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12. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WOODEN WEAPONS
IN AL-MUKHTĀR'S REVOLT AND THE
'ABBĀSID REVOLUTION*

PATRICIA CRONE

It is well known that al-Mukhtār'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-Mukhtār's revolt and the 'Abbāsīd 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-Mukhtār'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-Ḥanafīyya 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-Ḥanafīyya and his followers in Mecca, *fīmā zu'ima*, as al-Balādhurī wisely adds.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;⁴ and the fourth is that they had no

arms apart from wooden ones, implying that they used them for lack of anything better.⁵

All four explanations are based on the assumption that wooden arms were not real weapons,⁶ but rather a substitute for them. The first two explanations must be rejected, however.⁷ Both ignore the fact that the Khashabīs also used wood outside Mecca;⁸ contrary to what the first maintains, the Khashabīs in Mecca seem to have used swords as well,⁹ and the second is wholly implausible. The third explanation must also be rejected, for the Khashabīs did not revere an absent imam or *mahdī*, and they can hardly have deemed it unlawful to fight with swords since they used them in Mecca and elsewhere;¹⁰ without them they would soon have been suppressed. But the fourth explanation, which is identical with Wellhausen's, is highly plausible.¹¹

Wood is commonly identified as the weapon of those who were normally unarmed, especially slaves. When Sa'īd al-Ḥarashī gave orders for the Sogdian hostages in his camp in 104/722f. to be killed, the latter "had no arms, so they fought with wood (*khashab*) and were killed to a man".¹² In the disastrous battle of the Pass in Khurāsān in 112/730 al-Junayd promised freedom to all camp slaves who would join the fighting; the slaves responded by cutting wood to fight with (*fa qaṭā'a 'abīduhum al-khashab yuqātilūna bihi*), or they attacked the enemy with tent poles (*'umud*).¹³ In 119/737 the slaves (*ghilmān*) in Asad's camp likewise warded off Turks with tent poles (*'umud*).¹⁴ In 128/745f. Marwān II's *'abīd ahl al-'askar* attacked the Khārījite al-Khaybarī with tent poles (*'umud al-khiyām*);¹⁵ and when a man with

⁵ Khwārizmī, *Mafātīḥ*, 29, in confusion with the Zaydī Khashabiyya (cf. above, note 1).

⁶ Cf. also *Lisān*, v, 288.11, s.v. "*ḥmr*", on *al-aḥmar alladhī lā silāḥ lahu*, clearly a reference to al-Mukhtār's Khashabiyya.

⁷ Thus also van Arendonk in *ET*², s.v. "Khashābiyya".

⁸ *Pace* Dixon, 58, 78ff., 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 chanced on the firewood, and swords are mentioned elsewhere too (Tab. ii, 695.3).

¹⁰ Cf. the previous note; below, note 22.

¹¹ Wellhausen, *Oppositionsparteien*, 79f.

¹² Tab. ii, 1445.16.

¹³ Tab. ii, 1536.13, 1543.11, 1547.9.

¹⁴ Tab. ii, 1598.9.

¹⁵ Tab. ii, 1941.11; al-Azdī, *Mawṣil*, 72.2.

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

¹ *ET*², s.vv. "kāfir-kūb", "Khashabiyya". Some Zaydīs and Jahmites were allegedly also known as Khashabiyya, for different reasons (*Lisān*, i, 340.11, 343.9, s.v. "*kshb*"; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, ii, 140.6; cf. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, i, 289f.).

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 Ḥazm, *Fīṣal*, iv, 185–5; cf. Friedlaender, "Heterodoxies", 1907, 63, note 1 (where the text is clearer), 1908, 94f.; Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj*, i, 22, citing Khushaysh, where it forms part of a polemical account ascribed to al-Sha'bi. The parallel passage in Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *Iqd*, ii, 409–11, lacks the explanation of the wooden arms.

a stick (*ʿaṣā*) in his hand presented himself to Abū Muslim in order to join his army, he turned out to be a slave.¹⁶ Slaves clearly fought with such weapons because they had none better.

Al-Mukhtār's Khashabiyya were slaves and freedmen (*mamālīk*, *ʿabīd*, *mawālī*, *muḥarrarūn*).¹⁷ By origin they were captives, as the contemporary Bar Penkaye says.¹⁸ Some had been manumitted by their owners,¹⁹ others were set free by al-Mukhtār, who promised freedom to all slaves who would join him.²⁰ All were menial people, not soldiers.²¹ Bar Penkaye describes those who were sent against ʿUbaydallāh b. Ziyād as "13,000 men, all footsoldiers, without arms or equipment, without horses or tents: all that they had in their hands was either 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 Khashabī slaves in a poem by the contemporary Aʿshā Hamdān,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 Khashabiyya were poorly armed because they were slaves and freedmen who did not normally have access to arms at all. Al-Mukhtār 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.

