

NOTES ON AN ACCOUNT
OF THE SHURA APPOINTED BY
'UMAR B. AL-KHATTAB

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Document no. 6 in Professor Nabia Abbott's *Studies in Arabic Papyri*,¹ dealing with the assassination of 'Umar and the appointment of the Shūrā (i.e. the council destined to settle the succession to the caliphate), is an important piece of early Islamic historiography. The papyrus has been admirably edited by Professor Abbott, who proves that it is a leaf from Ibn Ishāq's *Ta'rikh al-Khulafā'*. She has also added a translation and a valuable commentary and discusses in full the document's date, provenance, and significance. It seems, however, that a few passages were not correctly read, and since their accurate interpretation is of relevance for the understanding and evaluation of the historical events related in the text, they deserve to be examined in detail.

I

A sentence from the speech addressed, according to Ibn Ishāq, by the dying 'Umar to 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ and remonstrating with him for trying to enter the Shūrā (second half of verso, line 1; p. 81, transl. p. 82) is read and translated by Abbott as follows: *ولولا ما طمعتَ بمعاوية ما طمعَ فيها طليق* "and had you not coveted it for Mu'āwiyah it would not have been coveted by anyone who was set free [after the victory of Mecca]". She comments:²

So far no direct early parallel text has come to light in support of this teamwork between 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ and Mu'āwiyah b. Abī Sufyān in reference to the caliphate at this early date. But confirmation of 'Umar's concern about Mu'āwiyah's ambitions as well as about those of 'Abdallah b. Abī Rabi'ah are reflected in *Iṣābah*, II, 745 in a passage that gives no indication of its earlier sources. Mu'āwiyah's caliphal ambitions, according to Mu'āwiyah himself, are said to date back to a conversation between him and Muḥammad, whom he quotes as saying: "Should you be in command, fear God and render justice" using, it should be noted, some of the very terms that 'Umar used in addressing 'Ali and 'Uthmān. Cf. *Iqd*, II, 229; *Nawāwī*, p. 565; *Iṣābah*, III, 887.

¹ Vol. I, *Historical Texts* (Chicago, 1957).

² P. 85, verso ll. 1-2.

For the crucial word read by Abbott *ṣana'ta* Dietrich proposes in his corrections *ṣana'ta*;¹ this would not affect Professor Abbott's proposition about the "team-work between 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ and Mu'āwiyah". The correct reading is, however, *ṣana'tu*:

وَلَوْلَا مَا صَنَعْتُ بِمَعَاوِيَةَ مَا طَمَعَ فِيهَا طَلِيقٌ; which means: "were it not for what I did for Mu'āwiyah, not one of the *ṭulaqā'*"² would have coveted it [i.e. the caliphate]."

The passage recto l. 17 to verso l. 2 consists of two statements by 'Umar. The first is a pronouncement that he would not have as Caliph anyone who had carried arms against the Prophet. This statement has its parallel in al-Balādhurī's *Ansāb*, v, 17 (as quoted by Abbott) and in *Ansāb*, MS. 860b; in both cases it is reported on the authority of al-Wāqidi.³ The second statement, with which we are now dealing, is elucidated by al-Balādhurī in a significant report in *Ansāb*, MS. 860b:

حدثني محمد بن سعد عن الواقدي عن كثير بن زيد عن المطلب بن عبد الله قال : قال عمر رضي الله تعالى عنه : إنَّ هذا الأمر لا يصلح للطلاق ولا لبناء الطلقاء ولو استقبلت من أسمى ما استدبرت ما طمع يزيد بن ابي سفيان ومعاوية أن استعملهما على الشام

Muḥ. b. Sa'd al Wāqidi' Kathīr b. Zaid' al Muṭṭalib b. 'Abdallah.⁴ 'Umar said: "This affair [i.e. the Caliphate] is not fit for the *ṭulaqā'* nor the sons of the *ṭulaqā'*". Had I foreseen [the course of] my affair as I do now that I see the consequences of it, Yazid b. Abī Sufyān and Mu'āwiyah b. Abī Sufyān would not have coveted to be appointed as governors of Syria."

According to this tradition 'Umar on his death-bed regrets that he appointed Mu'āwiyah as governor of Syria: and that is exactly the idea expressed in our text in verso l. 1. On the point of death he sees the consequences of appointing to high posts *ṭulaqā'* of the type of Mu'āwiyah and 'Abdallah b. Abī Rabī'ah: they are dangerous for orthodox Islam; they have grown so

¹ *Der Islam* (1959), p. 205.

² *L'A.* s.v. *ṭlq* gives two opinions about the meaning of the word; cf. also Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *al-Istiqā'*, p. 50.

³ I could not find the *imād* "traced back again to 'Amr b. Maimūn" (Abbott, *op. cit.* p. 85, l. 1) in the work of al-Balādhurī.

