CHAPTER VII.

CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE 'AZĀRIQA.

First Period 66-67.

It is difficult, indeed, to determine precisely the
time when al-Muhallab formally assumed the command. All
that we know is that al-Zubair b. 'Alī was at that time
encamped on the eastern bank of the Dijlatu 'l-‘Awrā'. Al-
Zubair b. 'Alī was sent by 'Ubaidullāh b. Bushair three
months after the drowning of Ḥāritha b. Badr which must
have occurred soon after the appointment of al-Qubā'
early in the year 66. Thus, according to a rough estimate,
al-Muhallab's assumption of command can be placed approxi-
mately in the fourth month of the year 66 A.H. when he
was a little over 59 years of age.

Al-Muhallab lost no time in setting in right earnest
about the preliminary preparations. The garrison town of
al-Basra was divided into five divisions or wards, every
one of which was occupied by a particular tribe after whom
it was called. The 'Ākhmās; as the five divisions were
called, were (1) Bakr, (2) 'Abd al-Qais, (3) Tamīm, (4)
'Azd and (5) 'Āhl al-‘Aliya ( = 'Āhl al-Madīna, mostly
Qaisites). Al-Muhallab selected twelve thousand (1) recruits
for his army from all the five divisions and placed each

(1). According to Dain. (232, 3-4), twenty thousand, eight
thousand from al-'Azd and the rest from the other
tribes.
division under a leader of its own. Thus, ʿUbaidullāh b. Ziyād b. Ẓabyān was appointed headman of the 'khums' of Bakr b. Wāʾil while al-Ḥarīsh b. Hilal al-Sādī was placed at the head of Banū Tamīm.

Now the army having been formed, the next question was of its equipment. The funds in the Bait al-Māl did not exceed two hundred thousand dirhems. As it would not do to draw upon these meagre and inadequate reserves, al-Muhallab had to tap some other source. With his extraordinary resourcefulness, he conceived of a very bold and an entirely original plan of providing the necessary amount. The Khārijite incursions had almost paralysed the upcountry trade and the commerce of the city which depended largely on the import of raw materials and commodities from al-ʿAwāz and Fārs was completely at a standstill. Al-Muhallab called the traders of al-ʾ Başra and impressed upon them that the only hope of the revival of their trade, which they had lost for the last one year, lay in the extermination of the menace of the ʿAzāriqa. Once the point was driven home to them that they had a genuine stake in the success of al-Muhallab's campaign, they willingly agreed to contribute their mite by advancing large credits on the assurance of early payment and a full recognition of their services afterwards. With the credit thus available to him, al-Muhallab completed the equipment of his army. Padded overcoats (البُطِّاَحَاتِ) and quilted gaiters (الحذاءِ) are particularly mentioned as some of the articles of equipment.
1. **THE BATTLE AT AL-JISR**

Al-Muhallab was now ready for an encounter, the immediate objective being the dislodging of the 'Azariqa from the threatening position that they had occupied on the other side of the Dijlatu 'l-‘Awra. The town of al-Basra lay twelve miles to the west of the river and was connected with it by means of two canals, -- Nahr Ma'qil in the north-east and Nahr al-'Ubulla in the south-east (1). Thus the road to the east passed over two bridges, -- the one across Nahr Ma'qil (cf. Tab. 2/1350,6) in close proximity to the city and the other over the main stream farther on. These two bridges are generally referred to in the annals as Jisru 'l-Basra (probably identical with al-Jisru 'l-Asghar) and 'al-Jisru 'l-‘Akbar' respectively. It was on the eastern extremity of al-Jisru 'l-'Akbar that al-Zubair b. al-Mahuz (2) was encamped. Advancing from al-Basra in the west al-Muhallab alighted at the western end of it, his troops following him mostly on foot. Both the armies now stood opposite each other on either bank of the Dijla.

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(1). Le Stra. 44.

(2). Al-Zubair is substituted in Tab. 2/584 by 'Ubaidullah b. al-Mahuz who according to Kam. and Anon. had remained behind at Nahr 'Urb. Al-Muhallab is reported to have encountered 'Ubaidullah just behind al-Jisru 'l-Asghar and to have compelled him to retire first to al-Jisru 'l-'Akbar and then to Silla-wa-Sillibra. In another report (Tab. 2/591) 'Amr al-Qanah, an 'Azraqite lieutenant, is said to have been driven out from the land between the two bridges by Habib b. al-Muhallab. The accounts of Kam. and Anon. are more coherent and credible.
The bridge, it will be remembered, had already been destroyed by the Basrans themselves. Al-Muhallab was now in urgent need of re-building it in order to carry his troops across the river. But the real problem was of establishing a bridgehead on the other side where the enemy was firmly planted. For this purpose he requisitioned a number of boats and ordered their speedy repairs. The boats were ready for use before the day advanced and in them he rushed across the river a contingent led by his son, al-Mughira. As they neared the other shore, the enemy fell upon them and put up a strong fight to prevent their landing. In the end of a hard and close fight, the ‘Azariqa lost ground chiefly due to al-Mughira’s strong archery. Al-Mughira’s forces at last succeeded in getting a foothold on the other bank and kept the enemy at bay till al-Muhallab built the bridge and crossed the river with the main body of his troops. Al-Muhallab only found the ‘Azariqa fleeing before the Basrans and he forbade his men to pursue them. Al-Zubair b. ‘Ali may have lingered somewhere for a short while but soon joined ‘Ubaidullah b. Bushair at Nahr Tirā.

