

THE TRIBAL KINGS IN PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA

A STUDY OF THE EPITHET *MALIK* OR *DHŪ AL-TĀJ* IN EARLY ARABIC TRADITIONS

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Researchers of Arabic and early Islam often encounter the term *malik* or *dhū al-tāj* as an epithet referring to some of the tribal leaders who lived in northern or southern part of the Arabian peninsula during the pre-Islamic period just before the appearance of Muḥammad. A thorough investigation of these titles, or of the persons who bore them, reveals that these were no more than local leaders whose authority did not exceed the bounds of their tribe, or of adjacent tribes. Furthermore, there is no justification for comparing them to the kings and emperors of the neighboring kingdoms, such as Persia, Ethiopia, and the Byzantine Empire. The scope of authority and command enjoyed by these local leaders cannot even be described in the same terms as that of the rulers of the southern kingdoms in Yemen, who belonged to the dynasties of Saba' and Ḥimyar. At the very most, they may not be compared with the rulers of the buffer emirates, the Lakhmids or the Ghassanids.

Why, then, were these rulers given the epithet *malik*, «king», and why were their heads adorned with *fijān*, «crowns»? This article will attempt to address these questions and to deal with the phenomenon of the *mulūk*, «kings», their authority, and the scope of their command, as well as with the sources from which they drew their authority and how it was imposed.

I

Islamic historical tradition refers to the existence of some tribal leaders known as *mulūk al-ʿarab*, «the kings of the Arabs». The earliest reference to these kings is contained in the issue of the letters which were sent by the Prophet to the kings of the neighboring countries, in which he proposed that they embrace Islam. Included in the list of kings are the names of five Arab

kings: two in the 'Umān region (the brothers Jayfar and 'Ubād, the two sons of al-Julandā al-Azdī), two in Yamāma (Hawdha b. 'Alī and Thumāma b. Uthāl of the Ḥanīfa tribe), and a fifth king, in Baḥrayn, by the name of al-Mundhir b. Sāwā al-'Abdī.¹

Regardless of the controversy regarding the date at which these letters were sent —viz., whether they were sent before the campaign of Ḥudaybiya (628/6), or immediately after the campaign, or later on during the last days of the Prophet²— two solid facts emerge in the context of this issue: first, the fact that these letters were indeed sent, and second, that there were indeed leaders in Arabia who bore the title *malik*, among whom Hawdha b. 'Alī bore the title of *dhū al-tāj*, «the owner of the crown».³ The Arab poets who referred to this leader, called him by this title. An anonymous poet from Muslim Persia who wrote a poem praising 'Abd Allāh b. Ṭāhir (the governor of Khurāsān on behalf of the 'Abbasids), mentions the royal crown which Hawdha b. 'Alī had placed on his head, in one of the verses of that poem:

¹ Ibn Hishām, *Sirat al-nabiyy* (ed. M. M. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, Cairo, 1963), p. 1.026; Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* (ed. E. Sachau, Leiden, 1917), vol. I(2), pp. 18-19; al-Ḥalabī, *al-Sira al-ḥalabīyya* (ed. Cairo, 1964), vol. III, pp. 300-303; Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, *'Uyūn al-āthār* (Cairo, n.d.), vol. II, pp. 266-270; al-Maqrīzī, *Imtā' al-asmā'* (ed. M. M. Shākir, 2nd ed., Qaṭar, n.d., photocopy of the Cairo edition, 1941), vol. I, p. 308; Ibn Ḥazm, *Jawāmi' al-sira* (ed. I. 'Abbās and Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Asad), Cairo (n.d.), p. 29; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Wafā' bi-aḥwāl al-Muṣṭafā'* (ed. M. 'Abd al-Wāhid, Cairo, 1966), vol. II, p. 738,741-742; Daḥlān, Aḥmad Zaynī, *Sirat Daḥlān* (ed. Cairo, 1310 a.h.), vol. II, pp. 175-177; al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh* (ed. Beirut, 1960), vol. II, p. 78; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-tārīkh* (4th ed., Beirut, 1983), vol. II, p. 143, 146, 157; al-Suhaylī, *al-Rawḍ al-unuf* (ed. 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Wakīl, Cairo, 1967), vol. VII, p. 465; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-al-nihāya* (4th ed., Beirut, 1979), vol. IV, p. 273, vol. V, p. 48; al-Mas'ūdī, *al-Tanbīh wa-al-ishrāf* (ed. M. J. De Goeje, Leiden, 1894), pp. 260-261; al-Diyārbakrī, *Tārīkh al-khamīs* (ed. Cairo, 1283 a.h.), vol. II, p. 92-94, 116. Some of these kings were sporadically mentioned in the following sources; Abū Yūsuf, *al-Kharāj* (4th ed., Cairo, 1392 a.h.), p. 141; Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba* (ed. Cairo, 1280 a.h.), vol. IV, p. 417; al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā* (ed. Cairo, 19630), vol. VI, p. 376, 379-380; Khalifa b. Khayyāt, *Tārīkh* (ed. Suhayl Zakkār), Cairo, 1967, p. 46; Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *al-Iṣāba* (ed. Cairo, 1328 a.h.), no. (8216); al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān* (ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid), Cairo, 1956-1957, p. 92, 95, 98, 105; Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat ansāb al-'arab* (ed. 'Abd al-Salām Ḥārūn), Cairo, 1962, p. 384; Ibn al-Kalbī, *Jamharat al-nasab* (ed. Nāḥī Ḥasan, Beirut, 1986), p. 201; Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-buldān* (ed. Beirut, n.d.) s.v. (*a.s.b.dh*); al-Jāhīz, *Rasā'il* (ed. 'Abd al-Salām Ḥārūn, Cairo, 1964), vol. I, p. 183.

² W. M. Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, Oxford, 1968, pp. 345-347; M. J. Kister, «al-Mundhir b. Sāwā», *E.I.*².

³ Al-Mubarrad, *al-Kāmil fī al-luḡha wa-al-adab*, (ed. M. Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm and Sayyid Shihāta, Cairo, n.d.), vol. III, p. 23; Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma'ārif* (ed. Th. 'Ukāsha, 2nd ed., Cairo, 1969), p. 97, 115; *al-Kāmil*, vol. I, p. 276; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* (ed. M. Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, Cairo, 1961), vol. II, 169.

*fa-anta awlā bi-tāji 'l-mulki talbasuhū
min Hawdhata b. 'Aliyyin wa-bni dhī Yazani.*⁴

«you are more worthy of placing the royal crown on your head/than were Hawdhata b. 'Alī and (Sayf) b. Dhī Yazan» (the king from the Ḥimyar dynasty in Yemen who converted to Judaism and died as a martyr in the Ethiopian invasion of his country). Hawdha's crown is also mentioned on other occasions, by another poet.⁵ In both cases, Hawdha's crown is etched in the collective memory of the early generations of Islam as an element symbolizing the concept of royalty and sovereign power.

Hawdha b. 'Alī was not the only one to acquire this title; other tribal leaders also bore it, such as the leader of the Tamīm tribe, Ḥājib b. Zurāra, who wore the *tāj al-mulk*, the royal crown, as described by al-Farazdaq.⁶

Epithets associated with royalty were sometimes combined in poetic terminology with the parallel term *mu'aṣṣab bi-al-tāj*, as reflected in the following verse, which praises a leader from the Kinda tribe by the name of al-Ash'ath b. Qays:

*wa-mu'aṣṣabun bit-tāji mafriqu rasihī
mulkun la-'amruka rāsikhu 'l-awtādi.*⁷

—«the man whose head is adorned with a crown / is, by your life, the deeply rooted royalty».

