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The Visit to al-Ḥusayn's Grave

The previous chapter argued that the profound sense of guilt felt by the Tawwābūn, as expressed in the four programmatic texts that introduce their story, caused them to take up armed resistance against the Umayyads with the aim of avenging the death of al-Ḥusayn or dying as martyrs in the attempt. They longed, in other words, to make their sincere repentance manifest, and they were prepared to sacrifice their lives to do so. The story tells how, on the way to the battlefield, the Tawwābūn stopped at al-Ḥusayn's grave, and the description of this visit at the grave, the subject of the analysis in this chapter, displays features that foreshadow aspects of the later trajectory of Shi'ism. The visit to the grave therefore merits deeper analysis in its own right. This is made possible by the fact that this passage, alone in the entire Tawwābūn story, is presented in more than one version. The visit to the grave is related through three *khābars* whose slight differences aid comparative analysis. A close examination of these three texts reveals features of the redactional history that are important because through them it is possible to distinguish layers of the text that have originated at different times.

In this chapter, I will argue that the three *khābars* derive from two earlier reports which have been adapted and supplemented with extra material. Within the *khābars*, various alterations and additions are often separated by the word '*qāla*', 'he said'.¹ This word is problematic as a delimiter, however, since it is used in several ways in early Islamic historiography in general and in this account in particular. Sometimes 'he' (the pronoun is implied in the verb) refers to the earliest authority in the previous *isnād*, and thus the word simply functions as an introduction to a new section of the text; at other times, it

¹ Hawting has not indicated these *qāla* instances in his translation.

indicates that Abū Mikhnaḥ or Hishām b. al-Kalbī have summarised the text that follows.² In the present context it is quite clear that ‘*qāla*’ is mostly used to indicate a seam between two earlier reports that have been juxtaposed in the *khabar*. As we do not know who placed the traditions side by side, or at what stage in the redactional history this was done (though it probably preceded Abū Mikhnaḥ’s compilation), it is impossible to know to whom the pronoun ‘he’ refers. Furthermore, as we will see, in at least one instance, a ‘*qāla*’ is missing where one might have been expected. This suggests that the editors were applying it quite arbitrarily, and that it must therefore be used with care as a tool in the analysis of the text.

The Text

In the following, the account of the visit to the grave is given in full, the three *khabars* being given with their chains of authorities. To facilitate reference, each *khabar* has been assigned a roman number (I–III) and has been divided into sections with Arabic numbers. Each section except the first begins where there is a *qāla* in the text. To distinguish these texts about the visit to the grave from the programmatic texts discussed in Chapter 5, I will refer to them with a ‘K’. Thus, for example, K.III.2 refers to *Khabar* III, Section 2.³ Bold text signifies the oldest layer, as will be clear from the analysis below.

Khabar I

‘Abd al-Jabbār b. ‘Abbās al-Hamdānī⁴ – ‘Awn b. Abī Juḥayfa al-Suwāṭī:⁵

1. Next morning they came [*sabbahū*] to the tomb of al-Ḥusayn. **There they remained for a night and a day praying over him and asking God’s pardon for him.**

² Sezgin, *Abū Miḥnaf*, 91–2; see also Fishbein’s note in al-Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. XXI, 6, n. 31.

³ As in the previous chapter, I have used Hawting’s translation throughout (al-Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. XX), though I have at times slightly amended it. At times I compare it with Fishbein’s translation (‘Life of al-Mukhtār’, 153–7), which is close to Hawting’s, but differs on certain important points. I have normally not included transcriptions of Arabic terms that Hawting has inserted within square brackets in his translation. On the other hand, I have added transcriptions of words and phrases within brackets where this is important for the analysis that follows.

⁴ Died probably between 140/757 and 150/767, according to Sezgin, *Abū Miḥnaf*, 190, but she gives no source for this, and I have not been able to confirm this information.

⁵ Died 116/734, according to Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Tabdhib*, vol. VIII, 170.

2. *Qāla*: **When the people reached the tomb of al-Ḥusayn, they shouted with one voice and wept.** Never was a day seen when there was more weeping.

Khabar II

‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Jundab⁶ – ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ghaziyya:⁷

1. *Qāla*: **When we reached the tomb of al-Ḥusayn (Peace be upon him) the people wept together, and I heard most of the people expressing the wish that they had fallen with him.** Sulaymān said: ‘Oh God, have mercy on al-Ḥusayn, the martyr [*al-shahīd*] son of the martyr, the right-guided one [*al-mahdī*] son of the right-guided one, the righteous one [*al-ṣiddīq*] son of the righteous one. Oh God, we call you to witness⁸ that we follow their religion and their path, and we are enemies [*a’dā*’] of those who killed them, and friends [*awliyā*’] of those who love them.’ Then he went away, and he and his companions encamped.

Khabar III

Al-A‘mash (Sulaymān b. Mihrān al-Asadī)⁹ – Salama b. Kuhayl¹⁰ – Abū Ṣādiq:¹¹

1. *Qāla*: **When Sulaymān b. Ṣurad and his companions reached the tomb of al-Ḥusayn, they cried in unison, ‘Oh Lord, we have betrayed the son of our Prophet’s daughter! Pardon us for what we did in the past “and**

⁶ He is only referred to as *rāwī* by Abū Mikhnaḥ (al-Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. XIX, 22, n. 98). The date of his death seems to be unknown. On him, see Sezgin, *Abū Miḥnaf*, 195–6.

⁷ This might be the same person as ‘Abdallāh b. Ghaziyya, who is reported as taking part in the movement and surviving the battle, and who transmits reports later in the story (al-Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. XX, 141, n. 515; see also Sezgin, *Abū Miḥnaf*, 200).

⁸ The word here is *nushhiduka*; Hawting translates this ‘... we testify to you ...’ (al-Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. XX, 132). However, the fourth form of the verb *sh-h-d* is causative, and rather means ‘to make someone a witness’ (see Lane, *Arabic–English Lexicon*, vol. II, 1610a; see also Fishbein, ‘Life of al-Mukhtār’, 153). I have made a similar change in the following *khabar*.

⁹ A famous traditionist who died between 145/762 and 151/768. See e.g. al-Mizzī, *Tabdhīb*, vol. XII, 90. On him, see also Kohlberg, ‘A‘maš’; Haider, *Origins*, 221–7; and van Ess, *Theologie*, vol. I, 237–9.

¹⁰ Died between 121/739 and 123/741 according to al-Mizzī, *Tabdhīb*, vol. XI, 317. See also Sezgin, *Abū Miḥnaf*, 218; van Ess, *Theologie*, vol. I, 244.

