

CHAPTER THREE

ABŪ MUSLIM AL-KHURĀSĀNĪ—THE HIJACKING OF THE KHURĀSĀN CHAPTER OF THE ORGANIZATION

I. *Roots?*

“As for his lineage, it has been subject to much disagreement, and it is futile to [try to] examine it exhaustively,” said Ibn al-Ṭīqīqā.¹ Was Abū Muslim a slave,² a free man,³ a servant,⁴ a *dihqān*,⁵ an Arab,⁶ a Persian,⁷ from Iṣfahān,⁸ from Khurāsān,⁹ Salm ibn ‘Uthmān, Ibrāhīm ibn Khatkān,¹⁰ the descendant of the great Persian wazīr Buzurgmihr,¹¹ the son of the disowned illegitimate Salīṭ ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-‘Abbās,¹² a

¹ Ibn al-Ṭīqīqā, p. 139.

² *Akhbār*, pp. 260, 263, 265, 266, 268; Ṭabarī, II: pp. 1726, 1769; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, pp. 119-20; Dīnawarī, pp. 338, 340; Ibn A‘tham, VIII: p. 154; Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, IV: p. 477; Ibn al-Athīr, IV: pp. 253-4; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, VI: p. 51; Ibn al-Ṭīqīqā, p. 139.

³ *Akhbār*, pp. 263, 265; Ṭabarī, II: pp. 1769, 1960; Azdī, p. 53; Dīnawarī, pp. 339-40; Ibn A‘tham, VIII: p. 154; Ibn al-Ṭīqīqā, p. 139; Ibn al-Athīr, IV: p. 252.

⁴ *Akhbār*, pp. 247, 253, 254, 255, 258, 260, 263, 265; Ṭabarī, II: p. 1960; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, pp. 84, 119, 120; Azdī, p. 50; Ya‘qūbī, *Ta‘rīkh*, II: p. 327; Mas‘ūdī, IV: p. 78; Ibn A‘tham, VIII: p. 154; Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, IV: p. 477; Ibn al-Athīr, IV: p. 252; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, VI: p. 52.

⁵ *Akhbār*, p. 225; cf. Ibn Khallikān, III: p. 145; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, IV: p. 49.

⁶ *Akhbār*, pp. 256, 263-4, 265; Ibn Qutaybah, *Ma‘ārif*, p. 420; Mas‘ūdī, IV: p. 78; Ibn Khallikān, III: p. 155.

⁷ *Akhbār*, pp. 257-8, 263, 265; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, p. 120; Baghdādī, *Ta‘rīkh Baghdād*, X: p. 207; Ibn al-Athīr, IV: p. 252; Ibn Khallikān, III: pp. 145, 155; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, VI: p. 52; Ibn al-Ṭīqīqā, p. 139.

⁸ *Akhbār*, pp. 225, 253, 257-8, 263, 265; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, pp. 118, 120; Ibn Qutaybah, *Ma‘ārif*, p. 420; Baghdādī, *Ta‘rīkh Baghdād*, X: p. 207; Ibn al-Athīr, IV: p. 252; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, VI: pp. 49, 52; Ibn Khallikān, III: pp. 145, 149; Ibn al-Ṭīqīqā, p. 139.

⁹ *Akhbār*, p. 256; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, p. 119; Ibn Qutaybah, *Ma‘ārif*, p. 420; Ibn A‘tham, p. 154; Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, IV: p. 477; Ibn Khallikān, III: p. 145 (from Mākhawān of Marw).

¹⁰ Salm ibn ‘Uthmān: *Akhbār*, p. 258; Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Uthmān, and other variations on Ibrāhīm ibn Khatkān, ibn Ḥayyakān, Abū Ishāq, or nicknamed Ḥayyakān: *Akhbār*, pp. 254, 255, 265, 266; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, pp. 85, 118, 120; Ya‘qūbī, *Ta‘rīkh*, II: p. 327; Baghdādī, *Ta‘rīkh Baghdād*, X: p. 207; Ibn Khallikān, III: p. 145; Ibn al-Athīr, IV: p. 252; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, VI: p. 52.

¹¹ Ibn al-Athīr, IV: p. 252; Baghdādī, *Ta‘rīkh Baghdād*, X: p. 207; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, VI: p. 52; Ibn Khallikān, III: p. 145; Ibn al-Ṭīqīqā, p. 139.

¹² *Akhbār*, p. 256; Ṭabarī, III: p. 114; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, pp. 79, 205; Azdī, p. 163; Ya‘qūbī, *Ta‘rīkh*, II: p. 367; Ibn Qutaybah, *Ma‘ārif*, p. 420; Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharah*, p. 20; Ibn al-Athīr, IV: p. 253; Ibn Khallikān, III: p. 154; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, VI: p. 66; Ibn

cross of some matchable elements of the above, or something else?¹³ It may be assumed that Abū Muslim himself may have been behind much of the mystification and the favorable elements, that the later ‘Abbāsīd propaganda only added, to the thickly opaque enigma, the degrading elements, and that the Persian sentiment turned it into mythology. Scores of old¹⁴ and modern¹⁵ scholars have approached the issue with skepticism or resignation.

With the discovery and subsequent publication of *Akhbār*, a new wealth of information, not any less contradictory, became available. Scholars writing after that, notably Omar, Daniel, Sharon, and Lassner, revisited the question of Abū Muslim’s origins, reviewing the new and the old material. With the exception of Daniel, who still saw “some evidence for each one of [the contradictory] views,” and conceded the “futility of trying to discover the truth about Abū Muslim,”¹⁶ each of the other three scholars tried to reconstruct a composite portrait. The

al-Ṭīqīqā, p. 139; For Salīṭ’s episode, see: *Akhbār*, pp. 149-50; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, pp. 76-9; Ibn Hazm, *Jamharah*, pp. 19-20; Ibn al-Ṭīqīqā, pp. 139-40.

¹³ A Kurd: *Akhbār*, p. 256; Ibn Khallikān, III: p. 155; Ibn Qutaybah, *Ma’ārif*, p. 420; A Yamanite Arab of Murād of Madhḥij, or generally of Madhḥij: *Akhbār*, pp. 263-5; a *mawlā*: *Akhbār*, p. 257; Ṭabarī, II: p. 1916; a slave from Harāt or Būshanj: Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, p. 119; Ibn al-Athīr, IV: p. 254; a native of Khuṭarniyah: Ṭabarī, II: p. 1960; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, p. 120; Mas’ūdī, IV: p. 78. Khuṭarniyah, in rural (*sawād*) Kūfah, was also the place where al-Mukhtār al-Thaqafī owned an estate called Liqfā, Ṭabarī, II: p. 520. Wellhausen made an interesting linkage from the coincidence (p.506). Mother, a slave girl, named Washīkah: Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, pp. 120, 185; Dīnawarī, p.339; Father, from Bābil or Khuṭarniyah, named Zādhān ibn Bindād Hurmuz, or a certain ‘Uthmān, descendant of Khosrau himself: Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, p. 120; A singular account in Dīnawarī, father: ‘Umayr ibn Buṭayn al-‘Ijlī, pp. 339, 340; etc.

¹⁴ Most sources expressed their resignation, either explicitly such as Ibn al-Ṭīqīqā, or by simply reviewing all or most contradictory accounts without expressing a preference, such as *Akhbār*. No one source vouches for any specific accounts. The following are further sources inspected but not analyzed in the preceding manner: Ibn Khaldūn, III: p. 217; Maqdisī, VI: pp. 92-3; Ibn Kathīr, X: p. 69; *Uyūn*, pp. 182-3; Ibn Taghribirdī, I: pp. 335-6.

¹⁵ Almost all modern scholars concede the difficulty, but some do specify certain likelihoods, which are, either compatible with their analysis of the overall situation, or on which the majority of traditions concur. Wellhausen is firm on a non-Arab origin; in one instance he considers Abū Muslim to have been a *mawlā* of Khuṭarniyah; in another, he leaves open the possibilities: either a *mawlā* or a slave (pp. 505-6, 518-9). Moscati says: ‘... probably a slave of Persian origin.’ Claude Cahen is resigned to the fact that Abū Muslim ‘remains for us what he was in his own time, an enigma’ (cf. Omar, *‘Abbāsīd Caliphate*, p. 76). Frye realizes that ‘the origin of Abū Muslim cannot definitely be determined from Islamic sources,’ but he asserts that it is ‘immaterial’ (pp. 28-38, esp. p. 28). The question does not detain Dennett, who accepts Ṭabarī’s account (II: p. 1769) that ‘Abū Muslim was purchased and given his freedom’ (*Marwān*, p. 282). Lewis realizes the sources disagreements, but erroneously asserts that they ‘agree that he was a Persian and a freedman of Ibrāhīm’ (*‘Abbāsīds*, p. 15). Shaban reiterates Frye’s position (*‘Abbāsīd Revolution*, p. 153).

¹⁶ Daniel, *Khurasan*, p. 101.

underlying assumption, of course, is that the truth does subside somewhere in the heap of contradictions, and that it can be found by synthesizing the various elements, as in the case of Omar and Sharon, or by an extensive and elaborate analysis culminating in highly hypothetical scenarios, as in the case of Lassner.

Omar concludes that “Abū Muslim was, therefore, a Persian *mawla* who spent his youth mostly at Kūfah ...”¹⁷ Sharon follows in his footsteps and reaches almost the same conclusions.¹⁸

Lassner’s more elaborate efforts yield similar but more specific results, which, though more thoroughly argued, are no more convincing. On whether Abū Muslim was a slave or a freeman, Lassner leads the reader, through a legal argument, to the conclusion that “Abū Muslim could not have been legally acquired by the ‘Ijlīs, nor could he have been resold ...,” and that “there is no reason to doubt that [he] served the ‘Ijlīs and then the ‘Abbāsīd revolutionaries in al-Kūfah, and that he was later sent personally to serve the *Imām* as his client.”¹⁹ Was he the son of Salīṭ? No, nor did he claim to be, Lassner contends; it was al-Manṣūr who faked the whole episode in order to justify the execution of the loyal *mawla* of the family.²⁰ Abū Muslim was neither a noble Persian, nor an Iraqī, nor a Khurāsānite, but a native of Iṣfahān, asserts Lassner.²¹

The problem with the assumption that the truth can be inferred is that its advocates do concur with all other scholars on the obvious ‘article of faith’—that the ambiguity was intentional. If so, it must follow that the inference cannot be made by tracing what may appear to be traceable. Nor, given the extreme contradictions, can a reconciliation of any elements be hoped to produce a synthesis, except by arbitrarily dismissing some traditions as well as the inconvenient variations of the accepted traditions. Reconciliation was arbitrarily attempted by Omar and Sharon. The laborious Lassner is caught in his own circular argument. He admits that “there is suspicion that much of this obfuscation is intentional,”²² and then he looks for the truth in ‘claims’ which he requires to be “articulated in convincing detail [to seem] proof enough ...”²³ He failed to see that, under the historiographical

¹⁷ Omar, *‘Abbāsīd Caliphate*, pp. 80, 76 ff.

¹⁸ Sharon, *Black Banners*, pp. 203-8, esp. 206.

¹⁹ Lassner, *Revolution*, pp. 106, 100-07.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 107-17, esp. 110-11; also, idem, ‘Son of Salīṭ.’

²¹ Lassner, *Revolution*, pp. 117-26, esp. 118, 121, 125, 126; also, Lassner, ‘Secret agent.’

²² Lassner, *Shaping*, p. 61; cf. Lassner, *Revolution*, p. 100.

²³ Lassner, *Revolution*, p. 123.

circumstances which he himself admits, any such ‘claim’ would have been ‘articulated in convincing detail’ only if its sole purpose was to mislead, not to make the obliterated tracks traceable. If at all seekable, one may be better off seeking the ‘truth’ in the odd accounts which may, just may, have escaped the multiple operations by the two sets of deft hands, and by popular adulation.

It is not only futile to try to sort out the mess; it is also impossible to make it less opaque. Where the issue is strictly Abū Muslim’s real roots, we are as resigned as Ibn al-Ṭiqṭiqā was.

