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AL-AŞFAR AGAIN*

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In a previous article,¹ I dealt with some Muslim rebels who called themselves "al-Aşfar." The first of such rebels, whom I was able to trace then, was Thābit b. Nu'aym al-Judhāmī, who rebelled in Syria in the year 127/744–45, saying, "I am al-Aşfar al-Qaḥṭānī." He was followed by Abū l-Sarāyā al-Sarī b. Maṣṣūr al-Shaybānī, who rebelled in the year 199/815 supporting two 'Alid/Fātimid imāms in Kūfa. His battle cry was "*yā Fātimī yā Maṣṣūr*," he minted a dirham with the legend "al-Fātimī al-Aşfar" (al-Fātimī refers to the 'Alid imām and al-Aşfar to himself), and called himself "al-Aşfar b. al-Aşfar." Two other rebels bore the name "al-Aşfar": one belonged to the Banū l-Muntafiq b. 'Uqayl ('Adnān/Qays 'Aylān) and operated in Southern Iraq in 378/988. The other belonged to the Banū Taghlib ('Adnān/Rabī'a) and rebelled in Ra's al-'Ayn (northern Iraq) in 439/1047. Whereas there is no doubt that Thābit b. Nu'aym and Abū l-Sarāyā themselves assumed the name "al-Aşfar" as a *laqab*, the same cannot be stated with certainty about the two later "al-Aşfar." It is obvious that the adoption of the name "al-Aşfar" by the first two rebels as a slogan for their rebellions must have been meaningful for them and for the people around them. However, the Arabic sources that record it do not give any explanation for its meaning. In my previous article, I attempted different interpretations of that now lost meaning, connecting it with a possible Byzantine Christian background (the "Banū l-Aşfar" explanation),² with eschatological ex-

* Al-Jāḥiẓ's text analyzed in this article was discussed at the *Islamic Seminar* held at the *Institute for Advanced Study* (Princeton) in November 1994. I wish to thank all the participants for their useful comments, as well as the participants in the 7th "*From Jāhiliyya to Islam*" *Colloquium*, especially my discussant L. Conrad. I wish also to thank Professor M. Lecker for his remarks and suggestions.

¹ M. Fierro, "Al-Aşfar," *Studia Islamica* 78 (1993): 169–81. To the bibliography given in note 3, add now A. Shvitiel, "The Semantic Field of Colours in Arabic," *The Arabist* 3–4 (1991): 335–39. The article by I. Hasson mentioned, in note 8, was published in *Studia Islamica* 78 (1993): 95–122. My article, mentioned in note 11, has appeared in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 20 (1996): 130–61. On Aşfar as an *ism* (not as a *laqab*), see Fierro, "al-Aşfar," pp. 173–74; a Jamāl al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. 'Alī b. Aşfar is mentioned in J. Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo* (Princeton, 1992), p. 140. In footnote 38, I mentioned that I had been unable to consult the study by F. 'Umar, "al-Alwān wa-dalālatu-hā al-siyāsiyya fi l-'aṣr al-'abbāsī al-awwal," *Bulletin of the College of Arts of Baghdad University* 14 (1971): 242–59. I would like to thank Professor 'Umar for sending me a copy of his article, from which I have profited in this paper.

² On Christianity among the Judhām, see I. Hasson, "Judhām entre la *Jāhiliyya* et

pectations (the "Messianic" explanation)³ and with the Khārijites (the "Ṣufri" explanation). Without reaching any firm conclusion, I thought it likely that there must have been a relationship between "al-Aşfar" and the label "Ṣufri" applied to a certain branch of Khārijism. A new text which I have come across opens new perspectives.

Al-Jāḥiẓ's Text

The new evidence is a text by al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868), found in his *Kitāb al-burṣān wa-l-'urjān wa-l-'umyān wa-l-hulān*.⁴ In it, Thābit b. Nu'aym al-Judhāmī appears as the third rebel to have used the slogan "al-Aşfar al-Qaḥṭānī," his predecessors being Ibn al-Ash'ath and Yazīd b. al-Muhallab. Al-Jāḥiẓ does not refer to Abū l-Sarāyā ("my" second rebel) in this text, because Abū l-Sarāyā did not call himself "al-Qaḥṭānī" and al-Jāḥiẓ is dealing with the expression "al-Aşfar al-Qaḥṭānī." Al-Jāḥiẓ does mention Abū l-Sarāyā elsewhere,⁵ without commenting upon his use of "al-Aşfar."

The *Kitāb al-burṣān* is an *adab* work where al-Jāḥiẓ collected miscellaneous data about people with certain characteristics related to the terms appearing in the title (leprosy, lameness, blindness and squinting).⁶ While discussing leprosy, al-Jāḥiẓ mentions some people whose skin was yellow, like Maslama b. 'Abd al-Malik, the famous Umayyad commander (d. 121/738), son of the caliph 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, who took over leadership of the Syrian army after al-Ḥajjāj's death. Maslama led the regular summer campaigns against the Byzantines in Asia Minor and besieged Constantinople in 98–99/716–18. In 100/719, he was fighting the Khārijites in Iraq, as well as the rebel-

l'Islam," *Studia Islamica* 81 (1995): 5–42, and pp. 20–25, and on Christianity among the Taghlib, see the article by M. Lecker in *ET*.² In his discussion of my paper during the 7th *From Jāhiliyya to Islam Colloquium*, L. Conrad pointed out that Esau was seen as the ancestor of both the Byzantines and the southern Arab tribes.

³ See pp. 176–78, and especially nn. 38 and 44, where I referred to the British Library manuscript of Nu'aym b. Ḥammād's *Kitāb al-fitan*, now available in the edition by Suhayl Zakkār (Beirut: Dār al-fikr, 1414/1993). M. Lecker informs me that more references than those I mentioned in my previous article can be found in Nu'aym's text related to the yellow colour.

⁴ Ed. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Ḥārūn (Baghdad, 1982), pp. 147–50 (the quotations refer to this edition). In the edition by Muḥammad Mursī al-Khulī (Beirut, 1981), 2nd ed., the text is found in pp. 99–101. I became aware of the existence of this text through the study by Ṣ. A. al-'Alī, "Alwān al-malābis al-'arabiyya fi l-'uhūd al-islāmiyya al-ūlā," *Majallat al-Ma'had al-'Ilmī al-'Irāqī* 26 (1975): 71–107; *ibid.*, 27 (1976): 62–101 (the text is found in *ibid.*, 26 [1975]: 80).

⁵ See *Kitāb al-burṣān*, p. 579.