This first success of al-Muhallab’s arms had only the effect of a tonic for the down-hearted people of al-Baṣra. They received the happy news with a sigh of relief and an outburst of joy. It was really a major operation accomplished with signal success through the wise leadership of al-Muhallab. Al-Mughira’s bold dash to the other bank in boats and his acquirement of
bridgehead there was but a daring feat. Al-Muhallab's prestige stood doubly enhanced in the estimation of his townfolk and the morale of his troops rose high. Gleefully did the poets celebrate this victory and joyously did they hail Al-Muhallab as their Saviour. Thus said a man of Al-Azd:-

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\text{“} \begin{align*}
\text{مَعَوَّدَةٌ} & \text{ بَيْنَ الْفَرْجِ وَالْحَرْبِ لِلَّهِ} \\
\text{وَالْمَاشِيَّةٌ} & \text{ بِنَفْعٍ عَنْ ذَاتِ الْمَلَكِ} \\
\text{وَالْمُهَٰلَكُ} & \text{ لِلَّهِ لِمَّا ذَٰلِكَ} \\
\text{وَالْمُهَٰلَكُ} & \text{ لِلَّهِ لِمَّا ذَٰلِكَ} \\
\text{وَالْمُهَٰلَكُ} & \text{ لِلَّهِ لِمَّا ذَٰلِكَ} \\
\end{align*}\text{“}
\]

(Anon. 103)

Another Azdite poet says:-

\[
\text{“} \begin{align*}
\text{أَلْيُهُمُ} & \text{ يَتَقَبَّلُونَ} \\
\text{مَعَوَّدَةٌ} & \text{ بَيْنَ الْفَرْجِ وَالْحَرْبِ لِلَّهِ} \\
\text{وَالْمَاشِيَّةٌ} & \text{ بِنَفْعٍ عَنْ ذَاتِ الْمَلَكِ} \\
\end{align*}\text{“}

(Kam. 626).

Al-Muhallab's immediate objective was only the driving out of Al-Zubair b. 'Ali and his troops from the vicinity of Al-Basra. This aim having been achieved, he did not pursue the enemy any further. He knew that the defeat of Al-Zubair b. 'Ali was not the end of the 'Azariqa. Many a great battle was yet in store for which he should be fully prepared. He was not puffed up with victory and even in the first flush of joy, would act according to the sober dictates of prudence. He would not advance a step further without consolidating the ground he had gained, thereby also safeguarding his line of communication and retreat.

Al-Muhallab, therefore, stayed in the districts
of Dijla (1) for forty days (2) and collected a consider­able sum of money by way of taxes, out of which he forthwith cleared the dues that he owed to the merchants and also paid his soldiers. This singular act of loyalty to obligations and solicitude for those under his command coupled with the heartening effect of his initial success, inspired among the people so much confidence in his leadership that they began to enlist in his army of their own voluntary will in the hope of booty and future commercial prosperity. Prominent among those who joined him at this time were Muhammad b. Wāsik al-Azdi, 'Abdullah b. Rabāh al-Anṣārī, Muʿāwiya b. Qurra al-Muzānī and 'Abū ʿImrān al-Juwnānī, — all of them deadly enemies of the Khārijītes.

Al-Muhallab then started for Nahr Tīrā where the 'Azāriqa were assembled. They, however, moved to al-ʿAbhāz. Al-Muhallab again made a halt at Nahr Tīrā and collected taxes from the neighbouring districts of al-Sūs and Manādhir. It appears that al-Muhallab's stay at Nahr Tīrā must have prolonged at least for a couple of months, which period he utilised to the fullest advantage for arming himself with a full understanding of the conditions in the enemy camp. Al-Muhallab had always been a great believer in the utility of espionage. Even in peace time he used to send spies to bring him news of all sorts.

(1). The 'districts of Dijla' extended from Maysān down to the sea. (Yaq. 4/319).
(2). Kam. 628, 13.
So, while here at Nahr Tīrā, his spies were active in the enemy camp and they informed him that the Azraqite force consisted mainly of low people like fullers, dyers, blacksmiths etc. Al-Muhallab, who had a due regard for psychological and emotional factors, could miss no opportunity of in his soldiers a contempt of the foe. Forthwith he addressed his soldiers and impressed upon them that the 'Azāriqa, low people as they were, should never get the upper hand of them.

Al-Muhallab's army was now sufficiently strong and well-equipped. His ranks had swelled to about twenty thousand. He was now ready for a major encounter. He, therefore, appointed his brother, al-Mu'ārik b. 'Abī Ṣufra, as his agent at Nahr Tīrā and departed for Sūq al-ʾAhwāz.

