

## al-Masu'di

In fact, this seems to be what happened in the case of al-Mas'udi. In *Muruj al-Dhahab*, he reproduces the first half almost word for word with a few omissions<sup>1</sup>.

He gives a slightly different version of Ibn Ziyad's entry into Kufa and adds some descriptions of the attempt to persuade al-Husayn not to go to Kufa. He then reverts to `Ammar's account and faithfully reproduces it<sup>2</sup>.

It seems conceivable that al-Mas'udi got his account from al-Tabari. Nowhere does al-Baladhuri use this account. Nor does Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani use it, although he was aware of it. He uses an *isnad* with a different intermediary from al-Tabari<sup>3</sup>.

Why, then, should this account be questioned? There are two main reasons. The first is that it reports that when the Imam al-Husayn heard of the news of Muslim b. `Aqil's death, he wanted to return; and the second is that it reports that when `Umar b. Sa'd's army came near, the Imam offered three options:

- (i) that he should return,
- (ii) that he should go to the outposts of the empire, and
- (iii) that he should go to Yazid.

It is worth analyzing Abu Mikhnaf's reports of these two incidents to see what they actually say and whether they are firm on these points. As far as Abu Mikhnaf is concerned, the Imam al-Husayn learns of the death of Muslim before al-Hurr arrives. Those who bring the message of Muslim's death urge the Imam al-Husayn to return but, before he can speak, the sons of Aqil intervene and say that they will not return<sup>4</sup>.

There is no report of the Imam saying that he would return in this conversation. Thus 'Ammar's version, which uses the words 'he was about to go back', attempts to read the Imam's mind. It also omits the speech that he made in which he encouraged his supporters to leave him, not wanting to endanger their lives on a mission which was now clearly impossible<sup>5</sup>.

In a speech to al-Hurr's men from Kufa, the Imam al-Husayn does say that they had given him covenants and promises. If they had kept to them, he would go on to Kufa, but if they had changed their minds, he would return<sup>6</sup>.

However, this statement demanded that the Kufans respond and admit that they had been false, and they did not do that.

As for the conversations between `Umar b. Sa'd and the Imam al-Husayn, Abu Mikhnaf gives three versions. The first clearly states that no one knew what they talked about<sup>7</sup>.

The second, preceded by the comment that it is what the majority of reporters hold, is the story of the three options<sup>8</sup>.

However, it is followed by a report from `Uqba b. Sim'an, the Imam al-Husayn's servant who was with him at Karbala' and survived.

He claimed that he was with the Imam al-Husayn all the time and heard everything he said. He goes on: `By God, he never gave the promise, which the people mention and allege, that he would put his hand in the hand of Yazid b. Mu`awiya, nor that they should send him to any one of the Muslim's border posts. Rather he said: "Leave me and I will go in this broad land so that we may see how the people's affair develops."<sup>9</sup>

With regard to the third report, which Abu Mikhnaf said was the majority opinion of reporters, the evidence for the Imam al-Husayn making such proposals is in a letter written by `Umar b. Sa'd to Ibn Ziyad. According to this, Ibn Ziyad is about to agree with these terms but is dissuaded by Shamir b. Dhi Jawshan<sup>10</sup>.

As Shamir is directly involved in the murder of the Imam al-Husayn, this could be a report which tried to remove as much of the blame from the authorities and to transfer it to individuals. It could be an attempt to exonerate the authorities and as such could have been put out by supporters of the Umayyads. On the other hand, it might again be an attempt by `Umar b. Sa'd to get a further delay in the operations.

When the reports of Abu Mikhnaf of these two incidents are compared with `Ammar's version, we see that the latter provides interpretations of Abu Mikhnaf's reports. Because they are seemingly reported on the authority of the fifth Imam, al-Baqir, they would seem to provide interpretations which Shi'i supporters must accept.

It seems that this was the purpose of `Ammar's version; while still showing the death of the Imam al-Husayn to be a tragedy it diminishes the stature of the Imam. It does not do so for Shi'is but it does so for non-Shi'is. It seems that its aim is to confirm to those who oppose the Imamate the weakness of individual Imams and to do so by putting this interpretation into the mouth of the Imam. It certainly does so in the case of Wellhausen in his study of this event. He accepts `Ammar's interpretation without even realizing that he has done so<sup>11</sup>.

Doubt has been cast on the validity of `Ammar's report from the fifth Imam. This is further confirmed if one examines its brief account of the actual fight. Thus it says: `All the Imam al-Husayn's followers were killed, among whom were more than the young men from his family. An arrow came and struck his son, who he had with him, on his lap. He began to wipe the blood from him saying, "O God, judge between us and a people who asked us to come so that they might help us and then killed us." He called for a striped cloak, tore it and then put it on. He took out his sword and fought until he was killed. A man of the tribe of Madhhij killed him and cut off his head<sup>12</sup>.

This is supposed to be a vivid account of the death of the Imam al-Husayn, as told by the Imam al-Baqir to a Shi'i adherent, `Ammar. It is clearly unacceptable. He does not know the exact number of the members of the Imam al-Husayn's family who were killed.

We have reports from Jabir b. Yazid in which the Imam al-Baqir names killers of individual members of the Imam al-Husayn's family; yet, according to Ammar, he does not even identify the killer of the Imam. I have already mentioned an account from Jabir which describes vividly one attack on the Imam al-Husayn.

Ibn al-Kalbi also gives a similar report on the authority of the Imam al-Baqir of the killing of the child with a slightly different prayer<sup>13</sup>, but this in no way confirms that `Ammar's report is from the Imam. Rather it lends credence to it by including one report well known to non-Shi'is from the Imam. Furthermore Abu Mikhnaf tells us that the sixth Imam reported that Imam al-Husayn had received thirty-three spear thrusts and thirty-four sword blows on his body by the time he was killed<sup>14</sup>. Yet `Ammar gives us one brief sentence describing how the Imam died.

Ammar's account must be suspect. It almost certainly did not come from the Imam al-Baqir and seems unlikely to be the work of a Shi'i such as `Ammar who was contemporary with Jabir b. Yazid al-Ju'fi and reported traditions from him.

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1. Al-Mas'udi, *Muruj al-Dhahab* (Beirut, n.d.), III, pp. 53-5.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-1.

3. Abu al-Faraj, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

4. Al-Tabari, *op. cit.*, 11, pp. 292-3.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 294.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 300.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 314.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 314.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 314.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 315.

11. J. Wellhausen, *The Religio-Political Factions in Early Islam*, tr. Walzer and Ostle (Amsterdam, 1975).

12. Al-Tabari, *op. cit.*, II, 282.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 360.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 366.

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