⁶ In the article devoted to al-Jāḥiẓ in the *ET*,² Ch. Pellat indicated that the *Kitāb al-burṣān* had recently been discovered in Morocco, adding that it was "of no great interest," a comment that overlooks the wealth of material that it contains.

lions Yazīd b. al-Muhallab, whom he defeated in 102/720.⁷ Al-Jāḥiẓ describes him as looking like a yellow locust, hence his *laqab* "Jarāda" (locust) and "Jarādat Marwān." No explanation is given for the yellowness of Maslama's skin: was it the result of an illness? Or was he born with that colour? According to Gabrieli, it was Yazīd b. al-Muhallab who called him *jarāda ṣafrā'* in a pejorative way.

Al-Jāḥiẓ adds that another Marwānid, Bishr b. Marwān, was yellowish (*muṣfarr*). He was governor of Kūfa in 71/690, and in 73/692 he was also given the governorship of Baṣra. In spite of holding this position, the caliph 'Abd al-Malik gave command of the army, which was fighting the Khārijites, to al-Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufra. When he arrived in Baṣra, Bishr was suffering from a disease or infection (which may explain his yellow colour), and died soon afterwards in 74/693.⁸

Al-Jāḥiẓ then proceeds to discuss 'Umar b. 'Ubayd Allāh b. Ma'mar al-Taymī (Northern Arab),⁹ who was governor of Baṣra for Ibn al-Zubayr and of Fārs for Muṣ'ab b. al-Zubayr, and who fought the Azraqīs in 68/687. In 73/692, the caliph 'Abd al-Malik sent him to fight against Abū Fudayk al-Khārijī. Al-Jāḥiẓ says that 'Umar b. 'Ubayd Allāh al-Taymī was ruddy (*aḥmar*)¹⁰ and fat, and he submitted himself to cupping once every seven days, and for this reason he was called "the red one of the Banū Taym" (*aḥmar Banī Taym*). When 'Umar b. 'Ubayd Allāh married 'Ā'isha bint Ṭalḥa, daughter of Ṭalḥa b. 'Ubayd Allāh and widow of Muṣ'ab b. al-Zubayr, he indicated in a verse that she had passed from someone yellow (*aṣfar*), i.e., Muṣ'ab b. al-Zubayr, to someone red (*aḥmar*), i.e., himself. The verses seem to suggest that the yellowness of Muṣ'ab b. al-Zubayr was due to a physiological condition. The colours applied to these two characters do not seem to be connected with their tribal affiliations — both 'Umar b. 'Ubayd Allāh al-Taymī and Ibn al-Zubayr were Qurashīs, although from different branches.

After mentioning 'Umar b. 'Ubayd Allāh al-Taymī, al-Jāḥiẓ informs us that:

Regarding their claim to be "al-Aṣfar al-Qaḥṭānī," we do not know what is the intended meaning: either the yellowness to which the colours¹¹ are traced, or the yellowing of the skin

⁷ See F. Gabrieli, "L'eroe omayyade Maslamah ibn 'Abd al-Malik," *Rendiconti Lincei* serie VIII, vol. 5 (1950): 22–39; *ET*², s.v.

⁸ See *ET*², s.v.

⁹ On him and his family (of the Banū Taym b. Murra of Quraysh), see M. Lecker, "Biographical Notes on Abū 'Ubayda Ma'mar b. al-Muthannā," *Studia Islamica* 81 (1995): 71–100, especially pp. 79–81.

¹⁰ According to Lane, the term *aḥmar*, when applied to men, means "white in complexion." However, the context in this case seems to indicate a ruddy or sanguineous complexion.

¹¹ For an interpretation of how to understand *al-alwān*, "colours," see the end of this section.

like the skin of *jarādat Marwān* [i.e., Maslama b. 'Abd al-Malik]. Both 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Muḥammad b. al-Ash'ath and Yazīd b. al-Muhallab rebelled, claiming to fulfill what had been transmitted¹² regarding "al-Aṣfar al-Qaḥṭānī," but there was no connection between their colours and yellowness. [For his part,] Thābit b. Nu'aym al-Ghāmīdī rebelled with the same claim in Syria and it was as if he had not ceased being immersed in *al-wars*.¹³ Abū 'Ubayda¹⁴ said: "I saw him crucified" (*wa-ammā qawluhum fī l-aṣfar al-qaḥṭānī fa-innā lā nadri ayya al-ma'ānī arādū: al-ṣufra allatī yunsabu ilayhā l-alwānu am isfirār al-jilda ka-jild jarādat Marwān wa-qad kharaja 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Muḥammad b. al-Ash'ath wa Yazīd b. al-Muhallab 'alā taḥqīq al-riwāya fī l-Aṣfar al-Qaḥṭānī wa-lam yakun bayna alwānihimā wa-bayna l-ṣufra sabab wa-kharaja 'alā dhālika Thābit b. Nu'aym al-Ghāmīdī bi-l-Shām wa-kāna ka-annahu lam yazal maghmūsan fī l-wars wa-khabbara Abū 'Ubayda qāla: ra'aytuḥu maṣlūban*).

Al-Jāḥiẓ goes on to say that among those who were "yellow" (*wa-min al-ṣufr*) there was Yazīd b. Abī Muslim al-Thaqafī (d. 102/720 in Ifrīqiya), suspected of being a Khārijī, and al-Maḍā' b. al-Qāsim al-Taghlibī al-Fāris al-Khaṭīb, who rebelled with the 'Alid Ibrāhīm b. 'Abd Allāh b. Ḥasan (the brother of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya) in 145/762 and was killed by al-Manṣūr.¹⁵ No clue is given as to the reason for Yazīd

¹² I have been unable to find any transmission regarding "al-Aṣfar al-Qaḥṭānī" (see Fierro, "Al-Aṣfar," pp. 176–77, and n. 4 above). The contents of such a transmission must have been eschatological. The study of South Arabian eschatological figures in Nu'aym b. Ḥammād's *Kitāb al-fitan* might provide some clues. On the one called *amīr al-ṣuḥab* ("Commander of the Bands"), see U. Rubin, "Apocalypse and Authority in Islamic Tradition," *Al-Qantara* 28 (1997): 11–42, n. 21. See also S. Bashear, "Yemen in Early Islam," *Arabica* 36 (1989): 327–61, especially pp. 338–43 ("Messianic Deliverance is Southern").

