

Patricia Crone

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From Arabian Tribes to Islamic Empire

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

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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.

XI

MAWĀLĪ 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 Mu'āwiya 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 Shī'ite 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 Mu'āwiya was continuing his policies against them; that the Umayyads owed their power to 'Umar and his *sāhib*, 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. Mu'āwiya 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 Mu'āwiya recommend them with pride.³ But on

¹ Cf. *EI*², *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 *Kūtab Sulaym b. Qays al-Hilālī*, ed. M. Bāqir Anṣārī (Qum: Nashr al-Hādī, 1995), II, 739ff. There are several Najaf printings with different paginations where the letter is easy to find via the table of contents (*kūtab mu'āwiya ilā ziyād b. abīhi fī sha'n shī'at 'alī*). It is also reproduced in al-Majlisī, *Bihār 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-Ismā'īlī *Kūtab al-balāgh* (cf. Stern, "The 'Book of the Highest Initiation' and other anti-Ismā'īlī travesties," in his *Studies in Early Ismā'ilism* (Jerusalem/Leiden: Magnes Press, 1983).

the other hand, the naive indignation expressed by some Shī'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.⁴ 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 (*mawlā*) 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-a'ajim*) 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.

⁴ 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-Islmā'īlī 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 *sunna* just as so many other rulings of 'Umar's had become *sunna* 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 'Umar had at least succeeded in keeping the Hāshimites 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 'Umar, the entire nation would have been *mawālī* of the Hāshimites. In fact, this might still be the fate ahead, for Ziyād had heard 'Alī predict, in the reign of 'Uthmān, that the people coming with black banners from Khurāsān would be non-Arabs (*al-a'ājim*) and that they would defeat the Umayyads, deprive them of their power, and kill them under every star.⁵

*Translation*⁶

- (1) Abān⁷ from Sulaym: Ziyād b. Sumayya had a Shī'ite secretary 739
 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

⁵ The author uses the term *mawlā* 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-a'ājim*, presumably because he found their client status demeaning: he carefully distinguishes clients in the sense of freedmen from other non-Arab converts (*al-mawālī wa-man aslama min al-a'ājim*) in §§4,9 of the translation below. In later texts 'ajam is a derogative term for unassimilated Iranians (cf. the attestations in Crone, "The 'Abbāsīd Abnā' and Sāsānid Cavalrymen," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 8 (1998), 14).

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

⁷ I.e., Abān b. Abī 'Ayyāsh (Fīrūz), a Baṣran *mawlā* who died in 140 or earlier and who was a companion of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja'far al-Ṣādiq according to the Imāmīs, but who transmitted from *jamā'ī* scholars according to the Sunnīs. Both sides characterize him as unreliable, but the Sunnīs know nothing about his Shī'ism or his transmission of Sulaym's book (*Dā'irat al-ma'ārif al-islāmiyya al-kubrā* (Tehran: Markaz Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-Islāmiyya, 1995), s.v. (I, 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. 'Alī).⁸ // And look to Rabī'a 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-mawālī wa-man aslama min al-a'ajim*). 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 Yemenīs 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. 'Adī: 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-sāfila*), 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-hmil ba'dahum 'alā riqāb ba'din*). . . ." (al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, ed. M.J. Kister (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1971), IV a, 186; for another version, see al-Madā'ini, *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, *Muhammedanische 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 'Alī is said to have observed in disapproval of the practice (al-Kulaynī, *Kāfi*, ed. 'A.A. al-Ghaffārī (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, 1342–47 AH), V, 318f.; 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, Qurashīs and non-Qurashīs for purposes of marriage (Abū l-Qāsim al-Kūfī, *Kitāb al-istighātha* (n.p. [Maktabat Niniwī l-Ḥadītha], n.d.), 44f. (drawn to my attention by Etan Kohlberg); Majlisī, *Bihār*,

inherit 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 (*thaghr*) or garrison city (*miṣr*), nor do you put any of them in charge of the judgeship (*qaḍāʾ*) or the laws (*ahkām*) of the Muslims.¹⁵

- (5) This was 'Umar's custom (*sunna*) and practice (*sīra*) 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,

XXXI, 35f.). The Sunnīs also know 'Umar to have had such views, though they do not describe them as an innovation (cf. below, note 60).

