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The Date of the Story of the *Tawwābūn*

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Introduction¹

Of the many studies of the emergence and early development of Shī‘ism that have been made, remarkably few have seriously analysed the story of the *Tawwābūn* (‘Penitents’). Some scholars have explicitly stated, or at least intimated, that the story is early, and hence argued that it is important for understanding the emergence of Shī‘ism.² No substantial study has been made of the date of the story, however. In the present study, I will analyse a part of the story of the *Tawwābūn*—the visit to the grave of al-Ḥusayn—as it is given us by the historian al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), who most probably faithfully renders the account by Abū Mikhnaf (d. 157/774). I will argue that at least this part of the story dates back to the end of the 1st century AH/beginning of the 8th century CE. Together with other indications for an old age, this supports the argument that much of the text, albeit not all of it, is indeed early.

The background to the story of the *Tawwābūn* is the death of al-Ḥusayn at Karbalā’ in 61/680. Although we are told that the group first began to gather in Kūfa soon after al-Ḥusayn’s death, the bulk of the story took place a few years later. Some of the men that failed to support al-Ḥusayn felt deep regret for their neglect to come to the help of the grandson of the Prophet. They gathered, chose Sulaymān b. Ṣurad as their leader, and discussed how they could best make penitence (Ar. *tawba*) for this crime. In their deliberations over their sin, they found that it was like the Israelites’ worship of the golden calf. In that situation, Moses had sentenced the children of Israel to let them kill each other,³ and the Penitents now considered following this example and commit collective suicide. Since killing oneself is not allowed for Muslims, however, they agreed on not taking recourse to this drastic measure. They decided that they would instead take to arms and go against the Umayyad army—to kill those that killed al-Ḥusayn, or be killed themselves in the attempt to find revenge for him. The Penitents were well aware that this act in all probability would lead to their own death, but they regarded it as an act of martyrdom for the cause of the loyalty to the Prophet and his offspring, and that it would cleanse them from their guilt. They set out in Rabī‘ II 65/November 684. Gathering at al-Nukhayla outside Kūfa, they realised that the people that had joined them were far fewer than they had hoped. Furthermore, the Shī‘ites from Baṣra and al-Madā’in that had promised

¹ The article is a partial result of the research project ‘Revenge or Martyrdom! The Story of the Penitents as a Link to the Early Development of Shī‘ism’, funded by the Swedish Research Council (reg. no. 421-2011-1806). It is a development of a section of a paper presented at MESA, Washington DC, Nov. 24, 2015. I am grateful to the participants of the panel for useful comments. I also want to thank my colleagues at Dalarna University for their remarks.

² Thus H. Halm, *Shi‘a Islam: From Religion to Revolution*, (Princeton: Marcus Wiener Publishers, 1997), and G. R. Hawting, ‘The Tawwābūn, Atonement and ‘Āshūrā’’, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 17 (1994), 166–181 respectively. I will come back to their studies below.

³ Qur. 2:54, cf. Ex. 32: 25–29. For a brief discussion of this verse from the Qur’ān, see below.

to support them had not yet shown up. In spite of this, they decided to depart. On their way to the battlefield they stopped at al-Ḥusayn's tomb at Karbalā', dedicating themselves to prayer for al-Ḥusayn's soul and remorseful crying over their own sin. As they moved on, they eventually met the Umayyads at 'Ayn al-Warda in northern Iraq, and were defeated. Some of the few survivors felt great shame that they had not been killed in the campaign.⁴

Previous studies

Some studies of the story of the *Tawwābūn* have been made from different perspectives. Julius Wellhausen has a short section on this movement in his classic work *Die Religiös-politischen Oppositionsparteien*, where he gives a summary of the story with a few comments.⁵ He states that it was a feeling of guilt rather than the obligation to take vengeance on al-Ḥusayn that motivated the *Tawwābūn*. Wellhausen accepts that Abū Mikhnaf actually relates historical facts, and that the speeches and letters given in the text are transmitted, not composed by the author.⁶

In a more general study of the emergence of Shī'ism, Montgomery Watt argues that most of the *Tawwābūn* belonged to tribes that had their origin in Southern Arabia.⁷ According to him, the loyalty that the Shī'ites felt towards the 'Alīds had its roots in South Arabian kingship ideology, according to which the king had supernatural qualities. Thus, they carried with them an idea of a charismatic leader that was applied to 'Alī and his descendants.⁸ Jean Calmard in his summary of the story of the *Tawwābūn* reiterates Watt's arguments, but does not position himself in relation to them. His understanding of the group is that they, in contrast to some other Shī'ite movements, did not pose a political threat to the Umayyads.⁹ Neither Watt nor Calmard discuss the date of the text, but seem to accept that it basically relates what actually happened at the time.

Like Wellhausen's rendering of the story, that of Syed Husain Mohammad Jafri can hardly be said to be analytical.¹⁰ It is rather a summary with some concluding points. The author there argues that the movement of the *Tawwābūn* was thoroughly Arabian (as distinct from later

⁴ The full text is given in Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-'l-mulūk*, (Leiden: Brill, 1879–1901), ser. II, 497–513, 538–578; *The History of al-Ṭabarī. Vol. XX: The Collapse of Sufyānid Authority and the Coming of the Marwānids*, translated by G. Hawting, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 80–97, 124–160. For more comprehensive summaries in translation, see J. Wellhausen, *Die religiös-politischen Oppositionsparteien im alten Islam*, (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1901), 71–74; (Eng. trans. *The Religio-Political Factions in Early Islam*, translated by R.C. Ostle and S.M. Walzer (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1975), 121–124); J. Calmard, 'Le culte de l'Imām Ḥusayn: Etude sur la commémoration du Drame de Karbalā dans l'Iran pré-safavide' (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Paris III: EHESS, 1975), 66–69; S. H. M. Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 222–234; Halm, *Shi'a Islam*, 16–20; F. M. Denny, 'Tawwābūn', *Encyclopedia of Islam*, second edition, (Leiden: Brill, 2000), vol. 10, 398; and M. M. Dakake, *The Charismatic Community: Shi'ite Identity in Early Islam*, (New York, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007), 90–95.

⁵ Wellhausen, *Oppositionsparteien*, 71–74; (eng. translation *Religio-Political Factions*, 121–124).

⁶ Wellhausen, *Oppositionsparteien*, 73–74.

⁷ W. M. Watt, 'Shi'ism under the Umayyads', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 92, no. 3–4 (1960), 158–172.

⁸ Watt, 'Shi'ism', 161–162.

⁹ Calmard, 'Culte', 69.

¹⁰ Jafri, *Origins*, 222–234.

Shī'ite movements where non-Arabic *mawālī* played predominant roles), and in opposition to Watt's thesis he maintains that a good number of the *Tawwābūn* actually came from the northern tribes. He further holds that the movement was religious rather than political in its character. Finally he maintains that there was a difference between the companions who lost their lives together with al-Ḥusayn at Karbalā' and the *Tawwābūn* in that the latter did not have recourse to al-Ḥusayn himself, and thus had

no personal binding force that could keep them zealous enough to make them die except a strong feeling of duty and a deep sense of religious obligation. Thus the *Tawwābūn* pushed Shī'ism another step further towards an independent and self-sustaining existence.¹¹

Like the previous authors, Jafri uncritically accepts the historicity of the text, in the sense that it relates the facts as they occurred. He says that the text of the letters from the leader of the *Tawwābūn*, Sulaymān b. Ṣurad to the Shī'ites of al-Madā'in and Baṣra has been 'meticulously preserved for us' by Abū Mikhnaf, and thus they 'make extremely useful and revealing reading for an understanding of the religious sentiments and feelings and the doctrinal stand of the Shī'a of this period.'¹²

In his monograph about the second *fitna*, Gernot Rotter has a couple of sections where he briefly discusses the movement of the *Tawwābūn*. In the first, he hypothesises that the 'willingness to self-annihilation' of the *Tawwābūn*, which is 'actually un-Arabic and un-Islamic',¹³ must be caused by a basic mental mind-set of the group. The triggering factors of this attitude cannot be retrieved today. Rotter says that the Medieval European Flagellants come to mind when reading about the *Tawwābūn*, and he thinks that the pestilence that raged in Iraq might have been a cause for their departure. He is careful to state, however, that there is no way in which we can prove this.¹⁴ Of more interest than these speculations about the causes for the endeavour of the *Tawwābūn* is his other section about the story, where he analyses the chronology given in al-Ṭabarī's text. Rotter argues that the date for the battle at 'Ayn al-Warda, Jumādā I 65/January 685, is wrong. Thus, Abū Mikhnaf contradicts himself in first giving this date and then just a few lines further on indicating that the battle occurred during the reign of 'Abd al-Mālik who began his reign in April that year.¹⁵ Al-Mas'ūdī gives a date later that summer,¹⁶ and other historians also agree that the battle occurred during 'Abd al-Mālik's reign. Furthermore, Rotter maintains, the distance from Kūfa to 'Ayn al-Warda is so long that it is implausible that the *Tawwābūn* could have travelled that far in just a couple of months.¹⁷ Personally, I would not give too much attention to Abū Mikhnaf's date for the battle. He was an experienced historian that would scarcely make a mistake like that. This date might well have been inserted by a later copyist or editor. Be that as it may, what is

¹¹ Jafri, *Origins*, 233.

