CHAPTER I.

Geneology - Arab or non-Arab? - >Abū ʿUfra.

Geneology (1).

For geneology see Agh. 18/8; ID. 283; IKh. 2/145; Isa. 4/108; Ist. 4/109; TT. 10/329; TI. 320; Usd.

† Thus also in Bal. 417; Iqd. 2/243; Kam. 245.4.

Agh. adds ʿbin al-wrāj}.4.
Al-Muhallab originally belonged to Dabā (1), the old principal town of 'Uman which had been the home of his father and forefathers for many a century. He was descended from al-*Atik, progenitor of a branch of 'Azd—'Uman which name was applied to one of the four principal groups (2) into which the descendants of al-'Azd became divided after their emigration from their original home in Yaman(3). The 'Azd—'Uman were so called after the name of their new home in order to distinguish them from the other collateral groups, e.g., 'Azd Sarāt, which, though tracing their descent from one and the same ancestor, al-'Azd, had drifted to different far-off lands and had likewise some distinctive suffix added to their common tribal name(4).

We come across a few references insinuating that al-Muhallab was not of the Arab stock and that his father was really a non-Arab, belonging to Khuzistan (5) or the

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(1). Tab. 1/543; Yaq. 2/543 and Ikh. 2/148; Bel. 76 'Dabba' (Dab). Al-Asma'I has described Dabā as a market place in 'Uman which probably is identical with the town of Dabā. (Yaq. 2/543; cf. Tab. 1/1979.
(2). Ency. 1/529.
(3). The emigration of al-'Azd, connected with the bursting of the Dam of Marib, is well-known.
(4). IKh. 2/148.
(5). Agh. 13/61.
island of Kharak, who migrated to 'Uman, settled amongst the 'Azd and then in course of time spuriously claimed his descent from them. Such references are mostly to be found in the verses of the contemporary poets, Ziyād al-‘Ajam, Ka'b al-Ashqarī and al-Farazdaq. Ibn Hajar also mentions that such view was held by 'a few people'.

(1) Abū 'Ubaida in Yag. 2/337. Khārik was an island in the Persian Gulf opposite the mouth of the river Shāpur (Le Str. 261). Mention of Khārik is also made by al-Farazdaq:

(Diw. 253)

(2) Ziyād al-‘Ajam says:

(Agh. 13/56). The second verse is also to be found in Iṣā. 4/109 where it is stated that the reference in the third line was particularly to Abū Sufra, father of al-Muhallab, who had remained uncircumcised till he was far advanced in age.

Ka'b al-Ashqarī says, eulogising Qutaiba b. Muslim, the avowed enemy of al-Muhallabīds, and satirising Yazīd b. al-Muhallab:

(Agh. 13/61). The three proper nouns occurring in the third verse are said to be the former names of Abū Sufra, his father and his grand-father respectively which were discarded in favour of 'Arab names after their fusion with the 'Azd. According to 'Abū 'Ubaida in Yag. 2/337 where verses 3 and 4 are given with variation, the former name of Abū Sufra was Būrça. The verses, with variation and along with many others, are also preserved in Tab. 2/1239-40.

Al-Farazdaq, in his satires, frequently refers to the non-'Arab origin of al-Muhallabīds. A few verses are quoted on infra p. 7 note(1). (3) Iṣā. 4/109.
There is no room for the least doubt about the Arab descent of al-Mihallab. His genealogy as given above is preserved by such eminent authorities as Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, Ibn al-`Athir, al-Isfahānī, Ibn Duraid, and Ibn Khallikān. Ibn Ḥajar too recognises it as the authoritative version which is also corroborated by Ibn al-Kalbī.

Now the references to the contrary can only be explained as the irresponsible utterances of unscrupulous poets who, in accordance with the spirit of the times, were moved by tribal jealousies and still more were motivated by selfish considerations of monetary gain. It was an age when tribal rivalries and old prejudices had revived with full force and particularly the traditional animosity between the Northern and the Southern Arabs was raging vehemently. The poets traded freely in satires, lampoons and encomiums and seldom did they allow the fall of a patron to affect their own fortunes. Often and without any compunction they shifted their allegiance from their erstwhile patron to his supplanter and the praise of the latter invariably involved a satire on the former.

