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'THE BATTLE AT KERBALA'. MULTICOLOR PRINT, PAPER

MIDDLE EAST; 20TH CENTURY

H: 35.5; W: 45 CM

Muhammad's son-in-law, Ali, was assassinated and his adherents (*shiat Ali*), under the leadership of his son Husayn, were defeated by the Umayyads in the battle at Kerbala in 680. Islam's division into two main branches – Shiism and Sunnism – was a reality. The event, which is often depicted in popular prints, is used by Shiites to recall the martyr's role that they feel they have played throughout history.

Ordinary chronology has been abolished in this print. Several episodes from the battle are enacted at the same time, and on each side, the battling parties still stand in their starting positions. On the right is Husayn with a small group of adherents, and on the top left is the commander of the Umayyad caliph Yazid with rows of well-equipped forces. We can also see into the afterlife. Husayn, now glorified, is found in the uppermost part of the picture flanked by *jinn*s (humanoid creatures created by God) on the left and by angels and early prophets on the right.

Published in:

Kjeld von Folsach, Torben Lundbæk and Peder Mortensen (eds.):  
*Sultan, Shah and Great Mughal: the history and culture of the Islamic world*, The National Museum, Copenhagen 1996, cat.no. 32;

Eleanor Lucy Deacon: *Karbala in the Ta'ziyeh Episode: Shi'i Devotional Drama in Iran*, Leiden 2025, cover;