THE CAMPAIGN OF HULUBĀN
A NEW LIGHT ON THE EXPEDITION OF ABRAHA

The record of the expedition of Abraha against the Ma’add and especially against the ‘Āmir b. Ṣa’ṣa’a deserves special mention. The record of this expedition found on an inscription on a rock in the vicinity of the well of al-Murayghān refers to a tribal division of Tamīm. It is the only case — as yet — in which a tribal division of Tamīm has been mentioned in an inscription.

This inscription « Ry 506 », found by the expedition of Professor G. Ryckmans, was published by him with a French translation and comments 1. It was published with a German translation and valuable comments by W. Caskel 2, rendered into English with notes and remarks by Sidney Smith 3 and by F. Beeston 4, who gave a penetrating analysis of the text. Of importance are the remarks and studies of J. Ryckmans 5. A comprehensive study of the inscription was given in Russian by A.G. Lundin 6. The inscription was partly translated into Arabic and furnished with notes by Jawād ‘Alī 7. The text given by Sidney Smith was translated into Arabic by ‘Īhsān ‘Abbās 8.

The rendering of F. Beeston of the inscription is here given in full:

« By the power of the Merciful One and His Messiah, the king Abraha (etc.) wrote this inscription when he had raided Ma’add in the spring razzia in the month dībṭn (and) when all the Banū ‘Āmir had revolted. Now the king sent ‘GūBR with the Kindites and ‘Alites and BŠR son of HŠN with the Sa’dites and these two commanders of the army did battle and fought, (namely) the Kindite column against the Banī ‘Āmir and the Murūdite and Sa’dite column against... in the valley on the TRBN route and they slew and made captive (the enemy) and took

1 Le Muséon, 66 (1953), pp. 275-284.
5 Le Muséon, 66 (1953), pp. 339-42; B.O. XIV, p. 94.
6 A.G. LUNDIN, Yujnaya Arabia w VI wieke (Palestynski Sbornik, 1961, pp. 73-84).
7 Jawād ‘Alī, Ta’rikh al-‘Arab qabla ’l-Islām, IV, 396-98.
satisfactory booty. The king, on the other hand, did battle at Ḥalībān and the (troops?) of Ma‘add were defeated and forced to give hostages. After all this ‘Amr son of al-Mundhir negotiated with Abraha and agreed to give hostages to Abraha from al-Mundhir, for al-Mundhir had invested him (‘Amr) with the governorship over Ma‘add. So Abraha returned from Ḥalībān by the power of the Merciful One (etc.).

Beeston’s comment shows clearly that the description deals with two campaigns: the campaign of the king, Abraha, at Ḥalībān and the campaign of Kinda and Sa‘d - Murād at TRBN. It is evident that we are concerned here with an enormous encounter in which many tribal forces participated.

Caskel remarks that the expedition might be considered as «Vor-übung» for the expedition of Abraha towards the North of the Ar. peninsula, which stopped near Mecca. J. Ryckmans states: «Cette expédition aurait partiellement servi de base à la tradition d’une campagne de Abraha contre la Mecque». Altheim and Stiehl state that the expedition of Abraha recorded in the inscription «Ry 506»


11 So voweled in al-Bakrī, *Mu’allam mā ‘sta’jam*, a.v. Ḥilbān. Yāqūt vowels: Ḥulabān (Buldān, a.v. Ḥilbān). Al-Bakrī states that it is «a city in al-Yaman, in the lowland of al Ḥadīr». Yāqūt states that it was «a place in al-Yaman in the vicinity of Najrān». He also quotes another opinion, that it was a water-place of the Banū Qushayr. Thilo locates the place according to Yāqūt and states that it is a wādī starting in the mountain-chain of ‘Arwā and flowing into the Rikā‘ Sirrā. It is located in the vicinity of Yadbul—see Thilo, *Ortenamen*, a.v. Ḥulabān.


is in fact the « Expedition of the Elephant » mentioned in the Qur’ān 15. Lundin devotes a comprehensive discussion to the proposition of Altheim - Stiehl and refutes their assumption stating that the « Expedition of the Elephant » is not connected with the events of 547 A.D., recorded in the inscription « Ry 506 » 16. He assumes that the « Expedition of the Elephant » took place about 563 A.D. 17.

