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## The Iconography of the Islamic Republic of Iran

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Iran

SASKIA GIELING

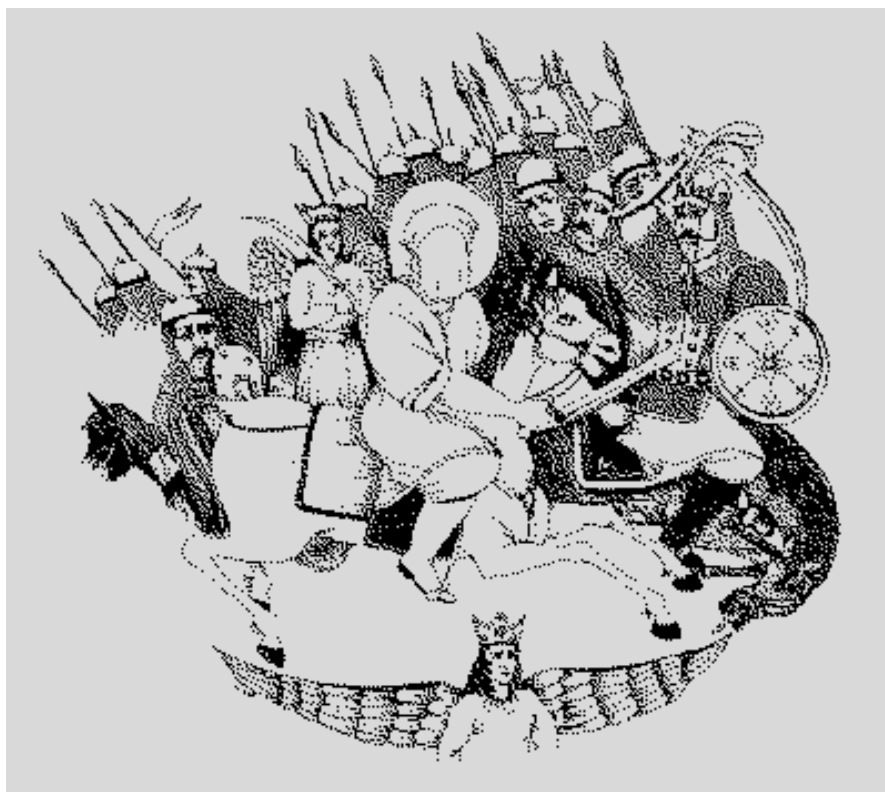
Audiovisual material played a vital role in the Iranian revolution of 1978/79. Khomeini's use of audio cassettes is well known, but the internal opposition against the Shah also made frequent use of visual material to spread their ideas. After the proclamation of the Islamic Republic, the new leaders continued this system. They regarded the use of wall paintings, posters and billboards, as an effective method for propaganda and mobilization, since many of their supporters were illiterate.

Two examples of iconography of the Islamic Republic are presented here. Most of the visual topics are presented in a religious setting. As a rule, the social or political message are combined with themes taken from Islamic, mainly Shi'ite history. Islamic symbols and motifs (such as the Ka'ba, the Dome of the Rock, and Husayn) are frequently used, but the artists also employ motifs and symbols such as the dove, which have their origin in Christianity. Where the style of the posters is concerned, traces of many twentieth century currents in European painting can be discerned, from Catholic romanticism and symbolism to expressionism and social realism. In some of the posters the influence of modern cinema and advertising artwork is also clearly visible.

### 1. The martyrdom of Husayn

In 680/61, on the day of 'Āshūrā', the Tenth of Muharram, the third Shi'ite imām Husayn was killed in a battle with an Umayyad army on the plain of Karbalā' in what is present-day Iraq. This fight was the outcome of an uprising against the Umayyad Caliph Yazid, planned by Husayn in order to revive Islam. Shi'ites consid-

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ILLUSTRATOR: SHARAREH SALEHI LORESTANI

er Husayn's death as one of the crucial events in history. Traditionally, Husayn's martyrdom to the cause of Islam has been regarded as a unique event in history, impossible to emulate for ordinary Muslims. This traditional view contrasts with the revolutionary interpretation illustrated in picture 2.