Al-Muṣḥira b. al-Muhallab led the vanguard of the army. As soon as he approached the 'Azāriqa they gave him battle in which he was deserted by some of his soldiers. He himself, nevertheless, stood fast the rest of the day as well as the succeeding night in which he lit fires as a beacon to his routed soldiery. The following morning al-Muṣḥira advanced for another battle but the enemy had already departed, setting fire to this burdensome stores. Al-Muṣḥira entered Sūq al-ʾAhwāz and was soon joined by al-Muhallab and his army. Al-Muhallab stayed in Sūq al-ʾAhwāz for a while and wrote a letter to al-ʿUbār in which he said:
"Ever since we started, we have been in the enjoyment of the constant favour of 'Allāh while the enemy is doomed to His continuous displeasure. We advance forward and he runs shy of an encounter. We alight and he departs till we have now occupied Sūq al-'Ahwāz." (1).

How brief yet vivid and eloquent is this account of his progress: Al-‘qubā‘ wrote in reply:-

"O Brother of the Ḍa‘īd. May you enjoy glory in this world and reward in after-life."

This rather unconventional form of address (أَخَا الْأَنزَرُ) could not but offend al-Muhallab's fine sense of decorum. He remarked to his friends: "How uncouth are the people of al-Ḥijāz: Don't you think he (al-‘qubā‘) knows my name, my father's name and my kunya as well?"

From Sūq al-‘Ahwāz al-Muhallab advanced towards Manāḍhir al-Ṣuḥrā where the Ḍa‘īrīqa had previously moved. Before his departure, he delivered an exhortation to his troops in which he said:-

"O People: You are familiar with the way of the Khārijites. Verily, if they get the upper hand of you, they would seduce you from your religion and would spill your blood. So fight them for the same that 'Alī b. Ṭālib fought their predecessors for. Before you, war was waged against them by Muslim b. ʿUbaīs who was

(1). For Arabic text see Appendix, P. 78, Letter I.
patient and reckoned only upon a reward from Allah. 

‘Uthman b. ‘Ubaidullah who was rash and extravagant and Haritha b. Badr who was opposed and disobeyed.

Now you should meet them with zeal and earnestness for they are but your servants and slaves and it will be very shameful for you and will constitute a slur upon your nobility and your faith that they should deprive you of your income and violate your women.' (1)

The above address is very remarkable in that it affords us a proof of al-Muhallab’s extraordinary military acumen. The short epithets prefixed to the names of the three unfortunate commanders who preceded him are particularly significant. They give us the causes that, according to him, brought about their utter failure. Muslim b. ‘Ubaia was, no doubt, patient and steady, but he was no more than that. He was lacking in strategy. ‘Uthman was rash and imprudent. Haritha b. Badr was, indeed, a capable leader. On several occasions he acted with energy and prudence. His lamentable failure is accounted for by the only reason that he was always opposed by others. ‘Uthman rejected his valuable advice outright. Al-Qubār would not concede his request for commission and reinforcements and lastly, he was disobeyed and deserted by his own followers.

This deep insight of al-Muhallab into the causes of his predecessors’ failure helped him to be careful not to suffer himself from any such drawbacks. It is here

(1). This is only a free translation. For Arabic text see Appendix p. 73.
that we appreciate the full implications of his terms of agreement with the people of al-Beṣra. The terms were designed to secure him against all interference from any other authority and to place at his disposal the means whereby he could conduct the campaign according to his own unfettered discretion. As for strategy, prudence and alacrity, these formed the distinguishing traits of his character.

**THE MURDER OF AL-MUʿĀRIK**

In the meantime it happened that ʿUbaydullāh b. Bushair despatched a man called Wāqid(1), a mawla of ʿAbū Ṣufra from among the captives of al-Jāhiliyya, to Nahr Tīrā where al-Muʿārik was stationed as al-Muhallab’s agent. Wāqid was accompanied by a party of fifty men, prominent among them being Ǧāliḥ b. Nikhrāq. This party captured al-Muʿārik, killed him and then put him on the cross. Then the unhappy tidings reached al-Muhallab, he sent his son al-Mughīra who reached the place when Wāqid had already left it. Al-Mughīra performed the funeral of his uncle, pacified the people and appointed another agent. He then returned to his father who had already alighted at Sulāf.

2. **THE BATTLE AT SULĀF.**

Sulāf, a place situated to the west of the Uujail near Manādhir al-Kubra (2), was the scene of the second engagement.

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(1). Thus Kam. 630; Anon. 104, 'Fayid' (نايد). (2). Yaq. 3/196.
between al-Muhallab and the ʿAzāriqa. At the very outset, the whole of the Azraqite force fell upon al-Muhallab's army with its full weight till the latter, being unable to withstand the stunning onslaught, broke in disorder leaving seventy dead on the battlefield. Al-Muhallab and al-Muhāra however, stood firm and the latter particularly proved his mettle. It appears from certain accounts that even al-Muhallab was at one time driven to flight (1). The ʿAzd, however, explain that it was no act of cowardice on al-Muhallab's part. Rather he only wanted to call back his routed soldiers and to defend them from behind.

Al-Muhallab passed the night with barely two thousand men. In the morning some of the routed soldiers returned and the number reached four thousand. Addressing them, al-Muhallab said:

"By ʿAllāh, your number is in no way small. Those who deserted you were only the coward, the weak, the greedy and the unrighteous. If you suffered injuries then the enemy has also suffered likewise. So, march towards the enemy with the blessing of ʿAllāh." (2).

