; God! tear out Mary's eyes, but spare her the sight of the mutilated body of the dearest of all imams.

**HATEF**: Now comes the mother of Moses, with a hundred sighs and lamentations to visit the head of the leader of men and genies. She's arriving with eyes in tears, with gestures expressing her sincere sorrow, She's approaching the head of Hussein while striking her head and her breast.

**THE MOTHER OF MOSES**: Head fallen beneath the sword of an enemy, accept my homage. Tell me, who separated you from your beautiful body? Who is the infamous traitor who made himself guilty of this culpable felony? I salute you, light of the eyes of men and spirits, martyr by crime, majestic imam Hussein! Was this the reward of your virtues, just this decapitated cadaver abandoned to the desert wolves? Ah! let me serve as ransom for this pure and halo crowned head. God let it be that this spectacle blind me, and let me no longer see in a similar condition relics of this jewel of the world.

**HATEF**: Hadedja, mother of Fatima, grand mother of the imam Hussein, is coming here to visit the late prince. She has eyes filled with pink, heart fatigued by sorrow. See how, all upset, she's coming to pay her farewells and weep.

**HADEDJA**: I am Hadedja, your grandmother, o Hussein. I am desolate and wail over you, inconsolable at not having been able to sacrifice myself to save your innocent head. Tell me, where is the rest of your body. Why were you decapitated? Scoundrels!! you have never blushed with shame nor feared the wrath of the prophet of God? Rose from my daughter's garden, I salute you: Alpha of the constellation of Capricorn, I salute you!! Cherished head, receive this homage from my afflicted soul! At the sight of this embloodied skull, my heart is

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twisting and tearing itself apart like a stuffed rag.

**HATEF:** Get back, get back, make room! The illustrious Fatima is coming to visit the head of the prince of martyrs. White monks and blacks, you all that may be here, allow the disconsolate mother of Hussein the martyr, the protectress of mortals on the day of resurrection, to pass. Prophets of God, I conjure you in the name of God, withdraw to a respectful distance, straighten yourselves up in line on both sides, honor the pearl of modesty, Fatima who is descending from paradise to come here. (3)

**FATIMA:** Victim of the sword of unjust persons, let me be your courage! Rose hardly blossomed in the gardens of the true faith, let your mother be sacrificed to you.

**THE HEAD:** O my sad mother, you don't want me to suffer alone, my best friend, you are coming here to share my pains. Come see what I've become.

**FATIMA:** Yes, I am your poor mother, my eyes weep with blood, here I am unfortunate and forsaken by you.

**THE HEAD:** Mother with a heart distressed by bitterness! The hand of nasty Chemr has left you without a son, mother, come see what I am become.

**FATIMA:** Where then is Ekber, of the purple cloak? Where is Kassem in his rose colored tunic? Tell it to me, and let your mother become your victim.

**THE HEAD:** Mother! your Ekber experienced death as a true martyr. Kassem rolled in his own blood! how many calamities are unchained against us, come, and for a moment see what I have become.

**FATIMA:** I salute you, martyr of cruelty! Broken beneath the sword of tyrants, drowned in your blood! I salute you! Unhappy head, far from your body, I salute you! Where is your cadaver? Your mother is ready to die merely at the sight of your head. Ah! let me be the victim of these disfigured features! Why haven't the waves of blood hidden your body from me? Speak, Hussein, speak, and may I be sacrificed as a burnt offering for you.

**THE HEAD:** Greetings, daughter of the prophet of mortals! Mother, be welcome. To please you, Hussein would sacrifice his soul a thousand times; even now he would have thrown himself at your feet to thank you for your arrival here. Behold indeed, your Hussein, the light of your eyes. Behold what this iniquitous nation has made of us. Barbarians, in their sordid cruelty, they severed my head. O my mother, what I have endured, no being created has ever endured.

