

On the Authenticity of *Ziyārat ‘Āshūrā*: A Text-Critical Approach*

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The authenticity and the chain of narration (*isnād*) of the text known as *Ziyārat ‘Āshūrā* have been subjects of discussion among Shī‘ī scholars. Beyond its spiritual significance and the personal experiences of the believers, often recounted in Shī‘ī traditions and literature, this text holds immense historical importance. In this note, I will not delve into discussions on the authenticity of this text's *isnād*, on which numerous studies have already been conducted. Among these, the writings of the prominent jurist and expert in the science of narrators, Ayatollah Sayyid Musa al-Shubayri al-Zanjani, stand out. Within Shī‘ī tradition, this *ziyāra* text is primarily narrated from Imam al-Bāqir. Here, I merely aim to demonstrate that, based on internal textual criticism, it is plausible to attribute this text to the late Umayyad period. I shall summarise this in a few points:

1. Within the *ziyāra* text, there is no content that appears anachronistic or inconsistent with its purported time of emergence. The references to the Imams and the Prophet's family align with beliefs prevalent during the end of the Umayyad era, with no indications of ideas that evolved later. The themes presented in the text mirror the conditions of Shī‘is during the late Umayyad period, capturing their sentiments concerning the tragedies endured by the Prophet's household and their feelings towards the

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Umayyads—emotions which are corroborated by primary historical sources from that era.

2. The themes of allegiance (*wilāya*) and disassociation (*barā'a*) apparent in the text are also congruent with the general atmosphere of the first half of the 2nd/8th century. This is evident to those familiar with the religious sectarian history of that period.
3. Throughout the *ziyāra* text, there is an emphasis on disassociating from the Umayyads, a trend that was evidently expanding among Shī‘ī circles during the late Umayyad period. This essentially constituted the Shī‘ī identity for a broad spectrum of Umayyad opponents, who, while opposing the Umayyads, expressed loyalty to the Prophet's family. Despite specific Shī‘ī trends at that time, the majority united around the central tenet of rejecting Umayyad rule. The primary focus of this *ziyāra* text is on overtly disassociating from the Umayyads. This focus in itself indicates the text's authenticity. Often, in later fabricated texts, influenced by prevailing atmospheres and general sentiments, the expressions of disassociation become broader, losing the specific emphasis on the Umayyads, who by then were a past era. Such broader terms could be interpreted as referring to the ‘Abbāsid period or even encompassing evolved Shī‘ī views on the scope of disassociation.

Another point to note is that this *ziyāra* text mentions several adversaries of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, such as Ibn Ziyād, Shimr, and ‘Umar b. Sa‘d. This suggests that it was composed at a time when these names were still familiar to its audience. The emphasis on such figures in a text that was produced during the late Umayyad period is entirely consistent with the prevailing sentiments of the Shī‘a community regarding the oppression and injustices they felt were meted out, by individual Umayyad leaders and their agents, against the *Ahl al-Bayt*. If the text had been written during a later period, it would undoubtedly reflect the circumstances of that era, possibly omitting the frequent mention

of specific individuals and various Umayyad families or their supporters. The fact that the text speaks of curses and damnation upon the Umayyad dynasty, their family, and their murderous agents “for all eternity” is a clear indication that it was written during a time when these families were in power and were beneficiaries of the oppressive Umayyad regime. Their followers, or in another interpretation of the *ziyāra* text, their community (*umma*) were actively perpetrating injustices against the *Ahl al-Bayt*, highlighting the juxtaposition of the “community” versus the “household of the Prophet.”

