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## Original Article: SET DESIGN OF ARAB THEATER

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### Author

Dilyara A. Guseynova.

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The popular religious theater "ta'zie" occupies the special place within traditional moslem art and has continued to be phenomenon of art culture. It was the most popular one in the Arab East, Iran, Azerbaidjan, India, Having appeared within Islam, "ta'zie" phenomenon has continued its development in local traditions of Shiit world. According to the historical chronicles "ta'zie" appeared in the 10-th century A.D. in Baghdad. Religious mystery of "ta'zie" occupies its special place even within such traditional moslem arts as the art of story-tellers "al-hakkavaty", theatre of shadows and theatre of vagrant actors. The story clearly demonstrates that artistic means very well go together with Arabic traditional folk forms. On the face of it, the phenomenon of theatre mystery is in contrast with the common knowledge that Islam prohibits to perform human beings.

"Ta'zie" is also unique because the action itself was born and developed thanks to Islam and has arab origin. I do not think it is necessary to dwell on a well-known story of Imam Houssein's death and the death of his family. But we should admit that the legend of this event was used as a beneficial theme to stage this legend and to make a special ritual appropriately modified.

Following the laws of three-part popular performances. that is drama-interlude-drama, which was common for arab countries, "ta'zie" performances were often interrupted by inserted episode. This episode helped to interrupt the chain of battle scenes and to eliminate some tension.

There is one special thing in arab theatre performances: time and space of the performance does not separate "the stage" and "the audience", in the contrary, it unites them both involving spectators in the theatrical activities. The actors and the spectators quite easily cross an invisible line, transforming the performance into mutual interaction between "the stage" and "the audience".

When staging "ta'zie" one should not think in terms of European theatre. It was only by the end of the 18-th century that special premises under the name of "takie" did appear. Before that time the scene could be laid on the cross roads, cemetery, caravanserai or the yard of a Mosk.

But the most popular place to perform is Takie. The founders of Takiees were often the reach and influent persons, or members of a guild or communities from different cities who settled in Iran, for instance, Azarbaijanis.

The buildings of Takiees were the important elements in the cities structures

and they were the centers of the quarters. Usually they had been decorated by a lot of flowers, lamps, candles and beautiful small carpets. Some of the Takiees were decorated by paintings. These pictures were about tragedy of ashura. Because of this background the impact which the Taiz'e dramas had on the visual arts is one the most curious developments in the history of Islamic art. It is known that during the 19 century there appear painting of religious subjects which were intended for the arab public at large.

In the center of Takie there was a round platform having stairway in the both sides and around the platform a round area for passing horses and bands of music.

There is very limited number of accessories in the scenery of "ta'zie" theatre and if there are any, they have a very relative character, for instance, if it is necessary to show that night has come, the stage is covered with blankets and pillows, hot sunny day is marked by fans in actors hands; the fact that the action is taking place inside some house is expressed by the door. "Ta'zie" theatre performance does not suppose any professional and artistic secrets, everything is clear and uncovered.

Tradition of "ta'zie" performance in arab countries has preserved the role of "director" or "producer". In arabic it is "muin buca" which means "assistant in mourning". But spectators do not notice his appearance among the actors. He plays the role of performance leader, who gives the signal for musicians and actors to start the event.

The most interesting thing about "ta'zie" is that at first it did not have professional actors. Local residents used to participate in it. Only in the course of the time did professionals appear. It was not easy to recruit suitable actors because they had to meet certain requirements. An actor had to possess strong and loud voice as performances were taking place in open air. Secondly, there was a direct connection between character's voice tembre and his morales that is, positive characters should

have high, pleasant tembre and vice versa. Of course the actor to play the part of Houssein had to meet the highest requirements like melodical voice, good ear for music, he should be slender, handsome and have a beard. Female parts were performed by young men whose faces were covered by veils. Producers used to have most problems with negative characters. The actors who were involved in it usually found themselves in dangerous situations as their characters hatred in the audience. For instance the actors who played the parts of calef Iazid's soldiers used to be nearly beaten by stones and had to run away.

Such emotions could be explained by traditions of performance.

An actor following strict frames of the given historical plot was deprived of any possibility for inner psychological development of his character. These conditions turned actors into neutral transformers of the text, giving the chance to spectators for stronger emotional experience.

It is known, that this kind of performance was popular in Azerbaijan, which had existed for 400 years and called "shebich". But theatre as well as other fields didn't avoid customary interdictions of Soviet times, or rather ignoring of some historical stages of development. Some historical facts were treated quite arbitrarily. The reason of it is that performance has the roots in religion. As a result of it, there are very little scientific materials, making it possible to reproduce the historical development of the theatre. A more precise look into history of Azerbaijan theatre can explain some modern peculiarities of it. Particularly, it becomes clear where do declamatory and melodious, as well as pathetic and high-flown manner of performance of first professional Azerbaijan actors come from. Lots of them in their youth took part in mysterious performances, which required extraordinary pathetics speech. Moreover, actors were specially trained to do it.

According to the researchers latest "shebich" performances in Azerbaijan go back to the years of 1921-1922. Usually special stages were erected mainly in squares. On the one side of the square there were Houssein's tents, on the other side, the tents of his enemy Iazid. The rivals, according to the play met on the banks of the river Euphrates, which was symbolized by a big copper basin filled with water. The division into two opposite camps was also reflected in music following the performance. The actors playing the parts of martyrs were singing sad melodies. At the same time the actors of the opposite camp were expressing their felling with threatening recitative. The audience was being greatly impressed. Listening to Houssein and his relatives, spectators supported them by exclamations of approval and even crying at their failure. In Azerbaijan theatre the actions was conducted by producer or "shebich gerdan" who was moving around the stage all the time and with a special stick was showing to each actor when to start playing his part.

It is difficult to dwell on "ta'zie" dramatic action without giving attention to the role of music in them. Of course, this subject requires serious musical studies. Here we would like to underline the role of musical-vocal portraits of the characters. In

line with the tradition each character had his own melody emotionally expressing his personage.

Thus, Imam Houssein was singing his part using melodious tradition of "dasghiak-shur". Many music schools were established in Azerbaijan in the 19th century when the famous musician Harrat Kouli Mouhammed ogli created his music school in Shousha. Recrouting young men with beautiful voices he trained them mainly in the art of "mougam" to use them in ritual in the course of "mouharram".

In the opinion of Azerbaijan composer the founder of Azerbaijan opera Ouzeir Gadzhibecov, it was musical performance in mysterious "shebih" actions that became the source of national Azerbaijan opera.

It is not quite easy to evaluate "ta'zie" performances only from one side. It has combined a lot of elements of century-old Moslem East cultural heritage – from epic manner of plot interpretation to its sacral character.

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