¹¹ Of al-Azd. A well-known Kūfan traditionist, whose date of death seems to be unknown. On him, see Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. VI, 206–7; Sezgin, *Abū Miḥnaf*, 206.

relent [*tub*] toward us, for you are the relenting one [*al-tawwāb*] and the compassionate one”.¹² Have mercy on al-Ḥusayn and his companions, the martyrs [*al-shuhadāʾ*] and the righteous ones [*al-ṣiddīqīn*]. We call you to witness, O Lord, that we are doing the same as they were when they were killed. “If you do not pardon us our sin and have mercy on us, then we are among the losers.”¹³

2. *Qāla*: They remained there a day and a night praying over him, weeping and abasing themselves. And from that time onwards the people did not cease to plead for mercy on him and his companions until they made the early morning prayer by his tomb on the following day, and that increased their fury. Then they mounted up and Sulaymān ordered the people to proceed. And no man would pass on until he had come to the tomb of al-Ḥusayn, stood in prayer¹⁴ over it, and asked for mercy on him and pardon for him.
3. *Qāla*: And by God, I saw them thronging more thickly than the people throng around the Black Stone.
4. *Qāla*: Sulaymān stood by his [al-Ḥusayn's]¹⁵ tomb, and whenever a group prayed for him and asked for mercy on him, al-Musayyab b. Najaba and Sulaymān b. Ṣurad said to them, ‘Join your brethren, may God have mercy on you!’ He continued in this manner until about thirty of his companions were left, and then Sulaymān and his companions made a circle around the tomb and Sulaymān said, ‘Praise be to God who, if He had wished, would have honoured us with martyrdom with al-Ḥusayn. Oh my God, since you forbade us it together with him, do not forbid us it on his account after him.’ And ‘Abdallāh b. Wāl said, ‘Verily, by God, I consider al-Ḥusayn and his father and brother as the best of Muḥammad’s community [who will be] imploring God’s favour [on behalf of the Muslims] on the Day of

¹² Qur. 2:128. Hawting has not indicated this passage as Qur’ānic.

¹³ Qur. 7: 23. Hawting has not indicated this passage as Qur’ānic. Similar expressions are found in Qur. 7:149 and 11: 47.

¹⁴ The words ‘in prayer’ are not found in the Arabic text. Obviously Hawting regards them as implied, and I agree on this, as similar formulae are found in other places of the text. Fishbein (‘Life of al-Mukhtār’, 155) translates this sentence: ‘but before leaving, each man came to the grave of al-Husayn, stood by it, and asked God to have mercy upon him and forgive him’.

¹⁵ The name of al-Ḥusayn is not mentioned here in the Arabic text, although it is clear that it is his tomb that is meant. Both Hawting (al-Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. XX, 133) and Fishbein (‘Life of al-Mukhtār’, 155) have inserted it.

Resurrection. Are you not amazed at the test to which this community has been subjected by its enemies? They killed two and brought the third to the brink of death.¹⁶

5. *Qāla*: Al-Musayyab b. Najaba said, 'I am one of those who will kill them. I dissociate myself from whoever shares their views. Them I will treat as an enemy and fight.'¹⁷
6. *Qāla*: All of the leaders spoke most eloquently. Al-Muthannā b. Mukharriba was a companion of one of the leaders and notables, and it pained me when I did not hear him making a speech with the people in a manner similar to their speeches.
7. *Qāla*: Before long, however, he delivered a speech which was not inferior to any of the others. He said, 'God made these men, whose status you have mentioned relative to their Prophet, superior to anyone except their Prophet. A mob to whom we are enemies and with whom we recognise no ties killed them. We have left our homes, our people and our properties seeking the extirpation of those who killed them. By God, even if the fight against them is where the sun goes down or the earth ends, it is incumbent upon us to seek it until we attain it. That is our booty and it is martyrdom, the reward for which is heaven.' We said to him, 'You have spoken the truth, you have achieved your end, and you have been granted success.'
8. *Qāla*: Then Sulaymān b. Ṣurad travelled on from the tomb of al-Ḥusayn and we went with him. We took the road by al-Ḥaṣṣāsa, then al-Anbār, then al-Ṣadūd, then al-Qayyāra.¹⁸

Formal Analysis

Sections K.I.1–2

Khabar I is actually quite long, extending over almost two pages in the Leiden edition of al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh*.¹⁹ Most of it relates the departure of the

¹⁶ Here, perhaps, Fishbein's translation is to be preferred: 'They killed two of them, and then satisfied their thirst for killing with the third' ('Life of al-Mukhtār', 155).

¹⁷ The words here translated 'dissociate myself' and 'treat as an enemy' come from the Arabic roots *b-r-r*' and *'d-w* respectively.

¹⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II, 546–8.

¹⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II, 544–6. The following formal analysis is quite technical. The reader who does not need to follow the detailed argument may jump to the analysis of the content below.

Tawwābūn from their camp at al-Nukhayla outside Kufa. Only the last few lines, *K.I.1* and 2 as reproduced above, deal briefly with the visit to the grave. These two sections probably originate from two earlier reports which have been joined, with the fissure indicated by the word *qāla*, 'he said'. '*Qāla*' is used several times in the *khabar*, but it seems mostly to refer back to the last-named authority in the *isnād* and is thus used mainly to indicate a new section in the narrative. At this point between *K.I.1* and 2, however, it is quite clear that '*qāla*' signals a break between two earlier reports. There are both internal and external grounds for this conclusion. Internally, *K.I.2* repeats the arrival of the Tawwābūn at the grave, which has already been stated in *K.I.1*. This repetition is hardly necessary either to give information or for narrative purposes, and it signals that two previously independent reports have been brought together at this point, but have not been sufficiently edited so as to create a smooth narrative. The external grounds for hypothesising two antecedent reports here will emerge from the subsequent analysis of the two following *khabars*, as well as from comparison with the accounts of Ibn A'tham and al-Balādhurī, where the same or very similar sentences are used to introduce longer reports.

Apart from repeating the arrival at the grave, the two reports give different information. *K.I.1* tells us about the duration of the stay at the grave – a night and a day – and also says that the Tawwābūn prayed over al-Ḥusayn and asked God's pardon for him. *K.I.2*, on the other hand, dwells on the shouting and weeping at the grave. Both these features recur in the two *khabars* that follow.

Section K.II.1

Khobar II is relatively short, and is entirely devoted to the visit to the grave. This *khobar* at first sight seems to constitute a single redactional unit. Although we are presented with three scenarios – the arrival at the grave and the people's weeping in unison, Sulaymān's prayer, and the departure and encampment – the narrative runs relatively smoothly, and each scene adds new information. However, I will argue later in this chapter that the wording of Sulaymān's prayer original to the tradition has been altered. In this *khobar*, it has received a more 'Shi'ite' mark than it had from the beginning.

The introductory sentence of the *khavar* is close in wording to the first sentence of *K.I.2*, though with some variations. The main difference is that the narrator here speaks as an eyewitness in the first person plural. Also, different words are used for the collective outpouring of grief. Furthermore, in *K.II.1* the sentence is not placed at the end of a longer passage, as in *K.I.2*, but introduces a separate tradition. I will have more to say about this shortly.

