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12. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WOODEN WEAPONS
IN AL-MUKHTAR’S REVOLT AND THE
‘ABBASID REVOLUTION* 

PATRICIA CRONE

It is well known that al-Mukhtar’s non-Arab followers fought with wooden clubs, thereby earning themselves the contemptuous epithet of khashabiyya, “wood people”, and that wooden clubs reappear in the hands of the Khurāsānī revolutionaries.1 Though the Khurāsānīs never seem to be known as khashabiyya, it is generally accepted that their clubs point to a link between al-Mukhtar’s revolt and the ‘Abbāsid revolution. But what did wooden weapons signify? This is the question I shall address in Professor Bosworth’s honour.

The Khashabiyya

The sources offer four different explanations why al-Mukhtar’s followers fought with wooden arms. One is that they did not want to violate the sanctity of Mecca when they were sent to rescue Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya from Ibn al-Zubayr; wooden arms were apparently permitted where real weapons were forbidden.2 Another is that they took the firewood with which Ibn al-Zubayr had intended to burn Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya and his followers in Mecca, ḥima zu’ima, as al-Raḍābihr wisely advises.3 The third is that they fought with wood because they held it unlawful to use swords in the absence of the awaited one/infallible imam; and the fourth is that they had no arms apart from wooden ones, implying that they used them for lack of anything better.4

All four explanations are based on the assumption that wooden arms were not real weapons,5 but rather a substitute for them. The first two explanations must be rejected, however:6 Both ignore the fact that the Khashabiyya also used wood outside Mecca,7 contrary to what the first maintainer, the Khashabiyya in Mecca seem to have used swords as well,8 and the second is wholly implausible. The third explanation must also be rejected, for the Khashabiyya did not revere an absent imam or mahdi, and they can hardly have deemed it unlawful to fight with swords since they used them in Mecca and elsewhere.9 without them they would soon have been suppressed. But the fourth explanation, which is identical with Wellhausen’s, is highly plausible.10

Wood is commonly identified as the weapon of those who were normally unarmed, especially slaves. When Sa’id al-Ḥarāshī gave orders for the Sogdian hostages in his camp in 110/722 CE to be killed, the latter “had no arms, so they fought with wood (khushāb) and were killed to a man”.11 In the disastrous battle of the Pass in Khurāsān in 112/730 CE the Junayd promised freedom to all camp slaves who would join the fighting; the slaves responded by cutting wood to fight with (fa qada’ ahdabhum al-khushab yugubillah bikh), or they attacked the enemy with tent poles (umud).12 In 119/737 the slaves (ghilāni) in Asad’s camp likewise warded off Turks with tent poles (umu’d).13 In 128/745 CE Marwān II’s abd al-‘aswar attacked the Khārijīte al-Khaybārī with tent poles (umu’d al-khaybāri)15 and when a man with

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* I should like to thank Chase Robinson for comments on the article.

