Ḥusayn, the Mediator

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A Structural Analysis of the Karbalāʾ Drama
according to Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr
al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923)

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Abstract

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The present study has a twofold purpose: Firstly, it is an analysis of the Karbalāʾ Drama—i.e. the death of Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī in the hands of an army which had been sent out by the Umayyad authorities, at Karbalāʾ in 60/680—as it is retold by the Muslim jurist and historiographer Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923). Despite its importance, especially to Shīʿite Islam, this text as such has received relatively little attention among scholars of Islam. In this study, the Karbalāʾ Drama is regarded as a myth and the method used to analyze it is inspired by the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss. Lévi-Straussian structuralism has probably never before been applied to early Arabic material to the extent that it is used here. The second purpose of the study, then, is to investigate to what extent and in what mode such a method is applicable to this material.

A portion of the text, called the "Text of Reference," has been selected and thoroughly analyzed. In that analysis, a number of structural features such as codes, oppositions, mediations, and transformations have been identified and made the basis for a more cursory study of the rest of the story. An important structural feature that is detected in this way is the way the argument of the story is forwarded. By the transformation of metaphors into metonyms, the story attempts to make arbitrary relationships look natural and intrinsic. Such a relationship is that between water and blood—two liquids which are at times shed, at times withheld in the story. Husayn takes a mediating position in that he *gives* his water and his blood. He acts as mediator both in a negative sense (he establishes the basic Islamic opposition of good and evil), and in a positive sense (as religious guide he acts as a bridge between them).

Keywords: Historiography, History and myth, History, Husayn Ibn 'Ali (629C–680), Islam, Karbala' (Iraq), Levi-Strauss Claude, Mediator (theology), Myth, Shiites, Structuralism, Tabari 838C–923

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For Astrid

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Preface and acknowledgements

When writing this thesis I have had two groups of readers especially in mind, besides those with a general concern for the History of Religions. One consists of those who ha a specific interest in the historiography of early Islam, and especially, perhaps, in the Karbalāʾ Drama and its interpretation. The other group are those with a theoretical interest in Lévi-Straussian structuralism and its application on new kinds of materials. As the work has progressed, I have come to understand that these two concerns unfortunately seldom converge within one and the same person, and for that reason I have felt obliged to be careful in explaining and clarifying matters in a way that to some readers might seem unnecessary. It is my hope, though, that these sections are brought to a minimum, and I presume that the reader who finds a passage tedious will simply skip to another, more interesting section of the text.

My transcription of Arabic follows Anglo-Saxon conventions. For quotations from the Qurʾān, I have used Arberrys translation. Dates pertaining to the early and classical history of Islam are both given according to the *hijrī* (Muslim) calendar and to the Christian. Thus the year of the death of the Prophet Muḥammad is written "11/632." Otherwise only Christian dates are given.

During the many years in which this work has been in progress in one form or another, a number of people have contributed to make it into what it is today. Some of those closely involved in my doctoral education at different stages have been the late Prof. Jan Bergman, Dept. of Theology at Uppsala University; Prof. Einar Thomassen, Dept. of Classics, Russian and the History of Religions at the University of Bergen; Prof. Gudmar Aneer, Dept. of Humanities and Languages at Dalarna University College;

1. Introduction

The Karbalāʾ Drama today

The Taxi stops at Hathi Chowk, the Elephant Crossing, in Saddar Bazaar. At this place three narrow roads meet and a small open place has been made between the houses. In the centre of the crossing there is a small traffic island with a roof. I have always imagined that it was once made for a policeman to stand there and direct the traffic but I have never seen it used. Now, a microphone is placed there, and loudspeakers are put on the roof. I step out of the car, and immediately see my friends who have placed their stand just where one of the streets opens up to the square. They greet me, and offer me a chair to sit on. There is an atmosphere of expectancy or even tension among the people gathered. A number of policemen, some of them heavily armed, are posted around the square, prepared to take action to uphold order.

I ask my friend Noman why he and his family, who are Sunni Muslims, have raised their stand to distribute drinks during the principal Shīʿite festival. He replies by telling me the story of Imām Ḥusayn, the grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad, who was attacked and under siege by the forces of the caliph Yazīd in the desert at Karbalāʾ in Iraq. No one gave them water. It is *sunna*, a sacred tradition to follow, to make up for that sin by giving water to those who want to commemorate the death of Ḥusayn and his followers. Later I learned that, especially in South Asia, Ḥusayn is highly revered also among Sunnis.

Today is the 9th Muḥarram, and for the first time I am about to see this Shīʿite ritual that I have read about so many times. Some hundred meters away, by the Shīʿite mosque I and my friends see black and red standards raised, and behind them a procession is formed. We hear a rhythmic pounding sound, and Noman and I go toward it to find out what is going on. The sound comes from a large group of men who beat their bare chests, following the rhythm of other men's chanting. Nearby a circle of people forms. The peo-

ple around the circle rhythmically shout: "Ya Ḥusayn! Ya Ḥusayn!" In the middle of the circle we see two young boys—they cannot be more than 10 to 12 years of age—that are facing each other, holding scourges made of chains that end with sharp blades in their hands. They wear no shirts. As the shouts from the people surrounding them increase in intensity, they begin to flagellate themselves with the chains, so that the blood begins to run on their backs. After half a minute or so they can not endure it more, and cease while the shouts become less intense. After a little while the shouts: "Ya Ḥusayn! Ya Ḥusayn!" grow stronger again, and the boys begin scourging themselves once again. They constantly keep eye contact, as if to detect if the other one will not give up first. Noman and I leave the place and return to the stand where my friends distribute water and lemonade in small bowls of clay to thirsty bypassers.

After a while the procession draws closer. At Hathi Chowk it stops. Many people sit down and others come to our stand to get a drink. I see a number of men whose backs are nothing but blood from the whipping. Two or three have fainted from loss of blood and are brought to a nearby hospital. Someone begins to speak in the microphone at the traffic island. After that another person sings a song about the tragedy at Karbalāʾ, and then a mullah begins to preach. I don't understand what he says but every now and then the whole crowd replies: "Ya ʿAlī!" or "Ya Ḥusayn!" At the periphery the women cry. The atmosphere is tense. I can understand how easy it would be to mobilize people through the powerful symbolism that is found in this story. That was exactly what happened during the revolution in Iran in 1979–1980, when the Shah was given the role of evil caliph, Yazīd, with the people taking the role of Ḥusayn so that martyrdom became a legitimate means in the struggle against the evil regime.

After about half an hour the sermon is over and the crowd begins to dissolve. A part of the procession continues but most of the people return to their homes. Suddenly I see, at the end of the procession, a beautifully adorned white horse. My friends explain to me that it symbolizes Dhū Jinnāḥ, the horse that Ḥusayn was riding during the battle of Karbalāʾ. Many people, mostly women, gather around it. The horse is covered with a bloodstained white sheet, and adorned with garlands and flowers. On the saddle a long stick is raised, at the top of which there is a metal hand. The five fingers of the

hand symbolize the five members of the *ahl al-bayt*, the family of Muḥammad, i.e. Muḥammad himself, ‘Alī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. The women who crowd around the horse pray and cry, and many give money to the functionaries who stand around the horse. I am told that prayers uttered close to Dhū Jinnāḥ are answered by God more often than otherwise. The procession and the horse move on, and we return to the stand which is now disassembled for the night. Next day it will be placed there again, to cater for the people of the new even larger processions to be held on the day of Ḥusayn's death.

This event, which I witnessed in Rawalpindi in June 1993, made a strong impression on me. I was both fascinated by the frenzy and the devotion that the people displayed and ill at ease by the blood and the pain.[1] What I experienced in Pakistan before, and even more after the celebration of Muḥarram in 1993, made me realize how deep the story of Ḥusayn and his death at Karbalāʾ is rooted in the world-view of Shīʿite Islam, and in the consciousness of Shīʿite Muslims. It constitutes the center of a "paradigm" that every Shīʿite carries within him or her; a paradigm of symbols, stories, rituals, attitudes, and values, that relate not only to Ḥusayn and his martyrdom, but to the whole of the family of the Prophet and their suffering. Thus, the celebrations described above have their background in the decades after the death of the prophet Muḥammad in 11/632. The Karbalāʾ Drama has ever since continually been retold among Muslims of different religious affiliation, though especially among Shīʿites, and it is written down in countless versions from the early centuries of Islam until today. One of the longest and most elaborate early versions, that of the non-Shīʿite jurist, theologian, and historiographer al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), is the object of investigation in this study.[2]

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[1] The conclusion I drew when watching the flagellated bodies was that the ritual must be very painful. Actually, according to Vernon Schubel who has made a study of Shīʿite rituals in Pakistan based on observations and a number of interviews, almost all participants in the flagellation rituals agree that it is physically painless. (Schubel, *Religious Performance*, 146.)

[2] When I talk of "the Karbalāʾ Drama," I refer to the story of the death of Ḥusayn as it is known to us in broad outline; i.e. the story as we conceive of it with a beginning, a central plot and a tragic

To readers not familiar with the history of Islam, here follows a brief background to these events, as it is often presented in modern academic textbooks on Islam: When the Prophet Muḥammad died in 11/632, he had no male heir. The group that later came to be called Shīʿites (from Shīʿat ʿAlī, "Alī's party") asserted that the Prophet had in fact designated his cousin and son-in-law, ʿAlī, as Imām, leader over the Muslims, after his own death. The Shīʿites came to assert that it was actually God who had elected ʿAlī. Thus he carried the divine guidance within himself. Therefore, he was the only person fit to guide the Muslim community. He was protected by God and could not commit a sin or mistake. Furthermore, he was married to the Prophet's daughter Fāṭima, and their two sons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, would inherit the divine guidance through both their parents (see Figure 1.1).

The group that came to be called Sunnis, on the other hand, argued that the leadership of the Muslim community was not automatically to be found within the family of Muḥammad. They chose an old and experienced Muslim by the name of Abū Bakr, and he became in fact the leader of the Muslims. Later on, the Umayyads, an old aristocratic family of Makka, rose to power.

As time passed the tension between the groups increased. Almost 50 years after the death of the Prophet, Ḥusayn, the younger son of ʿAlī set off towards the Iraqi town of Kūfa, where the Shīʿites had always had a strong support, an act that was regarded by the Umayyad authorities as an act of rebellion. At Karbalāʾ, close to the Euphrates, he was intercepted by a great army from the caliph Yazīd, and cut off from the river and all access to water. It was a bitter insight to Ḥusayn that many of the men of

ending. This drama is retold in many, more or less elaborate versions, e.g. those of Abū Mikhnaf, of Ṭabarī, and of others. To some people, the Karbalāʾ Drama becomes foundational to their identity and world view, thereby acquiring the status of what I will call "myth" (see below, p. 20–31). To the rest of us, the story is "just" a story, although a dramatic and tragic one, deserving the epithet "drama." For a similar use of the term, see Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, 181–190.

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                    │ 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib │
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            ┌───────────────┴───────────────┐
    ┌──────────────┐                 ┌──────────────┐
    │  Abū Ṭālib   │                 │  'Abdallāh   │
    └──────────────┘                 └──────────────┘
                                     ┌──────────────┐
                                     │  Muḥammad    │
                                     └──────────────┘
    ┌──────────────┐                 ┌──────────────┐
    │  (1) 'Alī    │═════════════════│   Fāṭima     │
    └──────────────┘                 └──────────────┘
            ┌───────────────┴───────────────┐
    ┌──────────────┐                 ┌──────────────┐
    │  (2) Ḥasan   │                 │ (3) Ḥusayn   │
    └──────────────┘                 └──────────────┘
                                 ┌──────────────────────┐
                                 │ (4) 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn │
                                 └──────────────────────┘
                                 ┌──────────────────────┐
                                 │ (5) Muḥammad Al-Bāqir │
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Names in boldface indicate members of the immediate family of Muḥammad, the *ahl al-bayt*.

Numbers indicate Imāms according to the Twelver Shī'ites.
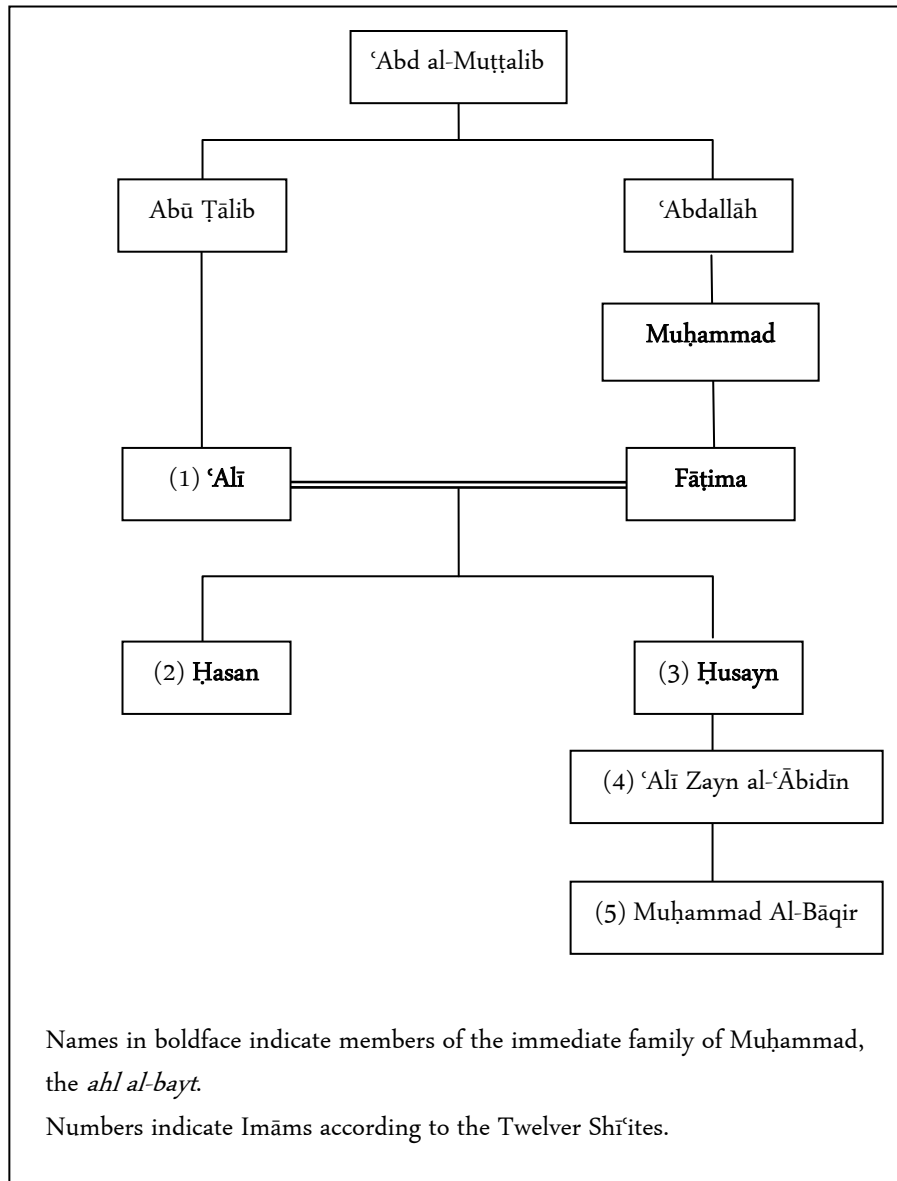
Figure 1.1. The family of the Prophet Muḥammad.

Kūfa who had earlier pledged their loyalty to him, now betrayed him and came against him in the army of the caliph. Ḥusayn first tried to negotiate with the caliph's army, but the harsh conditions that the governor of Kūfa stipulated for a truce was impossible for Ḥusayn to accept, and the only alternative, as he saw it, was fighting to death. So, on the 10th Muḥarram
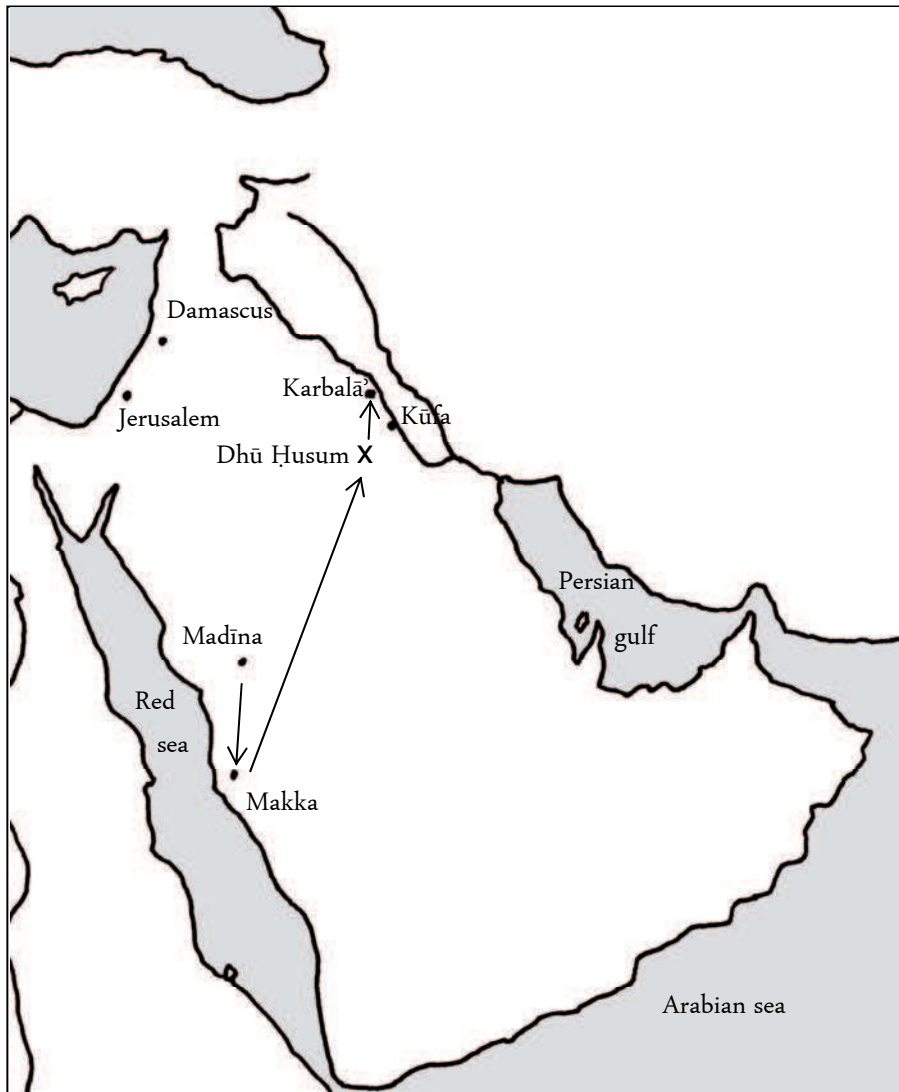
Figure 1.2. Map showing the sites of the Karbalā' Drama and Ḥusayn's journey.

61/10th October 680 the caliph's army of 4000 men attacked Ḥusayn's little group, which, according to tradition consisted of a little more than 100 people including men, women and children. The details about the battle, the desperate situation of the surrounded little group, their thirst and their heroic struggle, the cowardliness and cruelty of the attackers who killed even small babies and harassed the women, all these are vividly described

in the different accounts of the affair. At last even Ḥusayn fell. His head was cut off and brought to the caliph in Damascus.[3]

Since then, Ḥusayn and his companions have acted as prime exemplars of martyrdom in Shīʿite Islam. The sorrow over what happened at Karbalāʾ and the shame of the betrayal of the Kūfans have ever since characterized this form of Islam. Each year during the first days of the month of Muḥarram the tragedy is commemorated through processions through the cities and villages. People beat their chests, flagellate themselves with whips and chains and sometimes even wound themselves with knives and swords, all in an attempt to express their grief about the death of Ḥusayn and the loyalty toward the family of the Prophet.

Throughout the Shīʿite world, the ideas and values inherent in the Karbalāʾ Drama and the other stories of the members of the *ahl al-bayt* are expressed not only through the Muḥarram rituals, but in many different ways.[4] In the Pakistani society, the most obvious signs of the Shīʿite presence that I observed, besides the rituals described above, were the political expression of the values of this group. So, for example, the Shīʿites (which constitute around 30% of the population of Pakistan) interpreted harassments and persecutions from hard-core anti-Shīʿite Sunni groups as a suffering in the path of Ḥusayn and the sacred family. Shīʿite ideals were moreover visible in small details; a number of times I saw a small sign which was posted in shops and medical clinics, and which said in English: "Live like Ali. Die like Husayn." Other manifestations of the devotion to the sacred family included the frequent display of their names written in beautiful calligraphy on pictures or directly on the walls, and the naming of babies after one of its members.

My personal observations about the importance of the Karbalāʾ Drama are corroborated by numerous scholarly studies, where it is argued that

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[3] A more comprehensive summary of the full story in Ṭabarī's version is found in Appendix I.

[4] For an overview of the Shīʿites throughout the contemporary world, see Cole, *Sacred Space*.

this event is not only a matter of life and death here in this world, but that it has cosmic dimensions. Vernon Schubel, who did a field work study in Karachi in 1983, writes: "This event is understood by the entire Shiʿi world as one of the definitive actions in all of world history."[5] Studies of Shīʿite theology shows that acts of solidarity with the sacred family are regarded as salvific performances. Because of their perseverance and determination in their suffering at Karbalāʾ, God gave Ḥusayn and his family (including the following Imams) the power to intercede for the believers on the Day of Judgment, and thereby to convey salvation from God upon them.[6] Very early the twelve Imāms were thought to possess superhuman knowledge through which they have guided the believers throughout the ages.[7] Furthermore, the martyrdom of Ḥusayn has effect not only on those living in the time after its occurrence. Shīʿite chronicles and collections of traditions describe that once even Adam, the first man, was deeply moved when he heard Ḥusayn's mentioned. When he wondered why he felt so touched by this name, an angel related the story of Ḥusayn's death which was to take place in the distant future. Similar stories are told of other pre-Islamic prophets.[8]

Myth, Mythmaking and Historiography

A couple of years after my witnessing of the Muḥarram rituals in Rawalpindi, back in Uppsala, I participated in a series of seminars arranged by the late Professor Jan Bergman and his doctoral students, around the concept of myth. We students were asked to write a paper about this concept

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[5] Schubel, *Religious Performance*, 31.

[6] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 197–205; Bowker, *Problems of Suffering*, 131–133.

[7] Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*.

[8] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 27–28. For comprehensive treatments of the devotional and ritual aspects of Shīʿite piety in various cultures and contexts, see e.g. Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*; Halm, *Shiʿa Islam*; Schubel, *Religious Performance*; Thurfjell, "Living Shiʿism."

from the viewpoint of the tradition each of us studied.[9] At that time I real-
ized that the concept of myth is seldom associated with Islam, and when I
began to search systematically for references to myth in Islam, this image
was confirmed.[10] At the same time I had a very strong feeling that stories
like that of the death of Ḥusayn at Karbalāʾ have more of the function and
the weight to Shīʿite Muslims than many stories that we call "myth" in
other traditions have. So, why is the term "myth" not used for this kind of
stories in Islam?

There are at least two reasons, I think, for the reluctance of Western
scholars of religion to use the concept of myth in connection with Islam.[11]
First, there is the traditional way of defining myth among historians of
religions. Although there has never been a single definition of the concept
of myth that has been accepted among all, or even most historians of relig-
ion, certain presuppositions have reached a level of near consensus among
them. Basic among these is that myth should be defined as a *genre* of nar-
rative in distinction to other genres, such as legend and folktale.[12] Al-
though it is true that this distinction is hardly used within the History of
Religions today, it has been very influential, and it continues to be so
within other disciplines. In order to distinguish between different catego-
ries of "prose narratives",[13] criteria of form and content and of the attitude
held towards the story have normally been used. A good example is the

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[9] The papers were published in Sundqvist and Svalastog, eds., *Myter och mytteorier.*

[10] So, for example, an annotated bibliography on theories of myth with more than 500 entries
(Sienkewicz, *Theories of Myth*) contain only five references to Islam in the index, and a great
encyclopedia of myth (Bonnefoy, ed., *Mythologies*) has none.

[11] The term "West" here, as well as elsewhere in this study, is not a geographic or political concept,
but is an ellipse for the secular academic tradition that has developed in Europe and America during
the last two centuries, but is also found in other parts of the world.

[12] Other terms are often used for the category of "folktale," and a great confusion seems to underlie
this class of tales with its sub-classes. See Bascom, "Forms of Folklore," 7.

[13] The term is Bascom's.

table of criteria made by William Bascom, whose classification is based on these criteria. (See Table 1.1.)[14]

Table 1.1. *Three forms of Prose Narratives, according to Bascom.*

Form	Belief	Time	Place	Attitude	Principal Characters
Myth	Fact	Remote past	Different world: other or earlier	Sacred	Non-human
Legend	Fact	Recent past	World of today	Secular or sacred	Human
Folktale	Fiction	Any time	Any place	Secular	Human or non-human

According to the criteria outlined in Bascom's table, the Karbalāʾ Drama would classify as a legend rather than a myth. Although it is held as fact and, to Shīʿites at least, held as sacred, it is supposed to be *historical* fact and not placed in a remote past or a different world. Furthermore the principal characters are human, although God is certainly active in the background. The same is true for most stories of the formative years of Islam, i.e. the narratives of the life of Muḥammad and the decades after his death.

The second reason for the exclusion of the basic Islamic narratives from the category of myth is the view of myth as false stories. The clear-cut distinction between *mythos* (false stories) and *logos* (true, reasoned words or stories) goes back to Plato, and has ever since prevailed in Western society.[15] This categorization has become an instrument to distinguish truth from falsehood in general in the West, and is applied with great success to

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[14] Bascom, "Forms of Folklore," 9.

[15] Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth*, 37–42; McCutcheon, "Myth," 191. As both Lincoln and McCutcheon shows, however, the distinction was not at all as definite in Greek society before Plato.

distinguish between science (logic) and other concepts such as superstition or religion (myth). As history belongs to the category of science, it is set in opposition to myth—a distinction that has consequences for the classification of Islamic historiography. Until the 1970s the majority of Western scholars of Islam often accepted the Muslim view that the works of history written by Muslim historiographers (including such works as the biographies of the Prophet Muḥammad, many of the *ḥadīth*, and the great historical compilations of historians like al-Balādhurī (d. 279/892) and Ṭabarī) conveyed basic facts about events that really happened in the formative period of Islam.[16] Since this textual corpus was *history* (although, admittedly in many cases, biased history), it could not be *myth*. This idea was strengthened by the Muslim notion that some of these historical sources were based on revelation (notably the *ḥadīth* literature and the biography of the Prophet), and by the sharp distinction that Muslims themselves made between the falsehood of the pre-Islamic time of ignorance, the *Jāhiliyya*, and the truth of Islam that was revealed through the Prophet.[17] The distinction between revealed truth and myth is, of course, nothing that is unique to Islam, but can be found in other religious traditions as well. So, in addition to the distinction within Western academic scholarship between history and myth, there is the religious dichotomy between revealed truth and non-revealed stories which are held to be devoid of meaning, stories that in different analytical contexts have come to be termed myth. In the case of Islam, both worked together against using "myth" as a concept for stories of utmost importance from the formative periods of this tradition. (See Table 1.2.)

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[16] Of course, there were exceptions to this view at least from the beginning of the 20th century, as we will see in Chapter 2 below, where I will further develop the discussion of Islamic historiography and its reception among Western scholars.

[17] Neuwirth, "Myths," 477; Stetkevych, *Muḥammad and the Golden Bough*, 3.

Table 1.2. *Myth and its oppositions in traditional religious and in Western academic thought*

	Academy	Religion
Falsehood	Myth	Myth
Truth	History	Revelation

The problem, in my eyes, is that many stories with a historical background within various religious traditions have a function in the lives of the believers that qualifies them as myths, rather than as legends or pure historical narratives without further significance than giving facts about the past. This is true also for the Karbalā' Drama and other stories from early Islam. These stories shape the world-view of Islam, and give the reason for rituals and specific ways of living in the sense that stories that we call myth in other cultures usually do. It is hard to find another term that adequately conveys the function that these stories have for believing Muslims. Therefore, I would like to propose a use of the analytical category of myth as a story with a certain *function* rather than as a story that belongs to a specific genre.

Elsewhere I have discussed the category of myth, taking my departure from an article where the Finnish professor of folkloristics and comparative religion, Lauri Honko, struggles with the concept of myth.[18] The definition that Honko proposes is long and not very useful, but it is based on four criteria which I have used as tools to form my own definition of myth:[19]

(1) The *form* of the myth is narrative. It is related verbally, but it can also be expressed in other ways, as in drama, art, etc.

(2) The *content* of myths vary, of course, but normally they relate creative or decisive events in the beginning of time. For that reason cos-

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[18] Hylén, "Är Kerbala-dramat en myt?," building on Honko, "The Problem of Defining Myth."

[19] Honko, "The Problem of Defining Myth," 49–51.

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mogonic descriptions are important in many mythologies. Honko, how-ever, qualifies this criterion in a very important passage:

> [O]f course, not all myths are cosmogonic in content if the word is used in its strictly literal sense. The most important thing perhaps, at least it would seem so to me, is *the structural parallel between cosmogonic myths and certain other stories of the world's origin which the social group accepts as the ultimate source of its identity*. In other words, the term cosmogonic in this sense comprises all those stories that recount how the world began, how our era started, how the goals that we strive to attain are determined and our most sacred values are codified. Seen from this point of view the 96th sura of the Ko-ran, the birth of Christ, the life of Lenin, Che Guevara's death and Mao's speeches are all material which, under certain conditions, can be structured in a way which resembles ancient cosmogonic myths.[20]

(3) In its *function* myth are examples or models. Honko's words about this criterion can be summarized by invoking Clifford Geertz' two-pronged concept of model: Myths are static models *of* the world as it was from the beginning, and models *for* human behavior.[21]

(4) The *context* of myth is usually ritual, which reiterates mythical time and its events here and now.

The first and the last of these criteria are easily applicable to the Kar-balā' Drama. In its original form it is a narrative, although it is often re-lated in the form of drama, art, and poetry. It is also closely connected to a number of rituals, first and foremost the *'Ashūrā'* celebrations described in the introductory pages to this study, but also a number of different weekly, monthly and annual rituals, which differ between the various Shī'ite cul-tures, but which basically have the same basic components: the commemo-ration of the suffering and death of Ḥusayn and his family at Karbalā'.[22] If

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[20] Honko, "The Problem of Defining Myth," 50–51 (emphasis added).

[21] Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 93–94.

[22] Moreover, Honko's fourth criterion is strictly not necessary, since the context of myth *in normal cases* is ritual (Honko, "The Problem of Defining Myth," 51). Today, few historians of religions

the first and the fourth of Honko's criteria can be applied to the Karbalā᾿ Drama, it is not so obvious that the second criterion fits on this story. Although it seems impossible to get historically verifiable facts about the battle at Karbalā᾿, most Western scholars agree that it was a minor event in the political turmoil of the first centuries of Islam. One author describes it as "[a] routine police operation . . . ." from the point of view of the Umayyad authorities;[23] another says that "[i]t seems unlikely at the time that the affair had very much importance for the Umayyads. Husayn's force had been small and was suppressed with relative ease."[24] In historical terms, then, the incident itself was hardly decisive or creative in the history of the world or the Islamic community, not even in the extended sense that Honko gives these terms in the quotation above. It is in the further interpretation and narration that the incident has become significant, an example, a pattern, a paradigm for the suffering of the righteous. Thus, it is only in combination with the third criterion—the function of the story as a model—that the nature of a story as cosmogonic becomes obvious.

This process of interpretation of an ordinary event is probably what Russel McCutcheon refers to when he argues that myth is the creation of "the extraordinary from the everyday."[25] Actually Honko himself, in the lines quoted above, incorporates the third criterion in the second, thereby making the third criterion more or less superfluous; it is cosmogony as a *function* rather than as *content* of a story that makes a story a myth. A word which I will use to express this combination of cosmogony and

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would argue that myth and ritual are inseparable; even though the link between them is often strong, there are myths without rituals and vice versa.

[23] Shaban, *Islamic History*, 91.

[24] Hawting, *First Dynasty*, 50–51.

[25] McCutcheon, "Myth," 200.

model is "foundational".[26] One could argue in a similar way about many stories relating to early Islam as well as to Christianity and, as Honko suggests, probably to many other stories that are "cosmogonic" and paradigmatic. For that reason, I will employ the following definition of myth in the present study: *A myth is a narrative that is foundational to the world view or identity of a group of people.*

An obvious advantage with this definition of myth is that it includes all kinds of stories that are of such importance to people that they can be labeled "foundational". It does not take into account whether a story is "historically true"—in the sense that the events it relates can be verified by scholarly research—or not. This means that the dichotomy between myth and historiography looses its importance; historiography can function as myth and myth as historiography.[27] Although historiography is supposed to build upon "documentable objective facts,"[28] it is clear that these facts are always sifted through the understanding and the interests of the scholar. The British anthropologist Seth Kunin, who works mainly with Hebrew mythology, argues that the dichotomy myth/history is unimportant in certain cases, since

> all descriptions of events are artificial constructs, isolating particular moments in the ongoing flow of time. While we are not denying that the past occurred, we are denying the possibility of recovering the past in an unmediated/unstructured form.
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> . . . [B]oth myth and history are highly structured narratives that model self and the world and thus are functionally identical. The difference is one of

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[26] I have borrowed this term from Bergman, "Myt och historia" In the article, Bergman uses the Swedish equivalent of this term (*grundläggande*). That my translation and application of the term agrees with his was confirmed in a personal conversation in March 10, 1999.

[27] In this work, I try to uphold the distinction between history (events that have actually occurred in the past), History with capital H (for the academic discipline), and historiography (our perception of and narrating that history). For a similar use, see Gottschalk, *Beyond Hindu and Muslim*, 83 n.42

[28] Kunin, *We Think What We Eat*, 20.

content: myth uses events that may or may not be fictional (it can use histori-cal events), history uses events understood to be factual."[29]

Our society privileges fact before non-factual material. In other societies the preferences may be reversed. Therefore, Kunin argues, the distinction between historiography as truth and myth as falsehood is based on an ethnocentric privileging of the way our society understands the world.[30] I fully subscribe to Kunin's ideas on this matter with the addition that, whereas historiography very often is not foundational, myth always is. I guess that the cause for our concordant views on myth and history is the fact that both of us work with mythology from very history-conscious so-cieties.

A myth, then, is a means to "create" the world in which we live but it is also created in, and even out of, this world, since we respond to our ex-periences by creating and modifying myths. Russel McCutcheon, Ameri-can Historian of Religions, argues that the focus of the study of myth should be shifted from myths as something static, as stories of that which is sacred or in other ways extraordinary, to the study of mythmaking as a

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[29] Kunin, *We Think What We Eat*, 21. (Note that Kunin does not uphold my distinction between history and historiography.) Peter Gottschalk argues in a similar way, although he uses the concept "group memory" rather than "myth." Gottschalk, *Beyond Hindu and Muslim*, 83–90. See also Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 256–264.

In another context I applied this kind of reasoning on the individual. Like historiography, the personal memory is a selective process, and the historiography that we create of our own individual pasts have the same function as collective historiography and myth (Hylén, "Några begrepp och teorier i religionshistoria," 14). I find it particularly interesting that Kunin argues in a similar way (Kunin, *We Think What We Eat*, 22). Thus, I do not find Lincoln's notion of myth as "ideology in narrative form" sufficient, since that would presuppose that myth is always based in a group (Lin-coln, *Theorizing Myth*, 147). This is also one of the limitations with Gottshalks notion of "group memory."

[30] Kunin, *We Think What We Eat*, 21. Kunin furthermore points to the need of many religious people in our society to "factualize" their beliefs, because of the prevailing scientific paradigm: "Religion must be legitimized through experiences that are accepted as objective, not merely on the basis of faith." (Kunin, *We Think What We Eat*, 22).

process, as a kind of "social argumentation," a technique or a strategy that is completely normal and a necessary means for all building of identities.[31] Such a change in the perspective on myth fits very well with the notion that ordinary historical events as well as almost anything in the environment of a group can be used as myth. The French structuralist anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss calls this process *bricolage*, a word that is almost impossible to translate into English. A *bricoleur* is a kind of handyman, an artisan who uses whatever is at hand to mend and fix. He "is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks. . . . His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with 'whatever is at hand' . . . ."[32] In a similar way, Lévi-Strauss holds, myths are built with different elements that exist and are significant within a certain culture—be these historical events (as is often the case in historically interested societies), details from the natural environment, social or economic features within the culture, or whatever is at hand.[33] The myths are expressions or manifestations in narrative mode of underlying structures inherent in a specific society or culture. Whereas the structures are more or less constant, the myths themselves change, "transform" in Lévi-Strauss' terminology, due to the process of *bricolage*.[34]

Lévi-Strauss normally views *bricolage* as a collective, anonymous and more or less unconscious process. In McCutcheon's perspective, myth-making is also an act performed by named individuals or groups. A similar

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[31] McCutcheon, "Myth," 200.

[32] Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 17.

[33] The concept of *bricolage* is extensively discussed in Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 16–33. In the same book he talks of a specific "mythical thought." This is a complicated matter which I cannot go into in the present study. Here, I only want to state that, according to Lévi-Strauss, "mythical thinking" is not a feature of "primitive" peoples, but something we all practice.

For an interesting and unusual example of *bricolage* (Nietsche's creation of the notion of "the blond beast"), see Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth*, 101–120; the notion of Nietsche as bricoleur is found in 118.

[34] See below, Chapter 3, for a more comprehensive discussion of the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss.

view is held by the American Historian of Religions Bruce Lincoln, who, although he holds Lévi-Strauss in highest esteem, disagrees with him on this particular point. To Lincoln, the main purpose of myth is to classify the world we live in. This is an aspect of myth to which Lévi-Strauss pays great attention, without, however, discussing the political aspects of taxonomy. In contrast to Lévi-Strauss, Lincoln holds that

> taxonomy is hardly a neutral process, since the order established among all that is classified (including items treated only by allusion or implication, and above all human groupings) is hierarchic as well as categoric. . . .
>
> I am thus inclined to argue that when a taxonomy is encoded in mythic form, the narrative packages a specific contingent system of discrimination in a particularly attractive and memorable form. What is more, it naturalizes and legitimates it. Myth, then, is not just taxonomy, but *ideology* in narrative form.[35]

Lincoln further maintains that viewing myth in this way requires that we consider the role of the specific narrators who often modify the narratives and introduce changes in the classification so as to forward their own interests.[36]

With the modification of Lévi-Strauss' theory of myth and mythical transformation that Lincoln suggests, I find that it captures important aspects of the myth-building process, and for that reason I will employ it in the analysis of the Karbalāʾ Drama in Ṭabarī's version. Before going on, however, I must make the reader aware that there is a discrepancy between my own use of the term "myth" and that of Lévi-Strauss. Whereas my definition of myth is based on the function of a narrative, he uses *both* structural *and* functional criteria for classifying a story (or rather a set of stories) as a myth.[37] It is not that I deny that there are structures in myths;

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[35] Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth*, 147.

[36] Lincoln gives examples of this process, e.g. the differences between Pindar's, Empedocles' and Plato's hierarchies of classes of men (Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth*, 151–159).

[37] For the concept of structure, and for Lévi-Strauss' view of myth, see below, Chapter 3.

on the contrary, as this study attempts to show, myths are often (if not always) highly structured. The main difference between Lévi-Strauss' use of myth and mine is that I put functionality in the first place. This probably makes Lévi-Strauss' concept of myth wider than mine so that a greater amount of stories are included in his category of myths than in mine.

Purpose and Scope of the Present Study

In the present study, I will analyze the account of the death of Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī[38] (the Karbalāʾ Drama) as retold by the Muslim historian/theologian Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923). I will regard the story as a myth in the sense outlined in my definition in the previous section. The analysis is based on the structuralist theory and method of Claude Lévi-Strauss as it is developed by E. Köngäs Maranda and P. Maranda, S. Marcus, L. Scubla and others.[39] In doing this, I hope to attain two goals. The first is to give a deeper understanding of the Karbalāʾ Drama as a story that was foundational to Ṭabarī and, presumably, to the self-image of the Islamic community of his age. In order to truly understand its significance to Ṭabarī and his time, I should have compared it with other versions. This has not been possible, however, within the frames of the present work. Thus, this study must be considered a first step in this regard, inviting further investigation of other versions and comparisons with the one analyzed here.[40]

My second aim is to investigate to what extent and in what mode Lévi-Strauss' structuralism can be applied to the narratives of early and classical Islam. As I will show below, hardly any studies exist of Arabic material

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[38] In Arabic names *b.* is pronounced "ibn" or "bin" and has the meaning "son of."

[39] Maranda and Maranda, *Structural Models*; Marcus, "Canonic Formula"; Scubla, *Lire Lévi-Strauss*; Scubla, "Hesiod."

[40] This problem is further discussed below, on pp. 101–104.

from a structuralist point of view. More generally, since the interest in the writings and theories of Lévi-Strauss faded out in the late 1970s, it has not been fashionable to employ this theoretical and methodological apparatus within the discipline of the History of Religions. In the last two decades, however, his ideas have been developed and commented on, and it is my firm belief that History of Religions as an academic discipline would have much to gain by re-incorporating them into its theoretical and methodological arsenal.

Previous Studies

Myths in Islam

Although the concept of myth has seldom been associated with Islam, in later years a few studies has been made which, from a more theoretical point of view, have discussed myth in Islam. In the following paragraphs, I will very briefly summarize the ideas of some scholars who have dealt with this subject:

One of the most extensive discussions of myth in relation to Islam is that by the German Arabist Angelika Neuwirth, who has worked mainly with the concept of myth in the Qur'ān. In one of her many contributions to the recently published *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān*, she distinguishes between myth and legend in the Qur'ān.[41] She defines myth as "narratives that serve to explain and describe the experienced world by laying bare its archetypal patterns . . . ." which are often set in a cosmic or supernatural context and that serve to generate meaning and give guidance. Legends, on the other hand, are stories of "pious imagination celebrating an exemplary figure."[42] These definitions in many ways echo traditional classifications,

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[41] Neuwirth, "Myths."

[42] Neuwirth, "Myths," 447.

such as that of Bascom outlined in Table 1.1 above. It is not entirely clear to me what Neuwirth means by "archetypal patterns," but in the context in which she works, it seems they are themes found in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, as well as (though to a much smaller degree) in ancient Arabic lore that function as models for identification and guidance, that are incorporated into the formation of an Islamic mythology. These "hermeneutically distinguished genres of narrative . . . ." occur not only in the Qurʾān, but also in other kinds of Arabic literature.[43] In the Qurʾān, the ancient paradigms are "demythified", i.e. taken out of their original historical and narrative setting, and then reconstructed into a truly Islamic framework. Neuwirth lists a number of myths and legends in the Qurʾān, and argues that there is only one "qurʾānic narrative that could be viewed as a myth of history . . . ."—the exodus of Moses which has functioned as a paradigm to the Prophet Muḥammad and the early Islamic community.[44] One of the most important "archetypal paradigms" which is found many times in different contexts in the Qurʾān, is the annihilation of the disobedient and unbelieving nations, the so called "punishment stories".[45] This paradigm, in her view, is a borrowing and reformation of the Biblical story of the tower of Babel, which, in the Qurʾānic context keeps recurring throughout history rather than being a unique event in the (pre-)history of mankind as it is in the Bible. The function of the punishment stories is to give meaning to the precarious situation of the Prophet and the first Muslims when they were mocked at and persecuted by the pagan Makkans. "Thus the current situation acquires surplus meaning by being underscored with an archetypal dimension whose pattern even appears inscribed into the landscape of the broader homeland."[46] In another article, Neuwirth characterizes Sura 55 in the Qurʾān as mythical because "[i]t lists the

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[43] Neuwirth, "Myths," 477.

[44] Neuwirth, "Myths," 487–488.

[45] Neuwirth, "Myths," 488–490.

[46] Neuwirth, "Myths," 489.

individual acts of divine creation of heaven and earth, and the establishment and upholding of order in both realms," and warns "the mythic ensemble of beings, *al-ins wa-l-ǧinn* [the humans and the *jinns*] . . . ." that if they try to transgress the divine bounds, they will be punished in the hereafter.[47] Here again we see traces of a more traditional view of myth, where the pre-historical location of the events retold, and the participation of non-human beings provide the criteria for its classification.

The main problem with Neuwirth's discussions of myth in the Qur'ān, in my view, is that she oscillates between a functional and a traditional, genre-based view of myth: on the one hand they are "narratives informed with a particular hermeneutic code," i.e. they are stories which provide patterns of emulation in figures from ancient times (a functional criterion); on the other, she talks of these stories as belonging to specific classes and distinguishes between myth and legend as literary genres.[48] However, she points to an important matter when she shows that themes from earlier traditions are re-used and re-contextualized to fit into the Qur'ānic pattern—a kind of *bricolage* on the part of the early Muslims, I would prepared to call it.

Another interesting study of myth in the Qur'ān and in post-Qur'ānic literature is Jaroslav Stetkevych's study of a how pre-Islamic mythic pattern (that of the Golden Bough) is integrated into Islamic myth.[49] Stetkevych seems to hold a view of myth that is similar to Neuwirth's, although he never clearly defines the concept.

In the present study, it is post-Qur'ānic historiography, and particularly that of al-Ṭabarī, that is the main focus of my attention. Two scholars in particular have discussed the concept of myth in the writings of Islamic historiography in general, and in the writings of Ṭabarī in particular: the

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[47] Neuwirth, "Qur'ānic literary structure revisited," 392–393; see also 407–408.

[48] See e.g. Neuwirth, "Myths," 477.

[49] Stetkevych, *Muḥammad and the Golden Bough*.

American professor of Islamic History, R. Stephen Humphreys, and the French professor of Arabic culture and civilization, Claude Gilliot. None of them define myth, but both talk of myth as being found in the structures of historiographical narratives, rather than in specific genres.

Humphreys suggests that the interpretation of history in early Islamic historiography is influenced by the Qurʾān to a great extent.[50] The historians had to deal with the trauma of violence and divisions among the early Muslims, and they did so by viewing it from the perspective of the Qurʾān.[51] This is clear, Humpreys holds, first by the fact that to all Muslim historians the coming of Islam and the Qurʾān begins a new era in world history, and secondly because virtually all of them relate the same critical events from the early years of Islam, events which fit into a structural pattern that can also be found in the Qurʾān. In this pattern there are three central concepts: Covenant (God's promise of salvation in return for the human obligation to obey and worship him only), Betrayal (humanity's failure to fulfill the covenantal obligations and certain peoples' rejection of God's prophets) and Redemption (some communities' acceptance of the prophets, and the renewal of the covenant).[52] Thus, "the soul-searching provoked by the dialectic of scripture and historical experience crystallized in the form of an almost universally shared myth, one which we can call the myth of Covenant, Betrayal, and Redemption."[53] This myth, Humphreys argues, provides a pattern for the interpretation of history for all Muslim historians up to the tenth century. To these historians, the covenant that God made with the Muslim community, the last of all the divine covenants with humankind, now seemed to have been betrayed and the community to have fallen apart. Thus it was important to investigate how

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[50] Humphreys, "Qurʾānic Myth."

[51] More on this in Chapter 2.

[52] Humphreys, "Qurʾānic Myth," 276–278.

[53] Humphreys, "Qurʾānic Myth," 278.

and why this betrayal had happened, and how, if possible, redemption could be brought about.[54]

Boaz Shoshan, Israeli professor of History, criticizes Humphreys for reading into early Islamic historiography more than is actually there. Shoshan holds that the concept of covenant is not as important in the Qurʾān and especially not in later historiography, as Humphreys tries to make it.[55] Yet, in spite of the fact that the concept of covenant in its narrow sense might not be as obvious as Humphreys argues, in my view the values and ideas expressed by this term—a good relationship between God and man, involving a number of responsibilities from both parts—are undeniably more or less omnipresent in the Qurʾān as well as in early historiography. Thus, I would agree with Humphreys that the pattern that he describes can actually be found in these texts.[56]

Claude Gilliot suggests that there is in the works of Ṭabarī a structure of binary oppositions and mediations that is also found in the Old Testament.[57] He argues that this structure is used in Ṭabarī's exegetical and historical writings in order to convey his moral message, which is to restore the faith of old. The "exegetical key" and "hermeneutic grid" through which the events of history are viewed by Ṭabarī, is the structural opposition between submission to God, on the one hand, and rebellion against

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[54] Humphreys, "Qurʾānic Myth," 278.

[55] Shoshan, *Poetics*, 86–90.