**FATIMA:** O my star scintillating through a cloud of blood! Unhappy mother that I am, the rubies of your vermilion cheeks are bathed in the water of blood. You are unrecognizable o light of my dampened eyes! God! why aren't you striking me with blindness when I contemplate these horrors! A head noble like this one, drinking his blood, poor mother! Tell me, my son, where is your Zeineb? You are miserly of words, the two doors of the gate of sortie of your sweet talk are closing before the tenderness of you mother. It's night, mortals are reposing their heads on pillows of rest, and yours on the earth without other bed than that of desert stones. Tell your mother all the details of your martyrdom.

**THE HEAD:** Loving mother, if I tell you all that this severed head has suffered, you wouldn't have the strength to listen to me. In the midst of an unheard of distress, the storm broke our frail skiffs. See my cadaver on the earth, my head on the point of a lance! No one other than the sword has seen or heard what happened inside me. No one other than the arrow has penetrated to the depth of my heart A river of tears was given me to drink, and nothing but mortal wounds have had pity on me! Except for thirst, no one cared what happened inside me. Except for the moving sand no one placed my body on their breast. No plant has grown up in my garden except the poppy of regret. Injustice and cruelty exhausted on me all the springs of their rage. The shouts of my little children: Thirst!

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thirst! were joined in the death rattle of my agony.

**FATIMA:** Ashes of penitents cover the head of Fatima, and let her no longer have eyes! What then were your sins in this world, o my Hussein? Your throat cut and open mouthed, your head severed from your body, like that of a sheep of a sacrificer. God, what fate will your brothers meet, your friends, your allies, your disciples? What has become of Aly Ekber, light of your heart and eyes, and Abbas, and Kassem, and Asgar? What has happened to the sad Zeineb and to Kulsoum in the midst of so many ignominies. And that charm of your breast, the pretty Sekina, how could she stand to face so many privations?

**THE HEAD:** Unhappy mother, you would be too much afflicted by learning the disasters of your orphans. I cannot recount to you the story of brave Kassem. It would be painful for me to pass over the pearl of his martyrdom in the thread of the story. He fell stiff, like a tear from the eyes, on that oasis, hands and feet streaming blood; as if he was painted like a newlywed. (4) When I cast my last look on Aly Ekber, I felt as if a mountain had just fallen on me, each of his members was bruised, broken, polluted with mud and blood. No one gave water to my orphaned infant children. Abandoned by the whole world they sought for me with their feverish lips, and I, thanks to Yezid, I sent them, in the guise of water, a stream of blood from my wounds!

**FATIMA:** (to her father) Prophet, do you hear what these evil ones have done to Hussein? Pitiless in their cruelty, they have severed his head. Be judge, tell me, my father how can I help screaming: Ah! God, God, avenge the death of my son! Judge, if I can see my child, abandoned, degraded!

**MOHAMMED:** Don't afflict yourself to this degree, Fatima, your father is honoring you; he would sacrifice his life to you rather than see a tear of yours. You have the right to pity your assassinated son, drowned in his own blood. But the true cause of this martyrdom's a mystery for the reward of this martyr God will place in our hands the key to Paradise and the key to Hell, at the day of the last Judgement. He will leave to your good pleasure the future destinies of our people. Then it will be free for you, my daughter, to extract from the murderers of Hussein, a vengeance such as you shall choose.

**FATIMA:** Then so be it. But as we weren't present at Kerbela, on the day of his death, let's go there right away, my father, to acquit ourselves of the last duties about his cadaver. Let's honor it with lamentations and funereal songs! Let's let tears of blood shower from our eyes.

**MOHAMMED:** You can do it, my daughter. Surround it with such honors and funeral pomps as you please, and let the whole surface of the globe, from the oceanic abode of the whale to the celestial abode of the moon, be inundated by your tears. Listen only to your sorrow, bruise your cheeks, let your straggly hair float at the whim of the wind.

**FATIMA:** (singing) (5) Alas! o light of my eyes! what's become of you? His head falls from his shoulders and rolls on the ground; his cadaver struggles in blood, on the desert of Kerbela. Child of my soul, I am his victim, victim of a single glance from your eyes. Ah! if I could die for you, son of my soul. God! behold I am without a son. My entrails bleed at the thought of being separated from him. Ah! let your mother fall like an expiatory offering for your soul, for your body! And your children, tell me, how shall I see them slaves in a foreign country? How shall I see your orphans, o son of my soul?