1 E.F., s.v., “ṣāḥib al-ḥimma”, “Khashabiyya”. Some Ziyādis and Johnites were allegedly known as Khashabiyya, for different reasons (Liao, 3:460–1, 3435, s.v., “muhā’fiyya”); Ibn Haḍram, Muḥd., 2:36, 36, 37, 38, 39; Ibn Ḥajar, Taḥāfūt, 3:460–1; cf. van Ess, Theologie und Geschichte, 3, 280f.; 2. BA, v. 231.7; cf. AA, 104.10, 106.11; accepted by Dixon, Umayyad Caliphate, 58, with further references;
3 BA, v. 231.5;
4 Ibn Ḥaqq, Fīṣal, iv, 185–5; cf. Friedlander, “Herrodotoxiakos”, 1907, 63, note 1 (where the text is clearer), 1908, 94f.; Ibn Ṭasqīmīyya, Muḥd., i, 22, citing Khushabiyya, where it forms part of a polemical account ascribed to al-Sha’bī. The parallel passage in Ibn ‘Abd al-Rahmān, Ḥaqq, ii, 409–11, lacks the explanation of the wooden arms.
5 Khwāzażīnī, Miftāḥ, 29, in confusion with the Zaydi Khushabiyya (cf. above, note 1);
6 Cf. also Liao, v, 288.11, s.v., “khuṣur”, on al-ṣaḥibiyya al-walāḥi la sāḥib laḥm, clearly a reference to al-Mukhtar’s Khashabiyya;
7 Thus also van Arendonk in E.F., s.v., “Khashabiyya”;
8 Per Dixon, 36, 38f., who takes the non-Meccan evidence to refer to a different Khashabiyya;
9 The first explanation has them arrive with swords, which they keep in their scabbards to fight with wood instead; but the second implies that they fought with swords until they chance on the firewood, and swords are mentioned elsewhere (Tab. ii, 605–6).
10 Wellhausen, Geschichte des Islams, 76f.
11 Tab. ii, 1445.16.
12 Tab. ii, 1386.13, 1384.11, 1347.9.
13 Tab. ii, 1398.9.
14 Tab. ii, 1914.11; al-Azdī, Muṣūlī, 72.2.
a stick (tış) in his hand presented himself to Aḥāʾī Muslim in order to join his army, he turned out to be a slave.16 Slaves clearly fought with such weapons because they had more to lose.

Al-Mukhtar’s Ḥashabiyah were slaves and freedmen (manāṭik, 'aḥd, mawālī, mukarrarīn).17 By origin they were captives, as the contemporary Bar Pencaye says:18 Some had been manumitted by their owners,19 others were set free by al-Mukhtar, who promised freedom to all slaves who would join him.20 All were menial people, not soldiers.21 Bar Pencaye describes those who were sent against Ulukayyilah b. Ziyād as “13,000 men, all footsoldiers, without arms or equipment, without horses or tents: all that they had in their hands was a sword or a spear or a stick.”22 When al-Muhallab laid siege to them at Nisibis, he wrote them off, for the benefit of his troops, as nothing but “slaves with sticks in their hands.”23 They appear as unarmed Ḥashabiyah slaves in a poem by the contemporary ʿĀshā Ḥamdān,24 and later informants took it for granted that their wooden arms fell short of real weapons, as has been seen. It is thus reasonable to infer that the Ḥashabiyah were poorly armed because they were slaves and freedmen who did not normally have access to arms at all. Al-Mukhtar was of course in a position to equip some of them well, and so he did: a number of them were mounted and given stipends, to the disgust of their former owners.25 But he cannot have been in a position to equip 13,000 (or 20,000) new recruits from scratch.26 Hence their weapons were rudimentary.

Wellhausen modified his view, however. When he returned to the subject in the context of the ʿAbbaṣid revolution, he sensed that the wooden arms were symbolic of something, more precisely of Iranian participation, and summarily declared the club to have been “the national weapon of the lower Iranian population”, invoking the Ḥashabiyah in support.27 A similar idea has recently been proposed by Zakeri, with reference to the higher rather than the lower Iranian population. According to him, al-Mukhtar’s non-Arab followers were free Iranian horsemen who had defected to the Arabs in the wars of conquest and settled in Kufa, where they came to be known as the Ḥamraʾ; and in his view their wooden clubs were related to the Iranian national weapon known as the gurz, a club carried by mailed cavalrymen.28 But the wooden club was not a national Iranian weapon. Clubs and sticks were used by anyone, Iranian or otherwise, who could not afford proper equipment, above all slaves, but also rabble (ṣiqqa), lowgrade footsoldiers, bedouin, Kurds, nabājis and guriz.29 Horsemen encased in iron, on the other hand, did not fight with wooden arms. Zakeri may be right that Iranian cavalrymen carried a gurz and that this weapon lies behind the ‘umud carried by members of Ziyād b. ʿAbdūl’s dawla (some of whom were Ḥamraʾ);30 but the gurz will have been of iron, and ‘umud in the sense of clubs or maces (rather than tentpoles) were made of iron too,31 or at least covered with it.32 Since the clubs and sticks used by al-Mukhtar’s Ḥashabiyah are universally described as something less than real weapons, they obviously were not arms of the type used by professional cavalrymen.