The connection between the act of wearing a crown and the notion of royalty is a strong one. The poet al-A'shā, in addressing the Persian King, calls him *dhū al-tāj*.⁸ This epithet became rooted in the consciousness of generations of poets, so that the term *dhū al-tāj* became synonymous with

⁴ Al-Mubarrad, vol. II, 24; Ibn 'Abd Rabbihī, *al-'Iqd al-farīd* (ed. A. Amīn, A. al-Zayn and I. al-Abyārī, 3rd ed., Cairo, 1965), vol. I, p. 322; Yāqūt, *op. cit.*, s.v. (*shadhiyākh*); al-Tha'ālībī, *Thimār al-qulūb*, (ed. M. Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, Cairo, 1965), p. 521; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira* (ed. Cairo, 1963), vol. II, p. 199.

⁵ Al-A'shā, *Diwān al-A'shā* (ed. Beirut, 1960), p. 108; al-Mubarrad, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 24; al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-'Arūs* (ed. Cairo, 1306 a.h.), s.v. (*h.w.dh.*).

⁶ The link between the *tāj* and the royal title is clearly shown in the verse of al-Farazdaq, where he refers to *tāj al-mulk*; *Diwān al-Farazdaq* (ed. Beirut, 1966), vol. I, p. 100; Abū al-Baqā', *al-Manāqib al-Mazyadiyya*, (ed. Ş. Dararka and M. Khresāt, 'Ammān, 1984), p. 62; Abū 'Ubayda, *al-Naqā'id*, (ed. A. Bevan, Leiden, 1905), p. 76, 464.

⁷ Abū al-Baqā', p. 75; Naṣr b. Muzāhīm, *Waq'at Şiffīn*, (ed. 'Abd al-Salām Ḥārūn, Cairo, 1328 a.h.), p. 22.

⁸ *Diwān al-A'shā*, p. 57; Abū al-Baqā', p. 407.

the term *malik*, as attested by examples in Classical Arabic poetry.⁹ But there were rulers who used to adorn their heads with crowns, and even bore the title *dhū al-tāj*, but were not elevated to the ranks of royalty, as in the case of the Meccan ruler Saʿīd b. al-ʿĀṣ, Abū Uḥayḥa¹⁰ about whom it was said that no man in Mecca dared to wear a turban the same color as his, because of the reverence with which they regarded him.¹¹ But the fact that Abū Uḥayḥa was not given the title *malik* did not nullify the official-political significance of the term *dhū al-tāj*, which apparently always reflected the status of royalty. In a verse attributed to Khālīd b. Yazīd b. Muʿāwiya, the poet refers to a woman named Umāma, who was the granddaughter of Abū Uḥayḥa on her father's side and the granddaughter of the Caliph ʿUthmān on her mother's side. He mentions two elements of (secular) royalty and of the (religious) caliphate which were embodied by this woman, which she inherited from her ancestors Abū Uḥayḥa and ʿUthman. The poet writes:

*fa-in ḥuztahā thamma al-khilāfatu baʿdahā
taḥuz khayra ʿilqay minbarin wa-sarīrī.*¹²

—«if you win her (the woman) and afterwards win the caliphate / then you shall be worthy of the two most prestigious things: the caliphate and the kingdom». In this verse, the *minbar* (the preacher's pulpit) represents the element of the caliphate in its Islamic sense, while the *sarīr* (the throne of royalty) symbolizes the element of royalty in its secular, pre-Islamic sense.

It is apparently the verse of Khālīd b. Yazīd which created the impression that there is no difference between the expressions *dhū al-ʿamāma* («owner of the turban») and *dhū al-tāj* («owner of the crown»), so that Abū Uḥayḥa bore both epithets simultaneously. This synonymous interpretation of the two terms was attached by the author of *al-Manāqib al-Mazyadiyya*, who opposed the inclusion of Abū Uḥayḥa among the crowned kings despite the fact that he was indeed called *dhū al-tāj*, an epithet which stemmed from the

⁹ See, for example, the verse of al-Akḥṭal, in which he refers to the Sassanian king using the title *dhū al-tāj*, Abū al-Baqāʾ, p. 400. The same title is given to the vassal king of Ḥīra in a verse attributed to Hānīʾ b. Qabīṣa al-Shaybānī. See: *ibid.*, p. 401.

¹⁰ On him, see: Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Munammaq* (ed. Khurshīd A. Fāriq), Haydarabad, 1964, pp. 130-138 (index); *idem.*, *al-Muḥabbar* (ed. E. Lechten Steiter, Haydarabad, 1361 a.h.) (index).

¹¹ The turban of Abū Uḥayḥa is mentioned in an anonymous verse. See: *al-Muḥabbar*, p. 165; al-Zamakhsharī, *Rabīʿ al-abrār* (ed. S. Al-Nuʿaymī, Baghdad., n.d.), vol. IV, p. 2, p. 218.

¹² Abū al-Baqāʾ, pp. 70-71; al-Mubarrad, vol. 1, p. 347; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf* (ed. M. Schloessinger, Jerusalem, 1938), vol. 4(B), p. 70.

fact that he wore a turban.¹³ But there is no basis for the opinion of Abū al-Baqā' who was apparently unaware of the meaning of the word 'amāma in Arabic tradition, which was parallel to the term «crown» in the Persian tradition. When a man was given the position of tribal leader, *sayyid*, he would be crowned with a red turban;¹⁴ this accounts for the Arab proverb: *al-'amā'imu fījān al-'arab*¹⁵ («The turban is the Arab's crown»).

There is another case in which Abū al-Baqā' attempts to dissociate a tribal leader from the group of crowned rulers, *aṣḥāb al-ḥijān*. The person in question was Mālik b. 'Awf al-Naṣrī, who, according to the tribal conception, belonged to this group.¹⁶ He was head of the tribal federation of Hawāzin in the battle against the Muslims at Ḥunayn, but he converted to Islam after his tribe was defeated.¹⁷ As a sign of esteem, and in the interest of gaining his favor for his new religion, the Prophet awarded him with one hundred camels.¹⁸ Abū al-Baqā' asserts that the act of giving Mālik command in this battle did not stem from the fact that he was leader of the tribe, but rather was intended to gain his favor, as an act of good tidings.¹⁹ But Abū al-Baqā''s facts are not accurate: in fact, Mālik was given command because he was the *sayyid* as well as the *fāris* —the fighter-

¹³ Abū al-Baqā', p. 71.

¹⁴ *Lisān al-'Arab*, s.v. ('.m.m.).

