THE CELEBRATION OF ‘ĀŠŪRĀ’ IN SUNNĪ ISLAM

Maribel Fierro

C.S.I.C., Madrid

To S. Bashear,
in memoriam.

Muslim scholars show a tendency to consider an innovation the joyful celebration of ‘Āšūrā’ among the Sunnites, innovation which would have been established in order to counteract the Šī‘ī festival. This attitude implies that the mournful celebration of ‘Āšūrā’ was older than the joyful one. However, it is difficult to ascertain the character of ‘Āšūrā’ festival in early Islam. Further research is to be done in this field, as well as in that of the association of ‘Āšūrā’ with other non-Islamic festivals. In my paper, I will describe the main characteristics of the celebration of ‘Āšūrā’ among the Sunnites in medieval Islam, paying special attention to a specific practice, that of liberal spending on one’s household (at-tawsī‘ alā l-‘iyāl). The case of this practice may serve to shed some light on the development of ‘Āšūrā’ festival.

1. The Islamic festival of ‘Āšūrā’ takes place the 10th (or, according to some traditions, the 9th) of muharram, the first month of the Muslim lunar calendar, and it is singled out by voluntary fasting in the works of fiqh. The origins of this fast are explained in two different ways in hadīth literature. According to some traditions, the fast of ‘Āšūrā’ was practised by the Arabs in Gāhiliyya times. According to another wide-

---

spread tradition, the Prophet established the fast of ‘Āšūrā’ in imitation of a Jewish practice, with which he came into contact after his arrival in Medina; later on, Muhammad ordered the Muslims to perform the obligatory fast in ramadān and this month, consequently, substituted the day of ‘Āšūrā’\(^\text{2}\). At some time during this development, the Prophet wanted to distinguish the Muslim fast of ‘Āšūrā’ from that of the Jews, so he ordered the believers to fast the 9th of muḥarram instead of the 10th and from this arises the ḣibṭilāf on which day ‘Āšūrā’ falls. The Jewish practice followed by the Prophet was clearly the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur, the tenth day of the first month of the Jewish calendar; the idea of “atonement” was preserved in the Muslim festival in a tradition which says that the fast of ‘Āšūrā’ is an expiation (kaffāra) for a whole year\(^\text{4}\). Once ramadān became the fixed period for obligatory fast, ‘Āšūrā’ remained, as mentioned, a day of supererogatory fast in the legal theory. However, it maintained a special place among Muslim festivals (‘īd, pl. a’yād) as it is shown in the sādā’il yawm ‘Āšūrā’\(^\text{5}\).

\(^2\) See A. J. Wensinck et al., *Concordance et Indices de la tradition musulmane* (7 vols., Leiden 1936-1969), IV, 223-224 and *EF*, s.v. “‘Āshūrā’”; see also Abdarazzāq, *al-Muṣannaf* (11 vols., Beirut 1970-1972), IV, 285-291, and Ibn Abī Ṣayba, *al-Muṣannaf* (5 vols., Hyderabad 1966-70), III, 5-9. Ibn Durayd stated that the form sāda‘a’ did not exist in Ḥāhiliyya times, but Ibn Abī Ḥamra (see note 5) refuted it on the basis of the ḥadīṯ which says that the Arabs used to fast “on ‘Āšūrā’ day during the Ḥāhiliyya”. An attempt to reconcile the two traditions on the origins of ‘Āšūrā’ fast is to be found in Abū ʾl-Walīd al-Bāqī, *op. cit.*, II, 57-58. S. D. Gotein has pointed out the coincidences between ramadān and Yom Kippur, the day of fast of the Jews which is the precedent of ‘Āšūrā’: see his “Ramadān, the Muslim month of fasting”, *Studies on Islamic history and institutions*, Leiden 1966, pp. 90-110.

\(^3\) See Ibn Ruṣd, *op. cit.*, I, 214. The fast on the 9th of muḥarram is called ṭāsu‘a’. Ibn Abī Ḥamra (see note 5) deals at length with the etymology of both ‘Āshūrā’ and ṭāsu‘a’.