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 Kufan statement that "they are booty bestowed on us by God" (Tab. ii, 650.7). They are wrongly depicted as free converts who had flocked to the garrison cities in Lewis, *Arabs in History*, 70ff. (correctly as captives in Wellhausen, *Oppositionsparteien*, 79).

¹⁹ As the Kufans themselves pointed out (Tab. ii, 650.8).

²⁰ BA, v, 267.14; cf. Bar Penkaye in Brock, "North Mesopotamia", 65. The Syrians duly dismissed them as runaway slaves (Tab. ii, 647).

²¹ "Have you given up selling salt fish in the Kunāsa to give allegiance to the lying al-Mukhtār on the understanding that you will fight those who freed you from slavery?", as a Kufan snarled at one of them (Ibn Aʿtham, vi, 108.6).

²² In Brock, "North Mesopotamia", 65.

²³ Al-Haytham b. ʿAdī in *Aghānī*, vi, 50.11.

²⁴ Tab. ii, 684.11, 16.

²⁵ Tab. ii, 649f. They are said to have had 2000 horsemen at Nisibis (al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj*, iii, par. 2004).

²⁶ There were 20,000 of them according to al-Dīnawarī, 296.15, cf. 301.4. The figures, of course, simply mean "many".

Wellhausen modified his view, however. When he returned to the subject in the context of the ʿAbbāsīd 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 Khashabiyya 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-Mukhtār'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 Ḥamrā'; 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 (*sūqa*),²⁹ lowgrade footsoldiers,³⁰ bedouin,³¹ Kurds, *nabaṭīs* and *zanj*.³² 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 *ʿumud* carried by members of Ziyād b. Abīhi's *shurṭa* (some of whom were Ḥamrā');³³ but the *gurz* will have been of iron, and *ʿumud* in the sense of clubs or maces (rather than tentpoles) were made of iron too,³⁴ or at least covered with it.³⁵ Since the clubs and sticks used by al-Mukhtār's Khashabiyya are universally described as something less than real weapons, they obviously were not arms of the type used by professional cavalrymen.

²⁷ Wellhausen, *Arab Kingdom*, 505.

²⁸ Zakeri, *Sāsānid Soldiers*, 205ff., 217 (cf. 116ff.), with reference to von Grunebaum, 'Persische Wörter', 20, where the *kāfir kūb* is tentatively identified as the *gurz*, "the national weapon of the Iranians".

²⁹ Ibn Aʿtham, vii, 239.12.

³⁰ Tab. ii, 1926.9.

³¹ Thus Sharon, *Revolt*, 86.

³² al-Jāhiz, *Bayān*, iii, 51.

³³ Tab. ii, 79.8; Zakeri, *Sāsānid Soldiers*, 217 (where even *shurṭīs* explicitly said to have walked are cast as Iranian cavalrymen). But al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirā*, i, 181 (cited by Zakeri himself, 282), enumerates *jurza* and *ʿamīda* as different weapons, as does Tab. ii, 1234.1.

³⁴ Cf. Hava, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, s.v. *jurz* ("iron rod"); Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. *ʿamūd*, Tab. ii, 712.10–12.

³⁵ As conjectured by Fries, *Heereswesen*, 51; explicit references to *ʿumud ḥadīd* also suggest that they were not always of iron alone (Tab. ii, 912.6; 1234.1; al-Azdī, 252.11).

Nor can al-Mukhtār's Khashabiyya be identified with the Ḥamrā' who deserted during the wars of conquest to settle in Kufa. Zakeri has been misled by al-Dīnawarī,³⁶ who calls them *ḥamrā'*, possibly in the general sense of non-Arabs/Iranians³⁷ and possibly with specific reference to the deserters who settled in Kufa,³⁸ 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 libertatis*: they are *ḥamrā'*, '*ajam, abnā' al-'ajam* and *abnā' al-furs* to him,³⁹ never '*abīd wa mawālī*. And it is for the same reason that he never mentions their wooden weapons or their Khashabī nickname, but depicts Ibn al-Ashtar as extolling their martial virtues with reference to their alleged descent from Persian *asāwira* and *marāziba*.⁴⁰ This tells us something interesting about al-Dīnawarī, not about the Khashabiyya.