¹² Jafri, *Origins*, 228.

¹³ G. Rotter, *Die Umayyaden und der zweite Bürgerkrieg (680-692)*, (Wiesbaden: Deutsche Morgenländ. Gesellsch.: Kommissionsvlg Franz Steiner, 1982), 98, my translation.

¹⁴ Rotter, *Bürgerkrieg*, 98.

¹⁵ Rotter, *Bürgerkrieg*, 187–192. For this date, see al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, ser. II, 558; *History*, vol. XX, 144.

¹⁶ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, (Paris 1861–77), vol. V, 221.

¹⁷ Rotter, *Bürgerkrieg*, 189.

important here is that Rotter has a more critical stance towards the text than the previously mentioned scholars. He makes no further analysis of the sources to the text, however, but assumes that Abū Mikhnaf is its author. Yet, although he demonstrates that the latter made mistakes, as in the question of chronology, he seems to concede that the text actually relates historical facts about the *Tawwābūn*, their ideas and their mission, although he admits that we cannot reach the psychological motives for this.

Michael Fishbein has written a thesis about al-Mukhtār—the leader of a Shīʿite rebellion in Kūfa just after the movement of the *Tawwābūn*—in which he has a section where he compares the two movements.¹⁸ Although Fishbein is wary of distinguishing between religion and politics in early Islam, he maintains that, whereas the adherents of the *Tawwābūn* movement were mainly concerned with personal salvation, al-Mukhtār’s rebellion was predominantly political. Another important difference between the two movements is that, the leader of the *Tawwābūn* never claimed ‘to be acting on behalf of a specific living descendant of ‘Alī’¹⁹. In contrast, al-Mukhtār constantly alleged that he had been sent by Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyya, one of the surviving sons of ‘Alī with a woman from the tribe of Ḥanīfa (and thus not with Fātima). Fishbein seems to be taking the sources about the *Tawwābūn* at face value, since he refers to the differences between the speeches of Sulaymān b. Ṣurad and al-Mukhtār, and discusses them as words actually spoken by the leaders of the two movements.²⁰

A brief but important discussion of the ethos and meaning of the story is given by Heinz Halm.²¹ According to him, despite it being an old text, it contains ‘all the essential elements that characterize the Shiʿi religion today’. To Halm, the expressions ‘sin,’ ‘repentance’ and ‘punishment’ which are found in the text are ‘constitutive elements of Shiʿa Islam. They make up the core of Shiʿi piety.’²² Hence, the movement of the *Tawwābūn* with its emphasis on repentance is the origin for the later ‘Āshūrā’ rituals, which ‘are not mourning rituals, as is often believed, but a ritual of repentance’.²³ Halm, then, clearly states that the text is old, but he gives no arguments for this position.

A longer analysis of the account of the *Tawwābūn*, which also connects it to the ‘Āshūrā’ celebrations is that made by Gerald Hawting.²⁴ Hawting focusses on the relationship between the Jewish Day of Atonement (the ‘Āshūrā’) and the Shīʿite ‘Āshūrā’ celebration, and argues that the story of the *Tawwābūn* constitutes the link between them. While discussing several parts of the story, his main interest is on certain aspects of a programmatic speech ascribed to the leader of the *Tawwābūn*, Sulaymān b. Ṣurad, in the beginning of the account. Here, Ibn Ṣurad quotes Qur. 2:54, which talks about the incident where Moses returns from Mount Sinai

¹⁸ M. Fishbein, ‘The Life of al-Mukhtār b. Abī ‘Ubayd in Some Early Arabic Historians’ (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1988), 56–63.

¹⁹ Fishbein, ‘Life of al-Mukhtār’, 59.

²⁰ Fishbein, ‘Life of al-Mukhtār’, 59–61.

²¹ Halm, *Shiʿa Islam*, 16–20.

²² Halm, *Shiʿa Islam*, 18.

²³ Halm, *Shiʿa Islam*, 19. See also the following page, where the author maintains that ‘the self-sacrifice that the “penitents” in 684-85 actually committed has been ritualized in the Āshūrā customs’.

²⁴ Hawting, ‘Tawwābūn’. Hawting has also made the translation of the section of al-Ṭabarī’s *Taʾrikh* that contains the account of the *Tawwābūn* (Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. XX).

and finds the Hebrew people worshipping the golden calf. According to this verse, Moses said to the people:

You have done evil to yourselves (or ‘your souls’) by your taking of the calf. Turn in repentance to your Creator and kill yourselves ... and He will relent towards you. He is the relenting One, the Compassionate.²⁵

This verse causes the *Tawwābūn* to consider collective suicide as a means to expiate their sin. According to Hawting, this rather literal interpretation of the words ‘kill yourselves’ is unusual in Islam.²⁶ In the different Biblical versions of the story, however, it is not the killing as such that causes atonement, but rather Moses’ intercession for the people.²⁷ Hawting argues that it is the Jewish concept of the Day of Atonement that creates the association made in the Qur’ān and the *tafsīr* between the Israelites’ killing one another and atonement. In certain Jewish interpretations, the Day of Atonement is a day of self-mortification and grief, and Hawting suggests that

Q. 2:54, with its injunction *uqtulū anfusakum* [‘kill yourselves’], and the associated traditions about the Israelites’ self-destruction, are a development of Leviticus 16:29, which tells the Children of Israel, ‘afflict yourselves’ on the Day of Atonement.²⁸

He furthermore argues that this is the kind of association that the *Tawwābūn* make, and the rituals they perform during their visit at the grave of al-Ḥusayn are precursors of the *ta’ziya* rituals that later developed in Shī‘ism. Towards the end of the article he moreover says:

It could be maintained that it is only their preoccupation with the death of Ḥusayn, their identification of their ‘great sin’ with failure to support the grandson of the Prophet, which really places the *Tawwābūn* in a Muslim context. If one went through their speeches and letters and deleted the specific references to Ḥusayn and his family, what would be left would seem distinctly unusual in Islam.²⁹

To me, this statement signals that Hawting believes that the story of the *Tawwābūn* is indeed very early. The reason that the story is in many ways ‘distinctly unusual in Islam’, I infer, is that, at the early date when parts of it were composed, many tenets that are today considered as truly Islamic had not yet developed.³⁰

²⁵ I have quoted Hawting’s translation (‘Tawwābūn’, 168). In this passage, the root *t-w-b*, ‘to turn’, ‘repent’’, or ‘relent,’ occurs three times; once as an imperative urging the Israelites to repent, twice referring to God as the one who ‘turns’ or relents towards those who repent. It is from this root that the name of the group, *al-Tawwābūn* (‘Those who turn’, ‘the Penitents’) is derived. See also Hawting in al-Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. XX, 84, n. 378.

²⁶ Hawting, ‘Tawwābūn’, 171. But cf. M. E. Pregill, “‘Turn in Repentance to your Creator, then Slay Yourself’: The Levitical Election, Atonement, and Secession in Early and Classical Islamic Exegesis’, *Comparative Islamic Studies* 6, no. 1/2 (2010), 101-150. Pregill’s article is an excellent study of early interpretations of Qur. 2:54.

²⁷ See e.g. Ex. 32; Deut. 9:7–21; Ps. 106: 19–23.

²⁸ Hawting, ‘Tawwābūn’, 175, brackets added by me; see also p. 180.

²⁹ Hawting, ‘Tawwābūn’, 180.

³⁰ In support of Hawting’s argument, see Pregill, ‘Turn in Repentance’, 142, n. 87.

Maria Massi Dakake has also made a short analysis of the story of the *Tawwābūn* in her book about the development of the Shī'ite concept of *walāya* (a word difficult to translate as it has a wide range of meanings, but which in this context can be rendered 'love', 'allegiance', and 'charisma').³¹ Dakake argues that the *Tawwābūn* kept endorsing the high regard for 'Alī that had developed earlier, as well as 'the language of *walāya* and *'adāwa* ["enmity"] as the framework for determining and expressing communal religious loyalties.'³² At the same time, she maintains, there is a new emphasis among the *Tawwābūn* on the notions of martyrdom and the sanctity of the blood line of the Prophet, which were not found in 'Alid times, but which emerged after the Karbalā' tragedy. In this part of the book, Dakake uses the sources in quite an uncritical manner, and seems to accept the story as an account of what really happened.³³

Thus, all the studies of the story of the *Tawwābūn* accounted for above more or less take the early date of the text for granted. Even the studies that analyse the text in a more critical manner (mainly Rotter and Hawting) seem to accept that it paints at least a general portrait of the sayings, doings, and emotional struggles of the *Tawwābūn*, although in details the account may differ from historical reality. Given that the scholars referred to above accept the story as early, two questions arise: First, what reasons are there in fact to assume that the text is early; and second, how early is 'early'? Both questions, I believe, are motivated by the massive amount of studies that have been made in the last century, that have clearly demonstrated that early Islamic historiography cannot be taken at face value.³⁴ Medieval Muslim historians (just as present-day historians in a Western academic tradition) were influenced by the culture and values of their times. This affected their views of history and the events that had occurred. Thus, texts from the history of Islam have to be carefully analysed in order to sift out the biases of later historians from its earliest versions (which in themselves, of course, are accounts given from particular perspectives).