Curiously enough, the case of al-Mihallab forms a typical illustration of the poets' irresponsibility and disregard for truth and consistency. Of the three poets whose assertion of al-Mihallab's foreign descent has been referred to above, Ziyād al-`A<jam was devoted to him since an early date and continued to be his
panegyrist throughout his life. The full report in Agh. (1) leaves no doubt that the verse containing a jibe on 'Abū Suīra who 'circumcised late in life', was composed by him only in a fit of tribal jealousy just with a view to establishing the superiority of his own tribe, 'Abd al-Qais, over that of the rival poet, Ka'b al-'Ashqarī, who happened to belong to the same tribe as al-Muhallab. Similarly Ka'b long remained the family poet of al-Mahāliba (2) and his derogatory verses are themselves a proof that they were meant just to flatter the vanity of the powerful Qaisite to whom he had gone over after the tragic fall of his Yemenite patrons notwithstanding the fact that he himself was an Azdite. The satires of al-Farazdaq against al-Muhallabids are numerous indeed, yet his diwān too contains a Qasīda in honour of the sons of al-Muhallab (3) with many a laudatory verse in eulogy of their illustrious father. During the heyday of their ascendancy, al-Farazdaq had no scruples to lavish praises on the Bihallabids who had long been the target of his most vehement satires and whom he again satirized after their tragic end when he had nothing to hope for or fear from them.

(1) 13/56; See also Supra p.3 note 2.

(2) Al-Muhallab and his descendants are collectively called 'al-Mahāliba' (Kam. 96).

(3) Diw. 374.
also cut off from any deep and intimate contact with their Arab brethren inland. This could not but conduce to their giving up many Arab notions and habits and developing un-Arab ones in their place. Thus if we scrutinise closely the satires and invectives against the 'Azd 'Uman, we will find that they stress not so much their non-Arab origin as the un-Arab way of life practised by them. The assertion of their non-Arab origin is made just by way of a hyperbole for their un-Arab calling and religious and social practices. The same is exactly the case with the satires of al-Farazdaq, for instance, against al-Muhallab. The main theme on which the poet dilates is that the ancestors and tribesmen of al-Muhallab practised seamanship; that they did not worship Yaghuth or go round al-Dawar as the Arabs did; that they did not indulge in gambling and drinking bouts which were the proud boast of a pure Arab; that they knew not circumcision which was one of the observances of Fitrah dating from the time of Abraham; etc.etc. (1). Surely, all this may be true but the Arab origin still remains unquestioned.

(3) Yaq.4/522; Taj under 'Uman; also Ency. under 'Azd.

(1). Cf. the following two quotations from the satires of al-Farazdaq upon al-Muhallab:

A.

درتآريت الأزور زعفرة لما عليكم
جيث ومن أجلهم بزيادة بذل
ليا لينزونا نكمن وترعلم
وتم إعجابنا الأزور زعفرة

B.

حرا組織 العزور زعفرة لما عليكم
جيت ومن أجلهم بزيادة بذل
ليا لينزونا نكمن وترعلم
وتم إعجابنا الأزور زعفرة
Thus it is clear that the utterances of such opportunist and unscrupulous poets can have no authoritative value. However, it must be admitted that they seized upon a common prejudice prevalent among the Arabs of Central Arabia not particularly against al-Mahāliba alone but against the whole of 'Azd-'Umrān in general(1). The 'Azd-'Umrān were often jeered at for their calling, customs and social habits which, according to the standard notions, were inconsistent with the dignity and honour of a pure Arab. They were also called 'Mazūn' (or 'Mazūn') which name contained a disparaging reference to their calling of seamanship(2).