Some remarks concerning this controversy may be made here. The tradition of Ibn al-Kalbi stating that the Prophet was born 23 years after the « Expedition of the Elephant » is not « an isolated one » (« Danniyeh Muh. b. al-Kalbi stoyat osobnyakom ») - as Lundin claims. There are many traditions stating that the Prophet was not born on the « Day of the Elephant » or in the year of « the Elephant »; these can, however, not be discussed here. One of these traditions, an important one, may be quoted here.


... « Ibn Shihāb (i.e. al-Zuhri - K) : Quraysh counted, before the chronology of the Prophet, from the time of the ‘Elephant’. Between the Elephant and the (battle of the) Fijār they counted 40 years. Between the Fijār and the death of Ḥishām b. al-Mughīrā they counted 6 years. Between the death of Ḥishām and the building of the Ka'ba they counted 9 years. Between the building of the Ka'ba and the departure of the Prophet for al-Madīnā (i.e. the Hijra - K) they counted 15 years; he stayed 5 years (of these 15) not receiving the revelation. Then the counting (of the usual chronology) was as follows: »

This tradition of al-Zuhri is recorded by al-Zubayr b. Bakkār in

16 LUNDIN, op. cit., pp. 82-83.
his «Nasab Quraysh» and is quoted in Ibn 'Asâkir's «Ta'rikh Dimashq».

This tradition is not connected directly with the date of the birth of the Prophet and seems to be trustworthy. It fixes the date of the «Expedition of the Elephant» at 552 A.D. It is exactly the date fixed for the inscription «Ry 506» by Beeston. The proposition of Altheim-Stiehl seems to be correct: the inscription «Ry 506» is apparently a record of the «Expedition of the Elephant». The problem of the date of the birth of the Prophet deserves to be dealt with in a separate study.

Some additional details about the «Expedition of the Elephant», hitherto unknown, may here be quoted as well. Al-Baladurî records a tradition on the authority of Ibn Da'b: Jâbir b. Sufyân, the father of Ta'abbata Sharran (Ibn al-Kalbi says: Jâbir b. Sufyân b. 'Adiyy. Others say: Sufyân b. 'Amaythil b. 'Adiyy) said about the «Day of the Elephant»:

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\text{Atânā rákibun fa-na'ā Unāsān wa-} '\text{Abbāsān wa-nāsān ākharīnā, Aqamnā bil-Mughammasi niṣfa shāhrrin wa ...} \]

A horseman came to us and announced the death of Unās and the death of 'Abbās and other people. We stayed at al-Mughammas half a month and ... them in it, staying close together.

There is no intimation as to who the persons, mentioned in the verses, were. They were evidently from the tribe of Jâbir b. Sufyân, from the Fahm. From the verses we gather that the father of Ta'abbata Sharran witnessed the battle. They clearly point to the fact that Fahm took part in the battle against Abraha.

It may be of some interest to mention, that the family of Ta'abbata Sharran had some relations with Mecca. Umayya, the daughter
of Jābir b. Sufyān, the sister of Ta‘abbaṭa Sharran, married Naufal b. Asad 25. Her son ‘Adiyy b. Naufal b. Asad, the brother of Waraqa b. Naufal, was appointed by ‘Umar or ‘Uthmān as governor of Ḥadramaut.

Lundin discussing whether the inscription of «Ry 506» can be connected with the «Expedition of the Elephant» argues, that the inscription does not contain the names of the men mentioned in the North-Arabian tradition: Nufayl b. Ḥabīb, the guide of Abraha, Muḥammad b. Khuzā‘i, claimed to have been appointed over Ma‘add 28, the Khath‘am etc. One may remark, that the tradition of Ṭabarī explicitly says that Muḥ. b. Khuzā‘i was killed by the Kināna. Abraha advancing against Kināna intended to avenge the murder of Muḥ. b. Khuzā‘i 27. A contradictory tradition, recorded by Muḥ. b. Ḥabīb, states that Muḥ. b. Khuzā‘i was with the army of Abraha with the Elephant 28. In both cases (whether Muḥ. b. Khuzā‘i was alive or dead) there was no reason to mention his name on an inscription recording the events of a battle between the forces of Abraha and of revolting tribes. That seems to have been the reason that the name of the guide of Abraha was not mentioned either.