In the above-mentioned studies of the story of the *Tawwābūn* very little of this critical attitude is manifested. Rotter applies it to the chronological details of the text. Hawting does not explicitly state that he believes that the text is early, and the conclusions quoted above, which I have interpreted in this direction, are largely based on circumstantial evidence. Dakake, in

³¹ Dakake, *Charismatic Community*, 90–95; for her general discussion of the concept of *walāya*, see pp. 15–31; see also M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Notes à propos de la *walāya* imamite (Aspects de l'imamologie duodécimaine, X)', *Journal Of The American Oriental Society* 122, no. 4 (2002), 722–741, and particularly his succinct definition of the concept in *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam.*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 159 n.151.

³² Dakake, *Charismatic Community*, 94.

³³ This is unfortunate, as her analysis of the Ghadīr Khumm tradition in Chapter 2 of the book is an excellent display of critical method. A similar attitude to the sources concerning other events would have further increased the value of an already very good book.

³⁴ Among the many works that have been published on this, here are only a few examples that give an overview of the field of Islamic historiography and the modern discussion about it; each of them have copious references to other works: A. Noth and L. I. Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study*, (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin, 1994); F. M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, (Princeton N.J.: Darwin, 1998), an overview is found in p. 1–31; C. F. Robinson, *Islamic Historical Writing*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); C. Gilliot, 'Le débat contemporain sur l'islam des origines', in *Les débuts du monde musulman (VIIe – Xe siècle): De Muhammad aux dynasties autonomes*, ed. Thierry Bianquis, Pierre Guichard, and Mathieu Tillier (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2012), 355–371.

her turn, does not at all discuss the date of the story of the *Tawwābūn*. In a footnote to a previous chapter, however, she argues in more general terms that it is possible to use later ‘historical accounts as sources for the ideological terminology of the middle of the first century’ since they use a terminology and argumentation that was later abandoned.³⁵

Dating a text only on the basis of content in relation to the development of ideas can be precarious as it easily leads to circular reasoning: a supposed sequence of theological or ideological development is often made the point of departure for such studies, and when the text studied conforms to that image, this preconceived sequence is made the basis for the dating of the text and is in turn strengthened.³⁶ I certainly do not mean that arguments based on a perceived development of ideas are worthless and should never be applied; in fact, I will use such arguments myself below. They normally need to be supported by other kinds of evidence, however.³⁷

These methodological problems also affect the question of how far back in time the text can bring us. All the scholars reviewed above accept the authorship of Abū Mikhnaf, and in fact all of them also seem to acknowledge that the text gives us information about a time long before he was writing.

In the following sections, I will argue that a close analysis of both structure and content of the part of the account that describe the *Tawwābūn*’s visit to al-Ḥusayn’s grave, gives reason to believe that at least this part of the text goes back to the end of the first/beginning of the seventh century, at the latest. The result of this analysis can hopefully function as a base for discussions about the date of other parts of the text.

Authorship and basic characteristics of the story of the *Tawwābūn*

As far as I have been able to find out, all accounts of the *Tawwābūn* available to us go back to that written by Lūt b. Yahyā al-Azdī, better known as Abū Mikhnaf (ca 70–157/689–774).³⁸

³⁵ Dakake, *Charismatic Community*, 260 n. 1. As I maintain below, this kind of argument can be problematic. Another problem is that Dakake’s argument refers to the use of *terminology* in these texts, but she also applies it to the *events* recorded. Even if one accepts the first conclusion, the second by no means automatically follows from it.

³⁶ See C. A. Segovia, ‘John Wansbrough and the Problem of Islamic Origins in Recent Scholarship: A Farewell to the Traditional Account’, in *The Coming of the Comforter: When, Where, and to Whom?: Studies on the Rise of Islam and Various Other Topics in Memory of John Wansbrough*, ed. Carlos A. Segovia and Basil Lourié (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2012), xix–xxviii. I certainly do not mean that Hawting uses that kind of argumentation. As I have mentioned, he in fact never states in his article that the text is early; that is a conclusion I draw from his reasoning. On the other hand, my remarks above about Dakake’s method show that she at times yields to arguments of the development of ideas as the only basis for her conclusions. This is not to say that Dakake is wrong about her conclusions, only that her argument needs to be strengthened by a more critical stance toward the sources.

³⁷ An example is the analysis of legal *ḥadīth* from several perspectives (use of legal authorities, chains of transmission, and narrative style and literary form) performed by Najam Haider. For his method see *The Origins of the Shī’a: Identity, Ritual, and Sacred Space in Eighth-Century Kūfa*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 34–53.

³⁸ On him, see e.g. U. Sezgin, *Abū Miḥnaf: Ein Beitrag zur Historiographie der umayyadischen Zeit*, (Leiden: Brill, 1971); K. Athamina, ‘Abū Mikhnaf’, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, third online ed., (Brill Online, 2009), accessed 15 January, 2015.

His ‘book’ *Kitāb Sulaymān b. Ṣurad wa ‘Ayn al-Warda*³⁹ is the main source for all later major works on the subject.⁴⁰ There is no extant manuscript of Abū Mikhnaf’s work. It is reproduced, probably in its entirety, by Hishām b. al-Kalbī (d. 204/819), and it seems that the historian al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) has transmitted all of Ibn al-Kalbī’s text.⁴¹ If this is so, al-Ṭabarī’s version would give us the full version of Abū Mikhnaf’s work. Be that as it may, in the present study the version given by al-Ṭabarī will be investigated. Other versions will be referred to only when necessary for comparative purposes.⁴²

Unlike the narration of the tragedy of Karbalā’, (which al-Ṭabarī also relates with Abū Mikhnaf as his main source) I find relatively few obvious traces of editing from al-Ṭabarī’s side.⁴³ This is difficult to conclude, though, since we have only his version of the full text. However, there are very few gaps, dents and other irregularities in the text.⁴⁴ Of course, Ibn al-Kalbī might have made some editing, but, again, without other versions to compare with, it is difficult to confirm.⁴⁵ In my opinion, the cause for this lack of editing is the fact that the story of the *Tawwābūn* was not as politically or theologically inflammable as many other accounts in the early history of Islam, such as the killing of ‘Uthmān, the battle of Ṣiffīn, the battle of the Camel, and the tragedy of the killing of al-Ḥusayn at Karbalā’. In other words,

³⁹ Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, (Leipzig: Vogel, 1871–72), 93. I have put the word ‘book’ within quotation marks in order to show that by this I do not mean a published book in the modern sense. For a discussion of the question of oral and written material, see G. Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam*, (London: Routledge, 2006), 28–44.

⁴⁰ Besides the account of al-Ṭabarī which will be discussed below, see e.g. Ibn A‘tham al-Kūfī *Kitāb al-Futūh*, (Haydarabad: Matbaat Majlis Dairat al-Maarif al-Uthmaniyah, 1972), vol. VI, 47–53, 58–87 (the date of Ibn A‘tham’s death is uncertain; Conrad places it at the beginning of the 2nd/9th century (‘Ibn A‘tham and His History’, *Al-‘Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā: The Journal of Middle East Medievalists* 23 (2015), 87–125), whereas Lindstedt in a recent publication defends the possibility of a date about 100 years later (see ‘Al-Madā’inī’s *Kitāb al-Dawla and the Death of Ibrāhīm al-Imām*’, in *Case Studies in Transmission*, ed. Ilkka Lindstedt, et al. (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), 103–130)); al-Balādhurī (d. 279/892), *Ansāb al-Ashraf*, (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1936), vol. V, 204–213; and al-Mas‘ūdī (d. 345/956), *Murūj*, vol. V, 213–221. There are, however, some indications that versions of this story may have existed that go back to others than Abū Mikhnaf. Thus, both al-Balādhurī (*Ansāb*, vol. V, 204) and al-Mas‘ūdī (*Murūj*, vol. V, 219) refer to ‘Abū Mikhnaf and others’ as authorities for the story or part of it. Whether ‘the others’ stand for authors dependent on Abū Mikhnaf or not, we cannot know.

⁴¹ Halm, *Shi‘a Islam*, 163 n. 6.