¹³ *Wars* is the name given to a certain yellow plant which resembles sesame, and with which one dyes, "and of which is made the [liniment called] *ghumra* for the face," to be found in Yemen and nowhere else; "it is not wild, but is sown one year, and remains ten years, or twenty years... without ceasing to be profitable, resembling sesame in its manner of growth; and when it dries, on its attaining to maturity, its pericarps... burst, and it is shaken, and the *wars* shakes out from it..." See Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. Lane adds: "...it is useful for the [discolouration of the face termed] *kalaf*, used as a liniment; and for the [leprous-like discolouration of the skin termed] *bahaq*, [prepared] as a drink; and the wearing of a garment dyed with it strengthens the venereal faculty..." *Kalaf* is "a discolouration of the face by a thing that comes upon the face resembling sesame [freckles]; a dingy redness that comes upon the face." *Bahaq* is "the mild species of leprosy termed 'alpus' or 'vitiligo alba'; a whiteness that affects the skin or body."

¹⁴ Ma'mar b. al-Muthannā, the well-known philologist, and al-Jāḥiẓ's teacher, who died ca. 210/825; see Lecker, art. cit. in note 9.

¹⁵ On them see the references given by the editor of the *Kitāb al-burṣān*, pp. 149–50.

b. Abī Muslim being *min al-ṣufr* (it may refer to the colour of his skin; still there seems to be no relationship to his being a Khārījī). In the case of al-Maḍā' b. al-Qāsim, al-Jāḥiẓ adds that he was seen on the day of al-Mirbad¹⁶ "yellow, on a yellow nag, with a yellow turban and a yellow kaftan." Al-Jāḥiẓ then proceeds to describe the combination of colours in the way which the caliph al-Ma'mūn dressed. He ends the section devoted to the colour yellow by saying that some people pretend that al-'Īs b. Ishāq (i.e., Esau) was yellow of mien, which was the reason the *Rūm* were called Banū l-Aṣfar, whereas the *Rūm* claimed that their name derived from the yellow gold.

Coming back to the text relevant to our discussion, it is difficult to assess the exact meaning of the word "colours" (*al-awwān*). I think it refers to the distinguishing marks of a certain group, that is, the use of a certain colour in banners, clothing, etc., so that someone may thereby know his companions and, therefore, his enemies. In sum, what is also called "colours" in English. This meaning is the one which seems to make more sense in the context of the whole passage (see below *A New Explanation for al-Aṣfar: The Yemeni Connection*). Another possible interpretation is that a differentiation is being made between the dyeing of the skin through a yellow dyestuff, and the yellowing of the skin produced by natural causes (genetic, illness, etc.). If so, the latter would have been the case of Masiama b. 'Abd al-Malik. However, against this interpretation there is the fact that the *awwān* are opposed to the colour of the skin, they are something apart that does not refer to skin colour.

The First Two "al-Aṣfar" (First/Seventh Century)

Al-Jāḥiẓ's text takes the priority away from Thābit b. Nu'aym al-Judhāmī as having used the slogan "al-Aṣfar al-Qaḥṭānī." Regarding his *nisba*,¹⁷ al-Jāḥiẓ calls Thābit b. Nu'aym "al-Ghāmīdī" (a subgroup of the Azd tribe), whereas Yazīd b. Muḥammad al-Azdī calls him "al-Azdī" in his *Ta'rikh al-Mawṣūl*. The Azdīs settled mostly in Baṣra, established ties with the Rabī'a and became the leading tribe under the Muḥallabids.¹⁸ Yazīd b. al-Muḥallab b. Abī Ṣufra al-Azdī preceded Thābit b. Nu'aym in the use of the slogan "al-Aṣfar al-Qaḥṭānī" and he was preceded in turn by Ibn al-Ash'ath al-Kindī. Both Ibn al-Ash'ath and Yazīd b. al-Muḥallab were from tribes (Kinda and Azd) which belonged to Kahlān and not to Ḥimyar, having as common ancestor Qaḥṭān.¹⁹

¹⁶ See *EI*², s.v., "al-Mirbad."

¹⁷ See Fierro, "Al-Aṣfar," pp. 169–70 and the sources quoted there which mention "al-Judhāmī" as his *nisba*.

¹⁸ On Ghāmīd see *EI*², s.v., and on the Azd tribe (Qaḥṭān) *EI*², s.v.

¹⁹ See *EI*², s.v., "Qaḥṭān."

'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. al-Ash'ath²⁰ belonged to a noble Kindī family.²¹ He was the grandson of the famous al-Ash'ath (d. 40/661), who took part in the conquest of Northern Iraq and settled in Kūfa as chief of the Kindite sector.²² Ibn al-Ash'ath fought beside Muṣ'ab b. al-Zubayr against al-Mukhtār in 67/686 in Kūfa. He had supported al-Mukhtār's rebellion at the beginning, but the preference given to the *mawālī* made him escape to Baṣra. After Muṣ'ab's defeat by the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik, when the effective subjugation of Iraq to Umayyad rule took place, Ibn al-Ash'ath entered the caliph's service, as did al-Muḥallab b. Abī Ṣufra. Later, Ibn al-Ash'ath was charged with fighting the Azraqīs. In 75/694–5, al-Ḥajjāj was made governor of Kūfa and Ibn al-Ash'ath was charged with pursuing the Khārījite (considered a Ṣufī) Shabīb b. Yazīd al-Shaybānī, but was defeated. The relations with al-Ḥajjāj soon deteriorated. Ibn al-Ash'ath took much pride in his noble birth, gave himself the title of *Nāṣir al-mu'minīn*, presumably setting himself up as the defender of the true believers against the Umayyads and al-Ḥajjāj, whom he condemned as bad Muslims, and claimed to be the Qaḥṭānī awaited by the Yemenis who would restore domination to them. In spite of such arrogant behaviour and of the clear possibility of rebellion on the part of Ibn al-Ash'ath, al-Ḥajjāj named him commander of the Peacock army to fight against Kābulistān. Ibn al-Ash'ath eventually rebelled and his revolt came near to overthrowing the Umayyad caliphate. In 81/700, he marched with the army towards Iraq. According to one poem, he "had put himself at the head of the Qaḥṭānīs and the Hamdānīs against the Ma'addīs and the Thaqafīs." Ibn al-Ash'ath occupied Baṣra and Kūfa, where he was joined by the *qurrā'*.²³ Defeated by al-Ḥajjāj in 82/701, Ibn al-Ash'ath took refuge in Kābulistān, whose ruler protected him until he yielded to al-Ḥajjāj's pressure. He died in 85/704.