16 AA, 280.9.
17 E.g. Tab. ii, 627.14, 650.2, 6, 10; 651.10, 718.11.
18 In Brock, “North Mesopotamia”, 65; cf. the Kuban statement that “they are bespoiled bestowed on us by God” (Tab. ii, 650.7). They are wrongly depicted as free converts who had fled to the garrison cities in Lewis, Iraq in History, 790ff (correctly as captives in Wellhausen, On the Insurgents, 79).
19 As the Kubans themselves pointed out (Tab. ii, 650.8).
21 “Have you given up selling salt fish in the Kūnādī to give allegiance to the lying al-Mukhtar on the understanding that you will fight those who freed you from slavery?” as a Kuban snarled at one of them (Ibn Aʾīmah, vi, 108.6).
22 In Brock, “North Mesopotamia”, 65.
23 Al-Haytham b. ʿAbd al-Aqīf, vi, 90.11.
24 Tab. ii, 684.11, 16.
25 Tab. ii, 694. They are said to have had 2000 horsemen at Nisibis (al-Maʾsūdī, Marjāʾ, iii, par. 2004).
26 There were 20,000 of them according to al-Dīnawārī, 296.15, cf. 301.4. The figures, of course, simply mean “many”.
27 Wellhausen, Arab Kingdom, 505.
28 Zakeri, Ständesoldaten, 205ff, 217 (cf. 116ff), with reference to von Grunebaum, ‘Persische Wörter’, 20, where the kāfīkhāb is tentatively identified as the gurz, “the national weapon of the Iranians”.
29 Ibn Aʾīmah, vii, 239.12.
30 Tab. ii, 1226.9.
31 Thus Sharón, Reuel, 86.
32 al-Jahiz, Ḥayba, iii, 51.
33 Tab. ii, 793; Zakeri, Ständesoldaten, 217 (where even sharīʿ explicitly said that he had walked are cast as Iranian cavalrymen). But al-Dihlawī, Fardkalām, i, 101 (cited by Zakeri himself, 282), enumerates jarmu and dīnuṣ as different weapons, as does Tab. ii, 1254.1.
34 Hava, Arabic English Dictionary, s.v. jarmu (‘iron rod?’); Lane, Lexicon, s.v. ṣimūd, Tab. ii, 712.10–12.
35 As conjectured by Fries, Homestown, 51; explicit references to ‘umud badiʿ also suggest that they were not always of iron alone (Tab. ii, 912.6; 1234.1; al-Azdi, 252.11).
Not can al-Mukhtar’s Khashabiyah be identified with the Ḥanārī who deserted during the wars of conquest to settle in Kufa. Zakariya has been named by al-Dinawari,26 who calls them Ḥanārī, possibly in the general sense of non-Arabs/Iranians27 and possibly with specific reference to the deserters who settled in Kufa,28 because he sees them as his own people. It is because he identifies with them that he always describes them in terms of ethnicity rather than status (that is, they are Ḥanārī, ʿṣārār, Ḥanārī ʿṣārār and Ḥanārī ʿṣārār to him,29 never ʿābid wa manāfīl. And it is for the same reason that he never mentions their wooden weapons or their Khashabī nickname, but depicts Ibn al-Ahdab as extolling their martial virtues with reference to their alleged descent from Persian sadar and mardāb.30 This tells us something interesting about al-Dinawari, not about the Khashabiyah.