**MOHAMMED:** Hussein, your grandfather, the powerful, renders you homage, and his heart splits open in recalling what you have suffered. The time of separation has come; receive my farewells, light of my eyelids! Come, come, let me press your head against my breast and let me expire in weeping at this moment of our separation. (5) Without you, how will I enjoy repose in sublime paradise? How not to wail and sigh being far from you?

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**FATIMA:** My son, I say my farewells, joy of my breast, worn out with sorrow. I'm unaware who is intoning songs of commiseration in your honor, yet one more kiss goodbye and I am going: God watch over you. From the height of my abode in paradise, I will follow you with my prayers. God keep you!

**THE HEAD:** Part! O my angel-faced mother. The only prayer that I would still make to you is to commend Sekina to you. Let her soul be as dear as yours, watch over her youth, protect her. Don't forget my other children, nor my inconsolable sisters. O perjured men! is it by insulting them that you prove your gratitude for the blessings of our grand-father?

**MOHAMMED:** Nation of ingrates! I will bear the burden of your perversities. You having always been inclined toward evil, my heart never ceased to burn, night and day and to exhale incense in prayers so as to expiate your sins. Is it thus that you prove the respect owed to the rights that I had over you? Is it thus that you acquit the debt of devotion toward me! You have withered my heart with a bloody caustic, you have cast to the wind the flowers of my garden, poisoned my children, refused shade and water to my daughters, who prayed to you for it, lips dried with thirst.

(All the prophets and prophetesses disappear.)

**THE PRIOR:** May I fall victim to your head, o pride of two worlds! Explain to me, elect of men and of demons, where these women dressed in black came from? They pronounced over your head grief for the deceased, and rendered you funeral honors. What does this whole crowd of male and female weepers, who struck their breasts over your mortal remains signify?

**THE HEAD:** Those three women that you noticed, weeping more than the other were Hadedja, Mary and Eve. As for the one who left me last, know that she was my mother, the august Fatima.

**THE PRIOR:** Hussein, light of the eyes of the very powerful Mohammed, souvenir left to mortals by the courageous Aly, my skull is burning with the love that you've just inspired me with. Fulfill my humble prayer, martyr fallen under the sword of the unjust. I want you to convert me to your own religion, O Hussein, I renounce the stole of a Christian priest.

**THE HEAD:** Recite after me the formula of the profession of faith in Islam; say I confess there is no God other than Allah, and that Mohammed is sent from God, and Aly, friend of God.

**THE PRIOR:** God, don't forget on the day of Judgement the words I am pronouncing: I confess that there is no God other than Allah. (6)

**CURTAIN**

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The following footnotes were provided by M. Chodzko at the places indicated in the text.

1. Kacid, a foot messenger, and Sapar, peik, courier, messenger on horse or camel back.
2. Kelim Ullah, title that Orientals give to Moses. Each prophet, according to them has one which characterizes him. Thus Jesus Christ is Spirit of God, Abraham, friend of God; Mohammed Ambassador or envoy of God, Isaac, victim of God.
3. Among Muslims the custom means as well that a woman of distinction is arriving somewhere, all men finding themselves on her passage withdraw. To look her in the face would be an impardonable act against decency, an



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affront to public modesty.

4. It's known that in Persia on the wedding day, friends of the newly married conduct him to baths, perfume his hair and paint his hands and feet red (with henna), especially the toes.

5. In the original, *nouhe*, song of grief. The modern Greeks and many other nations have still kept this custom. They are the *Nenioe* of ancient tragedies.

6. The body of a dead Muslim must be interred as quickly as possible, otherwise his soul will have no rest. As soon as the deceased has been buried, with the customary rites, the angelic inquisitors, *Nekir* and *Munkir*, come to ask him if he really knows the Muslim catechism. This examination completed, they lead him before the tribunal, where judgement is pronounced. That's why the soul of *Hussein* cannot enter into paradise to rejoin his relatives, before his cadaver has been interred with all the honors which are owed to it.