Four important features of this *khavar* which are not found in *Khavar I* but are extant in *K.III.1* should be noted:

- a. The Tawwābūn wish they had fallen with al-Ḥusayn at Karbala. In this way they declare that they have betrayed al-Ḥusayn and that they repent of their sin. Here, though, their repentance is expressed less explicitly than in the following *khavar*.
- b. In Sulaymān's prayer, three epithets (two of which recur in *K.III.1*) are used to describe al-Ḥusayn and his father 'Alī: they are called 'martyrs', 'right-guided', and 'righteous'.
- c. Sulaymān prays for God's mercy on al-Ḥusayn.
- d. Sulaymān declares that he and his companions are following the religion (*dīn*) and path of al-Ḥusayn and 'Alī. He furthermore uses the words 'enemy' (*'adūw*, pl. *a'dā'*) and 'friend' or 'associate' (*wālī*, pl. *awliyā'*), a pair of concepts that have always been immensely important for distinguishing between Shi'ites and non-Shi'ites.²⁰

Section K.III.1–2

Khavar III is quite long, but, like *Khavar II*, it deals solely with the Tawwābūn's visit to the grave.²¹ *K.III.1* and 2 are introduced by sentences very close to *K.I.1* and 2, but with key elements presented in reverse order.

The opening words of *K.III.1* are almost exactly the same as those of *K.I.2*, and very close to the introductory sentence of *K.II.1* (see the synopsis in Table 7.1). As in *K.II.1*, the sentence introduces a longer report. *K.II.1* and

²⁰ See e.g. Amir-Moezzi, *Spirituality*, 262–70; Dakake, *Charismatic Community*, 65–7; Haider, *Shi'ī Islam*, 32–5.

²¹ This is the only occasion in the entire story of the Tawwābūn when three authorities are given in the *isnād*.

K.III.1 have several further elements in common. Although the wording partly differs, it is striking that in *K.III.1* the following elements recur in the same order as in *K.II.1*: (a) The Tawwābūn confess their betrayal of al-Ḥusayn; (b) they ask for mercy on him and his companions (not, however, his father as in *K.II.1*); (c) they use the epithets 'martyrs' and 'righteous' for them; and (d) they declare that they 'do the same' as al-Ḥusayn and his companions did when they were killed. Furthermore, a fifth element is introduced here, not found in *K.II.1*: (e) a quotation from the Qur'ān saying that if God does not forgive them, they will be 'among the losers'. The similarities to *K.I.2* and *K.II.1* are thus striking, and would be very difficult to explain other than by the hypothesis that behind them lies an older report which has been transmitted through different chains of authorities and has been modified by the transmitters on the way.

Then there follows (*K.III.2*) a '*qāla*', which introduces a sentence very similar to *K.I.1*. The main difference, apart from the reversed order of the words 'night and day', is the last clause of the sentence. In *K.I.1*, the Tawwābūn ask for forgiveness for *al-Ḥusayn* (*yastaghfirūna lahu*), whereas in *K.III.2*, they weep and abase *themselves* (*yabkūna wa-yataḍarra'ūna*).²²

Moreover, in *K.III.2* the introductory sentence is placed not at the end of a longer passage, as in *K.I.1*, but introducing a separate tradition. The obvious conclusion, and one that I have already indicated above, is that the sentences in *K.I.1* and 2 have been extracted from the beginning of two longer reports and juxtaposed at the end of *Khabar I*. This raises the question of why the opening sentence of *K.I.1* is not preceded by a '*qāla*'. Had it been part of an independent tradition, one would have expected the compiler to indicate this. Still, the close correspondence between the first sentences of *K.I.1* and *K.III.2* convinces me that both these sections are dependent on a single original report. This hypothesis, as I will demonstrate below, is corroborated by a comparison with Ibn A'tham's version of the story. The absence of a '*qāla*' to introduce the sentence in *Khabar I* just shows how unreliable this word is as a tool for tradition criticism. In order for us to discern the break between two

²² The expression *yastaghfirūna lahu* is found later in the tradition. It is a common phrase, however, and this isolated occurrence in a different position in the text as compared with *Khabar I* can at the most be considered an indirect indication for its being part of a fixed tradition.

reports that have been merged in a text, the '*qāla*' must be supplemented with other criteria, such as the interior coherence of a text unit, comparisons with other texts, and so on.

These similarities lead me to believe that the text from *K.I.1* to *K.III.2* is based on two older reports: Report A, traces of which are found in *K.I.2*, *K.II.1*, and *K.III.1*, and Report B, which has been used as the basis for *K.I.1* and *K.III.2*. This older layer is in bold type in the text of the *khbars* reproduced above and in Table 7.1. (See also Figure 8.1 in the following chapter.)

My hypothesis – that the three *khbars* in Abū Mikhnaḥ's account of the visit to the grave are based on two older reports – is corroborated by a comparison with the same passage as presented by Ibn A'tham and al-Balādhurī. Ibn A'tham's version is clearly an abbreviation of *Khabar* III, with a long interpolation between Reports A and B.²³ Although Ibn A'tham has in certain respects edited the *khabar*, it is in the latter part (*K.III.4–7*, to be discussed below) that the main changes have been made. In his text, the two anonymous reports A and B as formulated here are kept relatively intact in comparison with Abū Mikhnaḥ's version, and the interpolation of the long passage containing a speech and a poem by a certain Wahb b. Zam'a al-Ju'fi is placed between the two traditions.²⁴ This indicates that Ibn A'tham regarded Reports A and B as original units.

Al-Balādhurī's account is very short, and based on Report A with some modifications. It goes:

When Sulaymān and his companions reached the tomb of al-Ḥusayn [*lammā intabā Sulaymān wa-asḥābihi ilā qabr al-Ḥusayn*] they cried out in unison and wept [*ṣarakhū ṣarkhatan wāhidatan wa-bakaw*]. Sulaymān said: 'Oh God [*Allāhumma*], have mercy on al-Ḥusayn, the martyr son of the martyr!' They called out: 'Oh, avengers of al-Ḥusayn!' and they expressed their repentance [*tawba*] for neglecting to help him.²⁵

²³ Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī, *Futūḥ*, vol. VI, 67.

²⁴ For Ibn A'tham's 'interpolations', see Conrad, 'Ibn A'tham', 99–101. In this context, however, the interpolation is less overt than those Conrad discusses. The speech and poem ascribed to Wahb in fact have very little to do with the sentiment and the mission of the Tawwābūn, as it is expressed in the rest of the story.

²⁵ Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, vol. VI, 369–70.