It is a fact that in a relatively short time the decisive events fell into oblivion, poems composed on the occasion of the battles were lost. Only dim memories of the campaigns were preserved in a few verses.

A peculiar passage in al Baladhuri’s «Ansāb» 29 may shed new light on the relations between Abraha and Mecca, emphasizing the economic aspect:

... Minhumu 'l-Ḥarīthu bnu 'Alqamata bni Kaladāta bni 'Abdi Manāfi bni 'Abdi l-Dāri, rahīnata Qurayshin 'inda Abi Yākṣūma l-Ḫabashiyyi,


26 In the tradition of al-Ṭabarī (I, 551; ed. Cairo 1939) he was appointed over Muṣar, not over Ma‘add.

27 al-Ṭabarī, Tu‘rīkh, ib.; al-Ṭabarī in his Majma‘ al-Bayān XXX, 191 seq. tells that Abraha — when on his way against Meccah with his army — sent a man from Sulaym as a missionary to summon the people to make the pilgrimage to his church, which he had built. A man from the Kināna, from the Hums, met him and fought him. That increased the wrath of Abraha.

28 al-Muḥābbar, p. 130.

29 Ms. f. 811a.
From them (i.e. the Banū 'Abd al-Dār - K) was al-Ḥārith b. 'Alqama b. Kalada b. 'Abd Manāf b. 'Abd al Dār, the hostage of Quraysh handed over to Abū Yaksūm, the Abyssinian. (It happened) when a group of their merchants entered Mecca in a barren year. Some young men attacked and robbed them of their merchandise. Then discord broke out among them. They were later reconciled, after a group of nobles of Quraysh went to Abū Yaksūm and requested him not to cut off the merchants of his kingdom from (coming to) them. Al-Ḥārith and others were handed over as hostages 'to him (i.e. to Abraha - K). He honoured them and showed them friendship and they sent merchandise for themselves to Mecca.

Al-Ḥārith b. 'Alqama is also mentioned as hostage of Quraysh with Abū Yaksūm the Abyssinian in al-Zubayr b. Bakkār's «Nasab Quraysh».

This passage of the «Ansāb» is quoted by M. Ḥamīdullah in his Les rapports économiques - diplomatiques de la Mecque (Mélanges L. Massignon, II, 303) and in his Le Prophète de l'Islam, p. 195. Unfortunately Ḥamīdullah misinterpreted an expression of the report of al-Baladhurī. Ḥamīdullah renders the text as follows: «... ils s'excusèrent donc auprès du Negus ... Le Negus Abū Yaksūm (c.a.d. le roi de la dynastie d'Axoum) traita ces otages avec bonté ...» (Les rapports, ib.). And in his Le Prophète de l'Islam: «Le 'Abdarite al-Ḥārith b. 'Alqamah fut l'otage quraichite entre les mains du roi d'Abyssinie Abū Yaksūm (= akoumite) ... furent allés auprès de l'Aksoumite...»

But in the text quoted above there is no mention of the Negus at all. The expression «Abū Yaksūm al-Ḥabashi» refers to Abū ʿAlī Y a k s û m, because he had a son called Yaksūm, who ruled after his death. The merchants who were attacked at Mecca were not necessarily Abyssinians; they were evidently Yamanī merchants.

It is of interest to note that Ḥaqqī also surrendered hostages to

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30 Ms. Bodley, f. 69a; and see Ibn Ḥajar, al-Isāba, n° 8705 and n° 8714.
Abraha. Al-Baladhuri records that 'Utbân b. Malik b. Ka'b b. 'Amr was «the hostage of Abû Yaksûm the Abyssinian» 31. This tradition confirms the North-Arabian story about some contacts between Abraha and Tâ'if.

The tradition here quoted point to the direction of the activity of Abraha: Thaqif (Tâ'if), Fahm, Kinâna and Hudhayl — all these tribes staying in the vicinity of Mecca. One is inclined to trust to some degree the North-Arabian tradition stating that the expedition was directed against Mecca and her allies.

