Patricia Crone

From Arabian Tribes to Islamic Empire

Army, State and Society in the Near East c.600–850
CONTENTS

Introduction vii–xiii

Acknowledgements xiv

THE ARABIAN BACKGROUND

I The tribe and the state 446–473

II Tribes and states in the Middle East 353–376
*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society 3. Cambridge, 1993*

III The first-century concept of *hiǧra* 352–387
*Arabica 41. Leiden, 1994*

THE LATER EVOLUTION

IV Were the Qays and Yemen of the Umayyad period political parties? 1–57
*Der Islam 71. Berlin, 1994*

V A note on Muqāṭīl b. Ḥayyān and Muqāṭīl b. Sulaymān 238–249
*Der Islam 74. Berlin, 1997*

VI The significance of wooden weapons in al-Mukhtār’s revolt and the ‘Abbāsid revolution 174–187

VII On the meaning of the ‘Abbāsid call to al-rido 95–111
CONTENTS

VIII The 'Abbāsid Abnāʾ and Sāsānīd cavalrmen
    1–19

IX The early Islamic world
    War and Society in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds,
    eds K. Raafatd and N. Rosenstei. Cambridge, MA: Harvard
    University Press, 1999
    309–332

X The pay of client soldiers in the Umayyad period
    Der Islam 80. Berlin, 2003
    284–300

XI Mawāli and the prophet's family: an early Shi'ite view
    Patronate and Patronage in Early and Classical Islam,
    eds M. Bernards and J. Nawas. Leiden: Brill, 2005
    167–194

XII Imperial trauma: the case of the Arabs
    Common Knowledge 12. Durham, NC, 2006
    107–116

Index
    1–6

This volume contains xiv + 304 pages

PUBLISHER’S NOTE

The articles in this volume, as in all others in the Variorum Collected Studies Series, have not been given a new, continuous pagination. In order to avoid confusion, and to facilitate their use where these same studies have been referred to elsewhere, the original pagination has been maintained wherever possible.

Each article has been given a Roman number in order of appearance, as listed in the Contents. This number is repeated on each page and is quoted in the index entries.
MAWĀLI AND THE PROPHET’S FAMILY:
AN EARLY SHĪ'ITE VIEW

For Professor Madelung on his 70th birthday

The Imāmī work credited to the shadowy Sulaym b. Qays al-Hilālī (d. c. 90/708f.)\(^1\) contains a letter allegedly sent by Muʿāwiya to his governor of Iraq, Ziyād b. Abīhi, with instructions for Ziyād to tear up the letter as soon as he had read it and never to divulge its contents to anyone. Sulaym b. Qays, an investigative journalist avant la lettre, managed to copy the letter thanks to his friendship with a Shīʿite secretary in Ziyād’s service. Needless to say, it was a scoop. It revealed that ‘Umar had been deeply hostile to non-Arab Muslims; that Muʿāwiya was continuing his policies against them; that the Umayyads owed their power to ‘Umar and his sāḥib, i.e., Abū Bakr; and that non-Arab Muslims were natural allies of the Prophet’s family who would destroy the Umayyads as bearers of black banners from Khurāsān.\(^2\)

The letter is clearly fictitious. Muʿāwiya never wrote any such letter; nor is it obvious that the reader is being asked to believe that he did, though on this point opinions may differ. On the one hand, the sarcasm is so heavy that one would have thought the author beyond attempts at verisimilitude: he works like a cartoonist by drawing an exaggerated and distorted picture of the practices he dislikes and then having Muʿāwiya recommend them with pride.\(^3\) But on

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\(^1\) Cf. EI², s.v., where his existence is questioned (Djeblī). I owe my interest in the book to a paper presented by Maria Dakake at the MESA conference in Chicago 1998 and am indebted to Eran Kohlberg, Samer Traboulsi and the participants in the conference for comments on an earlier draft.

\(^2\) Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays al-Hilālī, ed. M. Bāqir Anṣārī (Qum: Nashr al-Hāḍ, 1995), II, 739ff. There are several Najaf printings with different paginations where the letter is easy to find via the table of contents (kitāb muʾāwiya ilā ziyād b. abīhi fi shā'īn sīḥat ‘alī). It is also reproduced in al-Majlisī, Bilār al-anwār (Beirut: Dār al-Riḍā, n.d.), XXXIII, 261ff., from Sulaym’s book.

\(^3\) It is the same method which is used in the anti-Ismāʿīlī Kitāb al-balāgh (cf. Stern, “The ‘Book of the Highest Initiation’ and other anti-Ismāʿīlī travesties,” in his Studies in Early Ismāʿīlism (Jerusalem/Leiden: Magnes Press, 1983).
the other hand, the naive indignation expressed by some Shi‘ite readers shows that the sarcasm was not always noticed, and the author may well have expected his audience to take his parody at face value. Either way, the letter is a clever piece of political satire. It is also of great historical interest. In what follows I give a summary of its contents, a full translation, a discussion of its date, and an analysis of what it tells us.

Summary

Sulaym’s sensational story goes as follows. Mu‘āwiya wrote to Ziyād b. Abīhi, his adopted brother and governor of Iraq, telling him to enforce the discriminatory measures against non-Arabs Muslims that ‘Umar had instituted in matters such as inter-marriage, inheritance, stipends and appointments to positions of authority. Mu‘āwiya reminded Ziyād that ‘Umar would actually have preferred to exterminate non-Arab Muslims and that he had written to his governor of Baṣra, Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī, telling him to cut off the heads of all those of them who had reached a certain height. But back in those days Ziyād b. Abīhi had himself been a client (mawłā) or so he had thought, this being before Mu‘āwiya had adopted him as his brother, so he had dissuaded Abū Mūsā, his employer at the time, and also warned ‘Umar that the measure would probably make the clients join the Prophet’s family, whom ‘Umar had likewise maltreated, and that this might enable ‘Alī to put an end to ‘Umar’s mulk. This was all the more likely to happen, Ziyād had said, in that he had heard ‘Alī predict that the non-Arabs (al-afriji) would become better and braver Muslims than the Arabs, and that they would eventually kill the Arabs and take over their spoils. ‘Umar had responded that this was precisely why he wanted to get them first: it was his intention to order all his governors to do what he wanted Abū Mūsā to do. But Ziyād had pointed out that the non-Arabs were too numerous, that ‘Alī and his family were too brave, and that their hatred of ‘Umar and his companion, i.e., Abū Bakr, was too great, so ‘Umar had abandoned his plans.

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1 My thanks to Samer Traboulsi for opening my eyes to this possibility; cf. the indignant editorial note in the Najaf edition triggered by the passage translated below as §7. (The anti-Isma‘ili book was understood in the same literal vein, even by modern Islamicists, until quite recently.)
Had he gone ahead, Mu'āwiya says, killing non-Arabs would have become *suna* just as so many other rulings of ʿUmar’s had become *suna* even though they were contrary to the Prophet’s practice. The non-Arabs would in that case have been eradicated once and for all. Unfortunately, this had not happened, but Abū Bakr and ʿUmar had at least succeeded in keeping the Ḥāshimites away from the caliphate, and it was the lowly status of their clans which had emboldened the Umayyads to seek the caliphate for themselves. If it had not been for Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, the entire nation would have been *mawāli* of the Ḥāshimites. In fact, this might still be the fate ahead, for Ziyād had heard ʿAlī predict, in the reign of ʿUthmān, that the people coming with black banners from Khurāsān would be non-Arabs (*al-ʿaṭīm*) and that they would defeat the Umayyads, deprive them of their power, and kill them under every star.⁵

Translation⁶

(1) Abān⁷ from Sulaym: Ziyād b. Sumayya had a Shīʿite secretary who was a friend of mine and who read aloud to me a letter that Mu'āwiya had written to Ziyād in reply to a letter from Ziyād to him. (It said:)

(2) Now, you have written to me asking me about the Arabs, whom you should honor and whom you should despise, whom you

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⁵ The author uses the term *mawāli* now in the narrow sense of freedman and now in the broad sense of non-Arab Muslims, but for non-Arab Muslims in general he prefers the term *al-ʿaṭīm*, presumably because he found their client status demeaning; he carefully distinguishes clients in the sense of freedmen from other non-Arab converts (*al-mawāli* *wa-man astūna min al-ʿaṭīm*) in §§4, 9 of the translation below. In later texts 'ṣītan is a derogative term for unassimilated Iranians (cf. the attestations in Crone, “The ʿAbbāsid Army and the Sassanian Cavalrymen,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 8 (1998), 14).