That Ibn A'tham's and al-Balādhurī's versions are similar to that of Abū Mikhnaḥ is of course no surprise, as they based their accounts of the Tawwābūn on his account. What is significant here, however, is that, although they have made amendments to Abū Mikhnaḥ's text, they have kept the two anonymous reports A and B basically intact. In all cases (Ibn A'tham's versions of Reports A and B, and al-Balādhurī's version of Report A), the introductory words are essentially the same as in those reports in Abū Mikhnaḥ's version. In every case, moreover, the introductions are followed by expressions that are entirely consistent with each of the respective traditions. Thus, an introduction from Report A is never combined with elements from Report B, or vice versa. Finally, although elements from each of the traditions may be cut out in the various versions, when they do occur, they always do so in the same order.

Before going on, I will focus on the differences between the two versions of Report A as given in *K.II.1* and *K.III.1*. If, as I argue above, these two sections have their origin in an older, anonymous report, why are they different? Is it possible to determine which of the two versions is nearer to the original? There is in fact a grammatical anomaly in *K.II.1* which may be of some help in tracing the tradition history of the two versions. A close reading reveals that the pronominal suffixes at the end of the section, which refer to al-Ḥusayn and his father 'Alī, are in the plural form, even though the dual form would have been grammatically correct. Thus, the text first refers to them as 'the martyr son of the martyr, the right-guided one son of the right-guided one, the righteous one son of the righteous one'. This is followed by an invocation to God to act as a witness that the Tawwābūn follow '*their* [al-Ḥusayn's and 'Alī's] religion and *their* path and are enemies of those who killed *them* and friends of those who love *them*'.²⁶ Had the text been grammatically correct, each of the pronouns italicised above would have been dual (*-humā* or *-himā*), as they refer to the two persons, al-Ḥusayn and 'Alī; but instead, they are plural (*-hum* or *-him*). It is true that such grammatical anomalies are not unusual, even in Arabic texts of high literary quality.²⁷ The corresponding sentence in *K.III.1* is grammatically correct: 'We call You to witness, O Lord, that we are doing the

²⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II, 546.

²⁷ I am grateful to Meir Bar-Asher for pointing this out to me.

same as [what *they* were] when *they* were killed'.²⁸ Here, the italicised pronouns (which are implied in the passive verb *qatalū*), which refer to Ḥusayn and his companions who fought at Karbala, are, correctly, in the plural.

To conclude this argument. In my view, the wording of K.III.1 is probably closer to, if not *the*, original rendering. The text was then later 'Shi'itised' in K.II.1 by substituting 'Alī for the fighters at Karbala, by emphasising the filial relationship of al-Ḥusayn to 'Alī, and by adding the epithet *mahdī* (rightly guided) to those of *shahīd* (martyr) and *ṣiddīq* (righteous).²⁹ The suffixed pronouns from the original version in the new rendering were, however, not changed, resulting in the slightly inaccurate grammar of K.II.1. A further, perhaps even more probative indication that the rendering of K.III.1 is older is that the reverse process is not likely. In other words, it is difficult to imagine 'Alī being replaced by al-Ḥusayn's companions at Karbala in a later version.

Sections K.III.3–8

In what follows, I analyse the approximately four-fifths of *Khabar* III that has not yet been discussed. The question I now address is the extent of anonymous Report B. Its beginning is quite clear, but where does it end? Does it extend to the end of *Khabar* III, or is much of that *khabar* composed of material that was added later? Unlike the first sentence of the tradition, and unlike Report A, there are no independent parallels that can be compared with the latter part of the *khabar*. In Ibn A'tham's account there is a shorter version of the *khabar*, but this is clearly based on Abū Mikhnaḥ and thus cannot be used for comparison.³⁰ Thus in this part of the study we must rely mainly on internal criteria, such as content and the flow of the narrative.

When it comes to K.III.6 and 7, however, there are quite clear indications that these sections were added later, even if they are written as part of *Khabar* III. These sections relate a speech by a certain al-Muthannā

²⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II, 546; *History*, vol. XX, 132. The passage is difficult to translate literally, which is why the words which I have placed within square brackets are inserted by the translator. In fact, in the Arabic text, only one pronoun is implied.

²⁹ For early instances of the formula '*mahdī ibn al-mahdī*', see the poetry by the Kaysānī poet Kutayyir 'Azza, e.g. *Dīwān*, 496.

³⁰ In a previous study, I more or less took for granted that Report A was roughly equal to K.III.2–5 ('Date', 200). As will be seen, I have changed my view on this matter.

Table 7.1 Synopsis of the khabars about the Tawwābūn's visit to al-Ḥusayn's grave

<i>Khabar I</i>	<i>Khabar II</i>	<i>Khabar III</i>
Report A		
K.I.2. When the people reached al-Ḥusayn's tomb, they shouted out in unison and wept;	K.II.1. When we reached the tomb of al-Ḥusayn (P) the people wept together;	K.III.1. When Sulaymān b. Ṣurad and his companions reached the tomb of al-Ḥusayn, they cried in unison;
<i>Lammā intabā al-nās ilā qabr al-Ḥusayn ṣāḥū ṣayḥatan wāḥidatan wa-bakū.</i>	<i>Lammā intabaynā ilā qabr al-Ḥusayn (ع) bakā al-nās bi-ajma'ibim.</i>	<i>Lammā intabā Sulaymān b. Ṣurad wa-aṣḥābihi ilā qabr al-Ḥusayn nadaw ṣayḥatan wāḥidatan.</i>
	Oh God, have mercy on al-Ḥusayn, the martyr son of the martyr, the right-guided one son of the right-guided one, the righteous one son of the righteous one.	Oh Lord ... have mercy on al-Ḥusayn and his companions, the martyrs and the righteous ones.
	<i>Allāhumma, irḥam Ḥusaynan, al-shahīd ibn al-shahīd, al-mahdī ibn al-mahdī, al-ṣiddīq ibn al-ṣiddīq.</i>	<i>Yā Rabb... irḥam Husaynan wa-aṣḥābahu, al-shuhadā' wa-l-ṣiddīqīn.</i>
	Oh God, we call you to witness that we follow their religion and their path, and we are enemies of those who killed them, friends of those who love them.	We call you to witness, Oh Lord, that we are doing the same as what they were when they were killed.
	<i>Allāhumma, inna nushbiduka annā 'alā dīnibim wa-sabīlibim, wa-a'dā'a qātilayhim wa-awliyā'a muḥibbayhim.</i>	<i>Wa-innā nushbiduka, yā Rabb, annā 'alā mithlimā qutalū 'alayhi.</i>
Report B		
K.I.1. They remained there a night and a day praying over him and asking God's pardon for him;		K.III.2. They remained there a day and a night praying over him, weeping and abasing themselves;
<i>Aqāmū bihi laylatan wa-yawman yuṣallūna 'alayhi wa-yastaghfirūna labu.</i>		<i>Aqāmū 'indabu yawman wa-laylatan yuṣallūna 'alayhi wa-yabkūna wa-yataḍarra'ūna.</i>

b. Mukharriba, a leader of the Basra Shi'ites.³¹ They make up a narrative unit, and the 'qāla' separating them probably does not, therefore, indicate a fissure between two traditions. Several features in the incident related here, as well as its position in the story at large, indicate that these two sections were not part of the original account.