The wooden clubs symbolized Iranians in al-Mukhtar’s revolt, they did so precisely because they were the weapons of slaves. Non-Arab origin and servile status were as inextricably linked in the Umayyad caliphate as were African origin and servile status in pre-emancipation America. All non-Arabs were “slaves” in Arab eyes whatever their formal status, partly because most of them were non-tribesmen who needed others to defend them,31 partly because they had suffered military defeat,32 and partly because all slaves in the formal sense were non-Arabs while conversely most non-Arabs were former slaves. A slave was a non-Arab, a non-Arab was a slave, literal or metaphorical, past or present, Muslim or otherwise.33 Hence the weapon of slaves was the weapon of non-Arabs, and above all of the numerically preponderant Iranians. The poet Farrā‘ taunted the Banū l-ʿAmīm in Basra with the claim that “they have Khodā in their hands and should go home to al-Ahwāz,” though the Banū l-ʿAmīm were free Iranians (or Iranianized Arabs) who had joined the Arabs during the conquests and who had thus avoided enslavement and client status alike.34 The taunt lies in the denial that Iranians could be soldiers; all non-Arabs were slaves armed with wood at best.

It thus stands to reason that al-Mukhtar’s Khashabiyah should have responded by wielding their wooden arms as a sign that the slaves/non-Arabs had come to wreak vengeance on their Arab captors; but whether they actually did so is hard to say. The theme of vengeance is simply attested in their revolt, of course, but it is formulated as vengeance for the Prophet’s family, not for slaves or Iranians, let alone for Zoroastrians. This in itself is quite remarkable. As captives of the Kufis, the Khashabiyah must have come overwhelmingly from former Sassanid domains, and they spoke Persian among themselves.35 Since they rebelled a mere fifty years after the conquests began, one would have expected them to unite in the name of their ancestral religion, be it in order to go home after the fashion of the Ismaelites in Egypt (or Spartacus) or with some other idea of regaining their former freedom; but of Zoroastrianism there is no trace. Possibly, the captives came from too many different religious communities (Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrian, Gnostic) to unite in the name of any that united them;36 and possibly, Zoroastrianism was too pagan, in the sense of incarnating in local use and practice rather than in a detachable set of propositions, and thus too context-bound to unite disparate peoples whose very problem was that they had been torn from their local homes.37 In any case the Khashabiyah, like the rebel slaves in America, formulated their war of liberation in the religious language of their captors.

The religious language they adopted transcended ethnicity, and so did their behaviour, at least initially. They used after all rebel under
Arab leadership. But in demanding vengeance for the Prophet’s family and styling themselves *shurut al-läh*, “God’s special troops” (at whose hands the vengeance was to be achieved), they cast the Prophet’s family as fellow-victims of their Arab captors and presented themselves as better Muslims than the latter, who had used the Prophet’s message to oppress the Prophet’s family along with his non-Arab followers. Vengeance for the Prophet’s family was a slogan to which non-Arabs in particular were likely to respond, as al-Mukhtar was supposedly told. 10 It is not for nothing that Bar Penkaye believed their revolt to herald the end of the Ishmaelites; 10 by the time they were enounced at Nisibis, they had shed their Arab leadership and were fighting on their own. But Bar Penkaye was not aware that they attached any special meaning to their humble arms, and only one Muslim source suggests that they did. According to Abū Mukhtar, they called their clubs *kāfirkabāt*, a half Arabic and half Persian word meaning “infidel-bashers”, and shouted “vengeance for al-Husayn!” as they wielded them in Mecca. 11 One would certainly infer from this that they saw their clubs and clubs as symbols of their servitude and wielded them against their captors as a sign that the tables had been turned. But Abū Mukhtar’s reference to *kāfirkabāt* is isolated and could be anachronistic. 12 It may well have been the Khashabiyah’s defeat that turned their clubs into symbols to those who retained their aspirations.