¹⁵ *Thimār al-qulūb*, p. 159. It is noteworthy that the phrase *ta'aṣṣaba bi'l-'iṣābati*, «to don the turban or bandage on one's head» has no other meaning than to be crowned as king, since the term *'iṣāba* in its wider sense means "crown". The significance is clearly understood from the words of the tradition concerning the coronation of 'Abdullāh b. Ubayy by his fellow tribesmen. The tradition begins as follows: *wa-laqaḍ iṣṭalaḥa ahlu hādhihī al-baḥrati' 'alā an yutawwijūhu, fa-ya'ṣibūhu bi-'iṣābati*. Ibn Shabba, *Akhbār al-madīna* (ed. Fahīm M. Shaltūt, Beirut, 1990), vol. 1, p. 357; *Lisān al-'Arab*, s.v. ('.ṣ.b); al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (ed. Cairo, 1378 a.h.), vol. VI, p. 50. The coronation act itself is referred to by the term *'aṣaba* in a verse attributed to 'Amr b. Kalthūm, al-Anbārī, *Sharḥ al-qaṣā'id al-sab' al-ṭiwāl* (ed. Abd al-Salām Ḥārūn, 2nd edition, Cairo, 1969), p. 389. It seems that Balādhurī had misunderstood the meaning of the phrase reported in al-Ya'qūbī *wa-'aṣabathu bi-'iṣāba*, since he comes to the conclusion that Sa'd b. 'Ubāda was suffering from a fever when the Anṣār convened the meeting of the Saqīfa of Banū Sā'ida to choose their candidate for the position of caliph after the death of Muḥammad. *Ansāb al-ashraf* (ed. M. Ḥamidullāh, Cairo, 1959), vol. 1, p. 581. Al-Ḥalabī also makes the same mistake when he states that Sa'd was ill in that meeting. See: *al-Sira al-ḥalabiyya*, vol. III, p. 479. The phrase used in al-Ya'qūbī denotes, in fact, the method of coronation according to the tribal tradition. In this context, the word *'iṣāba* has nothing to do with fever or any kind of illness. See: *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, vol. II, p. 123. It is surprising to note that D. Ayalon does not refer to the pre-Islamic concept of monarchy in his treatment of the term *malik* in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.

¹⁶ Abū al-Baqā', p. 72.

¹⁷ Ibn Ḥazm, *op. cit.*, p. 269; al-Wāqidi, *al-Maghāzi*, ed. M. Jones, Oxford, 1966, p. 886.

¹⁸ Ibn Durayd, *al-Ishṭiqāq* (ed. Abd al-Salām Ḥārūn, 2nd ed., Baghdad, 1979), p. 292.

¹⁹ Abū al-Baqā', p. 72.

horseman— of the Hawāzin federation.²⁰ The man chosen by Hawāzin to be blessed by his participation was none other than Durayd b. al-Ṣimma, who was already about sixty years of age and had lost his eyesight.²¹

While the grounds for including Mālik b. 'Awf within the category of those who bore the title of *dhū al-tāj* are not acceptable to Abū al-Baqā', the situation is different with regard to another tribal leader, by the name of Ḥāritha b. 'Amr al-Shaybānī, who bore the title *dhū al-tāj*.²² Ḥāritha's coronation was associated with the complex inter-tribal relationships that characterized that period: when the people of the Bakr b. Wā'il tribe rebelled against the king of al-Ḥīra, they came under the dominion of the opposing king from the Kinda dynasty in order to receive his assistance and support against the ruler of al-Ḥīra. But matters did not work out the way the Bakr b. Wā'il tribesmen had hoped. The two kings made peace, celebrated by the marriage of al-Mundhir, king of al-Ḥīra and the daughter of the king of the Kinda dynasty.²³ In light of the situation which arose, the Bakr b. Wā'il tribesmen crowned Ḥāritha b. 'Amr al-Shaybānī as their ruler and treated him as their king.²⁴

Two things can be learned from the coronation of Ḥāritha al-Shaybānī: first, that his coronation was the initiative of the local inhabitants and not of a third party (as would generally have been the case at that time, when it was the kings of Persia or their local representatives who has the final say regarding local events), and second, that the coronation was an act designed to strengthen a political position whose purpose was to break the yoke imposed by the hegemony of the ruler of Ḥīra. For these tribesmen—as for others— ridding themselves of this yoke meant ridding themselves of the annual tributes levied from them by the king of al-Ḥīra and of the need to place several youths in his custody as hostages to ensure their loyalty and subservience.²⁵

The case of Ḥāritha al-Shaybānī's coronation was not unusual for the pre-Islamic period or for the transitional period between the Jāhiliyya and Islam following the death of the Prophet, when tribal insurrections broke out

²⁰ Al-Wāqidī, p. 805, p. 885.

²¹ Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī* (ed. Cairo, 1285 a.h.), vol. IX, p. 2, p. 18; al-Wāqidī, p. 886; Ibn Hishām, p. 889.

²² Ibn Ḥazm, *op. cit.*, 324; Abū al-Baqā', p. 62.

²³ *Al-Naqā'id*, p. 267, pp. 1.072-1.073.

²⁴ Abū al-Baqā', p. 62.

²⁵ Kister, M. J., «Al-Ḥīra; Some Notes on its Relations with Arabia», *Arabica* 15 (1968), pp. 143-169.

at the beginning of the reign of Abū Bakr, which Islamic historiography refers to as *al-ridda*, the apostasy wars. One reported insurrection involved a southern tribe by the name of Banū Walī‘a in the area of Ḥaḍramawt. The representative of the al-Madīna government who was in charge of this region came out to suppress the insurrection and defeated the tribesmen. They sought refuge in the fortress of a ruler from the Kinda tribe called al-Ash‘ath, and requested his aid in the fight against the Muslim warriors. But al-Ash‘ath made his assistance contingent upon their crowning him as their king, which they did not hesitate to do. They appointed him king and crowned him in accordance with the same formula by which kings from the descendants of Qaḥṭan were crowned.²⁶ In this case, too, one notes the same two elements: that of personal initiative and that of an underlying political need which motivated the coronation.

The political element is clearly reflected in cases of coronation which served as an act of insurrection against the imposition of an external political power. Various tribal leaders and false prophets who led the rebellions against the regime of the first Caliph, Abū Bakr, wore crowns which symbolized the act of breaking the yoke of government imposed by the regime in al-Madīna.²⁷ But sometimes the political element is conspicuously absent from the circumstances which brought about the coronation of the tribal leader, as was the case in the decision by the Sulaym tribe to crown ‘Abbās b. Anas al-Ri‘ī. This decision was not carried to fruition, since the candidate for coronation abandoned the tribe and sought refuge with another tribe which had awarded him their patronage. This occurred after ‘Abbās al-Ri‘ī had been insulted by the behavior of one of his relatives.²⁸ As is well known, the candidate for coronation was one of the outstanding noble figures within his tribe and among other tribes.²⁹ In the case of ‘Abbās al-Ri‘ī, the only factors which came into play were internal ones, expressed by

²⁶ Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ nahj al-balāgha* (ed. M. Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, Cairo, 1961), vol. I, p. 295; Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī, *al-Awā‘il* (ed. M. Sayyid al-Wakīl, Ṭanṭa, Egypt, 1987), p. 310. According to another version, the initiative of Al-Ash‘ath’s coronation came from Banū ‘Amr b. Mu‘āwiya, al-Qalqashandī, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 16. A fresh data about the ridda of Banū Walī‘a was given by M. Lecker in his study: «Kinda on the eve of Islam...», *JRAS* 4 (part 3), 1994, pp. 333-356.

²⁷ Al-Ya‘qūbī, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 128.

²⁸ *Al-Aghānī*, vol. XVI, p. 57. It was reported that Banū Sulaym had crowned another person, named Mālik b. al Shārid, the brother of the famous poet al-Khansā. See: Ibn Ḥazm, *op. cit.*, p. 261. About other leaders of Sulaym who bore the royal title, see: M. Lecker, *The Banū Sulaym*, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1989, pp. 219-220.