It may be remarked here that there is a rather diverging tradition about the cause of the expedition of Abraha against Mecca: The grandson of Abraha (the son of his daughter), Aksûm b. al-Šabbâb al-Himyâr went to Mecca to perform his pilgrimage. On his way back from Mecca he stayed in a church in Najrán. He was attacked by men from Mecca, who robbed him of his luggage and looted the church. Aksûm went to his grandfather, and complained about the behaviour of the men from Mecca. Abraha vowed to destroy the sanctuary of Mecca 32.

The inscription mentions tribal troops of the army of Abraha despatched by the king: Kinda sent against the 'Āmir, and Sa'd-Murûd sent towards TRBN.

The troop of Sa'd, which we are interested in, was identified by Smith as a «sept of Quraysh» 33. Caskel identified the Sa'd as Sa'd al-'Ashîra 34. Caskel's assumption was accepted by Lundin 35. It was Jawâd 'Ali, who for the first time quoted two verses of al-Mukhabbal al-Sa'dî from the «Mu'jam mā 'sta'jam», in which the help of the Sa'd for Abraha was mentioned 36. It is rather important to stress that these Sa'd are in fact Sa'd of Tamîm.

The passage of al-Bakri 37 states that al-Mukhabbal al-Sa'dî boasted

31 al-Baladhuri, Ansâb, ms. f. 1139a.
32 al-Iṣbahânî, Dala'il al-nubuwa, p. 100-101 (ed. 1950); al-Suyûṭi, al-Durr al-munţâhir, VI, 304 (quoted from the Dalâ'il).
33 Smith, op. cit., p. 436, n. 2.
34 W. Caskel, op. cit., p. 29, n. 124.
37 al-Bakri, Mu'jam mâ 'sta'jam, s.v. Ḥulûbân; the first verse is quoted in L. 'A. s.v. ʧ̣ibb and in Taj al-'Arûs (s.v. ʧ̣ibb); for the expression ʧ̣aramu l-umûra see al-Baladhuri's Ansâb, IV, 158 (ed. Schloessinger) : ʧ̣aw-naʽamu ʧ̣aramûn amra Bakri 'bni
of their (i.e. of the Sa'd - K) help extended to Abraha b. al-Ṣabbāh, the king of al-Yaman; it was in fact Khindif who were his followers. He said:

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\text{Darabū li-Abrahata 'l-umūra maḥalluhā} \\
\text{Ḥulubānu, fa-'ntalaqū ma'a l-aqwālī} \\
\text{Wa-Muḥarr iqun wa-l-Ḥārithāni kilāhumā} \\
\text{shurakā'umā fi l-ṣīhri wa-l-aṃwālī} \\
\]

They decided for Abraha the actions (of war); the place of it was Ḥulubān, and they rushed with the qayls Muḥarriq and the two al Ḥārith both of them were our partners in kinship and possessions.

Al-Hamdānī quotes these very verses in his «Iklīl» remarking:

... «about Abraha the Qayl», says al-Mukhabbal mentioning their (i.e. of the Sa'd) loyalty («māyi») for him. Further al-Hamdānī says:

«About him (i.e. about Abraha) he said boasting of their deeds in war with him (i.e. fighting on his side — K):

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\text{Wa-yauma Abī Yaksūma wa-l-nāsu ḥuḍdarun} \\
\text{‘alā Ḥulubānīn idh tuqaddā maḥamilūh} \text{38} \\
\text{Fata’hūn lahū bāba l-Ḥuḍayrī wa-rabbuhu} \\
\text{‘azīzun yamashshī bi-l-suṣīfī arājīlūh} \text{39}. \\
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These two verses are found in a qaṣīda of al-Mukhabbal in the «Ikhtiyārāyn» (al-Mufaddal - al-ʿAṣmaʾī) edited by S.H. Husain 40.

The verses in the «Ikhtiyārāyn» contain, however, some variants which deserve to be mentioned:

Verse 1. taqaddā maḥāsīlūh (instead maḥāmilūh)
Verse 2. Ṭawaynā labum bāba l-ḥusaynī wa-dūnahu
\text{‘azīzun yumashshī bi-l-ḥirābī maqāwilūh}. \\

The two verses, for which the editor could nowhere find parallels, are rendered by him as follows:

And on the day of Abū Yaksūm when the people were present at Ḥalibān after its products were consumed

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\text{Wāʾilīn}; \text{and see the explanation of the expression in al-'Askari’s Jamharat al-amīhāl,}\]
\text{p. 62.}

38 Perhaps to be read «maḥāsīlūh».
40 P. 204 (The University of Dacca, Bulletin, XIX).
We closed against them the gate of the fortress in front of which was a prince whose chiefs went forth with the javelins 41.