\(^5\) Chapters on this matter are to be found in the ḥadīṯ collections. ‘Umar b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib b. Ṣāḥīh (d. 385/995) wrote a *K. faḍā’il ‘Āshūrā’* and so did the Andalusian Qāsim b. Ibrā-
Where do these *fadā'il* come from? There are several explanations about the excellences ‘Āšūrā’, usually connected with the fact that God bestowed *karāmāt* on his prophets on that day. So, for example, on ‘Āšūrā’ day Adam and David were forgiven, Noah’s ark landed, Abraham was saved from the fire, Solomon was given his *mulk*, the sea was divided for the children of Israel and Pharaoh was drowned, Jesus ascended into the sky, etc.\(^6\). It is worth noting that very seldom Muslim sources record the event that is generally agreed to have given rise to the Jewish festival of Yom Kippur, a day of fasting and atonement, a day when forgiveness is granted to all who repent fully. That event was the descent of Moses from Sinai with the second Tablets of the Law.\(^7\)

In Judaism there are other explanations about the origins of the Day of Atonement: according to some sources, in that day Jacob heard of Joseph’s death and mourned for him; it is also considered the day of the circumcision of Abraham and the day of the Akedah, the binding of Isaac.\(^8\) Because of these different explanations there is no agreement in

---

\(^6\) \*aš-\*\*šanāwī*, f.376b, cf. al-Uḫūrī, f. 153b-154a and Ibn Abī Ğamra, f.7b, where other events are mentioned: the people of Yūnus were forgiven, Jonas was saved from the whale, Joseph was set free out of jail. According to other lists recorded by the same authors, God created ten things on ‘Āšūrā’. See also Ibn al-\*Ğawzī*, *Kitāb al-mawdū‘āt* (3 vols., Medina 1966-68), II, 202 and Qadī an-Nu‘mān, *Da‘āʾīm al-islām* (2 vols., Cairo 1951-60), I, 338. It is also said that on ‘Āšūrā’ *taqūm as-sā‘a*.

\(^7\) I have found mention of this fact in Ibn al-\*Ğawzī*, *Mawdū‘āt*, II, 200 and \*aš-\*\*šanāwī*, f.374a.

\(^8\) See *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (16 vols., Jerusalem 1971-72), s.v. "Day of Atonement".
Judaism about the nature of the day. As Hawting has put it, “the majority view [among the Jews] is that it is a day of fasting, certainly, but a day with a positive and joyful character ... In contrast, some saw the day as one of mourning and self-mortification ..., so that, together with abstention from food or drink, it was demanded such things as constant standing in prayer, going without sleep, wearing sackcloth and ashes, and weeping.” This latter interpretation, in Hawting’s view, would have influenced the Šī’ī celebration of ‘Āšūrā’, which happened to be the day when Husayn was killed in Karbalā’ in the year 61/680:

“Just as in Judaism there were those who saw the Day of Atonement a day of joy and others as a day of sorrow, so in Islam there were similarly competing notions about the 10th of muḥarram, ‘Āšūrā’ day. It seems that the Šī’a had to struggle to uphold a mournful conception of the day in the face of a tendency to associate it with events which indicated God’s blessings on mankind,” some of which I have already pointed out. Hawting has also stressed that Šī’ī ‘Āšūrā’ does not seem to be associated with fast. This practice appears not to have been of great importance either in the popular celebration of the same day among the Sunnites, in spite of the ḥawāʾīd’s stressing of the fast as the only well-established sunna of ‘Āšūrā’.

2. The popular practices among the Sunnites connected with ‘Āšūrā’ seem to have developed especially in North Africa and Egypt. There are several studies dealing with the modern celebration of ‘Āšūrā’ in Morocco and Tunis. Its main features have been briefly described by Ph. Marçais: the supererogatory fast recommended in that day has almost no

---


10 Ibid., cf. the statement of al-Maqrizī in paragraph 3.

11 *El*, s.v. “Ασθυρα’ in the Maghrīb”, with bibliography; see also E. Doutté, *Magie et religion dans l’Afrique du Nord*, Paris 1984, pp. 526-534. Abū Ubayd al-Bakrī reports that on ‘Ασθυρα’ day oxes were sacrificed in Qayrawān and a big fair took place in Monastir: *Description de l’Afrique septentrionale*, ed. and transl. by M. G. de Slane, Paris 1965, pp. 60 and 79; on the celebration of ‘Ασθυρα’ in Monastir see also Qādī ʿIyāḍ, *Tartīb*
importance, whereas almsgiving is a widespread practice; the children of the Qur'ānic schools ask money for their teachers; the cemeteries are visited and the dead remembered; special dishes are prepared, using eggs and chickens; rites of fire, marriage and carnival are attested in various regions of North Africa.

We find information about similar and other practices in the Kutub al-bida' written by scholars who lived in Egypt like Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) and Ibn al-Hāǧǧ (d. 737/1336). Both of them describe and condemn the "innovations" introduced in the celebration of Āṣūrā among the Sunnites:

- it is a day of joy and happiness (al-saraḥ wa-salārūr);
- chickens are slaughtered and al-ḥubūb are cooked in a special way;
- ziyārat al-qubūr is performed;
- the application of henna by the women on their bodies is considered almost a duty;
- the women make also a special linen-cloth to be used as a shroud in order to stop Munkar and Nakīr approaching the corpses;
- to perfume with incense a prisoner is believed to get him out of jail;
- women and men bathe (al-iğtisāl) and colour the eyelids with kohl (al-ikṭiḥāl).  