²⁹ About al-Ri‘ī see: Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, MS. ‘Asher Efendi, Sulaymaniyya, Istanbul, nos. 597, 598, pt. II, fol. 210a; Wāqidī, p. 353; *Naqā‘id*, p. 302, 410; *Aghānī*, vol. XVI, p. 140.

a series of hindrances and acts of opposition on the part of various clans within the Sulaym tribe who were opposed to the coronation.³⁰

The external political element is missing from the story of the proposal to crown 'Abdu'llāh b. Ubayy, the leader from al-Madīna. This coronation plan, according to reports, came at the initiative of the Arab residents of al-Madīna (Yathrib), whether from the al-Khazraj tribe (the dominant tribe in that town) or as a coordinated effort from both the al-Khazraj tribe and the Aws tribe.³¹

Of all the reports regarding the coronation of Ibn Ubayy, only the tradition cited by al-Mas'ūdī contradicts this. According to al-Mas'ūdī, the Khazraj tribe forced the coronation upon the Aws tribe.³² But it is difficult to accept this version, since the circumstances and the general climate in Yathrib on the eve of the coronation would not have enabled a unilateral initiative by the Khazraj, even though they were the stronger side. As for the candidate for coronation, Ibn Ubayy had to his credit the neutral stance he maintained with regard to the mutual acts of violence between the two factions of the city's inhabitants, in which considerable blood was spilt—particularly in the bloody battle of Bu'āth.³³ In addition, Ibn Ubayy was no normal tribal leader; rather, he was a dominant figure of unique military importance, since one third of the fighting force of Madīna was under his command.³⁴ If needed, he could mobilize two thousand warriors from his tribe, from his «clients», *mawalīhi*, and from his allies outside Madīna.³⁵ His social stand, military power, and degree of influence are reflected in

³⁰ According to another report, Sulaym had crowned another tribal leader called Mālik b. al-Sharīd, who was soon murdered by a Kinanite murderer. Ibn Ḥazm, *op. cit.*, p. 261. Another leader from the tribe, called al-'Abbās b. Mirdās, was anxious to get the crown which the Banū Sulaym had prepared for al-Ri'ī, but failed to win it. See: *Aghānī*, vol. XVI, p. 140.

³¹ On the controversial nature of the traditions dealing with this issue, see: Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdīsī, *al-Istibṣār* (ed. 'Alī Nuwayhid, Beirut, 1972), p. 185; Wāqidī, p. 419; Ibn Shabba, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 357; Bukharī, vol. VI, p. 50; *Lisān al-'Arab*, s.v. (b.ḥ.r.); Ibn Hishām, p. 759; al-Ṭabarī, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 606; al-Kulā'ī, *al-Iktifā*, (ed. M. 'Abd al-Wāhid, Beirut, 1970), vol. II, p. 218; Abū al-Baqā', pp. 63-64; *Imtā' al-asmā'*, vol. I, p. 202; al-Suhaylī, *op. cit.*, vol. VI, p. 402; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Nihāya*, (ed. M. Ṭināhī and Ṭāhir al-Zāwī, Beirut, 1963), vol. I, p. 100; *al-Tanbīh wa-al-ishrāf*, p. 272; *al-Sira al-ḥalabiyya*, vol. II, p. 598; al-Diyārbakrī, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 472; Ibn Manẓūr, *Mukhtaṣar Ibn 'Asākir* (ed. Ma'mūn Ṣaghurjī, Damascus, 1989), vol. XXV, p. 291.

³² Ibn Sa'īd al-Andalusī, *Nashwat al-ṭarab* (ed. Naṣrat 'Abd al-Raḥmān, 'Amman, 1982), vol. I, p. 264.

³³ *Al-Kāmil*, vol. I, p. 418.

³⁴ *Al-Ma'ārif*, p. 159; Wensick, A. T., *Muḥammad and the Jews of Medina*, (tr. and ed. by W. Behn, Freiburg 1975), pp. 33-36.

³⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 553.

historical reports.³⁶ In the opinion of this writer, it was all of these facts, along with the atmosphere of reconciliation which characterized Madīna on the eve of the *hijra*,³⁷ which underlay the idea of crowning ‘Abdu’llāh b. Ubayy.

II

Abū al-Baqā’, referring to the crown of Hawdha b. ‘Alī al-Ḥanafī, says that Hawdha was indeed a noble figure within his tribe, but that he did not attain a rank which entitled him to place a crown upon his head.³⁸ Abū al-Baqā’'s words contain not the slightest hint of denial that Hawdha had a *tāj*, but in the same breath, Abū al-Baqā’ attempts to belittle the value of this *tāj* and to show that it is not in the same league as those of kings belonging to the well-known kingdoms of that historic period. This *tāj* was, in Abū al-Baqā’'s opinion, a simple crown suited to the proportions of a *sayyid*, a tribal leader, which consisted of a small number of beads with which he adorned his turban. But apparently, it was the poets who created the impression that this *tāj* was a real royal crown.³⁹ Abū al-Baqā’ apparently failed to notice the tradition regarding Hawdha’s crown, according to which Hawdha was summoned to the palace of Kisrā, the Persian king, and crowned there by the king himself, who placed a string of pearls upon his head, from which point onward Hawdha bore the title of *dhū al-tāj*.⁴⁰

In this context, Abū al-Baqā’ relied upon the version of Abū ‘Ubayda, which does not mention the King of Persia, and which describes Hawdha’s crown in an abstract fashion as nothing more than a few primitive beads. In that tradition, Abū ‘Ubayda establishes categorically that crowns were associated with the southern kings of the Ḥimyar dynasty, and that the northern rulers who were descendants of Ma‘add had no part in this royal heritage.⁴¹

³⁶ Ibn Hishām, p. 307, 759, 761; *al-Sīra al-ḥalabiyya*, vol. II, 598; Watt, *Muḥammad at Medina*, p. 184; Wensinck, pp. 33-36.

³⁷ Ibn Hishām, p. 292; *al-Sīra al-ḥalabiyya*, vol. II, p. 159; Ibn Sa‘d, vol. I(1), p. 147; al-Ṭabarī, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 354.

³⁸ Abū al-Baqā’, p. 55.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁴⁰ *Al-Kāmil*, vol. I, pp. 275-276; al-Ṭabarī, vol. II, 169. It was reported that the crown of Hawdha included some pearls on his turban, Ibn Durayd, *op. cit.*, p. 348. According to the version of Ibn al-Kalbī, the turban’s worth was estimated at about thirty thousand dirhams, *Jamharat al-nasab*, p. 539.

⁴¹ Al-Mubarrad, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 24; vol. III, p. 23; *al-‘Iqd al-faṣīd*, vol. II, 243-244; al-Suhayfī, *op. cit.*, vol. V, p. 41.