If the wooden clubs symbolized Iranians in al-Mukhtār'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,⁴¹ partly because they had suffered military defeat,⁴² and partly because all slaves in the formal sense were non-Arabs while conversely most non-Arab Muslims were former slaves. A slave was a non-Arab, a non-Arab was a slave, literal or metaphorical, past or present, Muslim or otherwise.⁴³ Hence the weapon of

³⁶ Likewise Morony, *Iraq*, 198, 496, though he harmonizes by having al-Mukhtār recruit both Ḥamrā' and *mawālī*.

³⁷ Thus clearly when other sources call them *ḥamrā'* (cf. above, note 6; al-Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, ii, 405f., where al-Mukhtār's *ḥamrā'* are adduced in illustration of this very meaning of the word).

³⁸ Suggested by his formulation *abnā' al-'ajam/al-furs alladhīna kānū bi'l-kūfa . . . wa-yusammawna 'l-ḥamrā'* (296.14f., 301.5).

³⁹ al-Dīnawarī, 296.14f., 300.15, 301.5, 306.11, 14, 21, 310.15, 315.11.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 302.17.

⁴¹ Such people were proverbially known as '*abīd al-'aṣā*, (al-Tha'ālibī, *Thimār*, 628, no. 1045; al-Jāhiz, *Bayān*, iii, 40; the expression presumably reflects the fact that slaves were beaten with sticks rather than that they fought with them).

⁴² Compare the fact that the Meccans were taunted as *ḥulaqā'*, freedmen, because they had been conquered by Muḥammad (who set them free in the sense of not enslaving them).

⁴³ Cf. the regularity with which Arabs would dismiss *mawālī* as slaves, e.g. Tab. ii, 596.16, 18; 859.1 (cf. 858.2, 18), 1120.13 (cf. 1119.1), 1431.8 (cf. 1430.7), BA, iva, 247.17, 19; BA, v, 356.11, 13; *Aghānī*, iv, 346.2 (cf. 244.8; also in *Uyūn*, 207.8, 11); YT, 441.1.

slaves was the weapon of non-Arabs, and above all of the numerically preponderant Iranians. The poet Jarīr taunted the Banū 'l-'Amm in Basra with the claim that "they have *khashab* in their hands and should go home to al-Ahwāz", though the Banū 'l-'Amm were free Iranians (or Iranianized Arabs) who had joined the Arabs during the conquests and who had thus avoided enslavement and client status alike.⁴⁴ 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-Mukhtār's Khashabiyya 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 amply 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 Kufans, the Khashabiyya must have come overwhelmingly from former Sāsānid domains, and they spoke Persian among themselves.⁴⁵ 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 Israelites 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 one of them;⁴⁶ and possibly, Zoroastrianism was too pagan, in the sense of incarnate in local use and practice rather than in a detachable set of propositions, and thus too context-bound to unite disparate people whose very problem was that they had been torn from their local homes.⁴⁷ In any case the Khashabiyya, 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 did after all rebel under

⁴⁴ *Aghānī*, iii, 257; cf. al-Jāhiz, *Bayān*, iii, 16, 83 (also cites the verse); Tab. i, 2534ff. (where they are Arabs by origin).

⁴⁵ Tab. ii, 724.11; al-Dīnawarī, 302.7.

⁴⁶ Cf. Bar Penkayē's impression that the *shurṭe* included "all the peoples under heaven" (Brock, "North Mesopotamia", 73).

⁴⁷ The 10th century Zoroastrian books convey a different impression, but they were written after centuries of exposure to Islam.

Arab leadership. But in demanding vengeance for the Prophet's family and styling themselves *shurtat allāh*,⁴⁸ "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-Mukhtār was supposedly told.⁴⁹ It is not for nothing that Bar Penkaye believed their revolt to herald the end of the Ishmaelites:⁵⁰ by the time they were ensconced 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 Mikhnaḥ, they called their clubs *kāfir-kūbāt*, a half Arabic and half Persian word meaning "infidel-bashers", and shouted "vengeance for al-Ḥusayn" as they wielded them in Mecca.⁵¹ One would certainly infer from this that they saw their sticks and dubs as symbols of their servitude and wielded them against their captors as a sign that the tables had been turned. But Abū Mikhnaḥ's reference to *kāfir-kūbāt* is isolated and could be anachronistic.⁵² It may well have been the Khashabiyya's defeat that turned their clubs into symbols to those who retained their aspirations.