The truth is that the 'Azd-'Umrān had settled in the far-off maritime region of 'Umrān, then under Persian suzerainty, as far back as during the time of Ardāshīr I b. Bābak (226-241 A.D.) who, it is reported, made them boatmen and fishers (3). No doubt, it was but natural for the dwellers in a coastal region to be attracted to the sea and take to seamanship and fishing. These two callings were considered highly derogatory to the honour of a pure Arab and hence they form the main burden of the satires against them. Moreover, the 'Azd in 'Umrān lived amidst a large non-Arab population and were

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(1) The Quraisyites were unwilling to recognise the 'Azd-'Umrān as Arabs (Enc. under 'Azd).

(2) 'Mazūn' is variously explained as (a) the Persian name of 'Umrān, as (b) connoting 'mallāhin (seamen)' and as (c) a small town in 'Umrān which was inhabited exclusively by Jews and seamen. In any case it contained a reference to seamanship. Al-Kumait says with particular reference to 'Abū Sa'īd (al-Mahallab) Vide Taj under 'Azd.
Further, it is quite understandable that the calling of seamanship brought the people of 'Uman into frequent contact with the island of Kharak and the mainland of Khuzistan. These navigational relations were exploited by the satirists to allege that 'Abū Sufra was a non-Arab from the above two places. The words ascribed to 'Abū 'Ubaida purporting to assert al-Muhallab's non-Arab origin (1) may very well be regarded as a mere exposition of a popular jibe rather than a considered testimony on his own behalf. Similarly, the Persian names variously attributed to al-Muhallab's ancestors (2) seem only to be an offshoot of the common prejudice.

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(1) Yaq. 2/337.

(2) Ibid; see also supra p.3 note 2.
The 'Azd-'Uman entered the fold of Islam in the year 8 (or 7) A.H. in response to an appeal from the Prophet addressed to their chiefs Jaifar and 'Abbad (1), sons of al-Julanda the Azdite. Following the death of the Prophet, however, they turned apostates, withholding the payment of al-zakāt, under the leadership of a high dignitary called Laqīt b. Malik al-'Azdī 'Ubū 't-ṭaj who, like so many other pretenders that cropped up at the time, arrogated to himself the privileges of prophethood and established his sway over 'Uman. This necessitated the despatch of a punitive expedition by 'Abū Bakr on the arrival of which the rebels entrenched themselves in Dabā but after a fierce fight (year 11 A.H.) surrendered with heavy losses to themselves and again returned to the path of Islam. A number of them were also captured as prisoners and sent to 'Abū Bakr (2).

It is definitely known that 'Abū Sufra, father of al-Muhallab, followed the general mass of his tribesmen in their acceptance of and revolt from Islam. He was, no doubt, one of the followers of Laqīt in apostasy and re-entered the fold of Islam on the crushing of the revolt (3).

There is a report, related on the authority of al-Waqīdī, to the effect that 'Abū Sufra was one of those

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(1). Thus in Tab. 1/1561; Yqb. 2/85. 1 Ath. 2/181. Ḥayāna. Bal. 76.
(2). Bal. 76; Tab. 1/1977-79.
(3). Isa. 3/535 on the authority of 'Ibn Sa'd.
men of Dabā who were turned prisoners after the victory over Laqīt and sent to 'Abū Bakr, as mentioned above. 'Abū Bakr, it continues, set all those prisoners free (1) and allowed them to go wherever they liked whereupon 'Abū Ṣufra settled in al-Baṣra. The report is mentioned in Ikh. (2/145-6) and also in Isa. where a few more details are added. But in either place, 'Abū Ṣufra is described as 'a boy not yet of age' which is wrong and renders the whole report unreliable. As pointed out in Isa., this description of 'Abū Ṣufra is untenable in view of the assertion of al-Ḥākim, which, no doubt, is indisputable, that al-Muhallab was born during the lifetime of the Prophet. 'Ibn Ṭalā'ib rejects it still more positively. He says, 'This report is untrue and al-Wāqīḍī has erred in it' because 'Abū Ṣufra was not among those prisoners nor did 'Abū Bakr see him at all. It was only to 'Umar, the second Caliph, that 'Abū Ṣufra paid a visit and at that time he was an old man with hoary head and grey beard which he dyed at the former's suggestion. How then, asks 'Ibn Ṭalā'īb, can 'Abū Ṣufra be a mere lad during the time of 'Abū Bakr while al-Muhallab, who was