Thereupon al-Ḥarīth b. Hīlāl, the chief of the Tamīm, stood up and urged upon al-Muhallab that he should not seek an encounter unless the enemy forced it upon him because the soldiers were miserably worn out by previous day's

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(1). A Tamīmite addresses al-Muhallab thus:—

Kam.631,11; Anon.105.

(2). See Appendix p. 9.
discomfiture. Al-Muhallab agreed to the suggestion. He then went out along with a party of ten till he overlooked the camp of the 'Azāriqa where he found that none of them was on the move. Al-Ḥarīṣ b. Hilāl again counselled him to leave that place and, accordingly, al-Muhallab crossed the Dūjail and reached the bend of a valley which was approachable only from one side.

An incident during the battle at Sulāf amply illustrates al-Muhallab's anxiety to treat all his soldiers on an equal footing without any distinction of birth, class or status in life. It was the military honours alone that counted with him. It so happened that a 'mawla' of al-Ẓād, ʿAbdur Ṭahmān al-ʿIskāf by name, in a fit of excessive zeal rode up and down between the two lines of battle, exhorting his own people to combat the foe vigorously and unflinchingly. The 'Azāriqa soon pounced upon him. Al-ʿIskāf fought gallantly against heavy odds till the very last breath in him but ultimately succumbed to his injuries. When al-Muhallab learnt of his death, he admonished al-Ḥarīṣ and ʿAtiyya al-ʿAnbarī, two noble and distinguished warriors, for not rushing to the succour of the brave al-ʿIskāf who met his end single-handed. Indignantly he asked them, "Was it that you made no attempt to rescue a chief of the army just because you were jealous of him on account of his being one of the 'mawālī'?" This was, indeed, the quality that endeared al-Muhallab to his soldiers.
3. THE BATTLE AT SILLĂ-VA-SILLĪBRĀ.

Al-Muhallab passed three days in that haven of a valley till his soldiers regained their lost vigour and were refreshed for a fresh clash of arms. He then started for Sillā-va-Sillībra, (in the district of al-ʿAhwāz near Manādhir al-Ṣuḡrā), and pitched his camp just near the ʿAzāriqa who had already been there before him. Three days had elapsed without a serious clash when ʿUbaidullāh b. Bushair exhorted his troops to take the initiative, heartening them with the thought of their victory only the other day at Sūlāf. The next morning al-Muhallab, who had all the time kept himself on the alert, arrayed his army in perfect order, placing the ʾAzd and the Ṭamīm in the right wing, the Bakr and the ʾAbd al-Qais in the left wing and the ʾAbī al-ʿĀliya in the centre. Similarly, the ʿAzāriqa also carefully arranged the disposition of their troops with ʿAbīda (1) b. Hilāl al-Ŷaʾshkūrī and al-ʿUbair b. al-Mahūz commanding their right and the left wings respectively. It is noteworthy that, despite the best and the constant efforts of al-Muhallab, the ʿAzāriqa were still superior in equipment, in the number of horses and in arms. This only throws into bold relief the folly of al-Muhallab's predecessors in sharp contrast with his own wisdom and foresight. The ʿAzāriqa had drained the whole country from Kaṁān to al-ʿAhwāz and, hence, they were beset by no financial difficulties.

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(1). Thus in Kam. and Tab.; Anon 94 and IAth. 4/83, ʿUbaida.
such as worried al-Muhallab. The 'Azāriqa had equipped themselves with long helmets which reached up to their breasts, ample coats of mail which they dragged behind them and leggings of mail which they tucked up to their belts with iron hooks(1).

At last, the two armies met. Three days were spent merely in an ostentatious display of patience and determination. A hundred horsemen advanced from the line of the 'Azāriqa, planted their spears and stood leaning upon them. Al-Muhallab also sent an equal number who did likewise, not budging from their positions except for prayers till dusk when both the parties retired to their respective camps.

The Third Day of the Battle.

This trial of determination at last yielded to actual trial of strength. On the third day the 'Azāriqa launched an attack and the Baṣrān replied to it. In the course of the struggle, al-Muhallab speared an 'Azāriqite who had already killed a man of his army. This proved to be the signal for a mass attack on behalf of the 'Azāriqa. They again adopted the same whirlwind tactics which they had so successfully used at Sūlāf. The result too was not very different. Consternation, confusion and disorder again broke out in al-Muhallab's army and the Baṣrāns took to flight in all directions. Even al-Muhallab himself, who is reported

(1). Tab. 2/587.
to have fainted as a result of a blow on the face, was lost for some time. Only al-Mughira stuck to his position in a party consisting mostly of the people of 'Uman. Then at midday al-Muhallab reappeared along with a hundred horsemen, his tongue lolling, his palms smeared with blood and the silk stuffing of his four-cornered hat (worn over the helmet) all torn and hanging loosely about. Al-Muhallab, however, maintained the fight till nightfall when the casualties on either side were very numerous.