To begin with, the incident is not consistent with other parts of the story of the Tawwābūn where al-Muthannā is mentioned. The first time he shows up in the story, it is as recipient of Sulaymān b. Ṣurad's letter to the Shi'ites of al-Madā'in and Basra, asking them to join the Tawwābūn in their mission (analysed in Chapter 6). As leader of the Shi'ites of Basra, al-Muthannā responds positively to the call and promises to come when summoned.³² When the Tawwābūn are about to set out from their camp at al-Nukhayla, they realise that the people of Basra and al-Madā'in have not come; they decide to go anyway, and let these groups catch up later.³³ During the battle at 'Ayn al-Warda, three messengers from al-Madā'in arrive at the battlefield to encourage the Tawwābūn and tell them that the Madā'inīs and the Basrans (the latter under the leadership of al-Muthannā) are on their way.³⁴ Help does not arrive in time, however, and the next time we hear of al-Muthannā is when he and his men (as well as the people from al-Madā'in) meet the remnants of the Tawwābūn, who are on their way back to Kufa.³⁵ Thus, the structure of the story at large speaks against al-Muthannā's presence at the grave of al-Ḥusayn.

Nevertheless, there are traditions which support the version that al-Muthannā was indeed present at the grave, or at least took part in the battle at 'Ayn al-Warda. Thus, al-Madā'inī begins his account of al-Muthannā's support for al-Mukhtār in Basra some time later with the words: 'Al-Muthannā b. Mukharriba al-'Abdī was among those who had witnessed [the battle of] 'Ayn al-Warda with Sulaymān b. Ṣurad.'³⁶ Al-Balādhurī has no record

³¹ According to Hawting, he was from 'Abd al-Qays of Rabī'a (al-Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. XX, 89, n. 388 and 133, n. 499). The name is differently given in the sources, e.g. Muthannā b. Makhrama (see al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, vol. V, 217; Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī, *Futūḥ*, vol. VI, 52, n. 4). Like Hawting, I have followed the version given in the *Addenda et emendanda* in the Leiden version of al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh*.

³² Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II, 505.

³³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II, 544–5.

³⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II, 561–2.

³⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II, 568.

³⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II, 680.

of al-Muthannā at the grave, but when he relates the meeting between the defeated Tawwābūn and the delayed support from al-Madā'in and Basra, he adds a note: 'Some people allege that ... Ibn Mukharriba showed up at the grave of al-Ḥusayn (peace be upon him) at the beginning of the expedition and were present at their battle. God knows best.'³⁷ This little note further indicates that there were traditions in circulation which gave al-Muthannā a role at the grave (as well as in the battle, perhaps), but that al-Balādhurī regarded them with suspicion.

There are, moreover, internal traces that suggest that this part of the text is not original. Although the scene described is basically the same, it differs from the preceding sections in several respects. Thus, in *K.III.4* and *5*, short speeches by Sulaymān and by two of the other leaders of the Tawwābūn, 'Abdallāh b. Wāl and al-Musayyab b. Najaba, are recounted, but none by any other participant at the grave. Furthermore, the leaders' speeches are not praised by the other participants. In *K.III.6* and *7*, however, the account suddenly changes into the first person, and we read that the narrator is sad that al-Muthannā at first does not give a speech like the other leaders, but that after he has spoken, the others commend him for what he said. Thus, both the structure and the content of the passage about al-Muthannā's speech differ from those of the speeches preceding it, factors which differentiate his speech from the rest of the *khbar* and signal that it is added later. Finally, *K.III.6* and *7* add nothing to the story at large (except for the alleged presence of al-Muthannā at the grave, of course), and the narrative would have run smoothly without it.

Ibn A'tham gives an abbreviated version of this segment of the story, in which parts of al-Muthannā's speech are related, merged with other phrases, but his name is not mentioned. Instead, this speech is presented as a collective outcry of the Tawwābūn gathered around the grave.³⁸

Thus, both structure and content argue that the passage about al-Muthannā b. Mukharriba here is a later insertion. The motive for the creation of such a tradition is probably the wish to give al-Muthannā, who was later active in support of al-Mukhtār in Basra,³⁹ a more significant role – for

³⁷ Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, vol. VI, 372.

³⁸ Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī, *Futūḥ*, vol. VI, 69.

³⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II, 680–3.

himself and for Basra – in the Shi'ite movement at large. His embarrassing belatedness in the affair of the Tawwābūn perhaps did not contribute to his image as a champion for the Shi'ite cause, and it might be that the traditions under discussion here, as well as other traditions which are now lost, were attempting to remedy this. It is difficult to know when this addition was made. I find it hard to believe that Abū Mikhnaḥ himself made such a flagrant break with the narrative structure of his own work. Whatever the background, in the following discussion of the traditions of the Tawwābūn's visit to the grave of al-Ḥusayn, I regard K.III.6 and 7 as an insertion, probably not included by Abū Mikhnaḥ in his *Kitāb Sulaymān b. Ṣurad* but added later to enhance al-Muthannā's reputation. It must, however, have been part of the text by the time of Hishām b. al-Kalbī at the latest (that is the turn of the third/beginning of the ninth century), as all the sources mentioned above use that edition of Abū Mikhnaḥ's account.

K.III.8 is merely a description of the course that the journey took after the visit to the grave of al-Ḥusayn. The accounts given by al-Ṭabarī and al-Balādhurī are very similar; they may give a correct picture of the journey, although this is impossible to establish with any certainty. Ibn A'tham's description ('[they] stuck to the main road'⁴⁰) is probably his own condensed rendering of the journey. It is plausible that a description of the journey of the Tawwābūn was included in the earliest versions of the story.

What remains is a discussion of the remainder of the *khabar*, from the latter part of K.III.2 to K.III.5. I noted above that only the first sentence of K.III.2 has a parallel which can be used for comparative purposes, namely K.I.1 (see Table 7.1). However, the content of the entire section K.III.2 is well in line with that of the original rendering of Reports A and B, to the extent that these have been identified. The two anonymous reports relate how the Tawwābūn weep, abase themselves, and ask God for mercy and forgiveness for themselves and al-Ḥusayn. This is very much also the message of K.III.2. Furthermore, K.III.2 is self-contained, in that it gives a brief but complete account of the visit to the grave from the arrival of the Tawwābūn, their sojourn overnight and their departure. Hence, it is plausible that K.III.2 more or less corresponds to the original rendering of Report B.

⁴⁰ Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī, *Futūḥ*, vol. VI, 70.