²⁰ On him see *EI*², s.v.; R. Sayed, *Die Revolte des Ibn al-Aṣ'ath und die Koranleser: Ein Beitrag zur Religions- und Sozialgeschichte der frühen Umayyadenzeit* (Freiburg, 1977); G.R. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam* (London, 1986), pp. 67–71.

²¹ See *EI*², s.v. "Kinda." See also M. Lecker, "Kinda on the Eve of Islam and During the Ridda," *JRAS* ser. 3, 4/3 (1994): 333–56.

²² His name was Abū Muḥammad Ma'dikarib b. Qays b. Ma'dikarib. Al-Ash'ath means "matted, disheveled, unkempt hair." He was also called *al-Ashajj* (scar-faced) and *Urf al-Nār* (said to be a South Arabian term for "traitor"). At the battle of Ṣiffin, he forced 'Alī to accept the principle of arbitration. See *EI*², s.v., and Lecker's study mentioned in n. 21. For his descendants, see P. Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 110–11.

²³ On them see *EI*², s.v.; G.H.A. Juynboll, "The Qurra' in Early Islamic History," *JESHO* 16 (1973): 113–29 and the sequels in *JSS* 19 (1974): 240–51, and *ZDMG* 125 (1975): 11–27; N. Calder, "The qurrā' and the Arabic Lexicographical Tradition," *JSS* 36 (1991): 297–307.

Some authors link the revolt of Ibn al-Ash'ath with the *mawālī* movement, seeing it as a sort of continuation of al-Mukhtār's rebellion. For Wellhausen, however, the basic cause was a rising of the Arab aristocracy against governmental authority, an attempt by the Iraqis to throw off the yoke of the Syrians and an uprising against the use of Syrian militia and the privileges that were granted to them. For Vecchia Vaglieri, there were also religious motives, and the scope of the revolt was enlarged to include those who were discontented with the Umayyad régime and who found support for their recriminations in religious motives. This is proved by al-Ḥajjāj's behaviour towards the rebels who fell into his hands. He pardoned the Arabs but punished tens of thousands of the *mawālī*, thus showing that he saw the latter as the most dangerous. G.R. Hawting thus concludes that

Ibn al-Ash'ath's revolt was fundamentally a revolt of the Iraqi soldiery and especially the *ashrāf* against what they perceived as an Umayyad attempt to supplant them. It was not... brought about by the *mawālī* and their grievances against the Umayyad government, although it is clear that the *mawālī* supported it. Neither was it an expression of the factionalism which was to become so important later. The fact that Ibn al-Ash'ath and most of his supporters were Yemenis merely reflects the fact that the Yemenis were the dominant tribal element in Kūfa, and, although al-Ḥajjāj as a Thaqafi was genealogically a "northerner," the commander of his Syrian troops was a "southerner" of Kalb. Regarding the religious polemic used by both sides, most of it is stereotyped, unspecific and to be found in other contexts.²⁴

Yazīd b. al-Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufra al-Azdī was a member of the important family of the Muhallabids.²⁵ His grandfather Abū Ṣufra is described by some sources as a Persian weaver²⁶ who migrated to Baṣra, where he was accepted as an Azdī thanks to his military valour. According to other sources, he was a genuine Azdī. Abū Ṣufra had been involved in the conquest of Fārs from 'Umān, and finally based himself at Baṣra, where 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib would have appointed him to the leadership of Azd.

²⁴ Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam*, pp. 69–70.

²⁵ See F. Gabrieli, "La rivolta dei Muhallabiti," *Rendiconti Lincei* serie VI, vol. 14 (1938): 199–236; M. Hinds, *An Early Islamic Family from Oman: Al-'Awtabī's Account of the Muhallabids* (Manchester, 1991); *EI*², s.v. "Muhallabids."

²⁶ Ibn al-Ash'ath is also described as "the son of the weaver of Kinda": see Hinds, *An Early Islamic Family from Oman*, pp. 79–80. There are different explanations for the name "Abū Ṣufra." It might be related to the use of the dyestuff known as *sufra*.

Abū Ṣufra's son, al-Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufra, was given appointments in Baṣra by 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, who also bestowed *sharaf* on him in a ceremony which apparently included anointment. Al-Muhallab was appointed governor of Khurasān by Ibn al-Zubayr, but the Baṣrans prevented him from going there by putting him in charge of the war against the Azraqīs. In 67/686, he helped Muṣ'ab b. al-Zubayr in his campaign against al-Mukhtār in Kūfa. Al-Muhallab was then appointed governor of Mawṣil, the Jazīra, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Under al-Ḥajjāj's governorship of Iraq, he fought again against the Azraqīs in 75/694, and his victory caused the Khārijites to flee for their lives to the Maghrib. Al-Muhallab supported al-Ḥajjāj against Ibn al-Ash'ath. He was governor of Khurasān when he died in 82/702, being succeeded by his son Yazīd.²⁷

Yazīd b. al-Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufra had fought with his father against the Azraqīs. He was in Khurasān when the rebellion of Ibn al-Ash'ath was taking place in Kūfa and there he captured some of the rebel's companions. According to al-'Awtabī's account, when Yazīd b. al-Muhallab was asked by al-Ḥajjāj to send such captives to him, he released those who were Yemenis and sent only those who were Northerners, so that al-Ḥajjāj said: "By God, Ibn al-Muhallab has simply used me as a butcher of Muḍar,"²⁸ and since then al-Ḥajjāj bore rancour against Yazīd b. al-Muhallab. In 85/704, al-Ḥajjāj dismissed him and other members of the family. Yazīd b. al-Muhallab escaped from jail and took refuge in Palestine with the future caliph Sulaymān, who, upon his accession, appointed Yazīd b. al-Muhallab to Iraq and Khurasān, where he amassed great wealth. Yazīd b. al-Muhallab was dismissed by 'Umar II in 99/717, was imprisoned and escaped shortly before 'Umar's death. He went to Baṣra where he raised a revolt, repudiating Yazīd II and calling for the enthronement of *al-riḍā min banī Hāshim*²⁹ (according to al-Balādhurī) or even claiming the caliphate for himself (according to a late Christian author). "But he is more commonly said to have called for the Book of God and the *sunna* of the Prophet, in conjunction with 'Irāqī freedom from Syrian troops and the end of the policies associated with al-Ḥajjāj. As opportunistic as the rebellion was, it provided the embryonic Yemeni faction with its first martyrs."³⁰ This does not mean that there were no Yemenis in the Syrian army. On the con-

²⁷ See *EI*², s.v.; S.M. Yusuf, "al-Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufra," *Islamic Culture* 19 (1944): 131–44.