Al-Muhallab was yet undaunted. Forthwith he took active steps to call back his worsted soldiers. He himself rushed towards the fleeing remnants of his army and standing on a hillock called out to them to return to him. The call was responded to by a number of his own tribesmen and a contingent of 'Uman re-joined him. Thus, al-Muhallab succeeded in collecting around him about three thousand soldiers.

Even at such a critical time when he was hard pressed for men, al-Muhallab was not sorry to lose a coward who would not fight for him wholeheartedly and of his own accord. It is related that he deputed a man of Tahiya b. Sud (a descendant of al-'Azd) to turn back the routed soldiers. That man came across one 'Amir b. Mismak who pleaded that al-Muhallab had excused him from service. When asked as to whether 'Amir should be allowed to go, al-Muhallab replied, "Leave him, for I do n't want men like him who are weak and coward."

(1) Dain. 282, 15.
The Fourth Day.

The following morning, al-Muhallab planned a surprise attack with the three thousand men that remained with him. A considerable number of the Azraqite soldiers had gone far off in pursuit of the fleeing remnants of al-Muhallab's army. Those who remained in the camp were complacently gloating over their victory. It never occurred to them that, after the events of the previous day, it should ever be possible for al-Muhallab to muster courage and strength to attempt another offensive against them. No doubt, the 'Azāriqa had relaxed but al-Muhallab was not the man to relax his unrelenting watch on the enemy. To him, this was a rare opportunity of turning defeat into victory. He would not allow any consideration of numerical weakness to deter him from availing himself of a golden chance. He at once determined to embark upon the bold adventure without the least delay.

Al-Muhallab must have felt it necessary that the whole strategy should be revealed beforehand to his soldiers in order to inspire hope and confidence in them. So, he addressed his soldiers and presented the whole plan before them. (1) Adverting first to the question of numbers which, of course, must have been the uppermost in their minds, he assured his followers that victory did not always go with superior numbers. Rather it depended on the help of Allah which very often was on the side of those who were numerically weak. (2) Further he said that they were in no way a

(1) See Appendix P. 1.
(2) Qur'an, 2, 250.
small body and that he had the fullest confidence in the sufficiency of their strength. They were all distinguished horsemen known for their perseverance and valour and he did not wish that they had with them any of those who had turned back for they would only have added a liability rather than an asset. He then held out before them the tempting prospect of a lightning raid on enemy camp while the enemy was simply resting on his laurels and was quite unmindful of and unprepared for any such contingency. Al-Muhallab further enjoined upon them to throw in their full weight and to be so quick as to kill the enemy commander and annihilate his entire army before it was replenished by the return of that 'Azraqite band which had gone out in pursuit of the routed Basrans. To make up the deficiency in arms and equipment, al-Muhallab hit upon a strange but, nevertheless, effective makeshift device. He asked everyone of his soldiers to provide himself with a bag in which to carry stones which he should hurl in the face of his opponent for 'they (the stones) will serve to startle the horses back and to turn their faces as well as to confound the footmen and to repel them.' He even suggested to them to have recourse to such tricks as to 'shoot one's spear' like an arrow and then, getting it out of the victim's body, do the same with it again and again. (1)

(1). Kam. 636.
Al-Muhallab's plan was executed strictly according to his calculations. A surprise attack was launched against the 'Azāriqa with such conspicuous success that they learnt of it only when al-Muhallab had penetrated the outskirts of their camp. A deadly and desperate struggle ensued. When the 'Azāriqa were at the point of exhaustion, a clever man from among them called out, "Hark! al-Muhallab has been killed." To contradict this disquieting falsehood which was bound instantly to affect the morale of his troops, al-Muhallab rode a short gray hackney and rushed speedily up and down between the two lines of battle crying out "Here, I am al-Muhallab." Such prompt action set at rest the apprehensions of his soldiers and they continued their attack with unabated vigour. In the afternoon, however, the soldiers showed signs of weariness and, consequently, enthusiasm was at a low ebb. But al-Muhallab was resolved to press the attack to a decisive end. He again roused the spirits of his soldiers and called upon them to shake off the slackness that was creeping upon them. Peremptorily he ordered his son, al-Mughira, to advance and urged his mawlā, Dhakwān, to move forward with his standard. Then he turned to Banū Tamīm and admonished them saying, 'Would you disobey me when I give you an order?' These admonitions had the desired effect and al-Muhallab's warriors pressed forward with renewed determination till they came face to face with 'Ubadullāh b. Bushair and his companions who were all fully equipped with arms and coats of mail.
All their defensive armour, however, proved of no avail. Al-Muhallab's men flung stones at their faces till they were overpowered and then killed them with spears or swords. By the evening, 'Ubaidullah was killed and his entire army was annihilated(1). Al-Muhallab, however, did not know of 'Ubaidullah's death till the following morning. During the night, he took strong measures to guard his camp against a night-attack. At mid-night, he sent a man of Yahmad, along with a party of ten, to the enemy camp. The party returned with the news that the 'Azariqa had already departed for 'Arrajân. Yet, nothing would make al-Muhallab relax his vigil. He only said, "Beware of a night-attack. I fear them the most at this moment."

The night passed off without any untoward incident. In the morning, al-Muhallab went round the corpses of the slain when the body of 'Ubaidullah was identified.