⁴² The reason why Abū Mikhnaf wrote about the *Tawwābūn* might have been that, according to Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, his great grandfather, Mikhnaf b. Sulaym al-Azdī, took part in the uprising of the *Tawwābūn* and died at ‘Ayn al-Warda (*Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, (Hyderabad: Majlis dā‘irat al-ma‘ārif al-nizāmīya al-ka‘īna, 1907–1909), vol. 10, 78). Other information contradicts this, however (see A. Borrut, ‘Remembering Karbalā’: The Construction of an Early Islamic Site of Memory’, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 41 (2014), 1–49). It seems a bit strange that Abū Mikhnaf does not mention his great grandfather with a single word. If the information that Ibn Ḥajar gives is correct, Abū Mikhnaf might have had a great interest in writing this story. On the other hand, it has been questioned whether Abū Mikhnaf was himself a Shī‘ite (Athamina, ‘Abū Mikhnaf’). Thus it might have been out of prudence that he did not mention his ancestor’s participation in the *Tawwābūn* uprising.

⁴³ For al-Ṭabarī’s editing of the Karbalā’ story, see T. Hylén, ‘Ḥusayn, the Mediator: A Structural Analysis of the Karbala Drama according to Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923)’ (unpublished Th.D. thesis, Uppsala University, 2007), 115–116, 228–231.

⁴⁴ One obvious such unevenness is the account of al-Muthannā b. Mukharriba at al-Ḥusayn’s grave which will be discussed below; another is the garbled chronology discussed by Rotter that I have mentioned above.

⁴⁵ Al-Balādhurī refers to Abū Mikhnaf via Ibn al-Kalbī (*Ansāb*, vol. V, 204), but since Al-Balādhurī himself has abbreviated and edited the text, it is impossible to compare it with the version of al-Ṭabarī, except when it comes to the overall structure or to details in the text. It is quite clear that Ibn A‘tham and al-Mas‘ūdī have also used Abū Mikhnaf’s text as a basis for their own recension, but again, these versions are so strongly edited that it is impossible to make detailed comparisons with al-Ṭabarī’s version.

the event of the *Tawwābūn* and the story about them were just not important enough for later historians to merit a lot of editing of the account to make it fit their views of history and ideology.⁴⁶ For this reason, I presume that the version of al-Ṭabarī very closely follows, or even reproduces Abū Mikhnaf's work in the main. We do not know at what time the latter wrote the text; to be safe, let us say sometime towards the end of his life, i.e. between 132 and 157/750–774. It is based on earlier reports, however, and there are moreover indications that at least parts of the text go back to the beginning of the end of the first century AH/the beginning of the 8th century CE, as I will argue below. This, of course, in no way guarantees that what is related in the text is what 'actually happened', at least not in its details, but it may give us a glimpse of what was going on in the emerging Shī'ite movement during the first decades of the 8th century CE.

In most cases there are two (occasionally one or three) informants in the *isnāds* between Abū Mikhnaf and the event of the *Tawwābūn*. In one place only, more than one version is given on a specific event: the visit at al-Ḥusayn's grave, about which three versions are related. I will analyse these below.

Ideological matters are mainly conveyed in the speeches and letters in the first half of the story, as well as in the account of the visit to the grave which is placed almost exactly in the middle of Abū Mikhnaf's 'book.' (The account about the dealings between Ibn al-Zubayr and the Khawārij must be excluded; it has probably been inserted later as it deals with the year 64, and was most likely not originally part of the 'book'.) It is interesting to note that, although al-Ḥusayn and his death at Karbalā' is almost omnipresent in the first half of the story, after the visit to the grave his name is not mentioned once, and the relatively few references to him and his supporters that were killed at Karbalā' and to the family of the Prophet, are made only in passing.⁴⁷ Similarly, whereas words derived from the root *t-w-b* ('turning' or 'repentance') occur at least 12 times in the first half of the text (a couple of times referring to God as the relenting one, the one who 'turns' from his anger), there are only four occurrences after the visit at the grave.⁴⁸ In the first half of the text, the sin of treason against al-Ḥusayn is deliberated on and discussed, whereas after the visit at the grave, on the other hand, the story becomes a common battle account with many of the traditional topoi of such accounts.⁴⁹ Here, then, the ideological aspects of the *Tawwābūn*'s mission are less frequent and dealt with in much more general terms. In other words, it is the first half of the story that is most interesting for the study of early Shī'ism.

⁴⁶ The future *religious* significance of this movement for the Shī'ites is of course another matter, as the studies referred to above have shown, and as I will argue in this and other studies, but that would not have occasioned heavy editing of the material.

⁴⁷ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, ser. II, 556, 558, 571; *History*, vol. XX, 142, 144, 156.

⁴⁸ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, ser. II, 550, 555, 560, 567; *History*, vol. XX, 137, 141, 145, 152.

⁴⁹ For such topoi (e.g. how the armies are arranged and who are appointed as commanders of the different units, the succession of command, messages of victory sent to the caliph, etc.) see Noth and Conrad, *Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, 111–129.

The *Tawwābūn*'s visit at the grave of al-Ḥusayn

As I mentioned above, the only place in the story where more than one *khavar*⁵⁰ is given to describe an event, is the account of the *Tawwābūn*'s visit to the grave of al-Ḥusayn, an absolutely central section of the story, both as regards the structure and the content. This episode is described through three *akhbār*, which makes it suitable for analysis as it is possible to compare the slightly different accounts given in the three *akhbār*. Hence, a close analysis of them can reveal aspects about the redactional history of the text. In the following section, I will argue that the main content of the three *akhbār* is actually derived from two earlier reports, supplemented in the third *akhbār* with some extra material. Within the *akhbār*, the older reports are separated by the word *qāla*, 'he said'. This word is tricky, however, as it is used in several ways in early Islamic historiography in general, as well as in this account. Sometimes 'he' (the pronoun is implied in the verb) refers to the earliest authority in the previous *isnād*, and the word thus simply functions as an introduction to a new section of the text; at other times it indicates that Abū Mikhnaf or Hishām b. al-Kalbī have summarized the following text.⁵¹ In the present context it is quite clear that the word is sometimes used to indicate a boundary between two earlier reports that have been juxtaposed in the *khavar*. As we do not know who placed the traditions side by side, and at what stage in the redactional history this was done (though most probably before Abū Mikhnaf's redaction), it is impossible to know whom the pronoun 'he' refers to. However, in at least one instance, a '*qāla*' is missing where one would have expected it (see below). This suggests that the editors applied it quite arbitrarily, and that it must be used with care as a tool in the analysis of the text.

The text

Here follows the account of the visit to the grave in full. The three *akhbār* are given with their chains of authorities. The entire text is divided into numbered sections for ease of reference, each section, except the first, beginning where there is a *qāla* in the text.⁵²

Khavar I. 'Abd al-Jabbār b. 'Abbās al-Hamdānī⁵³ < 'Awn b. Abī Juḥayfa al-Suwā'ī:⁵⁴

1) ...next morning they came (*ṣabbahū*) 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 (*yastaghfirūna lahu*).

⁵⁰ The Arabic term *khavar* (pl. *akhbār*) denotes 'a self-contained narrative unit which depicts an incident or a limited sequence of occurrences or conveys sayings' (S. Leder, 'The Literary Use of the *Khavar*: A Basic Form of Historical Writing', in *The Byzantine and Islamic Near East. Vol. I, Problems in the Literary Source Material*, ed. A. Cameron and L. Conrad, (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin, 1992), 277–315. The quote is from p. 279.) Typically, each *khavar* is preceded by a chain of authorities (*isnād*, pl. *asānīd*) that have transmitted it. Early Arabic historiography to a great extent consists of compilations of such *akhbār*. Leder's article is a good introductory discussion of the *akhbār* and their use.

⁵¹ Sezgin, *Abū Miḥnaf*, 91–92; see also Fishbein's note in Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī. Vol. XXI: The Victory of the Marwānids*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), 6 n. 31.

⁵² Throughout the article, I have used Hawting's translation (Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. XX). When I have occasionally amended it, I have indicated this. At times I will compare with Fishbein's translation ('Life of al-Mukhtār', 153–157), which is close to that of Hawting's, but yet differs on certain important points.

⁵³ Died probably between 140/757 and 150/767, according to Sezgin, *Abū Miḥnaf*, 190.

⁵⁴ Died 116/734, according to Sezgin, *Abū Miḥnaf*, 190.

2) *Qāla*: When the people reached (*intahā*) 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. Jundab⁵⁵ < ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ghaziyya.⁵⁶

3) *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 witness⁵⁷ 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)⁵⁸ < Salama b. Kuhayl⁵⁹ < Abū Ṣādiq:⁶⁰

4) *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 relent toward us, for you are the relenting one and the compassionate one”⁶¹. Have mercy on al-Ḥusayn and his companions, the martyrs (*al-shuhadā*) and the righteous ones (*al-ṣiddīqīn*). We call you to witness, oh 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.”⁶²

5) *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

⁵⁵ He is only referred to as *rāwī* by Abū Miḥnaf (Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī. Vol. XIX: The Caliphate of Yazīd b. Mu‘āwiyah*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), 22, n. 98). The date of his death seems to be unknown. On him, see Sezgin, *Abū Miḥnaf*, 195.