²⁸ See al-'Awtabī's text in Hinds, *An Early Islamic Family from Oman*, pp. 54–56.

²⁹ See P. Crone, "On the Meaning of the 'Abbasid Call to *al-riḍā*," in C.E. Bosworth, Ch. Issawi, R. Savory and A.L. Udovitch, eds. *The Islamic World from Classical to Modern Times: Essays in Honor of Bernard Lewis* (Princeton, 1989), pp. 95–111, especially pp. 97–98. This connection between "al-Aṣfar" and a Hashimī pretender is a precedent of Abū l-Sarāyā's legend, "al-fāṭimī al-aṣfar."

³⁰ *EI*², s.v., "Muhallabids."

trary, Yazīd II had "assembled those Syrian Yamāniyya who obeyed him, including Kalb, Ghassān, Lakhm, Judhām, 'Āmila, the tribes of Quḍā'a, Himyar, Kinda, al-Sakūn, Madhij and Khath'am"³¹ under the command of Maslama b. 'Abd al-Malik (the so-called *jarāda ṣafrā*). Yazīd b. al-Muhallab's comment on realizing that in the Syrian army there were no tribesmen from Rabī'a and Muḍar, would have been: "God damn Maslama: he has killed me with my people and not with his."³² Yazīd b. al-Muhallab's rebellion has been understood as tribal by Gabrieli³³ and as a conflict over policies by Shaban.³⁴ In a recent article, P. Crone has reviewed again Yazīd b. al-Muhallab's career, seeing it as a clear example of the factionalism characteristic of Marwānid politics.³⁵

Yazīd b. al-Muhallab was defeated by Maslama b. 'Abd al-Malik and killed in 102/720. He was, at the time, afflicted by a malady. It is said that he always wore a turban, but there is no mention of its colour.³⁶ In al-'Awtabī's account of the Muhallabids, frequent mention is made of their *liwā'*,³⁷ but its colour again is not described. We know from other sources that the *rāyat al-Azd* was yellow at the battle of Šiffin, but so was that of Thaḳīf.³⁸

A New Explanation for al-Aṣfar: The Yemeni Connection

Whereas according to the data used in my previous article the slogan "al-Aṣfar" seemed to originate from Syria, al-Jāhiz's text points to Iraq as its birth place. In both Ibn al-Ash'ath's and Ibn al-Muhallab's rebellions, the regional conflict was very much to the fore, showing an Iraqi hostility to the Syrians.³⁹ When the Syrian Thābit b. Nu'aym rebelled as "al-

³¹ Al-'Awtabī's text in Hinds, *An Early Islamic Family from Oman*, p. 68.

³² Ibid., p. 70.

³³ See Gabrieli, art. cit., p. 235, n. 1: "la sua rivolta conservò sempre il carattere di una questione di rivalità tribale."

³⁴ See an outline of his views in P. Crone's article cited in n. 35.

³⁵ See P. Crone, "Were the Qays and Yemen of the Umayyad Period Political Parties?" *Der Islam* 71 (1994): 1-57, especially pp. 25-28 for Yazīd b. al-Muhallab's career and pp. 42-57, especially p. 51, on factionalism.

³⁶ We have seen that al-Jāhiz mentioned that al-Maḍā' b. al-Qāsim al-Taghlibī, during his rebellion with the 'Alid Ibrāhīm b. 'Abd Allāh b. Ḥasan in 145/762, was seen "yellow, on a yellow nag, with a yellow turban and a yellow kaftan." We shall see below that, according to some sources, the distinguishing mark (*shī'ār*) of the Yemenis (*ahl al-Yaman*) in war was the wearing of yellow turbans and yellow banners, whereas the turbans and banners of Muḍar were red. According to other sources, the Arab lords (*sādat al-'arab*) wore yellow turbans.

³⁷ See Hinds, op. cit., pp. 22, 34, 68.

³⁸ See M. Hinds, "The Banners and Battle cries of the Arabs at Šiffin (657 AD)," *Al-Abhāth* 24 (1971): 346-67.

³⁹ See J. Haldon and H. Kennedy, "Regional Identities and Military Power: Byzantium and Islam c. 600-750," a paper presented at the *Fourth Workshop of the Late*

Aṣfar al-Qaḥṭānī" against the Umayyads, he was making use of a slogan which had been previously used by Yemeni anti-Umayyad rebels in Iraq. It was an adequate slogan to be used by Thābit b. Nu'aym, as his revolt was a Yemeni uprising against the Umayyads, more precisely, an uprising of the Syrian Yemenis against Marwān and his Qaysī supporters. The unity of *ahl al-Shām* was destroyed during the caliphate of al-Walīd b. Yazīd: "The alienation of the Syrians from the Umayyad family was followed by the re-emergence of the deep and damaging dispute between the Yamaniyah majority and the Qaysīs, a dispute which had remained largely dormant since the battle of Marj Rāhiṭ and the rise of 'Abd al-Malik. It was this dispute, above all, which destroyed the identity of *ahl al-Shām* and with it the power of the Umayyad caliphate."⁴⁰ It is in this context that Thābit b. Nu'aym, the member of a tribe loyal, until then, to the Umayyads, would have used the slogan of the former Yemeni Iraqis rebels against the Umayyads, and that may account for being considered an "Azdī" instead of a Judhāmī. According to al-Jāhiz's text, in Thābit b. Nu'aym's case, the colour of his skin was yellow: "It was as if he had not ceased being immersed in *al-wars*," the dyestuff called *al-wars* being a plant found only in Yemen.⁴¹ Al-Jāhiz states that he knew the colour of Thābit b. Nu'aym's skin from Abū 'Ubayda, an eyewitness who had seen him crucified. Since Abū 'Ubayda was al-Jāhiz's teacher, his report is, in principle, to be trusted. However, it is difficult to understand the meaning of al-Jāhiz's comment. Does al-Jāhiz mean that Thābit b. Nu'aym was using a kind of dye, be it *al-wars* or something else, like the dyestuff known as *ṣufra*?⁴² If so, what was the purpose of dyeing one's body? Was it in order to become pale, so as to appear as an ascetic, given the well-known equation of pallor with piety?⁴³ Or was dyeing one's body yellow just a fashion, like the consumption of certain kinds of *tīn* which produced the skin to become pale or yellow?⁴⁴ Was it an old custom,⁴⁵ perhaps a tribal one? Or was Thābit b. Nu'aym's skin yellow

Antiquity and Early Islam Project "Patterns of Communal Identity in the Late Antiquity and Early Islamic Near East" (London 5-7 May 1994).