In all actuality, Abū 'Ubayda's version is not immune to criticism. First of all, it was the poets of the period who spoke of the *tāj* of Hawdha, and they did not refer to this *tāj* as a simple string of beads devoid of any allusion to royalty, as the poet al-A'shā puts it. Furthermore, another poet, Labīd, emphasizes with regard to another leader that these beads indeed comprised the *tāj*.⁴² These beads were not simple, ordinary beads; rather, they were the pearls with which the royal crown was adorned.⁴³ Such pearls were not easily accessible because of their price and special worth. The difficulty involved in obtaining them and the effort involved in purchasing them may well have been what forestalled the initiative to crown 'Abdu'llāh b. Ubayy, as one may understand from the tradition of al-Wāqidi.⁴⁴ In this context, it is worth mentioning that Abu 'Ubayda was a disciple of the *shu'ūbiyya*, which undermined Arab cultural superiority and that he even dedicated some writings to citing the shortcomings, *mathālib*, of the Arab tribes.⁴⁵ This is yet another factor which weakens the credibility of his version with regard to Hawdha's *tāj*. The value of the crown—indeed, of any crown—was assessed in accordance with the value of the pearls that comprised the *tāj*. Hawdha's crown was worth three times the value of those which the Persians gave their agents from the Banū Naṣr dynasty of Ḥira: it is reported that the value of the crown given to Banū Naṣr was no more than ten thousand dirhams,⁴⁶ while Hawdha's crown was valued at thirty thousand dirhams.⁴⁷ In any case, however, the difference between these crowns and the royal crown of the Persian kings was a vast one: because of the extreme size and weight of the royal crown, it could not actually be worn on the king's head; instead, it was suspended from the ceiling above the royal throne, and when the king sat upon the

⁴² Labīd mentions in his verse the term *kharazāt al-mulk*, al-Suhaylī, *op. cit.*, vol. V, p. 41; al-Qālī, Ismā'īl b. al-Qāsim, *Amālī* (ed. M. A. al-Aṣma'ī, Cairo, 1926), vol. I, p. 75; *Thimār al-qulūb*, p. 184; *Lisān al-'arab*, s.v. (*kh.r.z.*); *Tāj al-'arūs*, s.v. (*kh.r.z.*).

⁴³ *Lisān al-'arab*, s.v. (*kh.r.z.*).

⁴⁴ Al-Wāqidi, p. 419; *Imtā' al-asmā'*, vol. I, p. 202; al-Ṭabaṇī, vol. II, p. 606; al-Diyārbakrī, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 472; *al-Sīra al-ḥalabiyya*, vol. II, p. 598.

⁴⁵ On the tendency of Abū 'Ubayda to adopt the *shu'ūbiyya*'s point of view see: Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Irshād al-arīb* (ed. S. D. Margoliouth, 3rd ed., Cairo, 1938), vol. XIX, p. 156; al-Suyūfī, *Bughyat al-wu'āt* (ed. Cairo, n.d.), p. 395. It is worth mentioning, in this context, the contradictory conclusions reached by Goldziher and H.A.R. Gibb concerning the issue of Abū 'Ubayda's *shu'ūbiyya*. While the former accepts the Muslim tradition, the latter sets out to prove the inaccurate nature of this tradition. See: H.A.R. Gibb, «Abū 'Ubayda», *E.I.*².

⁴⁶ Abū al-Baqā', p. 62.

⁴⁷ *Jamharat al-nasab*, p. 539; *al-Aghānī*, vol. XVII, p. 79.

throne, his head was positioned within the aperture of the crown, making it appear as if he were wearing it.⁴⁸

In addition to crowns, descriptions of other symbols and trappings of majesty and royal tradition have come down to us. Mentioned among these articles are the *namāriq*, which were a type of small cushion which also served as pillows and which were placed upon the king's throne or on the floor of his chamber.⁴⁹ The poet Ja'ir, in one of his odes, praises Warqā' b. 'Attāb, one of his senior figures in his clan, who used to drink in the company of the king and sit upon the *namāriq*.⁵⁰ Another type of colored carpet, called *namaṭ* (plural: *anmāṭ*), which was placed on the side of the pillows and became part of the accessories of the royal Persian throne,⁵¹ found its way onto the seat of the tribal king. Al-A'shā, in one of his verses, describes as «radiant as a shiny sword» the face of the tribal king who sat down on his throne in the morning, which was covered with royal pillows and colorful carpets.⁵²

The *wisāda* (pillow) became a symbol of royalty and government in the Islamic tradition. When the *anṣār* (the men of Madīna who were companions of the Prophet) proposed their leader, Sa'd b. 'Ubāda, as a candidate for the position of Caliph after the Prophet's death, they sat him down and gave him pillows to lean on.⁵³ The *wisāda* became an Islamic symbol of legitimate rule. In the context of the struggle of the Abbasid Dynasty against the Alid dynasty, the *wisāda* appears as a tool in this struggle: in the Abbasids' attempt to strengthen the legitimacy of their claim to power, they cite a tradition attributed to 'Alī, according to which he sat in the company of the Prophet, who was leaning upon a pillow of hairy leather. According to the tradition, al-'Abbās (forefather of the Abbasid

⁴⁸ But the crown of Yazdajard which the Arabs plundered from the royal palace in Madā'in (Ctesiphon) was much simpler. See: al-Suhaylī, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 301. See Shaked, Sh., «From Iran to Islam: On Some Symbols of Royalty,» *JSAI* VII (1986), 75-91.

⁴⁹ *Namāriq*, as a kind of small carpets laid down on the floor of the king's chamber, were described by Rab'ī b. 'Āmir, the Arab delegate who was sent to meet the Persian general Rustam before the battle of Qādisiyya (al-Ṭabarī, vol. III, p. 519). *Namāriq* as carpets on which one are mentioned in the *rajaz* of Hind (the mother of Mu'āwiya) before the battle of Uḥud, in which the Muslims were defeated by Quraysh. See: al-Wāqidi, p. 225; Ibn Hishām, 588; *Lisān al-'arab*, s.v. (*n.m.r.q.*); al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi' li-ahkām al-Qur'ān* (ed. Beirut, 1988), vol. XX, p. 24; *al-Nihāya*, vol. IV, p. 118.

⁵⁰ *Al-Naqā'id*, p. 781; *Dīwān Ja'ir* (ed. Nu'mān Ṭāhā, Cairo, 1971), vol. II, p. 934; Qurtubī, *op. cit.*, vol. XX, p. 24.

⁵¹ Shaked, *op. cit.*

⁵² The verse of al-A'shā describes the king as sitting upon *anmāṭ* and *wasā'id*. *Dīwān al-A'shā*, p. 44. It is reported that the *namaṭ* was a colorful cover placed upon the seat of the king. A plain, uncolored cover is not included in this category. *Lisān al-'arab*, s.v. (*n.m.ṭ.*).

⁵³ *Ansāb al-ashraf*, vol. I, p. 581.

dynasty) walked in, and the Prophet handed him the *wisāda* and told him to sit on it.⁵⁴ In this context, it is mentioned that Caliph 'Umar I had a pillow which he would take with him wherever he went.⁵⁵

The king's throne must have been a central item, but there was always room for comparison between one throne and another, the clear preference being for the higher seat. This becomes apparent from the comparison between the throne of the king of Ḥira and that of the king of Ghassān in Syria.⁵⁶

All of these items continued to exist in the palaces of the caliphs of the Umayyad and the Abbasid dynasties, but they ceased to comprise symbols of dominion or rule, because of their Jahilite nature and because the caliphs did not wish to be like the infidel kings.⁵⁷ Rather, they were careful to give themselves titles and symbols of an Islamic-religious nature, which raised them to the dogmatic position of the ideal Islamic leader.⁵⁸

An apparent result of the establishment of the phenomenon of tribal kings was the formation of a characteristic image of these kings within the consciousness of pre-Islamic Arab society. There were even mutual behavioral norms which formed and which governed relationships between the king and the community and between the king and the masses. Arab tradition particularly emphasized the reverential fear with which the average man viewed the king. In this context, Ibn Sa'd tells of a particular man who came to meet the Prophet. When he met him, the man was stricken by fright and began to tremble. The Prophet tried to calm him, saying: I am not a king, but the son of an ordinary woman from the Quraysh tribe.⁵⁹

The prestige of kings found concrete expression in the feeling of security enjoyed by those who had the kings' protection. Some of the merchants of Quraysh who arrived in Yemen presented themselves as descendants of the

⁵⁴ The significance of the *wisāda* as a symbol of power and rule is attested by a pro-Abbasid tradition which came to support their claim for rule and their legitimate right to the caliphate. According to this tradition, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and his uncle al-'Abbās visited the Prophet in his home and found him leaning on a *wisāda*. The Prophet lifted it and gave it to al-'Abbās and said to him: Sit down on it. Anonymous author, *Akhbār al-'Abbās* (ed. al-Durī, 'Abd al-'Azīz and A. al Muṭṭalibī, Beirut, 1971), pp. 186-187.