[56] See also Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 87–89, although Humphreys takes issue with Wansbrough on the latter's notion of "nostalgia" (Humphreys, "Qurʾānic Myth," n18). Van Ess does not use the concept of covenant in this context, but I assume he would agree that this is the theological expression for the early Islamic consciousness of election (*Erwählungsbewußtsein*) (van Ess, *TG*, vol. 1, 8). With regard to the concept of covenant in Ṭabarī, Humphreys is partly followed by Ulrika Mårtensson (Mårtensson, "Discourse," 310–318).

[57] Gilliot, "Mythe." In this article, Gilliot is clearly influenced by Lévi-Strauss as he is interpreted by the British anthropologist Edmund Leach (see Gilliot, "Mythe," 264–265). The concepts of binary oppositions and mediations are Lévi-Straussian, and will be discussed below.

the divine law, on the other.[58] He maintains that no special narrative genre, such as that we would normally designate as "myth", is needed to convey the mythical message of Ṭabarī. The structures of the "mental myth" (by which I understand the structure of oppositions and mediations) are materialized in a story, in this case in a historical narrative.[59]

Humpreys and Gilliot, then, talk of a mythic structure (although the former does not use the term "structure," but rather talks of "pattern" or "paradigm"), rather than of myth as narrative, and this structure is materialized in different stories. Thus, they have a view of myth than is probably closer to that of Lévi-Strauss than to mine. I regard the same stories from early Islam as myths, but for a different reason: they were foundational to Muslims in the age when they were produced. The important point, however, is that these two scholars have demonstrated that it is possible to apply structural analysis to early Islamic historiography in order to get a better understanding of the world view and identity of Muslims of the first centuries.

Modern Studies of the Karbalāʾ Drama

Although a number of modern studies have been made of the *event* of the death of Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī at Karbalāʾ and its significance in Islam, surprisingly few studies have been made of any of the accounts of the Karbalāʾ Drama *as text*. In this section, I will briefly review a selection of works of the former kind (others could have been chosen), and then discuss the two textual studies of the Karbalāʾ Drama that I am aware of.

Most of the studies of the historical event of the Karbalāʾ Drama discuss it in the context of the development of Shīʿism. Some of them use a number of sources, although Abū Mikhnaf's account as it is related by Ṭabarī is

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[58] Gilliot, "Mythe," 244–245.

[59] "Il y a une adéquation profonde entre le mythe mental et le mythe actualisé dans un récit." Gilliot, "Mythe," 265.

most frequently referred to. The majority of the studies of this kind give a more or less detailed, and usually uncritical paraphrase of the story, and then go on to comment on it from the various perspectives of the authors. So, more than a hundred years ago, Julius Wellhausen wrote a chapter on Ḥusayn and the battle of Karbalāʾ in his book *The Religio-Political Factions in Early Islam*.[60] After summarizing Abū Mikhnaf's account in Ṭabarī's version, he goes on to comment on Abū Mikhnaf's style and use of his sources, before he discusses the personalities and sentiments of the characters involved. Here, Wellhausen's interest in hard power politics is clearly manifested. In his eyes Ḥusayn is a selfish weakling, a dreamer who accomplishes nothing through his futile attempt to grab the power: "Like a child he stretches out his hands to the moon."[61] Wellhausen's sympathies are all with the Iraqi governor, ʿUbaydallāh b. Ziyād, the official that is immediately responsible for Ḥusayn's death. "[W]ith few means but with clear intent and firm hand, [the governor] understands the solution to the difficult problem. . . . He did his duty and in no wise exceeded the limits."[62] So, in the meeting between these two antagonists, what happened was only to be expected: "Like a clay pot [Ḥusayn] clashed against the iron ʿUbaydalla."[63]

This unsympathetic attitude toward Ḥusayn is unusual of later writers.[64] A very good overview of the story is that made by Laura Veccia Vaglieri in her article on Ḥusayn in the second edition of *Encyclopedia of Islam*.[65] This article deals with the person of Ḥusayn, rather than with the Karbalāʾ Drama as such, but since all sources of Ḥusayn emphasize this event to such a degree, much of the article is centered on the battle. Veccia Vaglieri

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[60] Wellhausen, *Religio-Political Factions*, 105–120.

[61] Wellhausen, *Religio-Political Factions*, 116.

[62] Wellhausen, *Religio-Political Factions*, 115.

[63] Wellhausen, *Religio-Political Factions*, 116.

[64] But see Lammens, "Al-Husain," published slightly later than Wellhausen's work.

[65] Veccia Vaglieri, "Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib."

first relates the story of the battle of Karbalā', before discussing "The legend of Ḥusayn", i.e. the ascription of marvels and miracles to him.[66] At the end of the article the author repudiates the views of Wellhausen and others with similar views. Referring to the speeches of Ḥusayn reported by the sources, she concludes that he was "a man impelled by an ideology (the institution of a régime which would fulfill the demands of true Islam)" albeit "stubbornly determined to achieve his ends, as in general are all religious fanatics . . . ."[67]

Mahmoud Ayoub's book *Redemptive Suffering in Islām* has probably been one of the most influential sources for a Western understanding of the Shī'ite sentiment. While the central purpose of his book is to describe and discuss the devotional aspects of the 'Ashūra ritual (i.e. the later interpretations of the Karbalā' Drama), Ayoub also deals with the "historical" aspects of the person of Ḥusayn and the events at Karbalā'. Ayoub dismisses the less sympathetic interpretations of Ḥusayn, and describes him as "a man of piety, idealism, nobility of character and ascetic detachment from the world."[68] He maintains that a careful study of the sources confirm the view that Ḥusayn had the right to rebel against "the illegitimate usurpation of power by . . . Yazīd" since it violated the ideals of Islam.[69] Although Ayoub is careful to state that political factors were also involved in the drama, he argues that these alone cannot explain the behavior of Ḥusayn. In addition to these external factors, he identifies three internal motives for Ḥusayn's martyrdom: "his idealism, the belief that his fate was predetermined and the certainty he seems to have had that he either had to submit or be killed."[70] Again, in this chapter the scholar attempts to understand Ḥusayn as a person and his emotions, rather than regarding

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[66] Veccia Vaglieri, "Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib," 612–614.

[67] Veccia Vaglieri, "Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib," 614.

[68] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 93.

[69] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 93.

[70] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 103.

the sources as later generations' interpretations of an earlier event.[71] In other parts of the book, however, Ayoub makes a masterly study of the later, devotional interpretations of the Karbalāʾ drama.

A study of a different kind is Maria Massi Dakake's doctoral thesis *Loyalty, Love and Faith*.[72] Dakake here traces the development of a Shīʿite communal identity. She argues that the Karbalāʾ event did not mark a shift from a political to a more religiously based movement, as has often been stated.[73] The Shīʿite movement, she maintains, had religious dimensions from the beginning. Dakake supports this hypothesis by studying the use of the term *walāya* (a religio-political term with a wide semantic field, but which can most easily be translated by "authority" and "loyalty"). Although this term was prevalent in the accounts of the First Civil War of Islam, i.e. when the authority of Ḥusayn's father ʿAlī was at stake, in the accounts of the Karbalāʾ affair, however, it is almost completely absent. In this story, it is rather the term *nuṣra* ("support" or "assistance") that is used instead, a term "which is synonymous with *walāyah*, when used in that sense, but which has none of the sectarian, charismatic or absolutist undertones often associated with the term *walāyah*."[74] The main theme of the accounts of Ḥusayn and Karbalāʾ is not his legitimacy (as it is with ʿAlī) as much as his inviolability and guidance.[75] Dakake's study is entirely different from those mentioned previously, in that it focuses on concepts used in historiography and *ḥadīth* rather than on the stories themselves. This opens the way for a healthy detachment on the part of the author from the content of the text; instead of investigating the historical event of

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[71] This is none the less true of Syed Husain Mohammad Jafri's depiction of Ḥusayn and the Karbalāʾ Drama in Jafri, *Origins*, 174–221.

[72] Dakake, "Loyalty." I am grateful to Professor Lynda Clarke, Montreal, who drew my attention to this work.

[73] Dakake, "Loyalty," 14–16.

[74] Dakake, "Loyalty," 118–119.

[75] Dakake, "Loyalty," 109, 118.

Karbalā', she endeavors to examine "the discourse surrounding the failed revolt of al-Ḥusayn as it is recorded in the prominent histories . . . ."[76] The problem is, however, that she does not discuss the status of the sources, but often seems to take their historical factuality for granted. She seems to presuppose that when a speech or a letter is recorded in the sources, this was what was actually said or written.[77] Because of this, it appears to be difficult for Dakake to dissociate herself from the person of Ḥusayn and his thoughts, and she now and then talks about the motives and ideas of Ḥusayn.[78]

By focusing on the Karbalā' drama as an historical event, then, these and many other scholars read the sources as more or less factual accounts of what really happened. I do not deny that this is possible to a certain extent. However, such a procedure demands a much more thorough discussion of the status as historical sources of the texts investigated. Furthermore, I think it is impossible to find anything but the major features of a historical event in texts such as these; thus, the sentiments, ideas and personal motives of the protagonists involved, are probably forever hidden to us.

The only analysis that I have found of a particular account of the Karbalā' Drama *as text,* is that of Boaz Shoshan in his *Poetics of Islamic Historiography.*[79] In the second part, Shoshan gives four examples of how Ṭabarī works, one of which is the Karbalā' Drama. To Shoshan, the story of Ḥusayn's death is a tragedy in and out. It contains two different strands that, in a complex manner work together to convey the tragic effect: on the

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[76] Dakake, "Loyalty," 109.

[77] See e.g. the discussion of the statement by one of Ḥusayn's companions at Karbalā' (Dakake, "Loyalty," 114), and the comparison of Ḥusayn's two letters to the Shī'a of Kūfa and the Baṣran *ashrāf* (Dakake, "Loyalty," 115–116).

[78] So, for example, she writes that neither Ḥusayn nor his followers held an absolutist view of his religious/political authority. (Dakake, "Loyalty," 115).

[79] Shoshan, *Poetics,* 233–252.

one hand Ḥusayn's determination to follow God's will and go to Kūfa against the advices of his friends, and on the other his attempt to escape his destiny when he realizes that he is threatened by death.[80] In this way, Shoshan concludes, the Karbalā' Drama "comes pretty close to the classical definition of tragedy, save for the element of *hubris*."[81] As will be clear from my own analysis of the text, I do not agree with Shohsan's specific interpretation of the story.[82] His approach to the text is much closer to mine than is that of the authors mentioned previously, however. In the present study, I do take a step further, though, and analyze the story as *myth* in the meaning of a foundational story, and not merely as a text. The difference is that I search for underlying deep structures that are conveyed through the content and the narrative structure of the story.[83]

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[80] Shoshan, *Poetics*, 235–236, 245.

[81] Shoshan, *Poetics*, 252.

[82] See below pp. 185–192.

[83] I will discuss the different levels of structure below on pp. 69–71.

2. Ṭabarī and His Context

Early Development of Islamic Theology and Politics

In this section, I will draw an outline of a possible view of the development of the Islamic community during the first three centuries of its existence. As a matter of fact, we know very little about this complicated historical process. Although a massive corpus of historiographical literature is preserved from the later centuries of the period discussed here, hardly any date from the $1^{st}/7^{th}$–$2^{nd}/8^{th}$ centuries, and very little is extant in unprocessed form from the $3^{rd}/9^{th}$.[1] What is left today is mainly edited versions, digests and compilations of $2^{nd}/8^{th}$-century historical works. To simplify matters a bit, the sources to the first decades of the Islamic civilization are basically works from the $3^{rd}/9^{th}$ centuries, in which books written perhaps a century earlier have been edited or compiled; these earlier works in their turn base their accounts on oral reports which in many cases are said to go back to eye-witnesses contemporaneous with the event reported.[2] Very little documentary or archeological evidence or non-Islamic historical writing exist to corroborate the image given in these works. Even the tradi-

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[1] A large amount of literature is already written on this topic. A very good introduction to the subject is Humphreys, *Islamic History*. Another comprehensive overview is Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*. Some other books that discuss the matter from various angles are Donner, *Narratives*; Noth and Conrad, *Early Arabic Historical Tradition*; Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*; Waldman, *Toward a Theory*, all of which contain many further references.

[2] For an example of this process, see my discussion about Ṭabarī's sources to the Karbalā' Drama, below on pp. 111–116.

tional Muslim dating of the Qur'ān has been seriously questioned by Western academic scholarship during the last decades (although no consensus as to an alternative dating has been reached), and it is uncertain whether it can be used as a source to the message of Muḥammad or the belief of his contemporaries.[3] This fact naturally leaves us with a lot of questions regarding the value of Arabic historiography as sources to the history of early Islam. Western scholarship has taken different stands in this matter from a high regard of the texts as sources, to utter skepticism and pessimism as to whether anything can be reconstructed at all of the early history of Islam.[4] This is not the place for a thorough discussion of the status of the sources to Islamic historiography, but these remarks on the sources should caution the reader that the following historiographical outline of the development of Islam in the first centuries, like every such reconstruction, is hypothetical.[5]

The image of the Madīnan state, where the divinely guided Prophet had the sole authority, is found in Islamic historical sources from an early date.[6] From these sources we learn that, when Muḥammad's career took its beginning, there was no state in the central Arabian Peninsula. What ex-

[3] The now classical work on this subject is Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, but cf. Donner, *Narratives*, 35–63.

[4] See Donner, *Narratives*, 5–31 for a typology of approaches, including a critique of the most skeptical position.

[5] It is impossible here to mention all that is written on the early development of Islamic political and theological thinking, and I will only bring up a few works that have been of direct importance to me when writing this chapter (for full references, see the bibliography). One of the most recent comprehensive monographs on the development of political thinking in early Islam is Patricia Crone's *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*. Very important is also Josef van Ess' *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra* (abbreviated *TG*). Volume 4 of this monumental work has a thematic overview of the development of theology and political theory. van Ess has made an English summary of the part on politics in the article "Political Ideas in Early Islamic Religious Thought." I have also made extensive use of Ella Landau-Tasseron's "From Tribal Society to Centralized Polity: An Interpretation of Events and Anecdotes in the Formative Period of Islam." The works mentioned here contain many further references.

[6] For the concept of "state" in this context, see Crone, *Political Thought*, 3–4.

isted was a system of blood-kinship groups (families, clans, tribes) where the group guaranteed the welfare of the individual. Contemporary scholars have interpreted the creation of an Islamic community in Madīna as an attempt to break up the tribal structure and substitute for it a "super-tribe of believers . . . ."[7] Tribal rules and customs were to a great extent replaced by divine commandments that the Prophet received from God and conveyed to the Muslims. To be a believer usually meant to acknowledge the leadership of Muḥammad.[8]

Not all members of the community had the same idea of how it should be run, however. As the number of Muslims grew larger, the need for enforcing the divine commandments on disobedient believers, and the means to do so, increased. According to the later sources, God's will was manifested through the life and success of the Muslim community, and Muḥammad, as the mediator between God and humanity, was political leader and religious guide in one and the same person. In the Qur'ān, he is described as the beautiful example (*uswa ḥasana*) to be followed in all spheres of life, as he is guided by God.[9] In many places in the Qur'ān, the people are admonished to "obey God and the Messenger."[10] From a Qur'ānic point of view, people are divided into three categories: Those who follow the Prophet faithfully are promised eternal life in the hereafter. Those who overtly reject him, on the other hand, are condemned to the Fire. The third category, consisting of those who verbally acknowledge their loyalty to him but do not act accordingly, are termed hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*) in the Qur'ān. They are usually considered as believers, but

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[7] Crone, *Political Thought*, 13. See also e.g. Landau-Tasseron, "From Tribal Society," 182.

[8] Landau-Tasseron, "From Tribal Society," 185–187.

[9] See Qur'ān 33:21.

[10] So Qur'ān 3:32, 132; 4:59 *et passim*. For an authoritative interpretation of the political role of Muḥammad according to the sources, see Kister, "Concepts of Authority," 84–88.

on the verge of backsliding.[11] Thus, the Muslim community under the leadership of Muḥammad was not merely a political unit, according to the classical sources. It was a means of salvation, and the hereafter (*al-ākhira*) was the real focus for its members.

Those who had lived together with the Prophet during his life were later termed his "companions" (*ṣaḥāba*), and since they had shared his life and followed him, they were regarded with great awe after his death and second only to the Prophet as models for imitation.[12] During his lifetime, they had been united under him in faith and had struggled together against attacks on the early Muslim community.

After the death of Muḥammad, however, the Muslims never reached the unity of the idealized image of the Madīnan state under the Prophet. The sources relate how, within a couple of decades, different groups, each carrying their own conviction about how Islam should be lived, vied with one another for political power in order to make their specific form of religion and polity the norm. Belonging to the right group, the true believers, was crucial in order to be able do God's will, since, it was believed, divine guidance was found within that group. The concept of the leader of the community, the *imām*, was fundamental. Patricia Crone has suggested that the role of the *imām* was like that of the leader of a caravan in the desert. He had two fundamental tasks: he gave the community existence—without the leader, no caravan, only scattered travelers in the desert; and he guided it to its destination, because a true *imām* was, himself, guided by God:

> He knew better than anyone else because he was the best person of his time: it was his superior merit that made people follow him. His guidance was seen as primarily legal, or in other words he declared what was right and wrong, for it

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[11] So for example in Qurʾān 3:166–167. For an excellent discussion of the concept of hypocrisy in the Qurʾān, see Izutsu, *Concepts*, 178–183. See also van Ess, *TG*, vol. 4, 679–680.

[12] van Ess, *TG*, vol. 4, 696–700.

was by living in accordance with God's law that people travelled to salvation. The coercion he might use to prevent people from straying from his caravan, or sowing dissension in it, was part of his guidance too, for anyone who strayed from the right path was lost and everyone would perish if the caravan broke up. . . . Everyone who travelled with him would be saved, everyone else was lost.[13]

Muhammad himself was, of course, regarded as the first and foremost of all *imāms*, and the community he created in Madīna followed him on the straight path to salvation. For this reason, the conflicts about leadership that emerged between his companions soon after his death were traumatic; if the companions of the Prophet had not been able to get along with each other, then who could? Much of the discussions in the later sources center on the third and the fourth caliphs: ʿUthmān from the clan of the Umayyads, and ʿAlī who was a member of the Hashimite family and the cousin and son in law of the Prophet. They belonged to the category of companions of the Prophet, and yet it was with them that the division became really acute. So, we are told that, when ʿUthmān had been charged with bad governance and murdered in 36/656, ʿAlī was accused for having his hand in the murder, or at least for not doing his utmost to catch and punish the murderers. Eventually, a battle ensued at Ṣiffīn, between Muʿāwiya, the head of the Umayyads, and his supporters on the one hand, and ʿAlī and those loyal to him on the other. Further splits occurred, so that when ʿAli was murdered in a mosque in Kūfa in 40/661, there had been a number of battles and skirmishes between at least four different groups that all claimed to have the right to rule the Muslims. This period of unrest was termed the First *Fitna*, the term *fitna* meaning "trial", "test" or "temptation". The idea was that, through this split God tested the Muslims to distinguish true believers from hypocrites or unbelievers.[14] The

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[13] Crone, *Political Thought*, 22.

[14] For a discussion of the concept of *fitna*, see Chapter 5.

Second *Fitna* started in 61/680 with the battle of Karbalāʾ, and went on in a series of more or less related conflicts, until 74/692. This was followed by a time of relative peace, until the Third *Fitna* which went on roughly between 127/744 and 135/752, and resulted in the overthrow of the Umayyad dynasty and the rise to power of the ʿAbbāsids. Ella Landau-Tasseron aptly summarizes the complex interplay of factors that contributed to the divisions in the early Islamic society:

> The pre-Islamic tribal society was rather homogenous and centrifugal. It was divided into parallel groups along genealogical lines. Islam generated far-reaching developments in all aspects of life: spiritual, political, social and material. These resulted, among other things, in the growing complexity of the dividing lines that now separated not only tribal groups but also factions (such as Qays and Yaman), religio-political groups (such as Shīʿis, Khārijīs, Qadarites and Murjiʾites), provinces (such as Syrians against Iraqis and Ḥijāzis), social classes (military, civilian) and ethnic groups (Arabs and *mawālī*). All these lines cut across one another; groups contested one another and the caliph could not, or would not, detach themselves from these contests.[15]

However, the idea of being a community elected and guided by God was very important and served as a way for delimiting and distancing oneself from the older traditions, Judaism and, above all, Christianity. This consciousness of election presupposed the unity of the Muslims. In the Qurʾān, division of the community is characteristic of the old communities.[16] How could the community be the divinely chosen people if it was as fragmented as the Christians? So the split of the Muslims that was manifest in the murders of the third and fourth caliphs and in the civil wars was a great trauma that later historians and theologians had to reflect upon. In fact, Josef van Ess suggests, these critical events gave the impetus

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[15] Landau-Tasseron, "From Tribal Society," 213.

[16] van Ess, *TG*, vol. 1, 7–16; vol. 4, 696; van Ess, "Political Ideas," 154.

for a number of important intellectual processes, the traces of which are preserved in the historiographical texts.

> Somebody had to be responsible for [the schism]. So people started justifying themselves; this is how historiography emerged, in those numerous treatises about the Battle of the Camel, about Ṣiffīn, about the *yawm al-saqīfa*. And so they pondered over the question of how, as true Muslims, they should have proceeded instead; this is how political theory originated. But looking out for the culprit in this context was a religious problem; this is how theology got involved. What is most remarkable in this process is the fact that these three elements, historiography, theology and political thought, appeared at the same time and so early that they became incorporated into the search for identity which preoccupied the early community and continues up to our day. The crux in explaining the events was that those who had killed each other during the first Fitna gradually became, as *ṣaḥāba*, the model for future generations. They had sinned. How should one put up with this fact?[17]

As I have shown above, R. Stephen Humphreys, Claude Gilliot and other contemporary scholars have also suggested that the split in the Muslim community gave rise to the idea of a break against God's covenant on the part of the Muslim community, a subject that is very important in the early Islamic historiography. Like van Ess, they suggest that one of the goals of the writing of history was to investigate how and why this betrayal had happened, and how, if possible, redemption could be brought about.[18]

Thus, the sources indicate that many Muslims in the first centuries were seriously worried about the schisms among the believers and tried to find ways to reconciliation. So, for example, the group called the *murjīʾa* argued that, since we do not know enough about ʿUthmān and ʿAlī we should

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[17] van Ess, "Political Ideas," 154. The *yawm al-saqīfa* refers to the event when Abū Bakr was elected caliph after the death of Muḥammad in the portico (*saqīfa*) of one of the clans of Madīna.

For similar views on the origin of Islamic historiography, see e.g. Donner, *Narratives*, 112–122, 276–280; Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*, 14.

[18] See above, pp. 35–37.

suspend (*raja'a*) the verdict to God and the Last Judgment, on who was right or wrong. Later on this idea was broadened to the idea that one should abstain from accusing *anyone* of unbelief who professed to be a Muslim. Other reconciliatory ideas were put forward and developed in other circles. At the same time the idea grew, and eventually prevailed, that the first four caliphs, who had been companions of the Prophet, were all on the same level, and were to be regarded as rightly guided (*rāshidūn*). This implied that the rulers after the four Rightly Guided Caliphs were not necessarily pious and good Muslims; in fact, the sources admit, most were not.[19]

The thought of a caliph that was not necessarily the best of believers brought to the surface the question of how to live under the rule of a sinner. The idea that it was the duty of any Muslim to correct a sinner is Qur'ānic, and many considered it a duty to do so even to the caliph. The injunction to command right and forbid wrong (*al-amr bi-'l ma'rūf wa 'l-nahy 'an al-munkar*) must be valid in all cases.[20] According to a *ḥadīth*, this could be done either through the hand (i.e. using violence) or through the tongue (i.e. through verbal reproach) or in one's heart (i.e. through quiet inner protest).[21] The early groups took different positions on this question, some advocating militancy against the sinful ruler, others verbal rebuke or quiet disapproval. In the early history of Islam, there are many examples of the former, whereas, as time passed, the latter two opinions gained strength and eventually prevailed in law and political thought.[22]

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[19] van Ess, *TG*, vol. 4, 696–700; van Ess, "Political Ideas," 154–155.

[20] This command is found several times in the Qur'ān, so e.g. in 3:104, 9:71 and 31:17. For more references, see Cook, *Commanding Right*, 13. Cook's monograph is a comprehensive study of the concept under discussion.

[21] Cook, *Commanding Right*, 32–35.

[22] Cook, *Commanding Right*, 477–479. For an inclusive discussion about the juridical aspects of rebellion and its suppression, see Abou El Fadl, "Ahkam al-Bughat."

As Muslim society grew more complex, it seemed impossible to find the two functions of divine guidance and political authority combined in one and the same person. The last serious attempt from the caliphal power to keep the function of religious guidance under its aegis was the *miḥna* ("inquisition") instigated by the caliph Ma'mūn in 214/829. In doing this, the caliph took a highly controversial theological question—whether the Qur'ān was created or not—and demanded that anyone who held a juridical or theological office had to conform to the belief that it was created. The *miḥna* can be interpreted as a move against the party of the religious and juridical scholars, the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*, who in practice had come to act as guides for the people in juridical and theological questions. The *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* generally adhered to the doctrine that the Qur'ān was uncreated. The importance of this action, then, lay not so much in the doctrine itself as in the attempt to impose it, and thereby to strengthen the religious authority of the caliph. The *miḥna* was a failure, though, and some 20 years later it was abolished. The position of the scholarly class as religious authority was secured, and as the caliphate as institution grew weaker in the decades to follow, the *'ulamā'* as a class became more significant.[23]

The division of political and religious authority must not be misunderstood, however. For one thing, there was never a clear line of demarcation drawn between the two domains, for another, both of them continued to belong to God.

> As far as medieval Islam is concerned, [this separation] stands for a change in the manner in which God's government was executed on earth, not for a process whereby government was emptied of religious significance. It means that there ceased to be a single person endowed with the fullness of God's delegated power: scholars took over the task of guiding people; the deputy of God was left with the coercive role, which eventually passed to kings. This was a separation of power and religion comparable to that which obtained in medieval Europe, in which God kept His sword in one institution and His book

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[23] Crone, *Political Thought*, 131–132.

in another. But in both cases the sword and the book alike continued to be God's. He just did not assign both to the same keeper any more.[24]

Crone illustrates the process of differentiation of the realms of the Muslim community with the image of three circles, representing state, society and religion. Initially the circles are united into one, representing the situation of the Prophet's Madīna, where the three domains are perfectly identical. Gradually they separate, so that the circles representing state and religion (which are my main concern here) are virtually apart, as was the case at the end of Islam's classical period.[25] By the time of Ṭabarī (late 3rd/9th and early 4th/10th centuries) there was still a considerable overlap, however. See Figure 2.1.
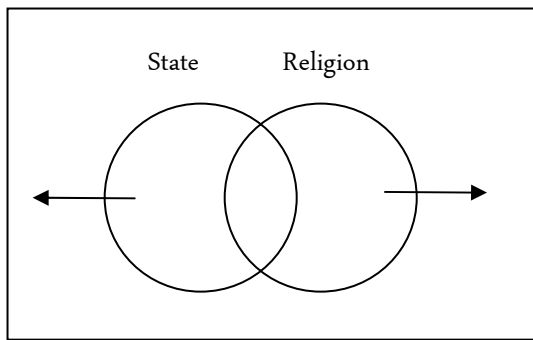
Figure 2.1. The gradual separation of religion and state.

In the preceding paragraphs I have sketched the development among the majority group that came to be called the Sunnīs (a shorthand designa-

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[24] Crone, *Political Thought*, 394–395, see also 132–133. Crones view of this process is more developed in Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, esp. chapters 4 and 5. Crone's and Hinds' description of this process has been criticized for not taking into account that the tension between the religious scholars and the political authorities in this part of the world is ancient, and for favoring "the 'royal' side of the royal:scholarly tension" (Calder, "Review of *God's Caliph*"). See also Mårtensson, "Discourse," 302 with further references. My point here, however, is merely that the political and religious forms of authority which are united in the earliest forms of Islam, later on gradually separate. This idea, as far as I have understood it, is not contested.

[25] Crone, *Political Thought*, 396. Civil society, on the other hand, remained largely united with religion (ibid.), but that sphere is not included in the concerns of the present study.

tion for *ahl al-sunna wa 'l-jamā'a*, i.e. "the people of tradition and unity"). The other group that came to subsist was the Shī'ites. They cared nothing for the theory of four Rightly Guided Caliphs. To them the leadership of the Muslims was a prerogative of the Prophet's family, in a narrower or a wider sense. Thus only 'Alī of the four first caliphs was legitimate, as he was the cousin and the son in law of Muḥammad. The other three were usurpers. The Shī'ites stuck to the idea that political and religious leadership could not be separated, but were united in one and the same person, the *Imām*, elected and guided by God.[26] The Shī'ites, however, never acquired real political power in the time and the region dealt with in this study, so their theories on this matter never had to stand the test of material politics.

In summary, the process described in the previous paragraphs was very complex, and only the barest outlines of how it may have developed have been sketched here. For analytical purposes, two closely interlaced components can be distinguished in the development of political/religious thought in the first three centuries, each one manifested by a centrifugal and a centripetal movement. One is the division of the Muslim community into groups, each one maintaining that their interpretation of Islam was the correct one, and the counter-movement of many theologians and of the central government that wanted to uphold political and religious unity; the other is the gradual separation of the initial unity of power into a political and a religious area of authority, and the opposite movement, represented mainly by the caliphal power, to keep them together. Yet, the image of the total unity of the Muslim community and its religious and political institutions has ever since the leadership of Muḥammad at Madīna served as inspiration for Muslim political thinking, and did so no less in the time of Ṭabarī and his sources.

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[26] I write *Imām* with a capital "I" when referring to the Shī'ite concept of the divinely guided leader, but *imām* with lowercase "i" when referring to leaders in general.

Ṭabarī and His *Ta'rīkh*

Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Yazīd al-Ṭabarī received his last name (his *nisba*, an adjective usually denoting descent or origin) from the province of Ṭabaristān on the southern coast of the Caspian Sea, where his family had their land, and where he was born in 224 or 225/839.[27] As a child he was a very precocious student (we are told that he knew the Qur'ān by heart at seven and acted as prayer leader at eight), and at the age of twelve he was sent from his home town Āmul to the north Iranian city al-Rayy (near present-day Teheran) to pursue his studies. Five years later he went to Baghdad in his search for knowledge. During the following 15 years, Ṭabarī studied in Baghdad and made at least two longer educational journeys, one to the south of Iraq and another to Syria, Palestine and Egypt. He met and studied under a number of prominent scholars of different fields. Like other students he took notes from the lectures of his teachers, and in his own writings he refers to many of them.[28] While in Baghdad he also acted as tutor to the son of the caliph Mutawakkil's vizier 'Ubaydallāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khaqān. When he returned to Baghdad from Egypt (probably around 256/870), he apparently considered his formal education to be over, and he spent the rest of his life teaching and writing (although he never stopped searching for knowledge). He probably never married, and had no children.[29] Ṭabarī died in 310/923 in his home in Baghdad.

Every scholar of his age had to have a good knowledge of the fields of *hadīth*, legal theory, Qur'ānic studies, and history in the sense of biographical data of a number of individuals. While his main interest was

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[27] In writing this short biography of Ṭabarī, I have mainly used Rosenthal, "General Introduction," with details supplied from other works cited.

[28] See e.g. Rosenthal, "General Introduction," 52–53.

[29] See, however, Rosenthal, "General Introduction," 34–36, for an anecdote which might be interpreted as if he had a son.

jurisprudence, Ṭabarī made major contributions in all these fields. He also had a keen interest in Arabic philology and had some knowledge in other languages (besides Persian, which he must have known well, considering his place of birth). Another interest of his was medicine. Although he never practiced it professionally (he gave medical advice to friends and students at times) he studied it, and we are told that a recently composed medical compendium, the *Firdaws al-ḥikma* by ʿAlī b. Rabban, was one of his favorite books.

Like any scholar of integrity and stature, Ṭabarī came into conflict with other intellectuals. The clash with the Ḥanbalites—followers of the eminent scholar Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855)—is well known. The roots and the course of this conflict are not identified, but at times the Ḥanbalis may have taken to violence to intimidate Ṭabarī. Whatever the cause of the conflict, it is important to notice that Ṭabarī always had a great esteem for Ibn Ḥanbal. The reason he went to Baghdad as a young student, is said to have been that he wanted to study for the great master. Ibn Ḥanbal, however, died shortly before Ṭabarī's arrival to the city. Furthermore, Ṭabarī often cited traditions collected by Ibn Ḥanbal and held the latter as a great authority in *hadīth* science. The conflict, then, was not with Ibn Ḥanbal himself, but with some of the later Ḥanbalīs. The conflict may have regarded questions of law and administration, and the fact that the Ḥanbalīs tried to establish a school of law.[30] Although Ṭabarī admired Ibn Ḥanbal as a scholar of traditions, he did not esteem the latter's knowledge in jurisprudence as highly, an opinion that would have caused great resentment among the Ḥanbalīs.[31] In the heat of the conflict, the rumor seems to have been spread that Ṭabarī was a Shīʿite. This was a common means of discrediting an opponent at the time, but there is nothing in his works that would point in this direction. On the contrary, he defended the equal posi-

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[30] Mårtensson, "True New Testament," 64.

[31] Rosenthal, "General Introduction," 70.

tion of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs—Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmān and ʿAlī—and it is clear that he generally upheld a Sunnī position in theology and law.[32] Regarding more immediate political matters, the American historian Marshall Hodgson argued that Ṭabarī's main aim was to transform the Islamic society through legal reform, rather than armed revolution. He wrote:

> Tabari represented a group of Muslims[33] who believed that the answer [to the question of how to realize the ideals of Islam] did not lie in military revolt in the vain hope of raising to power an ideal ruler . . . ; rather, the community should be held together even if this required acceptance of the current rulers; but then the moral inadequacy of those rulers must be recognized and counteracted. The answer lay in developing among the body of the Muslims themselves the kind of clarity and unity on legal standards of the good life that no ruling dynasty could ignore; if the concerned Muslims could establish a law that all would acknowledge, it would become less important who was ruler . . . .[34]

Considering this, the attempt at revolt instigated by Ḥusayn—the grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad and, as such, the guarantor for true Islam—must have been a very difficult event for Ṭabarī to handle. It is the purpose of the present study to analyze how he did this.

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[32] Sourdel, "Proffesion de foi," 181, 190. See also Gilliot, *Exégèse*, Chapter VIII.

[33] I.e. the the "*sharīʿa*-minded" *ʿulamāʾ*; see above p. 51. For a fuller discussion of the political views of the "*sharīʿa*-minded," see Hodgson, *Venture*, vol. 1, 348–350.

[34] Hodgson, "Two Pre-Modern Muslim Historians," 55. Hodgson illustrates his view by studying the affair of the murder of the third caliph ʿUthmān. For similar conclusions from the study of the Battle of the Camel, see Roberts, "Early Islamic Historiography," 279–281.

Ṭabarī was a very productive author; Gilliot lists 27 works by him.[35] Most of them are lost to us, and some are preserved in part or only in fragmentary form. Of his major works, only his voluminous commentary on the Qurʾān, (*Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, "The complete clarification of the interpretation of the verses of the Qurʾān"[36] henceforth abbreviated as *Tafsīr*, "Commentary") and his equally huge world history *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa ʾl-mulūk* ("History of the messengers and the kings" henceforth *Taʾrīkh*) are left to us in their entirety.[37] One of his major works on law (*Ikhtilāf ʿulamāʾ al-amṣār fī aḥkām sharāʾiʿ al-Islām*, "The disagreements of the scholars in the major centers with respect to the laws of the Muslim religion"[38]) is only partially preserved. Of the rest of his legal writings very little is left. To his contemporaries, however, Ṭabarī's fame rested mainly on his expertise in juridical and theological matters, and although his *Taʾrīkh* was highly acclaimed while he lived, it was only in the centuries after his death that it gradually received the immense importance it has come to have.[39]

General Aspects of Early Islamic Historiography

The *Taʾrīkh* of Ṭabarī shares a number of characteristics with other Islamic historiographical works of his time. I will briefly discuss two of these be-

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[35] As Both Gilliot and Rosenthal points out, there is great confusion about the works of Ṭabarī. He worked on his major pieces for many years, and often parts of a work were circulated before it was completed. Moreover, many of his books are known under different titles. For discussions of this problem and for lists of the works of Ṭabarī, see Gilliot, *Exégèse*, 39–68; Rosenthal, "General Introduction," 80–134.

[36] Rosenthal, "General Introduction," 105.

[37] A number of titles are given of this work, but all those that Ṭabarī himself used seem to refer to the two classes of divine messengers and rulers. For an interpretation of the implications of this fact, see below, p. 63.

[38] Rosenthal, "General Introduction," 101.

[39] Rosenthal, "General Introduction," 135–140.

fore returning to Ṭabarī.[40] The first aspect of the general Arabic historiography from this age is the use of the *khabar* (pl. *akhbār*), independent reports varying in length from one line to several pages, often introduced by an *isnād*, a chain of transmitters going back to an eye-witness contemporary with the event. Very often these *akhbār* are lined up to drive the narrative forward, but sometimes (and especially in Ṭabarī's work) a number of slightly different traditions on the same event are put together so as to give a complementary view, and at times traditions with completely opposite opinions of what happened are put together.[41] Due to the constant use of the *isnād*, the *khabar*-form has often induced scholars from the Western academic tradition to accuse Islamic historiography for being traditionalistic and conservative, playing down the individual author.[42] Ulrika Mårtensson brilliantly argues that the *isnād* in a historiographical work as that of Ṭabarī has a role similar to that of footnotes in present-day academic tradition. When Ṭabarī gives differing reports on the same event, he merely wants to show that various eye-witnesses perceived the same event differently and to expose the contribution of individual transmitters.[43] Moreover, she writes,

> [t]he *khabar*-form . . . also conveys the personal opinions of the historian who is writing. Studies of Ṭabarī's sections on specific historical events, e.g. the second *fitna*, the murder of ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān, and the Battle of the Camel, show that his views come through in his arrangement and evaluation of reports, and his interspersed comments.[44]

I will return to the question of Ṭabarī's redactional work shortly.

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[40] For general references to this subject see footnote 1 in this chapter.

[41] For examples of *akhbār*, see the Text of Reference in Appendix II.

[42] Mårtensson, "Discourse," 292–293.

[43] Mårtensson, "Discourse," 296–297.

[44] Mårtensson, "Discourse," 297.

Another general feature of early Arabic historiography is its religious character. That early Islamic historiography is basically religiously founded—in that it views the world as the arena for God's work, and the development of history as an expression of the relationship between God and humankind—is a notion virtually unanimously agreed upon by modern scholars.[45] There are different opinions on the impact of this feature for the Islamic writing of history, however. R.S. Humphreys have pointed out that some scholars, such as Franz Rosenthal and John Wansbrough, regard Islamic historiography as essentially static, unproductive and veered towards a nostalgic outlook on history in that the historians looked back to the early decades of Islam as the golden age, and viewed their own era as one of decline.[46] On the other hand, Humphreys himself, along with other scholars such as Hodgson and Gilliot, regard the religious paradigm as very productive and expressive of "an activist agenda" which aimed at restoring a primeval moral order.[47]

Some Contemporary Studies on Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh*

Although a number of studies of early Islamic historiography in general have been published in the last decades not many works specifically on Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh* have emerged. The most important event in the study of the *Ta'rīkh* recently has been the translation of the complete work into English between 1985 and 1999 in 38 volumes consisting of roughly 200 pages each, made by a number of leading scholars in Arabic and the history of Islam.[48] Each volume contains an introduction by the translator as well as footnotes along the text. The whole work is introduced by a "Gen-

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[45] This matter has also been discussed by Mårtensson (see Mårtensson, "Discourse," 297–300).

[46] Humphreys, "Qur'ānic Myth," 281. Humreys refers to Rosenthal, "Influence," 39–40 and Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, x (see also 130–132).

[47] The expression is Mårtensson's (Mårtensson, "Discourse," 298). See also Gilliot, "Mythe," 244–245; Humphreys, "Qur'ānic Myth," 281.

[48] Ṭabarī, *History*.

eral introduction" by Franz Rosenthal, already referred to above.[49] Many of these introductions give valuable insights to the work of Ṭabarī, but are of course not systematic studies of the work as a whole (Rosenthal's "General Introduction," for example, is mainly a biography of Ṭabarī followed by a list of his works.)

There are, however, three recent studies of Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh* that I want to discuss here. The first is the very interesting study of the historiography about the 'Abbāsids made by Tayeb el-Hibri, American professor of Arabic and Near Eastern Studies.[50] In spite of the fact that El-Hibri nowhere explicitly says that he will base his study on Ṭabarī' chronicle it is the portions of the *Ta'rīkh* that deals with the famous caliphs Hārūn al-Rashīd and his two sons al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn, as well as his grandson al-Mutawakkil, that are analyzed. What is most interesting with regard to the present study is the method employed by El-Hibri. He argues that Ṭabarī's and other historians' purpose in writing about the 'Abbāsids was not "originally to tell facts, but rather to provide commentary on a certain political, religious, social, or cultural issue that may have derived from a real and controversial historical episode."[51] In doing this, the historians made use of a number of "complex stylistic forms to express their views,"[52] such as figurative language, allusions, puns, metaphors, irony, etc. Since the texts often allude to, or employ models found in myths and stories from earlier times (for example in stories from early Islam, in the Qur'ān, or in the Bible) decoding of the texts "involves the dual task of tracing the line of meaning and establishing linkages across eras, regions, and systems of thought."[53] Although concepts from Lévi-Straussian structuralism are never mentioned in the book, nor, I would guess, intended by the author,

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[49] Rosenthal, "General Introduction."

[50] El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting*.

[51] El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting*, 13.

[52] El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting*, 14.

[53] El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting*, 15. See also El-Hibri, "Unity"

it is tempting to apply some of them to the method described below. So, I would interpret the "dual task" mentioned in the quotation above, as the application of the structuralist concepts of syntagm ("tracing the line of meaning" in the quotation) and paradigm ("establishing linkages across eras . . . .").[54] "Inversion" and "weakening of oppositions"[55] as well as "redundancy"[56] are some of the other structuralist concepts that are relevant to describe the narrative process in Ṭabarī, according to El-Hibri. Although extremely suggestive, a problem with El-Hibri's work is the lack of a more systematic and detailed methodology than the scattered statements found here and there in the text. These are at times of a very general nature and difficult to support without further studies; at other times a statement pertains to the specific pericope studied, in which case it is hard to grasp the general applicability of the statement for the study of Ṭabarī. Regrettably, this opens up for misinterpretations and misunderstandings of El-Hibris fascinating study; all the more so since a structuralist approach to Arabic historiography is still very unusual and the outlook and basic theoretical apparatus of structuralism is probably unknown to most historians of Islam.

Another problematic issue with El-Hibri's book that several reviewers have touched upon is his point of departure: that the Islamic historians of this age (including Ṭabarī) did not intend to convey historical facts but to comment on issues of the day. It has been shown that El-Hibri is not consistent on this point but now and then reverts to reconstructing history from the texts he studies.[57] Moreover, this opinion has been severely criticized. Kate Lang writes (in an otherwise very benevolent review) that El-

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[54] See also El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting*, 166–167.

[55] El-Hibri uses the talks about "a process of confirmation, reversal and transposition of imagery . . . ." and gives an interesting example of this. (El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting*, 90).

[56] "The key message is not communicated once, but repeatedly, and in various ways . . . ." (El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting*, 56; see also 90).

[57] See e.g. Lang, "Review of El-Hibri"; Shoshan, *Poetics*, 3–6.

Hibri has "set up an utterly unnecessary dichotomy and embarked upon the impossible task of separating fact from fiction . . . ."[58] The fact that the historians used an event to convey a moral message does not prove that this event is not historical.

Boaz Shoshan, who has written the second study of Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh* that I want to bring up here, argues that Ṭabarī's intention is indeed to convey historical fact and that he often explicitly and implicitly claims to produce the truth about a historical event.[59] Shoshan devotes a whole chapter to the different devices that Ṭabarī and his sources use to give the impression that a certain account is true.[60] This in no way precludes that Ṭabarī's own "voice and hand" are involved, and that he conveys a moral message in his choice of material and its arrangement.[61] I fully agree with Shoshan in his view on Ṭabarī's intention to convey *mimesis*, or the reproduction of historical fact, as well as ideology. But I am also convinced that in Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh*, as in much historical and religious narrative, there is a deeper structure that has to be analyzed with methods similar to those used by El-Hibri, although in a more systematic and theoretically grounded manner. By not regarding the deeper structures of the Karbalā' Drama, Shoshan in his study of the text misses out essential points of the story, as will be argued below.[62] Thus, both El-Hibri and Shoshan approach Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh* as text rather than as a record of historical events, but they do so in totally different manners which, in my view, complement rather than exclude each other, in spite of the arguments to the contrary from the two scholars.

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[58] Lang, "Review of El-Hibri." See also Cobb, "Review of El-Hibri."

[59] Shoshan, *Poetics*, 6–7.

[60] Shoshan, *Poetics*, Chapter 1.

[61] Shoshan, *Poetics*, Chapters 3 and 4.

[62] See below pp. 185–192.

Shoshan moreover argues that Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh* expresses not only *one* theological or political paradigm, but many.[63] However, in the third study of Ṭabarī that I will mention here, Ulrika Mårtensson, Swedish Historian of Religions, maintains that Ṭabarī wrote his *Ta'rīkh* in order to plead for a specific religio-political order: a centralized caliphal government which follows the standards of the divine law in its relations with its subjects, as distinct from a decentralized power where arbitrariness of government and administration could easily gain the upper hand.[64] In this, Ṭabarī distinguished between religion (*dīn*) and state (*dawla*) and held that the function of the former would be to provide moral guidance for the latter. The concept of covenant, Mårtensson argues, is central to Ṭabarī, in that it expresses the correct relationship between the religious sphere and that of the state. The covenant is a contract between God and mankind, and the prophets, from Adam to Muḥammad are mediators of its precepts. Mårtensson furthermore shows that Ṭabarī holds a few persons in the past to be exceptional in that they combined prophethood and kingship: David, Solomon, the Prophet Muḥammad, and the four rightly guided caliphs.[65] At other times, notably in Ṭabarī's own age, "authority was divided between the two institutions of *dīn* and *dawla*, with prophetic guidance mediated through the *'ulamā* in the institution of *dīn*."[66] Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh*, then, in Mårtensson's reading, is a history of the two institutions of religion and state, represented by messengers and kings respectively, and this is exactly what the title of the work, *History of the messengers and the kings*, alludes to. This understanding of Ṭabarī's historiography, then, supports

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[63] E.g. Shoshan, *Poetics*, 107.

[64] Mårtensson, "Discourse," 306, 331. She thus follows the interpretations forwarded by Hodgson and Humphreys, among others, but develops them considerably. For Hodgson's view, se above p. 56; for Humphreys' see above pp. 35–37.

[65] Mårtensson, "Discourse," 308–309.

[66] Mårtensson, "Discourse," 309.

the division of the "codes" of religion and authority argued in the follow-
ing chapter.[67]

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[67] See below, pp. 106–110.

3. Structure and Structural Analysis

What is structuralism?

The way in which the word structure is used among structuralists is quite uniform. It usually denotes *relations* between elements in a phenomenon in nature or culture.[1] The focus of structural analysis is thus on relations between elements rather than on the elements in themselves. Each element by itself is more or less meaningless unless it is related to other elements (as, for example letters in an alphabet that are not joined in words or single words that are not put together in sentences). The elements get their meaning from being related to other elements within the same system. Structures are found everywhere around us, in the physical world (in anything from molecules to galaxies), as well as in "[t]he metaphysical world of thought and language . . . as for instance: grammar, syntax, melody, rhythm, behavior, rituals, systems of symbolic classification and religious cosmologies."[2] But, as the American structuralist philosopher Peter Caws remarks, in the kind of structures that are studied in the social sciences and the humanities "the causal determinants . . . always include human intentions", in distinction from those found in nature.[3] For this reason, he argues, structures created by humans share two qualities: firstly, they are *signiferous*, or "meaning-bearing" and thus in themselves intelligible as well as making the world in which we live intelligible; secondly, structures

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[1] See for example Caws, *Structuralism*, 1; Jensen, "Structure," 314–316; Kunin, *Logic of Incest*, 20.

[2] Jensen, "Structure," 315.

[3] Caws, *Structuralism*, 1. For a similar distinction, see also Petitot, *Morphogenesis*, 20–21.

created by humans are *mattering*, i.e. "necessary or desirable" to those who have created them and deal with them. "The roots of mattering lie in the structure of biological needs, and it is in the intelligent satisfaction of those needs that meaning first comes into play."[4] Thus structuralism within the social sciences and in the humanities often claims to study issues that belong to the deepest concerns of human existence.

