

Note on the Cover Image

The cover image is a good illustration that the Karbala story has developed into something much more than just an ordinary battle account, and that it has ever since continued to grow, with characters and events constantly added. The image is a reverse painting on glass from the Qajar period (1796–1925; no precise date or artist are available), representing al-Ḥusayn on his horse with his baby son in his arms.¹ In the bottom left corner of the picture, his dead companions lie, decapitated. All of them are bloody and pierced with many arrows. These are features of the story that can be found in the early versions of the story analysed in Chapter 3. In the hadiths from the fourth/tenth-century collections discussed in Chapter 11, angels and jinn are prepared to support al-Ḥusayn in the battle, but he neglects their help. These figures can be seen at the top and bottom right corners of the picture. Much later, other elements were added to the story. The man standing to the left with a bowl in his hand is a nineteenth-century addition, the dervish of Kabul, who passed by the battle, heard the cry of the thirsty baby and appeared at the battle to offer water and ease the suffering of the child. Again, however, al-Ḥusayn refused to accept any help.² The image thus incorporates elements from several periods in the development of the story.

¹ The image is taken from Kazerouni and Salahshour, *Reverse Painting*, 108. I am grateful to Ms Salahshour for allowing me to use it, and to Ulrich Marzolph who alerted me to the picture and helped me interpret it.

² On the dervish of Kabul and other late additions to the Karbala story, see Deacon, 'Curious Addition'. Thanks to Lucy Deacon for sending me a copy of her article.