

JSTOR

[Skip to Main Content](#)

- [JSTOR Home](#)
- [Search](#)
- [Browse](#)
- [MyJSTOR](#)
- [Get Access](#)

Click to Show/Hide Navigation

[Skip to Main Content](#)



- [Login](#)
- [Help](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [About](#)



You are not currently logged in through a participating institution or individual account. See [access options](#) for more information.



Martyrdom: Mytho-Cathexis and the Mobilization of the Masses in the Iranian Revolution

Jill Diane Swenson

Ethos

Vol. 13, No. 2 (Summer, 1985), pp. 121-149

Published by: [Wiley](#)

Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/639984>

10.2307/639984

[« Previous Item](#) [Next Item »](#)

Rights and Permissions

- [More Rights Options](#)
- [JSTOR Terms And Conditions](#)

 This Issue

- [Ethos](#) >
- [Vol. 13, No. 2, Summer, 1985](#) >
- Martyrdom: Mytho-Cat...

Preview

If you need an accessible version of this item, please [contact JSTOR User Support](#). [View Full Screen](#)

[DOWNLOAD \(\\$12.00\)READ ONLINE](#)

JILL DIANE SWENSON

The events leading to Hussein's martyrdom began with the division of Islam into Sunni and Shi'ite branches upon the death of the Prophet in the seventh century (the first century of the Muslim era). When Muhammad died in 632, his religious community, which was also the first Islamic state, faced a constitutional crisis: How was his successor to be chosen? One faction, the Sunnites, who derived their name from the Arabic word meaning "tradition," argued that a caliph should be chosen the way Arab chiefs customarily are, through election. They were opposed by the Shi'ites, or the "partisans of 'Ali"—'Ali being the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad. The Shi'ites argued that Muhammad had been so extraordinary that his successors should come from his bloodlines, and they thought 'Ali was a perfect man, immune from sin and error in both spiritual and temporal matters.

For a while, the dispute seemed to have been settled in favor of the Sunnites, but when 'Ali himself was assassinated after becoming the fourth caliph, trouble broke out anew. Hassan, one of 'Ali's two sons, was poisoned, and the other, Hussein, was invited by the Shi'ites of Kufa (near present-day Baghdad in Iraq) to become their leader. Hussein set out for Kufa, but spies informed his political and religious opponent, the Sunni caliph Yazid, who sent a large military force to intercept him on the sun-scorched plain of Kerbala.

Hussein's small band was encircled before it could reach the Euphrates to get needed water. Yazid's military commander tried to force Hussein to pay homage

JILL DIANE SWENSON is a graduate student in the Committee on Human Development at the University of Chicago.

Next PageNext Page



End of preview. [Back to top.](#)

Ethos © 1985 [American Anthropological Association](#)

Purchase a PDF

Purchase this item for \$12.00 USD and download it as a PDF.

Already have an account? [Log in](#)



How does it work?

- 1 Register for a MyJSTOR account
- 2 Add up to 3 free items to your shelf
- 3 Items added to your shelf can be removed after 14 days.

Think you should have access to this item via your institution? [Login](#).

- [JSTOR Home](#)
- [About](#)
- [Search](#)
- [Browse](#)
- [Terms and Conditions](#)
- [Privacy Policy](#)
- [Cookies](#)
- [Accessibility](#)
- [Help](#)
- [Contact us](#)

JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization helping the academic community use digital technologies advance research and teaching in sustainable ways.

©2000-2013 ITHAKA. All Rights Reserved. JSTOR®, the JSTOR logo, and ITHAKA® are registered trademarks