The case being so, we are reduced to explaining Abū Muslim’s conduct by Abū Muslim’s conduct. Where a linkage to the roots is absolutely necessary in order to explain the psychology of a specific situation, we are reduced to conjectures and plausibilities. Therefore, what matters in this context is how Abū Muslim conducted himself, and how he presented himself. How he conducted himself is the subject of some substantial parts of this study. The way he presented himself is best illustrated by what he himself said, according to *Akhbār*, to Naṣr ibn Sayyār’s messengers, who were sent to find out who he was:

Aslam ibn Ṣubayḥ claimed that they asked him that day: ‘Where are you from?’ He said: ‘I am a man from the *muslimūn*; I do not affiliate myself to a tribe to the exclusion of another; my father perished in a country not his own; I have been a recipient of favors from more than one person, [favors] which have been subject to various gossip; but, Islam is my lineage, to the family of Muḥammad is my support, and I follow a correct course of action with those I am with.’²⁴

The perfect mystery was bolstered by its own subject; but it was not a mystery without some framing features. Belonging to the religion of the community is the defining property of identity, not a tribal affiliation, not a known father, not even a recent social background lit by his contemporaries’ cognizance of it, i.e., not any of the defining characteristics encoded in the imperial structure of reference within the Establishment.²⁵ “Who are you?” asked Naṣr’s messengers, “I am ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muslim,” he answered.²⁶ Shaban is correct in considering this name to have been the “key to [an] image,” and as “the best possible slogan for the Revolution ...;”²⁷ but he is not as correct in his attending historical analysis. What the full assumed name (Abū

²⁴ *Akhbār*, p. 283.

²⁵ Such characteristics were trivialized by Abū Muslim; in another account, he said: ‘to know about my conduct is more beneficial for you than knowing about my lineage (*Khbarī khayr laka min nasabī*).’ Ṭabarī, II: p. 1965; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf III*, p. 132.

²⁶ *Akhbār*, p. 282, in another variation of the same account.

²⁷ Shaban, *Abbāsid Revolution*, p. 154.

Muslim ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muslim al-Khurāsānī) actually and brilliantly depicted was, at once: the egalitarian Revolutionary ideal, but also the characteristic profile of the Iranian convert *par excellence*²⁸—be he from Mākhwān, Iṣfahān, or rural Kūfah; free, manumitted or slave; ‘Someone’ ibn ‘Uthmān ibn Yasār, or ‘Someone’ ibn Zādhān ibn Bindād Hurmuz.

It must, however, be stressed that the foregoing argument for abstention is applicable only to the issue of Abū Muslim’s roots. Once the discussion approaches the semi-to-dimly lit skirts of his Kūfan experience, the historiographical rules must change.²⁹ In the accounts on Abū Muslim’s origins, some elements which bear on his Kūfan experience are more useful in illuminating a riddle pertaining to the future leader than in trying to resolve the mystery of the roots of the child. How was it possible for someone who ascended from nowhere to wrest control, so easily and quickly, of the fruit for which experienced and intelligent men had toiled for three decades? Or, did Abū Muslim ascend from nowhere? Those elements do offer some clues to this riddle. When consolidated and juxtaposed, together with some odd or isolated accounts,³⁰ these clues contribute to a scenario more credible than any which may emerge from the collectivity of the more uniform accounts. It must be admitted, however, that veracity is not the target; it is not attainable. The target is plausibility, based on the few available historiographical building blocks. Quite a few aspects of the ‘plot’ would inevitably be conjectural. This may be risky; but, since there is no better recourse, it may be viewed as a more advanced ‘product’ than an incredible ‘scenario’, whose virtue lies merely in its being built upon the heap of the most repeated accounts.

II. *The Kūfan Sojourn/The ‘Ijlite Connection—What Significance?*

Contradictions between divergent accounts (and variations within the same account) notwithstanding, the threads of the intricate web intersect

²⁸ For conversion and the converts, see below, chapters six and eight.

²⁹ Part of the problem with Omar, Sharon, and Lassner, is that they did not draw this line. They apparently extended the historiographical status, which may apply to the relatively visible Kūfah situation, to cover the hopelessly dark ‘roots’. Moreover, they did so without contributing much to a convincing, or plausible, resolution of the more pertinent riddle of Abū Muslim’s future leadership.

³⁰ In the specific case of Abū Muslim, as well as in any other case where massive dysinformation permeates the sources, the odd and isolated reports must be viewed favorably, though with caution.

at two points: Abū Muslim's 'Ijlite connection,³¹ and his *sarrājūn* (saddle-makers) connection.³² The two connections are not contradictory. Only one account³³ has it that Abū Muslim went, from his childhood up to his liaison with the 'Abbāsīd house, only through the tutelage of 'Isā ibn Ibrāhīm al-Sarrāj (no.29). Other accounts depict the *sarrājūn* connection as subsequent and parallel to the 'Ijlite.

The Banū 'Ijl are an especially interesting tribe. Genealogical descendants of the Banū Lujaym of Bakr ibn Wā'il, they were the sister tribe of the famous Banū Ḥanīfah ibn Lujaym³⁴ of Yamāmāh, in the east of the Peninsula. The Banū Ḥanīfah had been the most adamant opponents of Islam, of Quraysh, and of the Ḥijāz, until they were defeated in the apostasy wars. 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭalīb's descendants from the Ḥanafīyyah woman were connected to some of the most politically consequential movements in Umayyad and early 'Abbāsīd history – to Kaysāniyyah, to Irjā', and to the genesis of the Organization. This probably has nothing more than a symbolic signification.

But the Banū 'Ijl themselves had their own mixed history in pre-Islam and during the early Arab conquests. Goldziher asserts that they had "completely passed into the Persian nationality."³⁵ They were, nevertheless, the acclaimed Arab heroes of the battle of Dhū Qār against the Persians.³⁶ But again, some of them in Baḥrayn did merge with Persian immigrants from Iṣṭakhr.³⁷ Daniel's cautionary note, that "the supposed Persophile tendencies of the 'Ijl ... [have] probably been a bit over-emphasized,"³⁸ may have some merit. Automatic extension of pre-Islamic alliances to the late Umayyad period is not always a safe course.

³¹ *Akhbār*, pp. 249, 253, 255, 257-67; Ṭabarī, II: pp. 1726-7, 1969, 1960; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, pp. 118-9, 120; Azdī, p. 50; Ibn Qutaybah, *Ma'ārif*, p. 420; Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, II: p. 327; Dīnawarī, pp. 338-40; Mas'ūdī, IV: p. 78; Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, IV: p. 477; Ibn A'tham, VIII: p. 154; Ibn al-Athīr, IV: pp. 252-3; Ibn Khallikān, III: pp. 145-6; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, VI: pp. 49, 51, 52.

³² *Akhbār*, pp. 253-5, 260, 266; Ṭabarī, II: pp. 1726-7; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, pp. 84-5, 119-20; Azdī, p. 50; Baghdādī, *Ta'rikh Baghdād*, X: p. 207; Ibn A'tham, VIII: p. 154; Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, IV: p. 477; Ibn al-Athīr, IV: pp. 252-4; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, VI: pp. 51-2.

³³ *Akhbār*, p. 254; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, pp. 84-5; Baghdādī, *Ta'rikh Baghdād*, X: p. 207; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, VI: p. 52; Ibn al-Athīr, IV: p. 252.

³⁴ Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharah*, pp. 312-3.

³⁵ Goldziher, 'Islamisme,' pp. 1-29; quote from p. 23: 'les Banou 'Idjl, passa complètement à la nationalité persane,' in Watt's translation (*Formative*, p. 46).

³⁶ The story pervades the primary Arabic sources; see, e.g. Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharah*, p. 312; Ṭabarī, I: pp. 1028-37, and *passim*.

³⁷ Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, p. 100; Watt, *Formative*, pp. 46-7; Watt, 'Idjl,' Schleifer, 'Idjl.'

³⁸ Daniel, *Khurasan*, n.27, p. 119.

One noteworthy feature in a portrait of the Banū 'Ijl of the last two decades of the Umayyad era is that some of their number were implicated with the notorious *ghulāt* movements in Kūfah, notably al-Mughīriyyah and al-Manṣūriyyah, described as *Khannāqūn* (stranglers), and *Raddākhūn* (head-crackers).³⁹ Ibn Ḥazm describes the descendants of Iyās ibn Muḍārib al-'Ijlī as *ghālīyah Khannāqūn*.⁴⁰ Of course, it would also be wrong to establish this portrait as a stereotype of the tribe.

Our immediate concern is the house of Ma'qil the 'Ijlite, whose two sons, Idrīs and 'Isā (nos.27, 30), in addition to the *mawlā* of 'Ijl, 'Āṣim ibn Yūnus al-'Ijlī (no.12) were directly embroiled in the affairs of Abū Muslim and the Kūfan leadership of the Organization. The house of Ma'qil owned extensive estates in Iṣfahān and a mansion in Kūfah.⁴¹ They also apparently had business interests in the bazaar of the city, as Idrīs ibn Ma'qil is described to have been a *'aṭṭār* (druggist).⁴² But it seems that they had started from humbler origins, and that Idrīs himself was responsible for the acquired fortune of the family, by means not above suspicion.

Ibn Ḥazm neutrally states that Idrīs "was a druggist, then his descendants' position became lofty (*Kāna 'aṭṭāran thumma jallat ḥālu waladih*)."⁴³ Balādhurī is more detailed and specific:

Idrīs ... used to work in perfumes and milk sheep. He came to *al-jabal* [i.e., Jibāl province] with a number of his kin and dwelt in one of the villages of Hamadhān known as Mis. Then they became rich and acquired estates. Idrīs jumped a merchant to whom he owed money, and he strangled him. It is also said that he strangled him and took his money; so he was taken to Kūfah, where he was imprisoned during the governorship of Yūsuf ibn 'Umar.⁴⁴

Balādhurī's account is echoed in other sources; however, regardless of why the 'Ijlites were imprisoned,⁴⁵ more important is the picture that emerges of a clan of adventurous frontier pioneers, who lived a rather

³⁹ Watt, *Formative*, p. 47; Omar, *Abbāsīd Caliphate*, p. 78, n.134; Daniel, *Khurasan*, n.27, p. 119. On the *Ghulāt* and these two specific movements, and their founders, the 'Ijlites al-Mughīrah ibn Sa'īd and Abū Manṣūr al-'Ijlī, nicknamed al-Kisf, cf. Hodgson, 'Early Shī'a', pp. 1-13; Hodgson, 'Ghulāt', Macdonald; Madelung, 'Manṣūriyya,' idem, 'Mughīriyya,' Qāḍī, *Kaysāniyyah*, pp. 167, 221, 243-56, 262-4, and passim.

⁴⁰ Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharah*, p. 213.

⁴¹ For example, *Akhbār*, pp. 255, 264, 260.

⁴² Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, p. 385; Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharah*, p. 313.

⁴³ Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharah*, p. 313.

⁴⁴ Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, p. 385.

⁴⁵ It has also been reported that they were imprisoned for tax evasion, or other tax related offences (*Akhbār*, pp. 255, 259, 266; Ibn Khallikān, III: p. 146); or because they had been officials of the previous governor (Azdī, p. 50; Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, p. 327; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, VI: p. 52) or because they were Hashimite partisans (Dīnawarī, p. 339).

shadowy life in their remote abode, which they turned into a stronghold, and in which they cultivated suspicious connections that smack of a 'banditry' of sorts.

Merchants were robbed in a high-way brigandry on the estates of 'Īsā ibn Ma'qil, during Khālīd ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Qasrī's governorship of Iraq. Khālīd inquired about 'Īsā; he was told he bestows his care on the robbers, and that he is for them a sanctuary in which they take refuge.⁴⁶

Ibn Qutaybah introduces Idrīs as the one whose abode was the frontier of Iṣfahān, "*al-nāzil bi-ḥaddi Aṣbahān*."⁴⁷ The officials of the area wrote to the governor of Iraq, Yūsuf ibn 'Umar, with two complaints against 'Īsā: the first was that he evaded the tax; the second was that he lived on the frontiers ("*wa-anna-hu nāzil fī al-tukhūm*."⁴⁸ If it were simply for tax evasion, the local police ought to have been able to apprehend the culprit. But, in view of the stronghold status of his abode off the trodden roads, the sub-governor of Qirmāsīn, himself, had to make the arrest,⁴⁹ no doubt at the head of a sizable force. When the brothers were apprehended, they were not alone, but with a number of others from the Jibāl province, "*ma'a qawm ... min ahli al-jabal*."⁵⁰

These were not common criminals. Even if the reason for 'Āṣim's imprisonment was spilling blood ("*bi-dam*"), or some other scandalous deed ("*bi-sababīn min asbābi al-fasād*,"⁵¹ and even if Idrīs was apprehended because he strangled his creditor, their apparent affinity with the Kūfan leadership of the Organization precludes a simplistic judgment. Their possible ties to their urban 'Ījlite brethren, the 'stranglers' and the 'head-crackers' of Kūfah, may add to their portrait a socio-political and ideological dimension. Their connection to Abū Muslim corroborates the foregoing; and his connection to them gives rise to a most important question about the real links in Abū Muslim's life, between his enigmatic past and his future in the lime light of history.