¹¹ Patrons had a title to the estates of their clients, whereas clients did not inherit from their patrons (Crone, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 36ff.). But patrons were not always Arabs: *mawālī* 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 *mawālā* is said to have been 15 dinars under Mu'āwiya, 20 under 'Abd al-Malik, 25 under Sulaymān, and 30 under Hishām (Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *Al-'Iqd al-farīd*, ed. A. Amīn *et al.*, repr. (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta'lif wa-l-Tarjama wa-l-Nashr, 1965), IV, 400.2). The Sunnīs insist that 'Umar awarded the same pay to Arabs and *mawālī* when he established the *diwān* (al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, ed. M.J. de Goeje (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1866), 458.2; Abū 'Ubayd, *Al-Amwāl*, ed. M.K. Harās (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyāt al-Azhariyya, 1969), 335f.). But according to the Imāmīs, it was 'Umar who fixed the pay of *mawālī* at 250 rather than 300 dirhams (thus al-Faḍl b. Shādhān, *Al-'Iqdāḥ* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lamī li-l-Maṭbū'āt, 1982), 136f., citing the Sunnīs themselves); and it was 'Alī who gave the same to Arabs and non-Arabs, even freed slaves (thus al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rīkh*, ed. M.T. Houtsma (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1883), II, 213; al-Kulaynī, *Kāfi*, V, 318f.; VIII, 69; Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ nahj al-balāgha*, ed. M.A.-F. Ibrāhīm (Cairo: 'Isā Ḥalabī, 1965-67), II, 200f.).

¹³ This particular grievance does not seem to be attested elsewhere, though *mawālī* are also deemed worth having as road workers in the Sunnī version of Sulaym's story (below, notes 55, 56).

¹⁴ That Arabs found it demeaning to pray behind *mawālī* is well known: when Nāfi' b. Jubayr b. Muṭ'im prayed behind a *mawālā*, he explained that he wanted to humiliate himself (Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *Iqd*, III, 412f.); Salmān al-Fārisī reputedly said, "One can't lead you Arabs in prayer or marry your women, God favored you over us with Muḥammad" (Ibn Qudāma, *Al-Mughnī*, ed. T.M. al-Zaynī *et al.* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qāhira, 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. "Mawālā," *EI*², VI, 878). But it is true that no *mawālā* was appointed to a coveted province such as Iraq or Khurāsān in the Umayyad period, and that *mawālī* 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 Hāshimites (*la-kunnā wa-jamā'c hādhihi l-umma li-banī hāshim al-mawālī*) and they would have inherited the caliphate, one after the other, in the same way as the families // of Kīsrā and Qaysar.¹⁶ But God removed it from the Hāshimites at their hands and gave it to B. Taym b. Murra, from where it passed to B. 'Adī b. Ka'b. No two tribes of Quraysh are smaller or more ignoble and despicable 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,¹⁷ and we are closer to the Prophet in terms of kinship (*fī l-rahīm*) than they are.¹⁸
- (6) Then our man (*ṣāhib*) 'Uthmān obtained it by consultation and general consent (*bi-shūrā wa-riḍā min al-ʿamma*) after consultation among six for three days.¹⁹ 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 *wālī* of someone killed unjustly.²⁰
- (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.²¹ If I could find a way of doing it and could entertain hope that the common folk (*al-ʿamma*)²² would accept it, then I would do it. But I have recently been at war and am

¹⁶ The reader is presumably meant to find it ridiculous that Mu'āwiya should make this comparison given that he introduced the *ḥisrawī* and *qaysarī* mode of succession 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 Shī'ite case because the Hāshimites were a sacred lineage.

¹⁷ *Finā al-tharwa wa-l-ʿizz*. The Najaf printing has *al-ghazw* for *al-ʿizz*.

¹⁸ 'Abd Shams and Hāshim were brothers. Taym and 'Adī were collaterals of older ancestors (cf. Caskel, *Ġamharat an-nasab. Das Genealogische Werk des Hīšām ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966), I, table 4).

¹⁹ Compare *Akhbār al-dawla al-abbāsiyya wa-fihī akhbār al-abbās*, ed. 'A.-'A. al-Dūrī and 'A.-J. al-Muṭṭalibī (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalī'a li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 1971), 51, where Mu'āwiya tells the Hāshimites that the caliphate has passed from one sub-tribe of Quraysh to another *bi-riḍā al-ʿamma wa-bi-l-shūrā l-khāṣṣa*.

²⁰ Cf. Q.17:33 (*wa-man qutila maẓlūman fa-qad ja'alnā li-walīyihī sultānan*). This paragraph reproduces genuine Umayyad arguments, except for the Shī'ite 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. *EI*², VI, 876b).

²² It also means non-Shī'ites, 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 humiliate 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 // 742 from Adam.²³ You have told me, and I regard you as trustworthy, O brother, that you read 'Umar's letter to the Ash'arī 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 (*dhalīl al-naḥs*) 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'arī (*da'ī al-ash'arīyīn*).²⁴ 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}²⁵ Abū Sufyān used to follow the example of Umayya b. 'Abd Shams.²⁶
- (9) Ibn Abī Mu'ayt²⁷ told me that you told him that you read 'Umar's

²³ Ziyād counted as the son of 'Ubayd, a *mawlā* of Thaqīf, until Mu'āwiya claimed him as his brother (cf. the long editorial note to the passage; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḥ al-nusul wa-l-mulūk*, ed. M.J. de Goeje *et al.* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1879–1901), II, 1382.4).