The commentary of the « Ikhtiyärāyn » has « maḥāsiluhu » and explains « mā tajamma’a minhu », « what comes together, combines ». « Abū Yaksūm » is explained : « a king »; « al ḫuṣayn » is explained : « a fortress, a palace »; « bi-l-ḥirāb » is explained : « he meant to say : his horsemen and his infantry ».

Al-Hamdānī’s comments are of some importance : « Hulubān — says Ḥamdānī — is located in Ḥadīr. Those who transmitted « Ḫadīr » refer to some king (wa-man rawāhu al-Ḵadīr arāda malikan min al-mulūk); he who transmits it « al-Ḫudayr » refers to al-Ḫaḍr.

The commentaries do not help us to understand this crucial verse of al-Mukhābbal. The commentary of « al-Ikhtiyārāyn » does not explain the situation and does not say anything about the fortress (al-ḥuṣayn) mentioned in the verse. The commentary of al-Hamdānī does not elucidate the situation.

What can be deduced is that the Banū Sa’d of Tamīm were the decisive factor at Hulubān, where the king Abraha decided about the movements of the troops (maḥāfil). They opened (or « folded up ») for the king a gate of a fortress, belonging to a mighty king and defended by well armed guards. This fortress must have hindered the advance of the troops of Abraha.

Of importance is the remark of al-Bakrī, that Khindif 42 were the followers of Abraha. Tradition is silent about the Northern tribes that aided Abraha : only the Southern Khulālī and Ash’ar are mentioned as his followers. It is only the Northern Humays b. Udd who are mentioned as having fought on the side of Abraha in his expedition against Mecca 43.

Other verses quoted by al-Hamdānī are 2 well-known verses of

42 See CASKEL, Die Bedeutung der Beduinen, p. 15; and comp. Naqā’id, index (Khindif); al-Balādhūrī, Aṣāb, I, 32-34; al-Muṣ’ab al-Zubayrī, Nasab Quraysh, p. 7-8; al ‘Ajjaj, Diwān, p. 60 (Ar. text; ed. Ahlwardt).
43 See Ibn al-Kalbī, Jamhara, ms. f. 115b; Ḥarb b. Humays b. Udd, they were with Abraha b. al-Ashram and perished on the « Day of the Elephant »; 60 of them were saved », etc.
Labid 44 and the often quoted verse of Qays b. al-Khaṭīm 45. They do not help us to know more about the expedition of Abraha.

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Lundin remarks that none of the scholars who published the inscription tried to identify the persons of Abū Jabr and Bishr b. Ḥiṣn (or Başhîr, or Başhâr; b. Ḥuṣayn or b. Ḥâṣṣân) 46. Lundin stresses that in the case of Abū Jabr only his «kunya» is known; his name is missing. He therefore attempted only to identify the person of Bishr b. Ḥiṣn.

The following lines can assist in identifying the person of Abū Jabr al-Kindî:

In the «Maqṣūra» of Ibn Durayd 47 a remarkable verse refers to Abū l-Jabr:

Wa-khamarat nafsa Abi l-Jabri l-jawā : ḥaṭṭā ḥawāhu ḥaṭṭu fi man qad ḥawā

And passion pervaded the soul of Abū 'l-Jabr: till death took possession of him among those whom he (i.e. death) took possession of.

The commentary supplies important details about Abū l-Jabr. He was a Kindî, from the kings of Kinda (i.e. from the royal family of Kinda - K). His «kunya» Abū 'l-Jabr was his name. He went to Kîrâ, asking for aid against his people. Kîrâ gave him a force of his mounted troops (al Asawîra). When Abū 'l-Jabr with his troop reached Kāṣîma — the troop saw the wilderness of the Arab land and decided to return. They put poison into the food of Abū 'l-Jabr. When he was overwhelmed with pain they asked him to write a letter to Kîrâ, stating that he gave them permission to return. He gave them the required letter. When they left he felt relief and journeyed


45 Diwân, p. 61 (ed. Samarrî'î - Matろうs); see Bresston, E.I. 5, op. cit., bibliography.

46 Lundin, op. cit., p. 76.

to al-Tā'if, to the Arab physician al-Ḥārith b. Kalada al-Thaqafi 48. He recovered from his illness due to the treatment of al-Ḥārith b. Kalada. He left for al-Yaman. But on his way back the illness returned and he died. He was mourned by his aunt (on his father's side), Kabsha, who composed the following dirge on his death.