All the threads within the traditions which connect Abū Muslim to the 'Ījlites lead to the prison in Kūfah;⁵² and there, despite their contradictions on almost every detail, they intersect at one point. Almost all of these accounts give the direct and crucial role of brokering the

⁴⁶ *Akhbār*, p. 253.

⁴⁷ Ibn Qutaybah, *Ma'ārif*, p. 420.

⁴⁸ *Akhbār*, p. 259.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Nor were the sons of Ma'qil the only 'Ījlites with this frontier mentality, their descendants and other kin displayed the same; cf. Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, pp. 386, 398.

⁵⁰ Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf III*, p. 119.

⁵¹ *Akhbār*, pp. 255, 259; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf III*, p. 119.

⁵² Except in Dīnawarī, where the prison is in the unlikely Wāsiṭ, p. 339. For the other traditions, see footnote no.31 above.

introduction of Abū Muslim to the high echelons of the Organization to ‘Āṣim ibn Yūnus al-‘Ijlī. ‘Āṣim emerges as the central figure in what, one may conjecture, appears to have been an orchestrated act to position Abū Muslim in a favorable spot and to ‘launch’ him straight into the beating heart of the Organization. Idrīs and ‘Īsā played auxiliary parts; and one gets the impression that they were little more than accessories necessary to provide the camouflage of social and political insignificance, accruing to Abū Muslim from allegations of lowly birth into a state of bondage on their estate.⁵³

Of ‘Āṣim we know very little outside this episode. His father was recruited by Bukayr ca. 124/741-742 in the context of these same events.⁵⁴ But, while the sources are not always clear on whether or when ‘Īsā and Idrīs became partisans,⁵⁵ only one account claims that ‘Āṣim was recruited in prison;⁵⁶ other accounts are emphatic on his long-standing partisanship, and some even depict him in an influential capacity.⁵⁷ And, while the imprisonment of ‘Īsā and Idrīs is attributed to a variety of reasons,⁵⁸ most accounts give a criminal reason for ‘Āṣim’s.⁵⁹ Probably more important is that, while ‘Īsā and Idrīs were relatively bound to their property and interests, ‘Āṣim may have been less bound and thus freer to roam the land.

This last feature bears a similarity to Abū Muslim’s unbound adulthood, and the similarity may permit us to wonder about a number of possibilities. But let us first turn to some significant questions about

⁵³ It was ‘Āṣim who told Bukayr about Abū Muslim, so Bukayr recruited him (*Akhbār*, p. 265). Or, alternatively, he brokered the deal of Abū Muslim’s sale, suggesting it to Idrīs, and pleading with Abū Salamah to make the purchase (*Akhbār*, p. 266). Alternatively, when Abū Salamah wanted to verify the legality of the deal, he turned to ‘Āṣim; ‘Āṣim inquired and confirmed the slave status of Abū Muslim, which verified the legality of the deal (*Akhbār*, p. 263). The suspicion that the deal may have been orchestrated becomes paramount when correlated with the claim that Abū Muslim admitted his slavery (*Akhbār*, p. 263). In a parallel tradition, the three or four *naqībs*, who would provide the link to Makkah and the Hāshimite congregation, met Abū Muslim when they visited ‘Āṣim in the prison. ‘Īsā and Idrīs were there merely as Abū Muslim’s masters; clearly so in Ṭabarī, II: p. 1726; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, p. 119; Azdī, p. 50; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, VI: p. 52. The distinction in Organizational status between the ‘Ijlites is not made in Ya‘qūbī, *Ta‘rīkh*, II: p. 327; Ibn Khallikān, III: p. 146.

⁵⁴ Ṭabarī, II: p. 1726; cf. Dhahabī, *Siyar*, VI: p. 51.

⁵⁵ According to Dīnawarī, p. 339, they had been devout partisans. Ṭabarī reports that Bukayr recruited them in prison, in 124/741-742, II: p. 1726; Balādhurī and *Akhbār* do not address the issue.

⁵⁶ According to *Akhbār*, p. 259, Ḥaṣ al-Asīr recruited ‘Āṣim in prison.

⁵⁷ See footnote no.53 above.

⁵⁸ See footnote no.45 above.

⁵⁹ *Akhbār*, pp. 255, 259; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, p. 119; Ibn Khallikān, III: p. 146.

Abū Muslim's adulthood, i.e., between his mysterious birth and his sudden 'stardom' in Kūfah:

- (1) If he came to 'Ijlite custody as a child, in bondage or otherwise, did he stay with them on their secluded estate right up to his *rendezvous* with history in the prison of Kūfah? Or,
- (2) did he leave them for some time, cultivate himself in the world, and come back when his venture turned sour or fruitless? Or,
- (3) did he make his very first contact with them when he was already a hardened man of the world—perhaps a defeated and bitter, but adamant, unrelenting and trained revolutionary, or perhaps, Revolutionary from the rank and file seeking a conduit to the top circles?

The first question cannot be entertained. A man as politically cultivated and as mutinous as Abū Muslim could not have spent his entire life, prior to a stunning rise in the world, in seclusion and bondage. Even if he was born to bondage, he must have somehow attained a degree of mobility and exposure. Operatively, from a political and historical point of view, such mobility and exposure would have put him in situations congruent with circumstances naturally resulting from positive answers to the second and third questions. The psychology and the drama would, of course, be interestingly different.

A major hypothesis here is that Abū Muslim was geographically mobile. The hypothesis does rest on grounds of plausibility, supported by scant, but strong indications in the source material. The tradition which excludes an 'Ijlite connection, by putting Abū Muslim in the exclusive custody of 'Īsā ibn Ibrāhīm al-Sarrāj,⁶⁰ does provide for geographical mobility. According to a composite of the variations of this tradition, al-Sarrāj took custody of the child when he was seven years of age. He used to roam the land with his merchandise, his territory being Iṣfahān, Jibāl, Raqqah, Naṣībīn, Āmid; i.e., not Khurāsān and the East. Abū Muslim is, apparently, supposed to have been always with him. He, reportedly, met Muḥammad ibn 'Alī when he was twenty years old or younger, in the company of al-Sarrāj, and he was still under one or the other of his earlier names. In one variation of the tradition, ascribed to a descendant (?) of Abū Muslim's,⁶¹ the newly appointed leader of the Organization descended on Khurāsān, under his newly assumed name, when he was nineteen years of age. When al-Sarrāj died, he had not discovered that Abū Muslim was his foster child, Ibrāhīm ibn 'Uthmān ibn ... ibn Buzurgmihr.

⁶⁰ See footnote no.33 above.

⁶¹ Baghdādī, *Ta'rikh Baghdād*, X: p. 207.

The problems with this account are numerous, not least of which is the fact that it exclusively falls in the dark area of Abū Muslim's past. It does not partake in the semi-lit zone of an open performance as the traditions on the 'Ijlite connection do. In obliterating any traces of a possible Khurāsānite link, this tradition displays a streak of deliberate denial which permeates the main body of the source material. In all cases, the geographical mobility for which it provides, when taken within the specific context of Abū Muslim's real reach, is nothing more than a change of scenery. It simply exchanges the land-serfdom for the ever-present personal control by al-Sarrāj. This is not the geographical mobility we mean.

The early geographical mobility, to which Abū Muslim's subsequent history attests, must have been coupled with full personal freedom to roam the land on his own and to implicate himself in any enterprise he chose, for any length of time, in Kūfah and the Tigris environs, as well as farther east, in Rayy, Nasā and beyond.

An incidental and unique account in Ṭabarī has Abū Muslim positioned right in the midst of the radical Mughīriyyah circles, in Kūfah, as early as 119/739. When Khālīd ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Qasrī, governor of Iraq, killed al-Mughīrah ibn Sa'īd al-'Ijlī and Bayān ibn Sim'ān al-Nahdī, he interrogated one of their comrades, Mālik ibn A'yan al-Juhanī, and released him. "When Mālik was alone with his confidants, amongst who was Abū Muslim *ṣāhib* Khurāsān," he boasted, in two verses, how he had mystified the governor into releasing him.⁶² The fact that the Mughīriyyah were a *ghālīyah* splinter group of the Kaysāniyyah is important; still more important is the 'Ijlite element, and the fact that the episode took place around the date mentioned. This means that Abū Muslim had been loose and active, in the revolutionary circles of Kūfah, at least five to six years prior to the prison scene. Most

⁶² Ṭabarī, II: p. 1620-1. There is a strange ambiguity in the report, but it does not bear on the present point. The governor interrogated Mālik, supposedly about his links to the executed rebels; the Arabic statement that follows, '*fa-ṣadaqa-hu 'an nafsi-hi fa-'aṭlaqa-hu*,' should normally translate into: 'he [Mālik] told him [the governor] the truth about himself; so he released him.' But this translation does not fit with the governor's harsh attitude, nor with Mālik's later boasting of deceiving him. Therefore, we must read the key word as '*fa-ṣaddaqa-hu*,' meaning that the governor believed what Mālik told him about himself, so he released him. This is passable, although it makes for an awkward Arabic formulation, which may be explained by assuming an omission, i.e., that Mālik had told the governor something about himself, and about others who do not appear in the sentence. This may explain the word '*shubhah*,' obscurity, in Mālik's hemistich, '*wa alqaytu-hu fī shubhah*,' boasting how he got away, probably by giving the governor dubious information on his comrades. More important, it is the only explanation of Abū Muslim's comment, years later, that, if he found Mālik, he would kill him on the strength of his own admission, '*bi-'iqrāri-hi 'alā nafsi-hi*.'

important is that this account of Ṭabarī's does not appear to have been fabricated to serve any specific purpose. It acquires its credibility from what may appear to be its weakness—its very uniqueness and incidentality.

On the margins of the prison scene and, less importantly, thereafter, Abū Muslim, now in the light of more reliable reporting, appears to have been at home in Kūfah, moving in the circles of the professional quarters, the *ṣarrāfūn*, the *sarrājūn*, and the *qaṣṣārūn*, where "he used to sit ... and his companions from amongst them [were] Mūsā ibn Yazīd and 'Uthmān ibn 'Īsā"⁶³ (nos.41, 48). This, however, does not necessarily mean that Kūfah was home; but, even if it were, there is nothing to preclude the possibility of a lengthy and intense Khurāsānite experience.

Abū Muslim's familiarity with the East cannot be doubted, nor can it be simply explained by the relatively short period when he later frequented the territory as Abū Salamah's messenger to the Khurāsānite Chapter. Lassner admits that "it appears reasonable at first thought that a genealogy from Khurāsān would have stood Abū Muslim in good stead given his complex political dealings in that province." But he dismisses the thought on grounds that "no such claim is articulated in convincing detail."⁶⁴ Lassner's reasoning has already been discussed and rejected. But I do not want to press the case for a 'genealogy from Khurāsān.' The point here is that 'his complex political dealings in that province,' which Lassner recognizes and no one disputes, cannot be explained by a belated introduction to the province; nor can his success be explained by the short period between this introduction and his grooming of these 'complex political dealings' into full bloom.

The accounts that trace Abū Muslim's roots to Khurāsān,⁶⁵ especially Ibn 'Abd Rabbih's, Ibn A'tham's, and, to a slightly lesser extent, Balādhurī's, must not necessarily be construed as vouching for a genealogy 'from Khurāsān'. The first two simply say that he had been in Khurāsān; Balādhurī says that he had been "a slave of someone from Harāt or Būshanj."⁶⁶ Therefore, aside from this futile discussion, one may be content with the fact these accounts do point to an early connection to the province. Moreover, establishing Abū Muslim's long-standing familiarity with Khurāsān from the source materials, in addition to the above reasoning, will, therefore, have to be based on accounts whose credibility (like that of Ṭabarī's account about Abū

⁶³ *Akhbār*, pp. 260, 255, 266; cf. Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, p. 120.