⁶ The translation renders Anṣārī’s text without reference to the variants in the notes, except where immediately relevant.

⁷ I.e., Abān b. Abī ʿAyāṣh (Firūz), a Basrān *mawāli* who died in 140 or earlier and who was a companion of Abī b. al-ʿUsayn, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq according to the Imāmīs, but who transmitted from Jaynāʾi scholars according to the Sunnīs. Both sides characterize him as unreliable, but the Sunnīs know nothing about his Shīʿīm or his transmission of Sulaym’s book (*Dāʿirat al-maʿārif at-islāmiyya al-tubrā* (Tehran: Markaz Dāʿirat al-Maʿārif al-Islāmiyya, 1995), s.v. (1, 45ff), and the sources cited there. My thanks to Etan Kohlberg for drawing this work to my attention).
should favor and whom you should keep at arm’s length, whom you should trust and of whom you should beware.

(3) I, brother, know more about the Arabs than anyone else. Look to this tribe of Yemen, honor them in public and despise them in private, for that is how I treat them. I favor their public gatherings (majālisahum) and give them to understand that they matter more to me than others, but in private my munificence and benevolence goes to others, because so many of them fight me on behalf of this man (sc. ‘Ali).8 // And look to Rabī’ā b. Nizār. Honor their nobles and despise their common folk (‘āmmatuhum), for their multitudes follow their nobles and chiefs. And look to Muḍar. Let them beat one another, for they are crude, arrogant, proud and extremely haughty. If you do that and let them beat one another, they will save you the problem of keeping control of them. Don’t accept any statement of theirs which is not accompanied by action, or any opinion of theirs which falls short of certainty.9

(4) And look to the clients and non-Arabs who convert to Islam (al-mawāli wa-man aslama min al-aḏājim). Treat them in accordance with the custom (sunna) of ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, for it humiliates and disgraces them, namely: Arabs marry (women) from among them but do not give (women) in marriage to them;10 Arabs

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8 There is some variation in the different transmission here, and the explanation that so many Yemenis are ‘Alid sympathizers is only found in one manuscript.

9 This paragraph is based on Mu‘āwiya’s advice to Ziyād as known, for example, from al-Haytham b. ‘Adīr. Ziyād wrote to Mu‘āwiya, asking for advice about the proper way of dealing with the Arabs; Mu‘āwiya replied, “Look to this people of Yemen: honor them in public and despise them in secret. And look to this tribe of Rabī’a: honor their nobles and despise their masses (al-safilā), for their masses follow the nobles. And as for this tribe of Muḍar, they are rough and crude, so put them in charge of one another (fa-ḥiṣnū ba’dahuhum ‘alā riqāb ba’dīn, . . .)’ (al-Balādhurī, Ansāb al-ashūrī, ed. M. J. Kister (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1971), IV a, 186; for another version, see al-Madāʾinī, ibid., 13, where Mu‘āwiya adds that Ziyād should choose his governors from Muḍar).

10 For the Arab reluctance to give their women in marriage to non-Arabs, see Goldziher, Muḥammedianes Studien (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1889–90), I, 127ff. The Arabs placed non-Arab Muslims in the same category as Christians and Jews by marrying their women without giving women marriage to them, as ‘Ali is said to have observed in disapproval of the practice (al-Kulaynī, Kūfī, ed. A.A. al-Ghaffārī (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Īṣāmiyya, 1342–47 AH), V, 316f.; cf. also below, notes 64–66). The Prophet had declared all Muslims to be equal and it was ‘Umar who first distinguished between Arabs and non-Arabs, Qurašis and non-Qurašis for purposes of marriage (Abū l-Qāsim al-Kūfī, Kīlāb al-tasgīḥatī (n.p. [Maktabat Ninewi] l-Ḥadīthha), n.d.), 44f. (drawn to my attention by Eitan Kohlberg); Maḥbūr, Bihār,
inheriting from them whereas they do not inherit from Arabs;\(^{11}\) you curtail their stipends and rations;\(^{12}\) they go forth in campaigns to repair the road and cut trees;\(^{13}\) none of them acts as prayer-leader for Arabs; none of them stands in the front line when Arabs are present, except to complete the line;\(^{14}\) you do not appoint anyone to any Muslim frontier province (\textit{thaqaf}) or garrison city (\textit{misr}), nor do you put any of them in charge of the judgeship (\textit{qâdî}) or the laws (\textit{ahkâm}) of the Muslims.\(^{15}\)

(5) This was 'Umar’s custom (\textit{sunna}) and practice (\textit{sîra}) regarding them, may God reward him greatly for his services to Muḥammad’s community, and to the Umayyads in particular. By my life, if it had not been for what he and his companion (sc. Abū Bakr) did,

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\(^{11}\) Patrons had a title to the estates of their clients, whereas clients did not inherit from their patrons (Crone, \textit{Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 36ff.). But patrons were not always Arabs: \textit{mawâlî} rapidly acquired freedmen and other clients of their own, who acquired freedmen and clients in their turn, and so on. Sulaym presumably held this to be an accidental feature of the institution.

\(^{12}\) The standard pay for an Arab soldier in the Umayyad period was 30 dinars/300 dirhams a year. That for a \textit{mawâlî} is said to have been 15 dinars under Mu‘awiya, 20 under 'Abd al-Malik, 25 under Sulaymân, and 30 under Hishâm (Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, \textit{Al-Iṣâṣ al-furû`,} ed. A. Anfîn \textit{et al.}, repr. (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta'if wa-l-Tarjama wa-l-Nashr, 1965), IV, 400.2). The Sunnis insist that ‘Umar awarded the same pay to Arabs and \textit{mawâlî} when he established the \textit{dirwâin} (al-Balādūrî, \textit{Futûh al-balad}, ed. M.J. de Goeje (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1866), 458.2; Abû ‘Ubayd, \textit{Al-Andalûsî}, ed. M.K. Habîs (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyât al-Azhariyya, 1969), 335f.). But according to the Imāmīs, it was ‘Umar who fixed the pay of \textit{mawâlî} at 250 rather than 300 dirhams (thus al-Faḍl b. Shâdhân, \textit{Al-Idâh} (Beirut: Mu‘assat al-A‘lami lil-Maṣbûṭ, 1982), 136f., citing the Sunnis themselves); and it was ‘Alî who gave the same to Arabs and non-Arabs, even freed slaves (thus al-Yâqûbî, \textit{Tarrâkh}, ed. M.T. Houtsma (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1983), II, 213; al-Kulaynî, \textit{Kitâb}, V, 318f.; VIII, 69; Ibn Abî l-Hajîd, \textit{Sharh waḥî al-balâgha}, ed. M.A.F. Ibrâhîm (Cairo: \textit{Isâ al-Halabî}, 1965–67), II, 200f.).