K.III.3, however, clearly breaks the narrative flow. There, the story switches to the first person, with the narrator relating how he saw the people crowding around al-Ḥusayn's tomb 'more thickly than the people throng around the Black Stone [of the Ka'ba]'.⁴¹ This is an example of the rhetorical device of *mimesis* (i.e. creating the illusion of having directly witnessed what actually happened), a frequent device in early Arabic historiography.⁴² By speaking in the first person, the narrator tries to convey a 'photographic' image of the scene and thus 'to inscribe history "as it really was"'.⁴³ After this section, which consists of only one sentence, the narrative reverts to an account in the third person. To my mind, K.III.3 is likely a later addition, the purpose of which is to demonstrate the high status of al-Ḥusayn, to make the story livelier, and to inspire confidence in the narrator and the story.

K.III.4 and 5 relate in further detail what happened when the group prepared to leave the grave. The first part repeats the departure scene, but adds a description of how the Tawwābūn are blessed by their leaders as they leave. This is followed by short speeches given by the same leaders, but here the tenor of their words differs from the renditions in K.III.1 and 2. Rather than crying out to God for forgiveness and mercy, here the Tawwābūn laud the family of al-Ḥusayn, accuse their enemies, and assert their wish to fight against the latter. As I will show below, the content of these contributions contains elements that probably did not develop within Shi'ism until later. This is also the only time in the story of the Tawwābūn when al-Ḥusayn's brother al-Ḥasan is mentioned, even if not by name. Taken together, the redundant description of the departure and the short speeches that convey a partly different message suggest that K.III. 4 and 5 belong to neither of the two anonymous reports, but are later additions.

Content

The foregoing, rather detailed analysis of the account of the Tawwābūn's visit to the grave of al-Ḥusayn suggests that the text is based on two anonymous reports, which I have called A and B. Of the texts, K.III.1 and K.III.2 are

⁴¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II, 547.

⁴² For a discussion of the use of *mimesis* in al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh*, see Shoshan, *Poetics*, 3–60; the employment of eyewitnesses in this respect is particularly discussed on pp. 25–41.

⁴³ Shoshan, *Poetics*, 25

probably the closest to the original Reports A and B respectively. *K.I.1* consists of the first sentence of Report B, and *K.I.2* is taken from the introduction to Report B. *K.II.1* is a modified version of Report A. It is not improbable that *K.III.8*, the onward journey from the site of the grave, is also very early. The rest of *Khabar III* (*K.III.3–7*), however, is, I think, made up of later additions (see Figure 8.1).

It should now be possible also to recognise which aspects of the content of the account are early, and perhaps to detect traces of the development of some of the ideas expressed within early Shi'ism. In the oldest sections of the text, *K.III.1* and 2, two of the themes that we found in the four programmatic texts examined in Chapter 5 figure prominently in the account of the visit to the grave: the role and the image presented of al-Ḥusayn, and the repentance of the Tawwābūn. The theme of the Karbala tragedy and the treachery of the Kufans, so important in the texts analysed in the previous chapter, is much less conspicuous here, though clearly implied.

The Image of al-Ḥusayn

As I have mentioned above, the two anonymous reports relate how the Tawwābūn asked for God's mercy on and forgiveness for al-Ḥusayn. Thus, in Report A (*K.III.1* in the outline above), they pray, 'Have mercy on al-Ḥusayn and his companions', and in Report B (*K.III.2*) we read that on departure, every one of them stopped at the grave and 'stood in prayer over it and asked for mercy on him and pardon for him'. In the light of later Shi'ism – in which al-Ḥusayn is one of the fourteen *ma'sūmūn*, those members of the family of the Prophet who are 'impeccable' or immune from error and sin – this is unexpected.⁴⁴ Though the earliest attestations of the concept of *'isma* or 'impeccability' being applied to the Shi'ite imams, dating from the third quarter of the second/late eighth century,⁴⁵ seem to use it to refer to the infallible transmission

⁴⁴ For the concept of *'isma*, 'inerrancy' or 'impeccability', see e.g. Madelung, 'Iṣma', and Algar, 'Čahārdah Ma'sūm'. There are, however, traditions in which the Prophet asked for forgiveness for *himself*, though he was sinless (see Crow, 'Death', 82–9; the tradition is quoted on p. 84). This is a different matter, though, and probably a later idea.

⁴⁵ Both Madelung ('Iṣma') and Algar ('Čahārdah Ma'sūm') maintain that the notion of the inerrancy of the Imāms was held at least from the first half of the second/eighth century. It is unfortunate, however, that neither of them substantiates their statements with examples or references, but having claimed this, both scholars move on to discuss the concept of *'isma* in the writings of

of the Prophetic message, it soon came to mean the complete impeccability of the Prophet Muḥammad, his daughter Fāṭima and the imams.⁴⁶ Furthermore, both the anonymous reports mention al-Ḥusayn and his followers side by side, almost as equals; all of them are called martyrs and righteous, and the Tawwābūn's prayers for mercy are extended to all those killed at Karbala. The only difference here between the companions and al-Ḥusayn is the latter's blood relation to his grandfather, the Prophet Muḥammad. Again, as in the programmatic texts examined in Chapter 5, the connection to the Prophet goes through Fāṭima. In other words, both Reports A and B portray al-Ḥusayn as an ordinary human being, standing in the same position towards God as all other humans, except for his close relation to the Prophet.

In the amendments of and additions to the two original reports, however, another image of al-Ḥusayn begins to emerge. Earlier in the chapter I have already discussed the association between al-Ḥusayn and his father 'Alī in K.II.1, where both are called martyrs and righteous, epithets that in Report A were originally given to his companions at Karbala. In *Khabar* II, al-Ḥusayn and 'Alī are moreover described as rightly guided, *mahdī*. This term was originally probably a kind of honorific title given to those leaders and prophets who were thought to be guided by God; it did not originally have the meaning of eschatological redeemer that it later acquired. In the latter sense, the *mahdī* is never portrayed as being or having a son, so here the more general meaning of the title is certainly meant.

In K.III.4, however, al-Ḥusayn, his father and his brother are said to be 'the best of Muḥammad's community [*umma*] [who will be] imploring God's favour on the Day of Resurrection [*wasīlatan 'inda Allāh yawma al-qiyyāma*]' . According to Jean Calmard, this is the first time al-Ḥusayn is invoked as an intermediary (*wasīla*) between God and humanity, even if the word here does not have the meaning it received in later Shī'ism.⁴⁷ Calmard,

Hishām b. al-Ḥakam, who was active at the *end* of the same century. On Hishām and his opinion on *'isma*, see also Bayhom-Daou, 'Hishām b. al-Ḥakam', 78–9. See also the discussion relating to this issue by Crow, 'Death', 82–9. Crow seems to take the authenticity of the sources for granted; if that is correct, the concept of *'isma* at least began to be discussed as early as Madelung and Algar suggest. For an extended discussion of *'isma* in early Shī'ism, see also Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, 159–79.

⁴⁶ Madelung, 'Iṣma'.

⁴⁷ Calmard, 'Culte', 68–9.

however, seems to accept that the text gives a more or less correct description of the actual event, while I regard this (as argued above) as a later addition. Thus, I think Calmard's bold assertion that this is the earliest instance of this idea exceeds the bounds of the evidence.