The Hāshimīyya

The sources do not comment on the Khurāsānī 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 dubs which they had also blackened

⁴⁸ Eg. Tab. ii, 645.16, 672.14, 691.3; cf. BA, v, 242.12, where A'shā Hamdān disowns the Khashabiyya as *shurtat al-kufr*; Bar Penkaye in Brock, "North Mesopotamia", 66, 73 (where Brock inexplicably understands *shurté* as a rendition of *shurāt*, a name for Khārījites).

⁴⁹ BA, v, 223.19.

⁵⁰ In Brock, "North Mesopotamia", 73.

⁵¹ Tab. ii, 694.15f.

⁵² Thus already de Goeje in his *Indices, Glossarium . . . ad BGA*, 278 (with reference to Ibn al-Athīr's version).

and which they called *kāfir-kūbāt*.⁵³ Having arrived in Iraq, they went to the Zāb on ulcerous donkeys armed with sticks and infidel-bashers (*bi 'l-ʿiṣī wa 'l-kāfir-kūbāt*) to fight Marwān II, according to al-Azdī, who has an 'Uqaylī, i.e. Qaysī, supporter of Marwān II narrate with astonishment how neither his coat of mail, inherited from his Jāhilī 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.⁵⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius notes that they 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.⁵⁵ According to a number of sources, the Umayyads who were massacred at Nahr Abī Fuṭrus and/or Ḥīra were clubbed to death with *kāfir-kūbāt*.⁵⁶ "Bring the infidel-bashers", Abū 'l-ʿAbbās commanded, whereupon guards came with blackened wood (*al-khashab al-musawwada*) and killed the Umayyads.⁵⁷ The troops "bashed them with *ʿmida* and *kāfir-kūbāt*", according to another version,⁵⁸ in which the *ʿmida* are perhaps a gloss for *kāfir-kūbāt* (though the 'Abbāsids did have troops armed with *ʿmida*).⁵⁹ Still other versions omit the *kāfir-kūbāt* altogether and have the troops bash the Umayyads with *ʿmida* or *ʿumud* alone.⁶⁰ (Conversely, a story about al-Zuhrī has Umayyad *shuraḥ* carry *kāfir-kūbāt* rather than *ʿumud*!)⁶¹ But *kāfir-kūbāt* remained emblematic of the 'Abbāsīd dynasty into the ninth century. Bukhārī troops armed with *kāfir-kūbāt* were to be found at Abū 'l-ʿAbbās' court; a *qādī* of Basra in his reign is said to have had bearers of *kāfir-kūbāt* march in front of him; and in the siege of Baghdād in 251/865f. the Ṭāhirid Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh distributed *kāfir-kūbāt* specially equipped with iron nails to the Baghdādī

⁵³ Al-Dīnawarī, 359f. The text has *wa qad sawwadū . . . anṣāf al-khashab*, which Sharon takes to mean that their clubs were half blackened (*Revolt*, 86) while Chouémi in *EI*², s.v. "*kāfir-kūb*", takes it to mean that they had blackened short clubs (similarly Zakeri, *Sāsānīd Soldiers*, 282).

⁵⁴ al-Azdī, *Mawsil*, 129f., 132.3.

⁵⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius, 192 = 147 (I owe this reference to Chase Robinson).

⁵⁶ *Aghānī*, iv, 346.4.

⁵⁷ Ibn A'tham, viii, 199.

⁵⁸ al-Azdī, *Mawsil*, 139.9.

⁵⁹ al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkira*, i, 181, where 'Abdallāh b. 'Alī asks al-Awzā'ī about the legitimacy of killing the Umayyads surrounded by soldiers armed with swords, *jirāza*, *ʿmida* and *kāfir-kūb(āt)*; YB, 249.3 (Fāryābī troops armed with *ʿumud* in al-Manṣūr's Baghdād).

⁶⁰ *ʿUyūn*, 208.1; BA, iii, 104.12; YT, ii, 426.10; cf. 427 ult., where Hishām's remains are beaten *bi 'l-ʿamūd*.