\(^{13}\) This particular grievance does not seem to be attested elsewhere, though \textit{mawâlî} are also deemed worth having as road workers in the Sunnî version of Sulaym’s story (below, notes 35, 36).

\(^{14}\) That Arabs found it demeaning to pray behind \textit{mawâlî} is well known: when Nâfi‘ b. Jubayr b. Mu‘âmîn prayed behind a \textit{mawâlî}, he explained that he wanted to humiliate himself (Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, \textit{Iṣâṣ}, III, 412f.); Salmân al-Fârîsî reputedly said, “One can’t lead you Arabs in prayer or marry your women, God favored you over us with Muḥammad” (Ibn Qudâma, \textit{Al-Mughâṣ}, ed. T.M. al-Zaynî \textit{et al.} (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qâhirâ, 1968–70), VII, 33, no. 5126); and so forth. But the detail about not having them in the front line does not seem to be mentioned elsewhere.

\(^{15}\) All this is somewhat exaggerated (cf. art. “Mawâlî,” \textit{EI²}, VI, 1878). But it is true that no \textit{mawâlî} was appointed to a coveted province such as Iraq or Khurāsân in the Umayyad period, and that \textit{mawâlî} were not acceptable as judges.
or for their strength and stubbornness in God’s religion, we and
this entire nation would have been the clients of the Hāshmites
(la-kunnā wa-jami’ hādhīhi l-umma li-banī hāshim al-mawāli) and they
would have inherited the caliphate, one after the other, in the
same way as the families // of Kisrā and Qaysar. But God
removed it from the Hāshmites at their hands and gave it to
No two tribes of Quraysh are smaller or more ignoble and desis-
propic than they are, so they made us (Umayyads) desirous of it.
We have a better right to it than they or their descendants do
because we are wealthy and powerful, and we are closer to the
Prophet in terms of kinship (fi l-raḥim) than they are.

(6) Then our man (ṣaḥīḥ) ‘Uthmān obtained it by consultation and
general consent (bi-shārā wa-rīḍa min al-‘āmma) after consultation
among six for three days. Those who had obtained it before
had done so without shūrā. When our man ‘Uthmān was killed
unjustly, we obtained it through him because God has given
authority to the wāli of someone killed unjustly.

(7) By my life, brother, if ‘Umar had fixed the blood-money of a
client at half that of an Arab, that would have been more in
keeping with piety. If I could find a way of doing it and could
entertain hope that the common folk (al-‘āmma) would accept it,
then I would do it. But I have recently been at war and am

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16 The reader is presumably meant to find it ridiculous that Mu‘āwiya should make this comparison given that he introduced the kisrāt and qaysarī mode of suc-
cession himself. Dynastic succession was as wrong in the Umayyad case as in that
of the Byzantines and Persians because it allowed ordinary families to monopolize
power whereas it was right in the Shi‘īte case because the Hāshmites were a sacred
lineage.

17 Fīnāl al-sharī‘a wa-l-i‘zz. The Najaf printing has al-qhayu for al-‘izz.
11 ‘Abd Shams and Hāshim were brothers. Taym and ‘Adī were collaterals of
older ancestors [cf. Caskel, Gamhurit an-nasab. Das Genealogische Werk des Hīfīn ibn
19 Compare Akháb āl-dawla al-’abbāsiyya wa-fihī akháb āl-‘abbās, ed. ‘A.-‘A. al-Dūrī
and ‘A.-J. al-Muṭṭalīfī (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalī‘a li-l-Ṭibā‘a wa-l-Nashr, 1971), 51, where
Mu‘āwiya tells the Hāshmites that the caliphate has passed from one sub-tribe of
Quraysh to another bi-rīḍa al-‘āmma wa-hi-l-shūrā l-hāṣṣa.
20 Cf. Q.17:33 (wa-mān quīthā maqālum fa-qad jē‘ahā l-wāliyyihī suḥūlān). This para-
graph reproduces genuine Umayyad arguments, except for the Shi‘īte point that
shūrā was an innovation.
21 In law the blood-money of a client was the same as that for an Arab, though
a client’s life was widely felt to be worth less (cf. El², VI, 876b).
22 It also means non-Shi‘ītes, as one is undoubtedly meant to know.
afraid of splitting people and turning them against me, so you must be content with what 'Umar instituted (sanna) regarding them, for that will humble and disgrace them. When this letter of mine reaches you, treat the non-Arabs with contempt and disdain, drive them away and don't ask for help from any of them, and don't fulfill any request of theirs.

(8) By God, you are the son of Abū Sufyān and have come from his loins. You don't share any genealogy with 'Ubayd apart from Adam. You have told me, and I regard you as trustworthy, O brother, that you read 'Umar's letter to the Ash'ārī in Baṣra. You were his secretary at the time and he was governor of Baṣra, and you were the lowliest of people in his view, and submissive in spirit (dhulūl al-nafs) because you thought that you were a client of Thaqīf. If you had known the certain truth in those days, as you do today, namely that you are a son of Abū Sufyān, you would have risen in your own estimation and been too proud to serve as secretary to someone falsely claiming to be an Ash'ārī (dā'ī al-ash'āriyīn). You know for sure, and we do too that {Abū Sufyān's/ grandfather Umayya b. 'Abd Shams went out to Syria on a trading journey and passed by Ṣaffūriyya, where he bought a slave and his son 'Abdallāh, and that}; Abū Sufyān used to follow the example of Umayya b. 'Abd Shams.

(9) Ibn Abī Mu'ayyāt told me that you told him that you read 'Umar's

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23 Ziyād counted as the son of 'Ubayd, a mawla of Thaqīf, until Mu'āwiya claimed him as his brother (cf. the long editorial note to the passage; al-Ṭabarī, Ta'rikh al-nasul wa-l-mu'tah, ed. M.J. de Goeje et al. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1879-1901), II, 1382.4).
21 The irony is rich inasmuch as it was Ziyād who was a dā'ī (as he is explicitly called by an adherent of al-Ḥusayn in al-Ṭabarī, Ta'rikh, II, 293.18).
25 The sentence in curly brackets, which is missing in the Najaf printing, is a gloss which has been clumsily inserted in the text so that it reads anna abī sūfīn kharaja mu'ānu zuddulu umayya b. abī shams, though the events are set before Abū Sufyān's time. The translation assumes the intended meaning to have been anna umayya b. 'abd shams zudd abī sūfīn kharaja.
26 The story is normally told slightly differently: Umayya b. 'Abd Shams, the ancestor of the Umayyad dynasty, left Mecca after losing a merit competition with Abū Ḥāshim and spent ten years in Syria, where his slave girl was impregnated by a Jew from Ṣaffūriyya and had a son, whom Umayya acknowledged as his own (Grone, Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987), 102 note 70, 117 note 45). Mu'āwiya similarly acknowledged Ziyād, the son of a slave or freedman, as his brother.
27 The Jewish child adopted by Umayya in Syria (normally called Dhalāwān rather than 'Abdallāh) was the ancestor of 'Uqba b. Abī Mu'ayyāt, an archenemy of the Prophet who was executed after the battle of Badr. The reference here is to 'Uqba's
letter aloud to Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī. He (ʿUmar) had sent him five spans of rope and told him, “Inspect the Başrans under you. Whomever you find from among the clients and non-Arab converts to Islam (al-mawālī ṭawārīkh al-ašlama min al-dāʿīm) who reaches five spans, move him forward and cut off his head.” Abū Mūsā consulted you about it, and you told him not to, saying that he should try to make ʿUmar reconsider, so he did and you took the letter to ʿUmar. You did all that as a partisan of the clients (taʾassuban li-l-mawālī), for at the time you thought that you were one of them and that you were a son of ʿUbayd, and you kept arguing with ʿUmar until you had made him change his mind; you made him afraid that there might be a schism (fuqrah al-nāṣ), so he was dissuaded; you asked him, “how can you be sure, given your hostile treatment of this family, that they will not flock to ʿAlī so that he can rise up with them and put an end to your power (mulk)?” So he desisted.