**al-madārik** (8 vols., Rabat s.d.), VI, 252.


14 'Abdarrāḥīm b. al-Ḥusayn al-İraqī aš-Šāfi'ī (d. 806/1403) wrote a fatwā declaring permitted abl al-ad-dāqgū wa-l-ḥubūb yavum 'Āṣūrā (see GAL II, 65-66 and Ibn Abī Ğamra, f.8b). al-İraqī appears in Abī Ğamra's works as a supporter of the popular practices of Āṣūrā.

15 On this practice see also al-Bayhaqī, Šucab al-îmān (ed. Abū Muḥammad as-Sa'īd
- people use to ask forgiveness (al-musāfahah) from each other;
- it is also a day of liberal spending on one's household and relatives (attawāt-i'ālā al-l'iyāl) and, more generally, of almsgiving to the poor and the orphans.\footnote{Other practices are mentioned in the works of Ibn al-Gawzī, Ibn Abī Ğamra, al-Uğhūrī and aš-Ṣanāwī: a special prayer; ziyārat 'ālim; to visit the sick; to stroke with the hand the head of an orphan (this practice is mentioned in the Torah according to al-Uğhūrī, f. 163a and aš-Ṣanāwī, f. 388a-388b); to cut the nails; to recite the sûrat al-îbâs one thousand times, etc.}

The survival of some of these practices in spite of the prohibition of the fuqahā' is attested by Lane: "It is a common custom of the Muslims of Egypt to give what they can afford in alms during the month of Moharram, especially on its first ten days, and more especially on the tenth day ...\footnote{E. W. Lane, \textit{An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians}, London 1860, p. 426. The qādī İbrāhīm b. 'Arafāt al-Qanā'ī (d. 744/1343) used to give one thousand dinars as alms every year on ‘Āşūrā day (aṣ-Ṣafādī, \textit{al-Wâfî bi-k-tawâyêt}, VI, ed. S. Dedering, Wiesbaden 1972, p. 55, num. 2495). I have not been able to consult B. Langner, \textit{Untersuchungen zur historische Volkskunde Ägyptens}, Berlin 1983, pp. 51-62, where she deals with the Egyptian festivals.}"; "... a dish, which it is the custom of the people of Cairo to prepare on the day of Ashooorā, ... is called 'hoboob', and is prepared with wheat, steeped in water for two or three days, then freed from the husks, boiled and sweetened over the fire with honey or treacle; or it is composed of rice instead of wheat; generally, nuts, almonds, raisins, etc. are added to it."\footnote{Ibid., p. 429. Huda Ša'rāwī remembers in her memoirs (\textit{Harem Year. The memoirs of an Egyptian feminist}, tr. M. Badran, London 1986, p. 46): "For the 10th of muharram, yatam al-Ashura, we made ashura, a special wheat pudding with nuts and dried fruits". A dish called asūra is also made in Turkey according to the following recipe: 1/2 kg grains of wheat (soaked overnight and cooked separately with water); 100 gr. chick-peas and 100 gr. cannellini beans (soaked overnight and cooked separately with water); 2 handfuls of rice added later on; dried figs, raisins, apricots and chestnuts (stewed and added to above); sugar; decorated with hazelnuts, walnuts, almonds, pomegranate, seeds and sprinkled with rose-water. So it is cooked in the vicinity of Karamürsel near Istanbul. I owe this information to Dr. G. R. Hawting, whom I wish to thank for his comments and suggestions.}
3. Some of the popular practices of ‘Āšūrā’ have been seen as imitation of the Jews. According to al-Uḡūrī and aš-Ṣanāwī, al-īgtisāl, al-iktihāl and lubās al-kattān were performed by the Jews of Medina and Haybar. R. Brunschvig sees in the slaughtering of chickens a probable influence of the kapparot, a custom practised on the day before the Day of Atonement (also on the eve of the New Year or rōḏ ba-šānā) in which the sins of a person are symbolically transferred to a fowl, usually a cock or hen; sometimes plants were used (e.g., beans, peas). On his part, Lane says that the custom of giving alms "seems to have been copied from the Jews, who are accustomed to abound in almsgiving and other good works during the ten days commencing with their New Year’s day and ending with the Day of Atonement." It is a common feature among the fuqahā’ who condemn these practices to consider that they originated as a means to counteract the Šī‘ī celebration of ‘Āšūrā’. On his part, al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442) states that the Ayyūbids singled out ‘Āšūrā’ as a joyful festival by way of liberal spending, special sweets, al-iktihāl and visiting the hammām, according to the customs of the Syrians imposed by al-Ḥaǧǧāq b. Yūsuf in the days of ‘Abdalmalik b. Marwān, the aim of al-Ḥaǧǧāq being to insult the followers of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. If al-Maqrīzī is to be be-

---

19 See al-Uḡūrī, f. 159b and aš-Ṣanāwī, f. 392b; see also fn. 16 on mash ra’s yatim.

20 La Berbérie orientale sous les Hafsides (2 vols., Paris 1947), II, 303-304, note 5 (see also p. 272) and Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. “Kapparot”, where it is said that this custom appeared in the 9th century.