In the meantime, there returned the 'Azraqites who had gone in pursuit of the Bağrans. Al-Muhallab had not neglected them. He had already stationed a number of horsemen and footmen along the way who dealt with them effectively and inflicted heavy losses upon them (2).

The murder of 'Ubaidullah took place in the month of Shawwâl, 66 A.H., after he had been leader of the 'Azariqa for sixteen months (3). The 'Azariqa suffered heavy losses

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(1). Tab. 2/588.
(2). Ibid.
(3). Anon. 105, 15-16.
estimated at seven thousand (1) although the losses on the side of al-Muhallab must also have been very considerable.

Both as regards vicissitudes and intensity, the battle was the fiercest yet fought between al-Muhallab and the 'Azāriqa. Al-Muhallab was completely routed on the third day. It speaks volumes for his presence of mind, his indomitable courage and confidence that he turned the tables against his foe the following day. It must be remembered that the final triumph of al-Muhallab was not due to mere chance or rashness born of despair. It was a well-thought-out premeditated plan which worked out exactly according to calculations. Moreover, the Basrans embarked upon it with a full consciousness of their inferiority in numbers as well as arms and equipment. It was only their confidence in their own prowess and in the strategy and resourcefulness of their worthy commander that spurred them on to ultimate triumph and buoyed up their spirits during the most exacting trials. No doubt, the Basrans fought against overwhelming odds and set up examples of highest courage and honest devotion. For instance, 'Abū 'Alqama al-Yahmādī, who distinguished himself by his deeds of valour, went round the young soldiers of al-'Amd asking them to 'lend their skulls' for a part of the day. The young soldiers fought as best as they could and on their return jokingly said to him, "Urns are lent, no doubt, but not the skulls." Then this incident reached the ears of al-Muhallab who could not let a merit go unrecognised, he rewarded 'Abū 'Alqama with one hundred thousand dirhems (1).

(1). Tab. 2/590.
Similarly, al-Miğīra performed an amazing feat of skill. Whenever he found a number of spears pointed at him, he bent down his head on his saddle-bow and cut them off from beneath and then overpowered his assailants.

It is noteworthy that the apparently worthless devices suggested by al-Muhallab proved as helpful as he had anticipated. One 'Iyyāsh is reported to have successfully performed the trick of 'shooting one's spear.' (1) The other device of stone-throwing was commonly practised by most of the soldiers with conspicuous results. One of al-Muhallab's clients is even reported to have killed three Azraqite soldiers successively with one single stone, the first victim being hit on the ear and the second one on the head. A Khārijite taunts al-Muhallab with the same. He says:

أنا بآهما لليقتلنا بها و بكلب بالجبر
(Anon. 108; Kam. 638)
"He came to us with stones in order to kill us with them.

But, woe be to you, are the valiant men killed with stones?"

Many verses are recorded in which the events of this fateful battle are referred to by poets from either side. A man from the side of al-Muhallab rejoices in the murder of 'Ubaydullāh thus:

ويدي سلمٌ وسأله في إلحامة سما سالعاً ما شئت والفائز
كما تصدّل جلاد الله خياماً
(Anon. 109; Kam. 639; Yaq. 3/111).

(1) Kam. 636.
The Azraqites in their verses make no attempt to mince matters or to extenuate the tragic events. With an aching heart they frankly acknowledge their utter defeat and the heavy losses suffered by them. Thus, according to one of them, the only consolation is that the defeat at Silla-wa-Sillibrā is offset by the victory at Sulāf. He says:

(1) Kam. 639; Yaq. 3/101-102.

Barely three thousand Azraqites survived the battle at Silla-wa-Sillibrā (1). Their number had thinned down to such an extent that only one fire sufficed for those who formerly used to gather round five or six different fires. Besides, all of them were in sad plight due to utter exhaustion. Under cover of darkness they managed to escape to Arrajan while al-Muhallab stayed in al-Ahwāz(2).

When victory was completed, al-Muhallab despatched al-Raqād (3) and al-Ṣaḵāb b. Zaid (an uncle of Jarīr b. Ḥāzim b. Zaid, the famous ‘rāvi’) with a letter to al-Qubā containing, in a remarkably terse language, an account of the chief events as well as the happy end of the battle(4)

(1). Tab. 2/591.

(2). Ibid.

(3). Al-Raqād was one of the distinguished warriors of al-Muhallab’s army. His lineage is, however, uncertain. Anon. al-Rażād; 2/1004; Tab. 2/1106; Yaq. 2/560. Further Kam. (631, 6) mentions him as a man of Banū Malik b. Ḥabīb while according to Tab. (in both places) he belonged to the tribe of al-‘Ātik. Cf. also Bel. 417, 14 "

(4). For Arabic text see Appendix P... Letter 2.
The remnants of al-Muhallab's worsted army who turned tail on the third day of the battle had already preceded this letter to al-Baṣra. Their arrival in the city with the news that al-Muhallab had been smitten again created the same sort of panic with which we are already familiar. It seemed as if the only dam against the onrushing tide of the 'Azāriqa had burst. Dismayed as the people were, they planned an exodus to the countryside. Even al-Qubā', the governor, is reported to have prepared for a flight from the city (1). The news of victory, however, gave them peace and joy and even those who had already evacuated, returned to their home. This incident amply demonstrated that al-Muhallab was the only bulwark of safety for the Basrans. Impressed with the same al-ʿĀmnaf b. Qais remarked, "al-Baṣra is al-Muhallab's (بَعْدَ فََٰتَمَّ)" (2).