**The Hashabiyya**

The sources do not comment on the Khausābīy’s use of wooden arms, but they offer several attestations. Al-Dīnawarī says that on the outbreak of the revolution the rebels came on foot, donkeys and horses from various parts of eastern Iran to Abū Muslim’s camp in Marw, all dressed in black and wielding clubs which they had also blackened

and which they called *kāfirkabāt*. 13 Having arrived in Iraq, they went to the Zab on ulcerous donkeys armed with sticks and infidel-bashers (bi l-ta’i wu’l-kāfirkabāt) to fight Marwān II, according to al-Azdī, who has an ‘Uqaylī, i.e. Qayṣ, supporter of Marwān II narrate with astonishment how neither his coat of mail, inherited from his Jāhili great-grandfather, nor his horse, bred in the tribe itself, proved to be of any avail when he was attacked by men armed with mere sticks. 14 Pseudo-Dionysius notes that he had sticks tipped with iron in their hands, so that they were truly the rod of God’s anger, and that they resembled people advancing to kill dogs. 15 According to a number of sources, the Umayyads who were massacred at Nahr Abī Futrus and/or Hirā were clubbed to death with *kāfirkabāt*. 16 “Bring the infidel-bashers”, Abū l-Abbas commanded, whereupon guards came with blackened wood (al-khashab al-musawwada) and killed the Umayyads. 17 The troops “bashed them with *d’maida* and *kāfirkabāt*”, according to another version, 18 in which the *d’maida* are perhaps a gloss for *kāfirkabāt* (though the ‘Abbasids did have troops armed with *d’maida*). 19 Still other versions omit the *kāfirkabāt* altogether and have the troops bash the Umayyads with *d’maida* or *tawal* alone. 20 (Conversely, a story about al-Zahrāʾ has Umayyad *shaṣf* carry *kāfirkabāt* rather than *tawal*! 21) But *kāfirkabāt* remained emblematic of the ‘Abbasid dynasty into the ninth century. Bukhari’s troops armed with *kāfirkabāt* were to be found at Abū l-Abbas’s court; a qāfī of Basra in his reign is said to have had bearers of *kāfirkabāt* march in front of him; and in the siege of Baghdād in 251/865 it is described by Muhammad b. ‘Abdallah distributed *kāfirkabāt* specially equipped with iron nails to the Baghdādī

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10 Al-Dinawari, 359f. The text has *zamīn qua qua quaqua*... *anaf al-khashab*, which Sharon takes to mean that their clubs were half blackened (Rosh, 96) while Choucri in BF, s.v. “kāfirkabāt”, takes it to mean that they had blackened short clubs (similarly Zscheri, Strmol Soldaten, 592).
11 Al-Azdī, Muncil, 129f., 132.3.
12 Pseudo-Dionysius, 192 = 147 (I owe this reference to Chase Robinson).
13 Aplani, iv, 346.1.
14 Ibn Athaʾain, viii, 199.
15 Al-Azdī, Muncil, 139.9.
16 Al-Dihabāt, Tadhkira, i, 181, where ‘Abdallah b. ‘Alʾ asks al-Awsāʾī about the legitimacy of killing the Umayyads surrounded by soldiers armed with swords, *jarnay*, *d’maida* and *kāfirkabāt*, (ibid, 249.3) (Faryāb tribes troops armed with *tawal* in al-Manṣūrī’s Bagdadī).
17 ‘Uqayl, 208.1; BA, iii, 104.12; YT, ii, 426.10; cf. 427 ult., where Hishām’s remains are bashed in Yawmad.
rable who were throwing bricks at the Samarran troops for lack of weapons to fight with; wooden arms thus once more came to be wielded by people who were normally unarmed. The Khurāsānīs still boast of their kifih khib in al-Jahīz’s epistle on the Turks. This evidence leaves no doubt that the Hashimiyas used wooden clubs in a symbolic vein. Sharon denies it with reference to al-Dinawari’s passage: according to him, the rebels merely carried kifih khib because they had not yet received money with which to buy proper weapons, something that Abū Muslim was soon to put right. This is the necessity argument proposed by Wellhausen in connection with al-Mukhtar’s revolt, but as Wellhausen himself sensed, there was more to it in the Khurāsānī case. Sharon rightly dismisses Wellhausen’s idea of the wooden club as a national weapon on the grounds that actually it was commonplace, but he fails to explain why the revolutionaries should have singled out their commonplace weapon for blackening and a name of its own, or why al-Dinawari should have bothered to mention it at all. Besides, it did not disappear when the rebels were paid. On the contrary, it was assigned a special role in the execution of the Umayyads and retained by the ‘Abbāsids thereafter, and though it was a weapon associated with slaves and rable, the Khurāsānīs boasted of having used ʾi. It must have had a special meaning, then.