To a great extent the way our minds structure the world is unconscious.[5] We are often not aware of how we relate experiences to each other, and when we express ourselves, whether in speech, in text, in music, in art or in the way we organize our society, these unconscious structures, in part at least, determine how this is done.

Structuralism as a movement is often said to have started with the publication of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916),[6] but its roots are earlier (Petitot, in fact, traces them back to Immanuel Kant (d. 1804), and Leach even further back, to Giambattista Vico (d. 1744))[7] and it has developed in so diverse directions that it is hardly meaningful to talk of one single structuralist movement. Perhaps Ernst Cassirer's characterization in 1945 of structuralism as "the expression of a general tendency of thought . . . ." still is more apt.[8] Thus, structuralism as a way of thinking is found in disciplines as diverse as biology, mathematics, psychology, linguistics, sociology, anthropology and literature.[9] In the

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[4] Caws, *Structuralism*, 184. See also 1, 145, and esp. 183–184.

[5] Kunin, *We Think What We Eat*, 7–14.

[6] Several English translations exist. I have used that of Roy Harris (see de Saussure, *Course*).

[7] Leach, "Structuralism," 55; Petitot, *Morphogenesis*, 28–29.

[8] Cassirer, "Structuralism in Modern Linguistics," 120, quoted in Caws, *Structuralism*, 11.

[9] Caws, *Structuralism*, 11–55; Petitot, *Morphogenesis*, 21–51.

present study, however, the anthropological strand of structuralism will be focused on, and more precisely that of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–).[10]

Born and raised in a French family of musicians and painters, Claude Lévi-Strauss studied law and philosophy at the Sorbonne.[11] A few years after graduating, he obtained a position at the University of São Paolo, Brazil. He had no training in anthropology or ethnography, but became interested and began to study the subject on his own. While in Brazil, he made a couple of field trips, only one of which resulted in publicized material. At his return to France, the Second World War had broken out. Paris was occupied, and with his Jewish background he had to escape to the USA. In New York, he started studying anthropology seriously, and also came to know one of the leading structuralist linguists, Roman Jakobson, who introduced him to structuralism and linguistics. When he returned to France after the war, he defended his thesis, *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté*, which was later on published as a book. This book was received with great enthusiasm, and structuralism became, much because of Lévi-Strauss, a fashionable trend of thought. After a number of publications, including *La Pensée sauvage* (1962) he began publishing the four volumes of the *Mythologiques* series (1964–1971), his *magnum opus*, where he analyzes several hundred myths from the Americas. In 1973 Claude Lévi-Strauss was elected into the French Academy.

The works of Lévi-Strauss are admittedly difficult to penetrate and understand. Besides, since the 1970s, structuralism has been out of fashion, and it is only slowly that his writings are reassessed and viewed with new interest. For that reason his ideas are not well known. Numerous introductions to the thinking of Lévi-Strauss miss out, not only the subtleties of his

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[10] For brief overviews of different variants of structuralism used in anthropology and the study of religion, including that of Lévi-Strauss, see e.g. Jensen, "Structure"; Leach, "Structuralism." In the following, when I refer to structuralism, that of Lévi-Stauss is meant, unless otherwise is stated.

[11] This paragraph is based mainly on the first chapter of Deliège, *Lévi-Strauss Today*.

theories, but have even misunderstood their basics.[12] Assuming that he is relatively unknown to most historians of Islam (and indeed to historians in general, at least outside the French-speaking world) this introduction to his thoughts and methods will be quite lengthy. Although much of Lévi-Strauss' earlier work is devoted to kinship structures and to totemism, it is his ideas on, and studies of myth that interest me in this work. So, in the rest of this chapter, I will discuss his ideas and how I apply them in my analysis of the Karbalā' Drama. In the following section, Lévi-Strauss' own thinking is in focus, although I will have to invoke other scholars' interpretations of him at times. Having dealt with the basic features, I will discuss a few other scholars' interpretations of important aspects of Lévi-Strauss' theories, notably the so called "canonic formula". This will lead me to the methodological issue of how to analyze the text under investigation in the present study in the last section of this chapter.

Basic notions in Lévi-Straussian structuralism

In order to deal with the world in which we live, all humans have a need to mentally organize it—i.e. to create meaning out of the incessant influx

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[12] A very good introduction to Lévi-Strauss' thinking in general and to his view on myth, is Sperber, *Le Structuralisme*. (Unfortunately I came to know about it too late to make use of it in this study.) A more comprehensive, but less original introduction is Hénaff, *Claude Lévi-Strauss* (Eng.). This book also includes a rather extensive bibliography of books and articles that Lévi-Strauss has written. The French original (Hénaff, *Claude Lévi-Strauss* (Fr.)) has the advantage of including summaries of all his important books and articles up to the date of the publication of Hénaff's book (1991). Deliège, *Lévi-Strauss Today* is also worth reading as a first introduction, although the author misses important points in Lévi-Strauss' thinking, and regards other aspects with less sympathy than I think is fair. To the introductions to Lévi-Strauss (although it is at times quite technical) must also be counted the first part of Scubla, *Lire Lévi-Strauss*, although it deals with his thinking from a specific angle: that of the "canonic formula" (see below). A good help for the study of Lévi-Strauss (although it is by no means enough in itself) is Maniglier, *Vocabulaire*.

of perceptions that invades our minds. Furthermore, it is important to most of us to view our world as a coherent whole. Details must be seen as belonging together in one way or another, or we will not be able to make sense of them. This is true of the peoples whose myths and behaviors we study, as much as of the scholar who tries to explain them. Lévi-Strauss says:

> [I]n the presence of a chaos of social practices or religious representations, will we continue to seek partial explanations, different for each case? Or will we try to discover an underlying order, a deep structure whose effect will permit us to account for this diversity and, in a word, to overcome its incoherence?[13]

Structuralists try to map how this mental organization takes place, or at least what it looks like in different cultures. Structuralism, thus, deals a lot with the ways in which we *classify* and *order* our world. As we have seen above, the need to classify is often considered to be basically a biological need. Although Lévi-Strauss at times touches upon the biological roots of structures, he seldom deliberates on the subject in a systematic manner.[14] To him, other levels of structure easier let themselves to be analyzed. Seth Kunin argues that Lévi-Strauss in fact works with structure on different levels, and that it is, for analytical reasons, convenient to use a model of four different levels: three levels of underlying structure (S_1–S_3), and one of the narrative level (N).[15] The deepest level, S_1, pertains to the biological structure of the brain, and is thus universal. It has often been held that structure at this level is binary in nature, but it is possible that it is more complex than that. Kunin uses the analogy of the hardware of a computer

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[13] Lévi-Strauss and Eribon, *Conversations*, 141.

[14] See e.g. Lévi-Strauss, *The Naked Man*, 684–693. At the end of this passage the author describes his previous discussion on the relationship between biology and structuralism as "free-ranging, intellectual musings, tinged with confusion and error . . . ."

[15] Kunin, *We Think What We Eat*, 7–14. See also Kunin, *Logic of Incest*, 12–13, although here the author only delves upon the three levels of underlying structure. He stresses, though that this distinction is analytical and that the levels of structure cannot in reality be discerned.

to describe this level of structure. The analysis of S_1 is usually not the main goal for structuralists. The second level, S_2, "is understood to be unconsciously shaped by a culture (loosely understood) or more likely a culture group, by which we mean a group of loosely related cultures rather than specific cultures."[16] S_1 and S_2 signify "the move from the biological potential for structure, to the cultural actualization of a specific structure/s."[17] It is highly abstract and devoid of specific content. Rather, it is on this level that the kind of categories are formed (for example whether they are binary or trinary), and the manner in which the categories relate to each other. To illustrate this, Kunin uses the analogy of the basic level of programming of a computer, such as machine language. The third level of structure, S_3, is culture and context specific, and less abstract. On this level elements of myth and ritual are organized in a meaningful way which is determined by S_2. It is on this level, Kunin argues, that the Lévi-Straussian "mythemes" and "ritemes", i.e. the smallest elements in the construction of myth and ritual, are found. The mythemes and ritemes have no significance of their own, but gain their meaning through their relation to other elements of the same kind. This level

> is analogous to the level in which specific data is inputted into the computer. This information will be utilized or categorized based on the abstract programming already inputted. As new information is added the programming will determine how it should be appropriately categorized.[18]

On the last level, the Narrative level, N, mythemes and ritemes are arranged into narratives (myths) or rituals. It is highly dependent on cultural and historical context, and the narratives and rituals change, transform, as the myth or ritual move in space and time. Unlike the underlying levels of structure, the narrative level is conscious. Kunin compares it with the out-

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[16] Kunin, *We Think What We Eat*, 11.

[17] Kunin, *We Think What We Eat*, 11.

[18] Kunin, *We Think What We Eat*, 8.

put on the computer screen, such as a game or a written document. Lévi-Strauss at times uses the terms "armature," "code," and "message."[19] In this work I interpret these terms as roughly corresponding to Kunin's levels S_2, S_3, and N.

One of the highly structured realms of humans (and therefore easily accessible for study), are their myths.[20] The main purpose of myths, Lévi-Strauss explains, is

> [t]o explain why things, which were different from the beginning, became what they are, and why they could not be otherwise. Because if things changed in one realm, the entire order of the world would be overturned due to the homology among all realms.[21]

So, myths help us structure and explain the world in which we live. But, as we all know, life does not easily allow itself to be structured, and there are always anomalies between classes and overlapping of categories. At times these irregularities create questions of deep existential or social nature in a society. Myths deal with the problems that these conflicts cause. They are there to resolve the contradictions between ideal and reality. The basic conflicts, however, are in reality insoluble since they are inherent in human existence and society, but the myths "shift" the problems to areas which are perceived as less dangerous.[22] So, in the myths, the main conflict is seen to be analogous to other oppositions which, "while never solving the primary contradiction, echo and perpetuate it on an ever smaller scale

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[19] Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 199. The notion of code is further discussed below.

[20] Other such "highly structured" areas are the kinship structures in many cultures, and, as Kunin argues, historiography (see above pp. 27–28).

[21] Lévi-Strauss and Eribon, *Conversations*, 140.

[22] This is one of the central ideas of Lévi-Strauss, expressed in many of his writings. See e.g. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 216, 229; Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 5 (quoting Durkheim, *Les Formes élémentaires*, 190); Lévi-Strauss, *The Naked Man*, 694–695; Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter*, 171.

. . . ."[23] Lévi-Strauss most lucidly expresses this idea in his conversations with the journalist Didier Eribon. In one passage the two men discuss Sigmund Freud's one-sided emphasis on sexuality, and Eribon comments the content of the myths that Lévi-Strauss has analyzed.

> D.E. However, in the myths you analyze, one is struck by the omnipresence of sexuality and the chain of violent acts accompanying it.
>
> C. L.-S. We notice it because this aspect has a large place in our own system of values and social life. Note however that a myth will never deal with a problem pertaining to sexuality in and of itself, isolated from all other issues. It will attempt to show that this problem is formally analogous to other problems that men raise concerning heavenly bodies, the alteration of day and night, the succession of the seasons, social organization, political relations among neighboring groups. . . . When faced with a particular problem, mythic thought sees it as parallel to others. It uses several codes at once.
>
> D.E. It's explanation by means of successive problems.
>
> C.L.-S. Without ever solving any of them. It is the similarity among all these problems that gives the impression that they can be solved, since one becomes aware that the difficulty perceived in one case isn't a difficulty at all in the others or not to the same extent. We reason a bit like that when, asked to give an explanation, we answer with "that's when . . ." or "it's like. . . ." It is laziness on our part, but mythic thought puts this procedure to such a supple and systematic use that it replaces proof.[24]

So, the myths do not avoid the conflicts, indeed they often pinpoint them, but in this shifting of the problem between different realms in life and the blurring of the real conflict is the true purpose of myths, according to Lévi-Strauss. How, then, do myths go about to deal with this question?

In the preceding quotation, Lévi-Strauss uses the term "codes" when talking of the different realms of life that is used to communicate the message of a myth. The concept of code is not without problems, and I will return to it in a further section. At present it is sufficient to acknowledge

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[23] Lévi-Strauss, *The Naked Man*, 694.

[24] Lévi-Strauss and Eribon, *Conversations*, 140 (ellipses in original).

that a code is "a category or class of terms . . . ." that relates to a specific realm in life.[25] A basic presumption of Lévi-Strauss is that, in a myth, the same structure is expressed through different codes and that one code can be translated into another.[26] As far as I know, Lévi-Strauss first uses the concept of code in his well known article about the myth of Asdiwal, a myth from the Tsimshian Indians on the Canadian west coast. In this myth, four different codes (in the article he uses the term "level" more or less interchangeably with "code") are used to convey the message of the myth: the geographic, the economic, the social, and the cosmological ones, "each one of these levels, together with the symbolism proper to it, being seen as a transformation of an underlying logical structure common to all of them."[27] To the "indigenous mind", however, the codes are not distinguished.[28] Thus, when the myth talks about the oppositions between heaven and underworld (cosmological code), peaks and valleys (geographical code), and mountain hunting and sea hunting (economic code), the same opposition between high and low is conveyed. The real problem that the myth grapples with through all the different codes, however, lies in a completely different realm: the social organization of the Tsimshians, and more specifically with their marriage customs. According to Lévi-Strauss, the Tsimshians had the idea, that marriage between matrilineal cousins would resolve a number of conflicts concerning authority and ownership between groups within the tribe. Experience, however, showed that it was not that easy to overcome these tensions. The conflict that the myth seeks to solve, then, is that between the ideal of a peaceful and just society brought about through matrilineal cross-cousin marriage, and the realization that this social institution did not have the desired effect. The myth

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[25] Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter*, 193.

[26] See e.g. Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter*, 171.

[27] Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology, 2*, 146.

[28] Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology, 2*, 158.

fails to solve the conflict though, but translates it to the geographic, cosmologic and economic realm:

> All the paradoxes conceived by the native mind, on the most diverse planes—geographic, economic, sociological, and even cosmological—are, when all is said and done, assimilated to that less obvious yet so real paradox, the dilemma which marriage with the matrilineal cousin attempts but fails to resolve. But the failure is *admitted* in our myths, and there precisely lies their function.[29]

In the present context it is not possible to go further into the problem that the myth of Asdiwal attempts to come to grips with. My point is that the message of myths, according to Lévi-Strauss, is conveyed through different codes that all express the same underlying structure.

The translation from one code to another is made through *metaphors*. A metaphor, in Lévi-Strauss' thinking, is a term from one code which replaces a term in another.[30] Metaphors are, thus, relations based on the *similarity* of the two elements that are juxtaposed. So, in the myth of Asdiwal, the directions west and east are metaphors for matrilocal and patrilocal residence, respectively; terms from the geographic code replace terms from the sociological code in this story and a metaphoric relation is created between the two codes.[31] To simplify matters a bit, the similarity between the two terms in the geographic code and those in the sociological code is perceived to be that, in the west as well as in a patrilocal residence, food exists in abundance, whereas in the east and in a matrilocal residence, there is not enough food (I will return to this further down). The British

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[29] Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology, 2*, 170 (emphasis in original).

[30] See e.g. Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 212; Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter*, 205. This is one way in which Lévi-Strauss uses the term "metaphor." But he also uses it in another sense, in which it is the codes themselves rather than single terms within them that stand in metaphorical relationship to each other. Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter*, 193–194; (see also Maniglier, *Vocabulaire*, 30). More on this below.

[31] Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology, 2*, 162–164, 173.

anthropologist Edmund Leach talks of metaphors as *arbitrary* associations between categories or codes.[32] So, for example, in the Western world there is a metaphorical relationship between the snake (animal code) and evil (metaphysical code). In India, on the contrary, snakes are often regarded as manifestations of benevolent spirits. Of course, snakes are not in themselves good or evil, but in the mythologies of these two cultural spheres, these two values have, rather arbitrarily, be attributed to the same class of animals. Metaphors are also *conventional*, Leach holds. Just about everybody in the Western cultural hemisphere knows that the snake symbolizes evil, and, therefore, a Westerner that has no knowledge of Indian culture might find the veneration of snakes there unintelligible.

Another kind of structural relation is the *metonym*, which could be described as a relation of *contagion* or *nearness*. The most common form of metonym is the *synecdoche*, the use of a part of an entity to denote the whole (as when a lock of hair is cut to represent the person from whom it is cut or when a crown is a symbol for royalty), but other relations are also common, such as the cause-effect relation.[33] Leach argues that in distinction from metaphors, which are arbitrary, a metonymic relationship is thought of as *intrinsic*. It is evident and natural in the cultural context where it is used, though for persons coming from other cultures where things are classified differently, the relationship might not seem so natural.

It must be said at once that the distinction between metaphors and metonyms is not as clear-cut as it might look. "Any arbitrary association which is used over and over again begins in the end to appear intrinsic."[34]

Two terms that are closely related to metaphor and metonym are *paradigm* and *syntagm*. Like the two previous terms, these are borrowed from

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[32] Leach, *Culture and Communication*, 11–22.

[33] *Metaphor* and *metonym* are concepts that Lévi-Strauss uses under the influence of the structural linguist Roman Jakobson. For the latter's use of these words, see Jakobson and Halle, *Fundamentals of Language*, 67–96.

[34] Leach, *Culture and Communication*, 20.

structural linguistics. In the last pages of *The Jealous Potter* Lévi-Strauss writes:

> We know that the meaning of a word is doubly determined: by the words that precede or follow it in the sentence and by the words that could be substituted for it to convey the same idea. Sequences of the first type are called syntagmatic chains by linguists; they are articulated in time. The second type are called paradigmatic sets; they are made up of words that could be mobilized at the moment the speaker chooses one in preference to others that he might also have used.[35]

To take a simple example, the sentence "Mary had a little lamb" is a syntagmatic chain. The words are pronounced in a sequence, one after the other. The meaning of the sentence is dependent on the right order of the words. If the same words were put in another order, such as "Little Mary had a lamb" or "A lamb had little Mary", the meaning would be different, and if they were totally jumbled, as in "A had little lamb Mary" it would be nonsensical.

It is possible, however, to keep the basic word order but substitute most of the words, and keep the same, or at least a similar meaning.

Mary had a little lamb.
The girl had a little lamb.
Mary possessed a little lamb.
Mary had one little lamb.
Mary had a small lamb
Mary had a little young sheep.

As long as the words keep their place in the sentence, all of them can be replaced by another word with the same or a similar semantic field. So, according to the choice of the speaker, any of the words "Mary" and "The girl" can be used; the two expressions make up a paradigmatic set; another paradigmatic set is made up of "had" and "possessed" as well as "owned"

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[35] Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter*, 205.

and other synonyms. This can be illustrated in tabular form, as in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. *Paradigmatic arrangement of sentences.*

Mary	had	a	little	lamb
The girl	possessed	one	small	young sheep

By changing most of the words, we could end up with the sentence "The girl possessed a young sheep", which is perfectly intelligible, and conveys the same basic meaning as the first line of the famous nursery rhyme. Yet, not the precise meaning since, in some cases, the words in the upper row in Table 3.1 are not always exact equivalences to those in the lower. So, for example "Mary" refers to a specific girl, whereas "the girl" could mean any girl. I will return to this matter further down in this section.

Lévi-Strauss uses the concepts of metaphor and metonym in the light of these two terms. In *The Jealous Potter* he writes: "Using a metaphor is taking a word or phrase from one syntagmatic chain and placing it in another syntagmatic chain."[36] In another place in the same book it is quite clear that the syntagmatic chains refer to the codes discussed above. Metaphors do not transfer meaning from one term to another but from code to code.[37] Thus, whereas metaphoric relations are associations across different codes, metonyms are relations within one and the same code. On the other hand, Lévi-Strauss also uses the term syntagmatic chain to denote myths in their capacity of narrated stories. A paradigmatic set is, in that case, a number of myths that are related to one another or segments from one and the same myth, which express the same structure in different variations.[38]

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[36] Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter*, 205.

[37] Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter*, 193.

[38] See e.g. Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 307.

In either case, it is obvious that Lévi-Strauss regards "mythical thought" as paradigmatic to a high degree. But when the meaning hidden in the paradigms is to be pronounced, it has to be expressed in a syntagmatic chain, i.e. in a story. In this syntagmatic chain, concepts are linked with one another through metaphors and metonyms. Thus, metaphor and metonymy are always combined in myth (and indeed, in any kind of discourse), and the actual meaning of a given myth is dependent upon transformations between the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic mode. As a myth is spread and retold in different contexts, new variations occur. And although the basic structural pattern (the *armature* in Lévi-Strauss' terminology) remains, characters used may change, roles may be inverted, elements may be lost or inserted, oppositions may become weaker, etc. In short, a number of what Lévi-Strauss calls *transformations* of the myth will occur. Since they are all related to one another, they make up a set of transformations or a "transformational group."[39]

As an example of this process we can imagine how the myth of Asdiwal was created and spread. The world view of the Tsimshian Indians would have included a number of ideas of their geographic environments, of different ways of gaining their livelihood, of cosmology and the transcendent powers that influenced their lives, and on how their society should be, and how it actually was construed. They also had a notion of what were the main problems in their society. All these ideas were interrelated. They held them simultaneously, and a network of relations—a paradigm which was hardly conscious—tied these ideas together. But when the Tsimshians wanted to express the problem of the discrepancy between the ideal and the actual way of life, they had to arrange these ideas into a syntagmatic chain. In this case, because the problem was perceived to be so difficult and filled with danger, it took the form of the kind of story that we as

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[39] Lévi-Strauss, *The Naked Man*, 675.

cultural analysts from "the outside" would call a myth.[40] As it was retold by different people in various contexts, an almost infinite number of variant versions came to existence, but—and this is important to Lévi-Strauss—they all share the same basic structure. A few of these versions of the myth have been collected by anthropologists, and analyzed by Lévi-Strauss. In this myth (or this set of myths) elements from the geographical, the economic, the cosmological, and the sociological codes were interlaced through metaphorical relations, so that, for example, geographic directions came to symbolize specific social organizations (east=patrilocal residence, west=matrilocal residence).

The relation between geographic directions and social organization is thus a classical analogy that can be written in the following formulaic manner:

East : West :: Patrilocality : Matrilocality

which should be read: "East is to west as patrilocality is to matrilocality." The purpose of an analogy such as this in a myth is, hence, to establish connections between two codes, in this case the geographic and the sociological, or in other words, to transform metaphors into metonyms and vice versa. East and west are metonymically linked—they belong to the same code—and the same applies to the different modes of residence. But structurally there is also a link between east and patrilocality on the one hand, and between west and matrilocality on the other, with the effect that "[w]hat were previously metaphorical relations . . . become metonymical connections, and what were previously metonymical associations . . . become metaphorical ones . . . ." (see Figure 3.1).[41] Myths abound with these analogies, according to Lévi-Strauss, and the shifts between metaphor and

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[40] Here, I use "myth" in a wider sense than in my definition on p. 27.

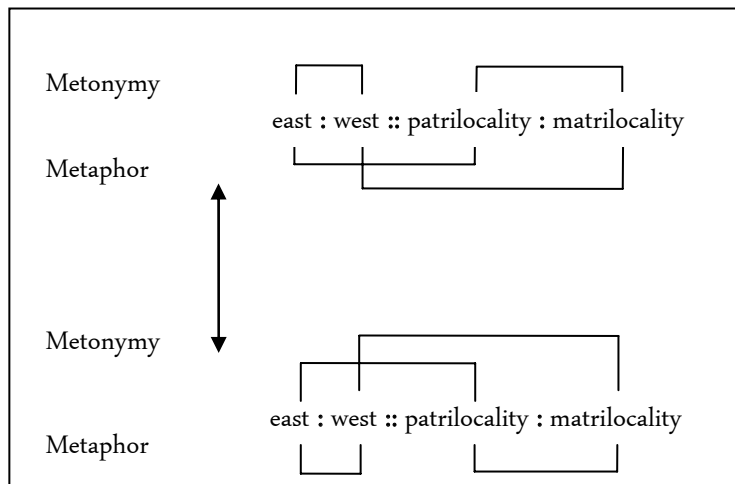[41] Mosko, "The Canonic Formula of Myth and Nonmyth," 132–133, from where the figure is also adapted.

Figure 3.1. Change between metaphor and metonym according to Mosko

metonym adds significance to certain concepts, and thus connects different areas of life, since

> [mind] works by the opposite of the Cartesian method; it refuses to break the difficulty into parts, never accepts a partial answer, and seeks explanations that encompass the totality of phenomena.
>
> When faced with a problem, myth thinks of it as homologous to problems raised in other domains: cosmological, physical, moral, juridical, social, etc. And it aims to account for all of these at once.[42]

In creating new connections between hitherto unconnected areas of life, the transformations between metaphor and metonym produce shifts in the classification system of a group or a culture. These transformations, then, are often used to argue why one classification is more adequate than another; to show that an association between two entities that may seem arbitrary and far-fetched is actually intrinsic and natural; in the words of Edmund Leach we use them "to persuade one another that metaphoric non-sense is really metonymic sense."[43] Lévi-Strauss also maintains that

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[42] Lévi-Strauss and Eribon, *Conversations*, 139.

[43] Leach, *Culture and Communication*, 22.

many myths have this movement, and try to legitimize far-fetched, logical operations of the mind through which entities are associated with each other (what he calls "transcendental deduction") by making them look as if they are natural and based on empirical observation ("empirical deduction").[44] Now, Lévi-Strauss shows that the change from transcendental to empirical deduction is not the same as the transformation between metaphor and metonym. It is normally much more complicated than that, and both metaphor and metonym are employed in empirical deduction.[45] My point, however, is that, whatever method used by the myths, they often attempt to make far-fetched, arbitrary or mysterious connections look natural, intrinsic and obvious. In the Karbalā' Drama this feature is very clear, as I will argue, and the change from far-fetched to natural connections is usually accomplished through simple transformations between metaphor and metonym in this story.

The example of change between metaphor and metonym in the myth of Asdiwal brings me to another important concept in the thinking of Lévi-Strauss: that of *oppositions*. The word opposition is not to be taken negatively. It is a neutral term that denotes almost any relation between two concepts. In Lévi-Strauss' own words:

> Mythical thought operates through means of oppositions and codes. However, the notion of binary opposition, which I have been accused of overusing, only intervenes in the analysis of myth as the smallest common denominator of the changing values arising from comparison and analogy. Binary oppositions thus might appear in very diverse modalities: symmetries (themselves of several types), contradictions, opposites, relative values, trope type figures of speech or of thought, and so on. These different modes of opposition belong to heterogeneous categories. Moreover, they never present themselves in ab-

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[44] Lévi-Strauss, "Deduction of the Crane"; Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter*, 58.

[45] Lévi-Strauss, "Deduction of the Crane," 19–20.

stract form and, so to speak, in a pure state. Rather, they take on a concrete aspect within codes . . . . [46]

In the example above from the myth of Asdiwal, it is perhaps not so strange that the two geographical directions, or the two modes of residence, are opposed to each other. As we have seen, the link connecting the elements from the geographic and the sociological codes is taken from a third code, the techno-economic one, and that, according to the myth, in the east and in a patrilocal residence, food is found in abundance, but in the west and in a matrilocal residence, there is famine. Thus, in this myth, matrilocality and patrilocality are opposed *with respect to* the availability of food supplies, just as east and west. And this is the point I want to make here: oppositions that are significant are always oppositions *in one or another respect*. So, for example, a man can have a number of roles in his life. He can be a husband, a father, a teacher, an amateur football player, etc. When he is considered together with his wife, it is usually not his function as a forward on the football field that is recalled; when in the class room, he is usually not thought of as a husband, etc. In family life a number of domestic roles are brought to mind: those of husband, father etc. In opposition to his wife he is a husband, and in opposition to his children he is a father. On the football ground a number of other roles are potential, such as team member, forward, etc. In opposition to members of his own team he can be considered a nice guy in the dressing room, a forward on the field, and perhaps a hero if he plays well. In opposition to other teams he can be seen as a danger.

When analyzing myths, Lévi-Strauss often talks of *terms* that are qualified with different *functions*. Terms can be persons (in the forms of humans, animals, divinities etc.), things etc., "i.e. any subject capable of acting, that is, taking roles."[47] Functions are the different roles or features

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[46] Lévi-Strauss, *The Story of Lynx*, 185. See also Caws, *Structuralism*, 86–89.

[47] Maranda and Maranda, *Structural Models*, 32.

carried by these terms. In myths we encounter a number of characters (terms), all of which have a great number of possible roles (functions). The Romanian professor of mathematics and semiotics, Solomon Marcus, has discussed the Lévi-Straussian concepts of term and function.[48] In his words,

> each character generates a field of semantic features but only one or some of them are actualized as a role. "If the terms are not determined by functions, they are only floating elements." In other words, pure characters, devoid of any role are ideal, fictional entities, they don't really exist.[49]

It is only in opposition to another character with a different role that we can know which one of all the possible roles that is actualized in the present context. Marcus takes an example from Lévi-Strauss' book *The Jealous Potter*. In that book, myths are related where a woman is opposed to the Goatsucker bird on the one hand, and to different men on the other.

> So, when *woman* is opposed to *bird*, we will select those semantic features of woman which are more relevant in defining the difference, the opposition with respect to bird; if, however, *woman* is opposed to *man*, we will select those features of *woman* which define the opposition with respect to *man*. So, in the first case the feature *human* is very suitable, while in the second case a feature like *jealous* may be relevant.[50]

Thus, the notion of binary oppositions is "the most fundamental component of structure" and as such, in Caws' terms, truly signiferous and mattering.[51]

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[48] Marcus, "Canonic Formula."

[49] Marcus, "Canonic Formula," 143, quoting Maranda and Maranda, *Structural Models*, 34. In the example from the nursery rhyme taken above, this is why the noun "the girl" cannot easily replace the proper name "Mary." The former carries a much wider field of semantic features than the latter.

[50] Marcus, "Canonic Formula," 143 (italics in the original).

[51] Caws, *Structuralism*, 87.

I will return to the discussion of terms and functions further on, but now I must introduce another important term from Lévi-Strauss' thinking: that of *mediation*. We have seen that the function of myth, according to Lévi-Strauss, is to diminish contradictions encountered in reality. The basic conflicts can never be solved, but are perceived as analogous with other areas of life where they can more easily be dealt with. In this process mediators play an important role. Lévi-Strauss discusses this in his basic article, "The Structural Study of Myth", and points to the fact that the *trickster* in American mythology is often perceived of as a problematic figure by analysts of myth. Why, he asks, should this role almost constantly be given to the coyote or the raven? In reply to his own question, he takes an example from the mythology of the Pueblo Indians and argues that

> two opposite terms with no intermediary always tend to be replaced by two
> equivalent terms which admit of a third one as a mediator; then one of the po-
> lar terms and the new mediator become replaced by a new triad, and so on.
> Thus we have a mediating structure of the following type: [See Table 3.2].

Table 3.2. *The Structure of Pueblo mythology, according to Lévi-Strauss*

Initial pair	First triad	Second triad
Life		
	Agriculture	
		Herbivorous animals
		Carrion-eating animals
		(raven, coyote)
		Beasts of prey
	Hunting	
	Warfare	
Death		

. . . [E]ach term generates the next by a double process of opposition and mediation.[52]

Table 3.2 shows that the basic opposition among the Pueblos is that of *life* and *death* (to Lévi-Strauss, this is in fact the basic opposition of humankind at large[53]), which is too dangerous and difficult to deal with. It is replaced by the "weaker" opposition of *agriculture* which causes life and *warfare* which causes death. This opposition is weaker because it is, to a certain extent at least, under the control of humans. However, between the two poles in this new opposition, *hunting* is inserted as a mediator since it partakes in the qualities of both the opposite poles: like agriculture it produces food (life), like warfare, it causes death. One of the polar terms and the mediator, in this case agriculture and hunting makes a new opposition between which the *herbivorous animals* enter as a mediator—they eat vegetables and thus do not kill what they eat, but they are hunted. Opposed to the herbivorous animals are the *beasts of prey* and between these two classes of animals a new mediator is inserted: the *carrion-eating animals*, which eat dead animals like the predators, but which do not kill their food, just as the herbivorous animals. This is where the coyote and the raven (both carrion-eaters) enter the scene. So, according to Lévi-Strauss, "the trickster is a mediator. Since his mediating function occupies a position halfway between two polar terms, he must retain something of that duality—namely an ambiguous and equivocal character."[54]

The function of a mediator is, thus, to create a bridge between opposites, but also, in many cases, to ascertain the distance between them, i.e. to show that they are impossible to, or should not be, overcome. A very interesting example of this double function of the mediator is the myth from the Amazonas, in which the sun and the moon travel in a canoe. The

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[52] Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 224–225.

[53] Lévi-Strauss, *The Naked Man*, 694.

[54] Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 226.

kind of canoe mentioned in the myths requires two persons to travel, one in the front who paddles, and one in the aft who steers; both are needed, and they can neither move closer to nor further away from one another. The myths say that if the sun and the moon came too close, the world would burn (from the heat of the sun) or rot (from the water associated with the moon), or both; if they were parted too far, the alterations of day and night would be jeopardized and chaos would ensue. But while in the canoe (the mediator) the distance between them is perfect.[55] Another example of this double role of mediation is the hat, which in some myths has the same function as the fog in other myths:

> [I]n American Indian thought and probably also elsewhere, the hat has the function of a mediator between up and down, sky and earth, the external world and the body. It plays the role of intermediary between these two poles; it can either unite or separate in different instances. This is also, as I have written in the past, the role of the fog, which is alternately disjunctive or conjunctive between up and down, sky and earth: "a mediating term conjoining extremes and rendering them indistinguishable, or coming between them to prevent them growing closer."[56]

In at least one instance, Lévi-Strauss talks of the conjoining and disjoining functions of mediators as *positive* and *negative mediation*, respectively.[57]

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[55] Lévi-Strauss, *The Origin of Table Manners*, 181–182.

[56] Lévi-Strauss, *The Story of Lynx*, 8, quoting Lévi-Strauss, *The Naked Man*, 398 (in the English translation of this book a reference is given to Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 293, a passage which deals with the same subject but does not contain the passage quoted).

[57] Lévi-Strauss, *The Origin of Table Manners*, 398. For further discussions of the functions and modes of mediation, see e.g. Hénaff, *Claude Lévi-Strauss* (Eng.), 166–174; Kunin, *We Think What We Eat*, 15–16; Scubla, *Lire Lévi-Strauss*, 33–39, *et passim*.

The canonic formula and its application

Now, Lévi-Strauss argues that myths transform according to a special pattern which he calls "a canonical relation". This relation is outlined in a formula which first appeared in his article "The Structural Study of Myth" in 1955 and recurred very sporadically until the publication of some of his lectures in *Anthropology and Myth* in 1984, of *The Jealous Potter* in 1985, and later works where he made explicit use of it.[58] Although the formula is almost completely absent in his *Mythologiques*, he has stated a number of times that it has been very important to him throughout his work with the myths analyzed in these books.[59] The formula goes:

$$f_x(a) : f_y(b) :: f_x(b) : f_{a-1}(y).$$

Lévi-Strauss gives the following cryptic comment to it at its first appearance:

> Here, with two terms, *a* and *b*, being given as well as two functions, *x* and *y*, of these terms, it is assumed that a relation of equivalence exists between two situations defined respectively by an inversion of *terms* and *relations*, under two conditions: (1) that one term be replaced by its opposite (in the above

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formula, a and a^{-1}); (2) that an inversion be made between the *function value* and the *term value* of two elements (above, y and a).[60]

In this passage, the *terms* and the *functions* discussed above make their first appearance. According to Lévi-Strauss, the crucial part of the formula is the fourth component: $f_{a^{-1}}(y)$, where the term a is replaced by its own opposition, a^{-1}, and term and function, a and y (or, rather their values) change places. What, then, does this mean?

The main problem with the canonic formula is that its author never clearly explains its meaning, nor gives an unambiguous example where he makes plain exactly how it is used and how it should be employed in other cases. In spite of its mathematical appearance, Lévi-Strauss has numerous times stated that it should not be read as a mathematical formula, but rather "as an image or picture, a graphic design that, I thought, could facilitate the intuitive grasp of a chain of relations."[61] As the reactions to the formula have shown, however, it is not as intuitive to most of his readers as he intended—neither to those who take a negative stance, nor to those positively inclined towards it.[62]

The most lucid explanation of the formula from Lévi-Strauss himself is the practical use he makes of it in his analysis of a series of Jivaro myths in *The Jealous Potter*. Here follows the *key myth* of this book in summary:

> The Sun and the Moon had the same wife, named Aôho (which means Goat-sucker). The Sun, who was warm and powerful, made fun of the weak and cold Moon. Moon became angry and climbed up to the sky on a vine while

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[60] Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 228 (italics in original).

[61] Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropology and Myth*, 4. See also Lévi-Strauss, *The Naked Man*, 634; Maranda and Maranda, *Structural Models*, 28.

[62] For a thorough discussion of the reception of the formula, see Scubla, *Lire Lévi-Strauss*. Scubla comments on the remark by Lévi-Strauss quoted in the previous sentence: "[W]e would be more inclined to regard [the formula] as an elliptical representation that needs deciphering and that might contain virtually within itself more that what its author was conscious of having put into it." (Scubla, "Hesiod," 152 n.14).

blowing on Sun and put him out. Aôho climbed after Moon and brought a basket of the kind of clay that women use for pottery. Moon cut the vine, and Aôho fell to the ground. The clay scattered all over the ground where it can be found by men, and Aôho changed into the Goatsucker bird. Later, Sun also climbed the vine, but he and Moon keeps evading each other and are never seen together. Because of this, the Jivaros are jealous of one another and fight over women.[63]

When analyzing this myth together with a number of variants, Lévi-Strauss asks: "What is the relation between the Goatsucker, who 'functions' as a jealous bird or as a cause for jealousy, and a woman whose function is to explain the origin of pottery?"[64] One of the main themes of the myth is marital jealousy. Moreover, pottery is very often considered a "jealous" art, not only in the Jivaro culture, but all over the world. The imposition of form on formless matter is to exercise control over it, i.e. to impose culture on nature and take possession of it. Moreover, the techniques employed in pottery are extremely delicate, and as such surrounded by "attitudes and rites of exclusion of which 'jealousy' is the narrative equivalent".[65] Among many American Indians, pottery is associated with woman, who, especially during her pregnancy both has the shape of a pot and functions as a container.[66] The Goatsucker bird is associated with jealousy; its huge mouth invokes sentiments of greediness; its nocturnal habits, its sad and lonely cry, and the fact that it neither builds nests nor lives in pairs manifests its exclusiveness—ideas that all suggest a "jealous" disposition. The jealous character of the Goatsucker is exploited in many myths throughout the Americas.[67] So, Lévi-Strauss argues, there is a link

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[63] Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter*, 14–15.

[64] Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter*, 57.

[65] Hénaff, *Claude Lévi-Strauss* (Eng.), 180. See also Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter*, 23–33, 177–180.

[66] Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter*, 180–181.

[67] Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter*, 34–47, 59–69.

between woman and pottery, between woman and jealousy and between Goatsucker and jealousy. But what is the connection between the Goatsucker and pottery, i.e. why is the Goatsucker introduced in a myth about the origins of pottery? In order to answer this question, Lévi-Strauss employs the canonic formula. So far, two *terms* (woman and Goatsucker) and two *functions* (pottery and jealousy) are identified. According to the canonic formula, the relation between these should be

$$f_j(G) : f_p(w) :: f_j(w) : f_{G-1}(p)$$

where G=Goatsucker, w=woman, j=jealousy, and p=pottery. "In other words, the 'jealous' function of the Goatsucker is to the 'potter' function of the woman as the 'jealous' function of the woman is to the 'reversed Goatsucker' function of the potter."[68] The first three relations of the formula are already established: there are connections between Goatsucker and jealousy, woman and pottery, and woman and jealousy. Since myths usually follow the transformation pattern outlined in the formula, the fourth relation must be there, Lévi-Strauss argues, although it is not found in the myths of the Jivaros. In other South American mythologies, however, there is a bird that is the inversion of the Goatsucker: the Ovenbird, which lives in pairs (marital harmony), has diurnal habits, has a joyful cry and builds beautiful nests out of clay; in short, it has features which make it a perfect opposite to the Goatsucker. And, in fact, Lévi-Strauss argues, there are many myths among the neighbors of the Jivaros that include the Ovenbird and are "inverse transformations of the Goatsucker myths".[69]

That this kind of transformation or "double twist"—represented by the fourth element in the formula—occurs when a myth passes over a border, for example a language border, a cultural border or even (as he maintains in an analysis of "hourglass architecture") from one building material to

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[68] Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter*, 57.

[69] Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter*, 58. For a more thorough discussion of the analysis of this myth, see Scubla, *Lire Lévi-Strauss*, 99–104.

another, is an argument often proposed by Lévi-Strauss.[70] Furthermore, in some instances at least, he claims that a set of myths transforming in this way make up "a kind of permutation group . . . .", although he occasionally applies the formula to the relationship between myth and ritual and, as previously indicated, even on architecture.[71]

It is a fact, though, that in spite of the frequent use of the canonic formula in the later works of Lévi-Strauss, many of its aspects are hidden in deep mist. The French anthropologist Lucien Scubla has pertinently identified some of the most important difficulties:[72]

1) The formula's field of application is not sufficiently defined. This problem applies both to the kind of material used (myths, rituals, the relation between myth and ritual, architecture, etc.) and to the universality of its application (is it, for example, a general law like Newton's law of gravity, or a logical operator connecting myths from neighboring cultures?).

2) Lévi-Strauss only uses the formula in an idiosyncratic way and its general application is never touched on. Each time he applies it, only a small part of the material available is used, and it is never explained why this of all the available data is selected. Furthermore several versions of the formula occur without any reasons given to why one version should be preferred over another.

3) None of the applications of the formula is convincing in the sense that it "establishes an indisputable relation between the canonical formula and the empirical materials to which it is supposed to relate."[73]

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[70] Lévi-Strauss, "Hourglass Configurations." For an example from the area of myth, see e.g Lévi-Strauss, *The Story of Lynx*, 99–101.

[71] Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 228. See also e.g. Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*, 248–249; Lévi-Strauss, *The Story of Lynx*, 104. For applications on myth-ritual relationship, see Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropology and Myth*, 113–117; for its use on a set of connected rituals, see Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropology and Myth*, 190.

[72] Scubla, "Hesiod," 124–125. A more thorough discussion of these and related difficulties is found in Scubla, *Lire Lévi-Strauss*, 115–121.

[73] Scubla, "Hesiod," 125.

However, the fact that the formula keeps inspiring Lévi-Strauss throughout his works on myth and that it recurs in the eighties after an absence in print of nearly two decades (although Lévi-Strauss maintains that he has continually been inspired by it), makes it worth while taking a closer look at it and see if it can give deeper insight into his thinking, and if it can be of any help to me in the analysis of the Karbalā' Drama. More-over, a number of quite successful attempts to interpret and apply the formula in a more general way have been made after its "renaissance" in the publication of his lectures in 1984[74] and of *The Jealous Potter* the following year. Most of these interpretations take their point of departure in a study from 1971, by the anthropologists Elli Köngäs Maranda and Pierre Maranda, where they applied it, not to myths, but to less complex kinds of folkloric tales and riddles.[75]

The Marandas begin by stating that, in contrast with the common "lin-ear analogy" which exists in two forms—"continuous analogy", A : B :: B : C (A is to B as B is to C) and "discontinuous analogy" A : B :: C : D (A is to B as C is to D)—the canonic formula can "formalize the twists found in myths . . . ."[76] Furthermore,

Lévi-Strauss' formula

$f_x(a) : f_y(b) :: f_x(b) : f_{a-1}(y)$

should be understood as the figuration of a mediating process where some dy-namic roles are expressed more accurately than in a simple analogy model.[77]

In the interpretation of the Marandas, the formula begins by stating an opposition between the terms *a* qualified by function *x*, and *b*, qualified by function *y* on the left side of the equation. On the right side, *b* appropri-

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[74] Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropology and Myth*.

[75] Maranda and Maranda, *Structural Models*.

[76] Maranda and Maranda, *Structural Models*, 26.

[77] Maranda and Maranda, *Structural Models*, 26.

ates the function *x*. "Thus, (b) is alternately specified by both functions, and can thus mediate opposites."[78] More concretely, the term *a* is often specified by a negative function *x*, and thus becomes the bad character, the villain of the story. The term *b*, on the other hand, is qualified by a positive function *y*, and thus becomes the hero. By taking on itself the negative function *x* and directing it against the villain *a*, *b* becomes the mediator in the story. It is capable of switching between the two functions and directing the negative function against the bad character. This process

> leads to a "victory" so much more complete that it proceeds from the "ruin" of the term (a) and thus definitely establishes the positive value (y) of the final outcome. . . . To put it metaphorically, the inverse of, say, a loss which expressed the actual impact of a negative power is not only a loss nullified or recuperation, but a gain, so that $f_{a^{-1}}(y) > f_x(b)$.[79]

In other words, the victory of good (*y*) over bad (*x*) gives *y* much greater power than it had before the conflict between *a* and *b*. The formula, thus, expresses a process, where the first three elements are lead up to the result which is expressed in the fourth. The outcome is greater than the beginning. An illustration of the process is given in Figure 3.2, which shows the
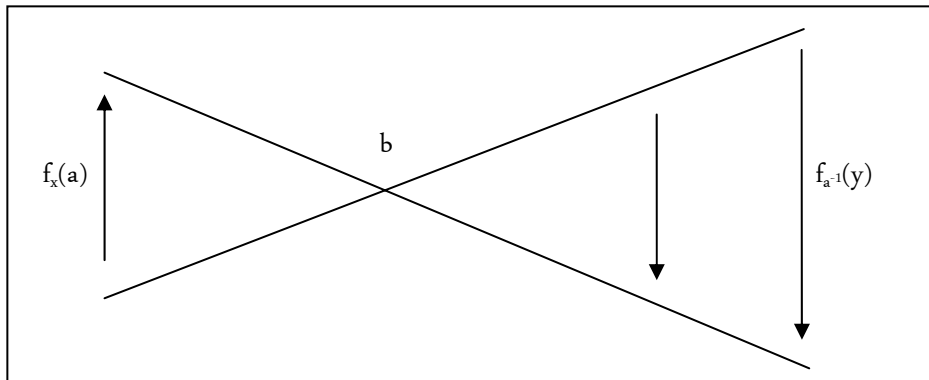

Figure 3.2. The Marandas' "optical model" of their interpretation of the canonic formula.

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[78] Maranda and Maranda, *Structural Models*, 26.

[79] Maranda and Maranda, *Structural Models*, 26–27.

passage from the first element of the canonic formula to the last, through the mediation of b, which causes the negative value x to be eliminated, and the positive y to be advanced.

Scubla comments on this interpretation of the canonic formula that

> [a]lthough it requires clarifying, the Marandas's interpretation is all the more satisfying in its principle in that it is entirely based on theoretical statements that are explicit or implicit in Lévi-Strauss's works and that are thereby shown to possess an unsuspected degree of unity. This interpretation demonstrates the close link between the founding text of 1955 and the optical model of mythical transformations mentioned by Lévi-Strauss at the end of his study on "The Story of Asdiwal" . . . .[80]

At the same time, there is a clear difference between Lévi-Strauss' use of the canonic formula and the Marandas' interpretation of it, in that the former maintains that it describes a cycle of transformations between a number of myths (this is true also of application of the "optical model" in "The story of Asdiwal"), whereas the latter applies it to the transformation that occurs within a single myth. Scubla maintains, however, that Lévi-Strauss is not clear on this matter. Furthermore, it seems that it is the same differentiating mechanism that is at work, on the one hand, to create and uphold a necessary diversity within a myth or a culture, and on the other, to maintain a sufficient distance between cultures or societies with their respective myths. This would, according to Scubla, explain why the formula is applicable to both cases.[81] Solomon Marcus, also argues that the formula is applicable both within a single myth and between myths. He maintains that the formula should be read as "an essential story",[82] so to

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[80] Scubla, "Hesiod," 138. See also Scubla, *Lire Lévi-Strauss*, 141–142. The "founding text" referred to in the quotation is the article "The Structural Study of Myth" in Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 206–231. Lévi-Strauss' use of the "optical model" referred to is found in Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology, 2*, 188.

[81] Scubla, *Lire Lévi-Strauss*, 142.

[82] Marcus, "Canonic Formula," 151.

say, i.e. the myth reduced to its most abstract form, where each of the elements are dependent on one another and where they must come in the right sequence in order to make sense.[83] On the other hand, he says, there are times when the sequence of the myth differs from that proposed by the canonic formula.