²⁴ The irony is rich inasmuch as it was Ziyād who was a *da'ī* (as he is explicitly called by an adherent of al-Ḥusayn in al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḥ*, 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 abū sufyan kharaja ma'ahu jadduhu umayya b. 'abd 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 jadd abī sufyan 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 Hāshim 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 (Crone, *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 Dhakwān rather than 'Abdallāh) was the ancestor of 'Uqba b. Abī Mu'ayt, 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-Ash‘arī.²⁸ He (‘Umar) had sent him five spans of rope and told him, “Inspect the Baṣrans under you. Whoever you find from among the clients and non-Arab converts to Islam (*al-mawālī wa-man aslama min al-a‘ājim*) who reaches five spans, move him forward and cut off his head.”²⁹ Abū Mūsā consulted you about it, and you told him not to, saying that he should try to make ‘Umar reconsider, so he did and you took the letter to ‘Umar. You did all that as a partisan of the clients (*ta‘aṣṣuban li-l-mawālī*), for at the time you thought that you were one of them and that you were a son of ‘Ubayd, and you kept arguing with ‘Umar until you had made him change his mind; you made him afraid that there might be a schism (*furqat al-nās*), 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 ‘Alī 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 ‘Umar 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 ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib say, “The non-Arabs (*al-a‘ājim*) will beat you in the cause

son al-Walīd, ‘Uthmān’s half brother who was governor of Kūfa until he was dismissed for drunkenness (cf. Caskel, *Ġamhara*, II, Register, s.vv.). Al-Walīd b. ‘Uqba is excoriated as an *‘ij* from Ṣaffūriyya in Majlisī, *Bihār*, XIX, 260, 264; XXXIX, 81.

²⁸ In the previous paragraph (§8) it is Ziyād who tells Mu‘āwiya about how he read ‘Umar’s letter to Abū Mūsā; here and in the beginning of the next paragraph (§10) it is Ibn Abī Mu‘ayy 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 ‘Umar’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 ‘Alī presumed a boy of five spans to have reached puberty (thus al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 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 ‘Umar 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 Shī‘ites also claim that ‘Umar expelled every non-Arab (*a‘jamī*) from Medina (ibid., 682) and that he wanted to kill all Zoroastrians until ‘Alī persuaded him to accept *jizya* from them (Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *A‘ām al-nubuwwa*, ed. Ṣ. al-Ṣawī and Gh. M. A‘wānī (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 lions³¹ who do not flee, so they will smite your necks and take over your spoils (*fa'y*)."³² So 'Umar said to you, "I have heard that from the Messenger of God, that is what made me write to your employer (*sāhib*) about killing them. I had decided to write to my governors of all the garrison cities about it." But you said to 'Umar, "Don't do it, Commander of the Faithful. You can't be sure that 'Alī won't call on them to help him. There are many of them, and you know the bravery of 'Alī and his family and his hatred for you and your companion." So you dissuaded him. You told me that it was partisan feelings (*aṣabiyya*) that made you dissuade him, and that it was cowardice which made 'Umar change his mind.³³ You (also) told me that you mentioned this to 'Alī in the reign of 'Uthmān and that he replied, "The people bearing the black banners which will come forth from Khurāsān, they are the non-Arabs (*hum al-a'ājim*) 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 'Umar 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 (*āfat al-dīn*).

³⁰ Also cited in Abū 'Ubayd, *Gharīb al-ḥadīth* (Hyderabad: Maṭba'at Majlis Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyya, 1964-67), III, 484; Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-buldān*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1885), 317f. (both with *al-hamrā'* for *al-a'ajim*).

³¹ Thus the Najaf printing (*usd*), emended to "strong" (*ashiddā'*) by Anṣārī.

³² Also cited in 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Al-Muṣannaf*, ed. Ḥ.-R. al-A'zamī (Beirut: al-Majlis al-'Ilmī, 1972), XI, no. 20811 (from al-Ḥasan). Compare Nu'aym b. Ḥammād, *Al-Fitan*, ed. M. al-Shūrī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1997), no. 658 (ed. S. Zakkār (Mecca, n.d.), 141.22), where this is what will happen if the believers do not perform the duty of commanding right and forbidding wrong (cited in Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 36f., with a further reference to al-Muttaqī al-Hindī).

³³ Following the second reading in note 52. Note that it is once more Ziyād who is Mu'āwiya's informant.

³⁴ Literally "a blower of fire" (*nāfikh nār*), cf. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863-93), s.v. "nfkh."

- (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 *ṣā‘* 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 Jāhilī location that he moved it (Kister, art. “Maqām Ibrāhīm,” *EI*², VI, 104b–107b).