Layta shi'ri wa-qad sha'artu abā l-Jabrī bi-mā qad laqīta fi 'l-tarḥālī
A-tamaṭṭat bika l-rikābū, abayta l-la'na, ḥattā ḥalalta ft laqṭālī
A-shujā'u fa-anta ashja'ū min laythin hamūsi 'l-surā, abī aṣḥālī
A-jawādū fa-anta ajwadū min saylin tadā'ā min musbilin ḥattālī 49
A-karīmu fa-anta akramu man ḥammat ḥāṣānun wa-man māshā fi 'l-ni'ālī
Anta khayrun min 'Āmirin wa-bni Waqqāsīn wa-man jammatū li-yama 'l-mihālī
Anta khayrun min alfi alfin min al-qara
mi 'idhā kunta ft wujūhī l-rījali

Ibn Durayd in his «Ishtiqai» 50 and Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi in his «Iqd» 51 mention that Kisra gave Abū l-Jabr as gift Sumayya, a girl from Zardaward 52. Abū l-Jabr cured by al-Ḥārith b. Kalada gratefully gave him Sumayya as a gift 53.

The story of Abū l-Jabr as given in the commentary of the «Maqṣūra» is recorded by Ibn Khalikān 54. Ibn Khalikān quotes the verse of Ibn Durayd and the narrative about Sumayya. The record of Ibn Khalikān contains, however, a detail of great importance: two versions of the name of Abū l-Jabr. According to version (1) his name was Yazid b. Shurahil al-Kindi; according to version (2) his name was Abū l-Jabr b. 'Amr.

48 See about him Ibn Ḥazm, Jamharat ansāb al-'Arab, p. 256; Ibn Ḥajar, al-Idāba, no 1472; al-Balādhuri, Ansāb, ms. f. 116a; Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, al-Istī'a, pp. 109, 304.
49 Added from the ed. Cairo, 1324 AH, p. 82.
52 Comp. Yāqūt, al-Buldān, s.v. Zandawār: it was al-Nushjānī who was cured by al-Ḥārith b. Kalada and gave him as gift Sumayya, the mother of Ziyād b. Sufyān (or b. 'Abīhī, or b. 'Ubayd, or b. Sufyān).
53 But see contradictory traditions: al-Balādhuri's Ansāb, I, 489 and Ibn Ḥajar, al-Idāba, VIII, 119 (no 611 - women).
Examining these narratives in the light of the two versions about Kabsha as recorded in the MS. of al-Baladhuri, one may assume that Abū Jabr of the inscription is identical with Abū 'l-Jabr (or Abū-Jabr) of the traditions quoted above and that he was from the branch of Āl al-Jaun.

Nothing could be found about the commander of the troop of Sa'd, Bishr (or Bashir, or Bashshār) b. Ḥiṣn (or Ḥuṣayn). The suggestion of Lundin that he might have been a prince of Kinda can hardly be accepted. There is evidence that the reading « Ḥiṣn » in the text of Ibn Khaldūn is merely a clerical error (al-Baladhuri Ansāb, MS. f. 996b.) It may be supposed that as a commander of a Khindif troop — and Khindif were the supporters of Abraha at Ḥulubān — a chief from among them would have been nominated. Were the Sa'd of the inscription a southern tribe — as assumed by Lundin — the appointment of a Kinda chief would have been plausible. It may be pointed out that Bishr and Ḥuṣayn are names frequently occurring in North-Arabian genealogies. The silence about the leader of the Sa'd in the battle of Ḥulubān can be explained by the fact that nobody of the Sa'd was interested to recall the deeds of the ancestors, who had served the cause of Abraha and participated in the attack led against the ‘Āmir b. Sa'ṣa'a and apparently intended against Mecca.

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55 See al-Baladhuri, Ansāb, Ms. f. 985b, 996b.
57 LUNDIN, op. cît., p. 76, n. 64-65.