⁵⁶ 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 (Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. XX, 141, n. 515; see also Sezgin, *Abū Miḥnaf*, 200).

⁵⁷ The word here is *nushhiduka*; Hawting has translated this ‘...we testify to you...’ (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 E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1984 (1863–93)), 1610a. See also Fishbein, ‘Life of al-Mukhtār’, 153. I have made a similar change in the following *khabar*.

⁵⁸ A famous traditionist who died between 145/762 and 151/768. (See e.g. E. Kohlberg, ‘A‘maš, Abū Moḥammad Solaymān b. Meḥrān Asadī (in some sources, erroneously, Azdī) Kāhelī Kūfī, 1st-2nd/7th-8th century Shi‘ite scholar, traditionist, and Koran reader’, *Encyclopedia Iranica*, online edition, (1989), accessed 19 January 2015). An extensive discussion of different views on him as traditionist and his sectarian identity is found in Haider, *Origins*, 221–227. About him, see also J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991–1997), I, 237–239

⁵⁹ Died 122/740, according to Sezgin *Abū Miḥnaf*, 218. About him, see also van Ess, van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, I, 244

⁶⁰ Of al-Azd. A well-known Kūfan traditionist, whose date of death seems to be unknown. On him, see Sezgin, *Abū Miḥnaf*, 206.

⁶¹ Qur. 2:128. Hawting has not indicated this passage as Qur’ānic.

⁶² Qur. 7: 23. Hawting has not indicated this passage as Qur’ānic. Similar expressions are found in Qur. 7: 149 and 11: 47.

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 prayer⁶³ over it, and asked for mercy on him and pardon for him (*yastaghfirūna lahu*).

6) *Qāla*: And by God, I saw them thronging more thickly than the people throng around the Black Stone.

7) *Qāla*: Sulaymān stood by his [al-Ḥusayn's] 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 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.'⁶⁴

8) *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.'⁶⁵

9) *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.

10) *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 recognize 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.'

11) *Qāla*: Then Sulaymān b. Surad traveled on from the tomb of al- Husayn and

⁶³ 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), has translated 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'.

⁶⁴ 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).

⁶⁵ The words here translated 'dissociate myself' and 'treat as an enemy' come from the Arabic roots *b-r-* and *-d-w* respectively.

we went with him. We took the road by al-Ḥaṣṣāša, then al-Anbār, then al-Ṣadūd, then al-Qayyāra.⁶⁶

Formal analysis

Khabar I is quite long, and most of it relates the departure of the *Tawwābūn* from their camp at al-Nukhayla outside Kūfa. Only the last few lines, sections 1 and 2 in the text above, briefly deal with the visit at the grave. These two sections most probably originate from two earlier reports which have been joined. The break is indicated by the word *qāla*, ‘he said’. Throughout the *khabar*, ‘*qāla*’ is used several times, but most of the times it seems to refer back to the last authority in the *isnād*, and thus mainly to indicate a new section in the narrative. At this point, however, it is quite clear that it signals a break between two earlier reports. There are both internal and external grounds for this conclusion. Internally, Section 2 repeats the arrival of the *Tawwābūn* to the grave which have already been announced in Section 1. This repetition is hardly necessary, neither in order to give information nor for narrative purposes. The repetition signals that here two previously independent reports are brought together and have not been sufficiently edited to create a smooth narrative. (As I will argue later, this amalgamation is probably not a work by Abū Mikhnaf, but must have been made before him.) The external reasons for hypothesising two previous reports here will be clear in the analysis of the following *akhbār*, as well as through a 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 the repetition of the arrival to the grave, the two reports give different information. Section 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. Section 2, on the other hand, dwells at the shouting and weeping at the grave. Both these features recur in the other two *akhbār*.

Khabar II (Section 3) is relatively short and is entirely devoted to the visit at the grave. This *khabar* seems to constitute a single redactional unit. Although we are presented with three scenarios—the arrival at the grave and the unison weeping of the people, Sulaymān’s prayer, and the departure and encampment—the narrative runs smoothly and each scene adds new information. The introductory sentence is similar to the first sentence of Section 2 in *Khabar I*, although with some variations. The main difference is that the narrator speaks as an eyewitness in first person plural. Also, different words are used for the collective outpouring of the grief of the *Tawwābūn*. Furthermore, in Section 3 the sentence is not placed at the end of a longer passage, as in Section 2, but introduces a separate tradition. I will have more to say about this below.

Four important features of this *khabar*, which are not found in *Khabar I* but which are extant in Section 4 of *Khabar III*, should be noted: (a) The *Tawwābūn* wish that they had fallen with al-Ḥusayn at Karbalā’. In this way they declare that they have betrayed al-Ḥusayn, and that they repent from their sin. Here, though, their repentance is not as explicitly expressed as in Section 4. (b) Three epithets (two of which will recur in Section 4) are used to describe al-

⁶⁶ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, ser. II, 546–548; *History*, vol. XX, 132–134.

Ḥusayn and his father ‘Alī in Sulaymān’s prayer; they are called ‘martyrs’, ‘right-guided’, and ‘righteous’. (c) Sulaymān prays for God’s mercy on al-Ḥusayn and ‘Alī. (d) Sulaymān declares that he and his companions follow 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 has always been immensely important for distinguishing between Shī‘ites and non-Shī‘ites.⁶⁷

Khabar III is quite long (sections 4–11), but, like *Khabar* II it deals exclusively with the *Tawwābūn*’s visit to the grave.⁶⁸ Sections 4 and 5 are introduced by the sentences found in Sections 1 and 2 in *Khabar* I, but their order is reversed.

The words that open up Section 4 are almost exactly the same as in Section 2, and very close to the introductory sentence in Section 3 (see the synopsis in Table 1). As in Section 3, the sentence introduces a longer report, and sections 3 and 4 have several features in common. Although the wording differs, it is striking that in Section 4 these features recur in the same order as in Section 3: (a) The *Tawwābūn* confess their betrayal of al-Ḥusayn; (b) They ask for mercy on him and his companions (though not his father, as in Section 3); (c) They use the epithets ‘martyrs’ and ‘righteous’ for them; (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 Section 3: (e) a quotation from the Qur’ān saying that if God does not forgive them they will be ‘among the losers’. The similarities to Section 2 in *Khabar* I and Section 3 (*Khabar* II) are thus striking, and would be very difficult to explain in another way than 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 follows a ‘*qāla*’, which introduces a sentence very similar to Section 1. The main difference, apart from the reversed order of the words ‘night and day’, is the last clause of the sentence. In Section 1, the *Tawwābūn* ask for forgiveness *for al-Ḥusayn* (*yastaghfirūna lahu*), whereas in Section 5, they weep and abase *themselves* (*yabkūna wa-yataḍarra ‘ūna*).⁶⁹

Moreover, in Section 5 the introductory sentence is not placed at the end of a longer passage, as in Section 1, but introduces a separate tradition. It seems, then, that the sentences from Sections 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 why the sentence from Section 1 in *Khabar* I was not preceded by a ‘*qāla*’. One would have thought that, had it been part of an independent tradition, the compiler would have indicated it. Still, the close correspondence of the first sentences in Section 1 and Section 5 makes me convinced that both these sections are dependent on a single original report. This hypothesis is corroborated by a comparison with Ibn A‘tham’s version of the story, as I will demonstrate below. The lack of a ‘*qāla*’ to introduce the sentence in *Khabar* I just shows how unreliable this word is as a tool for

⁶⁷ See e.g. Dakake, *Charismatic Community*, 65–67; Amir-Moezzi, ‘*Walāya* imamite’, 735–738; M. A. Amir-Moezzi and C. Jambet, *Qu’est-ce que le shī‘isme*, (Paris: Fayard, 2004), 133–134.

⁶⁸ This is the only occasion in the entire story of the *Tawwābūn*, where three authorities are given in the *isnād*.

⁶⁹ 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 evidence for its being part of a fixed tradition.

Table 1. Synopsis of the *akhbār* about the *Tawwābūn*'s visit to al-Ḥusayn's grave. Numbers refer to sections.