22 This is especially the case of Ibn Taymiyya, but the same idea can be found in Ibn Abī Ḥamra, al-Uḡūrī and aš-Ṣanāwī.

23 Kitāb al-kitāb (4 vols., Cairo 1324-26), II, 365; see also II, 289 on a strife between Šī‘ites and Sunnites on ‘Āšūrā’ day in the year 363/973. The Fātimid caliph al-Mur‘izz (341/953-365/975) complained to Qāḍī an-Nu‘mān on the fact that ‘Āšūrā’ was celebrated as yawm ‘id wa-surrīr (see an-Nu‘mān, Kitāb al-maġālis wa-l-musāyarāt, Tunis 1978, pp. 397-398). The Fātimids do not seem to have succeeded in imposing the Šī‘ī celebration of ‘Āšūrā’ on their North African subjects, the only influence left being the visit to the burial place of the head of the al-Ḥusayn in Cairo: see Lane, op. cit., p. 429ff.
lived, that would mean that already in al-Haḡḡāq’s time ʿĀṣūrā’ was celebrated by the Šiʿi as a day of mourning and that until that moment it had no special significance as a joyful festival for the Sunnites.24

Following the idea underlying the text of al-Maqrīzī, other Sunnī scholars insist on the fact that the above mentioned practices of ʿĀṣūrā’ were “innovations” and that traditions were invented in order to support them and make them appear as sunan. Among these false traditions we find: “who colours his eyelids with kohl on ʿĀṣūrā’ day will avoid any eye disease during the year”, “who bathes on ʿĀṣūrā’ day will not be sick during the year”25, “who spends liberally on his household on the day of ʿĀṣūrā’, God will bestow plenty upon him throughout the remainder of the year” (man wassa’a alā nafsī wa-ablihi/iyyalīhi [fī n-nafaqa] yawm ʿĀṣūrā’ wassa’a ilāb alayhi sā’ir a-s-sana). This tradition, which I will refer to as the tradition on liberal spending, deserves further attention.

4. The matn of this tradition, with the variants I have recorded26, is to be found with different isnāds. In a), b), c) and d) I give a selection of the isnāds quoted several times with mention of the authors who recorded them; in e) and f) I give two matn variants which I shall refer to in the following paragraphs.
a) ... Yūnus b. ‘Abdala’ilā (d. 264/877, Egypt) ← Sufyān b. ʿUayyna (d. 198/813, Kūfa, Mecca) ← Ğāfar al-Kūfī (d. c. 154/770) ← Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. al-Muntaṣir al-Hamdānī al-Kūfī (d. after 100/718) ← Muḥammad b. al-Muntaṣir b. al-ʿAğdaʾ al-Hamdānī al-Kūfī27 ← the Pro-

24 The Būyids were the first to establish officially the Šiʿi celebration of ʿĀṣūrā’ in the year 352/963: see H. R. Idris, Le Berbérie orientale sous les zirides (X-XII siècles) (2 vols., Paris 1962), II, 711, note 136.

25 On these traditions see Ibn al-Ḡawzī, Mawdūʿat II, 199-205; Ibn Taymiyya, Fatāwā XXV, 312; they are quoted by Ibn Abī Čamra, al-Ūghūrī and ʿaš-Šanāwī.

26 There is also a very long variant where Abū Hurayra reports that the Prophet recommended liberal spending on ʿĀṣūrā’ together with other practices: see Ibn al-Ḡawzī, Mawdūʿat II, 200-201 and cf. II, 202-203. See also al-Bayhaqī, Ṣnāʿab, III, n° 3795.

27 On these transmitters see Ibn Ḥaḡar, Taḥdīb at-taḥdīb (13 vols., Hyderabad 1907-
phet. Ibn al-Muntašir and Ibn ‘Uyayna state that they put to the test the tradition for sixty years and found that it worked. Ibn Taymiyya deals at length with this transmission, apparently because it was the most difficult to refute, as all the transmitters are considered *tiqa* in the *riqāl* works and appear in the six canonical collections. However, the fact that there is no Companion mentioned by al-Muntašir (who belongs to the generation of the Successors) gives room to Ibn Taymiyya’s refutation. Ibn Taymiyya does not seem to be aware of the variant of this transmission recorded by al-Bayhaqqī where it is Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. al-Muntašir who, without even referring to his father, cites the tradition on liberal spending as a mere saying (“*kāna yuqālu*”)...


