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, 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 Ishaq’s Ta’rikh al-Khulafa’. 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 Ishaq, by the dying 'Umar to 'Amr b. al-'As 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: "وَلَوْلَا نَظُّمَتْ بِمَعَاوِيَةْ مَا نَظْمَهُ فِيَّ بَثْرِهِ طَيْبَةً "and had you not coveted it for Mu’awiyah it would not have been coveted by anyone who was set free [after the victory of Mecca]". She comments:

So far no direct early parallel text has come to light in support of this teamwork between ‘Amr b. al-‘As and Mu’awiyah b. Abi Sufyān in reference to the caliphate at this early date. But confirmation of ‘Umar’s concern about Mu’awiyah’s ambitions as well as about those of ‘Abdallah b. Abi Rabī’ah are reflected in Isābah, ii, 745 in a passage that gives no indication of its earlier sources. Mu’awiyah’s caliphal ambitions, according to Mu’awiyah himself, are said to date back to a conversation between him and Muhammad, 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; Nawawi, p. 565; Isābah, iii, 887.

1 Vol. 1, Historical Texts (Chicago, 1957).
2 P. 85, verso ll. 1-2.
For the crucial word read by Abbott *sami‘ta* Dietrich proposes in his corrections *sana‘ta*; this would not affect Professor Abbott’s proposition about the “team-work between ‘Amr b. al-‘As and Mu‘awiyah”. The correct reading is, however, *sana‘tu*:

والولا ما صمت بعاوية ما طمع فيها طلیق

which means: “were it not for what I did for Mu‘awiyah, not one of the *tulaqt* 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-Baladhuri’s *Ansāb*, v, 17 (as quoted by Abbott) and in *Ansāb*, MS. 860b; in both cases it is reported on the authority of al-Waqidl. The second statement, with which we are now dealing, is elucidated by al-Baladhuri in a significant report in *Ansāb*, MS. 860b:

 Muḥ. b. Sa‘d; al-Waqidি; Kathīr b. Zaid; al-Muṭṭalib b. ‘Abdallah. ‘Umar said: “This affair [i.e. the Caliphate] is not fit for the *tulaqt* nor the sons of the *tulaqt*. Had I foreseen [the course of] my affair as I do now that I see the consequences of it, Yazīd b. Abī Sufyān and Mu‘awiyah 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‘awiyah 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 *tulaqt* of the type of Mu‘awiyah and ‘Abdallah b. Abī Rabī‘ah: they are dangerous for orthodox Islam; they have grown so

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3 I could not find the *imād* “traced back again to ‘Amr b. Maimūn” (Abbott, op. cit. p. 81, l. 1) in the work of al-Baladhuri.
4 See *Tabālīb al-Tabālīb*, VIII, 414; he was the transmitter of al-Muṭṭalib b. ‘Abdallah b. al-Ḥanṭab.
5 See *Iṣbaḥ*, no. 467 (s.v. ‘Abdallah b. al-Ḥanṭab) and no. 8021 (s.v. al-Muṭṭalib b. al-Ḥanṭab); and see *L’A*. s.v. *āmīb*; *Tabālīb*, x, 178; *Diwan* al-*Farsdag*, p. 92, ed. al-Ṣā’īlī.

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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 Isābab, 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:

And it is said that 'Umar told the men of the Shūrā: “Do not disagree among yourselves, for if you disagree Mu'awiyah 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”, f. 125 a, under the following isnad: Ibn Sa‘d>Muḥ. b. 'Umar (i.e. al-Waqidī)>Kāthīr b. Zaid>Abdallah b. al-Ḥanṭab>'Umar. This is exactly the same isnad as given by al-Baladhūri for 'Umar’s warning quoted above (p. 321) from the Ansāb, MS. 860b.

Another such warning is included in the report of Sufyān b. 'Uyyayna2 told on the authority of Abū Hārūn (i.e. Maṣ'ūd b. al-Ḥakam al-Madani).3 Here 'Umar warns the men of the Shūrā not to disagree among themselves lest Mu‘awiyyah seize power [i.e. the Caliphate] for himself (yastabīdubu dina'qum).

In a remarkable tradition told on the authority of Ḥabīb b. Abī Thābit (see below, p. 326, n. 1) ‘All 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-Aswād b. Yazīd6 and 'A'īsha. He asked 'A'īsha: “Do you not wonder how a man from among the fulāqat can contend for the Caliphate against the Companions of the Prophet?” 'A'īsha answered: “Why do you wonder at it? It is the power (sultan) of Allah, He

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1 This article was copied for the late Dr Schloessinger from the Damascus MS.
2 See al-Khatib’s Ta’rīkh Baghdād, IX, 174.
3 See Tabādīb al-Tabādīb, x, 116.
5 A-Lālākhuri, Ansāb, MS. 158a.
6 Isḥāb, I, 108.
grants it to the pious and the wicked; Fir'aun ruled Egypt for 400 years."

Abbot remarks that "Mu'awiyah's caliphal ambitions, according to Mu'awiyah himself, are said to date back to a conversation between him and Muhammad" (see above, p. 320). This tradition cannot serve, however, to establish the date at which Mu'awiyah actually began planning to win the Caliphate, since traditions about the Prophet foretelling the rule of Mu'awiyah, exhortations of the Prophet on behalf of Mu'awiyah, and the enumeration of his virtues by the Prophet, are fabrications of Umayyad propaganda. Traditions of this kind are found in al-Baladhuri's *Ansāb* and in Ibn 'Asākir's *Ta'rīkh*. There is a curious tradition, breathing the spirit of the Jāhiliyya, in which the Prophet is said to have given Mu'awiyah an arrow with which he would meet him in Paradise. Another specimen of transparent Umayyad fabrication is given in al-Baladhuri's *Ansāb*, MS. 3744, on the authority of Abū Hurayra: Gabriel told the Prophet: "God entrusted the revelation to me, to you and to Mu'awiyah."