The clubs identified the Khurāsānī rebels as slave rising against their Arab masters, in the sense of non-Arabs seeking vengeance for themselves and the Prophet’s family from their Umayyad oppressors. The Umayyads were clubbed to death with kifih khib because they were perceived as “Arabs” in a sense that the Prophet’s family were not, i.e. as tribally minded people unable to rise above their own ethnicity, and when the Qaysi soldier in the Battle of the Zab marvels at his own inability to defend himself against men armed with mere sticks even though he is wearing mail inherited from his Jahāfī great-grandfather and riding a horse bred in the tribe itself, the symbolic victory of captive non-Arabs over their tribal, Jahāfī-minded, well-armed and well-mounted captors could hardly be more clearly expressed. The kifih khib must indeed have stood for non-Arab, specifically Iranian, participation in the revolution, as Wellhausen argued, and as Zakeri argues too,²⁶ it is only their explanation of why it did so that is hard to accept.

Participation in the revolution elevated the captive non-Arabs to free and rightly-guided Muslims; they killed “Arabs” with wood because it was now the latter’s turn to be enslaved. But when Abū Muslim was murdered, a recruit of his concluded that even the Prophet’s family were “Arabs” and that there was no place for Iranians in Muslim society after all: he rejected Islam, reverted to Zoroastrianism and took to killing Arabs with ḥashah.²⁷ The adherents of the ‘Abbāsids themselves continued the symbolism by executing non-Arab traitors within their ranks with wood. When ʾĪsā b. Māhān, a mawsil veteran in the movement, fell into disgrace, he was sown up in a sack and battered to death, with ḥashah,²⁸ the same punishment was meted out to ʾudayf b. Maymūn, a mawsil poet who had given the signal for the massacre of the Umayyads by reciting some verses, but who defected to the ‘Aṣāl side when Ibrāhīm and ʾAbdallāh b. ʾAbdallāh rebelled.²⁹ Whereas participation in the revolution had elevated these men to free and rightly-guided Muslims, their betrayal reduced them to despicable slaves again: that, one assumes, was the message.³⁰

The Meaning of “Arabs”

Burayr b. Māhān, the mawsil of Banū Musliy, who played a key role in the foundation of the Hashimite mission, allegedly favoured Khurāsān as the place in which to found it on the grounds that easterners were fonder of the Prophet’s family than anyone else; in Jurjān, he said, he had met an Iranian (ṣūdūr min al-dājūm) who told him in Persian that “We have never seen a people more astray than the Arabs; when their Prophet died, they handed their power to

²⁶ Zakeri, Siyāsāt ʿAlāʾī, 274ff., once more casts the wielders of clubs as Iranian horsemen armed with the gāz.
²⁷ Ṣ. ʿAbd al-Rahmān, ʿAbdillāh, 134ff.
²⁸ ʿAb. iii, 109.12.
²⁹ Ṣ. ʿAbd al-Rahmān, ʿAbdillāh, 224ff.
³⁰ Cf. Ṣ. ʿAbd al-Rahmān, ʿAbdillāh, 103ff. and ʿAb. iii, 83ff., though the context here is ṣūdūr rather than ʿabd.
somebody other than his family,” the two of them then cried together.”71 On Abū ‘l-‘Abbās’ accession in 132/750, Dāwūd b. ‘Allī “mentioned the Arabs and deemed them slow, whereas he praised the people of Khurāsān”; “the Arabs conspired to deny our right and to help the Umayyad evil-doers until God appointed this army from the people of Khurāsān for us”; he said.72 Back in Khurāsān, Abū Muslim is said to have killed “the remaining Arabs of Rabī‘a, Muḍar, Nizar and Yemen.”73