(1). According to Isa. (4/108-9), the prisoners were released by 'Abū Bakr on the intervention of 'Umar. Yaq. 2/544 mentions that they were released by 'Umar only after the death of 'Abū Bakr.
one of his comparatively younger children, was born many years before the death of the Prophet? Moreover, some of his children were born thirty or even more years before the death of the Prophet.(1).

Another incongruity in this report is that it suggests that 'Abū Sufra settled in al-Ba'ara shortly after his supposed release by 'Abū Bakr which, of course, is not proved by later events.

According to Isa., it is a disputed point whether 'Abū Sufra ever saw the Prophet. But the evidence is almost decisively on the negative side. No doubt, Ibn al-Sakan has counted him as one of 'al-Ṣaḥāba' but he has only relied on a tradition which has as its source 'Abū Sufra himself and is handed down to us through numerous successive generations of al-Mahallabids and which, on the face of it, is somewhat fantastic. It purports to say that the Prophet was highly impressed by the tall and stately figure of 'Abū Sufra who visited him in a yellow robe which he trailed two yards behind him'. On an inquiry from the Prophet, 'Abū Sufra gave a fictitious pedigree of himself which he linked up with the famous al-Jalanda who, it is supposed, is referred to in the Qur'ān(2). The Prophet thereupon called him 'Abū Sufra'.

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(1). Ikh. 2/146.

(2). Al-Jalanda, a scion of the 'Aṣūr of al-Yaman, is said to have established himself on the coast of Fārs as early as before the time of Moses and it is claimed that it is he who is meant in the verse of the Qur'ān: 'His descendants known as or were very influential in that region long after the advent of Islam. (Yaq. 2/711).
by which name he is commonly known. 'Abū Ṣufra is also reported to have said that he had a daughter called Ṣufra who is unheard of anywhere else (1).

Now this report is utterly unreliable. Ibn Hajar testifies that its veracity was questioned and Ibn 'Abd al-Barr categorically denies 'Abū Ṣufra's visit to the Prophet which denial is also corroborated by the account in Usd. Evidently the above report was fabricated by the later al-Muhallabids just to add to the honour of their family (2).

Similarly, 'Abū Ṣufra's visit to 'Abū Bakr, which is asserted in a few reports though not with certainty (3), lacks confirmation and proof. Ibn Qutaiba has definitely denied it and most probably the name of 'Abū Bakr occurring in the report of al-Hākim (4) has by an oversight been put in place of 'Umar because it is strikingly similar to the report of 'Abū Ṣufra's visit to the second Caliph, which, of course, is beyond all doubt.

As the visit to the second Caliph came off only after 'Abū Ṣufra had settled in al-Baṣra, we now turn to his emigration from 'Umar and will next refer to the former event in accordance with chronological order.

'Abū Ṣufra left 'Umar in the capacity of a warrior. He was one of the members of the expedition organised by

(1). Isa. 4/108.

(2). Significantly enough, al-Ṯabarīshī introduces the above report with the words that it was 'an assertion of al-Muhallabiya.'

(3). Ist. 4/109 and Usd. 5/231.

"Uthmān b. 'Abī 'l-'Aṣī al-Thaqafī, the governor of al-Bahrayn and 'Ummān, and sent abroad under the command of his brother al-Ḥakam b. 'Abī al-'Aṣī to cross the sea and seek new conquests in the land of Fārs. This expedition which is described as a very large one (2000 strong) consisting of men drawn from the various tribes of 'Abī al-Qais, al-ʿAzd and others, first conquered the island of 'Abrkāvan (1), nowadays called Kishm near the Straits of the Persian Gulf, and then, disembarking on the mainland of Fārs, captured Tawwaj (2), a city situated a short distance up the mouth of the river Šāpur in the district of Ardshīr Khurra, where a number of Muslims were settled in the year 19 A.H.