⁴⁰ J. Haldon and H. Kennedy, art. cit.

⁴¹ See al-'Alī, "Alwān al-malābis al-'arabiyya," *Majallat al-Ma'had al-'Ilmī al-'Irāqī* 26 (1975): 87-89. According to al-Aṣma'ī (d. 213/828), al-Jāhiz and al-Tha'ālibī (d. 429/1038) that plant was exclusive of Yemen; ibid., p. 88.

⁴² See Fierro, "Al-Aṣfar," p. 181, n. 55.

⁴³ See Fierro, "Al-Aṣfar," p. 180, and see also below, *Revisiting the Ṣufri Explanation*.

⁴⁴ See T. Garulo, "Comer barro. Nota al capítulo XXX del *Kitāb al-muwaṣṣā* de al-Waṣṣā'." *Al-Qanṭara* 8 (1987): 156 (Maḥmūd of Ghaznā's skin was yellow given his excessive consumption of *tīn* from Nishapur).

⁴⁵ The Christians seem to have had the custom of anointing their bodies with saffron (*al-takhlīq*). See J.T. Monroe, *The Shu'ūbiyya in al-Andalus: The Risāla of Ibn García and Five Refutations* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1970), p. 36, quoting Ibn Mas'ada's (sixth/twelfth century) refutation

because of illness, or perhaps it was the effect produced in his body by his way of dying (crucifixion)?

Before answering these questions, I would like to link the description of Thābit b. Nu'aym's yellow skin with the description of another death that took place in al-Andalus. After the death of the second Umayyad caliph, al-Ḥakam II (350/961–366/976), effective power came to be in the hands of al-Manṣūr b. Abī 'Āmir al-Ma'āfirī, the *ḥājib* of al-Ḥakam's successor, Hishām. Ibn 'Idhārī remarks that there was a prediction according to which the Umayyads would be dethroned by someone who shared the characteristics of al-Manṣūr — among them, his *nasab* (Yemeni, as Ma'āfir belongs to Yemen) and the yellowness of the palms of his hands (*aṣfar al-kaffayn*). Al-Manṣūr was succeeded by two of his sons. The first, al-Muzaḥḥar, contented himself to continue being *ḥājib*, but the other, 'Abd al-Raḥmān Sanchuelo (d. 399/1009), proclaimed himself heir to the Umayyad caliph. One of the ways in which he justified such a proclamation was by the claim of being al-Qaḥṭānī.⁴⁶ He could do so because he was a Ma'āfirī. His claim led to *fitna*, to his violent death and to the eventual disappearance of the Andalusī Umayyad caliphate. The historian Ibn 'Idhārī states that, at the moment of his death, Sanchuelo was *muṣfarr al-yadayn wal-riḡlayn bi-l-ḥinnā*.⁴⁷

Now, dyestuffs like *ḥinnā* are well known to have been used to paint fingers and toenails, as well as hands and feet, a custom attested from early Islam to today.⁴⁸ The yellowness of Sanchuelo may, therefore, merely reflect this custom. But its description by the chronicler might also be understood as an attempt to assimilate Sanchuelo with Thābit b. Nu'aym al-Judhāmī: like him, Sanchuelo had acted against the Umayyads; like him, he had claimed to be al-Qaḥṭānī; and like him, there was yellowness in his body at the moment of his violent death. It could be argued that Ibn 'Idhārī, or his source, was not likely to assimilate an event of the end of the fourth century to one of the second century, especially taking into account that al-Jāḥiẓ, in the third century,

of Ibn García's *Risāla*: "And when the Catholicos made you follow the custom of cutting off the beard and shaving the head; when he forbade you to perfume yourselves with incense and to anoint your bodies with saffron; when he became the caliph in your religion, you decked the *lignum crucis* of the Messiah with precious stones after the removal of the latter, and you established in its place a feast day and a place of worship."

⁴⁶ See E. Lévi-Provençal, *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane*, 3 vols. (Paris and Leiden, 1950–53), vol. 2, 295–96, n. 2. On the means through which Sanchuelo attempted to provide legitimacy for his claim, see M. Fierro, "On Political Legitimacy in al-Andalus: A Review Article," *Der Islam* 73 (1996): 138–50.

⁴⁷ Ibn 'Idhārī (d. 695/1295), *al-Bayān al-mughrib*, vol. 3, ed. E. Lévi Provençal (Paris, 1930), p. 74.

⁴⁸ See G.H.A. Juynboll, "Dyeing the Hair and Beard in Early Islam: A Ḥadīth-Analytical Study," *Arabica* 33 (1986): 49–75.

had already forgotten the meaning of "al-Aṣfar."⁴⁹ However, al-Jāḥiẓ himself preserved the information about Thābit b. Nu'aym's yellow skin and the slogan "al-Aṣfar" seems to have been used after al-Jāḥiẓ's times by different rebels (see below, p. 12). I will come back to the issue of memory at the end of this paper.

Returning to the "Yemeni explanation," the slogan "al-Aṣfar al-Qaḥṭānī" was more Yemeni than Iraqi, as shown by the tribal affiliations of the first three rebels (Kinda, Azd, Judhām/Azd/Ghāmid). The "Yemeni explanation" would be supported by the fact that the lexicographer Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311) states in his *Lisān al-'arab*⁵⁰ that the distinguishing mark (*shī'ār*) of the Yemenis (*ahl al-Yaman*) in war was the wearing of yellow turbans and yellow banners, whereas the turbans and banners of Muḍar were red. The source of Ibn Manẓūr is al-Jawhārī (d. 393/1002 or 398/1007),⁵¹ who quotes, in turn, the poet Abū Tammām (d. 228/842 or 231/845). The slogan "al-Aṣfar" would then be tribal and its aim would have been to rally Yemenis against non-Yemenis. If "al-Aṣfar" started as a tribal slogan associated with Yemen, in 'Abbāsīd times it blended with 'Alid rebellion.⁵² Before Abū l-Sarāyā used it in connection with "Fāṭimid" expectations, the colour yellow had been used by the 'Alids Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya and Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Ḥusayn al-Aṭṭas.⁵³ Al-Maḍā' b. al-Qāsim al-Taghlibī used yellow colours during his rebellion with the 'Alid Ibrāhīm b. 'Abd Allāh b. Ḥasan in 145/762. On his part, the North African Khārījī (Ibādī) Abū Yazīd (d. 336/947) used yellow banners in his rebellion against the Fāṭimids.⁵⁴

A problem with the "Yemeni explanation" is the fact that the other occurrences of the term "al-Aṣfar" appear among Northern Arabs. But this does not constitute a serious objection.⁵⁵ As regards Abū l-Sarāyā al-Shaybānī and al-Aṣfar al-Taghlibī, although they were North-

⁴⁹ I owe this point to D. Wasserstein.

