

Beethoven’s Symphony of Freedom Played at IRIB Glass Building



TEHRAN -- Iranian musicians Houman Baqi and Farshad Sheykhi have performed Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 inside the damaged remains of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) Glass Building, which was struck during an Israeli aggression on June 16.

The attack on IRIB, one of the country’s key national media centers, interrupted a live broadcast when the explosion shattered the building, filling the studio with debris and smoke.

Sahar Emami, the news anchor on air at the time, courageously resumed broadcasting despite the chaos, condemning the aggression and rallying

the Iranian people with her words.

The choice of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, often called the “Symphony of Freedom,” was deliberate. Known worldwide as a symbol of unity, hope, and resistance, the music’s enduring legacy resonates deeply with Iranians determined to stand strong in the face of external aggression.

The IRIB Glass Building has long symbolized transparency and truth in Iranian media. Despite the severe damage caused by the strike, Baqi and Sheykhi’s haunting performance inside its ruins sends a clear message: Iranian culture and spirit remain unbroken

Iron Age Tomb Reveals Use of Graphite in Iranian Makeup



A 2,700-year-old burial in Iran uncovers makeup with graphite kohl.

TEHRAN -- Researchers have discovered the earliest known use of graphite in ancient eye makeup, kohl, shedding new light on cosmetic practices in Iron Age Iran.

A 2,700-year-old burial at the Kani Koter cemetery in northwestern Iran contained a ceramic vessel filled with a black powder made from manganese and natural graphite—the key ingredients of what was once kohl, a widely used eye makeup.

The study, published in Archaeometry and led by Silvia Amicone, shows that this rare blend was unlike previously known formulations. While kohl was common in ancient Egypt and the Middle East, this is the first evidence of a graphite-based version from Iran, offering a unique glimpse into regional variation in ancient beauty practices.

The tomb in which the ceramic vessel was found was part of an elite burial. It contained personal ornaments, weaponry, and cosmetic tools, including two small containers and two applicators. One container still held enough of the dark powder for scientific testing.

Analysis at the University of Tübingen and the University of Padova confirmed that the powder’s black color came from a mixture of manganese oxides and natural graphite. These minerals were crushed and combined to form a fine pigment, likely applied around the eyes.

This recipe stands out from others in the ancient world. In Egypt, eye makeup often contained lead-based compounds or carbon black. In contrast, the Kani Koter sample used no lead or carbon soot. Instead, it relied on minerals available in the Zagros Mountains, rich in both manganese and graphite.

Graphite’s inclusion is particularly important. Until now, it had never been confirmed as an ingredient in ancient kohl. The mineral’s silvery-black shine and easy application would have made it ideal for lining the eyes. Its presence reflects both innovation and adaptation to local resources.

No traces of organic materials, such as oils or binders, were found in the sample. Researchers say this could be due to two possibilities. The makeup may have been made entirely from minerals, or any organic ingredients may have degraded

over time. Ancient cosmetics recipes often included animal fats, plant oils, or resins, but those substances are more vulnerable to decay.

The burial itself was disturbed in 2016 by looters, but many objects were recovered by Iran’s Cultural Heritage Organization. The grave is believed to have belonged to a high-status individual, possibly a warrior. Alongside the cosmetics, the tomb contained weapons, jewelry, horse gear, and decorated items made of silver, bronze, ivory, and stone.

The kohl container and applicators were found intact, and the makeup was preserved inside a vessel, providing scientists with a rare opportunity for direct chemical analysis. This has helped researchers understand not just what people used for cosmetics but how those choices varied by region and available resources.

The finding adds to growing evidence that ancient societies in the Middle East developed their own makeup traditions. Similar cosmetic tools have been found in Assyrian-era burials and royal tombs. However, until now, few samples had been analyzed to determine what substances were actually used.

Other Iron Age kohl samples from sites like Estark-Joshaqaan and Hasanlu show different recipes. Some used lead compounds, while others contained antimony or iron oxides. The Kani Koter mixture is unique in combining manganese with graphite—a pairing not previously recorded in archaeological makeup studies.