⁶⁴ Lassner, *Revolution*, p. 123.

⁶⁵ See footnote no.9 above.

⁶⁶ Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, IV: p. 477; Ibn A'tham, VIII: p. 154; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, p. 119.

Muslim's Mughīriyyah connection) derives from their uniqueness and incidentality.

The general portrait in the sources depicts Abū Muslim traveling Khurāsān in disguise, on a miserable donkey.⁶⁷ He traveled extensively until his disguise became a threateningly known hallmark.⁶⁸ He did not stick to the highway, as would probably be expected from a messenger heading from Kūfah to Marw; but this is understandable, since he must have wanted to escape detection. He covered Rayy, Nīshāpūr, Abīward, Nasā, and their villages; he crossed garrisons, even recruited their chiefs of police, had encounters—good and bad—for which he later repaid in kind.⁶⁹ It may be said that these accounts pertain only to the time frame of his known involvement, after 126/743-744, as Abū Salamah's messenger. Maybe so, and the point needs not be argued. The central idea here is that from the tenor of these reports emerges a picture of a man widely and profoundly familiar with the land, its peoples, and its untrodden roads. This man did not only travel in insignificance; but, faithful to the obscure profile he presented of himself, he also posed as an insignificant persona even before the eyes of his Revolutionary leaders and their attendants. Abū Salamah said: "As for him, he admitted that he is a slave of the man who sold him to us (*ammā huwa fa-qad aqarra anna-hu 'abdun li-man abā'a-hu min-nā*)."⁷⁰ Sulaymān ibn Kathīr dismissed him as "this unknown, whom nobody knows what egg cracked to bring his head [into existence], nor which nest he outgrew (*hādhā al-majhūl alladhī lā yudrā ayyatu bayḍatin tafallaqat 'an ra'si-hi wa-lā min ayyi 'ushshin daraj*)."⁷¹ A servant of Sulaymān's explained why the household had once neglected to feed Abū Muslim: "He was too insignificant for us to be attentive to him (*kāna asghara 'indanā min an naltafita ilayh*)."⁷²

This, however, was not the light in which the *dihqān* of Nīshāpūr saw Abū Muslim:

It has been said that Abū Muslim came to Nīshāpūr on a donkey with a saddle; not a human soul was with him. One night he went to the mansion of the fādhūsban and knocked at the door; the household were alerted and went out to him. He said to them: 'Tell the *dihqān* that Abū Muslim is at the door asking [demanding? = *yathlub*] you for one thousand dirhams and a riding animal.' They told the *dihqān*, who asked: 'In what attire and gear is he?' They told him that he was alone and in the most

⁶⁷ *Akhbār*, pp. 225, 262; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf III*, p. 120; Ibn al-Athīr, IV: pp. 252, 254, 357.

⁶⁸ *Akhbār*, p. 262.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 225, 262, 263; Ṭabarī, II: p. 1949 ff., Ibn al-Athīr, IV: pp. 254, 357.

⁷⁰ *Akhbār*, p. 263.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 270-1.

⁷² Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf III*, p. 120.

miserable attire. [The *dihqān*] was silent for a while, then he ordered [that] one thousand dirhams and one of his best riding animals [be brought], he admitted [Abū Muslim] and said: 'Oh Abū Muslim! We have given you what you have asked for. Should any other need arise, we are at your disposal.' Abū Muslim said: 'We shall not neglect [to reward] what you have done.'

When [Abū Muslim] reigned, one of his relatives said: 'If you capture Nīshāpūr, you take all you want of the property of its Magian *dihqān*, the fādhusbān.' Abū Muslim said: 'We owe him a favor.' When Abū Muslim seized Nīshāpūr, gifts were sent to him by the fādhusbān. He was told: 'Do not accept them, and demand money from him.' He said: 'I owe him a favor.' He did not touch him or any of his people or his money. This is a sign of high-mindedness and ideal sense of honor.⁷³

That Abū Muslim repaid the *dihqān* fits into a pattern of two-eyes-for-an-eye, which characterized Abū Muslim's later practical expression of his appraisal of his long experience with the territory and its inhabitants.⁷⁴ That the *dihqān* sought to solicit Abū Muslim's good graces after Abū Muslim seized power is understandable; but why before that? Since the *dihqān* was not an inspired 'Abbāsīd *Imām*, who could prophetically see and construe the signs inherent in Abū Muslim's stature, what did he see in this miserable-looking night caller whose bare *kunyah* was enough to identify him? What awe, respect, love, or hope did Abū Muslim's as-yet-unknown name strike or inspire in the heart of the unfrightened and deliberate *dihqān*? Did this aristocratic, Magian native of the land recognize the ignoble slave, the descendant of Buzurgmihr or Khosrau, or the tireless veteran Persian revolutionary?

The relevant question about Abū Muslim is not genealogical—slave or free, Arab or Persian, native of Kūfah or of Khurāsān ... etc. This, important as it is, is irresolvable. The real question is whether, before coming into the light of the prison scene in Kūfah, he had a wide and profound personal history spanning the territory from Kūfah to Khurāsān, and whether such history displays a mutual affinity between Abū Muslim and the Iranian landscape in the East. Although it cannot be claimed to have been decisively proven, there is no doubt here that this must have been the case.

⁷³ Ibn al-Athīr, IV: p. 357.

⁷⁴ He rewarded 'Umar ibn al-Mukhtār (no.364) for having been a long-standing good friend, who had protected him from a group of angry Murji'ites at Rayy (*Akhbār*, p. 263). Likewise, he rewarded Mu'adh ibn Muslim (no.262), who had helped him feed his donkey (*Akhbār*, p. 225). But he destroyed Būnābādh of Nīshāpūr, because one of its buffoons had amputated his donkey's tail (Ibn al-Athīr, IV: p. 254). And he killed a group of people in the area of Nasā-Abīward because they had turned him down when he tried to convince them to give back a camel they had stolen from a shepherd (*Akhbār*, p. 225) etc.

A relation of such dimensions between an individual and a collectivity requires depth of time. Abū Muslim is largely portrayed as a young or a very young 'Abbāsīd operative. The confusion about his age is surpassed only by the confusion about his origins.⁷⁵ In all cases, the concept of an Abū Muslim too young to have achieved this type of relation with the populace, which we are suggesting he achieved, is incommensurate with the portrait of the experienced and able leader he soon emerged to be; after all, even as a legend, he was never acclaimed as another Alexander, groomed in a reigning royal environment. The concept of an overly young Abū Muslim is also untenable in the light of the stories of his own marriage and of those of the marriages of his two daughters.⁷⁶

From the preceding discussion, Abū Muslim emerges as a reasonably grown up man when he appeared in the *ghulāt* circles in Kūfah, in 119/737. By then, or at least by the time he appeared in the prison scene, ca. 124-125/742-743, he had become a well-traveled revolutionary with profound familiarity and complex connections in Khurāsān. Within this general frame of more likely facts, the plausible 'scenarios' are numerous and highly conjectural. The following is, I presume, the most tenable.

III. *The 'Abbāsīd Connection—A Plausible Scenario*

A year before Abū Muslim appeared in Kūfah, the Umayyad authorities had, in 118/736, cracked down on the Organization and executed

⁷⁵ He is reported to have been twenty years of age when he allegedly met Muḥammad ibn 'Alī towards the end of Hishām's reign, 125/743 (*Akhbār*, pp. 254-5; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, pp. 84-5); or nineteen, or even eighteen, when he was sent to Khurāsān as a leader of the Chapter, in 128/745-746 (Ibn al-Athīr, IV: pp. 252, 259; Baghdādī, *Ta'rikh Baghdād*, X: p. 207; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, VI: p. 52; Ibn Khallikān, III: p. 149). Other accounts date his birth to 100/718-719, thus symbolically identifying his age with that of the Organization (Ibn Qutaybah, *Ma'ārif*, p. 420; Ibn Khallikān, III: 149; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, VI: p. 48).

⁷⁶ In 129/746-747, Abū Muslim married the daughter of the *naqīb* 'Imrān ibn Ismā'īl (no.209) (Ṭabarī, II: pp. 1960, 1988; Baghdādī, *Ta'rikh Baghdād*, X: p. 207; Ibn al-Athīr, IV: p. 252; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, VI: p. 52). No date is given to his giving his two daughters, Fāṭimah and Asmā', in marriage, to the important *dā'ī*, Muḥriz ibn Ibrāhīm (no.280) and his son Fahm ibn Muḥriz (Baghdādī, *Ta'rikh Baghdād*, X: p. 207; Ibn al-Athīr, IV: p. 252). Of course, he must have done so before he was killed in 137/754-755, and most likely when he first arrived in Khurāsān as a member of the Organization, since marriages were used to cement alliances. But, even a later date would still be inadequate for the two brides to have been the granddaughters of the *naqīb*. They must have been children from a previous marriage. How old must Abū Muslim have been—and in which decade must it have occurred—when he entered into a marriage which would have produced two daughters, themselves eligible for marriage around the end of the third decade?

Khidāsh.⁷⁷ Bitter, but full of ambition and resilient, Abū Muslim took off to the capital of Shī'ite and radical movements, where the disconnected headquarters of the Organization was located. He had probably hoped to infiltrate the top echelons and to restore, through his person, the severed ties to the center of inspiration, as an introductory step towards reconstructing the huge but shattered and leaderless Chapter in Khurāsān. Traveling the untrodden roads, by chance or by design, he came upon the 'Ijlite stronghold, where he either resumed an earlier connection, or started and carefully bred a new one. He may have met 'Āsim there; or it may have been that the roads of these two unbound rebellious wandering spirits crossed, somehow, somewhere, earlier, or later.⁷⁸ Abū Muslim must have then continued his journey to his target, where he would commence his decade-long Kūfān sojourn.

In Kūfah, he embarked on a professional career in anonymity, mainly or exclusively in saddle making. But he never lost sight of his real target.⁷⁹ He nurtured social and political relations with other professionals of the market place, and with the *ghulāt* movements. Traveling with al-Sarrāj, if it so came to pass, he may have frequented the 'Ijlite estate, which may have also served as a meeting point with his contacts farther east. But, should that be discounted, the possibility that he may have kept in personal contact with the province through other means cannot be dismissed.

When the prison scene occurred, Abū Muslim had had five or six years to concoct, with his 'Ijlite friends, their roles which they performed in the scene, and which culminated with Abū Muslim's accomplishing his first concrete step towards his goal. 'Abbāsīd interpolations aside, there is no unresolvable conflict between the factual elements of the traditions which center around Abū Salamah's purchase of Abū Muslim, and the factual elements of the traditions which concur on a role for the four Khurāsānite *naqībs* who, on their way to Makkah, passed by the prison, saw Abū Muslim and recognized the 'signs' (*al-*

⁷⁷ Supra, pp. 16-20.

⁷⁸ In one account about Abū Muslim's origins, *Akhbār* states that he claimed descent from Banū Murād, and that thus he and 'Āsim became acquainted: '*fa-waqa'at al-ma'rifa bayna Abi Muslim wa 'Āsim ibn Yūnus al-'Ijlī bī-dhālika al-sabab*' (p. 265). Although the connection between the Yamanite Murād and the Raba'ite 'Ijlī is not clear, the important point is that, for some reason, Abū Muslim and his future broker may have gotten acquainted outside the context which presupposes that al-Khurāsānī was somehow bonded to the 'Ijlites.

⁷⁹ Balādhurī relates, on Ibn al-Kalbī's authority, that, one day, while Abū Muslim was attending to his manual job, he saw people running; he inquired about the reason; when told that they were watching an elephant, he said: 'What is so strange about an elephant? The marvel is to see me toppling a realm and bringing about another' (*Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, p. 120).