> This happens mainly when several variants of a myth are effectively involved in analysis (it seems that, so far, Lévi-Strauss is the only master of such an enterprise) . . . . It happens, however, that, against Lévi-Strauss's warning to interpret the canonic formula with respect to the set of all variants of the myth, most applications of the canonic formula proposed so far are concerned with individual variants. The move from two to three dimensions (the narrative, the structural [detection of mythemes] and the set of variants) seems to be difficult . . . .[84]

And in fact, in a comment to Marcus' article, Lévi-Strauss himself has admitted that his own use of the canonic formula implies a diachronic aspect. The last variant in the transformation group, which is represented by the fourth member of the formula, relates to an event that occurred in time—a passing over a border of language or culture, etc. So, he writes, "one may conceive of diachrony in two ways: either as inscribed in the internal time span of a specific narrative (*le temps du récit*), or as the inscription of several related narratives in an external time span (*le temps historique*)."[85] In spite of Lévi-Strauss' assertions that he has no mathematical intentions with the formula, a number of mathematicians have taken on the task to interpret it with very positive results. All of them have confirmed its un-

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[83] Marcus, "Canonic Formula," 136–137.

[84] Marcus, "Canonic Formula," 153–154. Square brackets in the original.

[85] Lévi-Strauss in a letter to Marcus, quoted in Maranda, "Conclusion," 314. See also Lévi-Strauss' comment to the articles in Maranda, ed., *Double Twist*, 313.

symmetrical character and the basic traits of the Marandas' interpretation.[86]

I will not enter into the discussion of the mathematical analyses of the canonic formula, since that would be beyond my competence. Instead I will turn to the interpretation made by Lucien Scubla who, as an anthropologist, takes his departure from the Marandas' reading of the canonic formula, and elaborates it further in the light of the morphogenetic theory founded by René Thom and developed by Jean Petitot.[87] To Scubla, then, the formula describes the way in which myths develop, and, as we shall see, how they do so in relation to ritual.[88] He furthermore argues that the formula expresses, not only positive, but also negative mediation, i.e. a differentiation of an original continuum as well as a conjoining of two disparate entities. This process of differentiation is, of course, typical for all cosmogonic mythology, which describes the passage from an undifferenti-

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[86] Solomon Marcus, who is himself a renown mathematician, claims that Lévi-Strauss is one of the few social scientists who has understood "that modern mathematics is no longer dominated by the idea of quantity, as in the past, but by the idea of structure . . . ." (Marcus, "Canonic Formula," 118). The French mathematician Jean Petitot, who is a disciple of René Thom (the founder of catastrophe theory in mathematics) has discussed the formula in terms of this theory (Petitot, "Approche morphodynamique"). Working from the perspective of group theory, the American mathematician Jack Morava has proven that the canonic formula represents a quaternion group of order eight, i.e. a mathematical group which, in contrast to the group of Klein (which Lévi-Strauss also employs at times) in non-commutative. The reason, Morava argues, why it has not before been appreciated by mathematicians is mainly because anthropologists and mathematicians have difficulties in understanding each other. (Morava, *On the Canonical Formula of C. Lévi-Strauss* [electronic article] (arXiv.org, 11 June 2003 [cited 17 April 2006]); available from http://arxiv.org/PS_cache/math/pdf/0306/0306174.pdf. I am grateful to Lucien Scubla for this reference.)

[87] For an overview of the catastrophe theory of Thom and its application to structuralism, see Petitot, *Morphogenesis*. For a direct application of this theory on the canonic formula, see Petitot, "Approche morphodynamique." For a summary and assessment of Petitot's work, see Scubla, *Lire Lévi-Strauss*, 201–293.

[88] This discussion of Scubla's interpretation of the canonic formula is based on Scubla, *Lire Lévi-Strauss*, 139–161, 185–197; Scubla, "Hesiod."

ated chaos to the present, differentiated cosmos. Thus, after the analysis of two Bororo myths, Lévi-Strauss concludes:

> It would therefore seem that the two myths, taken together, refer to three domains, each of which was originally continuous, but into which discontinuity had to be introduced in order that each might be conceptualized. In each case, discontinuity is achieved by *the radical elimination* of a certain fraction of the continuum.[89]

The "radical elimination" which Lévi-Strauss talks about in this passage, is, according to Scubla, formally expressed by the transformation $a \longrightarrow a^{-1}$. In myths, this transformation is usually brought about when an evil being is violently put to death.[90] Moreover, the passage from $f_y(b)$ to $f_x(b)$ should, according to Scubla, be expressed not so much in terms of mediation as of undifferentiation or contagion. In other words this process can be described as a move from an opposition between two distinct features (x) and (y) carried by two different actors (a) and (b), to the momentary contamination of b by x. This can be formalized as

$f_x(a)/f_y(b) \rightarrow f_x(a)$ *and* $f_x(b)$

or, if only the functions are written, simply

$x/y \rightarrow x.$

This operation "could then be cancelled and reversed by the elimination of an undesirable term (namely the operation $a \longrightarrow a^{-1}$)".[91] Scubla proposes a simplified version of the canonic formula which must be read *both* as a static equation:

A : B :: M : X

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[89] Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 52 (emphasis added).

[90] Scubla, *Lire Lévi-Strauss*, 143.

[91] Scubla, "Hesiod," 139. See also Scubla, *Lire Lévi-Strauss*, 143.

and as a process:

A/B → M → X

where the leftmost elements, A/B, refer to the binary opposition between the terms *a* and *b*, as qualified by the functions *x* and *y*. The third element, M, refers to the mediation or undifferentiation where *b* has momentarily appropriated the function *x*, and the fourth, X, to the result, consisting of a differentiation, where *a* is eliminated and *y* is promoted.[92] The static variant of this formula can be read as an analogy which is to be read: "as A is opposed to B, so M is opposed to X", which indicates "the two contradictory tendencies towards differentiation and undifferentiation constantly at work in human thought and societies."[93]

An important point in Scubla's interpretation is that the fourth element of the formula does not represent the total end of the process of differentiation, but rather the result of one transformation cycle, which in its turn engenders a new cycle of transformations. This can be schematized as

differences (A/B) → undifferentiation (M) → differentiating closure (X)

where X becomes the starting point of a new permutation cycle:
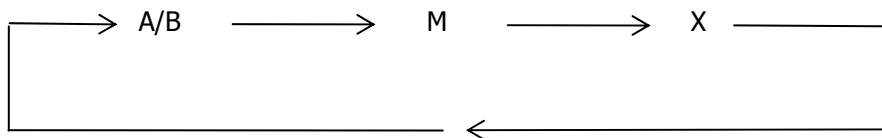
Scubla continues:

[92] Scubla, *Lire Lévi-Strauss*, 143; Scubla, "Hesiod," 139. It is important to notice that the capital X in this formula does not refer to the function *x* in Lévi-Strauss' version of the canonic formula. Scubla uses the sign "X" in his simplified version "so as to evoke graphically the optical model of the double twist, and also because this component still belongs largely to the realm of the unknown" (Scubla, "Hesiod," 139).

[93] Scubla, "Hesiod," 141.

> If we make the assumption that each mythical tale tends to describe a structurally stable segment of this cyclical process, we can then understand that the complete set of these tales may appear to be made up of the variants of one and the same myth and that these variants may in their turn be ordered—as Lévi-Strauss puts it in an unorthodox yet clear use of mathematical vocabulary—in "a series forming a kind of permutation group, the two variants placed at the far ends being in a symmetrical, though inverted relationship to each other."[94]

Viewed in this way, the canonic formula should be viewed as "la loi génétique du mythe, et . . . le modèle d'un processus morphodynamique."[95] I interpret this statement to mean that the formula describes 1) the process by which myths are formed, and 2) the deep structure of these stories. Scubla goes even further, however, and also connects it to the morphogenetic theory of rituals in relation to myths. Sacrifice, he maintains, is the kind of ritual in which "the radical elimination" of the undesired (the evil) is achieved. He exemplifies this with a discussion of the connection between myth and ritual in ancient Greece, where the Hesiodic myth of races can be interpreted as related to the ritual of the scapegoat (the *pharmacos*).[96] During this ritual, the whole of society is turned upside down and all social rules are broken. Furthermore, the king discharges all the negative traits in his own character onto a man who becomes his negative mirror image, the scapegoat. The latter thereby becomes the antithesis of the good king which is supposed to have ruled in the Golden Age of Hesiod's myth of the races, i.e. a true anti-king (in the canonic formula represented by a^{-1} or, in Scubla's interpretation, $King^{-1}$). At the end of the ritual the scapegoat is expelled or killed, thereby purifying society and differentiating

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[94] Scubla, "Hesiod," 140–141, quoting Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 223. See also Scubla, *Lire Lévi-Strauss*, 191–192.

[95] Scubla, *Lire Lévi-Strauss*, 190.

[96] Scubla, *Lire Lévi-Strauss*, 154–161; Scubla, "Hesiod." Unfortunately this interesting discussion is too long and complicated to be recapitulated in full, and here only a short summary is given, which cannot make full justice to the argument.

the dangerous mixture of virtue (*dikè*) and vice (*hubris*) that has been prevalent until then, order is reestablished, and the legitimate king is reinstalled.

In this context, then, Scubla's model should be read as follows: Initially *hubris* and *dikè* are in opposition to one another (A/B). As society develops, *hubris* and *dikè* are mixed (M), resulting in a dangerous situation where good and evil cannot be separated. A differentiation between them is needed (X), and while it is only hinted at in Hesiod's myth of the races, in the ritual of the *pharmacos* the scapegoat takes on himself all the negative traits of society (X), and is killed or expelled, thereby reestablishing society (the way back from the fourth to the first element of the formula).[97]

$$\longrightarrow \text{A/B} \longrightarrow \text{M} \longrightarrow \text{X}$$
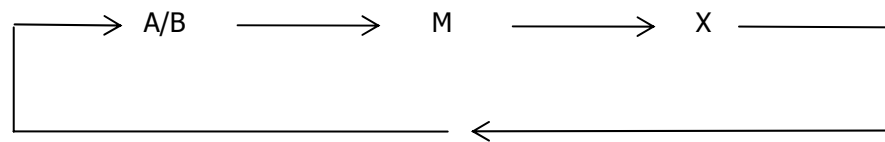
To Scubla, then, the canonic formula shows how myth and ritual are connected to each other. In contrast to Marcus, who maintains that the formula is "an essential story, able to capture a whole set of particular stories" and "situated on another level of abstraction and generality than the particular variants of the myth,"[98] Scubla argues that in the case of Hesiod's myth of races, at least, "[l]'application de la formule canonique . . . est donc bien plus qu'une transcription sténographique de son contenu, elle le rattache au ritual royal et met au jour le mécanisme victimaire qui leur est sous-jacent."[99] This connection between myth and ritual, which Scubla finds implied in many of Lévi-Strauss' later writings (in spite of the latter's vehement assertions in many of his early works that myth and ritual are to be separated) is, in my view, one of the most interesting aspects

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[97] Scubla, *Lire Lévi-Strauss*, 158–161; Scubla, "Hesiod," 146–150.

[98] Marcus, "Canonic Formula," 151.

[99] Scubla, "Sur deux applications." I am grateful to Lucien Scubla for giving me this unpublished paper and allowing me to quote from it.

of Scubla's interpretation of the formula. In the present study, however, I will deal mainly with the mythical aspect of the Karbalāʾ drama, and only briefly touch upon its connection with the ʿĀshūrā ritual (or, as it is also called, the Muḥarram ritual) and the application of Scubla's model to this myth-ritual complex.[100]

Further Methodological Considerations

Before entering into the method used in the present study, there are two points in the method of Lévi-Strauss that has to be further elaborated. Firstly, we saw above that Lévi-Strauss' idea is that a myth is a syntagmatic representation of a structure that can only be detected when rearranged into a paradigmatic mode. In the article "The Structural Study of Myth", he explains the method:

> Say, for instance, we were confronted with a sequence of the type: 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8…, the assignment being to put all the 1's together, all the 2's, the 3's etc.; the result is a chart:

1	2		4			7	8
	2	3	4		6		8
1			4	5		7	8
1	2		4	5		7	
		3	4	5	6		8[101]

The assumption is, that all the 1's "exhibit one common feature"[102], all the 2's another feature, etc. By putting them together and analyzing each of the columns in relation to the other columns, the meaning of the myth can be better understood.

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[100] See below, pp. 192–196.

[101] Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 213 (ellipsis in original).

[102] Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 215.

As I have shown previously, Lévi-Strauss has normally regarded myths not as single stories; they make up sets of transformations, and "[i]f a myth is made up of all its variants, structural analysis should take all of them into account."[103] The method of rearranging the syntagmatic order into a paradigmatic one should, thus, not only be applied to each single variant of a myth, but to all its variants, which would then be compared with each other in order to get the meaning.[104] There is no authentic or true variant of a myth with which one should start the analysis, Lévi-Strauss maintains. Theoretically, at least, any variant could make a suitable point of departure, because ultimately one would have to confront all the myths in the transformation group anyway. Lévi-Strauss uses the term "key myth" or "myth of reference" to denote the first myth analyzed.[105]

The second point that needs to be stressed is that structural analysis never takes place in a vacuum. The structure of a myth says something about the culture in which the myth is alive, and is, thus, an expression of how people of this culture view their world. For that reason, Lévi-Strauss argues that structural analysis always has to take into account the ethnography and history of that people. When analyzing the myths of a people, he constantly refers to their beliefs, habits, economy, and social structure and also to the habits and appearance of animals and plants that the people come in contact with. In order to understand why this animal or plant is used in a myth instead of that, or what characteristics of a celestial phenomenon makes the people view it in relation to a certain habit among

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[103] Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 217.

[104] See, e.g. the analysis of the myth of Asdiwal (Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology, 2*, 146–197).

[105] Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 218; Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 1–6. See also Lévi-Strauss and Eribon, *Conversations*, 134–135.

themselves or to a specific animal, one has to know the ethnography of the people and the natural history of its environment well.[106]

In the present study, I break against one of the basic rules of Lévi-Straussian structuralism: that of considering a myth as the totality of its variants and analyzing all of them. Instead, in the present work, only one version of the Karbalā' Drama is analyzed. There is a passage by Lévi-Strauss which can be taken as justification of this method. He writes:

> Considered purely in itself, every syntagmatic sequence must be looked upon as being without meaning . . . . In order to overcome this difficulty, we can only resort to two procedures. One consists in dividing the syntagmatic sequence into superposable segments, and in proving that they constitute variations on one and the same theme (see "The Structural Study of Myth" and "The story of Asdiwal"). The other procedure, *which is complementary to the first*, consists in superposing a syntagmatic sequence in its totality—in other words, a complete myth—on other myths or segments of myths. It follows, then, that on both occasions we are replacing a syntagmatic sequence by a paradigmatic [whole]; the difference is that whereas in the first case the paradigmatic whole is [derived] from the sequence, in the second it is the sequence that is incorporated into it. But whether the whole is made up of parts of the sequence, or whether the sequence itself is included as a part, the principle remains the same. Two syntagmatic sequences, or fragments of the same sequence, which, considered in isolation, contain no definite meaning, acquire a meaning simply from the fact that they are polar opposites. And since the meaning becomes clear at the precise moment when the couple is constituted, it [is as if it] did not exist previously, hidden but present, like some inert residue in each myth or fragment of myth considered separately. The meaning is entirely in the dynamic relation which simultaneously creates several myths or parts of the same myth, and as a result of which these myths, or parts of

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[106] Lévi-Strauss' writings are so full of these descriptions that it is possible to open any of his books almost at random and come across one of them, but see e.g. Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 3; Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology, 2*, 147–149.

myths, acquire a rational existence and achieve fulfillment together as opposable pairs of one and the same set of transformations.[107]

In this passage, Lévi-Strauss talks of two procedures for analyzing myths: one is to compare different sequences of one single myth, the other to analyze a series of related myths. And, although the procedures are complementary and support each other, in this passage, at least, the author does not exclude the use of the first one only. In fact, as the context to the text quoted shows (as well as other analyses by Lévi-Strauss), the first procedure is a prerequisite for the second. In order to compare several myths with each other, at first one of them has to be analyzed on its own merits. As a first step in the analysis, a paradigmatic whole into which the other myths are to be incorporated has to be "derived from" (Fr. *extrait de*) the first myth. Even the first myth, however, must be placed in a paradigmatic whole "that the myths, at this stage, have not yet supplied, and which must be sought outside the mythic field, that is in ethnography."[108] The continued analysis of many related myths will tighten the network of relations "while filling in gaps here and there."[109] The analysis which I perform in the present study, in other words, can be regarded as a kind of pilot study which is necessary for a future comparison between different versions of the Karbalāʾ Drama.

The Karbalāʾ Drama in the edition of Ṭabarī is a very long text. In the Leiden edition of Ṭabarī's *Taʾrīkh*, it extends to about 175 pages. In Howard's English translation, it is of similar length.[110] The extent of the story

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[107] Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 307, referring to Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 206–231 and Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology, 2*, 146–197 (emphasis added). The square brackets in the text indicate that I have slightly modified the translation to better suit what I believe is the intention of the French original text. See Lévi-Strauss, *Le cru et le cuit*, 313. As a whole, this passage reads better in French than in the English translation.

[108] Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*, 356.

[109] Lévi-Strauss, *The Origin of Table Manners*, 187.

[110] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 216–390; Ṭabarī, *History*, 19, 1–183.

makes it difficult to make a thorough structural analysis of the whole text. In analogy with Lévi-Strauss' "key myth" or "myth of reference", I have made a deep study of one portion of the text that I call the "Text of Reference", consisting of about 8 pages (10 in the translation),[111] in order to identify the various codes, oppositions, and transformations that make up the structure. With these structural features in mind, I have made a more cursory study of the story in its entirety.

The choice of Text of Reference is not completely arbitrary, although many other portions of the story could have been selected. My main reasons for choosing this passage rather than another one are presented here. It is to be noted that some of them were at first based on intuition rather than on more objective criteria.

The first reason is that the passage selected as Text of Reference occupies a central position in the story as a whole. It is situated in the middle of the narrative, and introduces a new moment in the plot: the physical confrontation between Ḥusayn and the treacherous Kūfans.

The second reason is that I believed that the four speeches that Ḥusayn delivers, according to text, are of central importance for the message of the story. In these sermons and their context, the positions of Ḥusayn and the people around him (friends as well as foes) are lined out.

My third argument is that I suspected that the somewhat surprising acts of Ḥusayn—his distribution of water to the enemy and his leading them in prayer—were of structural importance.

Finally, it is one of the longest *akhbār* (units of transmission)[112] in the whole story, although it has a couple of insertions. It would therefore make a limited and somewhat autonomous part of the story as a whole.

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[111] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 295–304; Ṭabarī, *History*, 19, 91–99.

[112] For this concept, see above on p. 58.

As the analysis will show the inklings proved to be correct and, in addition to this, the Text of Reference occupies an important position in the narrative structure of story as a whole.

As a pilot study, this analysis is in many ways tentative. Although the use of graphics and of mathematical-like formulas might give it an air of factuality which resembles that of the natural sciences (something which Lévi-Strauss himself has often been accused of), it is nothing of the kind. Lévi-Straussian structural analysis is a process of suggesting hypotheses and trying them, and like any other endeavor within the field of humanities, much depends on the point of view chosen and the context of the analyst. I will return to this question presently.[113]

The codes

The concept of code, which I have already discussed, is problematic in many ways. Still it is of importance in the writings of Lévi-Strauss, and I have made much use of it in the present study. If a code is "a category or class of terms" as Lévi-Strauss maintains,[114] it is important as a tool for categorizing one's mental world, and therefore should be important for the structural analyst who wants to map the world view of a people. On the other hand, Lévi-Strauss uses the term in different ways, which sometimes seem to contradict one another. To Lucien Scubla the notion of code in the writings of Lévi-Strauss is ambiguous and incoherent.[115] Are the codes inherent properties of myth or are they analytical categories used by the

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[113] A discussion of the ever tentative results of structural analysis is found in Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 5. A little later in the introduction to this book, the author discusses the role of the mathematical-like formulas, and asserts that they are not intended to prove anything, but merely to function as simplified illustrations of complicated structures. (Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 30–31).

[114] Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter*, 193.

[115] Scubla, *Lire Lévi-Strauss*, 259.

scholar who investigates it? Lévi-Strauss uses the concept in both ways. In one of his later texts he writes:

> Mythical thought operates through the means of oppositions and codes. . . . Binary oppositions . . . . never present themselves in an abstract form and, so to speak, in a pure state. Rather, they take on a concrete aspect within codes that are used to formulate messages, messages that themselves can be transposed into the terms of other codes and that can in turn transpose into their own system messages received through the channels of different codes. These codes are themselves heterogeneous, as they can be spatial, temporal, cosmological, sexual, social, economic, rhetorical, and so on. At least theoretically, their number is limitless, as codes are tools forged to satisfy the needs of the analysis. Only afterward can the degree to which they correspond to reality be ascertained. But we have to admit that in the first stages of the research, the selection and the definition of the axes on which are located the oppositions, and the selection and the definition of the codes to which they are applicable, owe much to the analyst's subjectivity, and thus they have an impressionistic character.[116]

This passage is important, firstly, because it shows that to Lévi-Strauss himself structural analysis is a subjective endeavor, as I mentioned above. But it also shows, in my opinion, that the codes are both used in the myths (as categories or classes of terms relating to a specific realm of life[117]) and that they are "tools forged to satisfy the needs of the analyst." The analysis of the myths thus proceed through a kind of hermeneutical circle, where the analyst, from the first readings of the myth in light of the ethnographic knowledge that he has of the culture where the myth is used, hypothesizes certain codes. Through the study of a greater number of myths and a deeper plunge into the ethnography, the early hypotheses of the codes are corroborated or revised and, departing from these revisions, new studies are performed.

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[116] Lévi-Strauss, *The Story of Lynx*, 185–186.

[117] See also Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter*, 171–172.

Following this procedure, I have identified the following codes in the Text of Reference:

The *spatial code*, which refers to the relative physical positions of people and things in the close neighborhood. Lévi-Strauss sometimes talks of a geographic code, but I found this label unsatisfactory in this case, since most spatial oppositions in the text occur within short distances.

The *temporal code* refers to aspects of time, such as different hours of the day, to express its message.

The *social code* refers to relations that exist or are strived for, such as manifestations of enmity or friendship or the social ranking between people.

The *genealogical code* refers to arguments found in the genealogies of people involved. In the Arabic pre-Islamic culture, genealogy was extremely important, and recourse was often taken to the merits of the ancestors in order to support claims to superiority—not only political superiority—of one person above another.[118] One of the most important thrusts of early Islam was the attempt to rank people, not through ancestry, but through piety. This effort partly failed, however, and although piety became a central criterion, genealogy was still very important.[119] It can be seen as a special case of the social code, but it is so important in the text, that I have chosen to treat it as a separate code in the analysis.

The *economic code* refers to the distribution of material entities, such as water and physical force.

The *dress code* of course refers to the message that a person's clothes confer.

The *linguistic code* refers to the way the language is used.

The last two codes are those that I have found most problematic to delimit, and they will need some more discussion than the previous ones.

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[118] Donner, *Narratives*, 104–111; Noth and Conrad, *Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, 37–38.

[119] Elad, "Community of Believers," 245–254.

They refer to the complicated interplay between religion and politics. We have already seem that most of the early and classical discussions in Islam regarding questions such as political legitimacy, the nature of government and the task of the ruler, had a conceptual basis and used a language where references to religion were replete. The discussion of Ḥusayn and his right (or lack of right) to challenge the authority of the caliph Yazīd and his governor Ibn Ziyād, was certainly no exception. In the story analyzed here, as well as in most Islamic historiography, the language of religion and that of politics are at times so entangled, that it can be very difficult to separate the two realms. As I have argued above, however, religion and politics conceptually constituted two different areas of life, at least to Ṭabarī. However, in labeling these two codes I hesitate to use the terms "religion" and "politics," since the ways the terms are used today in the Western cultural sphere in general are too narrow, and within the academic disciplines of History of Religions and Political Science too wide. In modern secularized society "religion" usually refers to a private sphere which has little or nothing to do with "politics," which is a public matter. The two are (or should be) entirely separate. Within the academic field of History of Religions, on the other hand, the concept of religion can apply to almost anything, as long as belief in some kind of what Historians of Religions refer to as "transcendent power" is involved. Very often, then, political dimensions of religion are included in these definitions and politics becomes submerged in this subject. Similarly, within the field of Political Science, the concept of "politics" often becomes so wide that it is totally impracticable, at least for the present purpose.[120] It is not that I reject these wide definitions in themselves, but in the present context they are not applicable. Similarly, the Arabic concepts *dīn* (which is often translated "religion") and *dawla* ("politics") are too wide for my use, and their exten-

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[120] So, for example, Manfred Halpern defines politics as "all we can do and need to do together" (Halpern, "Choosing Between Ways," 8).

sive overlap makes it difficult to distinguish between them in the analysis. For that reason I have decided to use the terms *piety code* and *authority code* instead.

The *piety code* refers to what might be described with the Arabic word *taqwā*. This word might be translated "fear of God", "mindfulness of God and the Last Day", or simply "piety".[121] This code includes expressions of piety as well as impiety, and it also includes references to divine rewards and sanctions to manifestations of piety or impiety. It also includes physical manifestations of faith, such as ritual observance and generally virtuous acts which can be said to be divinely sanctioned.

The *authority code*, finally, refers to statements on earthly government, and expressions of political loyalty to a person who makes political claims. It is closely related to the Arabic concept of *bayʿa*, a term which, in the text studied here, denotes a pledge of loyalty to another person as authority.[122]

Yet, as the analysis will show, there is a considerable overlapping of these two codes. One example is when Ḥusayn accuses the contemporary rulers for bad governance because they do not follow the law of God as laid down in the Qurʾān and the *sunna*. In such a case I will talk of the two codes combined.

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[121] See Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1, 310a. The second translation suggested is from Donner, *Narratives*, 99. For thorough discussions of the Qurʾānic use of this important and many-faceted word, see Alexander, "Fear" and more recently Ohlander, "Fear of God."

[122] See Tyan, "Bayʿa."

4. The Structure of Ṭabarī's Account of the Karbalāʾ Drama

An Overview of Ṭabarī's Sources

Ṭabarī was certainly not the first person to write an account of the Karbalāʾ Drama. Rather, his version is a compilation of a number of earlier works on the subject. Due to his extensive use of *isnāds* of "chains of transmitters", it is possible to trace his sources, at least to some extent. In this section I will give a brief overview of the sources that he used, as far as they are known to us today.

The story of Ḥusayn's death at Karbalāʾ belongs to a genre in Arabic literature often referred to as *maqātil* literature.[1] The word *maqātil* is a plural of *maqtal*, which in this context means "violent, unnatural death", "murder" or "assassination".[2] It was mainly developed within Shīʿite circles and played an important role in the formation of the Shīʿite identity as an oppressed and persecuted group. There are also works on the unnatural deaths of non-Shīʿites, however, such as the third caliph ʿUthmān. Sebastian Günther identifies four stages in the development of the *maqātil* genre. The first stage is pre-literary in that stories of the violent deaths of famous people were transmitted orally in *khabar*-form.[3] By the end of the 1st/7th and the beginning of the 2nd/8th centuries, historically interested

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[1] For a very good overview of this literature, see Günther, "*Maqātil.*" The following paragraph is based on this article.

[2] Günther, "*Maqātil,*" 192n.1.

[3] For the notion of *khabar*, see above, p. 58.

persons began to collect these *akhbār*. In the second stage (first half of 2nd/8th to the beginning of 3rd/9th centuries) material on specific occasions of *maqtal* (for example the killing of ʿAlī or of Ḥusayn) were written down, either as "mneumonic aids" used by scolars for their lectures, or as lecture-notes taken by students. Although some of these came to attain some distribution, and are listed in the early bibliographies, they were not "books" in the sense of literary works. Günther uses the Greek term *hypomnêmata* to describe this kind of work.[4] By this time also the first *maqātil* works, in the sense of authored and published books were produced. The third stage reaches from the middle of the 2nd/8th until the beginning of the 4th/10th centuries. In this phase, the *maqātil* material was incorporated into greater works such as Ṭabarī's *Taʾrīkh* and specific collections of this material, such as Abū ʾl-Faraj al-Isfahānī's *Kitāb Maqtal al-Ṭālibiyyīn*. In the fourth stage, from the middle of the 4th/10th century, the publication of *maqātil* literature in Arabic ceases. In the literature of other languages, such as Turkish and Persian, it survives in various forms.

So, Ṭabarī apparently had a lot of material to choose from when he wrote about the death of Ḥusayn. No less that 19 works with the title *Kitāb Maqtal al-Ḥusayn* ("The Book of the Killing of Ḥusayn") are known to us from the first centuries of Islam.[5] The most famous of these and the one which all the great chroniclers of the late 3rd/9th and early 4th/10th centuries (including Ṭabarī) ultimately fall back upon, is that by Lūt b. Yaḥya al-Azdī, better known as Abū Mikhnaf (ca. 70/689–157/775). He probably lived in Kūfa most of his life, and was one of the most prolific authors of *maqtal*-works, both on the deaths of ʿAlīds and of non-ʿAlīds.[6] He seems to

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[4] Günther, "*Maqātil*," 197. For the sake of convenience, I use terms like "book" and "publish" although these terms are anachronistic. The writing and distribution of literary works copied by hand was of course much different from today's publishing business. For a brief overview of this subject with further references, see Günther, "*Maqātil*," 197–199.

[5] Günther, "*Maqātil*," 199.

[6] Günther, "*Maqātil*," 201–203. For a list of his known works, see Sezgin, *Abū Miḥnaf*, 99–116.

have got most of his information about the Karbalāʾ Drama by collecting oral reports, but he probably also used written material.[7] Abū Mikhnaf's original work is lost to us. It is, however, extensively quoted by Hishām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī (ca. 120/737–204/819), who also wrote a book with this title. In his *Kitāb Maqtal al-Ḥusayn*, al-Kalbī uses much material from Abū Mikhnaf's work; apparently he faithfully quotes long passages from it. He also uses a lot of material from other authorities, however. All this means that Ibn al-Kalbī has processed and edited his material, and although the passages from Abū Mikhnaf are accurately reproduced, they might have been moved around, so as to fit into his own version of the story.

Ṭabarī uses Ibn al-Kalbī's book as his main source (well over 90 % of his account is from this source), and thereby gets a lot of Abū Mikhnaf's material in the deal.[8] Another source for Ṭabarī's account of the Karbalāʾ Drama (roughly 5 % of the material) is the Shīʿite traditionist ʿAmmār b. Muʿāwiya al-Duhnī (d. 133/750), who in his turn received his reports from the fifth Shīʿite Imām, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad al-Bāqir (the grandson of Ḥusayn, d. 114/732–733, see Figure 1.1). This material gives the complete story in brief. It is nowhere referred to as a book, and I would guess that it is of the *hypomnêma* kind described by Günther.[9] The same is probably true of Ṭabarī's third source, a short account of the complete story by the Kūfan traditionist Ḥusayn b. ʿAbd al-Rahmān (d. 136/753–754). Other sources add details, but do not give the full story. For an outline of the transmission of sources, see Figure 4.1.

Two points must be discussed before we can proceed to the story itself and the analysis of it. The first is that, although detailed chains of transmission are given in many cases, it is by no means definite that they are

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[7] Sezgin, *Abū Miḥnaf,* 66–97.

[8] For the following account of the sources of Ṭabarī, I have relied extensively on Howard, "Translator's foreword," x–xi and Howard, "Husayn the Martyr."

[9] See Howard, "Husayn the Martyr," 125 n.3.

The battle of Karbalāʾ and the events preceding and following it (60–61/680).

X X   X X

Imām al-Bāqir (d. 114/732)

Hypomnêmata

Hypomnêmata

ʿAmmār al-Duhnī (d. 133/750)

Ḥusayn b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (d. 136/753)

Abū Mikhnaf (d. 157/775)
Kitāb Maqtal al-Ḥusayn

Other sources

Ibn al-Kalbī (d. 204/819)
Kitāb Maqtal al-Ḥusayn

Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923)
Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa ʾl-mulūk

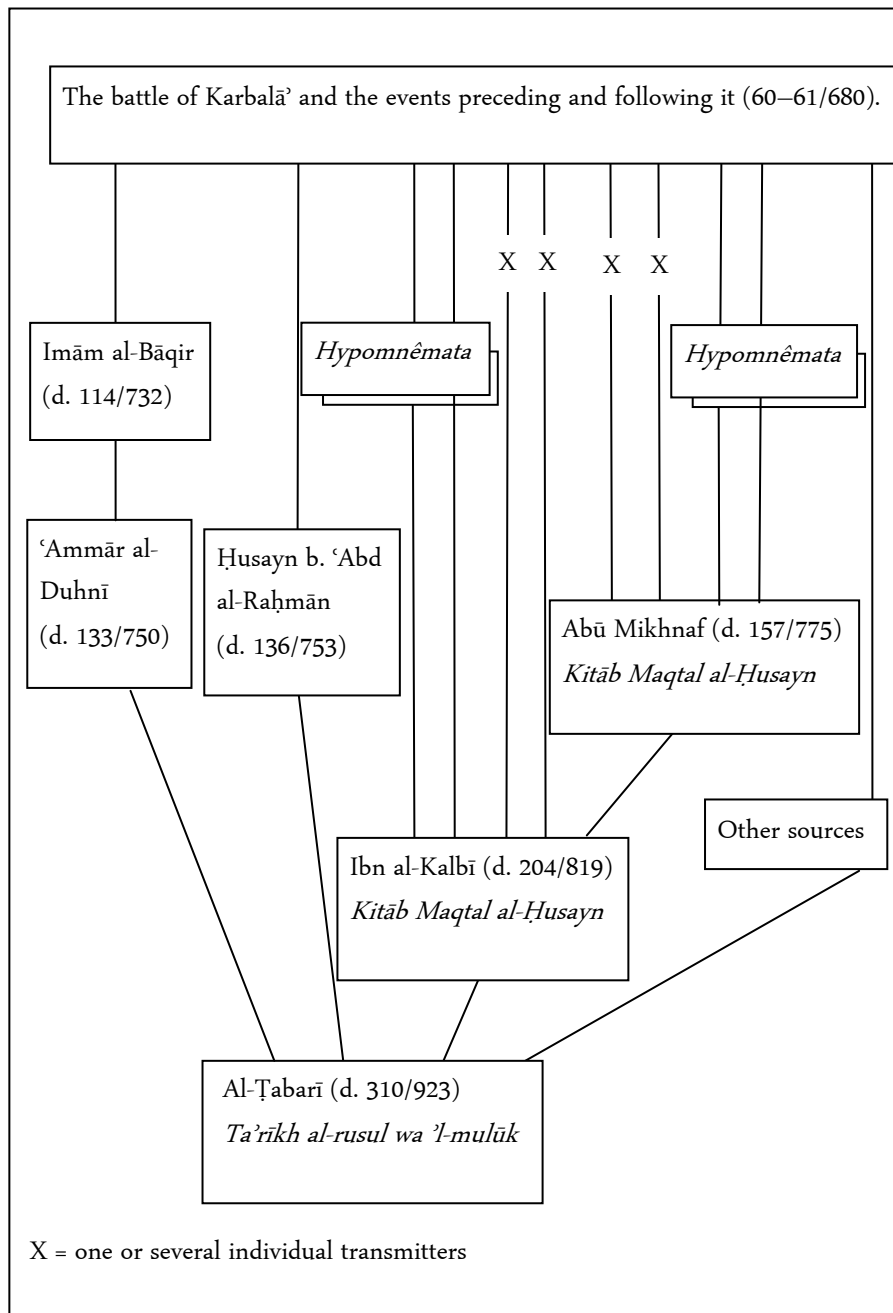X = one or several individual transmitters

Figure 4.1 *An outline of the sources to Tabari's version of the Karbalāʾ Drama.*

correct. *Isnād*s were often forged, especially in legal material, but also in historical, in order to give a report another status in the mind of the read-

ers than it would otherwise have had. So, for example, Howard doubts the authenticity of the material ascribed to ʿAmmār b. al-Duhnī.[10] Since al-Duhnī's authority was the fifth Imām, al-Bāqir, it might well have been considered, Howard argues, as the official Shīʿite account and thus the most trustworthy one. Howard suspects, though, that it neither goes back to Imām al-Baqir nor that it comes from the Shīʿite al-Duhnī. In his interpretation, the version ascribed to al-Duhnī's belittles the stature of Ḥusayn and cannot give such details of the battle as would be expected from an official account and a source as close to Ḥusayn as his grandson. Be that as it may, the point I want to make here is that it is possible, and indeed necessary, to be on one's guard concerning the chains of transmission given in the historical accounts.

The second point that I want to discuss is the editing of the material that was available to the authors of different versions of the account of the Karbalāʾ Drama (as well as other events in the history of Islam, of course). I have already touched upon this in my discussion of Ibn al-Kalbī above, and the same is true of Ṭabarī. From the versions of different authors that have used Ibn al-Kalbī's account, it is clear that the authors have used this account selectively and have rearranged it. This is not the place for a thorough study of how Ṭabarī has used his material, and I will only give one example which has bearing on the following analysis. At the very end of his version of the Karbalāʾ Drama, Ṭabarī has a poem by a certain ʿUbaydallāh b. al-Ḥurr al-Juʿfī, an Arab noble and a famous poet. This Ibn al-Ḥurr is also mentioned in a report before the battle, where it is described how Ḥusayn meets him and asks him to join in against the Kūfans. Ibn al-Ḥurr, however, refuses and decides to stay neutral.[11] Then, in the last report of Ṭabarī's story, it is related that Ibn al-Ḥurr visits Karbalāʾ and the graves of the people killed. He recites a poem in which he deeply

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[10] Howard, "Husayn the Martyr," 127–131.

[11] Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, II, 305–306; Ṭabarī, History, vol. 19, 100–101.

regrets that he did not support and defend Ḥusayn, the son of Fāṭima and the grandson of the Prophet, against the army of the Kūfan governor. In another version of Ibn al-Kalbī's account, found in four manuscripts translated by Ferdinand Wüstenfeld in 1883, the poem is not placed at the end of the story, but a different poem with a similar meaning is placed in connection to the first meeting between Ḥusayn and Ibn al-Ḥurr.[12] Although it is difficult to prove, I presume that it is Ṭabarī himself who has moved the poem to the place it has in his version. By appending the report to the end of the story, totally out of context, Ṭabarī gives it much more weight than it would have had, had it kept its position in the middle of the story. This is a technique that he uses elsewhere to subtly convey some of his own opinions about a certain matter.[13] Ṭabarī also used other techniques to communicate his own ideas.[14] See Appendix III for examples of some of these devices.

Analysis of the Text of Reference

Here follows an analysis of the Text of Reference. For the purpose of the analysis and to facilitate reference, I have divided the text into sections and subsections. The analysis of each section is opened with a summary of the text of that section. For the full text, see Appendix II. In the analysis, the text in the Appendix is referred to by the number of the section, followed by the number of the subsection. Thus, 1:4 refers to subsection 4 of Section 1 in Appendix II.

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[12] Wüstenfeld, *Tod des Ḥusein*, 57–58. This position is also indicated in Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, 174.

[13] Hodgson, "Two Pre-Modern Muslim Historians," 57; Humphreys, "Qurʾānic Myth," 275; Shoshan, *Poetics*, 120–124.

[14] Shoshan, *Poetics*, Chapter 4.

Section 1

> After a nightly halt on their way from Makka to Kūfa, Ḥusayn commands his attendants to get water, and he and his group set off. At noon, they see what they first believe is an oasis, but which turns out to be a military force ahead, traveling towards them. In order to avoid being surrounded by the enemies, Ḥusayn and his party seek refuge at Dhū Ḥusum. The enemy force, which consists of 1000 men lead by al-Ḥurr b. Yazīd al-Tamīmī, arrives, and all are prepared for a fight. Ḥusayn then orders his attendants to give water to the enemy and their horses. One person belonging to the enemy force, ʿAlī b. al-Taʿʿān al-Muḥāribī arrives late, and is given water by Ḥusayn personally.

The most obvious opposition in Section 1 is the *spatial* one, where Ḥusayn and his group are physically opposed to al-Ḥurr and his force. This is so from the moment when they perceive each other at a distance, and is explicitly expressed in the sentence "The people came up; there were about one thousand men under the command of al-Ḥurr b. Yazīd al-Tamīmī so that he and his cavalry stood facing (*muqābila*) al-Ḥusayn in the heat (*ḥarr*) of midday" (1:4).[15] The spatial code thus enforces the image of enmity between the two groups. The physical opposition is partially overcome, however, when Ḥusayn gives water to the enemy.

What is expressed in the spatial code, underlines the *social* opposition: the hostility between the groups. In this section al-Ḥurr and his men are depicted as aggressors, whereas Ḥusayn's group defend themselves against the aggression. Ḥusayn tries to escape to Dhū Ḥusum, where he can more easily defend himself. On the other hand, the text mentions that Ḥusayn has his tents erected before the enemy arrives. It is interesting that this is mentioned; the information seems to be redundant. From the preceding lines, the picture one gets is that Ḥusayn and his group just barely reach the *wādī* of Dhū Ḥusum before the Kūfan cavalry intercepts them, and they would hardly have had the time to set up the tents. So why is it so

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[15] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 296; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 92.

important to mention it here? One way to interpret it is that, when Ḥusayn has had his tents erected he is the chief of a desert camp, and can thus be regarded as a host who receives guests at his camp. This reading is underlined by his giving of water to the Kūfans. According to the text, then, Ḥusayn on the one hand is prepared to defend himself, on the other he wishes to be friendly to the Kūfan force and actively practices hospitability. In other words, the opposition of hostility is weakened by Ḥusayn's physical and social move across the border of enmity.

In this section the enmity between the two groups is emphasized by the *dress* code. Ḥusayn and his men are dressed for war (1:4).

Also in the *temporal* code an opposition is found: that between dawn and midday. Dawn is the time when water is drawn; midday is the time of heat and thirst. Ḥusayn appears at dawn; al-Ḥurr at noon.

In the *economic* code, there is an opposition between having and not having water. In the morning, before continuing his journey, Ḥusayn orders his attendants to get water (1:1). This statement would, strictly spoken, not have been necessary for the development of the story, if it had not had such importance later. The significance is, of course, that when Ḥusayn and his group meet the enemy, they have water. When al-Ḥurr and his men arrive, they and their mounts are thirsty, i.e. they lack water, and Ḥusayn commands his attendants to give them water to drink (1:4). This motif is epitomized by the report where Ḥusayn personally gives water to ʿAlī b. al-Ṭaʿʿān al-Muḥāribī, who arrives late and is very thirsty (1:5).[16]

Furthermore, the man in Ḥusayn's company who first spots the enemy makes a mistake, and thinks that what he sees is a group of palm trees (1:1–2). Palm trees would indicate an oasis and the possibilities of finding water. When it proves to be the enemy cavalry, and they arrive at Dhū

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[16] That Ibn al-Ṭaʿʿān should be seen as a symbol for the whole enemy force can be concluded from his name. Al-Ṭaʿʿān can be translated "the attacker" or "the one who pierces/stabs"; al-Muḥāribī means "the warrior."

Ḥusum, the imagery of the enemy is changed to one of heat and thirst. The connection between thirst, the midday heat and the enemy force is accentuated in the *linguistic* code, by the juxtaposition of the name al-Ḥurr and the word for heat, *ḥarr* (1:4). In unvocalized script (which is the normal state of Arabic script) these words look the same: *ḥrr*. It is certainly no coincidence that the (otherwise redundant) words "the heat of midday" (*ḥarr al-ẓahīra*) are situated so close to the name al-Ḥurr. Thus, al-Ḥurr and his men are associated with heat and thirst, and Ḥusayn with water and quenching of thirst.

Yet another opposition in the *economic* code is found in the text: that between having and lacking military force. Here the distribution is reversed, so that al-Ḥurr and his men have much military force (one thousand men in arms) whereas Ḥusayn's group is much smaller.

In the story about ʿAlī b. Ṭaʿʿān (1:5) there is also an opposition between his ignorance about the words that Ḥusayn utilizes and about the use of the waterskin, on the one hand, and the knowledge of Ḥusayn, on the other. Once again, Ḥusayn shares what he has, in this case knowledge about how to get water.

Al-Ḥurr and Ibn al-Ṭaʿʿān stand in a metonymic relationship to the Kūfan troop. They are the first (al-Ḥurr as the leader of the group) and the last in the force to arrive. Al-Ḥurr is the leader, and Ibn al-Ṭaʿʿān is the warrior. Thus, the characteristics with which these two men are described can be applied to the whole of the enemy group: lack of water and knowledge but in possession of physical force.

In Table 4.1 some of the important oppositions in this section are outlined. From the structure of the narrative, I would suggest that the distribution of water corresponds with that of knowledge, and that Ḥusayn's giving of water is a homology of his giving of knowledge. This will be further discussed below.

Table 4.1. *Important oppositions in Section 1.*

Codes	Oppositions	
Spatial code	Ḥusayn and his group	Al-Ḥurr and his group
Social code	Defense	Agression
Temporal code	Dawn	Noon
Economic code	Water	No water
	No force	Force
	Knowledge	Ignorance

Section 2

The reason for al-Ḥurr's mission is that 'Ubaydallāh b. Ziyād, the governor of Kūfa, has posted a large force at al-Qādisiyya to look out for Ḥusayn, and has sent al-Ḥurr in advance to meet him.

Section 2 is just a short note which interrupts the flow of the narrative in order to give the reason for the coming of al-Ḥurr. The text of the section shows that the enmity between al-Ḥurr and Ḥusayn is not just between the two men and their groups, but that behind al-Ḥurr is the governor of Kūfa, and ultimately the caliph, Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya. The latter had commanded the Kūfan governor Ibn Ziyād to take any action he deemed necessary to stop Ḥusayn. The real enemies of Ḥusayn are consequently not so much al-Ḥurr as his superiors, Ibn Ziyād and the Umayyads. The significance of this will become clearer as the story moves on.

The text in the section also underlines the uneven distribution of power. Behind al-Ḥurr is not only his one thousand horsemen but in fact the whole imperial army, in contrast to the small group of Ḥusayn. At the same time it underscores the great political import that the caliph attaches to Ḥusayn and his going to Kūfa. Here, then, the *social* opposition found in Section 1 is reversed. In this section, Ḥusayn's move to Kūfa is seen from the Umayyad perspective. Hence he is the aggressor, while the Umayyads, represented by their governor in Kūfa, are the defenders.

Section 3

> When the time for noon prayer draws near, Ḥusayn comes out of his tent, dressed in waistcloth, cloak and sandals. He delivers a speech, where he explains that he has come because the people of Kūfa have written to him and called on him to become their leader (*imām*), and that he is willing to fulfill that mission or to return, if they like. The Kūfans remain silent, but they accept to pray with Ḥusayn leading the prayers. After the prayer the two groups resume their former positions.

In Section 3 the thread of the narrative from Section 1 is taken up again. Two events are central in this section. One is the coming together in prayer (3:3), the other is the speech that Ḥusayn gives (3:2). The fact that the two groups pray together is significant from at least two perspectives beyond its obvious meaning in the *piety* code of fulfilling a religious obligation. The first is the fact that the two groups come together and then separate again in a *spatial* sense. The prominence of the spatial code is obvious in this section. Both at the beginning and at the end the spatial opposition is emphasized; in the beginning it is the statement about the spatial opposition between al-Ḥurr and Ḥusayn that takes up the story from Section 1 (3:1), and at the end it is said that they return to their previous positions after the common prayer (3:4).

The second perspective is the implications of the prayer and what happens immediately before and after it. This scene concerns the *authority* code as well as the *piety* code. When the two parties pray together, they manifest that they consider each other to be brethren in faith, and thus to be of one community. In early Islam, the membership of the community was most clearly displayed through participation in the common prayers. One of the most important means of showing where one's political loyalties were was prayer, or refusal to pray, behind a certain authority.[17] In this

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[17] This is exemplified a number of times earlier in the story, see for example Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 234, 260; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 24–25, 53. For a general discussion of prayer as sign of unity and identity, see van Ess, *TG*, vol. 1, 17–19. See also Kister, "Concepts of Authority," esp. 122.

case, however, the behavior of the Kūfans makes it clear that they do not accept Ḥusayn as a political authority. By accepting to pray behind him they acknowledge his spiritual superiority, but their conduct before and after the prayer shows that they did not recognize his political leadership. That Ḥusayn is allowed to lead the common prayer, then, is a manifestation of religious, but not of political unity. So, the act of prayer, which is often an act which manifests the piety *and* authority codes, here becomes a manifestation of piety only. Of course, the prayer is still a political act, in that the group manifests their communal identity through it. But it is not an act whereby Ḥusayn's political authority is expressed. That is made clear by the attitude of the Kūfans to his speech.