---

1909), XI, 440-441 (Yūnūs); GAS I, 96 (Ibn ‘Uyayna); *Tabdīl* II, 84-86 (Ǧaʿfar); *Tabdīl* I, 157-158 (Ibrāhīm); *Tabdīl* IX, 471 (Muḥammad).

28 See Ibn Taymiyya, *Fatāwī* XXV, 300 and 313; Ibn Abī Ğamra, f. 9b; aš-Šanāwī, f.384b-385b. I have not been able to check the *Musnad* of al-Ḥumaydī (ed. H. R. al-Aʿzamī, 2 vols., Beirut-Cairo 1380-82) where Ibn ‘Uyayna’s transmissions are abundant.

29 In J. Schacht’s view, however, that would be evidence in favour of its being an old tradition, according to his principle “*ismāḍs* have a tendency to grow backwards”: see The Origins of Muḥammadan Jurisprudence, Oxford 1950.

30 *Ṣuḥāb*, III, n° 3796. The *riwāya* of Muḥammad b. al-Muntašir is also found as a mere saying, without any mention of the Prophet.

31 Haysam, according to Ibn al-Ǧawzī, was considered *maqābul* by al-‘Uqaylī (d. 322/934: GAS I, 177) and dismissed by Ibn Ḥibbān. For the other transmitters see Ibn Ḥaḡar, *Tabdīl* IV, 222-226 (al-Aʿmaš); GAS I, 403-404 (Ibrāhīm); *Tabdīl* VII, 276-278 (‘Alqama).

where it indeed appears\textsuperscript{33}. It is also quoted by Ibn al-\At\=ir (d. 606/1209) in his \textit{\v{G}ami\textsuperscript{\textbf{c}}} al-\textit{us\=ul} in the chapter \textit{fi fa\=d\=i an-nafaqa}\textsuperscript{34}. His source is the work of the Andalusian Raz\=in b. Mu\=awiya (d. c. 535/1140), \textit{K. at-ta\=g\=r\=id \textit{fi l-\v{g}am\=e} bayna \textit{l-Muwat\=ta\textsuperscript{\textbf{a}} wa\-\textit{Si\=ib\=a\=h} al-bams}, still unpublished\textsuperscript{35}. It seems therefore that Raz\=in thought the tradition was included either in the \textit{Muwat\=ta\textsuperscript{\textbf{a}}} or in the collections of al-Buh\=ari, al-Muslim, Ab\=u D\=aw\=udi, an-Nas\=a\=i or at-Tirm\=idi\textsuperscript{36}. But it is found in none of the extant versions of these works\textsuperscript{37}, as can be checked through the Concordance. Among others, al-U\=gh\=uri pointed out this fact: he considers very odd (\textit{\textit{\textit{\v{a}g}\=i\=b}}) that Ibn al-\At\=ir quotes it in his \textit{\v{G}ami\textsuperscript{\textbf{c}}} and still odder that Ibn al-\At\=ir’s brother keeps mentioning it in his \textit{Ihtis\=ar \v{G}ami\textsuperscript{\textbf{c}} al-\textit{us\=ul}}, both stating that the tradition is to be found in al-Buh\=ari’s and al-Muslim’s collections. In my opinion, it is Raz\=in’s work where the explanation of this “oddity” is to be found. Two possibilities can be taken into account: either Raz\=in included it because he agreed with its contents, disregarding the fact that it was not mentioned in the canonical collections, or he found the tradition on liberal spending in the version at his disposal of one of those collections. The first possibility would be supported by the fact that the \textit{\v{h}ad\=it} on liberal spending on \textit{\v{A}s\=ura} was known in al-Andalus since the days of \textit{\v{A}bdarrah\=man II} (206/822-238/852), as I shall mention. The second possibility could be supported by the fact that there is some evidence on the transmission in al-Andalus of a version of al-Buh\=ари’s collection which was not the usual one\textsuperscript{38}. Maybe

\textsuperscript{33} See at-\textsuperscript{\textbf{T}}abar\=ani, \textit{al-M\=ugam al-k\=ab\=ir}, 10 vols., Beirut 1983, vol. X, p. 94, n. 10.007.

\textsuperscript{34} Ed. by \textit{\textit{\v{A}bdalq\=ad\=ir Arn\=a\=u\=t} (10 vols., s.l., 1969), IX, p. 527.

\textsuperscript{35} On him see \textit{GAL SI} 630.

\textsuperscript{36} These are the collections he used according to Ibn Hayr, \textit{Fab\=rasa} (2 vols., Zaragoza 1894-95), I, p. 123.