‘*alāmāt*’) in his person. The ‘Abbāsīd *riwāyah* embraced all versions of both traditions, and secured all roads to lead to the *Imām*, be it Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī, or his son and successor, Ibrāhīm.⁸⁰

Once Abū Muslim penetrated the upper echelons of the Organization, it was not difficult for him to prove his trustworthiness and diligence. His familiarity with Khurāsān made him ideally suited for the role of messenger to the leadership of the Chapter there. Nothing could have been more appropriate for his plans. This afforded him the time to revitalize his connections there (if they were at all dormant), and to prepare the logistics for the eventual takeover of the entire Chapter. Until then, he had to keep a very low profile before his prospective victims, but not in the eyes of his real constituency. One more necessary step in the preparations was to secure a Hāshimite ally.

That Abū Muslim did manage to forge a relation with Ibrāhīm personally, at some point after he penetrated the leadership of the Organization, is compatible with his later choice of Ibrāhīm’s younger brother, Abū al-‘Abbās al-Saffāḥ, for the caliphate, and it gives meaning to the crucial presence of his plant, Sābiq al-Khwārizmī, in Ḥumaymah, and to the maneuvers of his men in Kūfah to secure al-Saffāḥ’s appointment.⁸¹ The question is about the channels through which he was connected to Ibrāhīm, and about the quality and the internal balance and dynamics of the relation.

The direct internal channels, leading from the Organization’s leadership exclusively to Ibrāhīm,⁸² cannot be accepted. Indeed, we maintain that they did not exist. The tradition that Abū Muslim accompanied the *nuqabā’* to Makkah,⁸³ even while he was attached to

⁸⁰ *Akhbār*, pp. 225, 254, 256, 257, 260, 266; Tabarī, II: pp. 1769, 1916, 1960; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, pp. 84, 119; Ibn Qutaybah, *Ma’ārif*, p. 420; Dīnawarī, pp. 339-40; Ya’qūbī, *Ta’rikh*, II: pp. 327, 332; Mas’ūdī, IV: p. 78; Ibn A’tḥam, VIII: p. 154; Baghdādī, *Ta’rikh Baghdād*, X: p. 207; Ibn al-Athīr, IV: pp. 252, 254, 295; Ibn Khallikān, III: pp. 146, 149; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, VI: pp. 48, 49, 52; Ibn al-Ṭīṭīqā, p. 139.

⁸¹ *Infra*, pp. 124-35.

⁸² See footnote no.80 above. According to *Akhbār*, pp. 268-9, in one of the many variations of the account of how Abū Muslim was transferred to the *Imām*’s entourage, Ibrāhīm is reported to have asked Abū Salamah to relinquish him. Abū Salamah went back to Kūfah, presumably leaving Abū Muslim in Ḥumaymah. Inexplicably, however Abū Muslim is reported, in the same account, to have frequented Khurāsān with Abū Salamah’s letters to Sulaymān ibn Kathīr and his comrades. What can only be a one-time occurrence is made to appear as a frequent exercise; and the person who could only be either still with Abū Salamah in Kūfah acting as his messenger to Khurāsān, or with Ibrāhīm in Ḥumaymah, was made to be in both places at the same time.

⁸³ Some variations of this tradition relate that Abū Muslim endeared himself to the *nuqabā’* and offered to go with them. They took him to Makkah, where they met Ibrāhīm, who recognized Abū Muslim and took him for himself etc. If we discard the monopoly Ibrāhīm allegedly held on the *nuqabā’* and their communications in Makkah, the tradition becomes acceptable in its general outline. Cf. *Akhbār*, pp. 255-6; Balādhurī,

Abū Salamah and/or al-Sarrāj, provides a more plausible forum. In Makkah, while they were conducting their usual pan-Hāshimite communications, the *nuqabā'*, trustingly and inadvertently, exposed the Hāshimite theatre to Abū Muslim, and exposed Abū Muslim to whomever may have been interested amongst the congregation of *Āl Muḥammad*. Thus, two men, each with his own agenda, were on the look and alert. Each had something to offer to the other, and each had something for which the other voraciously hungered. Ibrāhīm boasted a Prophetic kinship but no direct genealogical descent, and an almost non-existent claim to the legacy, which the 'Alīds, as descendants, had almost exclusively claimed, unchallenged. He needed an operative on the field to place him on the map of genealogical claims. Abū Muslim was an operative on the field; but, on his own, outside the context of the Organization and his patrons, as the representative of his real grass-roots constituency only, he lacked a connection to the symbolic legacy, in the name of which only—he knew—he could do something positive for his cause.

Abū Muslim and Ibrāhīm, this most tenable of plausible scenarios continues to presume, cut a side deal, not much dissimilar to the one Mu'āwiyah and Ziyād ibn Abīh had cut, almost eighty-five years earlier. They must have been aware of the infamous but brilliant feat, and they probably modeled their bargain after that precedent. Here is where the roots of Abū Muslim's claim, that he was the son of Salīṭ ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās, should be sought.⁸⁴

The presumed terms of the deal may be gleaned from fragments scattered in the 'Abbāsīd *riwāyah* itself under different guises and in various forms—some directives attributed to the *Imām*, denials and accusations in the context of denouncing Abū Muslim, and certain attitudes and patterns which mark both the behavior of some men and the direction of events in the post-victory stage. Those presumed terms may be summarized as follows. In return for being endorsed as the *Riḍā*, when the time came, Ibrāhīm would agree to share power on geographical basis — the West would be his domain, while Abū Muslim would enjoy absolute supremacy in the East; or even to be content with

Anṣab al-Ashraf III, p. 119; Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, II: p. 327; Ibn al-Athīr, IV: pp. 252-3; Ibn A'tham, VIII: p. 154; Ibn Khallikān, III: p. 146; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, VI: p. 49. Other variations stop short of the Makkah trip, Ṭabarī, II: pp. 1727, 1769; Dīnawarī, p. 339; Ibn al-Athīr, IV: p. 252; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, VI: p. 52. In a third variation, Ṭabarī, IV: p. 166 puts Abū Muslim's first trip to Makkah under the events of the year 127/745.

⁸⁴ Lassner recognizes the historical similarity, but only as a symbolic potential completely fabricated and initiated by al-Manṣūr, to justify the execution of Abū Muslim (*Revolution*, pp. 107-17, esp. pp. 111-4).

a figure head status while delegating real power to Abū Muslim. Abū Muslim would be *amīn Ālī Muḥammad*, not as an appointed official, but as the member of the family who is singled out for this honor. Ibrāhīm would acknowledge Salīṭ as having been the son of ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās, and Abū Muslim as Salīṭ’s son. Abū Muslim would marry into the family. Perhaps, in due course, even earning a spot in the line of succession would not be beyond him.

The very idea of cutting a deal with Ibrāhīm, or, for that matter, with any other Hāshimite, was contrary to the central principle of consensus intrinsic to the doctrine of *al-riḍā*. But Abū Muslim was not about ideology. He was about power politics. The strategic dimension of the doctrine, that which allowed the Organization to maintain its independence in pursuing its agenda free from the heavy shadow of a specific candidate must have been most dear to Abū Muslim. He wouldn’t have jeopardized it. But this dimension was not threatened by this presumed deal. It was protected and ensured by the very nature of the deal and by the internal balances and dynamics of the relation between the two men and what each of them represented. Abū Muslim must have reckoned that he himself was the stronger party. He possessed the materiel while Ibrāhīm possessed only a very poor share in a symbolism, which could be upgraded only by an Abū Muslim victory, and only if Abū Muslim was still willing then. No one else was privy to the deal, not even, or especially not, the leaders of the Organization. Therefore, the element of an open commitment, which would have represented an undue pressure on Abū Muslim, was absent. The fulfillment of the two men’s pledges would depend on their good wills, especially that of Abū Muslim’s, and on the fact that it was a good deal for both of them—at least when it was cut.

Epilogue

What Abū Muslim could not have foreseen were the untimely deaths of his two successive convenient choices from the ‘Abbāsid clan, Ibrāhīm and his younger brother, al-Saffāḥ, and the accession of a different type of man. But these occurrences, eventful as they were, were mere historical accidents. More important than what Abū Muslim could not possibly have foreseen is what he miscalculated—the irreversibility of the dynamics of symbolism, legitimacy, and power, once they have interacted positively for an adequate period of time in favorable conditions. It appears that Abū Muslim did not appreciate the fact that the harder he fought on behalf of ‘Abbāsid legitimacy the less dependant on his good will the ‘Abbāsid legitimacy would become; that it would—

as it actually did—acquire a life of its own; and that, once he championed it publicly, he would not be able to counter it.

While still working with plausibilities, we might as well recognize that the formative features of an opening act may be sought in the contours of the closing act. And while Dhahabī is not a primary source, we may be well advised to read him as an early critic of the ‘Abbāsīd *riwāyah*. In his exposition of one of the final acts of the ‘Abbāsīd/Abū Muslim drama, Dhahabī lays bare the essence of the presumed deal, and the psychological dynamics governing it. When the nasty exchange between them escalated, Abū Muslim wrote to al-Manṣūr:

In [choosing] your [line of the family], I had been [over-] interpretative [of the ideology]; and I had erred (*innī kuntu fikum muta’awwīlan fa-akhta’*).⁸⁵

This is an admission by Abū Muslim that he personally had been responsible for the ‘Abbāsīd option. When the noose tightened around his position, he consulted one of his trusted men, Abū Ishāq al-Marwazī, who analyzed the situation for him as follows:

This man, [al-Manṣūr], harbors old grudges against you. Since [opposing him] had been your choice then [when you antagonized him], had you then taken as an ally a man from ‘Alī’s family, it would [therefore] have been closer [to doing the right thing]; [or] had you accepted his appointment of you to Khurāsān, Syria, and the *ṣā’if* (summer campaign), you would have had more time, and you would have been at liberty [to maneuver]; you would have dispatched [emissaries] to Madīnah and lured [or spirited] an ‘Alīd and installed him as *Imām*, (*fa-wajjahta ilā al-Madīnati fa-ikhtalasta ‘Alawiyyan fa-naṣṣabtahu imāman*); you would have won the hearts of the peoples of Khurāsān and Iraq; and you would have hurled at Abū Ja’far an equal of his to match him; then you would have been on a judicious course. [But now], do you [really] want to fight Abū Ja’far when you are in Ḥulwān, his soldiers are in Madā’in, and he is an undisputed caliph!? It is not [as viable] as you thought.⁸⁶

In effect, Abū Ishāq was retracing history, pointing out to Abū Muslim that he ought to have done, what he had done earlier, when he chose the weaker party; only that, this time around, he ought to have exchanged the ‘Abbāsīd for an ‘Alīd.

IV. ‘Hijacking’ the Khurāsān Chapter

It is only for methodological reasons that the characterization of the foregoing scenario is not upgraded from plausibility to veracity. For all

⁸⁵ Dhahabī, *Siyar*, VI: pp. 67-8.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 68.

other purposes, this scenario is compatible with the unfolding of the subsequent events, which we shall try to extract from the doctored 'Abbāsīd *riwāyah*.

The two men left Makkah carrying their secret: Ibrāhīm went back to Ḥumaymah to sit and wait in hope. Abū Muslim went back to Kūfah to resume his double mission, ostensibly as Abū Salamah's messenger to Khurāsān, and actually as the leader-in-waiting, cultivating and rearing his power relations, and calmly mobilizing his grass-roots constituencies.

Abū Salamah settled for a style of management by correspondence reminiscent of Bukayr's management through resident envoys, and, ironically, he would soon reap almost the same bitter fruits. It is not known how many trips Abū Muslim made to Khurāsān between ca. Sha'bān, 127/May-June, 745, when Abū Salamah had concluded his last trip, and early 129/Autumn, 746, when Abū Muslim stayed on for the lightning double blow he was soon to administer on both fronts: the internal and the external, becoming, first, the leader of the Khurāsān Chapter, and then the master of the East.

How did Abū Muslim become leader of the Khurāsān Chapter? Inevitably, as the 'Abbāsīd *riwāyah* would have it, Ibrāhīm simply appointed him.⁸⁷ The imposition of the *Imām*'s role, with the attending imperatives of obedience to him and harmony with his designs, wreak havoc on an otherwise coherent, humanly and historically understandable, stream of events. For, from this point on, there is scarce agreement on any detail.