Many Shi'ites see Husayn's role as that of an intercessor between man and God; and participation in the annual rituals and commemoration services during the first days of Muharram is seen as essential for obtaining a place in Paradise.

### 2. Kull yawm 'Āshūrā'

During the Iranian revolution, a more revolutionary interpretation of Husayn's death gained the upper hand. Husayn's struggle for the defense of Islam was presented as a model and example for the Iranians. His sacrifice and martyrdom were not unique but could, and should be emulated by every Muslim. During the war with Iraq, the leaders of the Islamic Republic emphasized that in Iran a re-enactment of the Karbalā' event was taking place: *Kull yawm 'āshūrā'*, *kull ard Karbalā'* (every day is 'āshūrā', every place is Karbalā'), emphasizing how much the Iranian population was prepared for martyrdom. ♦

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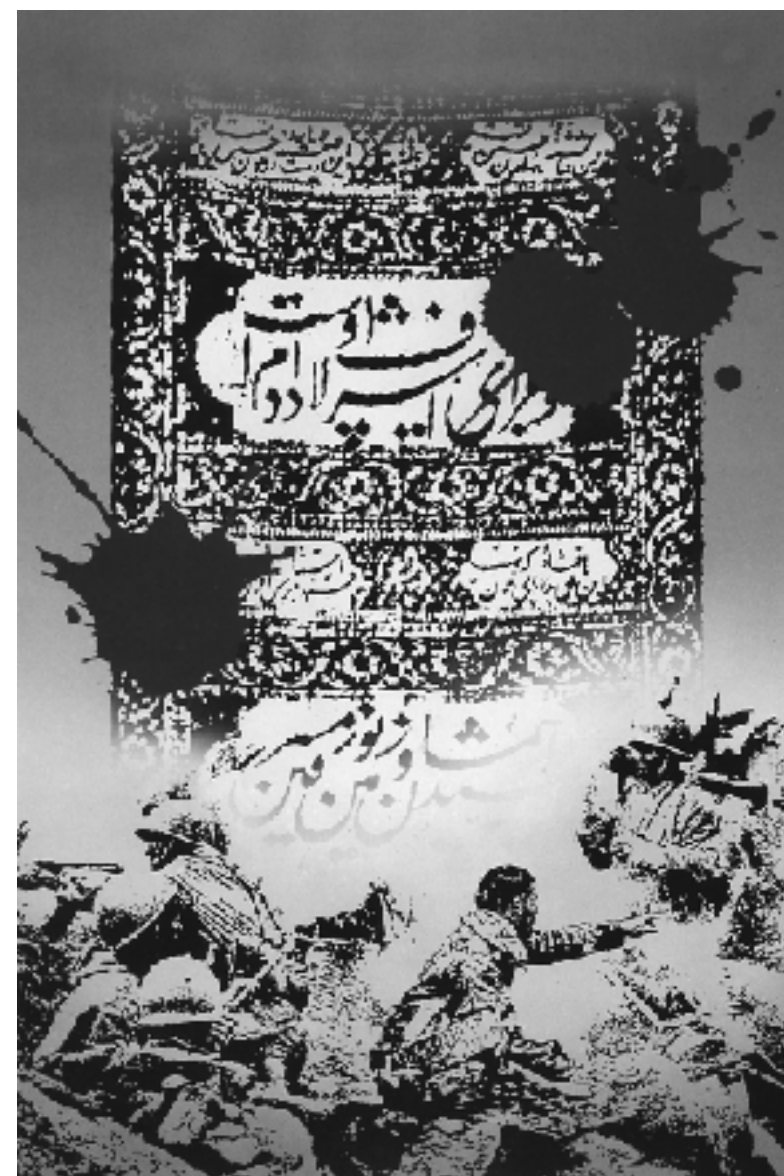
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