³⁶ For the disagreement over these measures, see Abū ‘Ubayd, *Amwāl*, 688ff. (drawn to my attention by Avraham Hakim). ‘Alī 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 Majlisī, *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,” *EI*²), but ‘Umar, Ibn Mas‘ūd and Ibrāhīm (al-Nakha‘ī) are all said to have denied that *tayammum* could be used for major pollution (al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān fī taḥṣīr al-qu‘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. Yāsir reminded ‘Umar of the Prophet’s *sunna* and Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī reminded Ibn Mas‘ūd of Q.5:6 (al-Ṭabarī, *loc. cit.*, also in the Sunnī Ḥadīth 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‘āwiya 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‘āwiya 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 (*shī'at 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 Iblīs who refused to prostrate to Adam out of arrogance and unbelief and envy."

- (14) Sulaym said: I had copied the letter 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 Rāfiḍī (his attitude to Abū Bakr and 'Umar is one of venomous hatred) and he wrote after the 'Abbāsīd 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 'Abbāsīd rather than 'Alid caliphs. This suggests that he was a Hāshimite Shī'ite.

Hāshimite Shī'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 (*ʿitra*), 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 Rāfiḍī 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, *rāfiḍī*) preference to everyone else which distinguished Hāshimite Shī'ism from other forms, and it was this form of Shī'ism that the 'Abbāsīds initially stood for. "There has not been any caliph among you since

⁴⁰ Anṣārī identifies the subject as Ziyād, but again it must be the secretary.

⁴¹ Cf. Madelung, "The *Hāshimiyyāt* of al-Kumayt and Hāshimī Shī'ism," *Studia Islamica* 70 (1989).

⁴² Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II, 1961f. (the missionary was Abū Dāwūd).

the Prophet died, apart from ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and this Commander of the Faithful who is behind me,” Dāwūd b. ‘Alī famously told the Kūfans in his accession speech on behalf of Abū l-‘Abbās in 750.⁴³

But Hāshimite Shī‘ism was a short-lived creed. Since the ‘Abbāsids were not going to share the caliphate with the ‘Alids, they were ill advised to continue stressing the special status of ‘Alī, while the ‘Alids themselves had nothing to gain from remaining under the shared Hāshimite umbrella. One soon had to choose between *shī‘at ‘alī* and *shī‘at banī l-‘abbās*. Several participants in the revolution drifted from Hāshimite to ‘Alid Shī‘ism from the 140s/750s onwards,⁴⁴ and in 145/762 the ‘Alids rebelled against the ‘Abbāsids under the leadership of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, irrevocably splitting the Hāshimite family into two. Al-Manṣūr responded (if his correspondence with the rebel is authentic) by asserting the rights of al-‘Abbās over those of ‘Alī; and when the testament of a prominent leader of the revolution who died in 785 declared ‘Alī to be the Prophet’s legatee (*wasī*) and heir to the imamate after him (*wāriṭh al-imāma ba-dahu*), al-Mahdī is said to have disapproved.⁴⁵ He disapproves of *rafḍ* in favor of ‘Alī 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-Mahdī says that he “is on the wrong track and at odds with our views and yours: he slanders the two *shaykhs* Abū 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-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III, 37; al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. C. Pellat (Beirut: al-Jāmi‘a al-Lubnāniyya, 1966–79), IV, §2279 (ed. Paris, VI, 55). Compare al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III, 33.4: “no caliph has ascended this pulpit of yours since the (death of) the Prophet apart from the Commander of the Faithful ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and the Commander of the Faithful ‘Abdallāh b. Muḥammad (i.e., Abū l-‘Abbās).” Slightly different versions appear in Ya‘qūbī, *Ta’rikh*, II, 420, and al-Azdī, *Ta’rikh al-mawṣil*, ed. ‘A. Ḥabība (Cairo: Lajnat Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-Qawmī, 1968), 124.

⁴⁴ Cf. Omar, *The ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate*, Baghdād (National Printing and Publishing Co.) 1969, 157f., 182, 205f.

⁴⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III, 532, on al-Qāsim b. Mujāshī‘ al-Tamīmī.

⁴⁶ Cf. the story in which he accuses the Kūfan judge Sharīk b. ‘Abdallāh al-Nakha‘ī of *rafḍ* (Wakī‘, *Akhbār al-quḍāh*, ed. ‘A.M. al-Marāghī (Beirut: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, n.d. [originally Cairo 1947–50]), III, 155f.; al-Marzubānī, *Akhbār shu‘arā’ al-shī‘a*, ed. M.H. al-Amīnī, repr. (Beirut: Shirkat al-Kutubī, 1993), 80; cf. also al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta’rikh al-baghdād* (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Sa‘āda, 1349 AH), IX, 292).

⁴⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III, 537, on Abū ‘Awn ‘Abd al-Malik b. Yazīd.