<i>Khabar I.</i>	<i>Khabar II.</i>	<i>Khabar III.</i>
Report A		
1. They remained there a night and a day praying over him and asking God's pardon for him; <i>Aqāmū bihi laylatan wa-yawman yuṣallūna 'alayhi wa-yastaghfirūna lahu.</i>		5. They remained there a day and a night praying over him, weeping and abasing themselves; <i>Aqāmū 'indahū yawman wa-laylatan yuṣallūna 'alayhi wa-yabkūna wa-yataḍarra 'ūna.</i>
Report B		
2. When the people reached al-Ḥusayn's tomb, they shouted out in unison and wept; <i>Lammā 'ntahā 'l-nās ilā qabr al-Ḥusayn ṣāhū ṣayḥatan wāḥidatan wa-bakū.</i>	3. When we reached the tomb of al-Ḥusayn (P) the people wept together; <i>Lammā 'ntahaynā ilā qabr al-Ḥusayn (ع) bakā 'l-nās bi-ajma 'ihim.</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. <i>Allāhumma, irḥam Ḥusaynan, al-shahīd ibn al-shahīd, al-mahdī ibn al-mahdī, al-ṣiddīq ibn al-ṣiddīq.</i> Oh God, we call you to witness that we follow their religion and their path; <i>Allāhumma, inna nushhiduka annā 'alā dīnihim wa-sabīlihim.</i>	4. When Sulaymān b. Ṣurad and his companions reached the tomb of al-Ḥusayn, they cried in unison; <i>Lammā 'ntahā Sulaymān b. Ṣurad wa-aṣḥābihi ilā qabr al-Ḥusayn nadaw ṣayḥatan wāḥidatan.</i> Oh Lord... have mercy on al-Ḥusayn and his companions, the martyrs and the righteous ones. <i>Yā Rabb... irḥam Ḥusaynan wa-aṣḥābahu, al-shuhadā' wa-'l-ṣiddīqīn.</i> We call you to witness, Oh Lord, that we are doing the same as what they were when they were killed; <i>Wa-innā nushhiduka, yā Rabb, annā 'alā mithlimā qatalū 'alayhi.</i>

tradition criticism. In order to discern the break between two reports that have been merged in a text, it must be supplemented with other criteria, such as the interior coherence of a text unit, comparisons with other texts, etc.

The similarities make me believe that Sections 1–5 of the three *akhbār* are based on two older reports, Report A, traces of which are found in Sections 1 and 5; and Report B which have been used for Sections 2, 3, and 4. Table 1 is a synopsis of the sentences that are similar to each other from the three *akhbār*.

The hypothesis that the three *akhbār* in Abū Mikhnaf's account about the visit at the grave are based on two older reports is corroborated by a comparison with the same passage in Ibn A'tham and al-Balādhurī. Ibn A'tham's version is clearly an abbreviation of *Khabar III*, with

a long interpolation between Report A and B.⁷⁰ Although Ibn A‘tham in certain respects has edited the *khobar*, it is in the latter part (Sections 7–10, which I have not discussed yet) where the main changes have been made. Thus, the two anonymous reports A and B (as far as they are analysed now), are kept relatively intact in comparison with Abū Mikhnaf’s version. Furthermore, 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.⁷¹ This indicates that Ibn A‘tham regarded Report A and B as original units.

Al-Balādhurī’s account is very short, and is based on Report B with some amendments. It goes:

When Sulaymān and his companions reached the tomb of al-Ḥusayn (*lammā `ntahā Sulaymān wa-ashābihi 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 for neglecting to help him.⁷²

That Ibn A‘tham’s and al-Balādhurī’s versions are similar to that of Abū Mikhnaf is of course no surprise, as they base their accounts of the *Tawwābūn* on that of the latter. What is significant here, however, is that, although they have made amendments to Abū Mikhnaf’s text, they have kept the two anonymous reports A and B basically intact. In all cases (Ibn A‘tham’s versions of Report A and B, and al-Balādhurī’s version of Report B) the introductory words are basically the same as in those reports in Abū Mikhnaf’s version. Moreover, in every case the introductions are followed by expressions that are consistent with each of the traditions. Thus, an introduction from Report A is never mixed with elements from Report B or vice versa. Finally, although elements from each of the traditions are cut out in the different versions, when they occur they always do so in the same order.

In what follows, I will analyse the approximately four fifths of *Khobar* III that have not yet been discussed, i.e. the end of Section 5 and Sections 6–11. I have indicated above that I believe that at least the first part of Section 5 is taken from Report A. The question I would like to address now is the extent of this report. In other words, the beginning of the anonymous Report A is quite clear, but where does it end? Does it extend to the end of *Khobar* III, or is the rest of the *khobar* from the middle of Section 5 to Section 10 in its turn composed of more than one tradition? Unlike the first sentence of the tradition, and unlike Report B, there are no independent parallels to the rest of the *khobar* that can be used as comparison. In Ibn A‘tham’s version there is a shorter version of the *khobar*, but this is clearly based on Abū Mikhnaf. The composition—and thus the date—of this part of the *khobar* is of significance, as its content is very interesting and can give us clues to the early development of Shī‘ite thought (I will briefly return to this below). As there very little to

⁷⁰ Ibn A‘tham al-Kūfī, *Futūh*, vol. VI, 67.

⁷¹ For Ibn A‘tham’s ‘interpolations’, see Conrad, ‘Ibn A‘tham’, 99–101. In this context, however, the interpolation is not as overt as the ones 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.

⁷² Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, vol. V, 209.

compare with outside the text itself, most arguments must be taken from the study of the internal structure. But, regrettably there is not much we can get from that either.

Several ‘*qāla*’ are interspersed in the text (each marking a new section in the quote above). Whether these signal the joining of originally separate traditions remains to be discussed.

I will begin by investigating Sections 9 and 10, which relate a speech by a certain al-Muthannā b. Mukharriba, a leader of the Shī‘ites in Baṣra.⁷³ It is quite clear that they make up a narrative unit, and that the ‘*qāla*’ separating them is not indicating a break between two traditions. Several features in the incident related here, as well as its place in the story at large, indicate that these two sections were not part of the original story.

The incident does not fit with other parts of the story where al-Muthannā is mentioned. The first time he shows up in the story, it is as recipient of a letter which Sulaymān b. Ṣurad writes to the Shī‘ites of al-Madā’in and Baṣra, asking them to join the *Tawwābūn* in their mission. As leader of the Shī‘ites of Baṣra, he responds positively to the call and promises to come when summoned.⁷⁴ When the *Tawwābūn* are about to set out from their camp at al-Nukhayla, they realize that the people from Baṣra and al-Madā’in have not come; they decide to go anyway, and let these groups catch up later.⁷⁵ 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 Baṣrans (the latter under the leadership of al-Muthannā) are on their way.⁷⁶ Their 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 Kūfa.⁷⁷ Thus, the structure of the story at large speaks against his 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 Baṣra 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.’⁷⁸ Al-Balādhurī has no record of al-Muthannā at the grave, but when he relates the meeting between the defeated *Tawwābūn* and the belated support from al-Madā’in and Baṣra, 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.’⁷⁹ 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.

⁷³ According to Hawting, he was from ‘Abd al-Qays of Rabī‘a (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 Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj*, vol. V, 217; Ibn A‘tham al-Kūfī, *Futūh*, vol. VI, 52 n. 4). Like Hawting, I have followed the version given in the *Addenda et emenanda* in the Leiden version of al-Ṭabarī’s *Tārīkh*.

⁷⁴ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, ser. II, 505; *History*, vol. XX, 89.

⁷⁵ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, ser. II, 544–545; *History*, vol. XX, 130.

⁷⁶ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, ser. II, 562–563; *History*, vol. XX, 147.

⁷⁷ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, ser. II, 568; *History*, vol. XX, 153.

⁷⁸ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, ser. II, 680; *History*, vol. XXI, 45.

⁷⁹ Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, vol. V, 211.

There are moreover internal traces that suggest that this part of the text is not original. In many ways it differs from the preceding sections, although the scene described is basically the same. Thus, in Sections 7 and 8, short speeches are related by Sulaymān and two of the other leaders of the *Tawwābūn*, ‘Abdallāh b. Wāl and al-Musayyab b. Najaba, but none from any other participant at the grave. Neither are the speeches by the leaders praised by other participants. In contrast to this, we are told in Section 10 that when al-Muthannā has given his speech, the others present praise him for it. The different structure of the passage about al-Muthannā’s speech, i.e. the particular mentioning of his name although he is not one of the original leaders of the Shī‘ites of Kūfa, the narrator’s pain at the fact that al-Muthannā initially does not say anything, and the subsequent praise for his speech sets this part of the *khavar* off from the rest and signals that it is added later. Finally, Sections 9 and 10 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 part of the story, where Al-Muthannā’s speech is related in slightly shorter form. His name is not mentioned, however, but the speech is presented as a collective outcry of the *Tawwābūn* gathered around the grave.⁸⁰

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 later was active in support of al-Mukhtār in Baṣra,⁸¹ a more significant role—for himself and for Baṣra—in the Shī‘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 Shī‘ite cause, and it might be that the traditions under discussion here, as well as other traditions which are now lost, try to remedy this. It is difficult to know when this addition was made. I find it hard to believe that Abū Mikhnaf himself made such a flagrant break against the narrative structure of his own work.⁸² On the other hand, it was most probably included by the time that Hishām b. al-Kalbī and Ibn A‘tham compiled their versions of the story, in the beginning of the third/ninth century (if one accepts an early date of the latter⁸³). Whatever the background, in the following discussion of the traditions of the *Tawwābūn*’s visit to the grave of al-Ḥusayn, I will regard Sections 9 and 10 of *Khavar* III as a later insertion, not included by Abū Mikhnaf in his *Kitāb Sulaymān b. Ṣurad*, but added later in order to enhance al-Muthannā’s reputation.