⁵⁵ Shaked, *op. cit.*

⁵⁶ *Amālī al-Qāṭī*, vol. I, pp. 257-258; note 12 above.

⁵⁷ Abū al-Baqā', pp. 83-84; *al-Aghānī*, vol. IV, p. 158. The pre-Islamic symbols of royalty were changed into Islamic symbols during the Islamic rule. On the new symbols see G. Zaydān, *Tārīkh al-tamaddun al-Islamī* (ed. Beirut, 1967), vol. I, p. 133.

⁵⁸ Crone, P. and Hinds, M., *God's Caliph, Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*, Cambridge, 1986, p. 33.

⁵⁹ Ibn Sa'd, vol. I(1), p. 4; Ibn Ishāq, *al-Siyar wa-al-maghāzī* (ed. Suhayl Zakkar, Damascus, 1976), p. 169.

dynasty of the kings of Kinda, so that they would not be harmed and could move freely.⁶⁰ Hawdha b. ‘Alī referred to this *hayba* in a letter of response which he sent to the Prophet.⁶¹ The greeting with which kings were saluted was accompanied by the *sujūd*, the act of bowing down and lowering one’s head, as attested by the verses of al-A‘shā.⁶² The *ḥadīth* of the Prophet refers to the *sujūd* which was customary and speaks of a short scepter which the king would carry; waving the scepter signified the beginning of the *sujūd* ceremony.⁶³ Kings got special treatment when they were taken as prisoners of war: while ordinary prisoners had their sideburns shaven as a sign of shame and humiliation, kings were spared this.⁶⁴ In addition, the ransom paid in order to free a king from captivity was one thousand camels, ten times the ransom for an ordinary prisoner.⁶⁵

III

The Sassanians, through their Lakhmid vassal kings, attempted to establish a network of alliances with the tribes in much of northern and northeastern Arabia as a mean of keeping these tribes under control and, in particular, to keep them from plundering or taxing settled districts in the Iraqi alluvium, or from plundering or disrupting the caravan trade.⁶⁶

Abū al-Baqā’ draws a general picture of the Sassanians’ influence in the region and of the mutual relationship between them and the various tribal groups.⁶⁷ As for the region of Bahrayn, this area was controlled by rulers from the tribe of Tamīm like al-Mundhir b. Sāwā, who were appointed as kings of the region on behalf of the Sassanians.⁶⁸ Bahrayn was actually a Persian territory, most of whose inhabitants were from the tribes of ‘Abd al-

⁶⁰ Al-Suhaylī, *op. cit.*, vol. VII, p. 410; Ibn Sa‘d, vol. I(1), pp. 3-4.

⁶¹ Ibn Sa‘d, vol. I(2), p. 18; *al-Sīra al-ḥalabiyya*, vol. III, p. 303.

⁶² The element of *sujūd* is included in a verse by A‘shā, Abū al-Baqā’, p. 54; al-Mubarrad, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 24; *Tāj al-‘arūs*, s.v. (*h.w.dh.*).

⁶³ *Al-Nihāya*, vol. II, vol. II, p. 36. About the *makhāṣir* (scepters) of the kings, see: *Lisān al-‘arab*, s.v. (*kh.s.r.*).

⁶⁴ *Al-Naqā’id*, 68.

⁶⁵ Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* (ed. A. Qaṭāmish, Cairo, 1971), vol. II, p. 424; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Mustaṣṣā* (2nd ed. Beirut, 1977), vol. I, p. 432; al-Maydānī, *Majma’ al-amthāl* (ed. Beirut, 1961), vol. II, 441.

⁶⁶ Donner, F., *The Early Islamic Conquests*, Princeton, 1981, p. 47.

⁶⁷ Abū al-Baqā’, p. 369; Donner, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-46.

⁶⁸ Kister, «Al-Mundhir b. Sāwā», *op. cit.*; *Mu‘jam al-buldān*, s.v. (*hajar*); *al-Muḥabbar*, p. 265; *Futūḥ al-buldān*, p. 95.

Qays and Bakr b. Wā'il; these coexisted with Banū Tamīm who were concentrated in the desert areas, *bādiyatuhā*.⁶⁹ To the south, in 'Umān, lived the Azd tribe, which comprised the dominant majority and which was controlled by two brothers: 'Ubād and Jayfar. These two had inherited the monarchy from their father, al-Julandā b. al-Mustakbir, and had been crowned as kings of this region on behalf of the Sassanid kings.⁷⁰ Yamāma was controlled by king Hawdha b. 'Alī, who had been crowned by the Sassanians. Its Banū Ḥanīfa inhabitants, who were under the authority of Persia, did not participate in the battle of dhū Qār (611) alongside the Persians and the other tribes which were allied with Persia.⁷¹

The rule and power of the tribal kings stemmed from the support and protection they received from the Sassanid kings. This may be gathered from the writings of Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī.⁷² Most of this support was in the form of a garrison of horsemen from the army of the king of Persia, which served as reinforcement to the local warriors of the vassal king.⁷³ Every year, these units were relieved by fresh units called *wadā'i'*.⁷⁴ These kings were respected by the tribesmen not only because of their noble origin, but also because of the totality of services they received from them, as is evident from Hawdha's case. The king was viewed as being able to satisfy all the aspirations and desires of his tribe.⁷⁵ The most important of the services which the king could provide was that of providing the tribesmen's lives with the sense that their lives were secure and that their tribe would not be taken into captivity.⁷⁶

Hawdha b. 'Alī's domain of influence was vast, extending from the territory controlled directly by the kings of Ḥīra at the north and east and down to the border with Yemen, which was controlled by the Persian governor, the *marzubān* of Yemen.⁷⁷ From the moment the tribe of Banū Ḥanīfa arrived in Yamāma and settle in Ḥajr, they began to extend their control over the adjacent territory.⁷⁸ In fact, Hawdha b. 'Alī inherited

⁶⁹ *Futūḥ al-buldān*, p. 95.

⁷⁰ Sa'īd al-Afghānī, *Aswāq al-'arab* (3rd ed., Beirut, 1974), p. 254; *al-Muḥabbar*, p. 265.

⁷¹ Watt, M., «Ḥanīfa b. Ludjaym», *E.I.*²; Donner, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁷² Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī, *Tārīkh siniyy mulūk al-arḍ* (ed. Beirut, n.d.), p. 82.

⁷³ *Al-Aghānī*, vol. XVI, p. 78; Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī, *op. cit.*, p. 83; *al-Kāmil*, vol. I, p. 379; Donner, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁷⁴ Al-Mubarrad, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 83.

⁷⁵ Abū al-Baqā', pp. 53-54.

⁷⁶ The security which the king guaranteed for his kinsmen is referred to in a verse by the poet 'Amr b. Kalthūm: Al-Tabrīzī, *Sharḥ al-mu'allaqāt*, (ed. Cairo, n.d.), p. 217; al-Anbārī, *op. cit.*, p. 389; Abū Zayd al-Qurashī, *Jamharat ash'ār al-'arab* (ed. Cairo, 1308 a.h.), p. 77.

