

**Biṣṭām b. Ḳays b. Mas'ūd b. Ḳays, Abu 'l-Ṣahbā' or Abū Zīk** (according to Ibn al-Kalbī, *Djambhara* 203, nicknamed “al-Mutaḳammir”)—pre-Islamic hero, poet and *sayyid* of the Banu Ṣhaybān. His family was considered one of the three most noble and aristocratic Bedouin families (*al-Aghānī*, xvii, 105). His father is known (*al-Muḥabbar*, 253) as one of the “*dhawū 'l-Ākāl*” (enjoying grants of the foreign rulers) and was granted by the Sāsānid kings as a fee Ubulla and the adjacent border territories (Ṭaff Safawān) against the obligation to prevent marauding raids of his tribesmen. Failing to fulfill his obligation in face of the opposition in his own tribe, and being suspected of plotting with Arab chiefs against Persian rule, he was imprisoned and died in a Persian gaol (*al-Aghānī*, xx, 140).

It is a significant fact, that Biṣṭām did not avenge the death of his father. On the contrary, Persian diplomacy succeeded, despite the Arab victory at Dhū Ḳār, in assuring the collaboration of Biṣṭām, and a fairly trustworthy tradition (*al-Naḳā'id*, 580) shows that the Ṣhaybānī troops were equipped by the Persian *'āmil* at 'Ayn al-Tamr. Born in the last quarter of the 6th century A.D. (T. Nöldeke, in *Der Islam*, xiv, 125) Biṣṭām became a leader of his tribe at the age of twenty (Ibn al-Kalbī, *op. cit.*) and succeeded in uniting his tribe: he is known as one of the “*djarrārūn*” (*al-Muḥabbar*, 250). Abandoning the idea of fighting the Persians he directed all his activities against his neighbours of the Banū Tamīm.

His first raid against the Banū Yarbū', a branch of the Banū Tamīm, was—according to al-Balādhurī—at al-A'ṣhāsh (*Ansāb*, x, 998 b). The Ṣhaybānī troops were defeated, Biṣṭām himself was captured and released without ransom. His second raid was probably at Ḳushāwa (*Ansāb*, x, 1003b). Here it is clearly mentioned that Biṣṭām commanded the attacking troops, but the raid itself was insignificant and ended with seizing of camels of a clan of the Banū Salīṭ. To the same early period belongs apparently the encounter

with al-Akra' b. Hābis at Salmān, in which al-Akra' was captured. A more serious enterprise was the raid of Ghabīṭ al-Madara (known as the Yawm Baṭn Faldj). A tribal federation of the Tha'ālib was attacked and overcome by the troops of Biṣṭām, but when the attackers proceeded against the Banū Mālik b. Hanẓala, they met resistance and were put to flight with the aid of warriors of Banū Yarbū'. Biṣṭām, captured by 'Uṭayba b. al-Ḥārith, had to pay a very high ransom and was compelled to promise not to attack the clan of 'Uṭayba any more (*Ansāb*, 998a, 988a, 995b, 996a). Breaking his promise he attacked after a short time the camp of 'Uṭayba's son at Dhū Kār (*Ansāb* 995b, 998a) and succeeded in seizing the camels (the raid is also known as Yawm Fayḥān). Not content with this victory, he prepared an attack on the Banū Tamīm in order to capture 'Uṭayba; but he was defeated in this battle at al-Ṣamd (or Dhū Ṭulūḥ) and barely escaped with his life (*Ansāb*, 998a). A further battle at al-Ufāka (known as the battle of al-Ghabīṭayn or al-'Uzāla), prepared and aided by the Persian *āmil* at 'Ayn al-Tamr, ended with the defeat of the attackers and with the escape of Biṣṭām (*Ansāb*, 1004 b). Biṣṭām fought his last battle at Naḳā al-Ḥasan. He was killed by a half-witted Ḍabbī, 'Āṣim b. Khalīfa, who is said to have boasted of his deed at the court of 'Uṭhmān. The date of his death may be fixed at *circa* 615 A.D.

Very little is known about the posterity of Biṣṭām. His grand-daughter Ḥadrā', the daughter of his son Zīk was about to marry al-Farazdaq but died before the appointed date.

Biṣṭām is said to have been a Christian. He was the *sayyid* of his tribe; when the news of his death reached his tribe, they pulled down their tents as an expression of their sorrow. Many elegies were composed on his death, and his person was glorified as the ideal of Bedouin courage and bravery. But in the times of al-Djāḥiẓ, in the urban mixed society of the towns of 'Irāk, his glory faded away and the common people preferred to

listen to the story of 'Antara (*al-Bayān*, i, 34) which came closer to their social equalitarian tendencies (cf. *EI*, s.v. *Antara*, R. Blachère).

(M. J. Kister)

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