Section 11 is merely a description of the course the journey took after the visit at Ḥusayn’s grave. The accounts given by al-Ṭabarī and al-Balādhurī are very similar, and might give a correct picture of the journey (although this is impossible to establish with any certainty). That of Ibn A‘tham (‘[they] stuck to the main road’⁸⁴) is probably his own condensed rendering of the journey, as his purpose was not so much to give historical detail but to

⁸⁰ Ibn A‘tham al-Kūfī, *Futūh*, vol. VI, 69

⁸¹ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, ser. II, 680–683; *History*, vol. XXI, 45–48.

⁸² However, if one accepts Rotter’s arguments about Abū Mikhnaf’s mixed up chronology about the battle that are discussed above, it is of course possible that he made a mistake in this regard as well.

⁸³ See note 40 above.

⁸⁴ Ibn A‘tham al-Kūfī, *Futūh*, vol. VI, 70.

entertain and to moralise.⁸⁵ It is plausible that a description of the journey of the *Tawwābūn* was included in the earliest versions of the story. But we cannot know whether any of the versions available to us actually made up an end to the anonymous Report A, or whether it was transmitted independently. For the present purposes, this is not important to determine, however.

What remains is an analysis of Sections 5–8. In these sections, there is little indication that any of the ‘*qālas*’ mark the juxtaposition of two traditions. The narrative runs smoothly, twice with pronominal references back to the section before a ‘*qāla*’.⁸⁶ The only section which clearly breaks the narrative flow is Section 6, where the narrator becomes visible by speaking in first person. However, this can be explained by the frequent use of the rhetorical device of *mimesis* (i.e. the creation of an illusion of relating what actually happened) in early Arabic historiography.⁸⁷ By switching to first person, the narrator tries to convey a ‘photographic’ image of the scene, thus ‘to inscribe history “as it really was”’⁸⁸. All in all, then, there is no sign of disruption that could indicate that Sections 5–8 consist of several traditions that are merged.

A slightly different impression is given when al-Ṭabarī’s account is compared with that of Ibn A‘tham, the only other text that relates the later part of *Khabar III* in any form. As I have mentioned above, Ibn A‘tham gives a shorter version of this part of the story; Sections 7 and 8 are omitted, and Al-Muthannā’s speech is related in slightly abbreviated form.⁸⁹ The fact that Ibn A‘tham reproduces Sections 5, 6, 9, and 10, although they are edited and abridged, whereas Sections 7 and 8 are left out, could indicate that Ibn A‘tham regarded the latter as a unit which could be dispensed with, or that they were not extant in the version of Abū Mikhnaf’s account that he based his account on. On the other hand, given his heavy editing of the texts he draws on throughout the *Kitāb al-Futūḥ*, it is by no means impossible that he simply excluded these sections because he found them superfluous.

To conclude the discussion about the final four fifths of *Khabar III*, I argue that Sections 9 and 10 about al-Muthannā are a later insertion. Whether Section 11 originally belonged to Report A, or was transmitted independently is impossible to determine, but this is hardly important in the present context. Finally, my tentative (albeit cautious) hypothesis is that Sections 5 through 8 make up a single unit, that is the unit I have previously labelled Report A.

⁸⁵ Conrad, ‘Ibn A‘tham’, 101.

⁸⁶ After the second ‘*qāla*’ (Section 7) it says: ‘Sulaymān stood by *his* tomb’, referring back to al-Ḥusayn who was mentioned in Section 6; and after the third ‘*qāla*’ (Section 8), al-Musayyab says: ‘I am one of those who will kill *them*,’ alluding to those who killed al-Ḥusayn mentioned in Section 7. This argument for the unity of the narrative is admittedly very weak, though, as the section about al-Muthannā, which I have already dismissed as a later insertion on other grounds, also refers back to the previous section. Thus, al-Muthannā refers to the words of ‘Abdallāh b. Wāl about al-Ḥusayn, ‘Alī and al-Ḥasan in Section 7, when he says: ‘God made these men, whose status you have already mentioned...’ (al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, ser. II, 547; *History*, vol. XX, 133).

⁸⁷ For an excellent discussion of the use of *mimesis* in al-Ṭabarī’s *Tārīkh*, see B. Shoshan, *Poetics of Islamic Historiography: Deconstructing Ṭabarī’s “History”*, (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 3–60; for the particular employment of eyewitnesses in this respect, see esp. p. 25–41.

⁸⁸ Shoshan, *Poetics*, 25.

⁸⁹ Ibn A‘tham al-Kūfī, *Futūḥ*, vol. VI, VI: 69

Content

Having discussed the structure of the three *akhbār* that relate the visit of the *Tawwābūn* to the grave of al-Ḥusayn, I will now briefly analyse the content of the text.⁹⁰

Two things stand out in the account of the visit at the grave, and are attested in both Report A and B: First, both traditions tell us that the *Tawwābūn* ask for God's mercy over al-Ḥusayn and forgiveness for him; second we are told that they weep and ask for God's mercy for themselves, and forgiveness for their sin of having betrayed al-Ḥusayn at Karbalā'. However, a close analysis reveals that there is a difference between the two reports in this respect, strengthening the hypothesis of two underlying reports. While in Report A the prayers for mercy and forgiveness for al-Ḥusayn are significantly more prevalent than the prayers for the *Tawwābūn* themselves (10 occurrences to 1), in Report B the opposite relation is at hand (2 instances of prayers for al-Ḥusayn versus 9 for the *Tawwābūn* themselves).⁹¹ That the *Tawwābūn* show repentance and ask for forgiveness for their sin of having abandoned the grandson of the Prophet in his most difficult situation is not surprising. After all, their entire project is based on these feelings. More unexpected is perhaps the prayer for forgiveness and mercy for al-Ḥusayn. In later Shī'ism he is one of the fourteen *ma'ṣūmūn*, those immune from error and sin, or 'infallible' of the family of the Prophet.⁹² Although the earliest attestations of the concept of *'iṣma* applied to the Shī'ite Imāms, that date from the third quarter of the 2nd century AH/late 8th century CE,⁹³ seem to use it to talk about the infallible transmission of the prophetic message, it soon came to mean complete impeccability of the Prophet Muḥammad, his daughter Fāṭima, and the Imāms.⁹⁴

Leor Halevi and others have demonstrated that visits to the graves of the deceased and prayer for God's forgiveness and mercy for the dead was a very common ritual, before Islam, as well

⁹⁰ This part will be much shorter than the previous one since I plan to publish a separate study of the content of this account and the significance of the story for the understanding of the development of Shī'ism in another context.

⁹¹ The exact numbers of occurrences can be discussed. Regarding the category 'Prayers for mercy for al-Ḥusayn' I have been able to count single words with that significance; the category 'Expressions of remorse...' have been slightly more difficult to digitize since it is more often expressed in phrases that sometimes contain several words with the same meaning. The overall tendency is clear, however.

⁹² For the concept of *'iṣma*, 'inerrancy' or 'impeccability', see e.g. W. Madelung, 'Iṣma', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, (Leiden: Brill, 1973), vol. IV, 182–184; H. Algar, 'Čahārdah Ma'ṣūm', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online ed., (1990), accessed 6 May, 2015.

⁹³ To my knowledge this is found in the *Kitāb ikhtilāf al-nās fi-'l-'imāma* by Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (d. 179/795) (for him and his idea of the knowledge of the Imām, see T. Bayhom-Daou, 'The Imāmī Shī'ī Conception of the Knowledge of the Imām and the Sources of Religious Doctrine in the Formative Period: from Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (d. 179 A.H.) to Kulīnī (d. 329 A.H.)' (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1996), 109–112; 'Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (d. 179/795) and His Doctrine of the Imām's Knowledge', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 48, no. 1 (2003), 71–108), and in the *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays* which is widely held to be a pseudoepigraphy which consists of several layers from different times (see M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux et le Coran parlant*, (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2011), 31–36). According to Bayhom-Daou, the date of the tradition most important for the notion of *'iṣma* (although the term is not used there) is 'the latter part of the second century, at the earliest' ('Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays Revisited', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 78, no. 01 (2015), 105–119), i.e. late 8th or early 9th centuries CE. Madelung ('Iṣma') maintains that the notion of the inerrancy of the Imāms was held at least from the first half of the 2nd/8th century, but he provides no argument for this statement.

