Two Images of Husain: Accommodation and Revolution in an Iranian Village

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Abstract
In academic circles, a common explanation for the success of the Iranian revolution has been the powerful effect of Shi'i religion and ritual on Iranians. Iranians are pictured as almost instinctively responding to the call of religious revolution. Supposedly, they present themselves for martyrdom almost as a reflex. The 1978 'ashura rituals mourning the death of Imam Husain are thought to have been especially compelling in sweeping Iranians into revolutionary action for this reason; emotions evoked through participation in the traditional 'ashura rituals automatically drew Iranians into the process of revolution. Singlehandedly, Shi'i worldview and ritual were supposed instrumental in changing Iranians into a nation of revolutionary activists. I will argue that such is not the case, but that rather a transformation in the understanding of the central meaning of Shi'i Islam among the Iranian masses coinciding with changing economic and political conditions was instrumental in bringing about the success of the Iranian revolution.

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