\textsuperscript{37} A similar problem with Raz\=in is also found in Ibn al-\At\=ir, \texti{\textit{\v{G}ami\textsuperscript{\textbf{c}}}}, I, 334, n\=o 118. I owe this reference to Prof. M. Cook, whom I thank for his comments on this paper.

\textsuperscript{38} See Ibn B\=ask\=uw\=al, \textit{op. cit.}, num. 1169, biography of Muhammad b. \textit{\textit{\v{A}l\=i}} b. Ma\=hm\=ud al-Warr\=aq (5th/11th century). On the existence of different versions of al-
the extant manuscripts of Razîn’s work will shed some light on this matter, but unfortunately I was unable to consult them.

c) ... Šu’ba b. al-Haǧǧaǧ (d. 160/776, Wāsīt, Baṣra) ← Abū z-Zubayr Muḥammad b. Muslim al-Makkī (d. 120/737) ← Ğābir b. Ābdallāh (d. 77/696 or 94/712) ← the Prophet. Ibn Abī Ğamra and al-Uǧhūrī mention that Abū Ĕumar b. Ābdalbarr (d. 463/1070) quoted the same tradition in his al-Iṣtidkār li-madāhīb fuqahā’ al-amṣār wa-‘ulamā’ al-aqtār fī ma’ tadammannahū l-Muwatṭa’ min ma‘ānī ʾr-ra’y wa-l-aṯār with an isnād ḍayyid ʾan Ĕumar b. al-Ḥattāb. I have not been able to check this reference as the hadīṯ does not appear in the only volume published until now.

d) There is also a māṭn variant which goes: man kāna dā ᾣudda wa-mayyasa fa-wassāʾ ʾala nafṣibī wa-ʾiyālihi yāʾīnī yawm ‘Āṣūra’ wassāʾa llāh ʾalayhi b-hayrāt ilā raʾ ʾas-sana al-mustaqbalā (“who is rich and wealthy and spends liberally on himself and his dependents, i.e. on ‘Āṣūra’ day, God will bestow upon him his blessings until the first day of the following year”).

e) There is evidence of a māṭn variant which mentioned the practice of liberal spending in connection with the eve of ‘Āṣūra’ (at-tawsīʾa laylat ‘Āṣūra’), as we shall see in the following paragraph.


39 On these transmitters see GASI, 92 (Šu’ba); Ibn Ḥaǧar, *Tabdīb* IX, 440-443 (Abū z-Zubayr); *Tabdīb* II, 42-43 (Ǧābir).

40 Ibn Abī Ğamra, f.10a (where “Saʾīd” is mentioned instead of Šu’ba); al-Uḫūrī, f.157b; aš-Šanawī, f.384b-385b. As in the version a), the transmitters state that they put the tradition to the test and found it to be true. Another version ending with Ğābir before the Prophet in al-Bayhaqī, *Ṣuʿab*, III, n° 3791.

41 Ed. by ʿAlī n-Naǧḏī Naṣīf, s.l., s.d. aš-Šanawī records: wa-kāna l-imām ʿUmar b. al-Ḥattāb yaqūlu: akhirū ḥayr buyyūtikum fi laylat ʿĀṣūra’ wa-yawmihi wasṣīʾī fīhi ʿalā abālī-kum.

42 aš-Šanawī, f. 384b-385b. This hadīṯ was transmitted by Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Ḥatīb al-Baḍḍādi with a defective isnād.
5. According to the isnāds mentioned, it seems safe to conclude that the ḥadīth on liberal spending was known in Kūfa and Mecca in the times of Ibn ʿUyayna (2nd half of the 2nd/8th c.) and in Baṣra around the same time. Between the 2nd/8th and the 3rd/9th c., the ḥadīth was known in Egypt (through Yūnus b. Ṭabdalaʿlā) and in Medina. This latter fact is attested in an interesting passage of the Kitāb al-bidaʿ written by the Andalusian Muḥammad b. Wadīḥ al-Qurṭubī (d. 287/900)\(^{43}\). In it another Andalusian, Saʿīd b. Ḥassān (d. 236/850) says that his Medinese teacher ʿAbdallāh b. Nāfiʿ (d. 206/821)\(^{44}\) told him not to transmit the ḥadīth on liberal spending during the night of ʿĀṣūrā (at-tawṣiʿa laylat ʿĀṣūrā) out of fear that it will be considered a sunna\(^{45}\). On his part, a third Andalusian, Yahyā b. Yahyā al-Layṭī (d. 234/848)\(^{46}\) states that he spent the night of ʿĀṣūrā in Medina in the company of Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795) and in Egypt in the company of al-Layṭī b. Saʿīd (d. 175/791), Ibn al-Qāsim (d. 191/806) and Ibn Wahb (d. 197/813) and none of them mentioned or did anything related to that ḥadīth. If we accept this statement, it will mean that the ḥadīth on liberal spending on ʿĀṣūrā reached Medina between 179/795 (death of Mālik) and 206/850 (death of Ibn Nāfiʿ) and Egypt between 197/813 (death of Ibn Wahb) and 264/877 (death of Yūnus b. Ṭabdalaʿlā) but it could also mean that all those scholars knew and ignored it. In al-Andalus, the ḥadīth on liberal spending is quoted by ʿAbdalmalik b. Ḥabīb (d. 238/852), a contemporary of the aforementioned Saʿīd b. Hassān, in a poem dedicated to the amīr ʿAbdarrahmān II\(^{47}\). Two conclusions can be