Al-Qubā' redirected al-Muhallab's letter to ʿIbn al-Zubair who had it read before the people of Mecca.

Replying to al-Muhallab, al-Qubā' congratulated the 'Brother of the 'Azd' (أخالцаصر - again the same unconventional form) on his glorious victory and commended him as the most impregnable fortress of the Muslims, the destroyer of the pillars of the infidels and a man endowed with diplomacy and leadership (3).

(1) Dāin, 282. The extent of the panic which was an index to al-Muhallab's importance can be gauged from the verses of a man of Banū Saʿd:

الآن أكل ماليك من الأشرحين 
فكان من نصاران ذو زوج
و سمع حرباً وألمت به 
و صبرن لهما، موالي من المغيرة

(Dain, 283).
Besides al-ʿubāʾ, a large number of Baṣrans wrote to al-Muhallab offering their felicitations to him on the auspicious occasion. Al-ʿĀhnaf did not write a letter but instead sent a word through the messenger assuring him that he stood fast by the pledge he gave to him at the time of their parting. Al-Muhallab was anxious to hear from al-ʿĀhnaf most probably because he wished to know whether the people of al-Baṣra still adhered to their undertaking. So, when the sheaf of letters was delivered to him he eagerly looked for the letter of al-ʿĀhnaf and, finding it not, asked whether he had not written to him. Thereupon the messenger communicated to him the verbal message and al-Muhallab felt so reassured with it that he said, 'This message is more pleasing to me than all these letters.'

A little later, al-Muhallab thought of impressing the Baṣrans still further with his momentous success. He commissioned an ʿAzdite to take the heads of ʿUbaydullāh and a few prominent men of his army (1) to al-Baṣra and present them to al-ʿubāʾ as a trophy of war. The ʿAzdite had only reached KurbujDīnār, at a distance of eight farsakh from Sūq al-ʿĀhwāz (2), when he was met by Ḥabīb, ʿAbdul Malik and ʿĀlī, sons of Ḳushair b. al-ʿAbū. They asked him as to what the news was and the unsuspecting

*(1). Anon. 107.

(2). Yaq. 4/249.
Azdite, unacquainted with their identity as he was, replied to them, with an air of pride mingled with joy, "Allāh has killed the heterodox ʿIbn al-Māhūz and lo! here is his head with me." Instantly the sons of Bushair rushed upon him, killed him and even put him on the cross. Then they buried the head of ʿUbaidullāh and also dug a hollow to which the rest of the heads were committed (1).

Referring to the same incident a poet says:

(Till ḍarātīḥ ʿannī ṣūrūtān
Man ṣabla wa-ḥaraṣsā)

(Anon. 107).

AL-ZUBAIR b. ʿALĪ.

Having withdrawn from Khuzistān after their defeat at Sillā-wa-Sillibrā, the ʿAzāriqa assembled at ʿArrajān, on the other side of the river Ṭab, and appointed al-Zubair b. ʿAlī as their Ṣmir. Al-Zubair's task was in no way an easy one. He had to reorganise the routed remnants of a vanquished army and to regenerate the former spirit in them. He, however, set about his task promptly and in right earnest. Through his energetic efforts and constant exhortations, the ʿAzāriqa were rid of the paralysing defeatism that had overtaken them and were again determined to continue the ceaseless warfare with their characteristic tenacity. But for the following few months they could not, despite the best efforts of their new leader, regain even a fraction of their former strength.

(1) Anon. 107 and Kam. 642. According to Yaq. 3/110, it was a Tamīmite who happened to pass by the corpse of ʿUbaidullāh as it lay on the battlefield. Recognising it, he cut off the head and proceeded with it to al-Ṭāgra. On the way, however, he met a band of Khārijites who killed him.
From 'Arrajān al-Zubair b. ‘Alī advanced to meet al-Muhallab but was easily repelled and forced to retreat. While on the retreat, he commissioned a hundred horsemen to lie in ambush for al-Muhallab in a lowland near his camp. Al-Muhallab, however, proved too alert and too far-sighted to fall into the trap. One day while he was out on an inspection tour round his camp, it occurred to him that the enemy could very well have laid an ambush at the foot of the mountain nearby which place was especially suited for the purpose. So, he despatched ten horsemen to the spot and soon they came upon the hundred enemy soldiers who had been hiding there. As soon as the enemy soldiers learned that their plot had been discovered and their designs foiled, they rushed out of their place of ambush, crossed the bridge (1) and escaped. Soon there occurred an eclipse of the sun and the 'Azāriqa were heard to cry out to the Basran soldiers, "O Enemies of 'Allāh, even if Resurrection were to take place, we will continue our holy war against you."(2)

Al-Muhallab was now so firmly established and the 'Azāriqa so greatly weakened that al-Zubair gave up all hope of gaining an advantage over the former for the time being. He therefore moved in the direction of 'Isfahān where he stayed for a month. Then, having collected fresh troops, he

(1) Probably the reference is to some bridge on the river Tab because it does not appear that al-Zubair should have advanced very far from it.