“Arabs” in these passages does not carry the straightforward ethnic sense that a modern reader is apt to impute to the word. It stands for the Umayyads and their su‘ūdet supporters, not for people who merely happened to be of Arab descent, as were a great many Khūrāsānis and the ‘Abbāsidīs themselves. Similarly, “the people of Khurāsān” are the supporters of the Prophet’s family who had staged the revolution, not simply people who happened to have been born in Khurāsān. Both groups are singled out from their ethnic or local substratum by their religio-political allegiance.

It follows that the anti-Arab sentiments voiced by the revolutionaries should not be understood as testimonies to ethnic hatred of the modern kind. The end of Arab domination did not mean that people of Arab parentage were going to be exterminated or expelled: Abū Muslim’s killing of Arabs notwithstanding, there was no ethnic cleansing in Khurāsān, or for that matter elsewhere. Nor did the revolutionaries hanker for a political (let alone religious) restoration of the Iran. What they hankered for was the elimination of a dynasty and associated supporters, identified as “Arabs” in the sense of people to whom Arab ethnicity was a value in itself. A new da’wa had arrived: a new set of people were going to get their turn. They were lovers of the Prophet’s family, above ethnicity, and enemies of the Arab chauvinists who had oppressed them.

Their views are particularly clear in a remarkable speech addressed by Qaḍḥaḥa to his troops on reaching Jurjān. “O people of Khurāsān, this land belonged to your forefathers”, he began, thus showing that he (or whoever composed the speech) held the revolutionaries to have their roots in the Sāsānīd empire. “They used to be granted victory over their enemy because of their justice and good behaviour. But then they changed and acted oppressively, so God became angry with them and took away their power, empowering over them the nation that they considered the lowest on earth. The latter took their country, bedded their women and enslaved their children, all the while making just decisions (yakkumān bi l-tadhil), fulfilling their contracts and assisting those who had been wronged. But then they too changed and altered their ways, made unjust decisions and persecuted the pious and God-fearing members of the Prophet’s family. So now He has empowered you over them so that He may avenge them through you...”74 The forefathers to whom Qaḍḥaḥa refers are the Sāsānīd kings and their subjects; the lowly nation is the Arabs, who soon turn into the Umayyads and their subjects; and the Khurāsānis are the new people destined to hold sovereignty when the new dynasty has been enthroned. But no ethnic terms are used for the first and the last: the Arabs had of course started as a tribal nation, but significant identities were now supra-local and a function of political and religious allegiance.

The speech is remarkable for the ease with which it presents the Sāsānīd and caliphal periods of Iran as dynastic “turns” within the history of the same religion. The Sāsānīd past is not rejected as an era of paganism to which God in His mercy has put an end by letting the Muslims conquer Iran, nor is it depicted as an era of national sovereignty tragically destroyed by Arab invaders. It is simply a pre-Arabian chapter in the history of Islam: the forefathers held sway by the grace of God until they incurred His wrath by misbehaving; the Arabs whom He raised up against them maltreated them in ways which are narrated with full approval; but now that they too have become unjust it is the turn of the Khurāsānis. There is nothing in the least reminiscent of ethnic hatred here. Still less does the speech voice Sāsānīd restorationism.75 But it does add to the impression that Shi‘ism, however Arab by origin, appealed to non-Arab Muslims in the Umayyad period by enabling them to voice their sense of oppression under a tribally orientated elite.

71 AA, 198.8.
72 Bā, iii, 140.14; 141.3.
73 Uyun, 193.13.
74 Tab. ii, 2004f. (blessings omitted; almost identically in Uyun, 192f.
75 Pace Zakari, Shi‘i Soldiers, 280.
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Agānī, see al-Dabbāhī.
Barjāk, see Borkh.
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