(10) Brother, I don’t know any son of Abū Sufyān’s family who brought worse luck to them than you did when you made ʿUmar change his mind and told him not to do it. // He informed me that the argument with which you made him go back on his decision to kill them was that you had heard ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭalīb say, “The non-Arabs (al-dāʿīm) will beat you in the cause

Son al-Walīd, ʿUthmān’s half brother who was governor of Kūfah until he was dismissed for drunkenness (cf. Casket, Ǧumāla, II, Register, s.v.). Al-Walīd b. ʿUqba is excoriated as an ʿīf from Ṣafṭiyya in Majūṣ, Bihār, XIX, 260, 264; XXXXIX, 81.

28 In the previous paragraph (§8) it is Ziyād who tells Muʿāwiyah about how he read ʿUmar’s letter to Abū Mūsā; here and in the beginning of the next paragraph (§10) it is Ibn Abī Muʿayyih who tells him; at the end of §10 the informant is once more Ziyād (cf. below, note 33). One cannot remove the passages with one or the other informant as interpolated without making the story unintelligible, but it is possible that two different versions have been cobbled together in the story as we have it. (I am indebted to Samer Traboulsi for drawing this problem to my attention.)

29 Cf. the catalogue of ʿUmar’s misdeeds in Sulaym, Kitāb, II, 682: he sent a rope of five spans to Basra with instructions to cut off the heads of anyone that high. The length is presumably determined, directly or indirectly, by the fact that ʿAlī presumed a boy of five spans to have reached puberty (thus al-Zamakhsharī, Al-Kashshāf (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, n.d. [1947]), III, 254, ad Q.24:59; my thanks to Harald Motzki for this reference). Elsewhere in Sulaym’s book the rope is sent by ʿUmar for the measurement of thieving boys in Basra, whose hands were to be cut off if they met the height requirement (Kitāb, II, 683). The Shiʿites also claim that ʿUmar expelled every non-Arab (ajamī) from Medina (ibid., 682) and that he wanted to kill all Zoroastrians until ʿAlī persuaded him to accept ġīza from them (Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, Al-ʿĀlim al-nabawwaa, ed. Ǧ. al-Ṣāwī and Gh. M. Aʿwānī (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1977), 176).
of this religion the second time round as you beat them the first time round”, 30 and he said, “God will fill your hands with non-Arabs. They will become lions 31 who do not flee, so they will smite your necks and take over your spoils (fay’).” 32 So Ĕmar said to you, “I have heard that from the Messenger of God, that is what made me write to your employer (sâhib) about killing them. I had decided to write to my governors of all the garrison cities about it.” But you said to Ĕmar, “Don’t do it, Commander of the Faithful. You can’t be sure that Ălî won’t call on them to help him. There are many of them, and you know the bravery of Ălî and his family and his hatred for you and your companion.” So you dissuaded him. You told me that it was partisan feelings (asâbiyya) that made you dissuade him, and that it was cowardice which made Ĕmar change his mind. 33 You (also) told me that you mentioned this to Ălî in the reign of Ĕuthmân and that he replied, “The people bearing the black banners which will come forth from Khurâsân, they are the non-Arabs (hum al-‘ajîm) and they are the ones who will wrest power from the Umayyads and kill them under every stone and star.”

(11) Brother, if you had not made Ĕmar change his mind, it would have become sunna, and God would have eradicated and exterminated them. The caliphs after him would have followed his custom (istannat bihi) until there would not have remained of them a single hair or nail or anyone at all. 34 They are the bane of religion (âfât al-dîn).

31 Thus the Najaf printing (wsh), emended to “strong” (ashîdiyya) by Ansârî.
33 Following the second reading in note 52. Note that it is once more Ziyâd who is Mu`âwîya’s informant.
(12) How much of what 'Umar instituted in this community is contrary to the sunna of the Prophet, yet people followed him regarding it and adopted it. This would have been like one of those institutions. They include his removal of the maqām from the place in which the Messenger of God had put it;35 his change of the sa‘ and mudd of the Messenger of God, which he enlarged;36 his refusal to allow a person in a state of major ritual pollution to purify himself with sand,37 and many other things of diverse kinds under more than a thousand headings, of which the most important and dearest and most delightful to me is his removal of the caliphate from the Hāshimites, who are the people entitled to it and its font and origin (ma’dinihā), for it is not right for anyone except them, nor will the earth come right except through them.38 When you read this letter of mine, keep its contents secret and tear it up.

(13) He said: when Ziyād39 had read the letter, he flung it on the ground, then he went up to me and said, “Woe unto me // for what I have left and what I have entered! I belonged to

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35 'Umar is commonly said to have moved the stone in the Meccan sanctuary known as maqām Ibrāhīm; the Shi‘ites say that it was to its Jāhili location that he moved it (Kister, art. “Maqām Ibrāhīm,” EI², VI, 104b–107b).
36 For the disagreement over these measures, see Abū ‘Ubayd, Anwa‘l, 688ff. (drawn to my attention by Avraham Hakim). 'Ali accuses 'Umar of having changed the Prophet’s measures in Sulaym, Kitāb, 677, and explains that this and other changes, including the maqām, could not be reversed, ibid., 720f.; reproduced in Majlis, Bihār, LXXX, 350, and XXXIII, 265; cf. also XXXIV, 168, 174, where the explanation is cited again, but not from Kitāb Sulaym. (I owe the first and the last four references to Avraham Hakim.)
37 Sunnī jurists allow both major and minor pollution to be removed with sand (cf. art. “Tayammum,” EI²), but 'Umar, Ibn Mas‘ūd and Ibrāhīm (al-Nakha‘i) are all said to have denied that tayammum could be used for major pollution (al-Tabarī, Jami‘ al-bayātu fi tafsīr al-qur‘ān (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1988), V, 113, ad Q.4:43; my thanks to Avraham Hakim for references which led to this one). 'Ammār b. Yāsīr reminded 'Umar of the Prophet’s sunna and Abū Mūsā al-Asbā‘ī reminded Ibn Mas‘ūd of Q.5:6 (al-Tabarī, loc. cit., also in the Sunnī Hadith collections). But according to Sulaym (Kitāb, II, 680), 'Umar “wrote to all his governors that when someone in a state of major ritual pollution has no water, he may not pray; he cannot do dry ablution with what he finds on the ground. . . .”
38 Mu‘āwiyah is such a cynic that he praises 'Umar for violating the sunna and opposing the one man who could put the world right: to a modern reader, the parody is now so crude that the author might as well curse Mu‘āwiyah directly instead of trying to impersonate him.
39 The name seems to have been inserted by mistake. It must be Ziyād’s secretary who flings the letter to the ground after reading it aloud to Sulaym (cf. §1), who picks it up and copies it.
the party of Muḥammad’s family and band (ṣiḥḥat āl muḥammad wa-hizbihi), but I have left it and entered the party of Satan and his band, and the party of someone who writes a letter like this! By God, I am like Iblis who refused to prostrate to Adam out of arrogance and unbelief and envy.”

(14) Sulaym said: I had copied the latter before the evening came. When night fell, he⁴⁰ asked for the letter and tore it up, saying, “Let no one know what was in this letter.” He did not know that I had copied it.