⁹⁴ Madelung, 'Iṣma'.

as in early Islam and in the cultures surrounding it.⁹⁵ Many of the traditions regarding death and burial already existed among Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians, as well as in the *Jāhili* religious traditions. To a certain extent, the Muslims continued these customs and rituals, but placed them in a new context, adapted them and, in certain cases, gave them a new content. In the same process, some earlier traditions were completely prohibited, and yet others were added. An important element in these visits was the prayer to God for forgiveness and mercy for the deceased. The *Tawwābūn*'s visit at al-Ḥusayn's grave must be regarded as a continuation of this ritual, with the pleading to God for mercy and forgiveness for him. However, there are also some new components related in the account of the visit to the grave, elements that are found in developed form in later Shī'ism and that give this particular visit a special tinge in relation to those that Halevi describes in his book.⁹⁶ Firstly, the moment of repentance, which permeates the entire story, must be mentioned. It is interesting to see, however, that there is no account of wailing in the sense of expressing sorrow for the loss of al-Ḥusayn, neither in the account of the visit to the grave, nor in the story at large. Although I am not prepared to go as far as Halm does when he implies that even present day 'Āshūrā' rituals are not mourning rituals but rituals of repentance, this is certainly true of the *Tawwābūn*'s visit at the grave of al-Ḥusayn.⁹⁷ Secondly, the corollary of repentance and the prayer for forgiveness is the wish for martyrdom while following the path of al-Ḥusayn. This is expressed in several places in the three *akhbār* discussed here. It is of course not the first time in the history of Islam that people are prepared to die for their faith.⁹⁸ What is new here is that martyrdom is conceived of as expiatory for past sins. This is very clear from the speeches ascribed to the leaders of the *Tawwābūn* in the beginning of the story.⁹⁹ Thirdly, we find in this account the notions of 'friendship' or 'love' (Ar. *walāya*) towards those who love and support al-Ḥusayn and his companions, and 'dissociation' (Ar. *barā'a*) and 'enmity' (Ar. *adāwa*) towards those who killed al-Ḥusayn or share his killers' views. As I have mentioned above, these concepts are very important in early as well as later Shī'ism as delimiters of the true community.

I will now turn the focus from the *Tawwābūn* themselves, and briefly look at their image of al-Ḥusayn (as well as of his father 'Alī and to some extent his brother al-Ḥasan) as it is conveyed in the text. al-Ḥusayn is described as a martyr (*shahīd*) together with his father, and the two are also given the epithets 'rightly guided' (*mahdī*) and 'righteous' (*ṣiddīq*).¹⁰⁰ But this is not enough. In Section 7, al-Ḥusayn, his father, and his brother are said to be 'the best of Muḥammad's community (*umma*) (who will be) imploring God's favor on the Day of

⁹⁵ L. Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islam*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 14–32, 226–233. See also Donner, *Narratives*, 85–86.

⁹⁶ See also Halm, *Shi'a Islam*, 16–20.

⁹⁷ Halm, *Shi'a Islam*, 19. Numerous studies clearly demonstrate that mourning for the loss of al-Ḥusayn has become an indispensable part of the 'Āshūrā' rituals. See e.g. M. Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of Devotional Aspects of 'Āshūrā' in Twelver Shi'ism*, (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), passim; V. J. Schubel, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam: Shi'i Devotional Rituals in South Asia*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 71–91, et passim.

⁹⁸ For an overview of the idea of martyrdom in early Islam, see E. Kohlberg, *Medieval Muslim Views on Martyrdom*, (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1997).

⁹⁹ See e.g. al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, ser. II, 500–501; *History*, vol. XX, 84–85. For discussions of these passages, see Halm, *Shi'a Islam*, 18–19; Hawting, 'Tawwābūn', esp. pp. 167–168.

¹⁰⁰ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, ser. II, 546; *History*, vol. XX, 132.

Resurrection (*wasīlatan 'inda 'llāh yawma 'l-qiyāma*).¹⁰¹ According to Jean Calmard, this is the first time that al-Ḥusayn is invoked as an intermediary (*wasīla*) between God and humanity, although the word does not here have the meaning that it received in later Shī'ism.¹⁰² Finally, the association made between al-Ḥusayn's grave and the Black Stone of the Ka'ba is remarkable.¹⁰³ I agree with Dakake when she says: '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'.¹⁰⁴ The sanctity and inviolability of al-Ḥusayn and the family of the Prophet is very prominent in the Karbalā' story,¹⁰⁵ and although the word *ḥurma* ('inviolability') is mentioned only once in the account of the *Tawwābūn* with regard to al-Ḥusayn,¹⁰⁶ the idea is certainly there.

The date of the text

To summarise the analysis made above, both structure and content of the text argue that there are two major reports underlying Abū Mikhnaf's account of the visit to al-Ḥusayn's grave (an account which is then adapted by Ibn A'tham and al-Balādhurī). These reports might very well have been transmitted orally in an initial stage, but have nevertheless been moulded by the transmitters according to their respective contexts.¹⁰⁷ Above, I conjectured that Abū Mikhnaf could have written his *Kitāb Sulaymān b. Ṣurad wa 'Ayn al-Wardā* in the second quarter of the second century AH/the third quarter of the 8th century CE. Given the different wordings and structures of the three *akhbār*, it is most unlikely that he could have made them up himself. It would have been extremely hard to forge traditions like these.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, it is difficult to see any motive for Abū Mikhnaf to do so in this case. As I have mentioned above, the movement of the *Tawwābūn* was too insignificant from a political point of view, to justify such editing of the material. Thus, in my opinion, the three *akhbār* that he has used to create this account must have been extant when he wrote it. If this is true, traditionists from the generation before him would have compiled the longer *akhbār* that make up the account (i.e. *Khabar* I and III; *Khabar* II probably was a single unit at this point), and in this process used the two anonymous reports, which I have called Report A and B, from a previous generation of narrators. The same case applies to this generation, though: one single person could hardly have forged the two reports that are at the basis of the *akhbār*. My argument, then, is that Report A and B have their origin two generations before Abū Mikhnaf, that is at least as early

¹⁰¹ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, ser. II, 547; *History*, vol. XX, 133.

¹⁰² Calmard, 'Culte', 68–69.

¹⁰³ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, ser. II, 547; *History*, vol. XX, 133.

¹⁰⁴ 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 'l-bayt al-ḥarām*) (Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. XX, 156). However, I find Dakake's conclusion that 'the sacred sanctuary' here refers to the *ahl al-bayt*, less probable. The reference might very well be literal, to the previous bombardment of the Ka'ba by the troops of the caliph Yazīd in 64/683 (see al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, ser. II, 424–427; *History*, vol. XIX, 222–225).

¹⁰⁵ Hylén, 'Ḥusayn, the Mediator', 172–174.

¹⁰⁶ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, ser. II, 508; *History*, vol. XX, 91.

¹⁰⁷ For a discussion of such processes, see Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written*, 28–44.

¹⁰⁸ This argument is developed and used by Harald Motzki in his works on the development of Islamic jurisprudence (see e.g. H. Motzki, 'The *Muṣannaf* of 'Abd al-Razzāq al-San'ānī as a Source of Authentic *Aḥādīth* of the First Century A. H', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 50, no. 1 (1991), 1–21). See also Najam Haider's discussion and application of this method regarding the early development of Shī'ism *Origins*, esp. p. 24–53 where the methodology is discussed.

as the end of the 1st century AH/the beginning of the 8th century CE. Of course, they might very well have originated before that, and even go back to eye-witnesses of the event.¹⁰⁹ There is, however, no way in which we can know this for sure.

Conclusion

In the passage analysed here, a paradox in the *Tawwābūn*'s view of al-Ḥusayn is apparent. On the one hand, they follow the traditional mortuary ritual and ask for God's mercy and forgiveness for him. On the other hand, they depict him as the best of Muslims, on a par with the Black Stone in Ka'ba, and even count on his intercession for them on the Day of Resurrection. Here, then, I would argue that we see the beginning of the elevation in Shī'ite mythology of al-Ḥusayn (as well as of his father and brother) to a level above humanity. Although in this text, the *ahl al-bayt* are hardly regarded as super-human, the movement in this direction is clearly discernible. The paradox between the traditional rituals (including the prayer for mercy on al-Ḥusayn, which would be regarded as blasphemous in later Shī'ism) on the one hand, and the high regard for al-Ḥusayn on the other, signals that in this story we have an account of a movement in the making, where old traditions mingle with new customs and ideas. The content of the passage relating the visit to the grave, thus supports the hypothesis that the text is indeed early.

In my evaluation of previous investigations of the story of the *Tawwābūn*, and the scholars' image of this text as early, I asked two questions: What reasons are there to believe that the text is early, and how early is 'early'? Although in the present study I have only analysed a part of the story, I believe that this investigation has strengthened the image given through studies such as those of Halm, Hawting, and Dakake that the text as a whole dates back to at the latest a few decades after the event itself. More investigations of different parts of the text, with the help of a variety of methods, are needed, however. It is my hope that such studies of this old text can give us deeper insights into the earliest developments of Shī'ite ideology and ritual and thus of the emergence of the Shī'ite identity.

¹⁰⁹ Thus, it is possible that the alleged narrator of *Khabar II*, 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ghaziyya, who speaks in first person plural, actually was an eye witness, and that Report B originates from him.