⁴ See *Tabdīb al-Tabdīb*, VIII, 414; he was the transmitter of al-Muṭṭalib b. 'Abdallah b. al-Ḥanṭab.

⁵ See *Iṣābah*, no. 4627 (s.v. 'Abdallāh b. al-Ḥanṭab) and no. 8021 (s.v. al-Muṭṭalib b. al-Ḥanṭab); and see *L'A.* s.v. *ḥntb*; *Tabdīb*, x, 178; *Dīwān al-Farazdaq*, p. 92, ed. al-Ṣāwī.

powerful that in the event of disagreement among the men of the Shūrā they are in a position to intervene and even seize power.

The passage quoted by Abbott in her comment on verso 1-2 (mentioned above) and in her comment on verso 3-4 (p. 85), from the *Iṣābah*, II, 745 (the biographical notice of 'Abdallāh b. Abī Rabī'ah; in ed. Cairo 1907—vol. IV, 64 inf., no. 4662) also contains a warning by 'Umar. The passage in question reads:

ويقال أنّ عمر قال لأهل الشورى: لا تختلفوا فإنكم إن اختلفتم جاءكم معاوية من الشام وعبد الله بن أبي ربيعة من اليمن فلا يريان لكم فضلا لسابقتكم. وإن هذا الأمر لا يصلح للطلاق ولا لبناء الطلقاء.

And it is said that 'Umar told the men of the Shūrā: "Do not disagree among yourselves, for if you disagree Mu'āwiyah will enter upon you from Syria, and 'Abdallah b. Abī Rabī'ah from the Yemen. They will not respect the fact that you were the first to accept Islam"... , etc.

Abbott remarks (comments on verso 1-2, 3-4) that the source of this report is not specified. Fortunately, however, it can be discovered. Ibn 'Asākir quotes this very report in the article "Mu'āwiyah",¹ f. 125 a, under the following *isnād*: Ibn Sa'd > Muḥ. b. 'Umar (i.e. al-Wāqidī) > Kathīr b. Zaid > 'Abdallah b. al-Ḥanṭab > 'Umar. This is exactly the same *isnād* as given by al-Balādhurī for 'Umar's warning quoted above (p. 321) from the *Ansāb*, MS. 860 b.

Another such warning is included in the report of Sufyān b. 'Uyayna² told on the authority of Abū Hārūn (i.e. Mas'ūd b. al-Ḥakam al-Madanī).³ Here 'Umar warns the men of the Shūrā not to disagree among themselves lest Mu'āwiyah seize power [i.e. the Caliphate] for himself (*yastabiddubā dīmākum*).⁴

In a remarkable tradition told on the authority of Ḥabīb b. Abī Thābit (see below, p. 326, n. 1) 'Alī is said to have stated that he accepted the Caliphate only for fear that a billy-goat from among the Banū Umayya might leap at it and play with the book of Allah.⁵

All these reports are clearly anti-Umayyad. The same tendency is clearly reflected in a peculiar conversation between al-Aswad b. Yazīd⁶ and 'Ā'isha. He asked 'Ā'isha: "Do you not wonder how a man from among the *ṭulaqā'* can contend for the Caliphate against the Companions of the Prophēt?" 'Ā'isha answered: "Why do you wonder at it? It is the power (*sulṭān*) of Allah, He

¹ This article was copied for the late Dr Schloessinger from the Damascus MS.

² See al-Khaṭīb's *Tārīkh Baghdād*, IX, 174.

³ See *Tabdīb al-Tabdīb*, X, 116.

⁴ Ibn 'Asākir, *op. cit.* f. 124 b.

⁵ Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, MS. 158 a.

⁶ *Iṣābah*, I, 108.

grants it to the pious and the wicked; Fir'aun ruled Egypt for 400 years."¹

Abbot remarks that "Mu'āwiyah's caliphal ambitions, according to Mu'āwiyah himself, are said to date back to a conversation between him and Muḥammad" (see above, p. 320). This tradition cannot serve, however, to establish the date at which Mu'āwiyah actually began planning to win the Caliphate, since traditions about the Prophet foretelling the rule of Mu'āwiyah, exhortations of the Prophet on behalf of Mu'āwiyah, and the enumeration of his virtues by the Prophet, are fabrications of Umayyad propaganda. Traditions of this kind are found in al-Balādhuri's *Ansāb*² and in Ibn 'Asākir's *Ta'riḫ*.³ There is a curious tradition, breathing the spirit of the Jāhiliyya, in which the Prophet is said to have given Mu'āwiyah an arrow with which he would meet him in Paradise.⁴ Another specimen of transparent Umayyad fabrication is given in al-Balādhuri's *Ansāb*, MS. 374a, on the authority of Abū Hurayra: Gabriel told the Prophet: "God entrusted the revelation to me, to you and to Mu'āwiyah."⁵