The date of the letter

The author of Sulaym’s sensational letter was clearly a Rāfidī (his attitude to Abū Bakr and ‘Umar is one of venomous hatred) and he wrote after the ‘Abbāsid revolution, in full awareness of black banners from Khurāsān and the massacres of Umayyads with which they were associated (§10). Yet he presents the revolution as a fulfillment of ‘Alī’s hopes, with no sign of disappointment that it had led to the accession of ‘Abbāsid rather than ‘Alid caliphs. This suggests that he was a Hāshimite Shi‘ite.

Hāshimite Shi‘ism was the belief that the Prophet’s family, defined as the entire Hāshimite clan, not just the ‘Alids, had a hereditary right to the caliphate which had been usurped by others.⁴¹ When Muḥammad died, the knowledge which God had revealed to him passed to his family (‘ītra), not to anyone else, as a missionary on behalf of the Hāshimiyya explained in Khurāsān in 129/746; therefore Muḥammad’s family were the keepers of the Prophet’s legacy and the font and origin of divine knowledge.⁴² Any Rāfidī might have agreed with this, but the missionary did not equate the Prophet’s family with the ‘Alids. It was this acceptance of all descendants of Hāshim as potential imāms in (usually, but not always, rāfidi) preference to everyone else which distinguished Hāshimite Shi‘ism from other forms, and it was this form of Shi‘ism that the ‘Abbāsids initially stood for. “There has not been any caliph among you since

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⁴⁰ Anṣārī identifies the subject as Ziyād, but again it must be the secretary.
⁴² Al-Ṭabarī, Ta‘rīkh, II, 1961f. (the missionary was Abū Dāwūd).
the Prophet died, apart from ‘Alî b. Abî Ṭalîb and this Commander of the Faithful who is behind me,” Dâwûd b. ‘Alî famously told the Kufans in his accession speech on behalf of Abû l-‘Abbâs in 750.\(^{33}\)

But Hâshimite Shi‘ism was a short-lived creed. Since the ‘Abbâsids were not going to share the caliphate with the ‘Alids, they were ill advised to continue stressing the special status of ‘Alî, while the ‘Alids themselves had nothing to gain from remaining under the shared Hâshimite umbrella. One soon had to choose between shi‘ at ‘alî and shi‘ at banî l-‘Abbâs. Several participants in the revolution drifted from Hâshimite to ‘Alid Shi‘ism from the 140s/750s onwards;\(^{34}\) and in 145/762 the ‘Alids rebelled against the ‘Abbâsids under the leadership of Muḥammad al-Nâfs al-Zakiyya, irrevocably splitting the Hâshimite family into two. Al-Manṣûr responded (if his correspondence with the rebel is authentic) by asserting the rights of al-‘Abbâs over those of ‘Alî; and when the testament of a prominent leader of the revolution who died in 785 declared ‘Alî to be the Prophet’s legatee (waṣī) and heir to the imamate after him (wârîth al-imâma ba‘-dahâh), al-Mahdî is said to have disapproved.\(^{43}\) He disapproves of raḥî in favor of ‘Alî elsewhere too,\(^{46}\) including in another story about a veteran who died in 785 (presumably a doublet of the first). Here the veteran asks the caliph to find favor with his son, of whom al-Mahdî says that he “is on the wrong track and at odds with our views and yours: he slanders the two šaykhûs Abû Bakr and ‘Umar and speaks ill of them,” to which the dying veteran replies that “he is adhering to the stance we stood for and called to when we rebelled.”\(^{47}\)


\(^{43}\) Al-Ṭabarî, Ta‘rîkh, III, 532, on al-Qâsim b. Mujâshîr al-Tamu‘î.


\(^{47}\) Al-Ṭabarî, Ta‘rîkh, III, 537, on Abû ‘Awn ‘Abd al-Malik b. Ṭâhid.
By then the stance was no longer viable. Some people continued in government service without renouncing their allegiance to the ‘Alids, but they did so by learning to live with divided loyalties, not by remaining loyal to a single, undivided house. Precisely what the official alternative to Hāshimite Shī‘ism was is anything but clear, given that al-Mahdi is described now as a Rāfīḍī or at least devotee of ‘Ali’s, now as an anti-Rāfīḍī, and now as the sponsor of a new form of rafīḍi amounting to rejection of all pre-‘Abbasid caliphs, including ‘Ali, as usurpers on the grounds that the ‘Abbāsids had enjoyed an exclusive right to the caliphate from the start. But even adherents of the new type of rafīḍ maintained a favorable attitude to Abū Bakr and ‘Umar in public, we are told, and Hārūn (786–809) reputedly went so far as to display a positive interest in ‘Uthmān. It was by recognizing ‘Uthmān as legitimate (under al-Mutawakkil?) that the ‘Abbāsids repudiated their Shī‘ite past altogether.

The author of our letter rejects Abū Bakr and ‘Umar in favor of the Hāshimites, casts the revolution as a fulfillment of predictions by ‘Ali, and settles scores with the Umayyads in the triumphant knowledge that they have fallen without betraying any awareness of splits among the Hāshimites who have ousted them. This suggests that he was writing in the immediate aftermath of the revolution. So too does the fact that his work survived as an Imāmī document: like so many others, its author probably drifted to ‘Alid Shī‘ism when the dust began to settle. All in all, then, he probably wrote before 762, but in any case not after the 780s, when the last adherents of Hāshimite Shī‘ism must have been dead or dying.

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48 The best-known example is Yaqtīn and his family.
49 Cf. Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, Ta’rīkh, ed. S. Zakkār (Damascus: Maṭābi‘ Wizārat al-Thaqāfah wa-l-Siyāsah wa-l-Irshād al-Qawmī, 1967–68), 702; Azdi, Ma‘ṣīḥ, 238, where he cites the Rāfīḍī proof text man kuntu maulāhu fa-‘allī maulāḥu against a Khārijite, possibly meaning no more than that the Khārijite was at fault for speaking ill of ‘Ali.
51 Al-Qummī, Kitāb al-maqāliyya, 65.4 (taken by Nawbakhtī, 42, to refer to another pro-‘Abbasid sect), 66.1 (missing in Nawbakhtī).
53 Zaman, Religion and Politics, 58f., sees it as happening already under Hārūn.
The caliphs and their policies

In agreement with the Imāmī literature in general, our author depicts ʿUmar as a staunch protagonist of Arabism and ʿAlī as a universalist. His most sensational allegation is that ʿUmar would have killed all mawāli who had reached the height of five spans if it had not been for Ziyād's intervention. In a Sunnī version of what is probably the same story, it is Ziyād who wants to call them, or who tells of how Muʿāwiya wanted to do so. “I see that these non-Arabs (al-ḥamrā’) have grown numerous,” Ziyād here declares, “and I suspect they will attack the Arabs and the government, so I have decided to kill half of them and to leave the other half to maintain the nobles (al-asrāf) and repair the roads”; or Muʿāwiya says, “I see that they are reviling our pious ancestors (al-salaf) and suspect that they will attack the Arabs and the government, so I think I shall kill part of them and leave part of them to maintain the markets (al-aswāq) and repair the roads.” The fact that the non-Arabs revile the salaf shows that they are Shiʿīs here too, but it is characteristic that ʿUmar has nothing to do with the plans for their elimination in these versions. For the Shiʿīs, ʿUmar was an Arab chauvinist whose policies were continued by the Umayyads; to the Sunnīs, ʿUmar was a universalist whose policies the Umayyads had changed. That the Umayyads were Arab chauvinists was taken for granted by both.