\(^{43}\) Ed. and transl. by María Isabel Fierro, Madrid 1988, num. VI, 8c; see also pp. 113-114 of the study.

\(^{44}\) On him see Ibn Ḥaḡar, Tadhīb VI, 51-52.

\(^{45}\) Ibn Nāfiʿ is recorded in al-Bayhaqī, Ṣuʿāb, III, n° 3793 and 3794 as a transmitter of the tradition on liberal spending. The anecdote found in the Kitāb al-bidaʿ thus seems to point to a change of his mind.

\(^{46}\) He is the famous transmitter of the Murwatta'. On him see op. cit. in the fn. 43, p. 13.

\(^{47}\) See Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, Madārik IV, 140 and J. Aguadé, El “Tārīj” de ʿAbd al-Malik b.
drawn from this fact. Firstly, ‘Abdalmalik never visited Iraq, so he must have learned that *hadīt* either in Hīgāz or in Egypt and this confirms the terminus ante quem of its spreading in those regions. Secondly, ‘Abdalmalik b. Ḥabīb considered it a sound *hadīt*, as in his poem he invites the Umayyad *amīr* to follow it ⁴⁸. This attitude implies that during his *riḥla* Ibn Ḥabīb met *ʿulamāʾ* who were transmitting that tradition as the words of the Prophet and who agreed with the practice.

It has been possible to establish the terminus ante quem of the existence of the *hadīt* for Kūfah, Basra, Hīgāz, Egypt and al-Andalus. To establish the terminus post quem is a more difficult matter. The evidence of the *insāds* a) and b) could be interpreted in the sense that it was formulated in Kūfah at the time of Ibrāhīm an-Nahāṣī and Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. al-Muntaṣir, i.e., in the 2nd half of the 1st/7th century. This was the time when al-Ḥaǧǧāq b. Yūsuf (d. 95/714) was governor of Kūfah, so maybe al-Maqrīzī was right after all when he stated that the practices connected with ‘Āṣūrā as a joyful festival originated in al-Ḥaǧǧāq’s time. However, the only safe conclusion with the available data is that the tradition on liberal spending was well known between the end of the 2nd/8th century and the beginning of the 3rd/9th century, enjoying the support of some Sunnī scholars.

6. According to some versions of a), Muḥammad b. al-Muntaṣir transmitted the tradition on liberal spending without tracing it back to the Prophet, that is, as a mere saying. At the same time, I have pointed out that the tradition is usually accompanied by a *ziyāda* where some of the transmitters say that they put the tradition to the test and found it to be true. This could mean either that 1) the practice of liberal spending on ‘Āṣūrā was a new one or at least was not well established and was thus in need of being praised in order to gain support; 2) it was an old practice which was being challenged and was thus in need of

---

⁴⁸ It is difficult to assess whether ‘Abdalmalik b. Ḥabīb wanted to introduce the practice in al-Andalus or was simply reminding the *amīr* of it in order to get his share of his “liberal spending”.

proofs of its being commendable; so, Muḥammad b. al-Muntaṣir started by saying "kāna yuqāl man wassā‘a ‘alā ‘iyālīhī yawm ‘Āšūrā‘" and the saying was eventually transformed into a prophetic tradition.

The first possibility can lead us to accept the view of scholars like Ibn Taymiyya and al-Maqrīzī who thought that this and other practices were invented in the 2nd half of the 1st/7th century in order to make of ‘Āšūrā‘ a joyful festival and therefore an insult for the followers of Husayn b. ʿAlī.

The second possibility leads us on the contrary to assume that it was an old practice that started to be challenged by the end of the 1st/7th century.

What follows are some general remarks on the possible origin of the practice of liberal spending.

7. In Judaism there is a close relationship between festivals and charity: "The Pentateuch ... insists that the needy be remembered when the festivals are celebrated". Almsgiving brings to the doer many blessing and among them there is atonement for sin. Although charity does not appear to be a specific practice of the Day of Atonement, it is so on the eve of that day: "It is customary to send gifts to the poor, and a duty to ask forgiveness from one another and to appease each other". According to the tradition e), liberal spending took place on laylat ‘Āšūrā‘, i.e. on the eve of the 10th of muharram. However, I have not found any reference to liberal spending on one’s household as a Jewish practice on the Day of Atonement or its eve.