There are, furthermore, two additional oppositions in the spatial code: one between Ḥusayn's staying in Makka and his coming towards Kūfa, and the other between his offer to continue to Kūfa or to return to the Hijāz (3:2). These oppositions are of course related to the opposition between the Kūfans' invitation and the rejection of him, acts which have both political and religious bearings. In his speech, Ḥusayn recalls their urgent call on him to come as religio-political leader; their present rejection of him is expressed through their silence after the speech. In the invitation and rejection of Ḥusayn then, both the *piety* and the *authority* codes are manifested.

When Ḥusayn addresses the Kūfans, he gives them the choice between granting him guarantees of their support in accordance with their invitations to him and not doing so. If they accept him, he will come, otherwise he will return. The consequence of Ḥusayn's coming to Kūfa is that the people of the town will receive leadership (*imāma*), unity (*jamāʿa*) and divine guidance (*hudā*) through him. While the concept of the *imām* has a specific meaning in Shīʿism, in this context it is almost certainly used in

the general sense of political leader and juridical precedent.[18] It is important to note though, that the concept here is closely related to those of unity and guidance—concepts that connote membership of the Muslim political and religious community, which was elected by God, and this in turn implied salvation, or eternal life.[19] So, what Ḥusayn offers in this speech is spiritual life through political and religious guidance to unity in the Muslim community. He offers something they do not have, and which they have earlier expressed that they badly need. I interpret this offering of *imāma* as a homology in the *economic* code to his offering of water in Section 1:4–5, since both *imāma* and water signify different aspects of life: physical and spiritual.

Thus, many of the oppositions in Section 3 are translated into the spatial code. The spatial movements can be schematized as in Figure 4.2.

Another point of interest is the dress Ḥusayn wears when he comes out of his tent: waistcloth, cloak and sandals. As far as I have been able to figure out this kind of dress was particularly used on two occasions: during the pilgrimage to Makka (*ḥajj*) and as a shroud on a dead corpse that was to be buried.[20] In the first case, it signified that the person wearing it was in a state of consecration, *iḥrām.* In this state killing was prohibited, and the *muḥrim* himself (the person in *iḥrām*) was inviolable.[21] In the case of

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[18] Dakake, "Loyalty," 113–114. For *imām* as legal precedent (rather than political leader), see Calder, "Significance."

[19] For the importance of unity in the early Islamic society, see van Ess, *TG*, vol. 1, 7–19. For the role of the *imām* as source of unity and guidance, see Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 31–42, and Calder, "Significance," esp. 263.

[20] For the dress worn during *ḥajj*, see almost any introduction to Islam, or Wensinck and Jomier, "Iḥrām"; for *izār* and *ridā'* as shroud for dead bodies, see Grütter, "Bestattungsbräuche," pt. 2, 83–84. I am grateful to John Nawas, Leuven University, who brought this article to my attention. In this and the following sentences I use past tense when describing the significance of the clothes during *ḥajj* and burial. The same meaning is attached to the dress today, however.

[21] This interpretation of the dress is indicated by Howard in Ṭabarī, *History*, 93 n.330 referring to Wensinck and Jomier, "Iḥrām" See also Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1, 555a, *ad "ḥurma."*
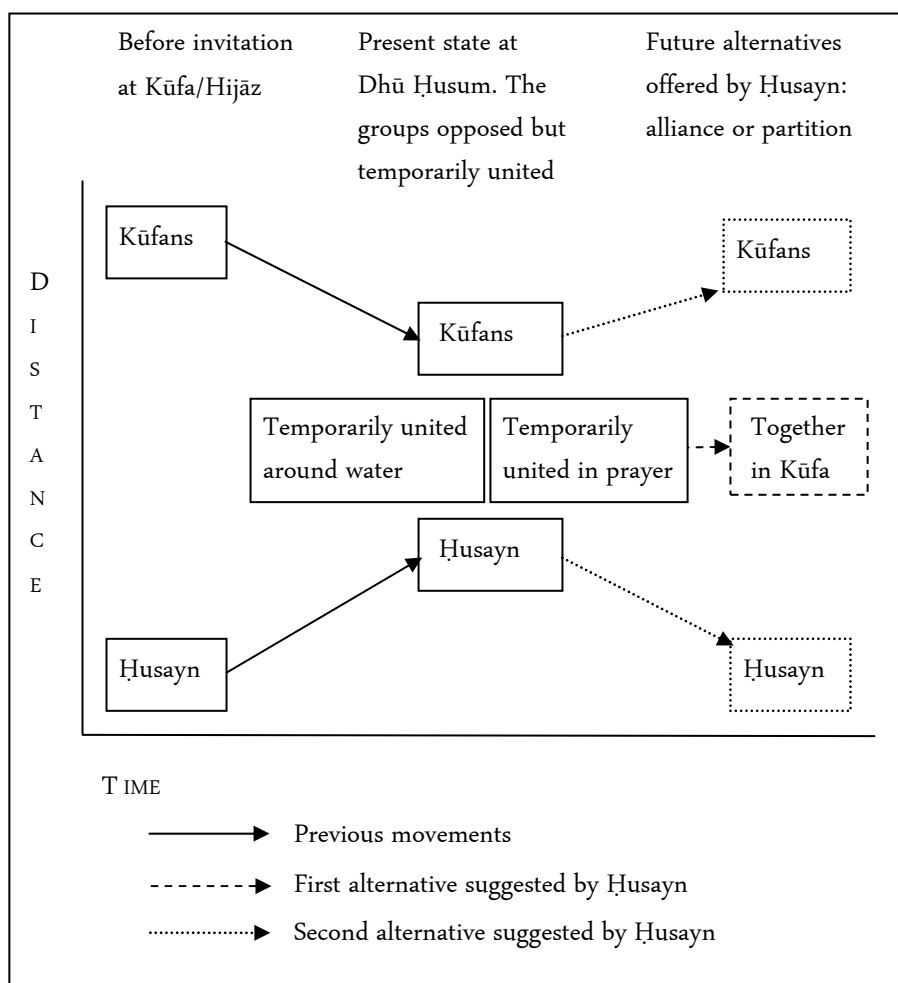
Figure 4.2. *Spatial movements in Section 3.*

the dead person the dress, together with the washing and perfuming of the body, had the significance of bringing it into a state of spiritual purity, *ṭahāra*. It was meant to show that the deceased was prepared to meet his Lord at the Judgment, and ready to enter Paradise.[22] As I have understood it, though, this kind of dress has never been connected to the normal *ṣalāt*,

22 Grütter, "Bestattungsbräuche," esp. pt. 1, 161–162, 168–170; pt. 2, 79–87.

although during the prayer the believer temporarily enters the state of *iḥrām*.[23]

The remark about Ḥusayn's dress thus points in two directions, as I interpret it. On the one hand it signifies that, like a *muḥrim* he wants to achieve peace and is inviolable, (even though he is not formally in a state of *iḥrām*). In this aspect it stands in stark opposition to the mention of the dress of war that he and his followers wear in Section 1:4. This interpretation gains support from a number of places in the Text of Reference (notably in his discussions with al-Ḥurr in Section 5 and 8), as well as in the story at large, where it is explicitly stated that Ḥusayn wants peace, or where his inviolability (*ḥurma*) is mentioned.[24] On the other hand his dress signifies his preparedness for death. It happened that Muslim warriors, who expected that they would die on the battlefield, i.e. die as martyrs, wore their shroud in the battle.[25] In this sense Ḥusayn's dress refers forwards in the Text of Reference, where, in Section 7:1 he talks of martyrdom as something to be desired, and in his reply to the warning issued by al-Ḥurr (Section 8). It also corresponds to an episode later in the story, where, the night before the battle, he and his followers prepare themselves for death by washing themselves with perfumed water, which was the normal practice when preparing dead bodies for burial.[26] The connotations of Ḥusayn's dress can be schematized as in Figure 4.3.

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[23] Wensinck, "Iḥrām"

[24] I will return to the question of Ḥusayn's inviolability.

[25] Grütter, "Bestattungsbräuche," pt. 2, 79. This interpretation was also suggested to me by Professor Julie Meisami in an e-mail message in reply to a question at the discussion list H-MIDEAST-MEDIEVAL@H-NET.MSU.EDU, May 5, 2005.

[26] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 327; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 121; For this practice in general, see Grütter, "Bestattungsbräuche," pt. 1, 161–170.
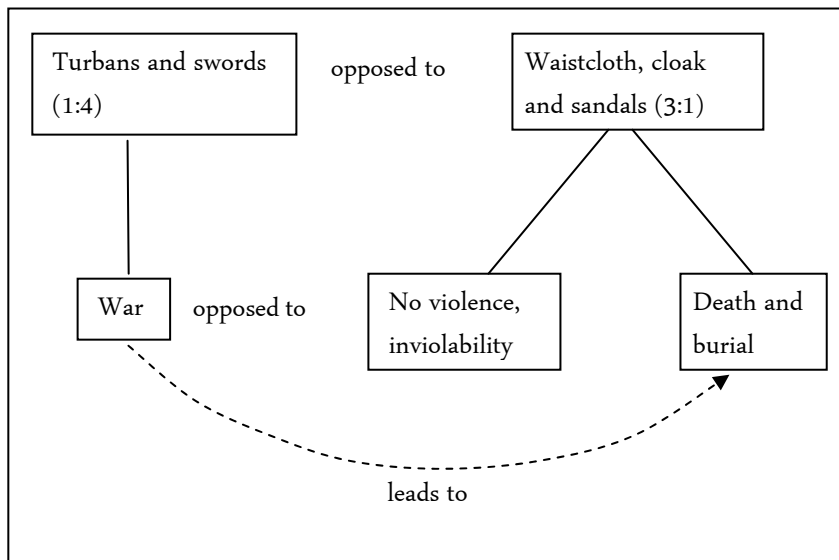
Figure 4.3. Connotations of Ḥusayn's dress in Sections 1 and 3

Section 4

> At time for afternoon prayer, Ḥusayn commands his followers to make ready for departure. Then he leads the prayer for both groups, and gives a second speech. This time he talks about the rights of the *ahl al-bayt* to rule, over against that of the Umayyads. Again, he makes clear that he is prepared to leave the Kūfans if they have changed their minds from what they expressed in their letters to him. After the speech, when al-Ḥurr questions the existence of the letters, Ḥusayn shows two saddlebags full of letters from the people of Kūfa. Al-Ḥurr says he has been ordered to bring Ḥusayn to the governor Ibn Ziyād in Kūfa, but Ḥusayn refuses to go with him.

In Section 4, Ḥusayn makes a new move across the boundary of enmity, first by leading al-Ḥurr and his men in prayer, then by speaking to them. The narrative structure of Ḥusayn's speech is revealing (see Figure 4.4). It can be said to consist of two conditional sentences, one at the beginning of the speech (*C 1* in Figure 4.4) the other at the end (*C 2* in Figure 4.4), both beginning with the Arabic conjunction *in*, "if". These sentences deal with what will happen if the Kūfans accept or reject Ḥusayn. Between

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C 1	If (*In*)
	you fear [God]
	and recognize the rights of those to whom they are due
	God will be more satisfied with you
S	We are the family of the house [of Muḥammad], more entitled to the authority of this government over you
	than (*min*)
	these pretenders who claim what does not belong to them and have brought tyranny and enmity among you
C 2	If (*In*)
	you dislike us
	and are ignorant of our rights, so that your view is different from what came to me in your letters and what your messengers brought
	I will leave you

Figure 4.4. Ḥusayn's second speech paradigmatically arranged.
C 1, C 2 = Conditional sentences. S = Statement

them is a sentence (*S* in Figure 4.4) in which Ḥusayn states the respective merits and demerits of his own family and "these people" by which must be understood the present government, the Umayyads. The parallel structure of the speech is very clear. The Arabic preposition *min*, "than", acts like a pivot. The text above this word deals with aspects of taking Ḥusayn as leader; that below treats aspects of taking "these people" as leaders. The central statement *S* first opposes Ḥusayn, one of the *ahl al-bayt* (in this context the *ahl al-bayt* must be interpreted as the family of Muḥammad),[27] to the "these people, (the Umayyads). Secondly, it states that the former are entitled to authority, whereas the latter are pretenders who bring tyranny and aggression. Thus, there are two oppositions in the central statement. The first is expressed in the *genealogical* code:

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[27] See Appendix II n.9.

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the *ahl al-bayt* / these people (the umayyads),[28]

the second in the *authority* code:

legitimate government / illegitimate government.

The sentence expresses a plain analogy, which can be expressed as follows:

the *ahl al-bayt* : legitimate government :: the Umayyads : illegitimate government

A closer look at the two conditional sentences *C 1* and *C 2*, reveals the structure shown in Table 4.2. The upper part of the table shows the first conditional sentence *C 1*; the lower part the second *C 2*. Arranged in this way, it becomes clear that the oppositions and translations between the different codes cooperate to bring forth the message that Ḥusayn wishes to

Table 4.2. *Paradigmatic arrangement of conditional sentences.*

	Col. 1	Col. 2	Col. 3	Col. 4
C 1	If	you fear God (*Piety code*)	and recognize the rights of those to whom they are due (*Authority code*)	God will be more satisfied with you. (*Piety code*)
C 2	If	you dislike us (*Authority code*)	and are ignorant of our rights, and your opinion has now changed from what came to us in your letters and what your messengers brought, (*Authority code*)	I will leave you. (*Spatial code*)

Note: *C1* and *C2* = Conditional sentences (see Figure 4.4).

convey. When the table is read horizontally, the clauses within each of the sentences correspond with each other, so that

fear of God $\equiv$ recognizing the rights of those to whom they are due $\equiv$ God's satisfaction [29]

in *C 1*, and

dislike of *ahl al-bayt* $\equiv$ ignorance of their rights or change of opinion $\equiv$ Ḥusayn leaving

in *C 2*.

In *C 1* this means that, what is expressed in the piety code in the first clause ("fear of God"), is expressed in the authority code in the second ("recognizing the rights . . ."), and then again in the piety code ("God's satisfaction"). In other words, the piety code is translated into the authority code and then back to piety code again. In *C 2* there is a similar translation between the first two clauses, which are in the authority code, and the third which is in the spatial code.

Read vertically, Table 4.2 shows that a metaphorical translation between piety code and authority code occurs in column 2, and one between authority code and spatial code in column 4. At the same time the values of the clauses are negated, so that what is expressed as positive in *C 1* is negative in *C 2*:

fear of god (+) $\rightarrow$ dislike of *ahl al-bayt* (-) [30]

in column 2, and

God's satisfaction (+) $\rightarrow$ Ḥusayn leaving (-)

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[29] In formulas used in this text, the symbol $\equiv$ should be read "corresponds with."

[30] In formulas used in this text, the arrow ($\rightarrow$) should be read "is translated into." The plus and minus signs indicate that the statement has positive or negative value.

in column 4. In column 3 no translation takes place, since both clauses are in the authority code. The negation, however, is there, so that the two clauses are opposed:

recognition of the rights of those to whom they are due (+) / ignorance of the rights of the *ahl al-bayt* or change of opinion (-)

In summary, then, the Kūfans are once again given the choice to accept or reject Ḥusayn as political leader. This time, however, the arguments that Ḥusayn put forward in favor of choosing him, are not only that they have called on him. More prominent in this speech is the genealogical and the piety arguments. Ḥusayn is of the *ahl al-bayt* and therefore has divine sanction for taking up the rule. If the Kūfans fear God, a *sine qua non* for every Muslim, they must accept him as political leader, and God will be satisfied.[31] If they chose to reject him he will leave them—by implication a sign of God's dissatisfaction.

When Ḥusayn has given his speech, al-Ḥurr tells him that he knows nothing about the letters that Ḥusayn referred to. Ḥusayn produces two saddle-bags full of letters, but al-Ḥurr denies that they (he and his men) have written them. Until now, no difference has been made between various groups of Kūfans. Here it becomes clear that there are differences among them. Furthermore, the fact that al-Ḥurr refers to his superiors, and that he has been ordered to bring Ḥusayn to Kūfa, is a first indication that he is not happy about his task. He is not there totally voluntarily, but because he is commanded to. Ḥusayn also makes it perfectly clear to al-Ḥurr that he does not want to go to Kūfa as a prisoner.

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[31] For an excellent recent survey over the notion of "fear of God" (*taqwā*) in the Qurʾān, see Ohlander, "Fear of God."

Section 5

> When Ḥusayn and his group set out to leave, al-Ḥurr and his men block the road for them. Ḥusayn curses al-Ḥurr, but the latter refuses to return the curse out of reverence for Ḥusayn and his mother. Al-Ḥurr wants to bring Ḥusayn to Ibn Ziyād in Kūfa and they begin to quarrel. At last they reach a compromise that Ḥusayn will go neither to Kūfa nor back to Madīna, but take a third way, while al-Ḥurr and his group will follow him. Al-Ḥurr hopes God will relieve him of the affair.

The *spatial* opposition between Ḥusayn and al-Ḥurr is retained and even strengthened when the latter hinders Ḥusayn and his group from going on in the direction they whish to journey. It is not said where Ḥusayn wishes to go at this point—the alternatives are to continue to Kūfa or return to the Hijāz. At this time the point is not in which direction he wants to travel but the fact that that he is stopped from going where he wants to, and that the compromise between the two antagonists means that a third alternative is chosen instead.

The *genealogical* code is applied in the quarrel between the two men. Ḥusayn curses al-Ḥurr through his mother ("May God deprive your mother of you"[32]), but al-Ḥurr refuses to return the curse and to mention Ḥusayn's mother in that context, since he can only say the best thing possible about her (5:2). The implied argument is that she is the daughter of the Prophet and therefore must not be cursed. She is above all other Arab women. It is obvious that al-Ḥurr highly reveres the *ahl al-bayt*, the family of the prophet. In this attitude I see another indication of the inviolability ascribed to Ḥusayn because of his ancestors.

The incident gives a clue to al-Ḥurr's desire to compromise rather than fight with Ḥusayn, and to the interpretation of his last statement in this section that he wishes that God would relieve him of the affair with

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[32] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 299; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 94.

Ḥusayn (5:3–4). Here al-Ḥurr explicitly manifests his hesitancy about the whole issue and his wavering loyalty to the Umayyads.

In the *social* code Ḥusayn and al-Ḥurr are again opposed to each other. Al-Ḥurr still has the role of an official, who acts on the orders of Ibn Ziyād, whereas Ḥusayn is, from their point of view, a rebel who is to be imprisoned. When the discussion is about to escalate to a fight, al-Ḥurr suggests a compromise which consist of a temporal truce while he waits for new instructions, and the quarrel is settled.

The structures of the *spatial* code and the *social* code thus correspond. Both spatially and socially al-Ḥurr makes a turn which corresponds more closely with his genealogical preferences.

Section 6

Then follows a third speech, which Ḥusayn delivers at al-Bīḍa. He says that it is incumbent upon every believer to correct sinful authorities, and that the present government is evil. Being the grandson of the Prophet, he has the right to put things right more than anyone else. If the people of Kūfa keep their promises, they will be righteous. If not, it is a way of acting which is well known of them, and in the past they have done so towards his relatives. Thus, they will violate not only their oaths, but also their eternal lives.

The most obvious opposition in Section 6 is not that between al-Ḥurr and Ḥusayn, as in the previous sections, but that between the Umayyads and Ḥusayn. When the Umayyads are described in Ḥusayn's speech, the strongest language possible is used: "these [authorities] have cleaved to the obedience of Satan and have abandoned obedience to the Merciful . . . .", to mention only two of the accusations he makes (6:2). Ḥusayn, on the contrary, is characterized by his blood-relationship with the Prophet and, hence by implication, by his righteousness (6:3).

Yet, it seems to me that the Umayyads are not the main target of this sermon. Their role is rather to legitimate Ḥusayn's insurrection and his

leadership of the people of Kūfa. Since the authorities are so corrupt, it is Ḥusayn's duty to correct them (6:3). For this he needs the help of the Kūfans. They have given Ḥusayn their pledge, and if they adhere to it, they will attain rectitude and loyalty from Ḥusayn and his family. The problem is that they are completely unreliable, however. Treachery is what must be expected from them. This is how they have behaved before towards the *ahl al-bayt*. In fact, Ḥusayn says, it would be an act of credulity to be deceived by them. By denying Ḥusayn their help, they have rejected their portion of the reward in the hereafter that they would have gained through this action (6:4).[33]

Ḥusayn also uses the Prophet to legitimize his claims. Firstly, the whole speech starts with a prophetical *ḥadīth*, the implication of which is that Ḥusayn has the right to correct the present government; secondly, Ḥusayn calls attention to his position as the grandson of Muḥammad and thereby as the heir of the Prophet, who can provide guidance to rectitude (*rushd*), and as an exemplar (*uswa*), just as the Prophet was[34]; and thirdly, he applies a passage from the Qur'ān, originally referring to Muḥammad, on himself and his family:

> Those who swear fealty to thee swear fealty in truth to God; God's hand is over their hands: Then *whosoever breaks his oath breaks it but to his own hurt*; and whoso fulfils his covenant made with God, God will grant him a mighty wage.[35]

According to the mainstream of Islamic exegetical tradition, this verse talks about the treaty of Ḥudaybīya, where, in a situation of distress,

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[33] That the words *fa-ḥaẓẓakum akhṭa'tum wa-naṣībakum ḍayya'tum*, "Thus you have mistaken your fortune and lost your destiny" (Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 300; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 96), refer to the hereafter, is not entirely obvious. In this matter I follow Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 107.

[34] See Qur'ān 33:21. Later in the story, Ḥusayn recalls this function of the Prophet to the lives of the believers. Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 324; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 118.

[35] Qur'ān 48:10 (italics added).

Muḥammad renews the pledge of loyalty (*bayʿa*) with his followers by putting their hands together.[36] The point of the verse quoted is that when Muḥammad and his followers clasped their hands, God held his hand over them and the pledge of loyalty was thus to God as well as to Muḥammad. Ṭabarī follows this interpretation in his commentary to the verse.[37] Thus, the person to whom pledge is given is Muḥammad, and giving the oath of allegiance to Muḥammad is giving it to God; there is a translation between the authority code (loyalty to Muḥammad) and the piety code (loyalty to God). The words in the quotation, which I have italicized, are quoted verbatim in Ḥusayn's sermon. To Ṭabarī and to most other people reading this text, the Qurʾānic passage alluded to, and the situation at Ḥudaybīyya, must have come to their minds. Ḥusayn actualizes the metonymic relationship between himself and the Prophet, and takes on himself and the members of his family the role of the latter. The implication is that a pledge to Ḥusayn is a pledge to God. This can be described by the formula:

loyalty to Muḥammad = loyalty to Ḥusayn (authority code) → loyalty to God
(piety code)

(*Metonymic relationship in the genealogical code*)

Whoever fulfills that pledge will receive "a mighty wage" from God, and he who violates it does so "to his own hurt". These last words refer, according to the commentary of Ṭabarī, to the loss of Paradise.[38]

In this section, then, there are a number of translations between the *authority* and the *piety* codes. For example, in the analogy

keeping pledge : breaking pledge :: keeping pledge : breaking pledge
with Ḥusayn   with Ḥusayn   with God   with God

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[36] For the concept of *bayʿa*, see Tyan, "Bayʿa"

[37] Ibn Isḥāq, "Life of Muḥammad," 505–506; Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ*, vol. 13, pt. 26, 99-100.

[38] Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ*, vol. 13, pt. 26, 100.

the left component is in the *authority* code, whereas the right one is in the *piety* code. It can be argued that the relation between the left and the right components is more than a mere analogy. To the mind of reader who sympathizes with Ḥusayn and his cause, a political pact with himself is not only *like* a pact with God; it *is* a pact with God. However, this analogy is, I suggest, another example of how metaphor is changed into metonym through translations between codes that are made to appear as identical. The structural process in this section can be schematized as follows:

keeping pact with Ḥusayn   →   keeping pact with God
(*authority code*)   (*piety code*)

and

breaking pact with Ḥusayn   →   breaking pact with God
(*authority code*)   (*piety code*)

Now, the pact with God is, of course, a reference to the divine covenant with the humans that is often mentioned in the Qurʾān and discussed in exegetical and theological literature.[39] Thus, keeping and breaking the pact with God is equal to Islam or unbelief respectively, and although Ḥusayn does not explicitly accuse anyone for being non-Muslim, he gets very close to it in this speech. The main argument in this section, then, is that the choice between the alternatives that the people of Kūfa have before them is of utmost importance. The political decision they make is a decision for or against the family of the Prophet. Therefore, it is claimed, it is also a decision for or against God, and it has eternal consequences for each individual. The argument is outlined in Figure 4.5.

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[39] On this theme, see e.g. van Ess, *TG*, vol. 4, 592–594; Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 8–12.
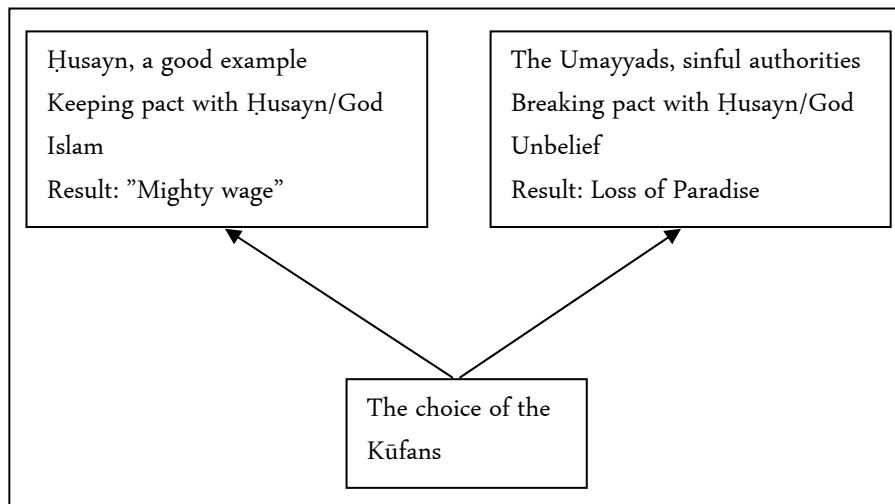
Figure 4.5. The choice of the Kūfans according to Section 6

Section 7

A fourth speech is related; again, it is delivered at Dhū Ḥusum. In this address, Ḥusayn regrets that the world has changed for the bad. The believer rightly desires to meet God. Martyrdom is preferable to life with "the oppressors". One of his companions respond, speaking for all his men, and asserts their loyalty to him, even to death.

In the former speeches, Ḥusayn have addressed the Kūfans. In this speech, however, the addressees are his companions, even though it is not explicitly mentioned. This sermon is completely different from the previous ones. As in the other speeches, two alternatives are given, but this time they are set before Ḥusayn and his followers rather than before the Kūfans, and his preferences are clear. Ḥusayn's quest is: Is it worth living in this corrupt world, or should one desire to meet God? Hypothetically there is the option of going on living in this world, but there is no doubt that the only acceptable option for Ḥusayn is "meeting God". Death is not undesirable; indeed it is regarded as martyrdom (*shahāda*) (7:1), with all

the privileges in the hereafter that this implies.[40] In the image of the meeting between the believer and God, the spatial and the piety codes are merged.

Ḥusayn's followers confirm his words by recognizing them as being uttered under the guidance of God. They share Ḥusayn's preference, and would rather help and support him and die, than live eternally in the present world. In speaking up in support for him, they stand in contrast to the Kūfans who remain silent after the first sermon (3:2), who do not admit that they have written the letters after the second (4:3), and who are depicted as deceitful and treacherous in the third (6:3).

Section 8

> The journey continues; al-Ḥurr tries to persuade Ḥusayn, that if he continues he will be killed. Ḥusayn says that it would be a disaster for al-Ḥurr if Ḥusayn was killed. He also tells a story of the brother of al-Aws, who is on his way to help the Prophet. When this man is warned that he might be killed, he quotes a poem which says that death is no shame for a man who dies a Muslim, striving for the good, distancing himself from those who are damned.

In Section 8 the narrative returns to where it left off before Section 6. The parties are traveling again, alongside each other. Al-Ḥurr is clearly worried about Ḥusayn. He tries to warn him that he will die if he chooses to fight. This warning is yet another sign that al-Ḥurr cares for Ḥusayn and wishes the best for him. Ḥusayn counters al-Ḥurr's warning with two arguments. The first is that it would mean a calamity to al-Ḥurr and his company to kill him (8:1). The implication in the *genealogical* code is that Ḥusayn, as the grandson of the Prophet, is inviolable. The second argument is that he is not scared by death. As the poem says, there is nothing wrong in dying

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[40] The concept of martyrdom in Islam is discussed by many modern scholars. See for example Kohlberg, "Shahīd," with bibliography. In spite of the fact that Ḥusayn has become the archetypal martyr in Islam, this is the only occurrence of the word *shahāda* referring to Ḥusayn in this story, as far as I have been able to detect.

as a Muslim who strives for the good with right intentions and who supports righteous men with his life (8:2).

This section reaffirms the notion expressed in Section 7, that for the righteous Muslim, death is nothing to be afraid of. In both these sections, then, death is regarded as martyrdom, i.e. physical death leads to spiritual life. This transformation, however, is conditioned by the religious status of the person in question. It is for the believer, the true Muslim, that this translation occurs.

Section 9

> They continue traveling, but keep separated, until they reach ʿUdhayb al-Hijānāt. A group of four men coming from Kūfa joins Ḥusayn. They are accompanied by a guide, al-Ṭirimmāḥ b. ʿAdī, who eulogizes Ḥusayn in a poem. Al-Ḥurr tries to stop the four men from joining Ḥusayn, but when the latter displays his intention to fight for their right to join him, al-Ḥurr desists.

In Section 9 the *spatial* and the *social* codes are prominent. The spatial opposition between Ḥusayn and al-Ḥurr remains; the somewhat cryptic formulation of the first sentence (that al-Ḥurr and his followers travel on one side and Ḥusayn on the other) must be understood that they travel in separate groups. This opposition is accentuated by al-Ḥurr's attempt to hinder the four men from Kūfa from joining Ḥusayn. Still, al-Ḥurr is not prepared to fight him.

The four men coming from Kūfa to join Ḥusayn stand in stark contrast to those Kūfans who invited him, but who has let him down. Ḥusayn's threat to al-Ḥurr, that he will defend them with his own life (9:3) agrees with his speech in Section 6, where he promised loyalty unto death to those who supported him (6:3). In al-Ṭirimmāḥ's poem the *genealogical* and the *piety* codes are found. Ḥusayn is said to be person of high ancestry, with all the virtues this involves, and he is also sent on a God-given mission (9:2).

Section 10

Ḥusayn asks the four men about the state of affairs in Kūfa. They inform him that the nobles have been bribed to go over to Ibn Ziyād, and that the rest of the people will soon do so. Ḥusayn's messenger Qays b. Mushir al-Ṣaydāwī has been killed by Ibn Ziyād. Ḥusayn weeps when hearing that, and quotes a verse from the Qurʾān about the death of those who are faithful. He prays to God, asking Him to give them all a place in Paradise.

The *authority* and *piety* codes are once more the most evident codes in this section. In the former, the treachery of the Kūfan nobles and the fickleness of the common people are set against the complete loyalty of Ḥusayn's second envoy, Qays b. Mushir. The same opposition is subtly set up between the loyalty of the four men coming from Kūfa and the people remaining there by Ḥusayn's words: "Tell me the news of the people you *have left behind you*" (10:1). Here the *spatial* code is translated into the authority code:

leaving the Kūfans behind   ⟶   joining Ḥusayn
(*spatial code*)   (*authority code*)

The translation between authority code and piety code is brought up in the scene where Ibn Ziyād tries to make Qays curse Ḥusayn and his father in order to save his life (10:2). Qays does the opposite, invokes God's blessing upon them and curses Ibn Ziyād and his father instead. Thus:

manifesting loyalty to a person   ⟶   invoking god's blessing upon that
(*authority code*)   person (*piety code*)

A similar translation is made in the analogy implied in the quotation from the Qurʾān and Ḥusayn's prayer attached to it. The quote is a few words from verse 33:23. The context of this verse is supposed to be the Battle of

the Trench, when the unbelievers assailed the Prophet and his supporters at Madīna.[41] The full verse and the beginning of the following one goes:

> Among the believers are men who have been true to their covenant with God; *some of them have fulfilled their vow by death, and some are still awaiting and they have not changed in the least*, so that God may recompense the truthful ones for their truthfulness and chastise the hypocrites.

Ḥusayn quotes the part I have italicized. The whole context distinguishes between the true believers and the hypocrites (ar. *munāfiqūn*), i.e. those Muslims who have declared their allegiance to the Prophet, but then refuse to take an active part on his side when they encounter hardships, such as fighting against unbelievers. This is an example of the application of a passage from the Qurʾān—which originally referred to the Prophet Muḥammad—on Ḥusayn, very similar to that in Section 6:4.

loyalty to Muḥammad = loyalty to Ḥusayn (authority code) → loyalty to God
                                                                (piety code)

(*Metonymic relationship in the genealogical code*)

Loyalty to God, in its turn, leads to paradise.

One last thing that I want to point to is Ḥusayn's weeping over his killed envoy. Thus, this long *khabar*, that I have called the Text of Reference ends with Ḥusayn shedding water, just as it begun with his drawing and giving water. I will return to the symbolism of water in a further section.[42]

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[41] Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ*, vol. 11, pt. 21, 152–153 (to Qurʾān 33:9).

[42] See below, pp. 176–184.

Prominent Structural Features
in the Text of Reference

In the previous part, I have listed oppositions and translations between codes that were found in each of the sections of the Text of Reference. In this part I intend to look at the Text of Reference as a whole from the perspective of the most important codes used.

Four codes stand out as they are much more frequently used than the others: the spatial, the authority, the piety, and the genealogical codes. In spite of the prevalence of the spatial code in the Text of Reference, it is obvious that the last three are much more important. The role of the spatial (as well as the other codes, not mentioned here) is mainly that of emphasizing and enforcing the message that the text attempts to bring across through the three main codes. It is an instrumental code, i.e. spatial matters are not crucial for the questions discussed in the text, but are rather employed to carry on the narrative and to call attention to significant events, processes and values through translations, mainly between this code and the authority and the social codes. It is used in this way in Sections 1, 2 and 3 (see the analysis of these sections above). In Figure 4.3 above, the movements recounted in the previous sections are summarized, together with the alternatives that Ḥusayn presents to the Kūfans. In Sections 4–10, it becomes clear that none of Ḥusayn's alternatives are realized. Al-Ḥurr wants to bring him to Kūfa, though as prisoner and not as *imām*. When Ḥusayn refuses, a compromise is negotiated, and the two groups continue in a third direction leading neither to Kūfa nor to the Hijāz. The text explicitly states that they do not travel together as a unity, however, but as two separate (and hostile) groups (9:1). In Section 10, the spatial code is used to emphasize the break with the Kūfans of the four men that join Ḥusayn, (10:1).

In two places the spatial code is directly translated into the piety code. In Section 4, the structure of Ḥusayn's speech directly connects his presence with God's satisfaction (4:2), and in Section 7 Ḥusayn's desire for truth and wish to leave the hardships that a life under a tyrannical government causes him, makes him longing to meet God.

However, it is through the authority, the piety and the genealogical codes that the message is conveyed, and it is these codes which are most important in the text. Throughout the text, Ḥusayn is described as doing his utmost to convince the Kūfans that his genealogical relationship to Muḥammad entails his political authority over them, and that political loyalty to him is as essential for a true Muslim as loyalty to Muḥammad. This is most explicitly spelled out in the speech in Section 4:2, where the argument is that he, as a member of the "family of the house [of Muḥammad]" (ar. *ahl al-bayt*) has the right to rule, and that it is an act of piety to acknowledge this. A similar statement is made in Section 6:3–4, although in different words. In this section, the connection between the codes is supported by quotations from the Qur'ān. By implication the same connection between genealogical code, authority code and piety code is made in Section 10:2. Here too, a quotation from the Qur'ān is used.

The argument that Ḥusayn delivers according to the text, is an analogy that converts metaphor to metonym, i.e. it makes the arbitrary connection (at least it might seem arbitrary to the outsider) between Ḥusayn, political loyalty and piety look perfectly natural (which, of course, it is to Ḥusayn himself and his followers). This connection is made through his kinship with the Prophet Muḥammad. As we saw above, all Muslims in Ṭabarī's time regarded the political loyalty of the first generation of Muslims to the person of Muḥammad as one of the primary acts of piety.[43] Those who refused to accept him as political and spiritual leader simply were not Muslims and those who paid lip-service to him were labeled hypocrites. Two of

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[43] See above, pp. 43–45.

the Qurʾānic references in the Text of Reference (Qurʾān 48:10 in Section 6:4, and Qurʾān 33:23 in Section 10:2) allude to this idea. The connection

loyalty to Muḥammad (*authority* code) = loyalty to God (*piety* code)

is thus already established and obvious to all Muslims. Ḥusayn's problem is that this connection is not naturally transferred to himself by all (or even most) Muslims. From his point of view, the loyalty which is endowed on Muḥammad should be given to himself, since he is the male person closest in kin to Muḥammad. Consequently, he tries to drive home the following three-part analogy:

the loyalty of : the authority :: Ḥusayn as : Muḥammad as ::
the Kūfans : of Ḥusayn :: grandson : grandfather ::
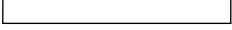
⎣_____⎦   ⎣_____⎦
 Authority code   *Genealogical code*

Prophethood of : the supremacy
Muḥammad : of God

⎣_____⎦
 Piety code

i.e. the loyalty of the Kūfans is to the authority of Ḥusayn as the kinship between Ḥusayn and Muḥammad which is as the prophethood of Muḥammad is to the supremacy of God. In other words: as Muḥammad has received his authority through his relationship with God, so Ḥusayn has received his authority over the Kūfans through his relationship with Muḥammad. However, in the speeches recorded in the Text of Reference, Ḥusayn refers not so much to his own authority as to that of the *ahl al-bayt*, the family of Muḥammad as a whole, a family of which he is now the head (4:2, 6:3). The formula can thus be simplified:

the loyalty of : the authority of :: the loyalty of : the supremacy
the Kūfans : the *ahl al-bayt* :: the *ahl al-bayt* : of God

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Here, the importance of the shift between metonym and metaphor is obvious, since the same analogy can be written in the following way:

the loyalty of . the loyalty of .. the authority of . the supremacy
the Kūfans : the *ahl al-bayt* :: the *ahl al-bayt* : of God

In the first instance, the metonym is the political relationship between the Kūfans and the *ahl al-bayt* on the one hand, and between the *ahl al-bayt* and God on the other, whereas metaphorically the political loyalty of the Kūfans towards the *ahl al-bayt* is associated with the submission in piety of the *ahl al-bayt* towards God and the political authority of the *ahl al-bayt* is connected to the divine supremacy. In the second formulation of the analogy, new "categories" or "codes" have been created, and the metonyms and metaphors are switched. In other words, the metonymic relationships within the authority and piety codes respectively at the same time shows the congruency between the divine authority and the political authority on the one hand, and between the human submission (*islām*) to God and the loyalty of the subject to the ruler on the other. (See Figure 4.6.)
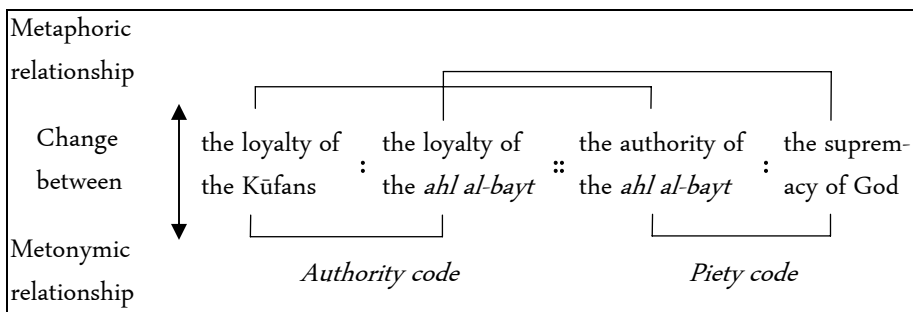
Figure 4.6. Change between metaphoric and metonymic relationships in the text.

The impact of this analogy is strengthened by the promises of God's reward to those who acknowledge the relation expressed in it, and threats of his punishment to those who do not. In the second speech related in the Text of Reference, Ḥusayn explicitly promises God's satisfaction over the Kūfans if they accept him (4:2). In other places he refers to God's sanc-

tions. For example, by expanding the injunction of loyalty towards Muḥammad to encompass the whole of the *ahl al-bayt*, and specifically to Ḥusayn himself, the divine rewards and punishments promised in the Qurʾān can be applied on his contemporaries, (as is done in Section 6:3–4, and especially in the verse there quoted form the Qurʾān).

In summary, then, the analysis of the relationship between the authority, the genealogical and the piety codes in the Text of Reference reveals that the piety code has precedence over the other two codes; the political standpoint of a person ultimately determines that person's relationship to God—the most important relationship to any human being. In this respect, two related oppositions are obvious in this text:

God's reward (*al-janna*) / God's punishment

and

Islam / unbelief

Of these two oppositions, the "reward/punishment" opposition must be considered stronger than the "Islam/unbelief" one, since the former pertains to eternity whereas the latter relates to life here on earth and is time-bound.[44] As long as one lives in this world it is possible to change course of life, to improve and become a good Muslim, or to deviate and backslide. After death, however, there is no turning back. What is done is done and one will have to take the consequences of one's temporal life. It is important to note, though, that the concept of unbelief is actually not found in the text. Although, in the account in Section 6:2, Ḥusayn comes very close to it, he never actually accuses the Umayyads or the people from Kūfa for being unbelievers. On the contrary he prays together with the latter (3:3;

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[44] The question about the eternity of Hell, or of the Fire as punishment, has been much debated among Muslim theologians. See van Ess, *TG*, vol. 4, 545–549; Haddad and Smith, *Understanding of Death*, 93–95. This is a theological discussion, however, and the notion of a temporal punishment in the hereafter is not found in this text.

4:1), an act which manifests their religious and communal unity. Instead of denouncing their faith, he implies that they are hypocrites, a label which is used on those who profess Islam but have deviated from the truth and are close to unbelief. The concept of hypocrisy can, thus, be regarded as a mediator between Islam and unbelief.

A third opposition in the piety code that is found in the text is

rectitude (*rushd*) / deviation

This opposition concerns individual Muslims, and is therefore weaker than the Islam / unbelief opposition, which are categories applied on all of humanity. Rectitude is the correct position for a true Muslim, while deviation amounts to hypocrisy. Between the two poles of this opposition, it is possible to enter a new mediating position: that of guidance (*hudā*), which leads from deviation to rectitude, to Islām and, finally to God's reward.

As mentioned above, there is also a difference between the first opposition (God's reward / God's punishment), which pertains to the hereafter, and the following ones, which concern life here on earth. Thus there is a fourth opposition in the piety code,

this world (*al-dunyā*) / the hereafter (*al-ākhira*)

which corresponds to the opposition

physical life / physical death.

The oppositions discussed above can be schematized as in Table 4.3, where the three first oppositions are situated on the vertical axis, and the fourth on the horizontal.[45] The outline in Table 4.3 is one way to represent the main part of a basic Islamic theological structure which is found not only in the text analyzed here, but which functions as an underlying

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[45] In this discussion and in Table 4.3, I have indicated the Arabic terms found or clearly alluded to in the text.

Table 4.3. *Basic oppositions in the piety code*

The hereafter (*al-ākhira*)	This world (*al-dunyā*)	
Physical death	Physical life	
God's reward (*al-janna*)		
	Islam	
		Rectitude (*rushd*)
		Guidance (*hudā*)
		Deviation
	Hypocrisy (*nifāq*)	
	Unbelief	
God's punishment		

Note: The shaded column denotes life after death.

grid in the message of the Qurʾān and, hence, in most Islamic theological and historical thinking.[46] In Lévi-Straussian terms, this basic structure would be the Islamic "armature".[47] It is not surprising, of course, that this structure should mould the Karbalāʾ Drama as it is presented in Ṭabarī's *Taʾrīkh*, given the theological position and status of its author. The point is that according to the Text of Reference, Ḥusayn fills the terms of the "This-world" oppositions (the oppositions in the unshaded fields to the right in Table 4.3) and its mediations with a specific political content. Thus, in Ḥusayn's messages these oppositions are homologous to other

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[46] I do not claim that this is a complete image of a basic Islamic structure. It can probably be elaborated much more. Other categories, such as the Qurʾānic *ḍalāla* (wandering astray) might perhaps be included in the general structure. This term differs from "deviation" used in the figure, in that the former is used as an opposite to guidance, and thus very close to, or even synonymous with unbelief in the Qurʾān and the exegetical literature, (Toronto, "Astray") whereas the latter term is my own abstraction of the descriptions of Ḥusayn's Muslim enemies in the Text of Reference. Furthermore, terms in this model can be substituted for others, as will be shown below.

[47] Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 199.

opposed concepts in different codes. The most important political opposition which, as I will argue presently, is congruent with the third opposition in Table 4.3, i.e.

rectitude / deviation (piety code),

is

keeping pledge with Ḥusayn / breaking pledge with Ḥusayn (authority code)

The mediating position between these opposite poles is the third attitude towards Ḥusayn that is recorded in the text: the ambivalence and doubt of al-Ḥurr.[48] There is, thus, a metaphoric relationship between the polar terms in the oppositions, so that

$$\text{rectitude : deviation :: } \frac{\text{keeping pledge}}{\text{with Ḥusayn}} : \frac{\text{breaking pledge}}{\text{with Ḥusayn}}$$

but there is no direct relationship between the mediating terms "guidance" and "ambivalence to Ḥusayn". Whereas the former pertain to the process of revelation (in this case through Ḥusayn), the latter talks about the attitude of individual Muslims toward this revelation.

This opposition in the political code is derived from a stronger opposition in the piety code, as I have shown in the analysis of Section 6 above:

keeping pledge to God / breaking pledge to God (piety code)

and here the mediating concept is the same as in Table 4.3, i.e. "hypocrisy". In Table 4.4, the religio-political content of the structure found in the Text of Reference is displayed.

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[48] Al-Ḥurr had never entered a pact with Ḥusayn, and therefore had nothing to break. If he is to be included in this triad of oppositions and mediation, which I think is correct, then the opposition would perhaps be better expressed in the terms having pledge / not having pledge. This, however, would not articulate the message of treason which is so important in the Text of Reference. The discussion of the attitude of al-Ḥurr is developed in the following section.

Table 4.4. *Basic oppositions in the piety and authority codes*

The hereafter (*al-ākhira*)	This world (*al-dunyā*)	
Physical death	Physical life	
God's reward (*al-janna*)		
	Keeping pledge with God	
		Keeping pledge with Ḥusayn
		Guidance (*hudā*)
		Breaking pledge with Ḥusayn
	Hypocrisy (*nifāq*)	
	Breaking pledge with God	
God's punishment		

Note: The shaded column denotes life after death.

So far I have discussed the *words* of Ḥusayn in the Text of Reference. In the following, I will analyze three of the *actions* that he performs in the same text, actions which supplement the words and reinforce the message that he wants to convey to the Kūfans. Of course it is impossible to completely separate the actions from the words, so I will have to return to his utterances as well, but the focus of the following pages will be on what he did rather than on what he said. The first action to be analyzed is his sharing of water in Section 1, the second his wearing of the special dress when speaking to the Kūfans in Section 3, and the third is his leading the two opposed groups in prayer, also in Section 3.

In Section 1, it is reported that Ḥusayn distributes water to the thirsty enemy force, and he also gives instructions to the ignorant ʿAlī b. al-Ṭaʿʿān about how to get it and drink it (1:5). Water in Arabic and the wider Islamic culture of course has the connotation of physical life, and of divine

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reward in the hereafter, whereas lack of water, heat and thirst, is the opposite. Numerous descriptions of Paradise and Hell in the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth literature are examples of this.[49] Had this incident been recorded alone, it might not have had any other meaning than to show Ḥusayn's understanding of the bodily needs of the thirsty men in al-Ḥurr's group; in itself a good act by which Ḥusayn not only manifests his compassion, but also shows that he does not want to fight. In the story as a whole, however, water as a symbol for life is so important that it is difficult to believe that it had a different connotation in this section, where it occupies such a conspicuous position.[50] I therefore suggest that the image of Ḥusayn giving water to thirsty men and animals is a symbol, in the economic code, for his potential as a channel of guidance and eternal life from God to humankind. This interpretation is further supported by the fact that the water distribution recorded here structurally corresponds to a number of instances throughout the Text of Reference, where Ḥusayn makes several different offers that conduce to eternal life. Thus, in Section 3:2 he offers his own presence (spatial code), which means *imāma*, including unity and guidance to the Kūfans, if they are loyal to him. Similarly, in return for their loyalty, he promises rectitude (*rushd*), the loyalty of his family, and himself as a model to follow (5:3). In summary, when Ḥusayn gives water he also provides instructions or guidance about how to get it, and this leads to physical life. Correspondingly, when he offers himself as *imām*

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[49] For concise descriptions of Paradise and Hell in classical Muslim thought, see e.g. Haddad and Smith, *Understanding of Death*, 84–90. Water and the fertility associated with it is also a Persian symbol for kingship. In earlier parts of his *Ta'rīkh*, where Ṭabarī deals with the history of the Sassanids, he relates how the rule of a good king brings water to rivers and irrigation canals, and how water abounds. This might have consequences for the image of Ḥusayn as political leader as well, as suggested to me by Ulrika Mårtensson. See Mårtensson, "True New Testament," 100–102; Mårtensson, "Discourse," 326–327; and also El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting*, 91–93 for a discussion of the same motif in other parts of Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh*.

