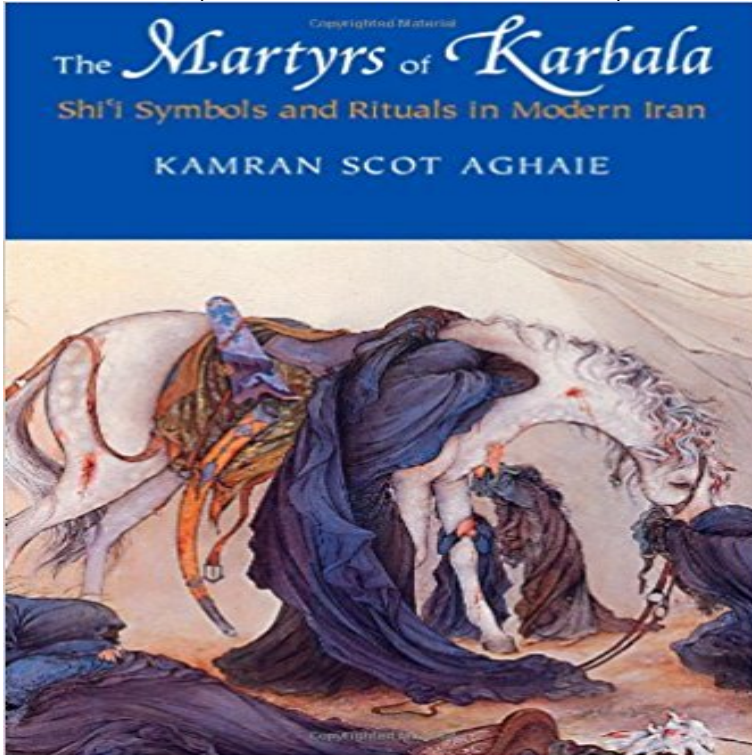


# The Martyrs of Karbala: Shii Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran



This innovative study examines patterns of change in Shiâ€™s symbols and rituals over the past two centuries to reveal how modernization has influenced the societal, political, and religious culture of Iran. Shiâ€™s, who support the Prophet Mohammadâ€™s progeny as his successors in opposition to the Sunni caliphate tradition, make up 10 to 15 percent of the worldâ€™s Muslim population, roughly half of whom live in Iran. Throughout the early history of the Islamic Middle East, the Sunnis have been associated with the state and the ruling elite, while Shiâ€™s have most often represented the political opposition and have had broad appeal among the masses. Moharram symbols and rituals commemorate the Battle of Karbala in 680 CE, in which the Prophet Mohammadâ€™s grandson Hoseyn and most of his family and supporters were massacred by the troops of the Umayyad caliph Yazid. Moharram symbols and rituals are among the most pervasive and popular aspects of Iranian culture and society. This book traces patterns of continuity and change of Moharram symbols and rituals in three aspects of Iranian life: the importance of these rituals in promoting social bonds, status, identities, and ideals; ways in which the three major successive regimes (Qujars, Pahlavis, and the Islamic Republic), have either used these rituals to promote their legitimacy, or have suppressed them because they viewed them as a potential political threat; and the uses of Moharram symbolism

by opposition groups interested in overthrowing the regime. While the patterns of government patronage have been radically discontinuous over the past two centuries, the roles of these rituals in popular society and culture have been relatively continuous or have evolved independently of the state. The political uses of modern-day rituals and the enduring symbolism of the Karbala narratives continue today.

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