According to some accounts, Ibrāhīm offered the position to Sulaymān ibn Kathīr, who declined, then to Qaḥṭabah, or Ibrāhīm ibn Salamah, who in turn declined.⁸⁸ Then he chose Abū Muslim,⁸⁹ or he suggested his name and Qaḥṭabah and Sulaymān warmly endorsed him.⁹⁰ But why was a new appointment required? Because, when the civil strife started in the province, Sulaymān wrote to Abū Salamah, requesting him to write to Ibrāhīm to urge him to send a member of his own family to head the Chapter;⁹¹ or, because some of the *nuqabā'* came to Ibrāhīm in person asking him to send them a leader;⁹² or Ibrāhīm

⁸⁷ On this point, the sources are unanimous, except that Ya'qūbī and Ibn A'tham attribute the appointment to Muḥammad ibn 'Alī (*Ta'rikh*, II: p. 332; Ibn A'tham, VIII: pp. 155-6).

⁸⁸ *Akhhbār*, p. 256; Ṭabarī, II: p. 1937; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf III*, p. 119.

⁸⁹ Ṭabarī, II: p. 1937.

⁹⁰ *Akhhbār*, p. 256; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf III*, p. 119.

⁹¹ Ṭabarī, II: p. 1949.

⁹² *Akhhbār*, p. 256; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf III*, p. 119; Ibn Khallikān, III: p. 147.

simply took the initiative.⁹³ He wrote to the *nuqabā'* ordering them to obey Abū Muslim,⁹⁴ ordered Abū Muslim to heed Sulaymān,⁹⁵ and wrote to Abū Salamah informing him of the appointment and instructing him to execute it.⁹⁶ When Abū Muslim arrived in Marw, in 127/745,⁹⁷ 128/746,⁹⁸ or 129/747,⁹⁹ he lodged with Sulaymān,¹⁰⁰ or with his own father-in-law, Abū al-Najm 'Imrān ibn Ismā'īl.¹⁰¹ Sulaymān and the others were dutifully obedient and venerating;¹⁰² alternatively, he was apprehensive of the imprudent choice of the inexperienced young man and sent him back to sender;¹⁰³ or he raged in outright indignation and hurled a jar of ink at Abū Muslim fracturing his head, and the meeting dispersed on this note.¹⁰⁴ The matter was eventually settled. The settlement was reached in the name of the inviolable entitlement of the *Imām* to the blind and absolute obedience of his shī'ah, by virtue of his sacred knowledge.¹⁰⁵ But then something strange happened:

Abū Muslim reverted to Sulaymān ibn Kathīr, informed him of what he had received [from the Imām], and had him read what had been written to him. Part of what had been written to him was: 'If Sulaymān ibn Kathīr accepts to take on the [responsibility of leading] the *da'wah*, and if he nominates himself for the task, submit to him. If he declines to take on the responsibility, do not, [nonetheless], disobey [any of] Sulaymān's commands, and give him priority in all your arrangements.'¹⁰⁶

If so, what was the dispute about?! Actually, by substracting the *Imām's* alleged role, the elements of truth emerge, in reasonable harmony, from two essentially similar accounts in *Akhhbār* and Ṭabarī,¹⁰⁷ their wide divergence on many particular details notwithstanding.

⁹³ *Akhhbār*, p. 269; Ṭabarī, II: p. 1960; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, p. 121; Azdī, p. 65.

⁹⁴ *Akhhbār*, p. 268; Ṭabarī, II: pp. 1937, 1960; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, p. 121; Azdī, p. 65.

⁹⁵ *Akhhbār*, p. 272; Ṭabarī, II: p. 1937; Azdī, p. 65.

⁹⁶ Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, p. 121.

⁹⁷ Azdī, p. 65.

⁹⁸ Ṭabarī, II: pp. 1937, 1949.

⁹⁹ *Akhhbār*, p. 269.

¹⁰⁰ Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, pp. 119, 121.

¹⁰¹ *Akhhbār*, p. 269.

¹⁰² Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, pp. 119, 121.

¹⁰³ Ṭabarī, II: pp. 1960-2; cf. p. 1937.

¹⁰⁴ *Akhhbār*, pp. 269-72. For other abuses attributed to Sulaymān and to his son Muḥammad, see Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, p. 168.

¹⁰⁵ *Akhhbār*, p. 271; Ṭabarī, II: pp. 1961-2.

¹⁰⁶ *Akhhbār*, p. 272.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 269-73; Ṭabarī, II: p. 1959 ff.

When he felt ready, Abū Muslim simply stayed in the province, never to see Abū Salamah again. Within the Khurāsān Chapter, he delivered his blow quickly and almost surgically. The clandestine nature of the movement did not allow for a lengthy and messy struggle which would have alerted the authorities. In addition to his commanding posture on the grass-roots level in the remote districts, Abū Muslim had carefully cultivated some very effective alliances in the villages of Marw, and on the different levels of the Organization leadership, including the *nuqabāʾ*. Sulaymān ibn Kathīr, the senior *naqīb*, was virtually isolated; after a brief flare of temper, he had no choice but to fall in line. After he won, Abū Muslim, ever the master strategist and tactician, appeased Sulaymān by deferring to him and according him the honors he expected—albeit only temporarily. They agreed to put a dignified face on the coup, by having Sulaymān himself write to the partisans in the districts, informing them of his decision to yield the leadership to Abū Muslim.¹⁰⁸

V. The Revolution

Now in firm control of the Khurāsān Chapter, Abū Muslim was in a position to unleash the dynamics of the popular uprising he had been grooming for so long. In Ṭabarī's words:

The partisans—*nuqabāʾ* and others—heeded and obeyed Abū Muslim ... He spread the *duʿāt* [all over] Khurāsān, and people joined in throngs and grew numerous, and the *duʿāt* permeated all of Khurāsān (*wa samiʿat al-shīʾatu minā al-nuqabāʾi wa ghayrihim li-Abī Muslimin wa atāʾuh ... wa baththa al-duʿāta fī aqtāri Khurāsāna fa-dakhala al-nāsu afwājan wa kathurū wa fashati al-duʿātu fī Khurāsāna kullihā*).¹⁰⁹

This text, probably not unintentionally, is reminiscent of the Quranic verse marking the massive spread of Islam amongst the Arabs: “*wa raʾayta al-nāsa yadkhulūna fī dīni Allāhi afwājan*.” One did not really have to rely solely on Dīnawarī's confused account, or to wait for the discovery of *Akhbār*'s manuscript, to realize the unmistakable character of the mass Revolution.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ *Akhbār*, p. 273. This is how we construe the strange passage which immediately follows the *Imām*'s alleged letter (*Akhbār*, p. 272), as a face-saving compromise by which Abū Muslim graciously appeased Sulaymān, and which claimed that Sulaymān had the option, but declined.

¹⁰⁹ Ṭabarī, II: p. 1962.

¹¹⁰ Dīnawarī's depiction of a mass movement, pp. 338, 340-1, 344, 356, 359-60. Gibb dismisses Dīnawarī's account, and ignores Ṭabarī's, asserting that: ‘In our most authentic records there is no trace of a mass movement...’ (*Conquests*, p. 94). Shaban restricts the movement to Marw (*Abbāsīd Revolution*, p. 152). Daniel does recognize the mass movement, but he excludes Transoxania (*khurasan*, pp. 51-2, 58, 86).

The detailed story of the open Revolution and its immediate preliminaries, from the time Abū Muslim arrived in the province to stay, has been masterfully told by Wellhausen.¹¹¹ Later, M. Sharon recounted the story in extensive detail.¹¹² Wellhausen synthesized his narrative from analyzing Ṭabarī's three accounts,¹¹³ and reconstructing the elements of a viable scenario. Of course, *Akhbār* was not available to Wellhausen. Sharon correctly realizes that "the tradition in *Akhbār*, relating to Abū Muslim's tribal policy is more complete and more genuine than the accounts of Ṭabarī, Azdī and Dīnawarī."¹¹⁴ However, the nature of these sources, complimentary in many respects, imposes itself on Sharon, albeit in a selective manner; he, therefore, tries "to reconstruct the complete picture from the traditions of Ṭabarī and the *Akhbār*."¹¹⁵

Actually, even though "*Akhbār* provides a wealth of previously unknown details, ... it also reinforces the basic veracity of the historiographical tradition which was hitherto the mainstay of Umayyad studies. What accrues from a careful probe of the account in *Akhbār* does not structurally alter what derives from Ṭabarī."¹¹⁶ Yet, one must remain alert to the fact that the events during this stage were still taking place on the covert level as much as they started occurring on the overt; and that the interaction and the overlapping between the two levels were at their highest intensity. In the composite account derived from the complimentary traditions, *Akhbār's* contribution to our understanding of the secret deliberations, and of the profound implications of Abū Muslim's strategy and tactics, is of sterling quality, despite interpolations and some confusion.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, *Akhbār's* account, once clarified and cleansed from interpolations, leaves no doubt that a sharp distinction must be drawn, geographically, between the Marw oasis and the outlying districts, and, strategically, between the role assigned in Abū Muslim's strategy to each of these two geographical

¹¹¹ Wellhausen, pp. 521-39, for the events in Khurāsān; pp. 538-42, for Qaḥṭabah ibn Shabīb's campaign.

¹¹² Sharon, *Revolt*, pp. 51-175, for the events in Khurāsān, pp. 179-217; for Qaḥṭabah's campaign.

¹¹³ Ṭabarī, II: pp. 1949-2003, on the authorities of Madā'inī, Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, and an anonymous source.

¹¹⁴ Sharon, *Revolt*, p.60. But I tend to be reserved about Sharon's detecting 'distortions' which Ṭabarī's accounts succeeded in introducing into the studies of van Vloten and Wellhausen' and about his considering that *Akhbār's* 'balanced and logical summary' corrects them. If they were 'distortions' which allowed van Vloten and Wellhausen to see the '*da'wah*' as predominantly Persian, the same abound in *Akhbār*.

¹¹⁵ Sharon, *Revolt*, p.70.

¹¹⁶ Agha, 'Abū Muslim,' p. 345.

¹¹⁷ Cf., *ibid.*, pp. 333-5.

constellations. Ethnically, once the demographic situation in each of the two constellations is understood, it becomes almost undeniable that the Iranian masses were the mainstay of the Revolution.

In view of Wellhausen's and Sharon's efforts, we shall not attempt here to reproduce what will inevitably be mere repetitions or endless contentions over details. The foregoing distinctions, however, mandate a brief pause to highlight their profound impact on our understanding of the dynamics of the Revolution and of the demographic character of its real constituency.

The events in the Marw oasis, in this context, cover the period from the first eruption, on Ramaḍān 25, 129 /June 8, 747, until Abū Muslim, "without striking a blow,"¹¹⁸ entered the city on Rabī' II 7, 130/December 15, 747.¹¹⁹ These events largely comprise extended and complex political and geographical maneuvers, mainly by Abū Muslim, but also by the warring Arab tribes, parties to the long standoff at the oasis. As far as the shifting alliances bear on the issue of the demographic and ethnic identities of the Revolutionary forces and their adversaries, some of these events are discussed in various parts of this book. Actually, except inasmuch as it weakened the Arab army, the tribal factor was not of much immediate consequence—the modern scholarly squabble over it notwithstanding.¹²⁰ What is worth noting is the ostensibly reverse correlation between Marw's being the seat of Arab power and Abū Muslim's pointed selection of the oasis to be the vortex of his mortal struggle with that power. Abū Muslim realized that, "almost purely Iranian, the outlying districts had become defacto demographic strongholds of the revolution before the revolution erupted." The presence of the Revolutionary leadership in these outlying districts was not as crucial as its presence in Marw, which, by contrast, "housed the Umayyad Arab provincial government nominally heading the main bulk of the once formidable Arab army, but actually paralyzed by the tribal stand-off that split its ranks." All Abū Muslim needed was an imposing presence in Marw, which, through political maneuvering, would help him perpetuate the 'deadlock at Marw,' and

¹¹⁸ Wellhausen, p.491.

¹¹⁹ *Akhbār*, p.315; Ṭabarī's anonymous source, II: p.1993. Madā'inī dates the event to Rabī' II, 7 or 9, while Abū al-Khaṭṭāb delays it two full months, to Jumādā II, 9 (Ṭabarī, II: pp.1990, 1984, 1987); Balādhurī advances it to Rabī' I (*Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, p.130).