⁵⁰ *Lisān al-'arab*, under the root *mḡr*. I found this reference in al-'Alī, "Alwān al-malābis al-'arabiyya fī l-uhūd al-islāmiyya al-ūlā," *Majallat al-Ma'had al-'Ilmī al-'Irāqī* 26 (1975): 80.

⁵¹ Al-Jawhārī, author of the *Tāj al-luḡha wa-ṣiḥāḥ al-'arabiyya*, travelled to the abodes of the Bedouin tribes of Muḍar and Rabī'a See "al-Djawhārī," *EI*², s.v.

⁵² For the precedent of Yazīd b. al-Muhallab see above, n. 29.

⁵³ See F. 'Umar, "al-Alwān wa-dalālatuhā al-siyāsiyya fī l-'aṣr al-'abbāsī al-awwal," *Bulletin of the College of Arts of Baghdad University* 14 (1971): 242–59, especially p. 258. But they also used the colour white: see *ibid.*, p. 250.

⁵⁴ See Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-mughrib*, ed. G.S. Colin and E. Lévi-Provençal, 2 vols. (Leiden, 1948–1951), vol. 1, p. 217. According to one of the manuscripts, they were red. In the eschatological literature there are references to yellow banners that will come from the West; see Fierro, "Al-Aṣfar," p. 177 and n. 39.

⁵⁵ The case of "al-Aṣfar al-'Akki" (see Fierro, "Al-Aṣfar," p. 174) remains unclear, as there seem to be divergent views regarding the genealogical affiliation of 'Akki; see *EI*², s.v.

ern Arabs, they belonged to the Rabī'a subgroup of 'Adnān. Now, the Rabī'a had been allies of the Azd against Tamīm/'Adnān in the first Islamic period. The Rabī'a tribes, although technically northerners, were hostile to the Muḍar and Qays, and thus were aptly to become allies of the Yemenis. This happened, for example, during the rebellion of al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Qays al-Shaybānī, a "Ṣufri" Khārījite from the region of Mosul who occupied Kūfa in 127/745 and Mosul in 128/746, where he was joined by Kalbite emigrants and adventurers.⁵⁶ An exception in the Yemeni trend is the rebel called "al-Aṣfar," who belonged to the Banū l-Muntafiq b. 'Uqayl ('Adnān/Qays 'Aylān) and who operated in southern Iraq in 378/988. But, as mentioned before, it is not clear whether, in this case, "al-Aṣfar" was something more than an *ism*. As regards the Almohad chief Abū Zayd Ibn Wajjān al-Aṣfar (d. 625/1228),⁵⁷ he was a Hintātī Berber who rebelled against the Almohads. Now, the Almohad caliphs, Maṣmūda Berbers, had adopted a Qaysī genealogy to back their adoption of the caliphal title *amīr al-mu'minīn*. This also meant that those who rebelled against them could be interested in presenting themselves as non-Qaysīs, that is, Yemenis. Shortly after the death of the Almohad caliph Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr in 595/1198, a man called 'Abd al-Raḥīm b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Faras had rebelled among the Berbers Jazūla, calling himself "al-Qaḥṭānī."⁵⁸ Ibn Wajjāb al-Hintātī could have adopted the name "al-Aṣfar" because of its Yemeni connotations, always in connection with the opposition against Qays, the genealogy assumed by the Almohads.

We have seen that, according to al-Jawharī and Abū Tammām, the *shī'ār* of the Yemenis was the wearing of yellow turbans and yellow banners as opposed to the red ones of Muḍar. Now, al-Jāḥiẓ (a contemporary of al-Jawharī and Abū Tammām) is stating that the "colours" (i.e., banners, clothing, etc.) of the first two rebels were not yellow. I have found no source contemporary with those rebels which states explicitly that yellow was a colour associated with Yemen. Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/884) and Ibn Durayd (d. 321/933)⁵⁹ say that the Arab lords (*sādat al-'arab*) wore yellow turbans,⁶⁰ and here there is no exclusivity for Yemen. It is thus clear that the association between "al-Aṣfar" and yellow "colours" (*alwān*) is, on the one hand, late and, on the other hand, not exclusive.

⁵⁶ See *ET*², s.v., and Hawting, op. cit., p. 100.

⁵⁷ See Fierro, "Al-Aṣfar," p. 174.

⁵⁸ See *Kitāb al-istiṣā'a*, trans. *Archives Marocaines* 31-32 (1932-33): 193-94.

⁵⁹ See al-'Alī, "Alwān al-malābis al-'arabiyya fī l-'uhūd al-islāmiyya al-ūlā," *Maḥallat al-Ma'had al-'ilmī al-'Irāqī* 26 (1975): 81 and 86. This information is found under the root *hry* in Ibn Manẓūr's *Lisān al-'arab*.

⁶⁰ Yellow seems to have been considered an aristocratic colour: see al-'Alī, "Alwān al-malābis al-'arabiyya," *Maḥallat al-Ma'had al-'ilmī al-'Irāqī* 26 (1975): 81. Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr is described as *ṣāhib al-ridā' al-aṣfar*; see Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil al-ṭālibiyyīn*, ed. Aḥmad Ṣaqr (Cairo, 1368/1949), pp. 181, 226.

If the slogan "al-Aṣfar," as used by the first two rebels, was not connected with partisan "colours," then the other alternative, according to al-Jāḥiẓ, is the "yellowing of the skin." I have already presented the possibility (see above, p. 10) that Thābit b. Nu'aym's yellow skin might have been due to the use of a dyestuff and proposed different explanations for it (to become pale, so as to appear as an ascetic; a fashion; an old custom, perhaps a tribal one). Now, Yemenis are known to dye their bodies and faces yellow⁶¹ with the dyestuff called *wars*, the reason for doing that being protection against the sun, the cold, vitiligo alba and freckles, but also to make the skin pale and to embellish the face.⁶² Here we have a Yemeni practice associated with the colour yellow that might well be the explanation for the use of the slogan "al-Aṣfar" by Yemeni rebels.