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.⁴⁸ Precisely what the official alternative to Hāshimite Shī'ism was is anything but clear, given that al-Mahdī is described now as a Rāfiḍī or at least devotee of 'Alī's,⁴⁹ now as an anti-Rāfiḍī, and now as the sponsor of a new form of *rafḍ* amounting to rejection of all pre-'Abbāsīd caliphs, including 'Alī, as usurpers on the grounds that the 'Abbāsīds had enjoyed an exclusive right to the caliphate from the start.⁵⁰ But even adherents of the new type of *rafḍ* maintained a favorable attitude to Abū Bakr and 'Umar in public, we are told;⁵¹ and Hārūn (786–809) reputedly went so far as to display a positive interest in 'Uthmān.⁵² It was by recognizing 'Uthmān as legitimate (under al-Mutawakkil?) that the 'Abbāsīds repudiated their Shī'ite past altogether.⁵³

The author of our letter rejects Abū Bakr and 'Umar in favor of the Hāshimites, casts the revolution as a fulfillment of predictions by 'Alī, 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.

⁴⁸ The best-known example is Yaḡtīn and his family.

⁴⁹ Cf. Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Ta'rikh*, ed. S. Zakkār (Damascus: Maṭābi' Wizārat al-Thaqāfa wa-l-Siyāḥa wa-l-Irshād al-Qawmī, 1967–68), 702; Azdī, *Mawṣil*, 238, where he cites the Rāfiḍī proof text *man kuntu mawlāhu fa-'alī mawlāhu* against a Khārijite, possibly meaning no more than that the Khārijite was at fault for speaking ill of 'Alī.

⁵⁰ Ps.-Nāshī' in J. van Ess, ed., *Frühe mu'tazilitische Häresiographie* (Beirut/Wiesbaden: Frank Steiner, 1971), §47; *Akhbār al-dawla al-'abbāsiyya*, 165; al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-shī'a*, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul: Staatsdruckerei, 1931), 43, cf. 42; Sa'd b. 'Abdallāh al-Qummī, *Kitāb al-maḡālāt wa-l-firaq*, ed. M.J. Mashkūr (Tehran: Ḥaydarī Press, 1963), 65f.

⁵¹ Al-Qummī, *Kitāb al-maḡālāt*, 65.4 (taken by Nawbakhtī, 42, to refer to another pro-'Abbāsīd sect), 66.1 (missing in Nawbakhtī).

⁵² Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, III, 749; cited in Zaman, *Religion and Politics under the Early Abbasids* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 57f.

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,⁵⁴ our author depicts ‘Umar as a staunch protagonist of Arabism and ‘Alī as a universalist. His most sensational allegation is that ‘Umar would have killed all *mawālī* 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 cull them, or who tells of how Mu‘āwiya 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-ashrāf*) and repair the roads”;⁵⁵ or Mu‘āwiya 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.”⁵⁶ The fact that the non-Arabs revile the *salaf* shows that they are Shī‘īs here too, but it is characteristic that ‘Umar has nothing to do with the plans for their elimination in these versions. To the Shī‘īs, ‘Umar was an Arab chauvinist whose policies were continued by the Umayyads; to the Sunnīs, ‘Umar 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 Shī‘ite view of ‘Umar (suitably toned down) is the more plausible, for even the mainstream tradition contains material in which he is a great protagonist of the Arabs.⁵⁷ 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

⁵⁴ Cf. above, notes 10, 12, 29.

⁵⁵ Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Muḥāḍarāt al-udabā’* (Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayyāt, 1961), I, 350, reading *aqlulu* for *aqbalu*.

⁵⁶ Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, *Iqd*, III, 413; translated (slightly differently) in B. Lewis, *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople* (New York/Oxford: University Press, 1987), II, 204 (drawn to my attention by Michael Cook).

⁵⁷ Cf. Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 74ff.; Kister, “The Crowns of this Community Some Notes on the Turban in the Muslim Tradition,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 24 (2000), 221f.

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 conquest 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 status, 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 Shī'ites, however, it also seems unlikely that 'Alī'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 ethnicity 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 prejudice against *mawālī* ran from the top to the bottom of Arab society. If 'Alī 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'āwiya rather than 'Umar (§4),⁵⁸ but it is hard to believe that

⁵⁸ Apart from the Asāwira and other deserters, who became confederates (*ḥaliḥs*), 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 *fa'y'* with their former captives on an equal basis without causing violent outrage among their subjects. Similarly, Mu'āwiya (rather than 'Umar)⁵⁹ may be responsible for the one-sided nature of *walā'*, 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.⁶⁰ But the reports on these two caliphs are a-historical, 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.⁶¹ 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.⁶² And even after the 'Abbāsīd revolution, people found it perfectly plausible that a massacre at Mosul should have been triggered

⁵⁹ Cf. the preceding note.