In historical terms, the Shiʿīte view of ʿUmar (suitably toned down) is the more plausible, for even the mainstream tradition contains material in which he is a great protagonist of the Arabs. It is difficult to see how he could have been anything else. He lived his entire life in tribal Arabia, where practically the only non-Arabs were slaves, freedmen and sundry non-tribesmen under Arab protection, whom it was natural to hold in contempt; and God Himself seemed to have a preference for Arabs, to whom He sent His prophet and

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51 Cf. above, notes 10, 12, 29.
whom He allowed to conquer the world. Non-Arabs captured in the
wars of conquest were of course free to convert and soon did, but
they can hardly have started doing so on a significant scale already
in ‘Umar’s time, since it was only under him that the wars of con-
quest began in earnest, and it would in any case have been very
odd if conversion had sufficed to grant them the same status as their
captors: it was after all by fighting against God that they had lost
their freedom. Deserters like the Asāwira who joined the Arabs of
their own accord were rewarded with high pay and quasi-tribal sta-
tus, but the vast majority of non-Arab Muslims entered the Muslim
community as defeated slaves. It seems unlikely that ‘Umar should
have given much thought to their position if and when they became
free Muslims, let alone that he should have granted them the same
status as their captors.

Pace the Shi‘ites, however, it also seems unlikely that ‘Ali’s views
should have been significantly different from ‘Umar’s. All the first
caliphs were Arab tribesmen who had imbibed contempt for non-
tribesmen as part of growing up and whose pride in their own eth-
nicity had been reinforced by the religious developments culminating
in the conquests; none of them is likely to have had an attitude to
non-Arabs significantly different from that of their subjects, and prej-
udice against mawāli ran from the top to the bottom of Arab soci-
ety. If ‘Ali had been ahead of his time on this issue, one would have
expected him to have been derided for his views, but the sources
preserve no recollection of this. Everything suggests that it was only
when non-Arabs converted on a significant scale that their status
became an object of debate.

The Umayyads were cast as protagonists of the Arabs because
they presided over a conquest society in which discrimination against
native converts was a fact of life, not because they led the way by
discriminatory policies and legislation. Sulaym (as we may continue
to call our author) is of course right that the regulations of military
pay must have been instituted by caliphal decree, probably by
Mu‘awiya rather than ‘Umar (§4),58 but it is hard to believe that

58 Apart from the Asāwira and other deserters, who became confederates (khalīf),
not clients, there were no non-Arab soldiers worth speaking of in ‘Umar’s time.
The captives had to be manumitted in order for the question of their position in
Muslim society (including the army) to arise, cf. Crone, Roman, Provincial and Islamic
Law, 89ff.
Mu‘āwiya, or any other early caliph, could have ordered the conquerors to share their *fayr* with their former captives on an equal basis without causing violent outrage among their subjects. Similarly, Mu‘āwiya (rather than ‘Umar) may be responsible for the one-sided nature of *wālūd*, which granted the patron a legal claim to his client’s estate without awarding a corresponding right to the client (§4), but no Arab is on record as having found this unfair. The remaining “legislation” by ‘Umar and Mu‘āwiya adduced by Sulaym does not seem in fact legislation at all. Arabs were indeed reluctant to give their daughters in marriage to non-Arabs, and both ‘Umar I and ‘Umar II are said to have shared this prejudice, and even to have forbidden such unions. But the reports on these two caliphs are ahistorical, and it is not clear that any caliph took it upon himself to lay down the law on this issue. In so far as one can tell, it was up to the marriage guardians whether to accept such unions or not. Similarly, there does not seem to have been any formal rules regarding the appointment of clients to positions of authority (§4). In fact, the Umayyads and their governors would appear frequently to have been ahead of their subjects in their willingness to employ clients, much as they may have regretted the necessity. Their non-Arab appointees were typically greeted with gross abuse from the Arabs of whom they were put in charge. The reader is meant to approve, not to feel outraged, when a Ḥimṣī tradition has Ka‘b al-Aḥbār declare that, “If I were put in charge of the captives in your hands, I would kill nine out of every ten.” Here the vision of a massacre is meant for people who deplored the impact of non-Arabs on Muslim society rather than those who were outraged by the prejudice against them. And even after the ‘Abbāsid revolution, people found it perfectly plausible that a massacre at Mosul should have been triggered

59 Cf. the preceding note.


by protests at the appointment of a client as governor to that overwhelmingly Arab town.\textsuperscript{63}

`Umar and `Ali, on the other hand, were built up as universalists by scholars, many of them mawāli themselves, who disapproved of the attitudes of their contemporaries. As the Umayyads typified the imperfect present in which they lived, so these two caliphs exemplified the ideal as practiced in the past, for it was of course inconceivable that the ideal should be new: if universalism was right now, it had always been right; only practice could have changed. By the mid-Umayyad period there cannot have been much doubt that Islam was universalist in the sense of directed to all human beings; perhaps there never was. But this is universalism in a loose sense, for it still left the question whether access to the Muḥammad’s God required membership of Arab society (in which case the Arabs remained a chosen people) or, if the Arabs were merely a subgroup within Muslim society, whether they were to enjoy a privileged status within it (allowing their chosen status to persist to a greater or lesser degree). One has grant Sulaym that the early Shi’ites come across as more genuine universalists than their jamāṭ counterparts, for whereas `Umar serves as the mouthpiece for a spectrum of views ranging from endorsement of the special position of the Arabs in both Sunnī and Shi‘ite literature to outright rejection of it in the Sunnī literature alone, ‘Ali seems to be depicted as an enemy of Arab privilege with great regularity in Shi‘ite and Sunnī literature alike, suggesting that this was a point on which Shi‘ites had agreed since early times. This is also suggested by the fact that the superiority of Arabs for purposes of marriage was rejected in all early Shi‘ite law, whether Zaydi,\textsuperscript{64} Imāmi,\textsuperscript{65} or Ismā‘īli,\textsuperscript{66} though the Zaydīs


were later to accept it. This is of some importance inasmuch as it is by refusing to give their women in marriage to other groups, and to accept food from them, that elites turn themselves into a castes. No Arabs to my knowledge are on record as having refused to eat the food of mawālī, but a great many refused to give their daughters to them, as noted already, and the religious scholars had to decide whether this should be condemned as jāhili prejudice or on the contrary endorsed as good Islamic practice with reference to the chosen status of the Arabs. Most jāmā'ī Muslims endorsed it. All Shi‘ites by contrast condemned it, clearly including Sulaym.

Mawālī and Shi‘ism

Sulaym’s view that there was a natural affinity between mawālī and Shi‘ism, once shared by Western Orientalists, has long been out of favor on the grounds that it was among the Arabs that Shi‘ism began and that it was only by historical accident at a late stage in history that Iran became a Shi‘ite country. Both points are correct, of course, but Sulaym’s testimony suggests that as far as the Umayyad period is concerned there is something to the old view after all.

Clients were converts to the beliefs of foreign invaders who had destroyed their polities and who continued to treat them with appalling arrogance even after they had adopted the invaders’ creed. It is a situation which a modern reader ought to find immediately intelligible, for it is closely paralleled by that created by the European expansion in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Like the Arabs, the Europeans destroyed indigenous polities and converted their victims to their own beliefs (in the form of secular modernity or Christianity, occasionally both) without accepting the converts as full members of their own societies. A native who adopted the religion and/or secular culture of the British did not become a Brit or a full member of the wider Christian/Western society but rather a “Westernized Oriental Gentleman,” or “wog” for short. Similarly, a

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68 For the Sunni rules of marriage equality, see Linant de Bellefond, art. “Kalā‘a,” EI2 and the literature cited there.
native who converted to Islam and adopted the language and culture of the Arabs did not become an Arab or a full member of the wider Muslim society, but rather a mawla, a term for which “wog” sometimes suggests itself as an effortless translation. In both cases the conquerors lacked a universalist high culture capable of uniting people in a single, educated elite transcending ethnicity (such as emerged after the ‘Abbāsid revolution). “As for what you say about the sunna of the Prophet, what do you know about that?” as Salm b. Aḥwaz al-Tamīmī, a pillar of the Umayyad regime, is supposed to have put it to the Hāshimiyya in Khurāṣān; “we are more likely to understand it than you are, for we are Arabs and descendants of Arabs whereas you are barbarian rabble and worshippers of cats.”