⁷⁷ *Al-Aghānī*, vol. XVI, p. 79.

⁷⁸ Watt, M., «Ḥanīfa», *op. cit.*

control over this extensive territory from his predecessors, and it was this fact which caused the Sassanid king to invite Hawdha to the capital of the Sassanians to be crowned there.⁷⁹ Banū Ḥanīfa's control over a long segment of the trade caravan route from Persia to Yemen, is what forced the Persian king to take the course of action that he did. In addition to the leadership, Hawdha b. ʿAlī acquired estates, agricultural farms, grazing land, and fortresses which came into his possession either by inheritance, or by force, or as a feudal estate (*iqṭāʿ*) provided by the Sassanid king—as, for example, the estates at Hajar.⁸⁰ Hajar, which was the central city in Baḥrayn, had formerly been under the control of al-Mundhir b. Sāwā, as mentioned above.⁸¹ When Hawdha acquired control of Hajar, he abandoned his dwelling at Yamāma and went to live in Hajar.⁸² The granting of estates to tribal leaders on behalf of the Sassanid kings was one of the means by which these kings bought the leaders' loyalty.⁸³ Actually, these leaders enjoyed the fruits of tributes collected from these estates, as well as reaping the resources of the estates themselves.⁸⁴

Leaders who received these expanses of land as estates were called *dhawū al-ākāl*.⁸⁵ When the Prophet called upon Hawdha b. ʿAlī to convert to Islam, he promised to leave Hawdha's estates in his hands if Hawdha agreed to his request.⁸⁶ Another tribal leader, Wāʿil b. Ḥujr, from the area of Ḥaḍramawt, had estates and fortresses which the Prophet listed in an epistle to him containing a similar offer.⁸⁷

From all of the above, one may gather that the acquisition of land and the actual realization of control over territory were the basic criteria for the dominion of a tribal king. The tradition cited by Ibn Saʿd leaves little room for doubt as to the strong, direct connection between the role of *malik* and the dominion over the land within a particular territory. The tradition says, in this context: «And they were called kings, since each of them had a *wāḍī* in his possession and was in dominion of all which lay therein».⁸⁸

⁷⁹ *Al-Kāmil*, vol. I, pp. 378-379.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 378-379.

⁸¹ *Al-Aghānī*, vol. XVI, p. 79.

⁸² *Dīwān al-Aʿshā*, p. 130; al-Mubarrad, *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 19.

⁸³ Donner, *op. cit.*, p. 47; Abū al-Baqāʿ, p. 500, 502, 397, 403.

⁸⁴ Abū al-Baqāʿ, p. 500.

⁸⁵ *Al-Muḥabbar*, p. 253.

⁸⁶ Al-Qalqashandī, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 379; al-Diyārbakrī, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 39; al-Damīrī, *Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān* (ed. Cairo, 1309 a.h.), vol. II, pp. 339-340.

⁸⁷ Ibn Saʿd, vol. I(2), p. 35.

⁸⁸ Ibn Saʿd, vol. V, p. 7; *Futūḥ al-buldān*, p. 120.

These *wādīs* (valleys, plains) were actually the green areas on which an agricultural or semi-agricultural society could be founded, or, at the very least, a shepherding society. Since desert regions like Arabia do not enable agriculture or grazing except in such areas,⁸⁹ the control over them was always a focal point for controversy and strife among the various kings, as one may gather from another tradition cited by Ibn Sa'ad.⁹⁰

A territory governed by a tribal king was called *maḥjar*, according to the Southern Arabic terminology. Each king in the southern Kinda dynasty had a *maḥjar* which he would enter when necessary.⁹¹ The *maḥjar* served as a *ḥimā*, a private retreat to which entrance by strangers was forbidden.⁹² The tribal kings had complete dominion over their territory and over all the people who lived there. This dominion took the form of an annual tribute which was imposed upon all inhabitants of the region. This was the practice among the Arab tribes which lived in the areas that were controlled by the kings of Ḥira.⁹³ The memoirs of one of the dynasty's princesses, Ḥurqa bint al-Nu'mān, mention the tax which was imposed upon inhabitants living in the region of Kūfa prior to the Muslim invasion.⁹⁴ Even tribes which were dominated by the king of Ḥira and which were further inside Arabia like that of Tamīm tribe were obliged to pay this annual tribute.⁹⁵ King Ḥujr b. al-Ḥārith of the Kinda dynasty, who dominated the Asad and Ghaṭafān tribes, imposed an annual tribute upon them; it was this tax which led the Asad tribe to rebel against the king's authority and to assassinate him.⁹⁶ King Zuhayr b. Juḥayma al-ʿAbsī, who was known by the nickname *malik al-ʿarab*, imposed an annual tax upon the tribes of the Hawāzin federation. Every year, he would come to the marketplace of ʿUkāz with his men to collect the tax, and it was there that he was assassinated by Khālīd b. Jaʿfar after he chastised a woman who had failed to pay the tax.⁹⁷ Sometimes the responsibility for collecting the tax from tribes which were under the king's

⁸⁹ Kamāl ʿAbdul-Fattah, *Mountain Farmer and Fellaḥ in ʿAsīr, Southwest Arabia*, Erlangen, 1981, pp. 55-62.

⁹⁰ Ibn Sa'ad, vol. I(2), p. 35.

⁹¹ About *maḥjar al-zurqān* see: al-Ṭabarī, vol. III, p. 335; *Muʿjam al-buldān*, s.v. (*zurqān*).

⁹² *Al-Kāmil*, vol. II, p. 258. On the institution of *ḥimā* in Jahiliyya and early Islam see: Løkkegaard, F., *Islamic Taxation in the Classic Period*, Copenhagen, 1950, p. 21.

⁹³ Abū al-Baqāʿ, p. 436.

⁹⁴ Al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, (ed. and translated into French by B. de Maynard, Paris, 1861-1877), vol. III, p. 210.

⁹⁵ Abū al-Baqāʿ, p. 436.

⁹⁶ *Al-Aghānī*, vol. VIII, p. 65; *Nashwat al-ṭarab*, vol. I, pp. 246-247.

⁹⁷ *Al-Aghānī*, vol. X, p. 12; Abū al-Fidāʿ, *al-Mukhtaṣar* (ed. Beirut, n.d.), vol. I, p. 78; Ibn al-Wardī, *Tatimmat al-Mukhtaṣar* (ed. A. al-Badrāwī, Beirut, 1970), vol. I, p. 107.

authority was placed in the hands of a local representative from one of the tribes, who was known as a *ridf* (plural: *ardāf*). This position was a prestigious and respected one.⁹⁸

The authority of the king did not exclude tribes which were permanent residents, such as the tribes of Aws and Khazraj in Maḍīna, which was ruled by *marzubān al-bādiya*, a sort of military governor who empowered the ruler of Banū Qurayza and, later, the leader of Banū al-Naḍīr, the two Jewish tribes in the area, to collect the tribute that had been imposed upon the two Arab tribes.⁹⁹ In this context it is reasonable to assume that the initiative to crown ‘Abdu’llāh b. Ubayy as king of al-Maḍīna on the eve of the Prophet’s *hijra*, was designed to eliminate the burden of Jewish control over the Arab residents of this town.