¹²⁰ There were three main warring Arab parties: the loyal tribes, mainly Muḍarite, with the governor, Naṣr ibn Sayyār; the anti-Muḍar-but-not-anti-Establishment opposition party of the Azdī, led by the two sons of al-Kirmānī, 'Alī and 'Uthmān; and the Khawārij, led by Shaybān ibn Salamah and allied to a Rabī'ah faction from the Banū Ḥanīfah under 'Alī ibn Ma'qil al-Ḥanaṭī.

allow his militias in the outlying districts to overpower the thinly spread, police-like, Arab forces.¹²¹

Wellhausen does realize that a mass rising occurred, although he restricts it to Khurāsān proper, thus excluding Transoxania and much of Ṭukhāristān.¹²² His concentration on the events in Marw, and the fact that *Akhbār* was not known to him, had a diluting effect on his understanding of the significance and extent of the geographical orchestration. Although he mentions the fact that Abīward, Marw al-Rūdh and Harāt had been won before Marw, he gives it no more than one sentence.¹²³ Most other modern scholars share Wellhausen's focus on the events in the oasis, simply because more information about the oasis is available in the sources. "This politically proportionate but demographically and strategically disproportionate focus... [resulted with the fact that] the great significance of the strategy of orchestration as crucial evidence of a mass Iranian uprising was either diluted or completely lost."¹²⁴ A few extracts from my article on Abū Muslim's conquest of Khurāsān may further clarify this matter:

The stark contrast, both of chronology and manner, in which the revolution made its sweeping territorial gains in the outlying districts first, and in Marw last, conveys the essence of Abū Muslim's strategy and tactics. When this strategy started yielding its quick and successive gains, Naṣr b. Sayyār was still in Marw, holding his own but completely paralyzed by his inability to stop the tribal war thanks, in good part, to this very strategy. Within a few months of first eruption, the entire territory (north, east and south of Marw, and the territory immediately to the west of the oasis) was swept clean, leaving only a southwesterly corridor – the one that Naṣr b. Sayyār would soon use in his flight via the Sarakhs highway to Ṭūs, Nishāpūr, up to the Sāwah oasis. All the while, Abū Muslim was conducting his political maneuvers in Marw. The bewildered governor described the revolutionary strategy with photographic accuracy: '[...] It is as if you are witnessing the ropes being put around our necks.' It was death-by-asphyxiation for Arab rule in Khurāsān... Around seven months after first eruption on Ramaḍān 25, 129, the capitulation of Marw came like the fall of an over-ripe fruit. Abū Muslim, without striking a blow, entered the city on Rabī' II 7, 130/December 15, 747. He had reaped the ultimate benefit of his binary strategy of perpetuating a deadlock at Marw through political maneuvering, and of overpowering the Arab forces in the outlying districts... His commissioned commanders and coordinating officers did not march with any armies from Marw. The Marw revolutionary

¹²¹ For above quotations, see, Agha, 'Abū Muslim,' pp. 341, 342 and 344. For a full discussion of Abū Muslim's strategy, see the whole article.

¹²² Wellhausen, p.498.

¹²³ Ibid., p.529.

¹²⁴ Agha, 'Abū Muslim,' p. 345.

resources could only sustain the show of force Abū Muslim needed right there... These commanders simply traveled to their armies, which had always been stationed where the soldiers were born. Abū Muslim's conquest of Khurāsān was not achieved by marching armies, but by local eruptions... In the various accounts of how all of Khurāsān fell to the revolutionaries, with the exception of two cases, we do not hear of major battles of the sort that occur between armies, not even in Marw. Save for Balkh and Ṭūs, two battles which had their own logic, the conquest was almost always a matter of killing or expelling the government's man in a given district. The multitudes must usually have engulfed the comparatively tiny garrisons; or the garrisons simply disbanded and melted away, or fled to the larger regional Umayyad strongholds. The only two battles in which Khurasanite Umayyad forces were engaged were last-stand battles made by such remnants who converged on two main locations from scattered and stampeded detachments. In the east, the vanquished remnants of the garrisons of Transoxania and eastern Ṭukhārīstān converged on Tirmidh, and thus occurred the battle for Balkh. In the west, after the fall of Marw, the remnants from Sarakhs, Nasā, Abīward, and the rest of central and western Khurāsān, in addition to the bulk of the Marw garrison, converged on Ṭūs (and Jurjān). In Ṭūs the Arabs of Khurāsān fought their last battle.¹²⁵

VI. *The Role of Transoxania and the Battle for Balkh*

There is unanimity, in modern studies, on placing Transoxania outside the Revolutionary geography, either by default, or by portraying it as a passive existence, or by writing it off as being actively pro-Umayyad. All three views are untenable; but all three are probably the inevitable results of the sources' underreporting of the role of al-'Alā' ibn Ḥurayth and his constituency, and of the failure of modern scholarship to detect this historiographical flaw. Scholars who wrote before the publication of *Akhbār* could not have detected this flaw. *Akhbār* is the first and only source to establish the crucial connection between the obscure Revolutionary al-'Alā' ibn Ḥurayth and his profound legacy; and it does this by citing his full name—son of Ḥurayth ibn Quṭbah and nephew of Thābit, the two celebrated and popular Sughdian leaders.¹²⁶

Wellhausen did not go beyond excluding the territory from the active Revolutionary domain.¹²⁷ Barthold is not specific about the role of the territory in the Revolution, but he realizes the coalition between the 'most heterogeneous elements,' and that Abū Muslim "attracted the

¹²⁵ Agha, 'Abū Muslim,' pp. 343-5.

¹²⁶ *Infra*, chapter six.

¹²⁷ Wellhausen, p. 498.

dihqāns and the rural population.”¹²⁸ Gibb, who vouched for a no-mass-rising, was deluded into translating Naṣr ibn Sayyār’s statesmanship in handling the Sughdian issue¹²⁹ into a reciprocated pro-Naṣr and pro-Umayyad Sughdian sentiment.¹³⁰

Shaban is all but completely oblivious to anything outside Marw. Omar registers, in passing, the capitulation of Marw al-Rūdh, Harāt and Abīward,¹³¹ but he sees no “strong historical evidence ... of deep dissatisfaction ... which would have led to a complete upheaval against [the Umayyads] in the cities of Khurāsān and *Māwarā’ al-nahr*.”¹³²

Sharon assigns the territory to areas which still had to be subjugated after Abū Muslim had gained control “of the territory of Khurāsān to the east of the line Marw-Marw-ar-Rūd-Herāt ... Abū Dāwūd was sent to try his luck in subjugating Transoxania,”¹³³ which means that it had not been subjugated yet. Actually, the sources to which Sharon refers in order to support his statement do not say what he says they say.¹³⁴

Despite his earlier and strongly founded recognition of the geographically widespread support for the Revolution,¹³⁵ Daniel excludes Transoxania from the revolutionary coalition. On the strength of ‘common interest’ and ‘genuine friendship’, he declares it pro-Umayyad.¹³⁶ The alliance between the Umayyad Establishment and the

¹²⁸ Barthold, *Turkestan*, p. 198.

¹²⁹ *Infra*, chapter six.

¹³⁰ Gibb, *Conquests*, pp. 92-4.

¹³¹ Omar, *‘Abbāsīd Caliphate*, p. 106; like Sharon and Shaban, he is absorbed with the events in Marw, pp. 89-106.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 107.

¹³³ Sharon, *Revolt*, p. 175.

¹³⁴ Balādhurī only relates how Abū Dāwūd deceived ‘Uthmān ibn al-Kirmānī into crossing the River, promising him the governorship of Transoxania; then he killed him (*Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, p. 131). Ṭabarī and Dīnawarī state the known fact that Abū Dāwūd was sent to Ṭukhārīstān, not Transoxania proper. To Samarqand, it was Sabbā’ ibn al-Nu’mān who was sent. More important, both texts use Khurāsān in its wider sense, i.e., including Ṭukhārīstān and Transoxania, and both explicitly state that Abū Muslim sent his officials after he had established his control over the entire area. Thus, Ṭabarī, II: p. 2001, ‘... lammā ... ghalaba ‘alā Khurāsān wajjaha ‘ummāla-hu ‘alā bilādī-hā fa-ista’mala Sabbā’ ibn al-Nu’mān al-Azdī ‘alā Samarqand wa Abū Dāwūd Khālid ibn Ibrāhīm ‘alā Ṭukhārīstān.’ And Dīnawarī, p.362, ‘istawla ‘alā Khurāsān wa ista’mala ‘ummāla-hu ‘alay-hā fa-kāna awwala man ‘aqada la-hu min-hum ṣinbā’ [I read: Sabbā’] ibn al-Nu’mān ‘alā Samarqand wa-wallā Khālid ibn Ibrāhīm ‘alā Ṭukhārīstān.’ Sabbā’ (no.322), also killed later by Abū Muslim, had been one of the very few Organization members embroiled in the tribal strife on the Kirmānī side. It is not strange that he was sent to Samarqand within the context of Abū Muslim’s wide maneuvers to scatter the Kirmānī men all over the province. Furthermore, Samarqand must have been quiet and did not require a top lieutenant. Abū Dāwūd was Ṭukhārīstān’s man; moreover, there was trouble there that called for his expertise. This is a different but related story that will presently be investigated.

¹³⁵ Daniel, *Khurasan*, pp. 48-52.

¹³⁶ He says: ‘Of all the Iranian provinces, it is unlikely that any was more openly and actively pro-Umayyad than Transoxania. It would be a mistake to believe that Umayyad

‘native aristocracy of Transoxania,’ as well as of other Persian territories, is a matter of undisputed historical record, although it cannot be asserted that it had always been a stable alliance. So are the personal ‘genuine friendships’ which Qutaybah, Asad ibn ‘Abd Allāh, and Naṣr cultivated. But this does not bear evidence to corroborate the theory Daniel advances. The alliance between any native aristocracy and a foreign ruling establishment has always been a precarious ‘institution,’ but it never prevented the masses of any society from rising in revolt. It did not in Khurāsān proper, nor in most of Ṭukhāristān, so why should it have in Transoxania!? The areas Daniel tries to exclude from the ‘true mass uprising,’ for which he vouches,¹³⁷ he himself includes, a mere thirty-five pages earlier.¹³⁸

Daniel further rests his argument on Ṭabarī’s account of the fighting near Balkh, which Daniel dates to 130/747-748, and on the revolt of Sharīk ibn Shaykh al-Mahrī (no.336) in Bukhārā, in 133/750-751, and on the subsequent turbulences. He tries to illustrate two points: First, “the greatest difficulty [with which] the Abbasids asserted control over these frontier areas,” and, second, “the intensifying dissatisfaction with Abbasid rule.”¹³⁹ He does not examine the implications of the fact that the period intervening between Sharīk’s revolt and the Revolution was apparently peaceful and uneventful.

Occurring around four years after the Revolution had scored its first triumphs in the East, Sharīk’s revolt does not necessarily bear any indications regarding the geopolitical situation and the demographic composition of the antagonistic forces at the time the Revolution broke out. If anything, it bears witness to the natural post-victory disintegration that plagues any revolutions whose mainstay is an extremely complex and extended coalition. The fact that certain forces in Bukhārā (or even the entire Bukhārā population) revolted in

strength there was derived solely from the many troops they had there... Umayyad support went much deeper than that. The Umayyad leadership and the native aristocracy of Transoxania, the Syrian muqātilah and the Iranian march lords and warriors, had a common interest in resisting Turkish encroachments... This coincidence of interest was cemented by many genuine friendships... Thus many of the Iranians who fought the ‘Abbāsīd forces in Khurāsān came from the principalities of Transoxania. It was only with the greatest difficulty that the ‘Abbāsīds asserted control over these frontier areas.’ Ibid., p. 86, see also p. 58.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 52.

¹³⁸ In refuting Shaban’s theory, that Marw was ‘the source of the revolt,’ and in consolidating his own, that it was ‘only its focal point,’ Daniel lists (according to Dīnawarī, Ṭabarī, *Akhbār* and Azdī) among the areas which rose in revolt: ‘... Soghdia, ..., Khuttalān, Kish, and Nasaf ... Khwārizm, ..., Bukhārā.’ (Daniel, *Khurasan*, p. 51, and notes 138, 141).