⁶⁰ For 'Umar I, see 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, VI, no. 10324 (widely cited elsewhere as well); Ibn Abī Shayba, *Al-Muṣannaf*, ed. M.A. al-Nadwī (Bombay: al-Dār al-Salafiyya, 1979-83), XII, no. 12522; cf. no. 12516, where he predicts that the Arabs will perish when the children of Persian mothers grow up. For 'Umar II, see Abū 'Ubayd, *Gharīb al-ḥadīth*, II, 219; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab* (Būlāq: Maṭba'at al-Miriyya, 1301 AH), X, 103f., s.v. "ṭabī'."

⁶¹ Cf. Crone, "Were the Qays and Yemen of the Umayyad Period Political Parties?" *Der Islam* 71 (1994), 12ff.

⁶² Nu'aym b. Ḥammād, *Fitan*, no. 655 (ed. Zakkār, 140).

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

‘Umar and ‘Alī, on the other hand, were built up as universalists by scholars, many of them *mawālī* 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 granted Sulaym that the early Shī‘ites come across as more genuine universalists than their *jamā‘ī* 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 Shī‘ite literature to outright rejection of it in the Sunnī literature alone, ‘Alī seems to be depicted as an enemy of Arab privilege with great regularity in Shī‘ite and Sunnī literature alike, suggesting that this was a point on which Shī‘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 Shī‘ite law, whether Zaydī,⁶⁴ Imāmī,⁶⁵ or Ismā‘īlī,⁶⁶ though the Zaydīs

⁶³ Azdī, *Mawāsil*, 145f.; cf. Robinson, *Empire and Elites after the Muslim Conquest: The Transformation of Northern Mesopotamia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), chaps. 6–7.

⁶⁴ See Zayd b. ‘Alī (attrib.), *Majmū‘ al-fiqh*, ed. E. Griffini (Milan, 1919), 199 (probably c. 750–70), with the commentary by al-Ḥusayn b. Aḥmad al-Siyāghī (d. 1221/1806f), *Kitāb al-raʾd al-naḍīr* (Tā‘if: Maktabat al-Mu‘ayyad, n.d.), IV, 259ff.

⁶⁵ Al-Kulaynī, *Kāfi*, 339–46; al-Mufīd, *Al-Muqni‘a* (Qum: Mu‘assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1410 AH), 512; al-Hillī, *Sharā‘ī al-islām*, ed. ‘A.M. ‘Alī (Najaf: Maṭba‘at al-Arbāb, 1969), II, 299f.; cf. also above, note 10; Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 33f.

⁶⁶ Al-Nu‘mān b. Muḥammad, *Da‘ā‘im al-islām*, ed. A. Fayḍī (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1951–60), II, nos. 728–31.

were later to accept it.⁶⁷ 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 *jamā'ī* Muslims endorsed it.⁶⁸ All Shī'ites by contrast condemned it, clearly including Sulaym.

Mawālī and Shī'ism

Sulaym's view that there was a natural affinity between *mawālī* and Shī'ism, once shared by Western Orientalists, has long been out of favor on the grounds that it was among the Arabs that Shī'ism began and that it was only by historical accident at a late stage in history that Iran became a Shī'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

⁶⁷ See for example Ahmad b. Yahyā b. al-Murtaḍā, *Al-Baḥr al-Zakḥkhār* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1947), IV, 48f.; al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī, *Al-F'tīṣām bi-habl allāh al-matīn* (Ṣan'ā': Maktabat al-Yaman al-Kubrā, n.d.), III, 251ff. (my thanks to Bernard Haykel for drawing this to my attention).

⁶⁸ For the Sunnī rules of marriage equality, see Linant de Bellefond, art. "Kaḥā'a," *ET*² 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 *mawlā*, 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 ‘Abbāsīd 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 Khurāsān; “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.”⁶⁹ 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 Khārījism and Shī‘ism offered ways of effecting such a severance. The Khārījites 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 Qurashī. But there were also ways in which Khārījism seemed to restate rather than to reject tribal values,⁷⁰ 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-Mukhtār’s revolt and the adherents of the Hāshimiyya in Khurāsān agreed: Jāhīlī-minded Arabs had excluded both the Prophet’s kinsfolk and his many non-Arab devotees from their rightful position in Muslim society.⁷¹ For another thing, the Hāshimites transcended ethnic divisions simply by being kinsmen of the Prophet, whether victimized

⁶⁹ *Akhbār al-dawla al-‘abbāsīyya*, 287.

⁷⁰ Some of them are discussed in P. Crone and F. Zimmermann, *The Epistle of Sā‘im b. Dhakwān* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 215ff.

⁷¹ Cf. Crone, “The Significance of Wooden Weapons in al-Mukhtār’s Revolt and the ‘Abbāsīd Revolution,” in I.R. Netton, ed., *Studies in Honour of Clifford Edmund Bosworth* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000), I, 176, 179f.