[50] I will presently deal with the symbol of water in the story as a whole.

and as model, this also means guidance, unity, rectitude,[51] etc., i.e. life in the hereafter.

In the economic code, the corresponding opposition to Ḥusayn's giving of water is, of course, the lack of water of the Kūfans related in Section 1, with the corollaries heat (*ḥarr*), thirst, and (by implication) ultimate physical death. In the spatial code this corresponds to the absence of Ḥusayn, and in the authority and piety codes to the lack of *imāma*, and by implication to disunity and deviation from the truth that ultimately lead to the displeasure and punishment of God.

The image of Ḥusayn giving water to the thirsty Kūfans is, thus, very powerful. Its more obvious significance is that it manifests Ḥusayn's desire for the physical life of his brethren in faith, but it is also a metaphor of the guidance to real, eternal life that he is able to give them. The following analogy is at work here (see also Table 4.5).

giving water : physical life :: guidance : eternal life.

The second argumentative action to be analyzed is Ḥusayn's wearing of waistcloth, cloak, and sandals during his first speech and the following prayer (3:1). In the analysis of Section 3 above, I have proposed that this dress carries a double message: that Ḥusayn is in a state of iḥrām, which implies non-violence and inviolability on the one hand, and that he anticipates death and burial as a martyr on the other. The underlying idea of both these notions is that the person who wears this dress does so as a sign of spiritual purity, a purity that renders him ready to meet God.[52] The interesting thing in this text is that Ḥusayn wears this dress outside of its

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[51] The word *rushd* has strong connotations of guidance, and this is how Howard has translated it (e.g. in Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 96). Like the English word "rectitude" it has to do with "following the right direction" (see Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1, 1089a).

[52] *Iḥrām* is a more extended state of sacrosanctity than is *tahāra* (ritual purity), but the former implies the latter. For the concept of *iḥrām* see Wensinck, "Iḥrām"; Wensinck and Jomier, "Iḥrām." For the idea of the purity of the martyr, see Grütter, "Bestattungsbräuche," pt. 1, 161–162; Kohlberg, "Shahīd," 204.

Table 4.5. *The structural position of Ḥusayn's giving water to the Kūfans.*

The hereafter (*al-ākhira*)	This world (*al-dunyā*)	
Physical death	Physical life	
Lack of water	Possession of water	
God's reward (*al-janna*)		
	Keeping pledge with God	
		Possession of water
		Ḥusayn giving water
		Lack of water, thirst
	Hypocrisy (*nifāq*)	
	Breaking pledge with God	
God's punishment		

Note: The shaded column denotes life after death.

normal use in the *ḥajj* or (somewhat less normal) in battle. His wearing of it indicates that for him, there is continuity between life and death; whether alive or dead he is close to God—thus, in a sense, the opposition on the horizontal axis in the figures above is not real to him. His proximity to God renders him inviolable when alive, and opens the way for him to Paradise when dead. As I have noted above, it is indicated in several places that his relationship to God is a function of his kinship to the Prophet. The significance of Ḥusayn's dress is outlined in Figure 4.7.

Furthermore, as Ḥusayn argues in his speeches, this translation between the piety and the genealogy codes brings about the further translation into the authority code; because of his sacrosanct state, Ḥusayn should be given political authority. It is an act of piety to be loyal to him. However, if the Kūfans fail to keep their part of the alliance and the whole affair ends with the death of Ḥusayn, this is nothing that he is afraid of. He will die as a martyr and will go to meet God.
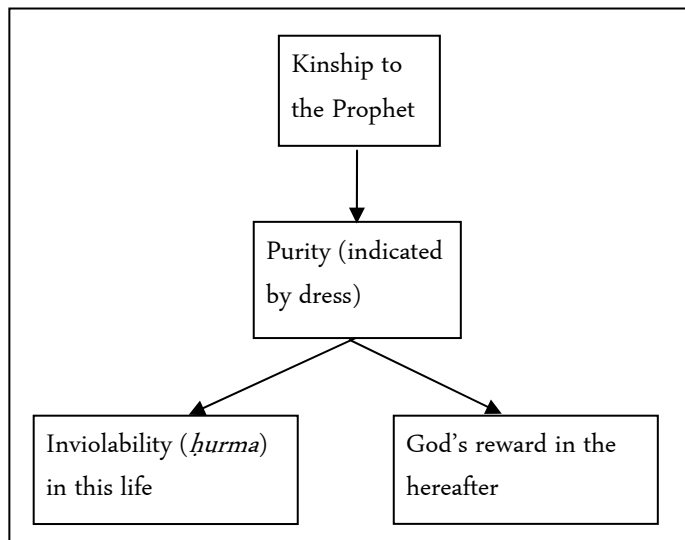
Figure 4.7. Significance of Husayn's dress in Section 3.

In Islamic theological thinking the relationships between the concepts of life, death, this world and the hereafter, are closely interlaced. Haddad and Smith begins a discussion of this matter with the words: "In the Qur'ān *dunyá* and *ākhira* are related both in the sense of 'now' and 'later,' and in the specifically moral juxtaposition of negative and positive."[53] Life in this world is created by God for the human race to live and benefit from, and is therefore sacred, good, and enjoyable. Thus, it is the duty of the human being to show gratitude towards God and to carry out His will. In particular taking the life of other humans is not allowed, except in specific cases.[54] In this sense *al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*, life in this world, is positive. When contrasted to *al-ākhira*, however, *al-dunyā* becomes a moral concept which, in comparison with the former, is relatively negative. By giving one's sole attention to this world and forget the hereafter, the human loses sight of what is really important and will earn God's punishment. In this sense the world is the arena for God's testing of the humans and for His

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[53] Haddad and Smith, *Understanding of Death*, 6. I have based the following discussion on life and death mainly on this book, as well as on Arnaldez, "Ḥayāt" and Netton, "Life."

[54] See e.g. Qur'ān 17:33.

guidance of them. As long as one lives in this world, there is the possibility to change one's course of life, but after death there is nothing one can do to improve one's record before God. "The world per se is not to be rejected—the reward of the hereafter is for those who do not neglect their duties in this world—but one's vision should focus on the things to come."[55]

In a Qur'ānic parable, life in this world is likened to rain which makes the earth flourish, but when the humans believe they are in control of the earth and what it provides, God destroys all that grows (Qur'ān 10:24).[56] Life in this world is fleeting. For the person who has the wrong perspective, i.e. for whom the focus is on the temporal, life ends with death in the sense that what awaits is terrible torment in hellfire. If one focuses primarily on the hereafter, however, death is nothing to fear, as the consequence is God's reward, i.e. true life.

Several passages in the Text of Reference illustrate these perspectives on life and death, on this world and the hereafter. It is perhaps most obvious in Section 8, where al-Ḥurr tries to warn Ḥusayn that he will be killed if he continues, and Ḥusayn replies that there is no shame in dying for Islam. It is very clear that al-Ḥurr has the wrong perspective, and Ḥusayn the correct. Ḥusayn goes even further in the speech in Section 7, where he talks of the deteriorated state of the *dunyā* and wishes to meet God, i.e. to die physically. In this context the concept of martyrdom (*shahāda*) is mentioned as the death of the true believer.[57] It is against this backdrop that Ḥusayn's act of giving water to the Kūfan troop should be seen. Just as the water sent by God in the abovementioned Qur'ānic parable promotes

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[55] Haddad and Smith, *Understanding of Death*, 7.

[56] Discussed in Arnaldez, "Ḥayāt" and Netton, "Life."

[57] Usually the fact that the person who dies is a believer is not a sufficient condition for classifying the death as martyrdom. Other qualities, such as dying in a regular fight for Islam, are also required (see Kohlberg, "Shahīd"). Such conditions are not explicitly mentioned here, though probably implied.

physical life, so does that which is distributed by Ḥusayn. Like all earthly life it is a life which does not last. However, the water that Ḥusayn shares is also a metaphor for the guidance that he will give to all those who are loyal to him, a guidance that brings eternal life.[58] Similarly the dress that Ḥusayn wears in Section 3, gets part of its significance through the ideas of life and death discussed above; the spiritually pure is near to God, whether physically alive or dead.

I will only briefly touch upon the last significant action in the Text of Reference. That is when Ḥusayn leads the Kūfans and his own supporters in prayer at Dhū Ḥusum (3:3). This act also has two dimensions: firstly, by praying together, the two otherwise hostile groups recognize each other as Muslims, and secondly, through it Ḥusayn is recognized as *imām* in the limited sense of being spiritually superior and thus fit to lead the prayers, although he is not accepted as political leader by the Kūfans. I will return to this in a further section.

Mediation in Text of Reference

In the Text of Reference, then, Ḥusayn tries to convince the Kūfans that they should accept him as their political and spiritual leader, their *imām* (Sections 3:2; 4:2; 6). His main argument is that he is the most prominent member of the Prophet's family, and that loyalty to the Prophet Muḥammad automatically involves loyalty to himself. This is a pious deed, which results in God's satisfaction and reward. As I have already indicated, the text records three different attitudes towards him, manifested by the people around him. Most obvious is the rejection of him by the Kūfan force as a whole, but there is also the opposite reaction, the unflinching

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[58] It is interesting to note that, the verses just after the Qur'ānic parable discussed, there follows a passage on divine guidance, the last judgment and the final outcome (Qur'ān 10:25–30). Of course we cannot know whether Ṭabarī or any other author or editor of the Karbalāʾ Drama had this passage in their minds when writing this, but the structural affinities are striking.

loyalty displayed by his own followers. The third approach is that of al-Ḥurr, the commander of the Kūfan force, who is very ambivalent towards him.

The attitude of the Kūfans is most obviously manifested in the spatial code, when it is reported that they occupy a position spatially opposite to Ḥusayn (1:4; 3:1, 4; 5:1). It is also shown by their silence after Husayns first speech (3:2). Furthermore, we are told that Ḥusayn's own view of the Kūfans becomes increasingly pessimistic as the story goes on. In the first sections it is reported that he tries to show his good will towards them, though being on his guard: he gives them water, he dresses in a way that shows he has peaceful intentions and his first speech (3:2) is very open towards them. The second speech (4:2) is more outspoken than the first, and there are hints that their political stand is of religious importance. In the third speech (Section 6), Ḥusayn is outright polemical against the Umayyads and describes the people of Kūfa as traitors on the verge of damnation. The final blow against Ḥusayn's hopes of winning the confidence of the Kūfans comes in Section 10, when the group of four men arriving from Kūfa informs him about the disloyalty of the people in the town.

Contrasted to the fickleness of the Kūfans is the steadfastness the people who adhere to Ḥusayn and are prepared to defend him to death. In the Text of reference, this is most obvious in Sections 7 and 10. In Section 7, the followers of Ḥusayn declare that they are prepared to die for him (7:2); and in Section 10, the loyalty unto death of Ḥusayn's second envoy to Kūfa, Qays b. Mushir, is set against the Kūfans, who are bought by the governor.

The third kind of attitude towards Ḥusayn is that of al-Ḥurr. He has been put in charge of this vanguard force by the Kūfan chief of police, and has apparently received clear orders to bring Ḥusayn to Kūfa (2; 4:3; 5:3). He is, however, very reluctant to enforce his command by the use of violence against Ḥusayn (5:3, 4; 9:3). As I have argued above, it is quite clear

that the reason for this position is the high esteem that he holds of the *ahl al-bayt* (5:2).

We have seen that a mediation between two opposites can be said to be present when a third element is introduced between the poles of the opposition, an element that partakes of the relevant characteristics of both the polar elements; a mediation which allows for a transition between opposites is positive and one that keeps them strictly apart is negative.[59] In the Text of Reference, I suggest, there are obvious instances of mediation. One is Ḥusayn's distribution of water (1:4, 5), where there are the two opposites: Ḥusayn has water and is not thirsty, but the Kūfans lack water and are thirsty. When he distributes water to the Kūfans, Ḥusayn's supply decrease and the Kūfans' increase, i.e. after the distribution, it could be said that the Kūfans have water and Ḥusayn lacks water. His giving of water thus partakes in the characteristics of both opposites and can be said to be a mediating action. The ideal, that no person should be thirsty, is accomplished, the mediation can be said to be positive. This mediation takes place within the economic code. As I have suggested above, the real importance of this mediation is found in its metaphorical sense which is expressed in the piety code. In this code, Ḥusayn's distribution of water is an image of his ability to give guidance from spiritual death to spiritual life; in structuralist terms, to bridge between categories. This mediation is explicitly expressed by Ḥusayn in his speeches in Sections 1–6.

In the Text of Reference, then, Ḥusayn mediates between the opposites on the vertical axes of Table 4.3 and Table 4.4 above, such as "deviation/rectitude" and "breaking pledge/keeping pledge". He is a mediator in that he shares the characteristics of both oppositions: he performs an act that is perceived by Muslim theologians to be very problematic in that he instigates a rebellion; but he also has a special relationship with God by virtue of his being the grandson of the Prophet. He thus partakes in both

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[59] See above, pp. 85–86.

good and evil, and is fit to mediate between the two opposites. Furthermore, he makes possible the movement from the negative category (deviation, or breaking the pledge with God, or spiritual death, or however it is termed) to the positive (rectitude, keeping pledge, or spiritual life) through his guidance. So, his mediation is clearly positive in this sense. But, Ḥusayn, I would argue, is a typical example of a mediator where the dichotomy between positive and negative mediation is not really applicable. Seen from one perspective his mediating role is positive, i.e. it brings together categories or allows for movement between them. From another it is negative, in that it keeps the poles of the oppositions apart. It is nowhere a question of bringing the two opposites together outside the figure of Ḥusayn, but on the contrary we learn that he forces the people to choose between accepting and rejecting him as religious and political leader, thereby choosing eternal life or eternal death. The two categories are thus kept strictly apart, except in Ḥusayn himself.

Beyond the Text of Reference: The Attitudes toward Ḥusayn

In the following sections I intend to leave the Text of Reference and take a closer look at the rest of the Karbalāʾ Drama in light of the results of the previous analysis.[60] Structures of symbols that are significant in the Text of Reference will be pursued in the rest of the story, and I presume that at least some of these will recur in the story at large. In order to facilitate the search for structures, I will investigate the text from three different perspectives found in the Text of Reference. These are: 1) the attitudes towards Ḥusayn of the people around him; 2) the image of Ḥusayn transmitted in the story; and 3) water and blood. I am aware that other perspec-

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[60] For a summary of the story, see Appendix I.

tives might have been chosen, but I am quite confident that these three will cover the most important aspects of the story. The three perspectives overlap, and some repetitions are inevitable, but I will try to make these as few and as short as possible.

In the previous section we have seen that the attitudes toward Ḥusayn from the people around him are a very important theme in the Text of Reference, and the same must be said about the story at large. Because of the brevity of the Text of Reference, the attitudes displayed are quite static: rejection, loyalty and doubt. But when the story is read in its entirety, it becomes clear that the feelings toward Ḥusayn in many cases change over time.

The opponents of Ḥusayn can be arranged in two categories: those who invited him to Kūfa then to betray him and leave him without support, or even join in the battle against him; and the "declared enemies of the *Shiʿa*, the officials and the supporters of the Umayyad government."[61] The most obvious example of changing attitudes is the former group: those who invited Ḥusayn to Kūfa to come and lead them in a revolt against the governor of the province. Under the pressure of the government they turn around completely, and even some of those tribal leaders (*ashrāf*) who signed the letters of invitation later joined in the battle against him.[62] The treachery of these persons is one of the main themes of the story, and is utterly condemned. We have seen how, in the Text of Reference, Ḥusayn reproaches them, but already in what precedes the Text of Reference many allusions are made to the unreliability of the Kūfans, and Ḥusayn is warned not to lay his life in their hands.[63] So also in the second half of the

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[61] Wellhausen, *Religio-Political Factions*, 114–115.

[62] On some of these men, see Howard's notes in Ṭabarī, *History*, 23–26. For an attempt at historical reconstruction of the role of the *ashrāf* in Kūfa in the times of the rightly guided caliphs ʿUmar and ʿAlī, see Hinds, *Studies*, 1–28.

[63] E.g. Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 221, 232–233, 272–276, 277–278; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 8, 22–23, 65–69, 71.

story, where Ḥusayn and his companions directly accuse them for treachery and caution them about the divine sanctions that their behavior might incur.[64] In spite of these charges, none of the traitors repent and join Ḥusayn in the battle. The fact that Ṭabarī leaves the accusations unanswered (except for one or two retorts from the Kūfans just before the battle begins) and produces no traditions that counter them, is a clear indication that he agrees with them. In fact, nothing positive is said about those Kūfans that betray Ḥusayn.

The people of the second group—consisting of the officials of the Umayyad government—are depicted with somewhat greater nuance. However, two of the main characters of this group, the governor ʿUbaydallāh b. Ziyād and his advisor Shamir b. Dhī al-Jawshan are described with few, if any, positive traits. Ibn Ziyād is characterized as a ruthless leader who is prepared to take any measures to enforce his will on the people of Kūfa and Ḥusayn. His obscure origin is often alluded to and contrasted to the high lineage of Ḥusayn.[65] The main responsibility for Ḥusayn's death is ascribed to him. From a religious point of view, he is portrayed as, if not pious so at least fulfilling his religious obligations. In fact, the only fault that can certainly be attributed to him is his inability to recognize the inviolability of the family of the Prophet. One of the atrocities that he is charged with is poking with his cane in the mouth of Ḥusayn's severed head.[66] On another occasion he publicly calls Ḥusayn "the liar who is the son of a liar . . . ." thus abusing both Ḥusayn and his father ʿAlī.[67] His

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[64] E.g. Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 328–331, 334–335, 352; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 122–126, 128–129, 146–147.

[65] Ibn Ziyād's was the son of Ziyād b. Abīhi (Ziyād, the son of his father). The latter had received this strange name because his father was unknown. Ziyād's mother was Sumayya (who is sometimes describes as a prostitute). Hence, Ibn Ziyād is often referred to as Ibn Sumayya. See Hasson, "Ziyād b. Abīhi."

[66] E.g. Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 370–371; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 165. I will discuss this presently.

[67] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 373; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 167.

attitude to the *ahl al-bayt* is a severe mistake, however, and I will have the opportunity to return to it.[68]

The portrait of Shamir b. Dhī al-Jawshan is drawn without any extenuating features. Besides his ruthlessness and dislike for Ḥusayn, he is also described as religiously corrupt.[69] It is he who convinces Ibn Ziyād to continue the fight with Ḥusayn, even though a peaceful compromise is at hand.[70] In the battle of Karbalāʾ, he is given charge over the left wing of the Kūfan army, but his outrageous behavior against the women and children in Ḥusayn's camp makes even his subordinates and fellow commanders despise him.[71] Even though Ḥusayn is not killed by his hand, he leads the final attack against him and urges the soldiers to kill him.[72]

The caliph Yazīd is depicted in a more ambivalent manner, with a number of reports that contradict each other. On the one hand, he takes stern measures against Ḥusayn, who refuses to give him his pledge of allegiance. When the former governor of Kūfa, Nuʿmān b. Bashīr, is found too lenient towards those who have ʿAlīd sympathies, Yazīd replaces him with the unyielding Ibn Ziyād, who is given more or less free hands to secure the town.[73] After the battle, when the focus is turned on to Yazīd again, a number of reports are quoted where Yazīd holds Ḥusayn responsible for his own death.[74] In one report Yazīd argues for his own case after the death of Ḥusayn:

> Do you know in what way [Ḥusayn] was mistaken? He used to say, "My father ʿAlī is better than [Yazīd's] father; my mother Fāṭima is better than his

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[68] For Wellhausen's positive assessment of Ibn Ziyād, see above p. 38.

[69] See e.g. Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 362; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 157, where Ḥusayn accuses him for having no religion or faith the last day, and Shamir does not reply to this charge.

[70] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 315; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 109–110.

[71] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 346–347; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 141.

[72] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 362–363, 365–366; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 157–158, 160.

[73] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 239–240, 270–271; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 30–31, 63–64.

[74] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 374–383; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 169–176.

mother; my grandfather the Apostle of God is better than his grandfather, and I am better than he and have more right for this affair than he has." . . . As for his statement that his grandfather is better than my grandfather, by my life, no one who believes in God and the Last Day would regard any one among us as an equal or a rival to the Apostle of God. However, he has been mistaken through his lack of understanding, for he did not read: "Say: O God, Master of the kingdom, You give the kingdom to whomsoever You wish and You take away the kingdom from whomsoever You wish. You strengthen those whom You wish and You make lowly whomsoever You wish. In Your hand is the decision. Indeed, You have power over everything."[75]

The point in Yazīd's argument is that ancestry is not an argument in favor of any political position. God distributes political power to, and withdraws it from whom He whishes. Piety includes revering the Prophet, though not necessarily recognizing his descendants' rights to political power. But piety, from the Umayyad perspective, also includes accepting the ruler that God has given power. To Yazīd and those loyal to him, then, there is no obvious connection between the genealogy code on the one hand, and the piety and authority codes on the other. Thus the analogy discussed above:

the loyalty of   :   the authority of   ::   the loyalty of   :   the supremacy
the believers   the *ahl al-bayt*   the *ahl al-bayt*   of God

which is the basis for Ḥusayn's argument, is not recognized by the Umayyads and their supporters.

On the other hand, we are told that Yazīd laments the death of Ḥusayn. In one report the messenger of Ibn Ziyad brings him the news of the battle, together with Ḥusayn's severed head. The report continues:

Yazīd's eyes filled with tears, and he said, "I would have been satisfied with your obedience without killing al-Ḥusayn. May God curse Ibn Sumayyah [i.e.

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[75] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 380–381; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 174, quoting Qur'ān 3:26. Howard's translation. See also Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 376, 380; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 170, 174. For an assessment of the general Umayyad position on this question, see Sharon, "Development," esp. 135–136 and n.33.

Ibn Ziyād]. By God! If it had been I who had accompanied him, I would have let him off. May God have mercy on al-Ḥusayn."[76]

This, and similar statements favor the view that Ḥusayn would have been freed or at least left alive, had he been allowed to pledge his allegiance directly to the caliph rather than to the governor, a compromise which Ḥusayn suggested before the battle.[77] Yazīd also treats Ḥusayn's surviving relatives very well, in spite of certain frictions.[78] He returns their stolen goods and provides them with everything they need before sending them back to Madīna.

In many ways, then, the image of Yazīd given by Ṭabarī is that of a ruler who has taken acceptable and appropriate measures against one of his rebellious subjects whom he, nevertheless, loves and honors. The ambivalence of Yazīd towards Ḥusayn's death is concentrated in the following verse, recited by Yazīd when he gets the news of Ḥusayn's death. It is quoted in no less than four different reports throughout the story:

"[Swords] split the skulls of men who are dear
    to us; but they were more disobedient and oppressive."[79]

There are, however, subtle indications in the text, which makes me believe that Ṭabarī's view of Yazīd was not that neutral. On two occasions, it is reported about Yazīd, just as it is about Ibn Ziyād, that he abuses Ḥusayn's head with a cane.[80] The editorial arrangement of these reports suggests that Ṭabarī consider them important and wants to convey the message that the

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[76] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 375; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 169. Howard's translation. Statements like this are found in Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 375–376, 378–379, 382; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 169–170, 172, 175–176.

[77] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 313–316; Ṭabarī, *History*, Vol. 19, 108–110.

[78] A quarrel between Yazīd and Ḥusayn's sister Zaynab, is reported in Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 377–378; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 171.

[79] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 282, 376, 380, 382; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 76, 170, 174, 176.

[80] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 282–283, 382–383; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 76, 176.

inviolability of Ḥusayn is neglected by Yazīd, in spite of the reports of his expressions of grief. Furthermore, in one of the reports about the positive treatment that Ḥusayn's surviving relatives get from Yazīd, Ḥusayn's daughter Sukayna says: "I never saw *a man who did not believe in God* who was better than Yazīd b. Muʿāwiyah."[81] The fact that this statement comes in the middle of an otherwise positive report about Yazīd, makes it all the more interesting. It would have been very easy for Ṭabarī to leave the report or to cut Sukayna's words out, but he has chosen not to do so. I do not want to suggest that Ṭabarī seriously claims that Yazīd was an un-believer, but the already tarnished image of the latter as a sincere and pi-ous Muslim is certainly further stained by the inclusion of Sukayna's statement.

So, my view of Ṭabarī's description of Yazīd is that, although the latter express his grief about the death of Ḥusayn, these expressions get a tinge of hypocrisy through Ṭabarī's arrangement of the reports.[82] It is easy for Yazīd to be benevolent to Ḥusayn's relatives when the real claimant for the caliphate is gone. Yazīd's political status is never put in question by Ṭabarī, however. On this matter he is remarkably silent. I interpret this to mean that he considers Yazīd to be a legitimate though not very good ruler.

To the group of Umayyad officials must also be counted the two com-manders of the contingents sent to intercept Ḥusayn: al-Ḥurr b. Yazīd, and ʿUmar b. Saʿd. Both are hesitant to go against Ḥusayn. Al-Ḥurr's reluc-tance has been discussed above. As for ʿUmar, he has just received an ap-pointment to become governor over Rayy when he is commanded by ʿUbaydallāh b. Ziyād, the governor of Kūfa, to lead the army against Ḥusayn. When he hesitates, ʿUbaydallāh threatens to withdraw the ap-pointment, and ʿUmar decides to obey the orders and go against Ḥusayn.

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[81] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 381; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 175. Howard's translation. The Arabic of the words that I have italicized goes: *rajulan kāfiran bi-ʾllāh*.

[82] For a more thorough discussion of the editorial arrangement of the reports that relate the events after the battle and its implication, see Appendix III.

However, he does so against the sincere advices of men around him. His nephew, for example, says to him: "By God! It is better that you should abandon all your world, the wealth and the earthly authority that you have than that you should meet God with the blood of al-Ḥusayn on your hands."[83] Before the battle, ʿUmar is prepared to accept the suggestions of compromise that Ḥusayn makes to him. ʿUbaydallāh, however, instigated by Shamir b. Dhī al-Jawshan stops all such attempts, and in the end ʿUmar carries out the orders of the governor and commands his troops to kill Ḥusayn, cut off his head, and even mutilate his headless corpse. He is very distressed, though, and when Ḥusayn is about to be killed, Ḥusayn's sister Zaynab watches him, and she later relates: "I could see ʿUmar's tears flowing down his cheeks and beard as he turned his face away from me."[84] Almost at the end of Ṭabarī's account, ʿUmar takes measures to rid himself of blame for the death of Ḥusayn by trying to prove that he has had to act on the orders of Ibn Ziyād.[85]

Al-Ḥurr, on the contrary, understands the gravity of the situation for his own spiritual welfare. When the battle is about to begin, he deserts the Kūfan force and joins Ḥusayn. It is related that, as he gradually moves to a position from where he is able to ride across to Ḥusayn's camp, a man standing nearby him asks him about his suspicious behavior. Al-Ḥurr replies: "By God! I am giving my soul the choice between heaven and the fire of hell. By God! I will not choose anything before heaven, even though I am cut to pieces and burnt."[86] When he reaches Ḥusayn, the latter says to him: "You are a free man (al-ḥurr), as your mother named you. You are a free man (al-ḥurr) in this world and in the next, God willing."[87] This is

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[83] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 308–309; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 104. Howard's translation.

[84] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 365; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 160. Howard's translation.

[85] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 385; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 178. For another instance where ʿUmar articulates his agony, see Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 319; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 114.

[86] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 333; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 127. Howard's translation.

[87] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 334; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 128. Howard's translation.

the second occasion in the story, in which a pun is made of al-Ḥurr's name. In the Text of Reference (Section 1), the name al-Ḥurr and the word for heat, *ḥarr*, are juxtaposed. There, al-Ḥurr is associated with the death that heat and thirst symbolize. In the second case, the literal meaning of the name al-Ḥurr, "freedom", is used. Al-Ḥurr is thus depicted as moving from the heat of death to the freedom of a life with God in the hereafter.[88] Schematically, this movement can be expressed thus:

al-Ḥurr ≡ *ḥarr* (heat) ≡ death ⟶ al-Ḥurr ≡ *ḥurr* (freedom) ≡ life

In conclusion, the prospect is bad for those of Ḥusayn's opponents who do not repent. Ṭabarī closes the main section of his narrative with two reports about a mysterious voice which is heard in Madīna, reciting a poem. It says:

O men who have rashly killed Ḥusayn,

    do expect torture and chastisement.

All the people of heaven,

    Prophets, angels and tribes prosecute you.

You have been cursed by the tongue of the Son of David,

    and of Moses, and the bringer of the Gospels.[89]

The words translated "torture and chastisement" are Qurʾānic terms for the divine punishment.[90] By editing the narrative so that these reports come at

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[88] Al-Ḥurr is not the only man who deserted the Umayyad force and joined Ḥusayn. Ṭabarī reports about a certain Yazīd b. Ziyād b. al-Muḥāṣir who was "one of those who had come with ʿUmar b. Saʿd against al-Ḥusayn" but had joined the latter (Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 356; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 150). The space given to al-Ḥurr's change of loyalties is incomparably greater, though, presumably because of his position in the Kūfan society and in the battle.

[89] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 385; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 178–179. Howard's translation.

[90] The words are *ʿadhāb* and *tankīl*. The first of these is the most common term for punishment and chastisement, human or divine, in the Qurʾān. The second (and different derivatives from the same root) is nearly a synonym for the first, and occurs only four times in the Qurʾān. For a discussion of

the end of an important section, Ṭabarī accords much weight to them. The reports would not be needed if the only purpose of the story had been to give information about a historical event. Ṭabarī's purpose is also moral, however, and this report, together with the very last one in the story—to which I will return later—and supported by the overall structure, conveys much of his own opinions on the matter: Those who were involved in killing Ḥusayn have committed a crime against God and will be punished for it. Now, there is nothing particular about this. The view that the death of Ḥusayn, the grandson of the Prophet, was a tragedy and an offense against God is all but unanimously held among early historians of Islam.[91] Where opinions differ, they do so mainly about who is to blame for this. Ṭabarī is careful in his judgments, but as I have suggested above, it is possible to discern his inclinations in this question through his editorial work.

Contrasted to the opponents of Ḥusayn, and especially to the Kūfans with their changing attitudes toward him, are his steadfast supporters. To this group belong his relatives and other supporters that have followed him from Makka, some who have joined him on the way (notably Zuhayr b. al-Qayn, who experiences an almost Pauline conversion in his meeting with Ḥusayn) and some people who have left Kūfa to join him.[92] Of these last mentioned are the group of four men who join him according to the Text of Reference (9:2). A few other names of people who support Muslim b. ʿAqīl in Kūfa, and later fight with Ḥusayn on the battlefield are recorded—although nothing is said about when they joined him.[93] The image of his

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these terms, see Fadel, "Chastisement and Punishment." The word *ʿadhāb* often refers to human punishment, but in this context it is clear that chastisement or punishment from God is understood.

[91] Veccia Vaglieri, "Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib," 614. See also Dakake, "Loyalty," 110.

[92] On Zuhayr b. al-Qayn and his conversion, see Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 290–291; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 85–86.

[93] Notable among them are Muslim b. ʿAwsaja (Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 249, 343; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 42, 137), ʿĀbis b. Abī Shabīb al-Shākirī (Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 237–238, 353–354; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 29, 147–148) and Abū Thumāma al-Ṣāʾidī (Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 149, 350; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 42, 144).

supporters does not differ much from that given in the Text of Reference; they are generally pictured as loyal unto death to Ḥusayn and his cause, as brave and pious, and they are promised Paradise after death.[94]

From this survey of the main characters of the story at least three different attitudes toward Ḥusayn can be discerned: that of the majority of the Umayyad officials, which is, to different degrees, negative to him or at least to his mission; that of his supporters, which is one of complete loyalty; and finally that of the Kūfans, of Zuhayr b. al-Qayn, and of the two commanders, which changes in one or the other direction as the story moves on. Before considering the structural implications of these attitudes, I have to discuss a couple of aspects of the image and role of Ḥusayn in the story.

Beyond the Text of Reference:
The Image and Role of Ḥusayn

In the section above, I have dealt with the persons around Ḥusayn. There can be no doubt, however, that the central character in the story is Ḥusayn himself. I have already analyzed his role in the Text of Reference, but in the rest of the story the special position and role of Ḥusayn is further elaborated. In the part that precedes the Text of Reference, he is, of course, considered a politically prominent person. The new caliph is anxious to get his oath of loyalty, and Ḥusayn's only true rival to political power,

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[94] It is fascinating that the women in the story—although playing minor roles with one or two exceptions—are all positive to Ḥusayn. Not one woman mentioned in the whole of the Karbalāʾ drama is opposed to him and his cause. On the contrary, we are told of women who reproach their men for their participation in the campaign against Ḥusayn. See e.g. Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 339–340, 359, 369; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 134, 153–154, 163–164. An investigation of the story from a gender perspective would probably give very interesting results, but is beyond the scope of this study.

'Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr, realizes that, as long as Ḥusayn is around, he will never obtain political supremacy for himself.[95]

Just as in the Text of Reference, Ḥusayn's claims for political supremacy are based on his genealogical and religious merits. The connection between the authority, the piety and the genealogical codes is found in many places, but are made clearer than ever in the correspondence between Ḥusayn and the inhabitants of Kūfa and Baṣra, prior to his journey toward Kūfa. In one of the letters of invitation from the Kūfans to Ḥusayn, the Kūfans write: "There is no imām over us. Therefore come, so God may unite us in the truth [*al-ḥaqq*] through you."[96] In his reply to them, Ḥusayn writes: "The statement of most of you is: 'There is no imām over us. Come, God may unite us in guidance and truth [*al-hudā wa-'l-ḥaqq*] through you.'"[97] When the same letter is referred to in Ḥusayn's speech at Dhū Ḥusum (Text of Reference, Section 3:2), only the word "guidance" (*al-hudā*) is used.[98] The use of these words recalls the numerous instances in the Qur'ān where these two concepts are used separately, or together, as in the three Qur'ānic passages where it is said that God sends his messenger (i.e. Muḥammad) with "guidance and the religion of truth (*al-hudā wa-dīn al-ḥaqq*)".[99] In the Qur'ān, and in Ṭabarī's interpretation of it, the term *hudā* normally denotes the divine revelation. Very often it is used synonymously with the Qur'ān.[100] Here, however, a guidance which goes beyond the Qur'ān (though certainly not against it, as is clear from the last sentences

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[95] As for Yazīd's concern about getting the pledge from Ḥusayn, see Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II: 216-223; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 2–10. For Ibn al-Zubayr's attitude to Ḥusayn, see for example Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 233, 274; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 23, 67.

[96] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 234; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 24. Howard's translation. Square brackets added.

[97] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 235; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 26. Howard's translation. Square brackets added.

[98] Howard translates the word *hudā* with "truth" in this place.

[99] Qur'ān 9:33; 48:28; 61:9.

[100] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, vol. 6, pt. 10, 150; vol. 13, pt. 26, 141; vol. 14, pt. 28, 112 on the verses referred to in the previous note. See also Izutsu, *Concepts*, 193–195.

of the letter to the Kūfans[101]) is indicated, since Ḥusayn is described as the *imām* that guides. As indicated in the analysis of Section 3 above, this can hardly be a reference to the Shīʿite conception of the infallible *Imām* and his guidance based on esoteric knowledge. Rather, it must be more generally understood as the guidance that the *imām* as juridical precedent can give, a guidance which leads to the truth (*al-ḥaqq*), which is often taken as a synonym for Islam.[102] In the last sentences of his letter to the people of Kūfa, Ḥusayn elaborates on the function of the *imām*, saying, "what is the imām except one who acts according to the Book, one who upholds justice, one who professes the truth, and one who dedicates himself to [the essence of] God?"[103] In this statement the inability of the present authorities to accomplish the most basic requirements of an Islamic government is implied, as is Ḥusayn's capacity to take on himself the leadership of the community.

Another letter, reportedly written by Ḥusayn to the nobles of Baṣra, contains the fullest argument for Ḥusayn's right to power in the whole story. I choose to quote it in full:

> God gave preference to Muḥammad before all His creatures. He graced him with prophethood and chose him for His message. After He had warned His servants and informed them of what he had been sent with, God took him to Himself. We are his family, those who possess his authority (*awliyāʾ*), those who have been made his trustees (*awṣiyāʾ*), and his inheritors; we are those who have more right to his position among the people than anyone else. Our people selfishly claimed our exclusive right to that. Yet we consented [to what they did] since we hated disunion and desired the well-being [of the community]. However, we know that we have greater claim to that right, which was

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[101] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 235; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 26.

[102] Crone, *Political Thought*, 21–23. For a very good study of the term *imām* as juridical precedent, see Calder, "Significance." For the concept of *ḥaqq* as synonym for Islam in the Qurʾān, see Izutsu, *Concepts*, 89, 97–101. For Ṭabarī's view of the concept of *ḥaqq*, see references in note 100.

[103] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 235; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 26. Howard's translation. Square brackets in original.

our entitlement, than those who have seized it. They have done well, set many things right, and sought truth. May God have mercy on them and forgive us and them. I have sent my messenger to you with this letter. I summon you to the Book of God [and] the Sunnah of His Prophet. Indeed the Sunnah has [almost] been killed while innovation has been given life. If you hear my words and obey my commands, I will guide you along the path of righteousness. Peace and the mercy of God be with you.[104]

In this letter the same structure of divine guidance that was identified in the Text of Reference is found, i.e. God > Muḥammad > Ḥusayn > the people.[105] Here, the genealogy code, the authority code and the piety code are again closely interrelated. The letter represents yet another attempt to make the metaphorical relationship between the codes metonymical, and this particular relationship between the codes, which to many people apparently seemed far-fetched, is made plausible.

In the part of the story that follows the Text of Reference, similar honorific characteristics are ascribed to him, by his followers, his enemies, and by himself. A few examples will suffice: According to his followers, God has purified and guided his soul, since he is of the family of the Prophet;[106] they see it as a duty towards him and towards God, and indeed a blessing to die for him;[107] he is called "one who guides, who is rightly guided (*hādi-*

[104] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 240; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 32. Howard's translation including brackets, except for the insertion of the word "and" in brackets. In Howard's translation the impression is given that "the book of God" and "the Sunnah of His Prophet" are synonymous. The Arabic text, however, has the letter *wa-*, "and," between these two sources of revelation. The translation is accordingly better rendered "the Book of God *and* the Sunna of His Prophet."

[105] See above, page 131.

[106] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 318–319; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 113. See also Zaynab's similar words about Ḥusayn and the rest of the family after the battle, in Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 371; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 165.

[107] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 322–323, 352; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 116–117, 146.

yyan mahdiyyan)";[108] the enemies are afraid to kill him, since they are "unwilling to be responsible for his death and such a dreadful sin."[109] When talking about himself, Ḥusayn traces his lineage back to the Prophet Muḥammad, and evokes the prophetic *hadīth* about his brother and himself, that they are "the two lords of the youths of the inhabitants of heaven."[110]

After the Text of Reference, there are very few explicit claims from Ḥusayn for political power. It seems that, once we are told that the Kūfans have turned against him and he lacks support for his cause, the genealogical argument is used more to plead for his inviolability, than for his right to political power.[111] In fact, the concept of the inviolability of Ḥusayn because of his kinship to the Prophet is very important in the story. As far as I have noticed, the word *ḥurma*, which has the significance of sacredness and inviolability, is used in three places in the story with reference to the *ahl al-bayt* in general and to Ḥusayn in particular.[112] One example is his final speech before the Kūfans, just before the battle, where Ḥusayn says:

> Trace back my lineage and consider who I am. Then look back at yourselves and remonstrate with yourselves. Consider whether it is right for you to kill me and desecrate my inviolability [*ḥurmatī*]. Am I not the son of the daughter of your Prophet, the son of the executor of his will (*waṣī*) and his cousin, the

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[108] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 350; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 145. The epithet "guide who is rightly guided" was commonly used of Umayyad and ʿAbbāsid caliphs as well. See Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 36–37, 80–81; Sharon, "Development," 139 n.47.

[109] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 359; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 153. Howard's translation.

[110] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 329; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 124 and n.414. Howard's translation.

[111] This has been indicated by Hodgson, "How Did the Early Shīʿa Become Sectarian?" 11. See also Dakake, "Loyalty," 107–118, for an interesting discussion of the Karbalāʾ Drama, where the author emphasizes the inviolability of Ḥusayn. Dakake, however, uses not only Ṭabarī, but other sources as well.

[112] For the meaning of the word, see Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1, 555a–b.

first of the believers in God and the man who [first] believed in what His Apostle brought from his Lord?[113]

In many other cases, the word *ḥurma* is not used, but the issue is clearly there.[114] Al-Ḥurr's concern for Ḥusayn seems to be based only on the genealogy of the latter (see above, the analysis of Sections 5, 8 and 9 of the Text of Reference) and after his desertion to Ḥusayn, he scolds the Kūfans and says:

> You have prevented [Ḥusayn], his womenfolk, his children, and his followers from the water of the flowing Euphrates, which Jews, Magians and Christians may drink, and which the pigs and dogs of the Sawād wallow in. Now they are likely to die of thirst. How wickedly you have treated the offspring of Muḥammad! May God not give you water to drink on the Day of Thirst, if you do not repent and do not desist from what you are set upon this day and this hour.[115]

This is only one of the many examples throughout the text, where Ḥusayn's inviolability is implied. It is interesting to note that even a number of the Umayyad supporters hold the notion of the inviolability of Ḥusayn, as reported by Ṭabarī. Above, I have already discussed the ambivalent attitudes of the caliph, Yazīd b. Muʿāwiya, and the commander of the main Kūfan force, ʿUmar b. Saʿd. Similar feelings are manifested by the Madīnan governor, al-Walīd b. ʿUtba b. Abī Sufyān, when he fails to get the pledge of loyalty from Ḥusayn for the new caliph.[116] Another example is the already cited passage, where the men of the Kūfan force fear to kill

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[113] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 329; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 123. Howard's translation. The word *ḥurmatī* within square brackets is added. The other two places where the word is used are Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 290 and 357; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 85 and 151.

[114] See e.g. Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 219, 308–309, 385; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 5–6, 104, 178–179, *et passim*.

[115] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 334–335; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 129. Howard's translation. Square brackets added.

[116] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 218–219; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 4–6.

Ḥusayn towards the end of the battle of Karbalā'. Ṭabarī reports that there was a long delay in the battle because "whenever one of the [Kūfan] people came against [Ḥusayn], he would turn aside from him and was unwilling to be responsible for his death and such a dreadful sin."[117]

Breaking the *ḥurma* of Ḥusayn is, thus, considered to be a crime against God. The notion of his inviolability is formed through a convergence of the piety and the genealogical codes, a convergence which most of the people in his environment, friends and foes, seem to accept.

In the face of all these noble characteristics attributed to Ḥusayn, he himself and his followers consider it a duty to support and help him.[118] In most instances, this support has a political tinge; to support Ḥusayn is to help him achieve his political goal. As I have indicated previously, there are only few records of political claims from Ḥusayn after the Text of Reference, as compared to the part that precedes it. On the other hand, the allusions to his inviolability—although not infrequent in the first part of the story—increase in number in the second half of the Karbalā' drama.[119] In the Text of Reference, these two claims come together, so that one of Ḥusayn's strongest arguments for political power is the chain of authority which runs from God through the Prophet Muḥammad to his grandson Ḥusayn. Thus, the Text of Reference acts as the point of intersection between two lines, one representing political claims, the other claims of inviolability, as in Figure 4.8.

The claim that Ḥusayn has a special status in relation to God is supported by a number of miracles reported by Ṭabarī. Twice, Ḥusayn has

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[117] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 359; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 153. Howard's translation. Square brackets added. See also Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 344, 364, 365–366; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 139, 159, 160. The same attitude was manifested towards Ḥusayn's son, 'Alī al-Akbar, when it is said that "the Kūfans were afraid to kill him." (Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 357; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 151).

[118] Dakake maintains that the call for support (*nuṣra*) of Ḥusayn is a significant theme in the story. Dakake, "Loyalty," 118–120.

[119] Dakake, "Loyalty," 117–118.
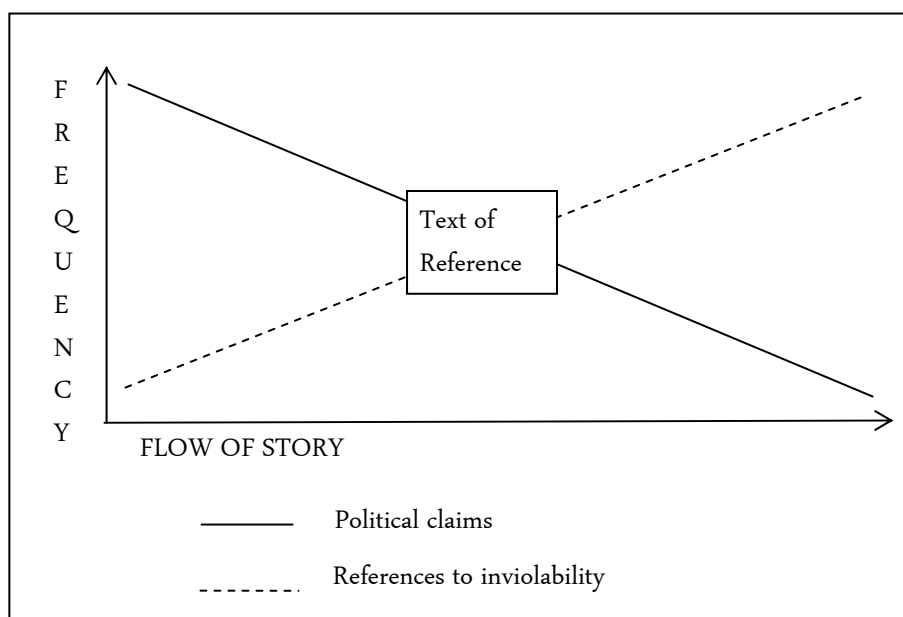
Figure 4.8. Distribution of claims for political power for Ḥusayn, and of references to his inviolability

dreams in which his death is predicted; in one of the dreams a man on a horse announces his death, and in the other the Prophet says to him: "You are coming to us".[120] Although not very unusual, a dream in which the Prophet appears must be considered a special favor, only accorded to the most pious. More important are the three instances in which Ḥusayn curses men from the enemy force. In the first case a man mocks him for not being able to get water; in the last, a man stops him when he tries to reach the river to get water. In both cases Ḥusayn curses the men, and as a result they are afflicted by terrible thirst throughout the rest of their lives.[121] In the second case, a man scorns Ḥusayn and tells him he will go to hell. When Ḥusayn curses him he falls of his horse, hanging from it with one foot stuck in the stirrup. In one of the versions of this story, Ṭabarī reports, "The horse bolted and dragged him along, making his head

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[120] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 306, 318; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 101, 112.

[121] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 312, 361–362; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 107, 156–157. The text of the first of these episodes is quoted below on p. 177.

strike every stone and clod of earth until he died".[122] The fact that Ṭabarī transmits these reports, the last mentioned in three different versions, is an indication that, to his mind, Ḥusayn was a very special person. I will return to this matter in a further section.

As I have noted above, the question of the split of the Muslim community seems to have been one of the major issues dealt with by early Muslim historians; perhaps even the question that triggered the writing of Islamic history.[123] This is also one of the key issues dealt with by Ṭabarī in his account of the Karbalāʾ drama. The dilemma that the historians have to deal with in considering the Karbalāʾ affair, is that the grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad, i.e. the person who has all the noble characteristics described above, is also the person around whom the community splits— from one point of view, the one who *causes* the split by rebelling against the established (though, perhaps not legitimate) authorities.[124]

Beyond the Text of Reference:
Water and blood

As we saw above, the concepts of life and death, in their physical and spiritual sense, are crucial in the Text of Reference. One of the central symbols for life in that part of the story is water, and no one who reads the Karbalāʾ drama in the version of Ṭabarī (or in any other version) can deny

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[122] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 337; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 131. Howard's translation.

[123] Se above, pp. 48–49.