We do not hear anything about the part played by 'Abū ẓufra in the conquest of 'Abrkāvan or the capture of Tawwaj (3) but in the following year (20 A.H. *) we find him enjoying a high military rank in the army of al-Ḥakam. It so happened that the planting of the Muslims on the soil of Fārs greatly perturbed its Marzubān, Shahrak (4) and their growing strength at last moved him

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(1). Also written 'Ibn Ḫavān or Ḫānī Ḫavān and also called Lāfit (Le Stra. 261).

(2). Also Tawwaz (Le Stra. 259-60).

(3). Tab. (1/2696 seq.) represents as if it were a battle for Tawwaj what Ṣalāh describes as the Battle of Ḥaftahr. The latter account is more detailed on this point and, hence, more credible. *'Ibn Ṣād: Tabaqāt 5/409. The account in Dāin. 141-142 makes it clear that the battle at Ḥaftahr took place one year after the landing of the Muslim army on the soil of Fārs. The sequence of events as related in the book also confirms that the year should be 20 A.H.

(4). Thus in Ṣal. and Tab.; also written ʿIṣām as in Yaq. In a verse in Yaq. 3/494 we also have ʿIṣām.
to put up resistance. So, he himself headed an army which crossed swords with the Muslim army under al-Hakam at Kāshāh (1), a place near Tawwaj in the land of Sābūr. In the Battle of Kāshāh, ʿAbū Sufra commanded the left wing of al-Hakam's army while the right wing and the vanguard were commanded by al-Jārūd al-ʿAbdī and Sawwar b. Hammām al-ʿAbdī respectively. The battle proved a fierce one; it is said to have been as hard and to have brought as much advantage to the Muslims as the famous Battle of Qadisiyya. The result was a decisive victory for the Muslims; Shahrak was killed (3) and Kāshāh was captured by force (3).

This is the first time that we meet ʿAbū Sufra in the capacity of a soldier. We do not know what walk of life he belonged to in the days before. But it is likely that he may have been a seaman or a fisher like most of his countrymen and that he was attracted to the army during the wave of military adventure which swept the Khilafah in the second decade of the Muslim era. The high rank of Commander of the left wing is suggestive of some previous services.

(1). Also written Ḍīshāh. This should not be confused with Ḍīshāh in Arrajān.

(2). Tab. also records (1/2637) another battle between ʿUthmān b. ʿAbī al- ʿAṣ and Shahrak towards the end of the caliphate of ʿUmar and the beginning of the caliphate of ʿUthmān (23-24 A.H.). This can only be a distorted version of what is mentioned in Bel. 386 as an expedition against ' the Brother of Shahrak' in the same years, 23 or 24. Shahrak was decidedly killed at Ḍīshāh. Of course, his son, who is mentioned in Tab.'s annals of the later battle, survived him.

(3). Bel. 386-87.
of which, of course, we possess no record but it is just possible that he may have served in some of the various earlier naval expeditions that were sent out from the coast of <Umar and al-Bahrain across the Persian Gulf by al-<Al'a>b. al-Hadrami, a former governor, and to the far distant coasts of Karachi and Bombay by Uthmân and his brother al-Hakam (1). Anyhow, the command of the left wing is a sufficient proof of the outstanding military qualities of Abu Sufra.

At the instance of <Umar, Uthmân also joined his brother al-Hakam when the latter had won the victory at Râshâh. Soon after his arrival at Tawwaj, Uthmân undertook a number of campaigns in the neighbouring country; Kazarûn and al-Nûbandjân are mentioned as two of the places attacked by him (2). Abu Sufra, as a prominent member of the army, may have taken part in these campaigns but henceforth we cease to hear anything about his military exploits.

