THE QURRA' IN EARLY ISLAMIC HISTORY
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In two fairly recent publications I came across two contradictory interpretations of the term qurra' as it occurs in early Muslim historical texts. Until recently this term was generally taken to mean 'Qur'ān reciters'. The two studies referred to are M. A. Shaban's Islamic history A.D. 600-750 (A.H. 132), a new interpretation 1) and G. Martin Hinds' Kufan political alignments and their background in the mid-seventh century A.D. 2). Shaban considers the term qurra' as a derivation not of the root Qäf-Rä'-Hamza but of the root Qäf-Rä'-Ya', and interprets it accordingly as 'villagers', synonymous with abl al-qurā. The evidence Shaban adduces is impressive 3), but, in my eyes, much more can be said about this issue. Hinds, on the other hand, adheres to the more conservative view and reads the term as standing for 'Qur'ān reciters'. However, he places them in a new light 4).

Nobody will contest the assumption that in early Islamic history there must have been 'villagers' as well as 'Qur'an reciters'. It is the purpose of this paper to sort out the interpretations of the term qurra' in various contexts. Also a reappraisal of the interpretation offered by Shaban will be ventured.

An appropriate historical episode to start the discussion with concerns the so-called musayyarrūn. These were people who, at one time, were expelled from Kūfa by the then governor Sa‘īd b. al-‘Āṣ in the year 33/653. There are many versions of this story two of which are recorded in Tabarî on the authority of Sayf b. 'Umar and Wāqidī respectively, and one in Baladhurî on the authority of Abū Mikhnaf 5).

3) Cf. p. 23 and 51, especially note 1.
4) Cf. p. 358 f.
These three versions more or less correspond in that Sa'id expelled a small group of people from Kufa because they had quarreled with him in a disagreeable manner over the distribution of the wealth of the conquered lands 1). Sa'id wrote to 'Uthmân asking his permission to banish them, and here I quote Abû Mikhnaf: "I cannot hold Kufa in hand with Malik al-Ashtar and his companions present. They are called the qūrrā' and they are a little stupid". Sayf's version also has the term qūrrā' indicating these people and Wāqidi's text seems corrupt in this passage.

'Uthmân advised Sa'id to send them away to Syria to Mu'āwiya. Then 'Uthmân warned Mu'āwiya by letter saying (Sayf's version): "The inhabitants of Kufa have packed off to you a few born troublemakers; frighten them, grapple with them ..." Mu'āwiya received them and argued with them. In Sayf's version he said: "You have attained honour (sharaf) in Islam, you have conquered peoples, you are in possession of their rank and their heritage. It has reached me that you hold a grudge against the Quraysh, but if it were not for them, you would return [to your dwelling-places] as lowly as you were." When they behaved in an uncivilized manner in the ensuing dispute—according to Wāqidi they even took Mu'āwiya by the beard—he flew into a rage and inveighed against one of them (Sayf's version): "As for you, Şa'ṣa'a, your village (qaryatuka) is the worst of all villages of the Arabs, it has the most stinking vegetation 2), it has the deepest wādi, it is most notorious for its sins, it has the lowliest neighbours, no sharif ever lived in it, if someone lowly ever went to live there he would be reviled for doing so and this would mean a blemish [on his reputation]. The inhabitants [of this village] acquired the most revolting names (laqabs) and the most ignoble sons-in-law ..." And so on.

Then Mu'āwiya wrote to 'Uthmân telling him how he felt about those musayyarūn. In Sayf's version: "People have come to me, they have no brains nor religion. Islam has made them troublesome and