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. Sunnīs might consider love of the Arabs to be part of the faith, but to Shīʿites, 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 Shīʿites 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 ʿAlī 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.⁷² 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 *al rasūl allāh al-muṭahharūn*, 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 ʿAbbāsīd 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: ʿAlī had foretold that the non-Arabs (*al-aʿjīm*) 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 ʿAlī'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."⁷³ 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

⁷² See for example al-Jāhīz, "Maqālat al-zaydiyya wa-l-rāfiqa," in 'A.-S. M. Hārūn, ed., *Rasāʾil* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1965-79), IV, 311ff., 317.

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.⁷⁴ When the *qā'im* came, there would be nothing but the sword between him and the Arabs, as the Shī'ites continued to say after they had stopped regarding the Hāshimite revolution as a fulfillment of their dreams.⁷⁵

The interpretation of the revolution as a role reversal is also found in an 'Abbāsīd development of the "Yemen/Muḍar/Rabī'a/the *mawāḥi*" 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 Shī'ites (as they are in Sulaym's '3). "Look to this tribe of Rabī'a and be suspicious of them," he continues, here with reference to the idea that the Rabī'a were prone to Khārijism and *fitna* because they were angry with God for sending the Prophet to Muḍar.⁷⁶ "And look to this tribe of Muḍar, 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 Muḍarīs;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."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.⁷⁹ In

⁷⁴ Crone, "Wooden Weapons," 178f., 180f. For arguments to the contrary, see Elad, "The ethnic composition of the 'Abbāsīd Revolution: a reevaluation of some recent research," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 24 (2000), esp. 275ff.

⁷⁵ Al-Nu'mānī (Ibn Abī Zaynab), *Al-Ghayba* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-'Alamī li-Maṭbū'at, 1983), 154f.

⁷⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II, 493, 1858; III, 329.

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

⁷⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II, 1937; Azdī, *Mawṣil*, 65 (slightly apocopated, but cf. 107.3); Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī l-ta'rikh* (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣādir, 1982), V, 348; cf. Elad, "Ethnic Composition," 255ff. My thanks to Amikam Elad for reminding me of the five spans here.

⁷⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II, 1974; III, 25; Azdī, *Mawṣil*, 107.3; *Akhbār al-dawla al-'abbāsiyya*, 392.3; al-Mada'inī in al-Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh al-islām* (Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-'Arūba, n.d.), V, 202, and in id., *Siyar al'lām al-nubalā'* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-

short, Yemenīs were to replace Muḍarīs 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 Yemenīs 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 Shī'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 Shī'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 Muḍar . . . and recruit many non-Arabs (*wa-stakthīr al-a'ājim*), for they are the people of our mission and God will assist it through them."⁸⁴ Here a more positive attitude to the angry

Risāla, 1982–85), VI, 59 (where the order is in a letter intercepted by Marwān II); Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *Iqd*, IV, 479 (slightly different); al-Dīnawarī, *Al-Akhhbār al-tiwāl*, ed. W. Guirgass (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1888), 358 (where it is Abū l-'Abbās who passes the order to Abū Muslim after Ibrāhīm al-Imām's death).

⁸⁰ Highlighted by Sharon, *Revolt. The Social and Military Aspects of the 'Abbāsīd Revolution* (Jerusalem: Institute of Asian and African Studies, 1990), 53, who sees a contradiction here.

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, *Kāfī*, VIII, 246; Qāḍī Nu'mān, *Da'ā'im*, II, no. 729.

⁸⁴ *Akhhbār al-dawla al-'abbāsīyya*, 204.8; reduced to "settle among Yemen and be kind to Muḍar" in Madā'inī's version in al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II, 1501.8. For another version, put in the mouth of Ibn al-Ḥanafīyya, see Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *Iqd*, IV, 476, where the *mawālī* are missing.

Rabī'a is adopted, and although non-Arabs are singled out for special importance, there is no order to kill Muḍar 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 Rabī'a, beware of Muḍar and pay special attention to the *a'ājim*, it was only the Muḍarī followers of the Umayyads that he was meant to beware of, not the upright ones; the result was that non-Arabs flocked to the *darwa*, closely followed not just by Yemen and Rabī'a, but by some Muḍarīs of insight as well.⁸⁵ Here, then, the role reversal is belittled, presumably to reassure Muḍarī members of the 'Abbāsīd 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 'Abbāsīd revolution notwithstanding.

Clearly, all the many versions of the "Muḍar/Rabī'a/Yemen/clients" trope give us later interpretations, not factual details.⁸⁶ Like the predictions attributed to 'Alī, 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 Hāshimite 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,⁸⁷ longhaired people whose genealogies were their villages and whose slogan was Persian *bekosh, bekosh*, "kill, kill,"⁸⁸ native rabble from the back and beyond, uncircumcised pagans who worshipped fire, cats, anything

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.