The use of graphite may have had both aesthetic and functional advantages. It reflects light, giving the skin a shimmering look, and clings easily to the surface when applied. These properties would have made it a desirable ingredient in cosmetic preparation, especially in ceremonial or elite contexts.

Researchers say this discovery helps reshape the understanding of how cosmetics were created and used in the ancient world. It also shows how deeply tied those practices were to local geology, trade, and culture.

The analysis not only reveals the contents of a single container but opens a window into how people in ancient Iran expressed identity, status, and beauty through materials drawn from the land beneath their feet.

Ashura in the Eyes of Western Orientalists

TEHRAN -- Recent research published in the quarterly journal Studies in the History of the Islamic World reveals that Western Orientalists, particularly from Germany and England, have succeeded in politically and socially analyzing the Ashura movement.

Although their understanding of the spiritual dimensions of this pivotal event is limited, these studies have positively contributed by introducing a wealth of literature on Ashura and emphasizing the need to rediscover Shiite identity.

The study, conducted by Mohsen Sheikh al-Islami, Amir-Teymour Rafee, and Hassan Ghorayshi Karin, undertakes a comparative examination of the political stances held by German and English Orientalists regarding the event of Ashura.

It also analyzes the intellectual foundations and practical approaches of these scholars. Using analytical and interpretative methods, the research seeks to answer how these Orientalists have politically viewed the Battle of Karbala and to what extent their analyses are grounded in deep intellectual understanding.

The central hypothesis posits that despite their extensive scholarly background and access to Islamic studies centers, many Orientalists tend to overshadow the religious and spiritual dimensions of the Ashura uprising by focusing solely on political and historical analyses.

One of the most significant milestones in Western Shiite studies was the Strasbourg Conference of 1968, where European scholars of Islam seriously and systematically engaged with Twelver Shiism for the first time.

Following the Iranian Islamic Revolution, Western scholars’ attention to the role of Ashura, Muharram, and Safar in motivating revolutionary sentiment and transforming religious thought into political activism intensified. Some Western thinkers concluded that Imam Hussein’s uprising was the starting point of a profound conflict between authentic Islam and the corrupt



Umayyad rule—a conflict deeply embedded in religious justice and faith.

German Orientalists studying Islam and particularly Shiism have adopted varied approaches toward the Ashura event. Their analyses are often secular, historicist, or occasionally poetic. Below are brief profiles of some prominent German scholars:

Engelbert Kaempfer (1651–1716): One of the earliest Orientalists to write about Ashura, Kaempfer relied on Persian sources like Maqatal al-Shuhada by Mulla Hussein Kashifi. His work is descriptive but lacks in-depth historical or theological analysis of Imam Hussein’s objectives.

Ferdinand Wustenfeld (1808–1899): A specialist in Arabic literature, Wustenfeld introduced Ashura into German academic discourse by publishing a version of Maqatal al-Husayn by Abu Mikhnaf. Although valuable, his work remained influenced by Sunni sources and lacked profound insight into Shiite culture.

Theodor Nöldeke (1836–1930): One of the most important German Orientalists who addressed the Karbala uprising in his works. He adopted a historical viewpoint and famously compared Imam Hussein to Jesus Christ in his sacrifices.

Despite their detailed and documented research, German Orientalists’ secular and external perspectives often prevented a full understanding and accurate reflection of the religious depth

and faith-based nature of the Ashura movement.

Martin Hartmann (Marbin): Praised Imam Hussein’s departure from Mecca to confront Yazid as the act of a man embodying the highest human emotions, believing his sacrifice would bear lasting fruit and serve as a guiding light for future Muslims.

Like their German counterparts, English-speaking Orientalists primarily studied Ashura from historical, political, or sociological angles, often neglecting its spiritual and theological aspects. Some key figures include:

Dwight M. Donaldson (1884–1976): In his well-known 1933 book on Shiism, Donaldson used diverse historical sources, including Shiite and Sunni texts, to describe Ashura. However, his analysis was limited by an insufficient grasp of Shiite doctrinal foundations, reducing the event to a political conflict and overlooking its divine and spiritual dimensions.