Like the Westernized elites of modern times, Muslim non-Arabs did not belong fully to either native society or that of the conquerors. Rejoining native society was rarely an option. One way or the other they had to make it in their new society, and they could only do so by severing the link between the truth and the conquerors to whom they owed it.

By the mid-Umayyad period, both Khārijism and Shi‘ism offered ways of effecting such a severance. The Khārijites famously denied that the truth had anything to do with ethnicity by proposing that God’s deputy could be of any descent: the most meritorious person was the most God-fearing (Q. 49:12), not necessarily an Arab or a Qurashi. But there were also ways in which Khārijism seemed to restate rather than to reject tribal values, and Sulaym is probably right that clients were strongly drawn to the Prophet’s family. This is not surprising. For one thing, they could cast the members of that family as fellow-victims of the existing order: ‘Umar had maltreated both of them, as Sulaym explains (§9), and as the clients al-Mukhtar’s revolt and the adherents of the Hāshimiyya in Khurāṣān agreed: Jāhilf-minded Arabs had excluded both the Prophet’s kinsfolk and his many non-Arab devotees from their rightful position in Muslim society. For another thing, the Hāshimites transcended ethnic divisions simply by being kinsmen of the Prophet, whether victimized

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60 Abūbīr al-dawla al-‘abbāsiyya, 287.
or not. They formed a sacred lineage so greatly elevated above Arabs and non-Arabs alike that the differences between the two were drained of importance. Sunnis might consider love of the Arabs to be part of the faith, but to Shī'ites, it was love of the imāms that was mandatory, and it left no room for love of a special people as well. This is the point Sulaym captures so well with the statement that but for the first two caliphs; the entire umma would have been clients of the Hāshimites.

Modern Shī'ites sometimes deny that they attach any importance to descent at all: the imāms were the most outstanding people in their own right, regardless of their kinship with the Prophet, they will say. This argument is also found in early Islam, for there were Zaydīs who declared 'Ali to have been the most meritorious man of his time irrespective of his kinship with the Prophet, which was not in itself a source of merit in their view. This was a coherent position for a universalist to take, but it is not easy to see how it could be squared with a sharp focus on āl rasūl allāh al-muṭahharīn, and in practice it was easier to reject ethnic particularism by means of a holy lineage than by simply declaring descent to be irrelevant.

Mawālī and the 'Abbasid revolution

Sulaym adds yet another testimony to the growing mound of evidence that the Hāshimite revolution was once seen as a non-Arab revolt by friends and foes alike. He presents it as a movement in which the clients turned the tables on their captors: 'Alī had foretold that the non-Arabs (al-a'dānim) would one day beat the Arabs in the name of religion as the Arabs had originally beaten them, and that the non-Arabs in question would come from Khurāsān (§10). Ibn al-Faqīh, who also knew 'Ali's prediction of a role reversal, similarly held it to have been fulfilled when the Khurāsānīs "beat the Arabs out of anger on behalf of God’s religion and in disapproval of the behavior of the Umayyads." That the roles of conquerors and victims were being reversed was what the Hāshimite soldiers themselves were signaling by using wooden clubs: the slaves were

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73 See the reference given above, note 30.
rebelling as free and rightly guided Muslims against their erstwhile captors, who had once been rightly guided conquerors entitled to their power, but who had now turned into wrongdoers deserving of enslavement themselves.\textsuperscript{74} When the qāʾim came, there would be nothing but the sword between him and the Arabs, as the Shiʿites continued to say after they had stopped regarding the Hāshimite revolution as a fulfillment of their dreams.\textsuperscript{75}

The interpretation of the revolution as a role reversal is also found in an 'Abbāsid development of the "Yemen/Muṣar/Rabiʿa/the mawālī" trope, though it is played down in another. The first is Ibrāhīm al-Imām's famous order that Abū Muslim should kill all Arabs in Khurāsān. "Look to this tribe of Yemen and honor them and settle among them, for God will not complete this matter except through them," Ibrāhīm begins, implicitly assuming Yemenīs to be Shiʿites (as they are in Sulaym's '3). "Look to this tribe of Rabiʿa and be suspicious of them," he continues, here with reference to the idea that the Rabiʿa were prone to Khārijism and fitna because they were angry with God for sending the Prophet to Muṣar.\textsuperscript{76} "And look to this tribe of Muṣar, they are the enemy close by," he concludes with implicit reference to the fact that most governors of Iraq and Khurāsān in the later Umayyad period were Muṣarīs;\textsuperscript{77} "so kill anyone about whom you have doubts, of whom you are suspicious, and of whose reliability you are not sure. If you are able to leave no speaker of Arabic in Khurāsān, then do so, and kill any youth you distrust who has reached five spans.\textsuperscript{78} The instruction is mentioned again in connection with Ibrāhīm al-Imām's death, this time as a straightforward order to kill all Arabs/speakers of Arabic.\textsuperscript{79} In


\textsuperscript{75} Al-Nuʿmānī (Ibn Abī Zaynab), Al-Ghayba (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lamī li-Maḥbūrat, 1983), 154f.

\textsuperscript{76} Al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, II, 493, 1858; III, 329.

\textsuperscript{77} Cf. the tables in Crone, "Qays and Yemen," 11f., 17f., 28–30, with 54f. It is also reflected in al-Madāʾinī's version of the trope, above, note 9.

\textsuperscript{78} Al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, II, 1937; Azdī, Mawṣūl, 65 (slightly apocopated, but cf. 107.3); Ibn al-Athīr, al-Kāmil fi l-Taʾrīkh (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣadīr, 1982), V, 348; cf. Elad, "Ethnic Composition," 255ff. My thanks to Amikam Elad for reminding me of the five spans here.

\textsuperscript{79} Al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, II, 1974; III, 25; Azdī, Mawṣūl, 107.3; Aḥbār al-dawla al-ʾabbāṣiyya, 392.3; al-Madāʾinī in al-Dhahabi, Taʾrīkh al-islām (Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-ʿArūba, n.d.), V, 202, and in id., Siyar aṭ-ṭāhir al-nubalāʾ (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-
short, Yemenis were to replace Muqarras as the ruler’s favorites, and it was Arabs rather than mawālī over the height of five spans who were to be massacred.

It is noteworthy that the Yemenis do not seem to count as Arabs in this story.\(^{80}\) Presumably they were seen as Arabs by ethnic origin alone, not in terms of cultural outlook, for Arabs in the disapproving sense were people who attached importance to their Arab descent as a source of special merit in, and knowledge of, Islam.\(^{81}\) Differently put, they were Arabs such as they had been back in tribal Arabia before the rise of Islam rather than Muslims as they ought to be now: drawn from any ethnic origin and united by a shared religion and high culture, in which Arabic provided the common language as English does in the global culture of today.\(^{82}\) “God has removed the pride of the Jāhiliyya and its boasting about ancestors from you,” as a Shi’ite version of the Farewell Oration put it: “Arabic is not the father or mother of anyone, merely a language.”\(^{83}\) All members of the Hāshimiyya, whatever their origin, were Shi’ite universalists committed to the view that ethnic origin was a mere accident of birth of no religious or cultural consequence. The Muslim community had however been dominated by Arab chauvinists such as ‘Umar and the Umayyads since the Prophet died, according to Sulaym. It was by eliminating such Arabs that the clients turned the table on their captors.