¹³⁹ Ibid., pp.86, 87 ff.

133/750-751 against the Revolutionary government does not mean that either Transoxania as a whole, or even Bukhārā in particular, was anti-Revolutionary in 129-130/747-748. The pro-ʿAlīd character of Sharīk’s revolt¹⁴⁰ is proof enough that it may have been a violent expression of the disappointment of one of the wings of the coalition for whom the chosen ʿAbbāsīd was not a *riḍā*. In fact, Sharīk’s statement, “This is not the basis on which we supported [or swore allegiance to] Muḥammad’s House (*mā ʿalā hādihā ittibaʿnā [or bāyaʿnā] Āla Muḥammad ...*),”¹⁴¹ strongly indicates that he himself, and probably his followers, had been ardent supporters of the Bukayrist Organization—supporters who broke with Abū Muslim three to four years after the Revolution had erupted and won, and in good time for them to make known their dissatisfaction with the fact that Abū Muslim had exchanged their *riḍā* for his ʿAbbāsīd *Riḍā*.

Daniel’s understanding of the fighting around Balkh, and his dating it to 130/747-748 are even less accurate. As it were, the fighting was a natural attendant to the initial breakout of the Revolution. It is clearly evident from Ṭabarī’s account¹⁴² that these events had started before the capitulation of Marw and even before the Umayyad forces stationed in large garrisons such as Balkh had started to disintegrate. What probably misled Daniel is Ṭabarī’s style. Ṭabarī commenced his account of the assassination of the two sons of Kirmānī, a later occurrence located in the events of the year 130, by recounting how the events in and around Balkh, with which ʿUthmān ibn al-Kirmānī was yet to be associated, had started. Ṭabarī’s usage of the Arabic equivalent of the English past perfect, ‘had sent’ (*kāna wajjahā*) seems to have eluded Daniel. Consequently, his understanding of the composition and alignment of the forces of the two antagonists was further removed from the facts which the account establishes.

A proper reconstruction of these events must start with the events of the first eruption on Ramaḍān 25, 129/June 9, 748, in Saqīdunj, when Abū Muslim affected his first orchestrated deployment of his commanders to the districts. This means that the events on which Daniel rests his argument had started three months before the end of the year 129, and six months before the capitulation of Marw. It was one of the first salvos in the severely underreported chain of purges which took place in a masterly orchestrated manner in the outlying districts of Khurāsān-Ṭukhāristān and Transoxania.

¹⁴⁰ See Narshakhī-Frye, pp. 62-4; Narshakhī, pp. 91-3.

¹⁴¹ Ṭabarī, II: p. 74; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf III*, p. 171; Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrikh*, II: p. 354; Dhahabī, *Siyar*, VI: p. 60; Dhahabī, *Tārikh al-Islām*, VIII: p. 345.

¹⁴² Ṭabarī, II: pp. 1997-2000; Ibn al-Athīr, IV: p. 313.

The Umayyad forces from Balkh, Tirmidh and the fleeing remnants from the other districts of Ṭukhāristān mobilized under the Umayyad prefect of Balkh, Ziyād ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Qushayrī. They assembled somewhere in the district of Jūzajān,¹⁴³ wherein was the town Ṭālaqān.¹⁴⁴ If the place was Janduwayh, a village of Ṭālaqān, then the two forces did engage in the very first battle ever between the two antagonists.¹⁴⁵ According to Ṭabarī, “when Abū Dāwūd approached [the Umayyad forces], they turned away in flight.”¹⁴⁶ Whichever way, the Umayyad forces must have been hard pressed between massive eruptions all around, and at the rear. For, their flight was not to Balkh, as would have been expected, but to Tirmidh, which had been a Qaysite stronghold on the northern bank of the Oxus since the days of Mūsā ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Khāzim al-Sulamī. The road to Balkh lay open before Abū Dāwūd, who entered it without further ado.¹⁴⁷

Abū Muslim, apparently in constant need for his staunchest ally to be close to him in order to offset Sulaymān ibn Kathīr’s influence in the ranks of the leadership of the Organization,¹⁴⁸ summoned Abū Dāwūd to Marw and appointed in his stead another, a more prominent, notable of the Rabī‘ah alliance, Abū al-Maylā’ Yaḥyā ibn Nu‘aym al-Shaybānī.¹⁴⁹

This chieftain had been a pillar of the Umayyad Establishment in Khurāsān, and a pivot of tribal politics in the province. He had been subgovernor of Āmul under Asad ibn ‘Abd Allāh, in 117-118/735-737. To him Asad entrusted the task of the execution of Khidāsh. When Asad died in 120/737-738, and before caliph Hishām chose Naṣr ibn Sayyār, Abū al-Maylā’ was one of the candidates nominated for the governorship of the province. Although he joined al-Kirmānī’s rebellion against the government of Naṣr, he, like al-Kirmānī himself, was by no reckoning an anti-Establishment Revolutionary. One month after Abū Muslim declared the Revolution, Abū al-Maylā’ counseled the Yaman and Rabī‘ah rebels to reconcile themselves with Naṣr. Conceivably aware of the ethnic dimension of the Revolution, and the threat it posed to the foundations of the Establishment, he warned his faction: “Choose: either you perish before Muḍar, or Muḍar perish before you.”

¹⁴³ Ṭabarī, II: p. 1997.

¹⁴⁴ Le Strange, p. 423.

¹⁴⁵ According to Yāqūt, II: p. 170.

¹⁴⁶ Ṭabarī, II: p. 1997.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ For Abū Dāwūd’s role in countering Sulaymān’s opposition and buttressing Abū Muslim’s position, see *ibid.*, p. 182; *Akhbār*, p. 271.

¹⁴⁹ Ṭabarī, II: p. 1997.

Apparently unheeded by his rash tribesmen, this thoroughly tribal politician played along and joined the unwitting and short-lived alliance of convenience between his frivolous faction and the cunning Revolutionary command of Abū Muslim.¹⁵⁰

Abū Muslim could not have been oblivious of his new appointee's history or disposition. Therefore, Daniel's finding this appointment 'rather surprising'¹⁵¹ is justified, but only at first sight. Considering Abū Muslim's cautious and untrusting nature, and his shrewd political maneuvering, it must be concluded that he had pondered the move and calculated the risk. Abū Muslim's calculations we can only surmise. Theoretically, his confidence in the solidness of indigenous popular support may have been strong enough to lull him into a false sense of security, enough to make him think that his precarious choice for the office could not do any serious damage. But this is not very likely, because Abū al-Maylā' could not have been the only option Abū Muslim had. Choosing him must have emanated from keen intention rather than necessity. The bulk of the dispersed Umayyad forces that had manned the garrisons of Ṭukhāristān and Transoxania, both of which had been purged since the outset of the eruption, must have since regrouped in Tirmidh, just across the Oxus from Balkh. In fact, with Āmul and Zamm closed on them, Tirmidh became the only option for the remnants from Transoxania. It made perfect military and political sense for Abū Muslim to create in Balkh a replica of the Marw situation, to pit against one another the demoralized loyal and the unwittingly rebellious elements of the same withering Establishment—a tactic not foreign to Abū Muslim. Staying as disengaged as possible from this foreseen fray in the strongest and most important Arab stronghold outside Marw afforded Abū Muslim the best opportunity to attend to the situation in Marw with free hands and with his trusted ally on his side, while his natural enemies, current and latent, consumed one another.

Abū Muslim's plan, if this was indeed his premeditated plan, backfired—thanks to the reawakened strategic perceptiveness of Abū al-Maylā'. He must have seen, on the field, the extent of damage the Revolution was progressively doing to the Establishment and to Arab presence. In his warning to his fellow tribesmen a few months earlier, he had said: "This man, [Abū Muslim], brought his cause to the open only a month ago, and he is already [leading] an army as [large as] yours."¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Ṭabarī, II: pp. 1583, 1589, 1662, 1925, 1966 for the quotation, 1970.

¹⁵¹ Daniel, *Khurasan*, p. 86.

¹⁵² Ṭabarī, II: p. 1966.

Presiding in Balkh over a superficial coalition between a contingent of his own tribesmen and the masses of the new rising regime, essentially foreign to him, he saw the entire landscape around him swept clean of the defenders of the realm to which he essentially belonged; and Marw itself was on the verge of collapse. Abū al-Maylā' saw his worst fears come true. In such circumstances, his own Rabī'ah brethren saw the light and came around to his original position. They heeded Naṣr's famous desperate plea, albeit only outside Marw, and too late:

Let Rabī'ah in Marw, and its sister [tribes] know:
 they ought to grow indignant before indignation becomes futile
 (*abligh Rabī'ata fī Marw wa ikhwatahā*
an yaghḍabū qabla an lā yanfa'a l-ghaḍabu)¹⁵³

So, Abū al-Maylā' wrote to Ziyād ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Qushayrī, the displaced Umayyad subgovernor of Balkh and de facto leader of the Umayyad coalition elements regrouped now in Tirmidh, seeking reconciliation; the latter responded favorably. The entire Umayyad forces present in the area came back from Tirmidh and linked up with Abū al-Maylā' somewhere on the southern bank of the Oxus, one parasang from Balkh, setting the stage for the only close-to-real showdown east of Tūs.¹⁵⁴

The composition of this Umayyad coalition is an important key to the understanding of the demographic structures of the antagonists, since it is the only factual element to which Daniel anchors his exclusion of Transoxania from the Revolutionary coalition. It is clear that all three major Arab alliances—Muḍar, Yaman and Rabī'ah—were represented.¹⁵⁵ The currently ruling alliance, Muḍar, and the official government apparatus were represented by the displaced subgovernor of Balkh, Ziyād ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān of the Banū Qushayr, and the two other veterans, Muslim ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān of the Banū Bāhilah and 'Isā ibn Zur'ah of the Banū Sulaym. The last two are likely to have also been subgovernors of some other districts who had also been displaced by the Revolutionary eruption.¹⁵⁶ The 'loyal opposition', if this term can be applied to the Yaman and Rabī'ah, joining ranks with Muḍar, completes the configuration of the clearly Arab 'wing' of the Umayyad coalition in this encounter.

¹⁵³ Naṣr ibn Sayyār, p. 28; cf. infra, pp. 206-12.

¹⁵⁴ Ṭabarī, II: pp. 1997.

¹⁵⁵ Ṭabarī, II: p. 1998.

¹⁵⁶ Muslim ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān, like Abū al-Maylā', had been nominated for the governorship of the province; he had also been tapped by Naṣr, all through the latter's governorship, as subgovernor of Balkh, of Tukhāristān, and in other official capacities, cf. Ṭabarī, II: pp. 1663-4, 1723, 1920-1, 1927-9.

The Iranian ‘wing’ of this coalition, *man ma’a-hum min al-A’ājim*, comprised the princes of Ṭukhāristān and Transoxania, *mulūk Ṭukhāristān wa-mā khalfā al-nahr wa-mā dūna-hu*.¹⁵⁷ The presence of the native aristocracy is no wonder; nor is that of Muqāṭil, the son of the celebrated Ḥayyān al-Nabaṭī. Muqāṭil was a very prominent *mawlā*—one of those whom Naṣr ibn Sayyār called ‘genuine’ (*ṣamīm al-mawālī*), probable allies of the Establishment.¹⁵⁸

No one should deny the presence of Iranians in the Arab ranks, or of Arabs in the Revolutionary ranks. Natural allies flocked to where their interests lay. But this is not the question. The question is who represented whose interests, what these interests were, and what majorities were on which side. These complex questions will be dealt with in parts two and three of this book.

¹⁵⁷ Tabarī, II: pp. 1998, 1997.

¹⁵⁸ Ḥayyān, Muqāṭil’s father, was a *mawlā* of an uncle of Abū al-Maylā’—Maṣqalah ibn Hubayrah al-Shaybānī; in Qutaybah’s days he was the commander of the official division of the ‘*dūwāmized*’ *mawālī* in the army. His son Muqāṭil was no less prominent. On Ḥayyān see, e.g. Tabarī, III: pp. 535, 552, 568-71, 582-3, 610, 619, IV: p. 54; on Muqāṭil and his father, Ḥayyān, see Crone, ‘Muqāṭil,’ pp. 238-45.