[124] How "established" a ruler Yazīd actually was at the time, is a question open to discussion. But it is quite clear that in Ṭabarī's time (i.e. about 200 years later), he was regarded as the regent in fact, and challenges to his power were treated as rebellions by the historiographers. For discussions of this question, see e.g. Hawting, *First Dynasty*, 46–57; Hodgson, *Venture*, vol. 1, 217–223, esp. 221 n.7. The legitimacy of Yazīd's caliphate is another question, and on this point the Muslim historiographers differ depending on their political ideologies. For a discussion of different views of Yazīd, see Lindsay, "Caliphal and Moral Exemplar."

that water is one of the central themes throughout, and almost everywhere it is connected to life and death. The first incident, in which water becomes important, is the report of Ḥusayn's cousin and envoy to Kūfa, Muslim b. ʿAqīl, who gets lost in the desert on his way to Kūfa. His guides die from thirst, and Muslim himself just barely survives.[125] Through this episode, the connection between water and life is set.

Soon after the Text of Reference, we are told that al-Ḥurr receives a letter from ʿUbaydallāh b. Ziyād, commanding him to stop Ḥusayn in an open place where he can not defend himself nor reach water.[126] This is the beginning of Ḥusayn's and his companions' desperate position, where water is withheld from them and their thirst continually increases till the battle is over. Many events narrated in the remainder of the story have to do with this struggle over water and its consequences. In a well-known incident, Ḥusayn sends a small contingent led by his half brother ʿAbbās, to try and break through the enemy lines to reach the river and fill the water-skins, and the enemy's attempt to prevent them.[127] Preventing the righteous *ahl al-bayt* and their followers from getting water is presented as an act of severe wickedness. I have already mentioned how Ḥusayn curses men who mock him for not having water, or who hinder him from reaching it. One of these episodes goes as follows:

> ʿAbdallāh b. Ḥuṣayn al-Azdī, who was numbered among Bajīlah, called out to him, "Ḥusayn, don't you see that the water is as hard to get as the middle of heaven! By God! You will not taste a drop of it until you die of thirst." Al-Ḥusayn cried out, "O God! Make him die of thirst and never forgive him."
>
> Ḥumayd b. Muslim reported: By God! Later I visited him when he was ill. By God, other than Whom there is no deity! I saw him drinking water without being able to quench his thirst, and then he vomited. Again he drank wa-

[125] Ṭabarī, * Taʾrīkh*, II, 236–237; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 28. A briefer version of this event is found in Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 228; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 17.

[126] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 307; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 102–103.

[127] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 312–313; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 107–108.

ter without being able to quench his thirst. This went on until his breath, that is his life, came to an end.[128]

The purpose of this incident is obviously to show that God sympathizes with Ḥusayn, and is prepared to punish those who withhold water from him. Furthermore, As I have already mentioned, when al-Ḥurr has deserted the Kūfans and joined Ḥusayn, he scolds his former allies for withholding water from Ḥusayn and his companions.[129] The gist of his speech is that their behavior is evil, and that even unbelievers, pigs, and dogs freely use the water of the river that is denied the *ahl al-bayt*.

This *withholding* of water as an act of *animosity* is contrasted with the *sympathetic shedding* of water in the weeping over Ḥusayn and his faithful and their cruel fates. I have already mentioned that, when Ḥusayn hears about the fate of his envoy, Qays b. Mushir, his eyes "glistened with moisture, and he could not hold back the tears."[130] More often, other people cry over the fate of Ḥusayn. Muslim himself, at his capture, weeps over Ḥusayn and his family.[131] When Ḥusayn has left Makka to go to Kūfa, his half brother, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya, gets the news of the departure while performing ablutions with water in a bowl. The narrator tells us: "He wept so that I could hear his tears dropping into the bowl".[132] Later, during the battle, two of Ḥusayn's young followers weep because they are unable to defend him properly.[133] Also the commander of the Umayyad force, ʿUmar b. Saʿd, when Ḥusayn's death is imminent, weeps so that the

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[128] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 312; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 107. Howard's translation. For a similar curse and its result, see Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 361–362; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 156–157.

[129] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 334–335; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 129, quoted on p. 173 above.

[130] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 303; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 99. Howard's translation. Se above, Analysis of the Text of Reference, Section 10.

[131] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 263; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 55-56.

[132] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 288; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 83. Howard's translation.

[133] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 352; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 146.

narrator can see his "tears flowing down his cheeks and beard . . . ."[134] After his death, many tears are shed over him, even by the caliph, Yazīd.[135]

The impression that God sympathizes with Ḥusayn is supported by the above-mentioned poem by ʿUbaydallāh b. al-Ḥurr al-Juʿfī that concludes the entire story.[136] In this poem Ibn al-Ḥurr deeply regrets that he did not support and defend Ḥusayn, the son of Fāṭima and the grandson of the Prophet, against the army of the Kūfan governor. Two stanzas of the poem go as follows:

May God water the souls of those who girt themselves (*taʾazzarū*)
 to help him with rain for ever.
I stood at their graves and their battlefield,
 my heart almost burst and the eye shed tears.[137]

The parallelism between rain and tears in these verses is evident, and displays a metaphor that is probably almost universal: the rain is the tears of Heaven. The poem, thus, points to a relationship between water and tears, and makes me confident that the opposition

withholding water / shedding water (tears)

is part of the structure of the story. Furthermore, as the withholding of water is an expression for the wish for (and indeed conducive to) death, the shedding of water (in the form of tears) expresses the regret of death and wish for life. Thus,

withholding water **:** death **::** shedding water (tears) **:** life

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[134] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 365; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 160. Howard's translation.

[135] E.g. Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 283, 287, 370–371, 375, 378; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 77, 81, 165, 169, 172. In Appendix III, however, I suggest that Ṭabarī views Yazīd's tears with suspicion.

[136] See above pp. 115–116.

[137] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 389; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 182.

Now, as the withholding of water in the present context is an evil act, it not only leads to the physical death of the righteous, but also to the spiritual death of the one who withholds it, just as the shedding of tears expresses a wish for physical life for the unjustly killed also gives eternal life to the weeper (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6. *The significance of withholding and shedding water*

	Consequences for object	Consequences for subject
Shedding water	"Physical life" (as a wish)	Spiritual life
Withholding water	Physical death	Spiritual death

Note: The "subject" is the person who withholds or sheds; the "object" is the person toward whom this act is directed.

In a couple of very interesting passages, water and blood are mentioned side by side in a way that shows the two liquids are closely interrelated in this story. The first instance is when Muslim b. ʿAqīl is captured by the forces of Ibn Ziyād. In the fight preceding the capture, Muslim is cut by a sword across his mouth. His lips are wounded and two teeth are knocked out.[138] Later, when brought to the governor's palace, he asks for a drink. First he is denied water by one man, but someone else sends a boy to get water for Muslim. When he tries to drink, however, blood flows from his mouth into the water in the cup, making it undrinkable. This happens twice. The third time that the cup is filled with water and Muslim tries to drink, two of his teeth falls into it. Muslim exclaims: "Praise be to God! If it had been a provision granted me, I could have drunk it," meaning that it was not God's will that he should have this water.[139] His death is preor-

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[138] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 261; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 54–55.

[139] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 265; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 58. Howard's translation.

dained, and his executioners are responsible for it. Therefore their shedding of his blood in the narrative also becomes a denial of water.[140]

Another occurrence of the same motif is found toward the end of the battle at Karbalāʾ. Two slightly different versions are given. The second goes as follows:

> When Ḥusayn's camp was overrun [by the enemy], he rode toward the dam, trying to reach the Euphrates. One of the Banū Abān b. Dārim shouted, "Woe upon you! Prevent him from getting to the water. Don't let his Shīʿah get to him." He whipped his horse, and the people followed him so that they prevented al-Ḥusayn from getting to the Euphrates. Then al-Ḥusayn cried out, "O God! Make him thirsty!" The Abānī took out an arrow and lodged it in al-Ḥusayn's throat. Al-Ḥusayn pulled out the arrow and held out the palms of his hands. Both were filled with blood. Then al-Ḥusayn said, "O God! I complain to you about what is being done to the son of the daughter of your Prophet."[141]

The first version is a little different, but the motif of Ḥusayn trying to get water and getting an arrow in his mouth is the same.[142] In these two traditions, the water that Ḥusayn craves for changes into blood, as in the story about Muslim b. ʿAqīl mentioned above. In both the case of Ḥusayn and that of Muslim, this transformation occurs immediately before their deaths. The similarity of these two events indicates a structural relationship between blood and water that is worth examining closer.

In the analysis of the water motif above, I have suggested that shedding water (in the form of tears) stands for life, whereas withholding water sig-

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[140] A little later, we are told, Ibn Ziyād gives Muslim water in a "common earthenware vessel." Ibn Ziyād says: "Only our unwillingness that you should become protected by drinking from it prevented us from giving you a drink from it [earlier] and then killing you. It is for this reason that we have given you a drink in this way." Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 267; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 60. Howard's translation. This is clearly a special case, in which water is not conducive to life.

[141] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 361–362; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 156–157. Howard's translation. Square brackets added.

[142] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 361; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 156.

nifies death. As for blood, it works the other way around. Bloodshed, of course, is an image of death, whereas abstaining from shedding blood means saving life. A number of passages in the story point to this. Maybe the prime example of the shedding of innocent blood is one of the most famous incidents in the Karbalā' drama, the killing of Ḥusayn's baby boy. The story goes that, many years after the battle, Abū Ja'far, the fifth Shī'ite Imām,[143] tells a man from the tribe of Asad that this tribe is guilty of the blood of his family. The man asks why, and Abū Ja'far relates:

> Al-Ḥusayn was brought his young child; he was on his knee. Then one of you, Banū Asad, shot an arrow that slaughtered the child. Al-Ḥusayn caught the blood [in his hand]. When the palm of his hand was full, he poured the blood onto the ground and said: "O Lord, if it be that You have kept the help of heaven from us, then let it be because Your purpose is better than [immediate] help. Take vengeance for us on these oppressors."[144]

Of course, in the story, all the deaths of Ḥusayn's followers related in the story of the battle at Karbalā' are examples of the shedding of innocent blood. More will be said on this shortly.

There are also a number of passages, where Ḥusayn and his followers refrain from shedding blood. We are told that Muslim b. 'Aqīl one time has the chance to kill the Kūfan governor, Ibn Ziyād, by stealth, but refuses to do so. This happens when the nobleman Sharīk b. al-A'war gets sick in the house of Hāni' b. 'Urwa (where also Muslim stayed). 'Ubaydallāh Ibn Ziyād, who holds Sharīk in high esteem (in spite of Sharīk's sympathy with the family of the Prophet and their cause), comes to visit him. Sharīk and Muslim have agreed that the latter will hide, and jump out and kill the governor when he sits down at the bedside. When Ibn Ziyād comes, however, Muslim remains in his hiding place:

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[143] His name as Imām was Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. around 735). See Figure 1.1 on p. 17.

[144] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 360; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 154. Howard's translation. Another version of this incident is found in Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 282; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 75.

[Sharīk] became afraid that Ibn Ziyād would escape and he began to recite: "What are you waiting for to greet Salmā? Quench my thirst [with a sip of water], even though my life is in that." He repeated that twice or three times. . . .

Ibn Ziyād rose and departed. Then Muslim came out. Sharīk demanded, "What stopped you from killing him?" He replied, "Two things. One of them was Hāni'"s dislike for him to be killed in his house. The other was a tradition that the people tell on the authority of the Prophet. 'Faith controls killing and a believer should not commit murder.'" Hāni' said, "By God! If you had killed him, you would have killed a great sinner (*fāsiq*), a profligate (*fājir*), and an unbeliever (*kāfir*). Yet I disliked the idea of his being killed in my house."[145]

Thus, for Muslim, the goal of righteousness is more important than the short-term gain of killing his worst enemy. Had he made a different choice, Hāni'"s, his own and eventually also Ḥusayn's life might have been saved. It would have been an unrighteous option, though, unworthy of a true believer.

That Muslim made the right choice is later indirectly confirmed by Ḥusayn, who acts in a similar way. Ṭabarī relates an incident just before the battle is to begin, where one of Ḥusayn's followers has the opportunity to kill the evil Shamir b. Dhī al-Jawshan, and asks Ḥusayn for permission to do so. Ḥusayn refuses as he is unwilling to start the fight.[146] Muslim's and Ḥusayn's attitude is an attempt to avoid shedding the blood of believers, to save their lives, even though they are grave sinners. The blame for starting the battle clearly falls on the army from Kūfa. When all other ways to solve the conflict have been tried, and 'Umar b. Sa'd is pressed by

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[145] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 248–249; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 41. Howard's translation. Another version is found in Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 244; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 37. In this version the water motif is more pronounced, but the Prophetical *hadīth* is missing.

[146] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 328; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 122. Ḥusayn takes the same position when one of his companions exhorts him to fight the relatively small group of al-Ḥurr, before the main army led by 'Umar b. Sa'd arrives. Ḥusayn refuses because he does not want to be the one who starts fighting. Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 307–308; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 103.

Shamir to start fighting Ḥusayn, the commander shoots an arrow towards Ḥusayn's camp and shouts: "Be witnesses that I was the first to shoot," thereby "officially" opening the battle.[147] When the Kūfans have begun the battle, Ḥusayn's and his followers' fight is an act of self defense, and they are not guilty of any fault. It is, furthermore, interesting to note that, with only one possible exception, each time blood is mentioned in the story it is the blood of Ḥusayn and his supporters. Although enemies are killed in the battle, nothing is said of their blood.[148] This indicates, I believe, that although Ḥusayn's party kill, they are not indulged in unjustified blood-shed.

The overall picture, then, is that Ḥusayn and his companions are just and keep their integrity as good Muslims by refusing to shed blood un-justly. The Umayyad officials and the Kūfans, on the other hand, shed blood that is sacred (*harām*).[149] In other words, Ḥusayn withhold blood whereas the Umayyads and the Kūfans shed blood.

The relationship between blood and water is, thus, a function of the manner of their distribution. *Life* is caused by the shedding of water and by the withholding of blood. *Death*, on the contrary, is caused by the withholding of water and the shedding of blood. Thus, the economic code here works on two levels, so to say. The manner in which water and blood are distributed, are related to the "distribution" of life and death.

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[147] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 335; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 129. Howard's translation.

[148] See e.g. Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 253 (Hāni' b. 'Urwa), 351 (Nāfi' b. Hilāl), 359 (Ḥusayn), 370 (Ḥusayn's dead body); Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 45, 145, 153–154, 164. The possible exception is when Ḥusayn says to the Kūfans, just before his death: "If you kill me, God will send misfortune among you and cause the shedding of your blood." Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 365; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 160. Howard's translation.

[149] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 266; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 59. See also the discussion on the concept of *ḥurma*, above, p 160.

Ḥusayn as mediator

I have suggested above that Ḥusayn's giving of water in the Text of Reference, is an act which mediates between life and death in their physical sense, and thus is a metaphor for a mediation between spiritual life and death. To develop that argument further, his *giving* of water mediates between the death that the *withholding* of water and the life that the *shedding* of water bring about. The giving of water shares in the two opposite elements of life and death. Concretely, it remedies the thirst of the Kūfans, thus leading them from death to life. But by giving some of his own water away, he loses some of his precious supplies. Since water is a scarce resource in the desert, Ḥusayn himself comes closer to death. The same pattern is visible if the act of giving water is taken as a metaphor for guidance. By offering guidance, he offers (spiritual) life to the Kūfans, but at the same time he challenges the political authorities that bring about his own (physical) death.

When it comes to blood, the opposition is symmetrical but inverted, so that *withholding* it saves life, and *shedding* it causes death. But is there a mediating element which corresponds to that of giving water? I believe there is, and in order to argue for this, I will make a short detour.

Boaz Shoshan argues that, in this story, there is a clear tension between human activity and divine fate, between personal responsibility and God's predestination of events.[150] So, for example, Ḥusayn's journey toward destruction more often than not seems inevitable. At times he is advised to back out, but he refuses to do so by referring to the course that God has preordained for him.[151] At other times the decision to go on is described as his own.[152] When he meets the Kūfan vanguard led by al-Ḥurr, he offers

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[150] Shoshan, *Poetics*, 233–252. This argument is also found in Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 120–121.

[151] E.g. Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 273–274, 277–278, 294; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 66–67, 71, 90.

[152] E.g. Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 275, 293, 304; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 68, 88, 100.

the Kūfans the alternative of his returning to the Hijāz if they do not want him as their *imām* (Text of Reference, Sections 3 and 4). In the same way, when the battle is immediate, we are told that Ḥusayn actively tries to find an escape, but when the outcome seems unavoidable, he finds comfort in the fact that what happens is God's purpose and that He will give him and those that die by his side a place in Paradise.[153] Referring to this tension, Boaz Shoshan regards the story as a tragedy "on two different counts that work together yet, occasionally, also work against each other in creating the tragic effect."[154] Shoshan's argument, however, seems to build on a misunderstanding of Ṭabarī's notion of submitting to the will of God. He writes

> [w]hat we have here is a *theological story*: the unavoidable tragedy that is the result of submission to God's will. What the accounts in the *History* amount to is a story of a Muslim, pious in the extreme, who, despite the "good advice" of sympathizers not to embark on his adventure, and despite his foreknowledge of the terrible end in the offing, is determined to continue on a course of destruction that is directed by "God's decision" and omnipotence.[155]

Shoshan then argues that Ṭabarī makes the story more complicated by introducing "accounts . . . which depict Ḥusayn as less determined,"[156] by which he means Ḥusayn's attempts to negotiate with 'Umar b. Sa'd, his endeavor to postpone the battle to the following day, and his final address

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[153] For Ḥusayn's attempts to avoid the battle in honor, see e.g .Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 310, 313–314, 328–331; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 106, 108–109, 123–125. For the view that the outcome is preordained by God and will lead to the best, see e.g. Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 306, 318, 352–353, 360; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 101, 112, 147, 154.

[154] Shoshan, *Poetics*, 235–236.

[155] Shoshan, *Poetics*, 245. Italics in the original.

[156] Shoshan, *Poetics*, 245.

to the Kūfans just before the battle in which he implores them not to kill him.[157]

Submitting to the will of God, however, does not mean sitting down, quietly waiting for destiny to have its course. Rather, it means following the path of God to its end, doing what one thinks is the right thing to do in the situation, but accepting one's fate as the best that could happen *sub specie aeternitatis*. So, as I read the Karbalā' drama, there are no two strands in the way Shoshan maintains. As expressed in the text, Husayn's determination is not so much going to Kūfa at all costs, as doing the will of God whatever the outcome. On this point he is never wavering. Within this general ambition, going to Kūfa and offering his leadership to the inhabitants of the town, is only a partial aim. When he realizes that this plan is thwarted due to the treachery of the Kūfans, he wants to do whatever he can in order to save his life (still without going against God's will) and to keep the unity of the Muslim community; so he is prepared to return to the Hijāz, to go somewhere else, or even give his pledge of loyalty to the caliph, Yazīd, though *not* to the governor of Kūfa, 'Ubaydallāh b. Ziyād.[158] Then, understanding that there is no way for him to get out of the affair alive, he still does what is considered the right thing to do: he fiercely defends himself, and trusts God that the final outcome will be according to His wisdom. One illustration of Ḥusayn's and his family's total trust in God, is found in the story before the battle. I have already referred to the incident, when the party travels along and Ḥusayn nods off a couple of times. When he wakes up, he recites the Qur'ānic verse, "We belong to

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[157] Shoshan, *Poetics*, 245–249, referring to Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 309–314, 320, 328–331; Ṭabarī, *History*, 104–109, 114, 122–125.

[158] The reason that the text gives for Ḥusayn's refusal to give in to Ibn Ziyād is not entirely clear, though it hints at his fear that, if he gives himself up to Ibn Ziyād, he will be killed in a humiliating way not worthy of the grandson of the Prophet, just like his cousin Muslim before him. (Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 330; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 125).

God and to Him we will return."[159] His son 'Alī asks why he says so, and Ḥusayn replies that, in his dream he has seen a man who announced their death to him.

> 'Alī said, "Father, may God not show you any evil. Are we not in the right?" [Ḥusayn] said, "Indeed, by Him to Whom all servants must return!" 'Alī said, "Then, father, we need have no concern, if we are going to die righteously." Al-Ḥusayn replied, "May God give you the best reward a son can receive from his father."[160]

Many other examples of this attitude are found throughout the latter part of the story.[161]

So, it is my contention that Ṭabarī's image of Ḥusayn is one of a person (and not just any person, but the head of the *ahl al-bayt*) who is willing to sacrifice his life for a higher cause, i.e. the path of God.[162] Ḥusayn, thus, becomes an example, an ideal model (*uswa*)[163] for all Muslims who have their focus on the hereafter rather than on the present world. As such, he brings true life through his death. His *giving* of blood therefore partakes of both life and death, and can be considered a mediating entity between the two oppositions of *shedding* blood and *withholding* blood.[164] The symmetry between the structure of water and that of blood is obvious; although

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[159] Qur'ān 2:156.

[160] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 306; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 101. Howard's translation. Square brackets added.

[161] So, e.g. Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 324, 342, 360, 363; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 118, 137, 154, 158, *et passim.*

[162] This is, of course, a notion that is greatly amplified in later Shī'ism. See e.g. Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 120–122; Halm, *Shi'a Islam*, 16, 30–32; Jafri, *Origins*, 200–204.

[163] As we have seen above (Analysis of the Text of Reference, Section 6) Ḥusayn uses this term on himself.

[164] From a strictly Islamic point of view, Ḥusayn cannot on his own accord give his blood, since he himself has no power over his own physical life. That power belongs to God alone. Thus, it is rather Ḥusayn's willingness to submit to God, who gives and takes life as He finds best, that I consider as Ḥusayn "giving his blood."

the oppositions are inverted, the mediating concept is the same (see Table 4.7).

Table 4.7. *The structure of water and blood in the story*

	Life	Death
Water	Shed	Withheld
	Given	
Blood	Withheld	Shed

This structure fits well into the basic Islamic structure discussed above (see Table 4.8).[165]

Table 4.8. *Water and blood in the larger structure of the story.*

The hereafter (*al-ākhira*)		This world (*al-dunyā*)
Physical death		Physical life
Lack of water		Possession of water
God's reward (*al-janna*)		
	Islam	
		Shedding water/Withholding blood
		Giving Water/blood
		Shedding blood/Withholding water
	Hypocrisy (*nifāq*)	
	Unbelief	
God's punishment		

Note: The shaded column denotes life after death.

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[165] In commenting on Table 4.8, it should be said that, although the unbelief of the Umayyads and the Kūfans is sometimes hinted at, it is difficult to see that Ṭabarī should actually regard them as non-Muslims. The split of the community is very real, and there is no doubt who Ṭabarī regards as being on the right side. Still, he never goes as far as to reject the faith of the opponents of Ḥusayn. Therefore I still find it appropriate to place the triads of opposition and mediation of water and blood between "Islam" and "Hypocrisy," rather than between "Islam" and "Unbelief."

I fully agree with Shoshan, that what we have here is a theological story (but then, what in Ṭabarī's writings is not theological), but I differ from him in that I am not immediately prepared to call it a tragedy. From a literary and purely human standpoint, it might be a tragic tale, but from the theological perspective that Shoshan claims that it has, it is not entirely tragic. The story is certainly heartrending as such; the split of the community is devastating for the self-image of early Islam; the rejection of the grandson of the Prophet is close to rejecting the Prophet himself. In short, in Ṭabarī's version, the Karbalā' Drama becomes a story of a real crisis in the early Islamic community. Yet, the story of Ḥusayn gives hope, because it points to the issue that is of real importance: total submission to God which leads to true life, even though life in this world is a misery and physical death is imminent. This is expressed in many places, and with special pregnancy in the Text of Reference, Section 7, where Ḥusayn says to his companions:

> You have seen what this matter has come to. Truly, the world has changed and has become worse; its goodness has retreated and it has become very bitter. There remains only a small rest of it, like what is left in a jar, a paltry life like an unhealthy pasturage. Can you not see that truth is no longer practiced and falsehood no longer desisted from so that the believer rightly desires to meet God. I can only regard death as martyrdom and life with the oppressors as a tribulation.[166]

This is the only place in the entire story that the word "martyrdom" (*sha-hāda*) is used pertaining to Ḥusayn. The idea is that, by following the path of God to such an extent that one's life is taken, the martyr invokes the sympathy of anyone who wishes to do the will of God, exhorting them to do the same.

The most pertinent example of people that understand the message of Ḥusayn, is al-Ḥurr. By taking the challenge so seriously that he is prepared

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[166] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 300–301; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 96.

to let go of his worldly life, he gains true, eternal life. He goes from heat (*ḥarr*) to freedom (*ḥurr*). Later, he is followed by others, the most famous being "the penitents" (*al-tawwābūn*). I will briefly return to this movement below.

From this point of view, Ḥusayn's accomplishes the kind of mediation that the Marandas have described in their "optical model".[167] The main opposition would then be *life* and *death* in their spiritual aspects (in Table 4.8 represented by the concepts "God's reward" and "God's punishment"), the former being connected with Ḥusayn, the latter with the Kūfans and the Umayyads. Ḥusayn then commits an act of rebellion, and causes a split in the community, which could be regarded as a breaking of the pledge to God (i.e. spiritual death), and he furthermore dies a physical death, and thus becomes associated with both life and death. This leads to the conversion (or, in structuralist terms, the *inversion*) of one of the Kūfans (al-Ḥurr). This conversion from death to life of al-Ḥurr shows that life prevails over death. The essence of the story, as interpreted here, can be lined out in Lévi-Strauss' canonic formula:

$$f_d(K) : f_l(\d{H}) :: f_d(\d{H}) : f_{K^{-1}}(l)$$

where the functions d=death; l=life and the terms K=Kūfans; Ḥ=Ḥusayn; and K^{-1}=The converted Kūfan, al-Ḥurr. In other words (following the Marandas[168]), the Kūfans, specified by the function of death, are opposed to Ḥusayn, who is specified by the function life. Ḥusayn then takes on the negative function of death, which process leads to a victory so much more complete in that it proceeds from the moral ruin of the Kūfans and the conversion of one of them, and thus definitely establishes life as the final outcome. It must be remembered that in this analysis I focus on al-Ḥurr as representative of all those who realize the seriousness of the matter and

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[167] See Figure 3.2 on p. 93.

[168] See above, p. 92.

convert, since his case is the most obvious in the text. Others might have been chosen, such as Zuhayr b. al-Qayn. The gain of the process is, thus, that the spiritual life of those who convert to the path of God is greater than the death of Ḥusayn, a death which is only physical. Ḥusayn's moral victory is also a proof that his act of "rebellion" was not directed against the will of God. He did not fight against God or Islam, but against those powers that threatened to morally undermine and destroy the religion. Thus, in the story as a whole, and not only in the Text of Reference, Ḥusayn's function as mediator is both positive and negative. By refusing to subordinate to the corrupt and unjust authorities he keeps the two categories of life and death apart. By letting himself be "contaminated" with death (at least in its physical sense, and perhaps even in its spiritual meaning in that he causes a split in the community) he joins the two categories in himself. He furthermore serves as an exemplar, a model to all Muslims, thus allowing them to pass from death to life.

After Karbalāʾ.

I have already mentioned one of the consequences of the event at Karbalāʾ in the movement of the *tawwābūn*, the "Penitents." The story of this movement is also retold by Ṭabarī on the authority of Hishām b. al-Kalbī who seems to quote most of Abū Mikhnaf's work, *Kitāb Sulaymān b. Ṣurad*.[169] In brief the story tells us the following:

> Four years after the death of Ḥusayn, a number of his Kūfan followers who had not joined him at Karbalāʾ deeply regret their failure to support him. They regard their own sin in the light of that which the Hebrews committed against

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[169] Hawting, "Translator's foreword," xvi–xvii. The story is related in Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 497–513, 538–578; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 20, 80–97, 124–160. For studies and comments on the movement, see Denny, "Tawwābūn"; Halm, *Shiʿa Islam*, 16–20. In a very interesting article, G.R. Hawting argues that the movement of the *tawwābūn* is the link connecting the death of Ḥusayn with the Jewish Day of Atonement (Hawting, "Tawwābūn").

God when they created the golden calf. In a fiery speech, their leader, Sulay-mān b. Ṣurad says:

> [B]y God, I fear that this time in which life has become so miserable and ca-lamity so great and injustice so prevalent is assigned to be our last. What good is it for the most virtuous of this Party [*Shīʿa*] that we were yearning for the family of our Prophet to come, offering them help and urging them to come, but when they came we were weak and feeble and spineless, we delayed and waited to see what would happen, until the descendant of our Prophet, his off-spring and his progeny, flesh of his flesh and blood of his blood, was killed in our very midst? . . . Rise up indeed for your Lord has been angered. . . . Be like those Israelites when their prophet [Moses] said to them, "You have done evil to yourselves by your adoption of the Calf. Turn in repentance to your Creator and kill yourselves. That will be best for you with your Creator." And do what the people did. They fell on their knees and stretched out their necks and accepted the judgment, until they understood that nothing would save them from the magnitude of their offence except patient acceptance of the slaughter. How will it be with you if you are summoned to something simi-lar?[170]

The Penitents then reject the idea of collective suicide, as it is not allowed in the Qurʾān, but agree to an act which amounts to the same, namely to take up arms and go against the Umayyad army; to kill his murderers or die in the at-tempt to do so. When they prepare themselves to leave Kūfa, only 4000 turn up out of the 16000 who had pledged their allegiance to the cause, and the number is further reduced as the march goes on. They make a stop at Karbalāʾ and spend a day and a night there in prayer, weeping, and penitence before they go on. At ʿAyn al-Warda in Northern Iraq they meet the Syrian army and are utterly defeated in 64/685. Only a few of the penitents survive, and they are filled with shame that they did not die in the battle.

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[170] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 500; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 20, 83–84, quoting the Qurʾān 2:54. Hawting's translation. Square brackets added. The quotation from the Qurʾān refers, according to traditional Muslim commentary (including Ṭabarī, see Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ*, vol. 1, pt. 1, 407–412), to the incident of the Golden Calf of the Hebrews. In his anger, Moses commanded the Israelites to begin to kill one another in atonement for their sin, and the people willingly did so until God stopped them. For a Biblical parallel, in which it is the Levites who are commanded to kill the sinning people, see Ex. 32:25–29. For other Hebrew parallels, see Hawting, "Tawwābūn."

According to Heinz Halm, "the self-sacrifice that the 'penitents' in 684–685 actually committed has been ritualized in the Âshûrâ customs," i.e. the ritual that I had the opportunity to witness in Pakistan, and that I have given an account of in the introductory chapter of this study.[171] Halm further argues that the ritual is not a mourning ritual, as has often been believed, but a ritual of repentance.[172] He goes on to say:

> [T]he ritual action—the shedding of one's own blood by flagellation or by beating one's brow with a sword—is a surrogate for that which is actually implied—expiatory death—and at the same time assures the actor of its outcome, namely, exoneration from historical guilt.[173]

A structuralist analysis of the story of the Penitents and of the 'Āshūrā' (or, as it is called on the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent, the Muḥarram) ritual in the light of the finds in the analysis above, is far beyond the scope of the present study. But I will only briefly return to Lucien Scubla's interpretation of Lévi-Strauss' canonical formula, and argue that his model might be of relevance for the study of the development of the ritual. First, let us recall the model.[174] Scubla argues that the canonical formula can be simplified, and written in two ways: one which expresses the mediation in a static manner:

A : B :: M : X

and one which expresses it as a process:

A/B → M → X.

In both cases, A and B refer to the opposition between the two opposites, the $f_x(a)$ (in the Karbalā' Drama, the death of the Kūfans) and $f_y(b)$ (the

[171] Halm, *Shi'a Islam*, 20.

[172] Halm, *Shi'a Islam*, 19.

[173] Halm, *Shi'a Islam*, 20. See also Hawting, "Tawwābūn."

[174] See above, pp. 96–101.

life of Ḥusayn) in the original appearance of the formula, whereas M stands for the mediation or undifferentiation where the term b has momentarily adopted the function x (the momentary adoption of spiritual death and the real suffering of physical death of Ḥusayn). The fourth element, X, finally, represents the outcome, a differentiation where the term a is eliminated and the function y is promoted (the "dead" Kūfan, al-Ḥurr, is brought to spiritual life and life gains the victory). It is to be noted, that it is *not* the killing of Ḥusayn that constitutes the "radical elimination" of the term a $(a \rightarrow a^{-1})$ i.e. the process that Scubla has interpreted as "the putting to death of a malevolent being."[175] This operation is rather expressed in the conversion of al-Ḥurr. Ḥusayn's death is mediatory, and brings about the differentiation between categories of which "the radical elimination" of the "old" al-Ḥurr is the first result.

As Scubla suggests, however, the whole mediation process can be regarded as a transformation cycle where X is not only the end result, but also the starting point for a new cycle.
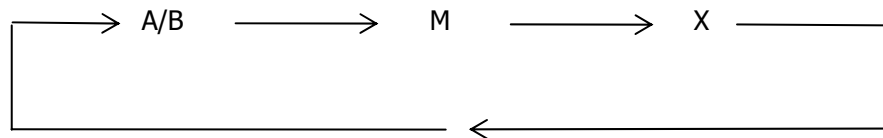
In this light we can see the movement of the Penitents as the next cycle, and each occurrence of the Muḥarram ritual as consecutive cycles. In the story of the Penitents, once again we find the dichotomy between spiritual life and spiritual death—or as it is expressed in a letter from Sulaymān b. Ṣurad to some other Shīʿites: the dichotomy between this world (*al-dunyā*) and the hereafter (*al-ākhira*).[176] This dichotomy is felt as a sentiment of repentance within each of the Penitents; they should have focused on the hereafter and have chosen life, but instead, out of cowardliness and this-worldly goals they chose a path that will ultimately lead to death. This

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[175] Scubla, *Lire Lévi-Strauss*, 143. My translation.

[176] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 502–504; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 20, 85–87.

anguish takes its open expression in the suicidal attack on the Umayyad army, an act which is aimed at "mortifying" the self and which ended with the actual physical death of most of the participants. Physical death, however, was precisely what the Penitents had aimed at, since it signified that their real focus was on the hereafter and that spiritual life was the reward they would gain. The mediation in this story, the M in Scubla's model, then, would be the feeling and act of repentance, where life is mixed with death; the result, the X in the model, is the "annihilation" of the this-worldly focus of the Penitents, and the victory of true life in the hereafter.

The yearly ʿĀshūrāʾ or Muḥarram rituals can be regarded as a weakened form of the act of the Penitents. Here, the actual suicidal struggle against the evil powers, have been substituted for oral and physical acts of repentance, but they usually do not lead to physical death. As Halm points out, however, the latter is certainly not unheard of, as the Iranian revolution and the subsequent Iran-Iraqi war amply demonstrated.[177]

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[177] See Halm, *Shiʿa Islam*, 20. See also 134–137, 150. Again, I want to emphasize that the application of Scubla's model to the account of the Penitents and the ʿĀshūrāʾ ritual is only provisional. In order to corroborate it, thorough analyses of the text and the ritual need to be undertaken.

5. Conclusions and Prospects

Ṭabarī and the Karbalāʾ Drama

According to Ṭabarī's account, each of the two antagonist parties in the Karbalāʾ Drama, Ḥusayn and the Umayyads, claim that it is exclusively by *their* authority and power that true Islam is upheld. As for Ḥusayn, a number of the speeches ascribed to him have been discussed in the analysis above. His argument that he has the right to the political authority due to his kinship with the Prophet Muḥammad, has also been mentioned. In a similar way, the Umayyads and their supporters claim exclusive right to the government. Most obvious is, of course, Yazīd's demand for *bayʿa*, the pledge of loyalty from those men that he regards as his political rivals. His argument that his position is given by God, has been discussed above. Furthermore, both parties accuse the other for splitting the community. The severity of such a sundering of the Muslim community is conveyed through the voice of one of Ḥusayn's most loyal followers, Zuhayr b. al-Qayn, who talks to the Kūfans when the battle is about to commence, and says:

> People of al-Kufah, here is a warning to you of God's punishment, a warning insofar as it is the duty of a Muslim to advice his brother Muslim—and we are still brothers in one religion and one faith as long as the sword does not strike between you and us. Therefore you are still appropriate persons to receive advice from us. When the sword strikes, the protection will be cut asunder. We will be a community, and you will be a community. God has tested us and

you (*ibtalāna wa iyyākum*) through the offspring of Muḥammad so that God may see what you and we are doing.[1]

The completion of the split of the community is reported a few pages later. We have already seen how, when ʿUmar b. Saʿd, the commander of the Kūfans, "officially" opens the battle by shooting an arrow, the battle has started and there is no return. The split of the community is also expressed in reports of the prayers. In Section 3 and 4 in the Text of Reference, Ḥusayn leads both his own followers and the Kūfans in a common prayer, indicating that they are all of one faith and community (although politically in different camps). However, during the battle, we are told that, not only does Ḥusayn's group pray separately, they are moreover forced to pray "the prayer of fear", i.e. to make two groups which alternately pray and act as guards against the Kūfans.[2] This is a clear indication that the Kūfan force have ceased regarding them as Muslims, if not in theory, at least in practice.

The unity of the Muslim *umma* was regarded as a sign of its status as a chosen people, bound to God through a covenant that implied their keeping his laws in return for His satisfaction. The division of the community was seen as a violation of the divine covenant. The Karbalāʾ Drama is so important to the early Muslim historians, first because it is an manifestation of *fitna*, of civil strife and of sundering of the community, and second, because it so closely ties the break of the divine covenant to the betrayal of a political treaty, i.e. the pact between Ḥusayn and the Kūfans. The latter is considered an expression of the former. It is true that this interpretation belongs to Ḥusayn and his followers, rather than to the Umayyads and their supporters, and Ṭabarī himself does not explicitly disclose his mean-

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[1] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 331; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 125–126. Howard's translation. Brackets added. For a similar warning from ʿUbaydallāh, although posed in more political terms, see Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 254; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 47.

[2] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 350; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 144. For "the prayer of fear," see Monnot, "Ṣalāt al-Khawf."

ing. As his material is arranged, however, the interpretation of Ḥusayn and his group stands out as the more correct one. It is obvious that Ṭabarī's account of the Karbalāʾ Drama is related from their point of view, rather than from that of the Umayyads.

The internal struggle for power in the Islamic community of the early decades thus was an important theme for the early Muslim historiographers, and has bearing on the Muslim community still today. With a general term, these struggles were called *fitna*, often translated "sedition", "temptation" or "trial".[3] Abdulkader Tayob, South African professor of Religious Studies, discusses how the concept has often been used throughout the history of Islam: "As a key term in the perceptual-symbolic system of Islamic culture, *fitna* (civil strife) maps a conservative religious approach to political or social issues."[4] Forces, who wish to hamper political or social change, refer to this concept in order to intimidate political conflict and strife. Tayob maintains, however, that Ṭabarī normally did not have this negative view of *fitna*. To him, it rather evoked ideas of "test" (*ikhtibār*), "trial" (*ibtilāʾ*) or even "purification" (*tamḥīṣ*). "Thus, the various forms of *fitna* as a test offer an opportunity for being distinguished as a firm believer. In this case *fitna* cannot be avoided and should not be avoided."[5] In the quotation above of the words ascribed to Zuhayr b. al-Qayn, the term *fitna* is not used. But Zuhayr says that God has *tested* the community through Ḥusayn, using the word *ibtilāʾ* (although in verbal form), a word which Ṭabarī, according to Tayob, considered more or less synonymous with *fitna*. As I read the Karbalāʾ Drama in Ṭabarī's version, the main message of the story lies in the religio-political implications of Ḥusayn's journey toward Kūfa and the attitudes taken to him by different people.

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[3] For the theme in the early Muslim historiographical tradition, see e.g. Donner, *Narratives*, 184–190; Noth and Conrad, *Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, 33–35. For a discussion of this concept in the contemporary political debate, see e.g. Esposito and Voll, *Islam and Democracy*, 41–43.

[4] Tayob, "Ṭabarī's exegesis of *fitna*," 158.

[5] Tayob, "Ṭabarī's exegesis of *fitna*," 169

When he challenges the corrupt Umayyad authorities, he forces people to choose between being a good Muslim and a "hypocrite"; between living a true life with one's focus on the hereafter, and a maimed life where the main concern is this world and its goods. He acts as a water-shed, thus keeping the opposite categories apart, but also guides all those who accept him as *imām* on the right way, thus allowing for movement between the categories. This is also how this story has often been interpreted by Sunnī Muslims.[6] Shī'ites, however, have gone further, and hold that only a total submission to Ḥusayn as Imām and guide will lead to salvation.

Structuralism Applied to Islamic Historiography

Although, as I stated in the introductory chapter, I consider this work as a pilot study which opens up for comparisons with other versions of the same story, the results from the foregoing analysis has made me confident that the study of historiographical texts from the early centuries of Islam can indeed benefit from the theoretical and methodological apparatus of Claude Lévi-Strauss. Some of the results were rather predictable, such as the basic structure of Islamic categories; the structure in the outline drawn in Table 4.3 above was hardly surprising (although the arrangement of the different categories in this way is distinctly Lévi-Straussian). Other results, such as the relationship between water and blood, as well as the mediatory role of Ḥusayn, I think, would have been more difficult to reach without a structuralist analysis. More important, perhaps, is the nature of the arguments of the text that the structural analysis has exposed. Ṭabarī's specific religio-political message in his version of the Karbalā' Drama is conveyed

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[6] Veccia Vaglieri, "Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib," 614. Vernon Schubel shows that, in contemporary South Asia, also Sunnī Muslims celebrate the death of Husyn, but in a joyful demeanor, totally different from that of the Shī'ites. This is because they emphasize the element of victory over evil in Ḥusayn's death. Schubel, *Religious Performance*, 135–136.

by arguing that one system of classification is better and more correct in the eyes of God than another. He does this through the change of what many might have considered far-fetched conclusions into natural, obvious facts—a change that is accomplished in the transformation from metaphor to metonym and other operations. This operation can be illustrated by a generalized version of the Lévi-Straussian model that I have repeatedly used in the foregoing analysis of the text.

Table 5.1. *Lévi-Strauss' model of mediation applied to Islamic historiography in general.*

The hereafter (*al-ākhira*)	This world (*al-dunyā*)	
Physical death	Physical life	
God's reward (*al-janna*)		
	Islam	
		A
		M
		B
	Hypocrisy (*nifāq*)	
	Unbelief	
God's punishment		

Note: The shaded column denotes life after death.

In the different versions of this model that we have seen in the previous chapter, the content of the two leftmost columns have been relatively constant; it is the content of the third column has changed the most. The *structure* of the third column, however, has remained intact with two opposite terms and a mediating term between them (in Table 5.1 the opposites are represented by A and B, and the mediating term by M). These terms keep changing according to the message that the author wants to convey. We have seen how they have shifted between the piety code (Table

4.3), the authority code (Table 4.4) and the economic code (Table 4.5 and Table 4.8). Generally spoken, this becomes especially interesting when we consider the religio-political dimensions of the message of a text from early Islam. I would like to extrapolate the conclusions drawn from this model, and suggest that the phenomenon of inserting different political terms in the basic Islamic structure is nothing peculiar to the present text; indeed, the whole of Islamic historiography could be seen as based on the same armature overlaid with different political and theological contents. In order to argue for, and to have any success in conveying a certain religio-political idea in the environment of the emerging Islamic civilization, the advocate of such an ideology would have to fit it into the Islamic armature (and this is, of course, the case even in our days). In that sense it is possible to say that it is this basic structure that makes a historical text Islamic.

One of the great advantages with a structural study such as this, I would argue, is that it shows how a myth argues that the different realms expressed through the codes are not really separate, but that they all belong together: through the attempt to create metonyms out of metaphors, reality is shown to make a whole, although a differentiated whole. But, and this is important, a whole that is differentiated in the way that the "author" of the myth (whether it is a single person or a group) views it. That is, the myth has to show that certain elements do not belong to the ideal world of the myth, or they must be shown to stand in contradiction to, or to threaten the order that it argues for. Through the process of *bricolage*, different authors (whether it be a group or a single person) give the same event a different meaning.

What next?

As I have suggested previously, the analysis made here of Ṭabarī's version of the Karbalāʾ Drama needs to be supplemented by studies of other versions of the same story, and compared with these. Interesting structural

transformations might come to the surface when not only the internal development is studied, but also that between different versions of the same myth. Lévi-Strauss' thesis that the "double twist" that is expressed through the canonic formula occurs when a myth passes a kind of border—for example a linguistic or ideological line—could be tested by comparing Sunnī versions of the Karbalāʾ Drama with Shīʿite ones, and Arabic versions with those in Persian or other languages.

Other stories related by Ṭabarī should also be made objects for structural analysis and compared with the results of the present study. In this way the network of relationships between symbols that are sketched here can be corroborated or contradicted, and the meshes of the network will probably be tighter knit by newly found relationships. I have also mentioned the need for further analysis of the Karbalāʾ Drama in relation to the movement of the Tawwābūn and the ʿĀshūrāʾ ritual, and the application of Scubla's interpretation of Lévi-Strauss' canonic formula to this myth-ritual complex.

The question of extra-Islamic origins of the Shīʿite sentiment and its rituals has often been discussed. Structural analyses of non-Islamic mythology—Jewish, Christian, Iranian and ancient Mesopotamian—and the comparisons of the structures of these mythologies, is a way, I believe, to approach an answer to this question.

Moreover, further investigations of the version studied here are needed. One important aspect of Ṭabarī's version of the Karbalāʾ Drama that I have deliberately left out, because of its vast dimensions, is that of kingship in Islam in relation to Ḥusayn. As many scholars have shown, water is an image of kingship in early Islam, and it would probably be very rewarding to investigate the notion of kingship with regard to the symbolism of water

in the story; the denial of water from Ḥusayn is also a denial of political power from him.[7]

Myths keep changing. Their content, their function, and at a slower pace, their structure, adapt to ever new situations. This is a fact which makes their analysis both frustrating and challenging: frustrating because the analysis of a myth is never finished; challenging because it manifests the ability of mankind to adjust to new circumstances. In the "Overture" to the first book in his *Mythologies*, Lévi-Strauss writes:

> The study of myth raises a methodological problem, in that it cannot be carried out according to the Cartesian principle of breaking down the difficulty into as many parts as may be necessary for finding the solution. There is no real end to the mythological analysis, no hidden unity to be grasped once the breaking-down process has been completed. Themes can be split up *ad infinitum*. Just when you think you have disentangled and separated them, you realize that they are knitting together again in response to the operation of unexpected affinities.[8]

The structural analysis of the Karbalāʾ Drama is not finished. On the contrary, it has spurred me on to continue the structural analysis of "the Islamic Myth" (in the Lévi-Straussian sense of all its variants taken together), the stories that has formed, and that continues to form the world view and identity of billions of Muslims in all ages throughout the world. If others have got the same impetus through reading this work, I will be more than satisfied.

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[7] For water as an image of kingship in early Islam, see e.g. El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting*, 91–92; Mårtensson, "True New Testament," 100–102; Mårtensson, "Discourse," 326–327; Ringgren, "Religious Aspects of the Caliphate," 740.

[8] Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 5.

Appendix I. Summary of the Karbalāʾ Drama according to Ṭabarī

Here follows a summary of the Karbalāʾ Drama in Ṭabarī's version. It is intended to give a fairly thorough overview to readers not very familiar with the story, but it cannot be used for analysis of the text. I have followed the account of Hisham b. al-Kalbī, which is Ṭabarī's main source, and only indicated where the other sources fit in, and give very brief digests of their content. Where several, differing reports are given on the same subject in Ibn al-Kalbī's version, I have normally ignored the differences and only summarized the main outline of the story. The numbers in brackets refer to the pages in the Leiden edition of Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh*.[1] These pages are also given in the margins in the English translation.[2] The page numbers, however, must only be seen as rough indications as to where a specific episode is to be found in the text, as reports often overlap and a specific event might be retold twice in different places.

[216–223] *Ibn al-Kalbī.*

> At the death of the Umayyad caliph Muʿāwiya in Damascus in the month of Rajab, 60/ April, 680, his son Yazīd becomes the new ruler. The latter immediately sends a message to his governor in Madīna, al-Walīd, to inform him of the death of his father, and command him take the oath of allegiance from the politically most important people: Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī, ʿAbdallāh b. ʿUmar, and ʿAbdallāh b. al-Zubayr. None of them pledge their allegiance to Yazīd, and at night Ibn al-Zubayr and Ḥusayn escape for Makka.

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[1] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II.

[2] Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19.

[223–227] Then follows an interlude about ʿAbdallāh b. al-Zubayr who is fought by his brother ʿAmr b. al-Zubayr, but is victorius over the latter. This has nothing to do with the Karbalāʾ Drama, but due to Ṭabarī's annalistic arrangement, this episode is placed here, in the year when it occurred.