In conclusion it may be said that, if correctly interpreted, the papyrus contains no evidence of collaboration between Mu'awiyah and 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ. The passage discussed stresses the background of the *furaqā* 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, an anti-Umayyad tendency.

1 Ibn 'Asākir, *op. cit.* f. 130a; the tradition about the *furaqā* mentioned by Abbott, *op. cit.* p. 85, l. 23, is told by Ibn Abzi (sic, not Ibn Abzi)—see *Tabākh al-Tabākh*, vi, 132 note 2 infra; some anti-Umayyad traditions are recorded in al-Suyūṭī's *al-Durr al-manṭıkīb*, iv, 191.


3 *Op. cit.* chapter "Mu'awiyah".


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. Abī Rabī'ah was governor, not of Najd (p. 85, l. 20), but of Ḥanād in Yemen; cf. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *al-Iṣlaḥ*, no. 1515; al-Baladhuri, *Ansāb*, MS. 804a. Verso l. 4: read *قَالُوا فَلَا أَشْتُ"* instead of *فَكَانُوا فَلَا أَشْتُ"*. Verso l. 5 is read *قَالُوا فَلَا أَشْتُ"* and translated: "They asked: 'What is it you wish [to say]'?" Dietrich took *fa-ammā* to be a slip of the scribe and proposed *fa-mā* (*Der Islam*, 1939, p. 201). The correct reading is, however, *قَالُوا فَلَا أَشْتُ"*: "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:

لعVOثمحل لله صلّم بسمالله وسعما ل رسول الله خير بيني

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 ل before ل رسول الله in l. 11.

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

"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] 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-Mawāhid.

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.” 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.”

These remarks are correct as far as Sunni sources are concerned. This account, however, seems to be of Shi‘ite character, and is in fact found in the Amdīli of al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (died 413 A.H.).

1 Der Islam (1919), p. 205.
2 mis was dropped; other such omissions are discussed by Abbott, p. 83 infra.
3 Vol. II, 208; for various other versions see: Ibn Kathīr, Tafsīr, iv, 186; also al-Suyūṭī, Ta’rīkh al-Khilafah, p. 152.
5 Ibid. p. 96.
6 Ed. Najaf 1367 A.H., p. 66.

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and copied in the Bihar al-Anwar. The report in the Amali reads as follows:

قال أبو الحسن علي بن يلال الميالي قال حدثنا على بن عبد الله
العماني قال حدثنا ابن مهرب بن محمد التقي قال حدثنا يوسف بن سعيد الأحصى
قال حدثنا عبد الله بن موسى الحبشي عن كلب عن حبيب بن إبراهيم قال:
لما حضر القوم الدوام للشورى جاء المقداد بن الأسود الكنيدي رحمه الله فقال:
أدخلوني معكم فإن لله عدى نصحا ولي يكم خبر. قالوا. فقال أدخلوا رأس
واشموا مني. قالوا عليه ذلك فقال أسا إذا أيتم فلا تابعوا بل لا يشهد
بدرًا ولم يبايع يعمر الرضوان وإنهم يوم أحد ويوم النبي الجمان. فقال عثمان
أما والله لننذروا نأمركم إلى ربي الأول فما نزل بالقداس السموت فقال:
أخبروا عثمان أن رضت إلى ربي الأول والآخر. فلما بلغ عثمان نيته جاء حتى
وقف على توجهه فقال: رحمك الله إن كنت وان كنت يني عليه خيرا. قال
له الزبير: لآسفتك بعد الموت تذنبي ففي حياتي ما زدتني زيدي. قال:
يا زبير أن تربى احتب أن يموت مثل هذا من أصحاب محمد صلى الله عليه
وال وسلم.

[Imad] . . . Habib b. Abi Thabbit said: When the people assembled in the
court to attend the Shura, al-Miqdad b. al-Aswad al-Kindi 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
Ridwan oath of allegiance, who was put to flight at the battle of Uhud
and at the battle when the two armies met.” Whereupon Uthman said:
“Should I become ruler [i.e. caliph] I will return you to your first
master.” When death came upon al-Miqdad he said: “Inform Uthman
that I am going to be returned to my first and last Master.” When
Uthman 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 [Uthman]:

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 Abi b. al-Abbas (see Dihwân, ed. Husayn
Naşṣar, p. 48).
3 He was a half of the Banû Zuhra; see Istabâb, no. 8179.
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‘Uthmān then said: “O Zubayr, do you think that I would want such a Companion of Muhammad—may Allah bless him and give him peace—to die while wroth with me?”

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

There is no doubt that the account in Ibn Ishaq’s work is of Shi‘ite character. It is enough to note that one of the transmitters of the account, ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Mūsā al-‘Absi was a notorious inventor of Shi‘ite traditions.1 Gibb rightly classifies Ibn Ishaq’s account as Shi‘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-‘Utbayt 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 Ishaq favoured the Shi‘ite religio-political party”.4 On the contrary, the text preserved in the papyrus clearly shows his Shi‘ite inclinations.5

1 See Tabdhīb al-Tabdhīb, vii, 50–3.
2 J.N.E.S. xvii, 224.
5 In ll. 11–12 of the verso the correct reading is neither sākinatan nor sākitatan as suggested by Abbott, nor tuwākinub as suggested by Dietrich, but šākiyatam; in fact the other sources have mardatam, or wuj’atam (in al-Baihaqī, al-Sunan al-Kubrā, vi, 293), which are synonyms of šākiyatam.