The connection between the role of ruler and the collection of taxes from the tribesmen under that ruler’s authority, is also emphasized in traditions dealing with the attempted crowning of ‘Uthmān b. al-Ḥuwayrith as ruler of Mecca on behalf of the Byzantine ruler. In this context, Ibn Ishāq reports that this man offered the Byzantines to collect a tax on their behalf from the inhabitants of Mecca in exchange for giving them permission to sell their wares in the markets of Syria.¹⁰⁰ More detailed versions report that Ibn al-Ḥuwayrith visited the palace of the Byzantine emperor and proposed that the latter annex Mecca under his control as the Sassanians had annexed Yemen. He also proposed himself as a candidate for the position of king of Quraysh, his tribe. The emperor accepted the proposal and issued an order whereby he appointed Ibn al-Ḥuwayrith king of Quraysh. Ibn al-Ḥuwayrith returned to Mecca with the appointment and attempted to convince his fellow tribesmen that the change would not cost them dearly and that they would have to part with only a minuscule sum of money to be transferred to the treasury of the Byzantine emperor.¹⁰¹

The payment of a tribute to the tribal king was a *sine qua non* for all such kings throughout all historical periods, attested in every case that has come down to us. This was the practice amongst the ancient kings of Yemen, the *tabābi’a*, who maintained dominion over the northern Arab tribes and

⁹⁸ *Al-Naqā’id*, p. 66, 299; *Thimār al-qulūb*, p. 184; *Lisān al-‘Arab*, s.v. (*r.d.f.*); Donner, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁹⁹ Ibn Rusta, *al-A’lāq al-nafīsa* (ed. Beirut, n.d.), p. 177.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Suhaylī, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 358-359.

¹⁰¹ Abū al-Baqā’, pp. 64-65; *al-Munammaq*, pp. 178-180; al-Fāṣī, *Shifā’ al-gharām* (ed. ‘Abd al-Salam al-Tadmūrī), Beirut, 1985, p. 171; *idem*, *al-‘Iqd al-thamīn* (ed. Fu’ād Sayyid, Cairo, 1965), vol. I, p. 153.

collected a tribute from the tribes they controlled.¹⁰² This was also the case when the Sasanians appointed the vassal king, Ma'ḍī-Karib b. Sayf b. dhī Yazan, as king of Yemen after they had vanquished the Ethiopian invaders.¹⁰³

The tribal tradition emphasized the feeling of pride and glory felt by tribes which succeeded in evading the payment of tribute out of an unwillingness to be subjugated by kings. The term *laqāh*, which expresses political independence and a refusal to yield to the humiliating rule of kings, was frequently used by the few tribes who enjoyed this position of independence.¹⁰⁴ The element of not paying the tribute was the chief factor which characterized the tribes that enjoyed the status of *laqāh*.¹⁰⁵

The sphere of authority of the tribal king also included the marketplaces which were held consecutively throughout all seasons of the year. The king in whose dominion the marketplace was held would collect customs on merchandise entering the marketplace. In addition, he enjoyed another privilege: the king's own merchandise was given priority over that of ordinary merchants in the marketplace, and the sale of ordinary merchandise was suspended until all of the king's own merchandise had been sold.¹⁰⁶ The king's control of the marketplace was a constant source of rage for the tribesmen, who complained in particular of the customs which the king imposed upon the sale of their wares.¹⁰⁷

Against this background of the ruler and the ruled, and in light of the conflict of interests between the king and the tribes under his authority, a hostile inclination toward the monarchy developed within Jahiliyya Arab society. So it was that disobedience toward the king and the desire to break the yoke of imperial rule became the *makrūma*, an ideal norm which the tribesmen passed down from generation to generation. The act of taking kings prisoner became an act of heroism which was glorified, as evidenced by

¹⁰² *Murūj al-dhahab*, vol. III, p. 226. In spite of the legendary nature of the reports on Yemen and the ruling dynasties in this part of Arabia before Islam, one may consider the verses quoted by Mas'ūdī as an indicator which reflects, to some extent, the facts on the ground.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 166.

¹⁰⁴ *Rasā'il al-Jāhiz*, vol. I, p. 187; *Lisān al-'arab*, s.v. (*l.q.h.*); *al-Naqā'id*, p. 69). Meccans who enjoyed the status of *laqāh* used to boast of this, and included the term *laqāh* within the *talbiya*, the religious rites performed during the pilgrimage ceremony: *al-Muḥabbar*, p. 315.

¹⁰⁵ *Rasā'il al-Jāhiz*, vol. I, pp. 182-187; Ṭabarī, vol. III, pp. 283-284; al-Hamdānī, *Mukhtaṣar kitāb al-buldān*, (ed. Beirut, 1988), p. 21.

¹⁰⁶ *Al-Muḥabbar*, p. 264.

¹⁰⁷ *Lisān al-'arab*, s.v. (*m.k.s.*).

tribal poetry.¹⁰⁸ Regicide, the assassination of kings, was considered the height of glory by tribal values, an ideal which fathers diligently passed on to their sons, as reflected by the odes written by the foremost poets of the Jāhiliyya and of early Islam.¹⁰⁹

ABSTRACT

This article deals with the issue of tribal kings in pre-Islamic Arabia. These kings, *mulūk* in Arabic, were no more than tribal leaders who bore the title, *malik*, and placed crowns on their heads. Some of them had derived power from the Sassanid emperor who used to grant them crowns. Their scope of authority was mainly local, limited to the specific territory of their own tribes, or in some cases, was extended to include other territories by means of a federation of tribes.

Supported by a garrison of horsemen from the Persian army they could impose their power over the population and territory as well. Their dominion took the form of an annual tribute extracted from the inhabitants under their control. They also acquired control over the seasonal markets held in their area, and the trade routes as well. In return, the tribal king was responsible for his tribesmen's lives and the security of their property.

RESUMEN

Este artículo se ocupa de los reyes tribales en la Arabia pre-islámica. Estos reyes (en árabe, *mulūk*), eran en realidad jefes tribales que llevaban el título de *malik* y se tocaban con coronas. Algunos derivaban su poder del emperador sasánida, que eran quien les concedía las coronas. Su autoridad era principalmente local y limitada al territorio concreto de sus propias tribus; en algunos casos, a través de una confederación tribal, podía extenderse a otros territorios.

Apoyados por guarniciones de la caballería persa, los reyes podían ejercer su poder sobre el territorio y la población, lo que se traducía en un tributo anual pagado por los habitantes de las áreas bajo control. Asimismo, los reyes controlaban los mercados estacionales que se celebraban en su territorio y las rutas comerciales que lo atravesaban. A cambio, eran responsables de las vidas de sus contríbulo y de la seguridad de sus propiedades.

¹⁰⁸ Some of these cases have been preserved in classical Arabic poetry. See, for example *Sharḥ al-Mu'allaqāt*, p. 231; *al-Kāmil*, vol. I, p. 256; Abū al-Baqā', p. 129, 448; *al-Aghānī*, vol. VIII, p. 64; vol. XVI, p. 79.

¹⁰⁹ Some examples may be found in: *Diwān al-Farazdaq*, vol. I, p. 321, 323; Abū al-Baqā', p. 442, 443, 513, pp. 527-531; *al-Naqā'id*, p. 884, 899; al-Qalqashandī, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 378-379; Bashshār b. Burd, *Diwān Bashshār* (ed. M. 'Āshūr, M. Faṭḥ Allah and M. Amīn, Cairo, 1950), vol. I., 317; Ibn 'Asākir, *Tadhīb tārikh Dimashq* (ed. A. Badran, 3rd ed., Beirut, 1979), vol. X, p. 246.