(2) Kam. 641.
in marched down to Arrajān via al-Ṣūs and Tustar at
which places he was stoutly opposed by al-Muhallab (1).
Arrajān he once again advanced with the intention of
storming the camp of al-Muhallab by surprise but al-Muhallab
was not to be taken unawares. He had already anticipated
and even warned his soldiers against an attack from al-
Ẓubair with a reinforced army. All the time his sound advice
to his troops had been neither to be frightened and panicky
so that their morale may remain unimpaired nor to be lax in
vigilance lest the enemy be tempted to gain an advantage
over them. As a result, the Azāriqa, to their utter dis­
appointment and defeat, found al-Muhallab fully prepared
and the entrances well-guarded (2). The attack only resulted
in a clear victory for al-Muhallab (3).

Ever since his victory at Silla-wa-Sillibrā in Shawwāl, 66,
al-Muhallab's activities against the Azāriqa were mainly of
a defensive character. He himself took no initiative to
launch an offensive against them. Rather he confined hims
elf to resisting their occasional incursions into Khuzistān and
al-ʿAḥwāz. His main concern was to keep them to the adjacent

(1). Anon. 110.
(2). Kam. 641.
(3). A Tanūmite (probably from Banū Riyāh b. Yarbū')
celebrates this triumph in the following:

سقى الله الحمصكي الحديث
من البرسي، ينثر النحماء
ما وصى المحصكي جمارت
عوامل يجتمع تبنيهان الخبراء

(Kam. 641.)
country of 'Isfahān in the north-east and 'Arrajān in the south-east. No attempt was made even to dislodge them from their base at 'Arrajān.

Al-Zubair b. 'Alī was still at 'Arrajān when al-Qubā' was deposed and succeeded by Muṣ'ab b. al-Zubair early in 67 A.H. (1). With the arrival of Muṣ'ab at al-Basra, we hear of al-Muhallab as the former's agent in Fārs. From there, however, he was recalled very soon in order to help Muṣ'ab in his expedition against al-Mukhtar of al-Kūfa.

Thus ended rather abruptly the first period of al-Muhallab's campaign against the 'Azāriqa. It lasted barely one year during which time al-Muhallab had three major engagements with the enemy. The results achieved were very great. At the end of the period the 'Azāriqa had been swept away from the very walls of al-Basra to 'Arrajān and 'Isfahān. They had lost their veteran chief 'Ubaidullāh b. Bushair and had suffered incalculable losses which immeasurably weakened their strength for a long time to come. But the menace was far from being totally crushed. Al-Zubair b. 'Alī was still marshalling his forces with unabated zeal. No doubt, al-Muhallab did not follow up his victory at Sillā-wa-Sillibrā and made no effort to give a death-blow to the enemy who lay severely wounded. But a closer examination will prove that his restrained policy was fully justified

(1) Yaq. 2/314 is wrong in placing the arrival of Muṣ'ab so late as in the year 68.
by the stark realities of the situation. It should not be forgotten that he had to pay very dear for his victory at Sillā-wa-Sillibrā. This hard-won victory was gained only at an immense cost to his own strength. According to one estimate, (1) the losses on the side of al-Muhallab were even greater than those on the side of the enemy. Thus al-Muhallab had no striking power left to seek an encounter with the enemy with confidence in his own success. Yet he attended to his defence with such alertness, alacrity and vigour that he never lost an inch of the ground previously gained by him.

References:

- Anon. 103-110.
- Kam. 627-642.
- Tab. 2/584-91.

(1) Anon. 105, 17.
not a few of them to quit their hearth and home and to seek refuge in al-Baṣra (1).

At al-Baṣra these refugees, prominent among them being Shabath b. Hibāl and Muḥammad b. al-ʿAshʿath, continually brought pressure on Muṣṣab, the new governor, to launch an expedition against al-Mukhtar. Muṣṣab was at first reluctant to embark upon the venture but ultimately gave his assent provided that al-Muhallab could be persuaded to join him. Accordingly, he wrote to al-Muhallab, then acting as his agent in Fars, informing him of his intention and inviting him to come down and to accompany him in his march upon al-Kūfa. The letter found al-Muhallab as well as his companions in no mood to leave their established position and to undertake another hazardous campaign. Al-Muhallab, therefore, replied to Muṣṣab in the negative on the pretext of some engagement in connection with tax-collecting. But al-Muhallab was indispensable for a victory. Muṣṣab made it plain to Muḥammad b. al-ʿAshʿath while the latter was goading him to precipitate action, that he was determined not to move unless al-Muhallab came to help him. He, however, suggested that Muḥammad should personally go to al-Muhallab and try to bring him round to comply with their request. Accordingly, Muḥammad proceeded to al-Muhallab, taking with him a letter from Muṣṣab which deserves a place here as an index to the eminently sublime position that al-Muhallab had attained.

(1). IʿAth. 4/112-18.