The overall tone of this *ziyāra* text, which is directed against the Umayyads, does not suggest a text written at a time when the Umayyads had already fallen from power, and logically there would no longer have been a tangible reason to express such strong anti-Umayyad sentiments. The text speaks of peace (*silm*) and war (*harb*) concerning the *Ahl al-Bayt* and their adversaries, and then immediately expresses curses towards families like Āl Ziyād, Āl Marwān, the Umayyads, and their agents, thereby clarifying who these adversaries are. When this text mentions the Āl-Marwān family and the Umayyads, it is evident that it was articulated in an environment where these families were still in power. The intent behind this text was to highlight that, although the actual murderers of al-Husayn b. ‘Alī and his companions might no longer be alive, their lineage continued. Even if they distanced themselves from the actions during the time of Yazīd, the Umayyad caliph, they still followed the same path, and opposition to their remnants was still necessary. This perfectly captures the atmosphere a decade or two before the Abbasid Revolution and portrays the condition of Shī‘ī groups in the early 2nd/8th century in Kufa.

A section of this *ziyāra* text also describes the oppression that the supporters of the *Ahl al-Bayt* faced from their adversaries, which precisely reflects the challenging anti-Alid and anti-Shī‘a environment towards the end of the Umayyad period. Indeed, this text, which is both promotive and confrontational, emphasises stirring Alid sentiments

and anti-Umayyad feelings by repeating emotive phrases that are profoundly impactful. Consequently, this text can be characterised as revolutionary, making complete sense within the framework of the late Umayyad period and aligning with the revolutionary tendencies and Alid/Shī‘a sentiments against the Umayyads.

The subsequent point concerning the tone we encounter in the text of *Ziyārat Āshūrā* pertains to the theme of anticipation and fostering hope for the uprising of an individual from the *Ahl al-Bayt* of Muḥammad to seek vengeance and confront the enemies of the *Ahl al-Bayt*; adversaries who have obstructed the *Ahl al-Bayt* from their rightful statuses (*marātib*). The text’s phrase in the initial mention of this theme reads: “... to grant me the pursuit of your revenge alongside a victorious Imam from the *Ahl al-Bayt* of Muḥammad....” The term victorious (*mansūr*) is among those expressions that have been fully validated, through independent sources, within the Shī‘ī milieu and the combative Shī‘ī factions during the late Umayyad era. In my opinion, the emphasis on this matter in the *ziyāra* text should be considered its primary focus, serving as a manifesto for the Shī‘a opposition against the Umayyads during that period. The second instance in *Ziyārat Āshūrā* where the theme of revenge and association with the Imam is mentioned is: “...to bestow upon me the pursuit of my revenge alongside a guiding Imam, manifestly speaking the truth from you.” What’s described here about the conditions of that Imam is what the Shī‘a sought during the Umayyad’s final period concerning a rightful Imam. The term manifest (*zāhir*) possibly refers to the background and belief based on the well-known *Hadīth* of Kumayl from the Commander of the Faithful prevalent among the Shī‘a concerning two types of Imams (*qā’im*)—the manifest uncovered (*zāhir makshūf*) and the fearful submerged (*khā’if maghmūr*). This belief was the source of discussions and splits among Shī‘a in the early periods.

To conclude, our discussion indicates that, the *Ziyārat Āshūrā* text can be analysed for its authenticity and its attribution to the late

Umayyad period by employing an internal historical critique methodology and historical semiotics. Although this method cannot precisely indicate whether this text is truly attributed to Imam al-Bāqir, for this matter, the *isnād* and transmitter criticism have always been the Shī‘ī scholars’ references. Even if we assume that this text is not from the Imam, it seems that, from a purely historical perspective, *Ziyārat ‘Āshūrā’* can be deemed a Shī‘ī promotional text from the late Umayyad reign. It likely circulated as a manifesto and a covert promotional text among certain Shī‘ī factions and has been read traditionally as a Shī‘ī text. This text, however, was later preserved among Twelver Shī‘ī scriptures. Still, it is evident that the foundations of these later documents rely on older texts that circulated among the Shī‘a for over two centuries and were ultimately narrated, recorded, and compiled in canonical books.

When analysing the *isnāds* and texts of the first few Islamic centuries, relying solely on traditional methods to verify their authenticity is insufficient. Particularly for the historian of beliefs and doctrines, an internal critique of the text and comparison with other validated texts is exceedingly essential and enlightening.