<Umar also wrote to Abu Musá al-Ash'arî, the governor of al-Basra, to extend every help to Uthmân who, it seems, fixed the base of his military operations at al-Basra, the nearest garrison town, shortly after his arrival in Fars because during the last two or three years of the Caliphate of <Umar there was very close collaboration between the two. Abu Musá himself accompanied Uthmân in many a campaign in Fars and often helped him with men. Thus Abu Sufra

(1). Bal. 431-32.
(2). Bal. 388.
must have settled in al-Basra along with the army of <Uthman about the year 21 A.H. in which, as will be seen in the next chapter, al-Muhallab is noticed with the Basran army.

It was from al-Basra that <Uthman (1) despatched <Abu Sufra along with a number of Azdite men to visit <Umar. <Umar asked <Abu Sufra as to his name which he gave as Zalim b. Sariq (lit., unjust b. thief). Perhaps the undesirable import of these names set <Umar to think of a better name for him. Seeing that <Abu Sufra had dyed his head and beard, which had grown white, he observed, "You are <Abu Sufra (lit., father of yellow colour)," and thence-forth the 'Kunya' was adopted.

On this visit, <Abu Sufra was also accompanied by ten of his sons of whom al-Muhallab was the youngest. <Umar looked at them all and then, pointing out to al-Muhallab in whom he saw signs of early promise, said to <Abu Sufra, "This is the chief of all your sons."

It is said that <Abu Sufra also applied to <Umar for some job which request the Caliph dismissed with a jocular reference to his and his father's unhappy names, saying, "You are 'unjust' and your father is a 'thief'" (2).

(1) At this time <Uthman is said to be the 'Amir' of al-Basra which should not be taken to mean 'governor.' It must, however, be remembered that the administration of al-Basra was not yet centralised into the hands of the governor. Various troops were stationed under independent commanders who collaborated with each other as the occasion demanded (Tab. 1/2713, 8-10). The armies of <Abu Musa and <Uthman b. <Abi 'l-'Aasi are mentioned as distinct from each other so late as in the year 29 A.H. (Tab. 1/2832).

(2) Sh.; cf. Iqd. 1/297.
The visit to 'Umar is the last event recorded of 'Abū Sufra’s life. As he was already old enough, he must have died not long afterwards.

'Abū Sufra must have had at least ten sons. We, however, know of only five of them:

1. Qabīṣa, popularly known as the grand father of Hazārīmard (lit., one thousand men), a sobriquet conferred on 'Umar b. Ḥafṣ b. 'Uthmān b. Qabīṣa, a famous governor of Africa, as a recognition of his extraordinary bravery. Another descendant of Qabīṣa was Judai b. Sa‘īd b. Qabīṣa who served al-Muhallab on many an occasion and is also mentioned as the ‘Khāl’ of Yazīd b. al-Muhallab. Qabīṣa was the leader of the ‘Azd in the expedition of Muslim b. 'Ubaïs against the ‘Azārīqa.

2. Al-Maghīra. His two sons, Bishr and Ṣa‘ān were distinguished horsemen of al-Muhallab’s army. Another son called al-Maghārā is also known.

3. Al-Nakhf. He had a son called Sabra. (1)

4. Al-Buḥṭurī. He had a son called Sa‘īd (2).

5. Al-Muhallab. He is said to have been born of the same mother as Mas‘ūd b. ‘Amr, the chief of the ‘Azd who was murdered during the upheaval in al-Baṣra in the year 64 A.H. (3).

(1). ID. 283; Tab. Index.
(2). Agh. 5/167.
(3). ID. 294.
6. A daughter of 'Abū Ṣufra called Hind is also mentioned in Iqd. (4/157). At one time about the third quarter of the first century (1), she was regarded as the most respected and influential widow of al-Baṣra.

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(1). The anecdote in Iqd, belongs to the period when was the Qādī of al-Baṣra. According to Tab.(index) Zurara was appointed Qādī in 45 and again held the same office in 55 and 75-76 A.H.