In conclusion it may be said that, if correctly interpreted, the papyrus contains no evidence of collaboration between Mu'āwiyah and 'Amr b. al-Āṣ. The passage discussed stresses the background of the *ḫulaqā'* and purports to prove that 'Umar considered their regime as a menace to Islam; it shows, as has already been pointed out by Sir Hamilton Gibb in his review of Abbott's book,⁶ an anti-Umayyad tendency.⁷

¹ Ibn 'Asākir, *op. cit.* f. 130a; the tradition about the *ḫulaqā'* mentioned by Abbott, *op. cit.* p. 85, l. 23, is told by Ibn Abzā (*sic*, not Ibn Abzī)—see *Tabdīb al-Tabdīb*, VI, 132 note 2 inf.; some anti-Umayyad traditions are recorded in al-Suyūṭī's *al-Durr al-manthūr*, IV, 191.

² See Levi della Vida-Pinto: *Il Califfo Mu'āwiyah*, I, nos. 319, 322, 321, 323 and 316 n.; and see Pellat: "Le culte de Mu'āwiyah au IIIe siècle", *Studia Islamica*, VI, 53-66 (esp. pp. 56-7).

³ *Op. cit.* chapter "Mu'āwiyah".

⁴ Ibn 'Asākir, *op. cit.* p. 118; and see Fraenkel, "Das Schutzrecht der Araber", *Or. Stud. Nöldske*, I, 294.

⁵ Levi della Vida-Pinto, *op. cit.* no. 320. ⁶ *J.N.E.S.* XVII, 222-4.

⁷ It may be pointed out that 'Abdallāh b. Abi Rabī'ah was governor, not of Najd (p. 85, l. 20), but of Janad in Yemen; cf. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *al-Isfī'āb*, no. 1515; al-Balādhuri, *Ansāb*, MS. 804a. Verso l. 4: read يتشاورون instead of يشاورون. Verso l. 5 is read قالوا فاما شئت and translated: "They asked: 'What is it you wish [to say]'" ; Dietrich took *fa-amma* to be a slip of the scribe and proposed *fa-mā* (*Der Islam*, 1959, p. 205). The correct reading is, however, قالوا قل ما شئت: "They said: 'Say what you wish [to say]'" .

II

Professor Abbott transcribes verso ll. 10-11, a passage of 'Uthmān's speech in which he defends himself from al-Miqdād's attacks, as follows:

فبايع لى رسول الله صلعم بشماله وسمما \ رسول الله خير يعينى

This is translated: "So the Messenger of God—may God bless him and give him peace—took the oath for me by grasping his (own) left hand (furthermore) the Messenger of God specified bounty to come to me." Dietrich accepts this reading, adding only لى before رسول الله in l. 11.¹

The correct reading of the passage is, however, as follows:

فبايع لى رسول الله صلعم بشماله وشمما \ ل رسول الله خير (من) يعينى

"So the Messenger of Allah—may Allah bless him and give him peace—took the oath for me by grasping his [own] left hand, and the left hand of the Messenger of Allah is better [than]² my right hand." This indeed is the expression which occurs in 'Uthmān's answer to 'Abd al-Rahmān b. 'Auf as reported by al-Zurqānī in his *Sharḥ al-Mawābiḥ*³

فشمال رسول الله خير لى من يعينى

Commenting on this passage containing al-Miqdād's attack on 'Uthmān, Abbott remarks that "the direct attack of al-Miqdād on 'Uthmān and the latter's speech in defence of himself are nowhere reported in this setting, though the substance of the passage is frequently met with in the sources in various other settings and versions".⁴ Abbott suggests that the passage may be traced to the lost work of 'Awāna on the Umayyad dynasty, and repeats that "Miqdād is nowhere else in the sources associated directly with the passage. Neither does the passage itself appear in any of the sources in connexion with 'Uthmān at the time of the elective council".⁵

These remarks are correct as far as Sunnī sources are concerned. This account, however, seems to be of Shī'ite character, and is in fact found in the *Amāli* of al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (died 413 A.H.)⁶

¹ *Der Islam* (1959), p. 205.

² *min* was dropped; other such omissions are discussed by Abbott, p. 83 inf.

³ Vol. II, 208; for various other versions see: Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, IV, 186; also al-Suyūṭī, *Ta'rikh al-Khulafā*, p. 152.

⁴ *Op. cit.* p. 86 (comments on verso 7-13).

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 96.

