THE ROLE OF THE AZDITE MUHALLABID FAMILY IN MARW'S ANTI-UMAYYAD POWER STRUGGLE

An historical reevaluation *

BY

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FOREWORD

In their studies of the Arab conquest of Persia and, specifically, in their analyses of the Arab himself in this phase of Islamic history, Western historians, such as Wellhausen, Van Vloten and Gibb, have generalized the story of the tribes. The rivalries and internecine outbreaks which had their origins, in some cases, in Arabia before the time of Muḥammad and which spread, during the successive waves of Arab expansion, to Iraq and then to that area « to the East » known as Ḥūrāsān, are contrasted in these studies with the Umayyad dynasty’s efforts at establishment of a central authority and a dependable system of control over the outlying areas under Arab influence. In opposition to what is called

* Bibliography

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Umayyad policy (whose chief architects—the Caliph Mu‘awiya, the governors of Iraq, al-Ḫaġġāq, and of Ḫurāṣān, Qutayba—were characterized by authoritarianism and force) stands the rival formations of Mu‘ādhar and Yaman (whose most prominent subdivisions—Tamīm and Azd—were characterized by self-interest, jealousy and instability). Wellhausen and Gibb particularly measured the social and political developments of this first, and most expansive, Islamic century in terms of Umayyad durability against « the tribes » as the one stabilizing factor—apart, of course, from Islam itself. They tended therefore to read the sources—primarily al-Ṭabarī and al-Balāḏūrī—from an Umayyad point of view and to regard the persistence of tribal distinctions in general as potentially « disruptive »¹ or as anachronistic in an era of power politics and power demands.

The policy they admired, stated briefly above as conquest and stable control, was enforced by the sustaining of a crest of Arabism and by joining that crest to an established Persian authority represented on the local level by the person of the dihqān (the local landed gentry or village lord), who served as intermediary between the Arabs and the conquered population, as collector of the ǧīzīya (the poll-tax on non-Muslims), as overseer for the housing provisions for Arabs, and even in some instances as conscripter of local military troops. The policy at its best adopted rather than destroyed and

¹ See Studies on the Civilization of Islam by H. A. R. Gibb, (Boston 1962), pp. 8 ff. Such a view was held also by Ibn Ḥaldūn with respect to his nomad-settled dichotomy. It is not a false view, but it can become a shibboleth.