⁸⁷ Nu'aym b. Ḥammād, *Fitan*, no. 565 (ed. S. Zakkār, 122). For runaway slaves in the revolution, see also Omar, *'Abbāsīd Caliphate*, 96; add 'Abd al-Ḥamīd b. Yahyā, *Rasā'il*, ed. I. 'Abbās (Amman: Dār al-Shurūq li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 1988), 199 (letter no. 8).

⁸⁸ Nu'aym b. Ḥammād, *Fitan*, nos. 550–52, 558 (ed. Zakkār, 118, 120); cf. *Akhbār al-dawla al-'abbāsiyya*, 206.1, 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, *Tārīkh*, II, 1969).

except God and Muḥammad, and who had come to kill the Arabs along with upright *mawālī* and to destroy Islam.⁸⁹ In a more dispassionate vein Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī observes that it was the ‘*ajam* of Khurāsān along with miscellaneous Arabs and Bedouin who transferred power from the Umayyads to the ‘Abbāsids.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 ‘Abbāsīd 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 Hāshimites, 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-

⁸⁹ Cf. Naṣr b. Sayyār’s poems (in Dīnawarī, *Akhbār*, 360; Ibn A‘tham, *Kitāb al-futūḥ* (Hyderabad: Dā‘irat al-Ma‘ārif al-‘Uthmāniyya, 1968–75), VIII, 161–63; Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj*, IV, 2286 (ed. Paris, VI, 62); Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, *Iqd*, IV, 478f.); ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd b. Yahyā’s letters to Marwān II (in his *Rasā’il*, nos. 8, 38); and Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād, *Fitan*, no. 565 (ed. S. Zakkār, 122). The charges of cat worship and the like are refuted in *Akhbār al-dawla al-‘abbāsiyya*, 282, 287, 290ff. Compare the traditions in S. Bashear, *Arabs and Others in Early Islam* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997), 103. Cf. also al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Nizā‘ wa-l-takhāṣum* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ahrām, n.d.), 66; *Al-Maqrīzī’s Book of Contention and Strife*, trans. C.E. Bosworth (Manchester: Journal of Semitic Studies, 1980), 88 (107); the ‘Abbāsīd took over with the help of the ‘*ajam ahl Khurāsān*’; they overthrew the Umayyads with ‘*ajam Khurāsān*’.

⁹⁰ Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī, *Ta’rīkh sinī mulūk al-arḍ wa-l-anbiyā’* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Ḥayyāt, 1961), 160 (chap. 10, section 9).

⁹¹ Thus an anti-‘Abbāsīd tradition in Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād, *Fitan*, no. 538, where Ibn ‘Abbās tells people to honor the Persians when black banners arrive, “for our regime will be based on them (*fa-inna dawlatanā fihim*)”; cf. also nos. 543–4, 547, on the theme of “woe to the Arabs” and *dhill al-‘arab* after the third civil war (ed. Zakkār, 116–18). Compare al-Jāhīz, *Al-Bayān wa-l-tabayn*, ed. ‘A.-S.M. Hārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1948–50), III, 366 (their *dawla* was ‘*ajamiyya khurāsāniyya*); Ibn Ḥazm in Ibn ‘Idhārī, *Kitāb al-bayān al-mughrib*, ed. G.S. Colin and É. Lévi-Provençal (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1948–51), I, 63f. (similarly); Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj*, V, §3446; (ed. Paris, VIII, 291f.) where the Arabs lose out to al-Manṣūr’s clients and slaves rather than to Khurāsānīs.

⁹² 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.⁹³ 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 *mawlā*, the son of a captive from Sīstān, who was offended when he was appointed governor of Kirmān: he had set his eyes on Khurāsān and attributed his failure to receive the governorship of that province to his *mawlawiyya*.⁹⁴ Marwānid 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 *mawālī* of this type who were likely to sympathize with the Hāshimiyya. But it is impossible to say more without going into conditions specific to Khurāsān, and on that there is nothing to be learnt from Sulaym's letter.

A context for the letter?

Abū Muslim was rumored to have killed all the Arabs of Rabī'a, Muḍar, Nizār and Yemen who remained in Khurāsān after Naṣr b. Sayyār's flight and Qaḥṭaba's departure for Iraq.⁹⁵ This is obviously an exaggeration. There is however every reason to believe that Abū 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? Khurāsānī Arabs who had not openly committed themselves to the Umayyad cause could not automatically be assumed to be supporters of old regime. His answer presumably was that if they had not joined the *da'wa* either, their loyalty

⁹³ 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).

⁹⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II, 1458 (year 104). For his ancestry, see Khalīfa, *Ta'rikh*, 168 (year 29).

⁹⁵ *Al-Uyūn wa-l-ḥadā'iq*, ed. M.J. de Goeje (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1869), 193.13.

to the Hāshimiyya 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 *waṣīyya* 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 Muḍarī “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 *mawālī* or else the story about ‘Umar (and Ziyād or Mu‘āwiya’s) order regarding the extermination of *mawālī* 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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