Finally, the association made between the grave of al-Ḥusayn and the Black Stone of the Ka'ba in K.III.3 is interesting.⁴⁸ I agree with Dakake when she writes, 'To connect this stone with the tomb of al-Ḥusayn is a statement of immense symbolic significance for understanding the concept of the sanctity of Ḥusayn as the bearer of Prophetic blood.'⁴⁹ As we have seen, the notion of the sanctity and inviolability of al-Ḥusayn and the family of the Prophet is very prominent in the Karbala story,⁵⁰ and the idea is certainly present even if the word *ḥurma* ('inviolability') is mentioned only once in the account of the Tawwābūn with regard to al-Ḥusayn.⁵¹ Again, this section is probably a later addition to Report B, and it is uncertain when it was appended.

There are, therefore, obvious indications in the account of the visit to the grave that the image of al-Ḥusayn developed over time. In the earliest sections, those that probably quite faithfully recount the two anonymous reports A and B, he is described as an ordinary man, more or less on a par with his companions at Karbala except for the fact that he is the grandson of the Prophet. By contrast, in the parts amended or added later, he is clearly depicted as standing above his followers and the Tawwābūn. He is partly removed from human history, to use the words of McCutcheon.

The Karbala Tragedy and the Treachery of the Tawwābūn

The oldest parts of the account contain no description of what happened at Karbala; the event is only alluded to in Report A (K.III.1) as the Tawwābūn

⁴⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, ser. II, 547; *History*, vol. XX, 133.

⁴⁹ Dakake, *Charismatic Community*, 94. Dakake indicates a similar statement of one of the Tawwābūn after the battle proper, where he calls the enemy 'destroyers of the sacred sanctuary' (*yā mukhribī al-bayt al-ḥarām*) (al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II, 571; *History*, vol. XX, 156). However, I find Dakake's conclusion that 'the sacred sanctuary' here refers to the *abl al-bayt* less probable. The reference might very well be literal, referring to the bombardment of the Ka'ba by the troops of the caliph Yazīd in 64/683 (see al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II, 424–7). The later connection and contrast between the grave of al-Ḥusayn at Karbala and the Ka'ba will be further discussed with regard to the merits of pilgrimage to the grave in Chapter 11.

⁵⁰ See Chapter 4.

⁵¹ See above, Chapter 6 on Sections T.II.2.

ask for forgiveness for their sin of failing to support al-Ḥusayn and his companions. In Reports A and B, the tragedy is thus implied when the Tawwābūn cry out over their betrayal. The treachery, on the other hand, is conspicuous in both the older reports. Thus, Report A begins with the outcry, 'Oh Lord, we have betrayed the son of our Prophet's daughter!' In Report B, the confession of betrayal is less explicit, but the weeping and self-abasement of the Tawwābūn clearly signify their consciousness of the sin they have committed.

As will be seen in the next section, in the later amendments and additions to the three *khābars*, this sense of guilt is played down.

The Dire Consequences for the Traitors, the Need to Repent and the Manner of Repentance

Report A (K.III.1) ends with a quote from Qur. 7:23: 'If you do not pardon us our sin and have mercy on us, then we are among the losers.' In the Qur'ān, this is actually Adam and Eve's plea for God's forgiveness when they have sinned against His command not to eat of the tree in the Garden (of Eden). In quoting this verse, the report thus signals that the treachery of the Tawwābūn against al-Ḥusayn is a sin of the gravest order, an offence that will bring perdition on those who committed it if they are not forgiven. Thus, in another quotation from the Qur'ān in the same section, the Tawwābūn plead to God, 'relent [*tub*] toward us, for you are the relenting one [*al-tawwāb*] and the compassionate one' (Qur. 2:128). This verse contains the only two occurrences in the entire story of the root *t-w-b* where it is God who is the 'turning' or relenting subject. In the Qur'ān, God's 'turning' towards the human is normally conditioned by human repentance. Referring to the passage of the Golden Calf discussed above, Reynolds and Moghadam write, 'As a rule, human *tawba* precedes, and is a condition of, divine *tawba* (Q 2:160; 5:39). In Q 2:54 the Israelites, after the sin of the (golden) calf, are told to return (*tūbū*) to God that he might turn to them (*tāba 'alaykum*).'⁵² Report A, like other parts of the story, therefore clearly demonstrates the Tawwābūn's awareness that God's forgiveness can only follow their own *tawba* and that they consider it necessary to manifest their repentance publicly to show their sincerity. Their plea to God for forgiveness is therefore closely associated with their declaration that they are now

⁵² Reynolds and Moghadam, 'Repentance', 383.

doing what al-Ḥusayn and his companions did at Karbala when they were killed. Turning their backs on their previous cowardly negligence, they are now prepared to follow the example of his companions on the battlefield. The weeping and self-abasement related in Report B signify the same kind of plea for forgiveness, even if that report foregrounds the prayer for al-Ḥusayn's soul.

The amendments and additions to the original reports give a slightly different picture of the feelings of the Tawwābūn. The profound sense of guilt and the plea for God's forgiveness are toned down, and what is accentuated in their place is their bold declarations of loyalty and love towards al-Ḥusayn and his family, as well as enmity and the desire to fight against their enemies. It is in these parts of the account that we find various forms of the concepts *walāya* ('love' or 'loyalty') towards the family of the Prophet, and *'adāwa* ('enmity') towards and *barā'a* ('dissociation') from its enemies (*K.II.1*; *K.III.5*).⁵³ The more recent layers of the account, in other words, contain markers of a Shi'ite group identity that are not found in the earliest reports.

Ritual Aspects

The section dealing with the visit of the Tawwābūn to al-Ḥusayn's grave is, furthermore, one of the earliest accounts of a Shi'ite ritual that was later to emerge.⁵⁴ Although what is described here is not a *ziyāra*, a pilgrimage ritual, as it developed later, the way Randal Collins talks of interaction rituals – as encounters between people where they mutually focus their attention on something – is applicable here.⁵⁵

To set the visit to the grave in a more general context, I will briefly, before analysing the text, summarise the relevant parts of Leor Halevi's book on death rites in the emerging Islamic community.⁵⁶ Halevi argues that rituals regarding death and the dead body are crucial in the establishment and preservation of the identity, what I call 'social formation', of a religious community.⁵⁷ He contends that the early pre-Islamic rituals of washing the corpse, visiting

⁵³ On these concepts and their significance for the early Shi'ite community, see Dakake, *Charismatic Community*, 49–57. On *walāya*, see Amir-Moezzi, *Spirituality*, 231–75.

⁵⁴ Dakake, *Charismatic Community*, 94. See below, Chapter 11.

⁵⁵ See Chapter 2.

⁵⁶ Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*. For the importance of visits to graves in later Shi'ism, see also Schöller, *The Living and the Dead*, vol. II, 29–33.