⁶ Ed. Najaf 1367 A.H., p. 66.

and copied in the *Bibār al-Anwār*.¹ The report in the *Amālī* reads as follows:

قال أخبرني أبو الحسن علي بن بلال المهلبى قال حدثنا علي بن عبد الله الاصبهاني قال حدثنا ابراهيم بن محمد الثقفي قال حدثنا يوسف بن سعيد الاريحي قال حدثنا عبيد الله بن موسى العبسي عن كاسل عن حبيب بن ابي ثابت قال : لما حضر القوم الدار للشورى جاء المقداد بن الأسود الكندي رحمه الله فقال ادخلوني معكم فيا لله عندي نصحا ولي بكم خير . فابوا . فقال ادخلوا رأسي واسمعوا مني . فابوا عليه ذلك فقال أما إذا أبيتتم فلا تبايعوا رجلا لم يشهد بدرا ولم يبايع بيعة الرضوان وانهمز يوم أحد ويوم التقى الجمعان . فقال عثمان أما والله لئن وليتها لأردتكم إلى ربك الأول فلما نزل بالمقداد الموت قال : أخبروا عثمان أني رددت إلى ربي الأول والآخر . فلما بلغ عثمان موته وجاء حتى وقف على قبره فقال : رحمك الله ، ان كنت وان كنت ، يُثنى عليه خيرا . فقال له الزبير : لأعرفنك بعد الموت تندبني : وفي حياتي ما زودتني زدي² . فقال : يا زبير أتراني احب أن يموت مثل هذا من أصحاب محمد (صلعم) وهو علي ساخط .

[*Isnād*] . . . Ḥabīb b. Abī Thābit said: When the people assembled in the court to attend the Shūrā, al-Miqdād b. al-Aswad al-Kindī came and said: "Take me in, for I have some advice to give for the sake of God and your own good!" They refused. Then he said: "Let me put my head [in the door] and listen to me." They refused. Then he said: "Since you have refused I recommend [at least that you] do not swear allegiance to a man who was not present at Badr, did not swear the Ridwān oath of allegiance, who was put to flight at the battle of Uḥud and at the battle when the two armies met." Whereupon 'Uthmān said: "Should I become ruler [i.e. caliph] I will return you to your first master."³ When death came upon al-Miqdād he said: "Inform 'Uthmān that I am going to be returned to my first and last Master." When 'Uthmān was informed of his death he came, stood at his grave and said: "God grant you His mercy, you were [scil. excellent], you were [excellent]"—extolling him thus. Al-Zubayr recited to him ['Uthmān]:

I know that you will bewail me after my death

But in my lifetime you did not provide me with provision.

¹ Vol. VIII, 352.

² The verse is attributed to 'Abīd b. al-Abraṣ (see *Dīwān*, ed. Ḥusayn Naṣṣār, p. 48).

³ He was a *ḥalīf* of the Banū Zuhra; see *Iṣṭāḥab*, no. 8179.

'Uthmān then said: "O Zubayr, do you think that I would want such a Companion of Muḥammad—may Allah bless him and give him peace—to die while wroth with me?"

The setting in the *Amāli* of al-Mufīd and the role played by al-Miqdād are the same as in the papyrus text of Ibn Ishāq; in the account of the *Amāli*, however, 'Uthmān resorts to threats instead of defending himself.

There is no doubt that the account in Ibn Ishāq's work is of Shī'ite character. It is enough to note that one of the transmitters of the account, 'Ubayd Allāh b. Mūsā al-'Absī was a notorious inventor of Shī'ite traditions.¹ Gibb rightly classifies Ibn Ishāq's account as Shī'ite *Dichtung*.² It may be mentioned that al-Jāhiz denies the authenticity of all the traditions transmitted on the authority of al-Miqdād which support the rights of 'Alī to the caliphate or deny those of Abū Bakr. Al-Jāhiz stresses that al-Miqdād bore a grudge against 'Alī because 'Alī tried to prevent the marriage of al-Miqdād with al-Ḍubā'ah bint al-Zubayr b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib.³

All in all it is difficult to share Abbott's opinion that the account in the papyrus "gives no inkling of partiality for either of these two major candidates and hence calls into question the accusation that Ibn Ishāq favoured the Shī'ite religio-political party".⁴ On the contrary, the text preserved in the papyrus clearly shows his Shī'ite inclinations.⁵

¹ See *Tabdīb al-Tabdīb*, VII, 50-3.

² *J.N.E.S.* XVII, 224.

³ *Al-'Uthmāniyya* (ed. 'Abd al-Salām Hārūn), pp. 180-1.

⁴ *Op. cit.* p. 97.

⁵ In ll. 11-12 of the verso the correct reading is neither *sākinatan* nor *sākitatan* as suggested by Abbott, nor *ṣusākinabw* as suggested by Dietrich, but *sbākiyatan*; in fact the other sources have *marīḍatan*, or *wajl'atan* (in al-Baihaqī, *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, VI, 293), which are synonyms of *sbākiyatan*.