⁶¹ Ibn 'Asākir, *Tahdhīb*, v, 29; cited in Lecker, "Biographical Notes", 40, with further reference to the facsimile edition and Ibn Manẓūr's abbreviation of Ibn 'Asākir's work.

rabble 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.⁶² The Khurāsānīs still boast of their *kāfir-kūbāt* in al-Jāhīz' epistle on the Turks.⁶³

This evidence leaves no doubt that the Hāshimiyya used wooden clubs in a symbolic vein. Sharon denies it with reference to al-Dīnawarī's passage: according to him, the rebels merely carried *kāfir-kūbāt* because they had not yet received money with which to buy proper weapons, something that Abū Muslim was soon to put right.⁶⁴ This is the necessity argument proposed by Wellhausen in connection with al-Mukhtār'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-Dīnawarī should have bothered to mention it at all.⁶⁵ 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 rabble, the Khurāsānīs boasted of having used it. It must have had a special meaning, then.

The clubs identified the Khurāsānī rebels as slaves 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 *kāfir-kūbāt* 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 Qaysī soldier in the Battle of the Zāb marvels at his own inability to defend himself against men armed with mere sticks even though he is wearing mail inherited from his Jāhilī great-grandfather and riding a horse bred in the tribe itself, the symbolic victory of captive non-Arabs over their tribal, Jāhilī-minded,

⁶² Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, iv, par. 2328; Wakī', *Qudāh*, ii, 51.-2 (corrupt); Tab. iii, 1586.13; 1597.4; 1589.7; cf. Zakeri, *Sāsānid Soldiers*, 282f.

⁶³ In his *Rasā'il*, i, 20.2; cf. also his *Bayān*, i, 142.7.

⁶⁴ Sharon, *Revolt*, 86f.

⁶⁵ He would have had no reason to do so even if the sources had offered instant transmission after the fashion of modern television. In fact, of course, they only tell us what was remembered and considered significant after the event.

well-armored and well-mounted captors could hardly be more clearly expressed. The *kāfir-kūb* must indeed have stood for non-Arab, specifically Iranian, participation in the revolution, as Wellhausen argued, and as Zakeri argues too,⁶⁶ 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 *khashab*.⁶⁷ The adherents of the 'Abbāsids themselves continued the symbolism by executing non-Arab traitors within their ranks with wood. When 'Īsā b. Māhān, a *mawlā* veteran in the movement, fell into disgrace, he was sown up in a sack and battered to death, with *khashab*,⁶⁸ the same punishment was meted out to Ṣudayf b. Maymūn, a *mawlā* poet who had given the signal for the massacre of the Umayyads by reciting some verses, but who defected to the 'Alid side when Ibrāhīm and 'Abdallāh b. 'Abdallāh rebelled.⁶⁹ 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.⁷⁰

The Meaning of "Arabs"

Bukayr b. Māhān, the *mawlā* of Banū Musliya who played a key role in the foundation of the Hāshimite 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 (*raǰul min al-a'ājim*) who told him in Persian that "We have never seen a people more astray than the Arabs; when their Prophet died, they handed his power to

⁶⁶ Zakeri, *Sāsānid Soldiers*, 281ff., once more casts the wielders of clubs as Iranian horsemen armed with the *gurz*.

⁶⁷ BA, iii, 246.-8, on Sunbād; cf. Sadighi, *Mouvements*, 134ff.

⁶⁸ BA, iii, 169.12.

⁶⁹ BA, iii, 224.12.

⁷⁰ Cf. Tab. iii, 83.8, though the word here is *'ilj* rather than *'abd*.

somebody other than his family”; the two of them then cried together.⁷¹ On Abū ‘l-‘Abbās’ accession in 132/750, Dāwūd b. ‘Alī “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, Nizār 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 *‘aṣabi* supporters, not for people who merely happened to be of Arab descent, as were a great many Khurāsānīs and the ‘Abbāsids 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 *dawla* 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 Qaḥṭaba 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 Sāsānid 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 lowliest on earth. The latter took their country, bedded their women and enslaved their children, all the while making just decisions (*yaḥkumūna bi ‘l-‘adl*), 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 Qaḥṭaba refers are the Sāsānid kings and their subjects; the lowly nation is the Arabs, who soon turn into the Umayyads and their subjects; and the Khurāsānīs 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 Sāsānid and caliphal periods of Iran as dynastic “turns” within the history of the same religion. The Sāsānid 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 Khurāsānīs. There is nothing in the least reminiscent of ethnic hatred here. Still less does the speech voice Sāsānid restorationism.⁷⁵ But it does add to the impression that Shī‘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 BA, iii, 140.14; 141.3.

⁷³ *‘Uyūn*, 193.13.

⁷⁴ Tab. ii, 2004f. (blessings omitted); almost identically in *‘Uyūn*, 192f.

⁷⁵ Pace Zakari, *Sāsānid Soldiers*, 280.

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