⁵⁷ Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 1–5, 234–40.

the graves of the dead and praying for God's mercy and forgiveness for the deceased, together with other customs associated with death and burial, gradually became 'Islamicised' during the second and early third/eighth and early ninth centuries in order to distinguish the Muslims from other communities and strengthen the unity within the Islamic *umma*.⁵⁸ One such marker, he argues, where the process of Islamisation is clearly visible is that of epitaphs.

On a tombstone bearing one of the earliest inscriptions known from a Muslim context, we read:

In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate, this grave belongs to
'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Khayr al-Ḥajrī.

Forgive him, O God, and make him enter [Paradise] by your mercy, and let
us go with him.

Seek forgiveness for him whenever this inscription is read, and say 'Amen!'

This inscription was written in Jumādā II of the year 31 [January or February
of the year 652 CE].⁵⁹

Halevi asks to what extent this inscription can be called 'Islamic', as the only unambiguous indication that the deceased belonged to the movement that later came to be known under the label 'Islam' is the reference to the *hijrī* calendar. Although there is no reason to doubt that this 'Abd al-Raḥmān identified himself as 'Muslim', or perhaps as a 'Believer' (*mu'min*) or 'Emigrant' (*muhājir*), the inscription itself can hardly be said to be 'Islamic'. Halevi demonstrates that over the first centuries of Islam, epitaphs increasingly came to include particular characteristics such as references to the Prophet Muḥammad, quotations from the Qur'ān and formulaic confessions of faith. Similarly, burial customs such as the washing of the dead body, the procession and communal prayer at the burial, and the physical appearance of the grave

⁵⁸ Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 14–32. The term 'pre-Islamic religious traditions' here does not necessarily mean the *jāhili* tradition that was supplanted by Islam, but includes traditions which existed before the emergence of Islam and continued to exist beside it (in, for example, Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism) and which to a certain extent were also taken over and integrated into Islam.

⁵⁹ The translation is from Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 14, and the discussion of the lack of Islamic characteristics on the following pages of this book. For a slightly different translation of the same text, see Donner, *Narratives*, 85. The Arabic text is available in El-Hawary, 'Most Ancient Islamic Monument', 322.

were given specific 'Islamic' characteristics. Consequently, a tombstone at a woman's grave about four decades later has more 'Islamic' characteristics, such as the reference to the Muslims as a family (the *ahl al-islām*), the lament over the Prophet's death, and the *shahāda* (although in slightly different form from the classical one). Still, though, there is no quotation from the Qur'ān. These only emerge towards the middle of the second/eighth century.⁶⁰

My point here is that many supposedly Islamic traditions associated with death and burial already existed within other religious traditions in the area – among Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians, for example. To a certain extent, the Muslims maintained these customs and rituals but placed them in a new context, adapted them and, in certain cases, gave them new content. In the same process, some earlier traditions were completely prohibited, while others were added. (This is true not only of rituals surrounding death and burial, of course, but also other rituals such as prayer, pilgrimage and fasting.)

The account of the visit of the Tawwābūn to Ḥusayn's grave is a further example of the process of 'Islamisation' – or perhaps, rather, a 'Shi'itisation' of pre-Islamic rituals. In the oldest layers of the story, that is, in Reports A and B (K.III. 1 and 2), part of what is described – the visit to the grave and the pleas to God for forgiveness and mercy for al-Ḥusayn – constitutes a ritual that was familiar in this context. By later Shi'ite standards, however, asking God to forgive al-Ḥusayn's sins was absurd, as we have seen. Yet, already in these old strata there are some elements that are less usual in this setting: the Tawwābūn's repentance and their prayers for forgiveness for *themselves* rather than just for al-Ḥusayn. In these reports we probably come closer to a description of the actual event than in the later additions and emendations; in the later parts of the text, we find activities and words that have more of a Shi'ite tinge.

Another aspect of interest is the role of the Kufan tribal burial grounds, the *jabbānāt*, as spaces where rebellions were often instigated and prepared. When the men of the tribe gathered at their *jabbāna* to get ready for battle, the women customarily wailed and spurred the fighters on to avenge the dead

⁶⁰ Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 20–2. For the establishment of the Qur'ān as a text common to all Muslims at the turn of the second/eighth century, see Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an*.

of the tribe.⁶¹ As Parker Selby has indicated, several features in the description of the Tawwābūn's visit to al-Ḥusayn's grave correspond to this practice. He writes: 'this is not to deny the soteriological notions of atonement motivating the participants in the revolt, but to suggest that the Tawwābūn's revolt also be understood as a prototypical social institution of Arab tribal politics'.⁶² I agree with Selby's conclusion. Thus in *K.III.2*, for example, we read that 'the people did not cease to plead for mercy on [al-Ḥusayn] and his companions until they made the early morning prayer by his tomb on the following day, *and that increased their fury*'. The last clause, italicised here, clearly points in this direction. The scenes described in the early layers of this story thus amply express the intense emotions of the Tawwābūn – in Durkheimian language, their collective effervescence – which intensified their determination to avenge the death of al-Ḥusayn or to die in the attempt. Still, *wailing* in the sense of expressing sorrow for the death of al-Ḥusayn is conspicuous by its absence from the account. The grief that the Tawwābūn manifest is not so much at having lost al-Ḥusayn as of having sinned gravely against God and the family of the Prophet.⁶³ Furthermore, while their visit to the grave foreshadows the developed Shi'ite ritual of the *ziyāra*, we see nothing of the miraculous qualities of the grave that are found in later traditions and pilgrimage manuals.⁶⁴

Summary

The account of the Tawwābūn's visit to the grave of al-Ḥusayn is interesting in several respects. The composition of the text reveals some of the history of its tradition and shows that it consists of at least two layers. The earlier one is made up of two anonymous traditions about the visit to the grave, where ideas are expressed which disagree with, or are less common in, later Shi'ism, such as the tenet of the infallibility of the imam and the sense of deep guilt of the Tawwābūn for neglecting al-Ḥusayn. In this layer, furthermore, 'Alī is absent, and the genealogy of al-Ḥusayn is traced through his mother Fāṭima to the

⁶¹ Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 132–3.

⁶² Selby, 'Husayn's Dirt', 23–4.

⁶³ This in agreement with Halm (*Shi'a Islam*, 19), but contrary to what Dakake assumes in her analysis of the story (*Charismatic Community*, 90–5).

⁶⁴ See Chapter 11.

Prophet. The later layer is merged with and appended to these two early traditions and displays more 'markers' of Shi'ism as it developed later. Here, then, we see clear traces of the imam (whether 'Alī, al-Ḥasan or al-Ḥusayn) being elevated to a figure above ordinary humanity. Thus, within this story, most of which was composed before the end of the second/eighth century, we can already see a certain development of Shi'ite doctrine. In the following chapter, I will discuss the dating of the text in more detail.