[227–232] *ʿAmmār al- Duhnī.*

This is the first part of al-Duhnī's brief account of what happened to Ḥusayn and his followers. This part deals with the invitations sent by the Kūfans to Ḥusayn, Ḥusayn's sending of Muslim b. ʿAqīl as his emissary to Kūfa, the treachery of the Kūfans against Muslim, and the execution of him and his host Hāniʾ b. ʿUrwa in the hands of the governor, ʿUbaydallāh Ibn Ziyād.

[232–272] *Ibn al-Kalbī.*

The same account is given in Ibn al-Kalbī's version, but in a much more comprehensive fashion.

[232–236] Ḥusayn stealthily leaves Madīna for Makka. On the way he encounters a man who admonishes him to stay in Makka and not go to Kūfa. In Makka he becomes very popular among people in general, but not to Ibn al-Zubayr who realizes that no one will take any interest in him as long as Ḥusayn is present. Meanwhile a group of the people of Kūfa decides to write letters of invitation to Ḥusayn, asking him to come and lead them in an insurrection against the present governor of the town, Nuʿmān b. Bashīr. They send a number of envoys with the letters and with oral invitations. Ḥusayn replies that he will send his cousin Muslim b. ʿAqīl as his representative to find out if the situation is as they describe it. If so, he writes, he will come as soon as possible.

[236–238] Ḥusayn dispatches Muslim, who, on his way to Kūfa gets lost in the desert. His two guides die from thirst, and Muslim himself finds water only in the last minute. He regards the incident as a bad omen for his mission, and writes to Ḥusayn, asking the latter to relive him of the task. Ḥusayn re-

fuses, however, and Muslim continues and reaches Kūfa. He stays in the house of al-Mukhtār b. Abī ‘Ubayd, and a great number of people begin to visit him and give their oath of allegiance to Ḥusayn.

[238–241] The Kūfan governor, Nu‘mān b. Bashīr, publicly warns the people not to rebel, but some nobles consider him too lenient toward the Shī‘ites. They write to the caliph Yazīd, and explain the situation to him. Yazīd decides to get rid of Nu‘mān and give the governorship of Kūfa to the present governor of Baṣra, ‘Ubaydallāh b. Ziyād. Meanwhile Ḥusayn has written a letter to the nobles of Baṣra in which he invites them to join him against the Umayyads. Ibn Ziyād gets to know about the letter the day before he is about to leave for Kūfa, executes Ḥusayn’s messenger and give a stern warning to the Baṣrans, not to involve themselves in any rebellious acts.

[241–249] Ibn Ziyād leaves for Kūfa. When he arrives there he is veiled. The people believe that it is Ḥusayn, and greet him with joy. Ibn Ziyād is very concerned. He goes to the palace, ousts Nu‘mān b. Bashīr, and immediately calls for a general prayer in which he warns against any kind of disloyalty toward himself and the caliph. He charges the leaders of the town to give him reports about all strangers and troublemakers in the town. He sends a servant to work under cover, and gather information about the followers of Ḥusayn in the town. Because of all the visitors, it is well known where Muslim stays, and he moves to Hāni’ b. ‘Urwa, who reluctantly receives him. In Hāni’’s house, the influential Sharīk b. al-A‘war, also lives. Sharīk, who is loyal to Ḥusayn and his family, but who is still well regarded by Ibn Ziyād, gets sick while staying there. Ibn Ziyād announces that he will come and visit him. Sharīk and Muslim arrange a trap for Ibn Ziyād, so that when the governor visits the sick man, Sharīk will ask for water. This is a signal to Muslim, who is hidden and will jump upon the governor and kill him. When the time comes, however, Muslim does not kill Ibn Ziyād in spite of Sharīk’s demand for water. He explains his behavior by referring to a *hadīth* from the Prophet that it is wrong to murder another Muslim. A few days later Sharīk dies from his illness.

[249–254] Through his spy, Ibn Ziyād is informed that Muslim lives in Hāni’’s house. The governor summons Hāni’ and begins to interrogate him. When the latter recognizes the spy, he confesses but refuses to hand Muslim over to Ibn Ziyād. Instead he threatens Ibn Ziyād that his own tribe will come

and rescue him. Ibn Ziyād strikes Hāniʾ across the face with his staff and locks him up. Outside the gates of the palace people from Hāniʾ's tribe gather, wondering what has happened to Hāniʾ, but they are calmed when they learn that he is alive.

[255–259] Muslim learns about Hāniʾ's situation, and gathers all the people that have pledged loyalty to Ḥusayn. The whole crowd marches to the palace to rescue Hāniʾ, and outside the palace more people gather during the afternoon. Ibn Ziyād's situation is precarious, and he assembles the nobles of the town around him. He commands them to bribe and threaten the people to make them go away. The people are made to believe that a Syrian army from the caliph is approaching. People begin to disperse, and by the evening only thirty men are left with Muslim. They leave the palace and begin to move back. The men drop away and after a while Muslim is alone. He does not know the town, and has nowhere to go to find shelter. He wanders up and down the lanes and finally reaches a house of an old woman, whom he asks for a drink of water. She agrees to give him shelter and hides him in a spare room. After a while her son arrives home and realizes that Muslim is hidden in the house.

[259–264] Meanwhile, Ibn Ziyād and the nobles in the palace understand that no people are left in the darkness outside and that the danger is over for the time being. The governor summons all the leading people of the town to the evening prayer. He commands everyone to look for Muslim, and orders the head of the police force, Ḥusayn b. Tamīm, to instigate a search for him. In the morning, the son of the woman who hides Muslim reveals his whereabouts to Ibn Ziyād. A party is sent out to capture him. When the men arrive at the house where Muslim hides, he refuses to come with them, and fiercely defends himself with his sword. He receives a cut across his face, and finally gives up when the leader of the group promises him safe conduct, Muḥammad b. al-Ashʿath. Since Muslim had earlier sent a letter to Ḥusayn, telling him that it was safe for him to come to Kūfa, he now asks Ibn al-Ashʿath to send a new message to inform Ḥusayn about what has happened and to implore him to return to Makka. Ibn al-Ashʿath agrees to do so and sends a messenger who finds Ḥusayn on the way between Makka and Kūfa.

[264–272] Muslim is brought to the palace. He is thirsty and asks for a drink of water. At first it is denied to him, but then he gets a cup. When he

tries do drink, however, blood from his wounded mouth runs down into the water, making it undrinkable. He and Ibn Ziyād argue and the governor orders him to be taken up on the palace roof and be beheaded there. His head and body are thrown down on the market place below. After him Hāniʾ is also executed, as is another man who took part in the insurrection. Ibn Ziyād writes to the caliph and informs him about what has happened. Yazīd replies that he is satisfied with Ibn Ziyād's handling of the situation so far. He warns the governor that Ḥusayn is approaching Kūfa and commands him to stop him.

[272–281] Meanwhile in Makka, Ḥusayn makes preparations for his departure to Kūfa. A number of people, including some of his relatives warn him against going to Kūfa, since the people there are known to be fickle in their loyalties. Only Ibn al-Zubayr supports Ḥusayn in his decision, realizing that in this way he will get rid of his rival. On his way to Kūfa, Ḥusayn waylays a caravan with goods aimed for the caliph Yazīd. He also meets a number of people coming from Kūfa (among them the famous poet al-Farazdaq) who again warn him from entering the town. Also from Makka people send letters to him to advise him against going to Kūfa. Ḥusayn replies to all these admonitions, that as long as he trusts God and follows His will, he has nothing to fear, even though it might lead to his death.

[281–283] *ʿAmmār al-Duhnī.*

Then follows the second part of al-Duhnī's account. This relates the rest of the story in brief terms: Ḥusayn is intercepted by the Kūfan troops, he tries to negotiate but fails. The battle ensues, and Ḥusayn, almost all male members of his family, and his other followers are killed. The surviving members of the family are sent to Ibn Ziyād in Kūfa, and then to Yazīd in Damascus. Yazīd treats them well, and allows them to return to Madīna.

[283–287] *Ḥusayn b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān.*

The whole story is again given in very brief form, from the invitation from the Kūfans, over the mission of Muslim b. ʿAqīl and his execution,

Ḥusayn's journey to Kūfa, the battle at Karbalāʾ and the aftermath of the survivors in the hands of Ibn Ziyād in Kūfa and Yazīd in Damascus.

[287–288] *Ḥārith b. Muḥammad*

Five reports follow on the authority of Ḥārith (d. 282/895–896).[3] Four concern the date on which Ḥusayn was killed. The fifth says that Ḥusayn's head was the first to be raised on wood.

[288–390] *Ibn al-Kalbī*

[288–289] Ḥusayn continues toward Kūfa, while Ḥusayn b. Tamīm, the Kūfan chief of police, posts guard forces around the town. Ḥusayn sends Qays b. Mushir al-Ṣaydāwī with a message to his own people in Kūfa, telling them that he is on his way and admonishing them to be prepared for his arrival. The Kūfan forces, however, capture Qays and bring him before Ibn Ziyād. The governor commands him to publicly curse Ḥusayn from the top of the palace, but instead Qays blesses him and curses Ibn Ziyād. The governor tells his men to throw him from the top of the palace, and he dies.

[289–291] On his way toward Kūfa, Ḥusayn encounters a man who warns him against going to Kūfa. Ḥusayn insists on continuing, however. A man named Zuhayr b. al-Qayn travels on the same route together with his company. He is a supporter of the Umayyads, and loathes having to share watering places with Ḥusayn. When Ḥusayn stops, Ibn al-Qayn travels on and vice versa. One evening he cannot avoid stopping close to Ḥusayn's camp. Ḥusayn sends a messenger, asking Zuhayr to come and visit him. Zuhayr's wife tells him to go, and he does so. When he returns, he is changed. He has decided to join Ḥusayn. Since he realizes that the company of Ḥusayn can lead to his own death, he divorces his wife so that she will not suffer if he is killed. He also gives his companions permission to leave. He becomes one of the most devout followers of Ḥusayn.

[291–294] Two men from the tribe of al-Asad start from Makka a few days later than Ḥusayn, and try to catch up with him to join him. On their way they meet a man coming from Kūfa, and ask him about the state of affairs in

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[3] Ṭabarī, *History*, vol.19, 82 n.279.

the town. He tells them that Muslim and Hāni' have been killed. Later the two Asadīs reach the company of Ḥusayn, and tell him what they have heard. They try to convince him not to continue, but the brothers of Muslim want vengeance and say they will continue any way. At that Ḥusayn decides to go on. He also receives the news that another envoy of his, ʿAbdallāh b. Yuqṭur has been caught and killed. When hearing the news from Kūfa, Ḥusayn realizes how dangerous his continued journey will be, and he gives permission to anyone who has followed him to leave. A number of Bedouins that have joined him on the way depart. He meets yet another man from Kūfa who warns him not to continue, but Ḥusayn persists, since he believes it is God's will.

[295–304] The Text of Reference. For the full text, see Appendix II.

Ḥusayn and his company catch sight of the vanguard of the Kūfan troops at a distance. They try to find a place where they cannot be surrounded, and race to a *wadī* called Dhū Ḥusum. The enemy force arrive closely afterwards. The leader of the force is al-Ḥurr b. Yazīd al-Tamīmī al-Yarbūʿī. When the two groups stand opposed to each other, Ḥusayn commands his servants to give water to the thirsty enemies and their mounts. While at Dhū Ḥusum, the enemies twice pray together with Ḥusayn's group with Ḥusayn leading the prayers. Ḥusayn gives two speeches to the Kūfan force, trying to convince them that they should support him. When Ḥusayn and his group try to depart, al-Ḥurr and his men stop them. Al-Ḥurr explains that his orders are to bring Ḥusayn to Kūfa. Ḥusayn and al-Ḥurr quarrel, but in the end they reach a compromise: Ḥusayn will not return nor go to Kūfa, but take a third way, while al-Ḥurr writes to Ibn Ziyād and asks for further instructions. A third speech directed to the Kūfans is recorded. Ḥusayn also talks to his own followers and says that death is better than living under oppressors. They set off again. Al-Ḥurr clearly displays his unwillingness to fight against the grandson of the Prophet, and implores Ḥusayn to give up, or he will be killed. Ḥusayn replies that death is nothing to fear for someone who does the will of God. After a while a group of four men coming from Kūfa try to join Ḥusayn, together with their guide, al-Ṭirimmāḥ b. ʿAdī. Al-Ḥurr and his men attempt to stop them, but after some discussion they are allowed to unite with Ḥusayn and his men. The four men tell Ḥusayn what has happened with his last en-

voy, Qays b. Mushir, and inform him that all the people of Kūfa have deserted him, or soon will do so.

[304–308] Al-Ṭirimmāḥ asks Ḥusayn to come with him to the strongholds of his own tribe, where he would be protected from the Umayyads, but Ḥusayn refuses. They continue, and reach the camp of ʿUbaydallāh b. al-Ḥurr al-Juʿfī, a Kūfan noble and a poet. Ḥusayn asks Ibn al-Ḥurr to join him, but he refuses. He has left Kūfa because he wants to stay neutral in the conflict between the governor and Ḥusayn. On their continued journey Ḥusayn drowses and in a vision sees a man on a horse announcing his death. When he tells his son ʿAlī, the latter replies that, as long as they are in the right, they have nothing to fear from death. The leader of the Kūfan force, al-Ḥurr receives instructions from the governor that he should stop Ḥusayn at a place where he cannot get hold of water. They stop not far from the river Euphrates.

[308–313] Next day a Kūfan force of 4000 men, led by ʿUmar b. Saʿd, arrives and unites with al-Ḥurr's group. Earlier, ʿUmar b. Saʿd had been appointed to a governorship in al-Rayy. When Ḥusayn approached Kūfa, Ibn Ziyād commanded ʿUmar to go out against him before he set of for Rayy. ʿUmar hesitated because he did not want to fight against the grandson of the Prophet. Ibn Ziyād threatened to withdraw his appointment, and against the sincere advice of his relatives ʿUmar decided to obey Ibn Ziyād. When ʿUmar and his force reach Ḥusayn, the latter informs ʿUmar that he is prepared return. ʿUmar forwards the information to Ibn Ziyād, who refuses to concede and demands that Ḥusayn gives his oath of allegiance to the caliph Yazīd. Meanwhile, Ibn Ziyād commands, Ḥusayn and his followers should not be allowed to get any water. A man mocks Ḥusayn for not getting to the water. Ḥusayn asks God to punish him. Throughout the rest of his life, the man is constantly thirsty. Ḥusayn sends a small group of his men, led by his brother ʿAbbās b. ʿAlī, to try and get water from the river. They partially succeed.

[313–317] Ḥusayn wishes to negotiate with ʿUmar b. Saʿd, and they meet at night, sitting so that no one can hear them. Ḥusayn suggests three alternatives: that he is allowed to return; that he should leave himself to the caliph, Yazīd b. Muʿāwiya; or that he should be allowed to go to one of the border stations far away. (According to another version, Ḥusayn only suggests that he should leave and not go to Kūfa.) ʿUmar writes to Ibn Ziyād about Ḥusayn's suggestions. Ibn Ziyād is prepared to accept that Ḥusayn goes to Yazīd and

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pledge his allegiance to him. However, his advisor, Shamir b. Dhī al-Jawshan insists that this would be a sign of weakness on the part of the governor. Instead he should demand that Ḥusayn gives his oath of allegiance to Yazīd before himself, Ibn Ziyād. The governor concedes, and writes back to ʿUmar that Ḥusayn must come to Kūfa and pledge his allegiance to the caliph before him. If Ḥusayn rejects that command, ʿUmar must fight him, kill him, cut his head off and make the horses trample his body. If ʿUmar refuses to fight Ḥusayn, he must give over the command of the troops to Shamir. The message is delivered to ʿUmar by Shamir himself. Shamir also offers a guarantee of safe conduct to three of Ḥusayn's half brothers, who are related to him. The three brothers refuse, claiming that God's guarantee of safe conduct is more worth.

[317–327] Ḥusayn sits in front of his tent and nods off. In a dream the Prophet says to him: "You are coming to us." At the same time the Kūfan force is approaching, ready for battle. Ḥusayn asks them to delay the fighting to the following day, so that he and his followers might consider the situation once more during the night. The delay is granted them. Ḥusayn speaks to his followers and give them all permission to leave during the coming night. Only two men are prepared to leave him. The rest of his followers renew their pledges to him. Ḥusayn's son ʿAlī, who is sick and nursed by his aunt Zaynab (the sister of Ḥusayn), hears his father recite a poem about their death. Zaynab begins to cry and tear her clothes, but Ḥusayn tries to comfort her, telling her that they will go to live in Paradise. During the night and the morning, Ḥusayn and his companions pray and make themselves ready for the battle. They move the tents closer and position themselves with the tents at their back. They also fill a ditch behind the tents with cane and fire-wood which could be lighted and protect them from being attacked from the back. They also dissolve musk in a big bowl of water, and anoint themselves with it in order to be prepared for death. In the morning Ḥusayn holds a copy of the Qurʾān in front of him, and together with his followers he rides to meet the enemy.

[327–332] When the Kūfans see the firewood and cane burning behind the tents, Shamir b. Dhī al-Jawshan mocks Ḥusayn, asking if he is in a hurry to reach Hell-fire. One of Ḥusayn's followers has the opportunity to shoot him with an arrow, but Ḥusayn does not allow him to do that, because he does not want to be the one who starts the fight. Ḥusayn sits on his horse and speaks

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to the Kūfans. He tells them that because of the inviolability of himself and his family, and because the Prophet held him and his brother in such high esteem, they should not kill him. He also asks some of the people in the Kūfan army why they sent their invitations to him, and ask them to let him return to where he came from. He finally surrenders himself to God and asks for His protection. One of Ḥusayn's followers, Zuhayr b. al-Qayn, then speaks, and urges the Kūfans not to attack. Muslims should not fight each other, he says. If the sword strikes, the community will split. God uses Ḥusayn to test them and their faith. He exhorts them to desert the tyrant, Ibn Ziyād, and the caliph Yazīd, since these rulers will only bring evil to them. He asks them to allow Ḥusayn at least to go to Yazīd. Shamir and Ibn al-Qayn begin to quarrel.

[332–335] When the army is set in motion toward Ḥusayn, al-Ḥurr separates himself from the crowd. He tells a man who asks him about his behavior, that he is about to choose heaven rather than hell. Then he rushes across to Ḥusayn, and joins him. Husayn welcomes him. Al-Ḥurr speaks to the Kūfans, saying that they behave very wickedly against Ḥusayn in that they have invited him, and then betrayed him. Now they have denied him water that even unbelievers and impure animals have access to. ʿUmar b. Saʿd calls for the standard, and then shoots an arrow, thus "officially" opening the battle.

[335–338] A certain ʿAbdallāh b. ʿUmayr al-Kalbī and his wife Umm Wahb bt. ʿAbd[4] from Kūfa joined Ḥusayn at an earlier stage. When the battle begins, two men from the Kūfan army challenge the men in Ḥusayn's group to single combat. ʿAbdallāh b. ʿUmayr responds, and kills the men. Also Umm Wahb comes rushing to his help with a tent pole, but is sent back to the women. As the enemy force attack, the defenders kneel and lift their spears against the horses, thus warding off the onslaught. A Kūfan mocks Ḥusayn, who asks God to send him to hell. The man falls off his horse, but his leg is stuck in the stirrup, and as the horse runs, his head bumps against the ground, and he is killed.

[338–356] At first the battle proceeds through a number of duels which are related in great detail, but the Kūfan commanders understand that Ḥusayn's fighters kill at least as many as are killed from their own group,

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[4] In Arabic names *bt.* is pronounced "bint" and has the meaning "daughter of."

and prohibit any further single combats. The Kūfans then attack on a larger scale. It is clear, however, that the account of the battle is not recorded in strict chronological order, but that episodes with a similar content is rather heaped on top of each other.[5] The deaths of some of the more important men in Ḥusayn's group, their words to Ḥusayn and to the enemies, as well as their prayers to God are recorded in detail. After the deaths of the other followers of Ḥusayn, those of his family are related:

[356–361] The first of Ḥusayn's family to be killed is his son ʿAlī al-Akbar.[6] He attacks the Kūfans, who are afraid to kill him. At last he is attacked and killed. Ḥusayn and his sister Zaynab grieve over him. ʿAbdallāh b. Muslim b. ʿAqīl is killed by two arrows. An unidentified nephew of Ḥusayn is cut down. He calls for Ḥusayn, who rushes to help him, but the horses of the enemies trample him to death. Most of the enemies are afraid to be responsible for death of Ḥusayn, so they refrain from attacking him. One man, however, gives him a sword-cut on the head, and wounds him. Ḥusayn is tired and less active. He brings out a small child and holds him in his lap. An arrow hits the baby and kills him. Ḥusayn's brothers are killed, as is another young relative, probably a nephew of Ḥusayn.

[361–366] Ḥusayn is thirsty and tries to reach the water. A Kūfan shoots an arrow which lands in his mouth, so that the blood spurts. He asks God to punish the man who shot the arrow. Later the man is constantly thirsty, and drinks so that his stomach is splits open. Shamir and some of his men attack Ḥusayn. A boy from Ḥusayn's family tries to defend him, but is arm is cut off. Ḥusayn defends himself fiercely, and the enemies are afraid to kill him. Finally he is attacked by a group of people and wounded. Sinān b. Anas b. ʿAmr deals him the lethal blow.

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[5] See e.g. the account of the death of Yazid b. Ziyad b. al-Muhāṣir Abū al- Shaʿthaʾ al-Kindī, which appears far into the account, but which has a note saying that he was among the first to be killed (Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 355–356; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 149–150.

[6] Ḥusayn is said to have had two sons named ʿAli: ʿAlī al-Akbar (ʿAlī the Older) and ʿAlī al-Asghar (ʿAlī the Younger). The latter was sick during and could not participate in the fight. He was one of the few male members of Ḥusayn's family whose survival is recorded. He became the fourth Shīʿite Imām by the name ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (see Figure 1.1 on p. 17).

The part about the surviving family members before Ibn Ziyād in Kūfa and Yazīd in Damascus which now follows is complex and certainly edited to convey a specific message. Only an outline is given here. It is further analyzed in Appendix III.

[366–374] The body of Ḥusayn is plundered. Then the people turn to the women's tents and begin looting them. Shamir wants to kill the sick ʿAlī al-Asghar, but is stopped by ʿUmar b. Saʿd, who also forbids any plundering of the women's tents, but what has already been taken is not returned. Some men volunteer to let their horses trample the dead body of Ḥusayn. His head is taken to Ibn Ziyād. The surviving members of the family of Ḥusayn are also brought to Kūfa and the governor. Ibn Ziyād pokes the mouth of Ḥusayn's head with his cane. An old man present protests that he has seen the Prophet kiss those lips. Zaynab and Ibn Ziyād argue about what was God's intention in letting Ḥusayn and all the others be killed. Ibn Ziyād also threatens to kill ʿAlī Asghar, but Zaynab pleads for his life, and he is allowed to live. Ibn Ziyād summons all the people of Kūfa to a general prayer, and announces that Ḥusayn "the liar and son of a liar" is dead. An old, blind Shīʿite protests, and says that it is Ibn Ziyād who is the liar. Ibn Ziyād wants to punish him, but his tribesmen protect him, and take him away. Later, however, Ibn Ziyād catches him and executes him.

[374–383] The head of Ḥusayn is brought to Damascus and the caliph Yazīd. Later the surviving members of his family are also brought there. Yazīd expresses regret and grief over the death of Ḥusayn, but also states that it was Ḥusayn's own fault. One report has it that he pokes with a cane in the mouth of Ḥusayn's head. He treats the family very well, although he argues with Zaynab and ʿAlī. Later he sends them to Madīna followed by a courteous escort.

[383–385] This section contains four different reports on events following the death of Ḥusayn. According to the first, Ibn Ziyād sends a messenger to Madīna to proclaim the news of Ḥusayn's death. The second report says that ʿAbdallāh b. Jaʿfar, the uncle of Ḥusayn, is informed about the death of his sons. He expresses grief, but is proud that they died while defending Ḥusayn. The third report is about Ibn Ziyād asking ʿUmar for the document in which

he commanded the latter to lead the force against Ḥusayn. ʿUmar refuses to return it, and says that he has sent it away, as a proof that he did not act voluntarily when going out against Ḥusayn. The fourth report tells of a mysterious voice that was heard in Madīna, which recites a poem of doom over those who have killed Ḥusayn.

[386–388] A list of those of the Banū Hāshim, i.e. the relatives of the Prophet, that were killed in the battle.

[388–390] Ibn Ziyād wants the Kūfan nobleman ʿUbaydallāh Ibn al-Ḥurr al Juʿfī to express his full loyalty to him, the governor. Ibn al-Ḥurr refuses, and escapes. Later he reaches Karbalāʾ and seeks God's forgiveness for not supporting Ḥusayn. He recites a poem which extols those who helped Ḥusayn and deprecates his adversaries.

Appendix II. The Text of Reference

Here follows the complete Text of Reference. The translation is my own, but I have relied heavily on Howard's translation in *The History of al-Ṭabarī*.[1] For the purpose of the analysis and to facilitate reference, I have divided the text into sections and subsections. The former are indicated by a headline, the latter by a boldface number. Numbers in square brackets refer to pages in the Leiden edition of Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh*.[2] As for the *isnād*s (chains of transmission), I have followed the practice of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, in which the *isnād* in which the names of the transmitters are separated by an em-dash "—".[3]

Abbreviations used:

(P) = Peace be upon him (*'alayhi al-salām*)

(S) = May God bless him and give him peace (*Ṣallā allāhu 'alayhi wa-sallama*)

Section 1

1. [295] According to Hishām (b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī)—Abū Mikhnaf—Abū Jānāb—'Adī b. Ḥarmala—'Abdallāh b. Sulaym and al-Madhrī b. al-Mush-ma'ill, both of Asad: Al-Ḥusayn, peace be on him, went on until he stopped at Sharāf. At dawn he commanded his servants to get a lot of water. Then they continued from there and went on at a quick pace during the first part of the day until midday.

2. [296] Then one of the men said: "God is greater!" Al-Ḥusayn said: "God is greater! Why did you say 'God is greater'?" The man answered: "I saw palm-

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[1] Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 91–99.

[2] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 295–304.

[3] Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 1, xv.

trees." The two men of Asad said to him: "This is a place in which we have never seen a palm-tree." The two men reported: Al-Ḥusayn asked us: "What do you think that you see?" We said: "We think it is the necks of horses." Al-Ḥusayn declared: "By God! I think so too. Isn't there a place where we could take refuge by putting it at our rear so that we can face the people from one direction?" We said to him: "Yes there is Dhū Ḥusum over on your side. Turn left toward it, and if you reach it before the people, it will be what you want."

3. The two men reported: So he took to the left toward it. They reported: We went in that direction with him. No sooner had we done this than the necks of the cavalry vanguard appeared in front of us and we could see them clearly. We left the road and when they saw that we had moved off the road, they turned toward us. Their spears looked like a swarm of bees; their standards were like birds' wings.[4] The two men reported: We raced toward Dhū Ḥusum; we got there before them. Al-Ḥusayn dismounted and ordered his tents to be pitched; they were erected.

4. The people came up—they were one thousand mounted men under the command of al-Ḥurr b. Yazīd al-Tamīmī al-Yarbūʿī—so that he and his cavalry stood facing al-Ḥusayn in the heat of midday. Al-Ḥusayn and his followers were all wearing their turbans and swords. Al-Ḥusayn said to his servants: "Provide the people with water to let them quench their thirst, and give their mounts water to drink little by little." His servants stood up and gave the mounts a little water at a time.[5]

Servants stood up and gave the people water to drink until they had quenched their thirst. Then they began filling [297] their bowls, basins and cups with water and took them to the mounts. When [a mount] had drunk

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[4] Howard translates the words "*ka-anna asinnatahum al-yaʿāsīb*" by "their spears looked like palm branches stripped of their leaves" (Ṭabarī, *History*, 92). I think, however, that Howard's translation is not correct. The noun used here is *yaʿsūb* (pl. *yaʿāsīb*), which usually means bee, locust or other flying insect. Howard seems to have taken in for a related word: *ʿasīb* (pl. *ʿusub*), which has the meaning of palm branch without leaves. (For these words, see Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 2, 2040–2041). Furthermore, my translation emphasizes the great multitude of the enemy force rather than barrenness, which makes this translation fit better with the second metaphor used to describe the enemy force: "and their standards looked like birds' wings."

[5] This sentence is an abbreviated duplicate of the following ones. It must be a case of poor editing.

three, four or five draughts, the water was taken away from it and given to another mount until all the mounts had been watered.

5. According to Hishām—Laqīt—'Alī b. al-Ta''ān al-Muḥāribī:[6] I was with al-Ḥurr b. Yazīd. I was among the last of his followers to arrive. When al-Ḥusayn saw how thirsty both my mount and I were, he said: "Make your beast (*rāwiya*) kneel." To me *"rāwiya"* meant waterskin, so he said: "Cousin, make your camel (*jamal*) kneel." I made it kneel. Then he said: "Drink." But when I drank, water flowed from my waterskin. Al-Ḥusayn said: "Bend (*ikhnith*) your waterskin," using the word that means "*i'tif*" (bend). I did not know how to do that. Al-Ḥusayn stood up and bent it. Then I drank and gave my mount to drink.

Section 2

1. Al-Ḥurr b. Yazīd had come toward al-Ḥusayn from al-Qādisiyya. The reason for this was that, when [the news of] the coming of al-Ḥusayn reached 'Ubaydallāh b. Ziyād, he had sent al-Ḥusayn b. Tamīm[7] al-Tamīmī, who was in charge of his police, and ordered him to take up position at al-Qādisiyya, to place lookouts and to control [the area] from al-Qādisiyya to Khaffān. He had sent al-Ḥurr in advance from al-Qādisiyya with these one thousand mounted men to meet Ḥusayn.

Section 3

1. He remained positioned opposite Ḥusayn until the time for the midday prayer drew near. Al-Ḥusayn ordered al-Ḥajjāj b. Masrūq al-Ju'fī to give the call to prayer. He called to prayer. When the *iqāma*[8] was about to be made, al-Ḥusayn came out dressed in a waistcloth (*izār*), cloak (*ridā'*) and wearing a pair of sandals. He praised and glorified God. Then he said:

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[6] This subsection is probably an insertion in Abū Miknaf's text. It is introduced by an *isnād* which does not include Abū Mikhnaf, and it is missing from some other versions, such as that of Balādhurī (Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, 169–170).

[7] The text of Ṭabarī has Numayr here, but this is corrected in the *Addenda and Emendanda*, DCLIV of the Leiden edition. Cf. though, with the version of Mufīd (Mufīd, *Al-Irshād*, 207).

[8] The second call to prayer that immediately precedes the prayer.

2. "People, it is an excuse [for my coming here] (*innahā maʿdhira*), both to God the Mighty andExalted and to you, that I did not come to you until your letters were brought to me, and your messengers came to me saying, 'Come to us, for we have no *imām*. God may unite us in guidance (*ʿalā ʾl-hudā*) through you.' Since this was your view, [298] I have come to you. Therefore, if you give me guarantees in your covenants and pledges I will come to your town. If you will not and are averse to my coming, I will leave you for the place from which I came to you."

3. They were silent before him. Then they said to the muezzin: "Recite the *iqāma*." He recited it. Al-Ḥusayn (P) asked al-Ḥurr: "Do you want to lead your followers in the prayer?" He replied: "No, but you pray and we will pray with you leading the prayer." Al-Ḥusayn prayed in front of them.

4. Then he entered his tent, and his followers gathered around him. Al-Ḥurr went back to his position and entered a tent that had been put up for him. A group of his followers gathered around him. [The rest of] his followers returned to their previous positions, each of them holding the reins of his mount and sitting in the shade [of the animals].

Section 4

1. At the time for the afternoon (*ʿaṣr*) prayer, al-Ḥusayn ordered his followers to prepare for departure. Then he went out and ordered the call for prayer to be made and the call for the afternoon prayer was made. Then the *iqāma* was recited. Al-Ḥusayn came forward and prayed with the people. When he had said the final greeting of peace [in the prayer], he turned his face toward the people. He praised and glorified God, and said:

2. "People, if you fear [God] (*in tataqqū*) and recognize the rights of those to whom they are due, this will be more satisfying to God. We are the family of the house [of Muḥammad] (*wa-naḥnu ahlu ʾl-bayt*)[9], more entitled to the authority (*wilāya*) of this government (*amr*) over you than these who claim what does not belong to them, who bring tyranny and aggression among you. If you dislike us and are ignorant of our rights, and if your view is different from

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[9] For a discussion of the phrase *ahl al-bayt*, which was not only used to denote the family of Muḥammad, but other families as well, see Sharon, "Ahl al-Bayt"; Sharon, "Umayyads" Although it is not explicit, in this case the reference is obviously to Muḥammad's family, however.

what came to me in your letters and what your messengers brought to me, then I will leave you."

3. Al-Ḥurr b. Yazīd said to him: "By God! We know nothing of these letters that you mention." Al-Ḥusayn said: "ʿUqba b. Simʿān, bring out the two saddlebags [299] in which their letters to me are kept." He brought out two saddlebags that were full of documents and scattered them in front of them. Al-Ḥurr said: "We are not among those who wrote to you, and we have been ordered that when we meet you we should not leave you until we have brought you to ʿUbaydallāh b. Ziyād." Al-Ḥusayn said to him: "Death will come to you if you do that." He said to his followers: "Rise and mount!" They mounted and waited for their women to mount.

Section 5

1. Then he said to his followers: "Let us depart!" When they set out to leave, the people got in between them and the direction they were traveling.

2. Al-Ḥusayn said to al-Ḥurr: "May God deprive your mother of you! What do you want?" He said: "By God! If any of the Arabs other than you were to say that to me, while he was in the same situation as you, I would not fail to mention his mother's being deprived of him. I would say it whoever he might be. But, by God, there is no way for me to mention your mother except by saying the best thing that can be said."

3. Al-Ḥusayn said to him: "So what do you want?" Al-Ḥurr said: "By God! I want to take you to ʿUbaydallāh b. Ziyād." Al-Ḥusayn said to him: "Then, by God, I will not follow you!" Al-Ḥurr said to him: "Then, by God, I will not leave you!" These statements were repeated three times. When the conversation between them was getting more intense, al-Ḥurr said to him: "I have not been ordered to fight you. I have only been ordered not to leave you until I bring you to Kūfa. If you refuse that, then take any road that will neither bring you into Kūfa nor take you back to Madīna. Let that be a compromise between us until I have written to Ibn Ziyād and you have written to Yazīd b. Muʿāwiya if you like to write to him, or to ʿUbaydallāh b. Ziyād if you wish. Perhaps God will cause something to happen [300] that will protect me from being troubled in any way by your affair."

4. He continued: "Therefore, take this [road] here and bear to the left of the road to al-ʿUdhayb and al-Qādisiyya." Between [al-Qādisiyya] and al-ʿUdhayb there are thirty-eight miles. Al-Ḥusayn set off with his followers and al-Ḥurr traveled along with him.

Section 6

1. According to Abū Mikhnaf—ʿUqba b. Abī al-ʿAyzār:[10] Al-Ḥusayn preached to his followers and the followers of al-Ḥurr at al-Bīḍa. He praised and glorified God, and said: "People, the Apostle of God (S) said: 'Whoever sees an authority who is acting tyrannically, making permissible what God has forbidden, violating God's covenant, and opposing the Sunna of the Apostle of God (S) by acting against the servants of God sinfully and with hostility, and does not correct[11] them by deed or by word, it is God's decree that that person will know the consequences [of his neglect] (*kāna ḥaqqan ʿalā 'llāhi an yudkhalahu mudkhalahu*)[12].'

2. Indeed, these [authorities] have cleaved to obedience to Satan and have abandoned obedience to the Merciful; they have made corruption visible; they have not administered the punishments laid down by God; they have appropriated the taxes exclusively to themselves; they have permitted what God has forbidden, and they have forbidden what He has permitted.

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[10] The portion consisting of Sections 6 and 7 are almost certainly an insertion in the original text, in spite of the fact that it has an *isnād* that goes back to Abū Miknaf: firstly, it begins with a new *isnād* with a transmitter, ʿUqba b. Abī al-ʿAyzār, that is not found anywhere else in the story; secondly, it breaks the flow of the narrative between the end of Section 5 and the beginning of Section 8; thirdly, it suddenly introduces a new place, al Bīḍa; and fourthly, it is missing from important versions, such as that of al-Mufīd (Mufīd, *Al-Irshād*, 208).

[11] The text here and a few lines further down has the word *yuʿayyir*, and a couple of lines further down, *ʿayyara*, which means "upbraid" or "reproach" (Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, series II, 300, lines 8 and 11). It is much weaker than *ghayyara* (lit. "cause change," in contexts like these usually rendered "put right"), which is normally used in similar contexts, (Cook, *Commanding Right*, 34–35) and which is used by al-Balādhurī in the same place. Cook suggests that the word here should be read as *ghayyara* (Cook, *Commanding Right*, 231n26), and I have adopted this reading.

[12] For the last two words in this sentence I follow the reading of Qurʾān 4:31, 17:80 and 22:59. The literal translation would be "make him enter his gate."

3. I am more entitled than anyone else to put things right (*Anā aḥaqqu man ghayyara*).[13] Your letters were brought to me, and your messengers came to me with your oath of allegiance that you would not hand me over or desert me. If you fulfill your pledge, you will attain your rectitude, for I am al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī, the son of Fāṭima, daughter of the Apostle of God (S). My life is with your lives, my family is with your families. In me you have a good example (*uswa*).

4. However, if you will not act, but you break your covenant and lift off the pledge of allegiance to me from your necks, then, by my life, that is not a thing that is unknown of you. You have done that to my father, my brother and my cousin, Muslim. Anyone who was deceived by you would be gullible. Thus have you mistaken your fortune and lost your destiny. For 'whosoever breaks his oath breaks it but to his own hurt.'[14] God will enable me to do without you. Peace be with you, and the mercy and blessings of God."

Section 7

1. ʿUqbah b. Abī al-ʿAyzār reported: Ḥusayn (P) stood up to preach at Dhū Ḥusum. He praised and glorified God, and said: "You have seen what this matter has come to. [301] Truly, the world has changed and has become worse; its goodness has retreated and it has become very bitter. There remains only a small rest of it, like what is left in a jar, a paltry life like an unhealthy pasturage. Can you not see that truth is no longer practiced and falsehood no longer desisted from so that the believer rightly desires to meet God. I can only regard death as martyrdom and life with the oppressors as a tribulation."

2. He reported: Zuhayr b. al-Qayn al-Bajalī stood up and said to his comrades: "Will you speak or should I?" They said: "No, but you speak". He praised and glorified God, and said: "We have heard God guide your words, son of the Apostle of God. By God! If our world was eternal and we could be immortal within it, but that, if by helping and supporting you, we must abandon it, then we would still prefer going with you rather than staying in it." Al-Ḥusayn prayed for him and spoke well of him.

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[13] See note 11 above.

[14] Qurʾān 48:10

Section 8

1. Al-Ḥurr started to travel alongside him, while saying to him: "Ḥusayn, I remind you of God with regard to your life (*innī udhakkiruka 'llāha fī nafsika*), for I testify that if you fight, you will be fought, and if you are fought, you will certainly be killed as I see it." Al-Ḥusayn said to him: "Do you think that you can frighten me with death? Could a worse disaster happen to you than killing me? I do not know what to say to you. I can say what the brother of al-Aws said to his cousin when he met the latter as he was going to help the Apostle of God (S). [His cousin] said to him: 'Where are you going, for you will be killed?' He said:

2. 'I will depart, for there is no shame in death for a young man;
  whenever he intends right and strives as a Muslim,
and has supported righteous men with his life;
  [302] opposed the cursed and abandoned the criminal.[15]'"

He reported: When al-Ḥurr heard that from him, he drew away from him.

Section 9

1. He and his followers traveled on one side and Ḥusayn on the other side (*wa-kāna yusīru bi-aṣḥābihi fī nāḥiyya wa-Ḥusayn fī nāḥiyya ukhrā*), until they reached ʿUdhayb al-Hijānāt. There, the dromedaries of al-Nuʿmān used to graze.

2. Suddenly a group of four approached from Kūfa on their camels, driving along a horse of Nāfiʿ b. Hilāl, which was called al-Kāmil. They had with them their guide, al-Ṭirimmāḥ b. ʿAdī, on his horse. He was reciting:

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[15] The two last words in the second verse of Ṭabarī's version of the poem are quite unintelligible in the form they now stand. The words: *yaghushshu wa-yurghimā*, in this context would mean something like 'using deceit and humiliation'. It is apparent that different editors find it difficult to make them fit into the context, since a number of variants are given in the Leiden edition, and both Mufīd and Balādhurī have different readings. Howard has chosen to follow Balādhurī's rendering in his translation, a reading which is not given as a variant in the Leiden edition of Ṭabarī. He gives no reason as to why he has chosen this specific reading. I have chosen to follow one of the variants given in the Leiden edition, one which is very close to that of Mufīd's text (Mufīd, *Al-Irshād*, 208).

O, my camel, do not be frightened by my urging;
  but hasten before the dawn rises,
With the best riders and the best travelers;
  until you may kneel at the house of a man of high ancestry,
A praiseworthy man, a free man, a generous man;
  whom God has sent for the best mission to fulfill.
Then may God cause him to remain for the rest of time.

He reported: When they reached al-Ḥusayn, they recited these verses to him. He replied: "By God! I hope that what God wants for us will be good whether we die or be victorious."

3. He reported: [303] Al-Ḥurr b. Yazīd approached them and said: "These men from the people of Kūfa are not among those who came with you. I will either detain them or send them back." Al-Ḥusayn said to him: "I will defend them as I would defend my own life. They are only my supporters and helpers. You gave me your word that you would not do anything against me until you received a letter from Ibn Ziyad." He said: "Of course! But they did not come with you." [Al-Ḥusayn] said: "They are my followers and they are just like those who came with me. Therefore if you carry out the agreement made between us [you will let them stay]. Otherwise, I will have to fight you." At that al-Ḥurr desisted.

Section 10

1. Then al-Ḥusayn said to them, "Tell me the news of the people you have left behind you." Mujammiʿ b. ʿAbdallāh al-ʿĀʾidhī, who was one of the group of four that had come to him, said: "As for the nobles of the people, there has been much bribery among them, and their coffers have been filled so that their friendship has been won over and their loyal support has been ensured [by Ibn Ziyād]. They are all united against you. As for the rest of the people, their hearts are inclined toward you, but tomorrow their swords will be drawn against you."

2. Al-Ḥusayn said: "Tell me what you know of my messenger to you." They said: "Who was it?" He said: "Qays b. Mushir al-Ṣaydāwī." They said: "Yes, al-Ḥusayn b. Tamīm captured him and sent him to Ibn Ziyād. Ibn Ziyād commanded him to curse you and your father, but he had called for God's bless-

ings on you and your father and cursed ibn Ziyād and his father. Then he urged the people to support you and told them of your coming. Ibn Ziyād ordered him to be thrown from the wall of the palace." The eyes of al-Ḥusayn (P) glistened with moisture, and he could not hold back the tears. Then he said: "'Some of them have fulfilled their vow by death and some of them are still awaiting and have not changed in the least.'[16] O God! Make paradise an abode for us and for them. Gather us and them in a dwelling place [304] of Your mercy and of the desirable reward that You have in store."

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[16] Qurʾān 33:23

Appendix III. Yazīd b. Muʿāwiya's Attitude to the death of Ḥusayn

In the introduction to his translation of the volume of Ṭabarī's *Taʾrīkh* that contains the Karbalāʾ Drama, Ian K.A. Howard argues that the text often portraits the caliph, Yazīd b. Muʿāwia, in a rather positive light, and tries to divert the blame of Ḥusayn's death from Yazīd to the Kūfan governor ʿUbaydallāh b. Ziyād.[1] Howard, however, also adduces reports to the contrary. Boaz Shoshan follows Howard in arguing that there is a clear pro-Yazīd strand in the text, but is less nuanced than is Howard in that he chooses to overlook some of the contradictory reports that Howard mentions, and, when he cannot ignore these reports, treats them as more or less anomalous to the text.[2] Shoshan regards this as one of the occasional instances where Ṭabarī reveals his political ideas. Ulrika Mårtensson advocates a similar view, when she writes that Yazīd is described as "a noble and just statesman, in command of the Qurân and his constitutional rights, and who is at least as aggrieved by the loss of al-Husayn as the remaining family-members."[3]

I have no difficulty in following these three scholars in their suggestion that some of the reports convey a pro-Umayyad line of thought, but I am not prepared to go as far as Shoshan does, and view this as Ṭabarī's own policy. Nor do I think that Ṭabarī wishes to picture Yazīd in such positive terms as is suggested by Mårtensson. On the contrary, I would suggest that the chronicler here gives an image of Yazīd which is, if not outright

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[1] Howard, "Translator's foreword," xi–xiv.

[2] Shoshan, *Poetics*, 100–102, esp. n.84.

[3] Mårtensson, "True New Testament," 77.

negative, so at least tarnished with the failure to appreciate the inviolability of Ḥusayn. Some of the arguments for this view of mine have already been given above.[4] Here, I will only discuss the arrangement of the versions concerning the episode of the abuse of Ḥusayn's severed head, to further sustain my arguments in that section.

There are four versions given of the incident in question. In brief, they tell us that, when Ḥusayn's severed head was brought before the Kūfan governor Ibn Ziyād (in two of the reports), or before the caliph Yazīd (in the other two), the ruler in question begins to poke the mouth of the head with a cane. In three of the versions, an old man who witnesses the act rebukes the ruler, saying that he has seen the Apostle of God kiss those lips. The act must, of course, be interpreted as deed of utter humiliation of Ḥusayn and a total disregard of his inviolability. Through the words of the old man—a companion of the Prophet—it is also made an abuse of the Prophet himself.

The first occurrence of the incident is found in the report of ʿAmmār al-Duhnī (on the authority of the fifth Shīʿite Imām, the grandson of Ḥusayn, Muḥammad al-Bāqir), before the middle of the story.[5] In this case it is Yazīd who abuses Ḥusayn's head while reciting the verse:

Swords split the skulls of men who are dear

    to us; but they were more disobedient and oppressive.

He is rebuked by Abū Barza al-Aslamī, a companion of the Prophet.

The second occurrence is related in the account from Ḥuṣayn b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, a few pages later, also before the middle of the story.[6] Here, it

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[4] See above, pp. 163–164.

[5] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 282–283; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 76. For an outline of the complete Karbalāʾ Drama in Ṭabarī's version, see Appendix I.

[6] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 286; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 81.

is Ibn Ziyād who pokes the head, while remarking that Ḥusayn's hair has grown grey.

The third and fourth occurrences of the incident are found in Hishām b. al-Kalbī's long account, toward the end of the story.[7] Both versions are related on the authority of Abū Mikhnaf. In the first, it is the Kūfan governor, and in the second the caliph who abuses the severed head, the caliph while reciting the verse quoted above. In both cases the rulers are reprimanded; the identity of the man who scolds Ibn Ziyād is given as Zayd b. Arqam, while the man who reproaches the caliph is the same Abū Barza as in the report of ʿAmmār al-Duhnī (see Table).

Table. *Arrangement of the four versions of the incident with Ḥusayn's head in Ṭabarī's* Taʾrīkh.

Location	Transmitter	Offender	Rebuker
282–283	ʿAmmār al-Duhnī–Imām al-Bāqir	Yazīd b. Muʿāwiya	Abū Barza al-Aslamī
286	Ḥusayn b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān	ʿUbaydallāh b. Ziyād	—
370–371	Hishām b. al-Kalbī—Abū Mikhnaf	ʿUbaydallāh b. Ziyād	Zayd b. Arqam
382–383	Hishām b. al-Kalbī—Abū Mikhnaf	Yazīd b. Muʿāwiya	Abū Barza al-Aslamī

Note: Page numbers in leftmost column refer to *Taʾrīkh*, II.

As a number of scholars have shown, the arrangement of reports with contradictory content is an important means for Ṭabarī to get across his personal views, and that the versions introducing and concluding an account carries a special weight in that respect.[8] In this case, the four reports are arranged so that Yazīd is the offender in the first and the last versions, whereas Ibn Ziyād commits the offensive act in the two versions in the

[7] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, 370–371, 382–383; Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. 19, 165, 176.

[8] See e.g. Hodgson, "Two Pre-Modern Muslim Historians," 56–57; Humphreys, "Qurʾānic Myth," 275. A longer discussion on this method of Ṭabarī is found in Shoshan, *Poetics*, 120–131.

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middle. Furthermore, in one of the versions, Ibn Ziyād is not rebuked by a companion of the Prophet. I am not sure that it is possible to say that Ṭabarī lays the blame on one more that the other. However, taken together with the image produced in other episodes in the account of what happened after the death of Ḥusayn, Yazīd's weeping over the death of Ḥusayn gives one the impression of being crocodile tears.

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