---

49 Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. “Charity”.

50 Ibid. The same idea is found in the hadīt literature: see A. J. Wensinck, A Handbook of Early Muhammadan Tradition, Leiden 1927, p. 19 (Alms as atonement). Malik says in his Muwatta’: “sadaqa is the impurities of people which they wash off themselves”.

51 Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. “Day of Atonement”, p. 1381. As I have pointed out, to ask forgiveness is also a Muslim practice of ‘Āšūrā‘; the iqtisāl of the Muslims has also a parallel among the Jews: “During the geonic period, the custom of ritual immersion on the eve of the Day of Atonement was introduced” (loc. cit.).
In the hadīth literature there are many traditions which stress that it is a duty for the Muslims to give an-nafaqqah to their own relations (‘alā ahlihi wa-iyyālihi)⁵². At the same time, to neglect the family or household and to omit taking good care of them (‘idā‘at al-iyyāl) are considered a sin⁵³. This nafaqqah ‘alā l-iyyāl is a variety of almsgiving and thus we find it mentioned in the chapters devoted to sadaqa and zakāt. Now, there is some evidence that the fast of ‘Āşūra’ ended with the zakāt al-fitr. Qays b. Sa‘d b. ‘Ubāda, a Companion of the Prophet⁵⁴, is reported to have said: “We used to perform the fast of ‘Āşūra’ and to give the alms of fast breaking. When ramadān and (its) zakāt were revealed, those practices were neither ordered nor forbidden and we kept doing them”⁵⁵. At the same time, there is also some evidence that fast and zakāt al-fitr started to be associated only with ramadān. For example, ‘Alī is reported to have said: “The fast of ramadān abrogated any other fast and the zakāt abrogated any other almsgiving”⁵⁶. The revelation of ramadān as the month of fast and zakāt al-fitr appears thus as having disrupted the same practices on ‘Āşūra’: some Muslims kept performing them on that day, while others started to oppose them. However, once again I have not found any reference to alms or liberal spending on one’s own relations and household as a specific practice associated with the breaking of fast or with the eve of fast⁵⁷.

⁵² See, Concordance, s.v. “iyyāl” and Wensinck, Handbook. A man’s iyyāl are “the persons whom he feeds, nourishes or sustains; or the persons who dwell with him, and whose expenses are incumbent on him, as his young man or slave, his wife, and his young child; the dependants for sustenance”: E. W. Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 8 vols., London 1863-93, s.v. iyyāl.

⁵³ See, for example, Zayd b. ‘Alī, Corpus iuris, ed. and transl. by E. Griffini, Milano 1919, p. 98.


⁵⁶ Ibid., X, 118.

⁵⁷ T. Fahd lists among the features of an Islamic festival the following: "une générosi-
This leads to trying in another direction. In the version d) of the tradition on liberal spending ‘Āṣūrā’ and the New Year (ra’s as-sana) are mixed together\textsuperscript{58}. The celebration of the New (solar or lunar) Year is usually associated with the giving of gifts: this happens in the rōš hašānā of the Jews\textsuperscript{59}, in the yannayr of the Christians\textsuperscript{60} and in the Persian nayrūz\textsuperscript{61}. Now, ‘Āṣūrā’ was fixed on the tenth day of the first month of the Muslim calendar\textsuperscript{62}. This association with the beginning of a new year could have transferred to ‘Āṣūrā’ some of the practices peculiar to the celebration of New Year’s day and among them liberal spending on one’s own relations and household\textsuperscript{63}.

\textsuperscript{58} In the 8th/14th century, Ibn ‘Arafa “authorisait-il les particuliers à marquer ce jours (1er janvier) par des liberalités envers leurs proches. Le premier jour de l’année julienne, concurrencé par ‘āshūrā’ n’est plus guère aujourd’hui remarqué que dans les campagnes”: Brunschvig, La Berbérite orientale, II, 306.

\textsuperscript{59} Encyclopaedia Judaica, s.v. “Rosh ha-Shanah”.


\textsuperscript{62} “On which day of the Arabian year the fast was originally observed cannot be ascertained owing to our defective knowledge of the calendar of the period; naturally its observance coincided with the Jewish on the 10 Tishrī and so fell in the Autumn”: \textit{EF}, s.v., “āshūrā” (A. J. Wensinck).

\textsuperscript{63} While this paper was in the process of being published, an excellent study appeared written by S. Bashear, “Āshūrā, an early Muslim fast”, Z.D.M.G. 141 (1991) pp. 281-316.