The other version of the trope has Muḥammad b. ‘Alī instruct his first missionary to “settle among the people of Yemen, conciliate Rabī‘a, beware of Muqarr ... and recruit many non-Arabs (wa-stakhthir al-a‘ājm), for they are the people of our mission and God will assist it through them.”\(^{84}\) Here a more positive attitude to the angry


\(^{81}\) As in Salm’s statement quoted above, note 69.

\(^{82}\) For other examples of the same usage, see Crone, “Wooden Weapons,” 179f.

\(^{83}\) Al-Kulaynī, Kāf, VIII, 246; Qādī ‘Nu‘mān, Daf‘ān, II, no. 729.

\(^{84}\) Abū b. ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Awwād al-abbasīyya, 204.8; reduced to “settle among Yemen and be kind to Muqarr” in Mada’nīn’s version in al-Ṭabarī, Ta‘rīkh, II, 1501.8. For another version, put in the mouth of Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya, see Ibn ‘Abd Rabbi, Ḥid, IV, 476, where the mawālī are missing.
Rabi'a is adopted, and although non-Arabs are singled out for special importance, there is no order to kill Mu'dar or the Arabs in general. On the contrary, as Abū Muslim later assured Naṣr b. Sayyār, although it was true that the imām had ordered him to settle among Yemen, conciliate Rabi'a, beware of Mu'dar and pay special attention to the aḍāstim, it was only the Mu'dārī followers of the Umayyads that he was meant to beware of, not the upright ones; the result was that non-Arabs flocked to the da'wā, closely followed not just by Yemen and Rabi'a, but by some Mu'dārīs of insight as well. Here, then, the role reversal is belittled, presumably to reassure Mu'dārī members of the 'Abbāsid elite (who were actually numerous) that there was no need to feel alienated, the constant harping on the theme of Yemenīs and non-Arabs in the 'Abbāsid revolution notwithstanding.

Clearly, all the many versions of the "Mu'dar/Rabi'a/Yemen/clients" trope give us later interpretations, not factual details. Like the predictions attributed to 'Aḍī, they summarize what they see as the meaning of the revolution, and their pity formulation suggests that they were used for purposes of propaganda. But the idea that non-Arab Muslims played a major role in the Hashimit movement cannot be dismissed as mere propaganda intended to assure non-Muslims that there was room for them in the new establishment, for the enemies of the revolution had the same impression. To the Umayyads and their supporters, the revolutionaries were runaway slaves admixed with lowly clients and Arab riffraff, longhaired people whose genealogies were their villages and whose slogan was Persian bekosh, bekosh, "kill, kill," native rabble from the back and beyond, uncircumcised pagans who worshipped fire, cats, anything

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85 Akhbār al-dawla al-'abbāsiyya, 284f. Discussed (in a vein unpersuasive to me) by Sharon, Revolt, 58f.; Elad, "Ethnic Composition," 258f.
86 For a sample (including some cited here), see Crone, "Qays and Yemen," 55f., with 48f.
88 Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād, Fītan, nos. 550–52, 558 (ed. Zakkār, 118, 120); cf. Akhbār al-dawla al-'abbāsiyya, 206.), where the fact that their genealogies are their villages is singled out for praise. The participants in the revolution were identified by their villages rather than their tribes in Abū Muslim's register (al-Ṭabarī, Ta'rīkh, II, 1969).
except God and Muhammad, and who had come to kill the Arabs along with upright *mawāli* and to destroy Islam.\(^{90}\) In a more dispassionate vein Ḥamza al-İşfahānī observes that it was the *‘ajam of Khurāsān along with miscellaneous Arabs and Bedouin who transferred power from the Umayyads to the ‘Abbasids.\(^{90}\) His statement makes explicit what everyone knew to be the case, namely that many participants in the revolution, including most of the leaders, were ethnic Arabs, who moved on to play a dominant role in the caliphate down to the fourth civil war (though the early ‘Abbasid caliphate struck many as non-Arab in character, too).\(^{91}\) It is on the participation of ethnic Arabs that the modern literature has concentrated for the past thirty years or so, with salutary effect.\(^{92}\) But they were a minority, and what was so remarkable about the revolutionaries to contemporaries was in any case their ability to transcend ethnicity: Arabs or Iranians, all were clients of the Hāshmites, as Sulaym would have said.

None of this does anything to explain why it was Khurāsānīs who took it upon themselves to enact the role reversal. Sulaym’s catalogue of discriminatory practices is of interest for reflecting the griev-

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\(^{93}\) The foremost representative of this line of research is now Elad, whose emphasis on the Arab nature of the revolution sometimes seems a little excessive (cf. his “Ethnic Composition” and his contribution to the present volume).
ances of people who were doing well in Muslim society, not those of villagers and other humble people oppressed by Arab fiscal demands. Villagers found it difficult even to gain acceptance as members of Muslim society. In so far as they avoided being deported as illegal immigrants, their standard complaint about the Umayyad army was that they could not get into it, not that they were paid less than Arabs there, and they are not likely to have chafed under their inability to secure government positions or to marry Arab women. By contrast, there is a story of a mawla, the son of a captive from Sistân, who was offended when he was appointed governor of Kirmân; he had set his eyes on Khurâsân and attributed his failure to receive the governorship of that province to his mawlawiya. Marwânid society was full of such men who would have made it to the top if they had not been non-Arabs, or who actually did make it to the top, but who still had to endure insults and prejudicial treatment from Arabs less able or educated than themselves. It is mawâlî of this type who were likely to sympathize with the Hâshimiyya. But it is impossible to say more without going into conditions specific to Khurâsân, and on that there is nothing to be learnt from Sulaym’s letter.

A context for the letter?

Abû Muslim was rumored to have killed all the Arabs of Rabî‘a, Muḍjar, Nizâr and Yemen who remained in Khurâsân after Naṣr b. Sayyâr’s flight and Qaḥtaba’s departure for Iraq. This is obviously an exaggeration. There is however every reason to believe that Abû Muslim engaged in purges, and the exaggeration was presumably born of shock and outrage at their magnitude. What right did he have to kill all these people? Khurâsânî Arabs who had not openly committed themselves to the Umayyad cause could not automatically be assumed to be supporters old regime. His answer presumably was that if they had not joined the dâ‘im or their loyalty

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53 Wellhausen, who saw the revolution as a non-Arab revolt triggered by social grievances, had such people in mind (Wellhausen, The Arab Kingdom and its Fall (London: Curzon Press, 1973); (German original, 1902), chaps. 8–9).

61 Al-Ṭabarî, Taʿrîkh, II, 1458 (year 104). For his ancestry, see Khaliṣa, Taʿrîkh, 168 (year 29).

to the Hāshimiyā was equally uncertain. It may well have been in justification of his brutal treatment of such people that Ibrāhīm al-Imām was credited with his famous wasiyya regarding the elimination of Arabs from Khurāsān: Abū Muslim was only following orders; the imām (who was always right) had instructed him to kill any Muḥārīr “about whom you have doubts, of whom you are suspicious, and of whose reliability you are not sure,” and “to leave no speaker of Arabic in Khurāsān,” but rather to “kill any youth you distrust who has reached five spans.” Either the formulation was meant to recall ‘Umar’s order regarding the extermination of mawālit or else the story about ‘Umar (and Ziyād or Mu‘āwiya’s) order regarding the extermination of mawālit was brought into circulation in order to justify Abū Muslim’s killing of Arabs. Either way, Sulaym could well have composed his particular account of ‘Umar’s order in response to criticism of the murderous nature of the new regime. This would have the merit of explaining why he should have found it worth his while to put together a letter calculated to work its readers into a state of raging fury at a dynasty that had already fallen.

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XI

MAWĀLI AND THE PROPHET'S FAMILY

93


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