Edward G. Browne (1862–1926): In his literary history of Iran, Browne highlighted Ashura’s impact on shaping collective emotions, social fervor, and anti-authoritarian movements in Iran. He regarded Ashura as a profoundly emotional and symbolic event that strengthened the spirit of sacrifice, resistance, and protest among Shiites.

Thomas Carlyle: The English philosopher observed that the greatest lesson from Karbala is Imam Hussein and his loyal companions’ steadfast faith

in God. Their example proves that in the conflict between right and wrong, numbers do not matter.

Several shortcomings characterize Orientalists’ treatment of Ashura:

Lack of Source Criticism: Orientalists tend to accept texts at face value without rigorous critique of the historical documents.

Neglect of Shiite Primary Sources: There is often insufficient reliance on authentic Shiite texts, leading to incomplete interpretations.

Confirmation Bias: Researchers often seek to validate their preconceived notions rather than uncover objective truth.

Moreover, Muslim and Shiite scholars themselves have responded in varied ways to Orientalist narratives—some fully accepting, others entirely rejecting, and a third group adopting a critical yet constructive stance. This diversity has prevented a unified viewpoint from emerging.

Since the mid-20th century, Shiite studies in the West have evolved into a serious academic endeavor. Orientalists have managed to politically and socially dissect the Karbala uprising and to some extent recognize its spiritual impact.

Positive outcomes of these studies include introducing abundant literature on Ashura, emphasizing Shiite identity rediscovery, pioneering new research methodologies, and generating innovative perspectives on Imam Hussein’s teachings.

To prevent misinterpretation and distortion by Orientalists, the best strategy involves publishing scientific works in various languages, conducting meticulous scholarly critiques, actively participating in international conferences, combating exaggerations, and highlighting the positive contributions of Orientalist scholarship.

This approach not only enriches global understanding of the Ashura movement but also honors the profound legacy of Imam Hussein (AS), whose martyrdom continues to inspire the hearts of believers worldwide.

Chavoshi Pays Tribute to Abalfazl al-Abbas (AS) With New Song

TEHRAN -- Acclaimed Iranian singer and songwriter Mohsen Chavoshi has released a moving new music video dedicated to Abalfazl al-Abbas (AS), the loyal and courageous brother of Imam Hussein (AS).

The release came as the Islamic world prepares to commemorate Ashura, the 10th day of Muharram, which marks the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (AS) and his companions in the Battle of Karbala.

Published on Chavoshi’s official social media channels, the song highlights the unwavering devotion of Abalfazl al-Abbas (AS), who stood by his brother Imam Hussein (AS) until his final breath and was martyred on the 9th of Muharram, a day before Ashura.

The emotional tribute blends poetic lyrics with soulful music, evoking the sorrow and spiritual power associated with the tragedy of Karbala. Chavoshi, known for his deep and symbolic compositions, once again brings religious history to life through art.

Abalfazl al-Abbas (AS) is revered by Muslims, especially in Shia Islam, as a symbol of loyalty, bravery, and sacrifice. His actions during the siege of Karbala — particularly his valiant attempt to bring water to the children of Imam Hussein (AS)’s camp — are remembered as among the most honorable moments in Islamic history.

Ashura, which falls on the 10th of the lunar month, commemorates the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (AS), the beloved grandson of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and 72 of his companions in 680 CE (61 AH), in the plains of Karbala, present-day Iraq.

Chavoshi’s latest release has been widely shared online and praised for its depth and heartfelt tribute to one of the most revered figures in Islamic history. The video serves as both a cultural and spiritual contribution to this sacred time of remembrance.



Picture of the Day



The 900-year-old Nakhl-gardani ritual in Abyaneh symbolizes Imam Hussein’s funeral, attracting locals and tourists during Tasua and Ashura ceremonies.

Photo by ISNA