Revisiting the Ṣufri Explanation

In my previous article, mention was made that, according to some sources, the so-called "Ṣufri" Khārījites derived their names from *ṣufr*, "yellow colour" or "paleness," this being the colour of the faces of the sect members because of their extreme devotional practices.⁶³ Considering then Thābit b. Nu'aym as the first to have used the slogan "al-Aṣfar al-Qaḥṭānī" in his rebellion in 127/744-45, I formulated the hypothesis that "he wanted to be associated with those *ṣufriyya*, either because he had become one of them or because he wanted to make use of their prestige as pious and devoted men, and in order to do so he chose as his slogan the term "al-Aṣfar," assuming it as his own *laqab*. He would not have been the first to use it, but all those rebels who are mentioned in the sources as being Ṣufrites would have done the same."⁶⁴

Al-Jāḥiẓ's text proves now the use of the slogan "al-Aṣfar" to have been contemporary with the alleged founders of "Ṣufri" Khārījism according to the heresiographical traditions, one of whom we have already

⁶¹ S. Günther first pointed this practice out to me.

⁶² I owe this information to Dr. Hanne Schönig, who has kindly provided me with data taken from her unpublished work "Traditionelle Schönheitsmittel der Jemenitinnen." Among the sources for this issue see L.W.C. van den Berg, *Le Hadramout et les colonies arabes dans l'archipel indien* (Batavia, 1886), p. 102, and A. Schopen, *Traditionelle Heilmittel im Jemen* (Wiesbaden, 1983), pp. 192-93.

⁶³ To the references given in my previous article about the equation between pallor/yellow colour and piety/religious experiences (see Fierro, "Al-Aṣfar," p. 180, n. 54), can be added Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d. 770/1368 or 779/1377), *Riḥla*, trans. S. Fanjul and F. Arbós (Madrid, 1981), pp. 369, 635; Ibn al-Zayyāt al-Tādilī, *Regard sur le temps des soufis: Vie des saints du sud marocain des Ve, VIe, VIIe siècles de l'hégire*, trad. M. de Fenoyl, Editions Eddif (1995), p. 138.

⁶⁴ Fierro, "Al-Aṣfar," p. 181.

encountered, al-Muhallab b. Abī Šufra.⁶⁵ Some sources present Šāliḥ b. Musarriḥ al-Tamīmī (d. 76/695) and Shabīb b. Yazīd al-Shaybānī (d. 77/697) as the first “Šufri” rebels, but this seems to be a back projection.⁶⁶ Lewinstein has argued that the term “Šufri,” with the meaning of pallor caused by extreme piety which can be attested in the cases of Šāliḥ b. Musarriḥ and of the Ibādī Abū Ḥamza al-Mukhtār b. ‘Awf al-Azdī (d. 129/747),⁶⁷

might early on have referred to Khārijites of many persuasions. It was not originally the possession of any one group... The Khārijite reputation for piety... coupled with the descriptive use of *šufri*, may indicate that the label had broad Khārijite relevance in the first century. Its range would have narrowed somewhat as Azraqites and Najdites withdrew from the general movement at Baṣra and established their own sectarian identities, and even further as an Ibādī political organization came into its own in the late Umayyad period. Eventually, it might have come to be applied to those non-secessionist Khārijites who competed against the Ibādīyya for popular support.⁶⁸

It is well known that the other major branch of Khārijism also bears a name associated with colour: the Azāriqa.⁶⁹ The names of these branches (Azāriqa/Azraqīyya, Ibādīyya, Šufriyya) have been explained in heresiographical works as stemming from those of their alleged founders, such as Ibn al-Azraq, Ibn Ibād and Ibn Šaffār/Ibn Šufri/Ibn al-Aṣfar, an explanation that has been usually dismissed as being a later construct. But the association with colours remains and there is no special reason for not taking it seriously.

When dealing with the practice of dyeing the hair and beard in early Islam, Juynboll shows how dyeing with black as well as *ḥinnā* was identified as a “characteristic” of pious Muslims and he reminds us how the

⁶⁵ See K. Lewinstein, “Making and Unmaking a Sect: The Heresiographers and the Šufriyya,” *Studia Islamica* 76 (1992): 75–96, especially p. 79. For the relationship between the Muhallabids and Khārijism, see *EI*², s.v. “Muhallabids” (the Muhallabid women had strong Ibādī connections) and E. Savage, “Survival Through Alliance: Establishment of the Ibādīyya,” *BRISMES Bulletin* 17 (1990): 5–15 (on the association of the Muhallabids and the Ibādīs in North Africa).

⁶⁶ See Lewinstein, “Making and Unmaking a Sect,” pp. 80–81; Ch. Robinson, “Early Khārijism in Northern Mesopotamia,” paper presented at the *Fourth Workshop of the Late Antiquity and Early Islam Project* “Patterns of Communal Identity in the Late Antique and Early Islamic Near East” (London, 5–7 May 1994).

⁶⁷ On him see *EI*², s.v. “al-Mukhtār b. ‘Awf.” In one of his sermons he “refers in a positive way to the yellowed bodies of his pious followers”; Lewinstein, “Making and Unmaking a Sect,” p. 95.

⁶⁸ Lewinstein, “Making and Unmaking a Sect,” pp. 95–96.

⁶⁹ See K. Lewinstein, “The Azāriqa in Islamic Heresiography,” *BSOAS* 54 (1991): 251–68.

shaving of the head was associated with Khārijism. Juynboll then asks: “Do we have here a reference to the ways in which political adversaries in early Islam sometimes chose to distinguish themselves from one another, both flaunting their respective ‘characteristic’ in the face of the other, both having done something eminently conspicuous to the hair of their head and/or beard?”⁷⁰

It seems to me that it is not far-fetched to think that the colour-associated names of the three branches of Khārijism could refer to one of those ways in which political adversaries in early Islam chose to distinguish themselves from one another. That colours played an important political role in the early history of Islam is well known. It is especially clear in the case of black, associated with the ‘Abbāsids. F. ‘Umar has explored the influence that this association had in the use of colours other than black by those who opposed ‘Abbāsid policies: for example, the “Šufyānī” opposition used the red colour.⁷¹ He also records that in the rebellion of al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Qays al-Shaybānī,⁷² the colour white was used.⁷³

Following the assumption that colours could have played a role in the presentation and propaganda of the different Khārijī groups with colour-related names, the question to be asked is how the association with those particular colours came into being and how those colours were used. The connection between *šufri* and pallor caused by extreme piety, as discussed by Lewinstein, seems convincing. But considering the data on the use of the slogan “al-Aṣfar” and the different colours associated with Yemen and Muḍar, the possibility of a connection with tribal distinguishing marks must also be taken into account.⁷⁴ One could speculate about many possible developments. To give an example, both Ibn al-Ash‘ath and Yazīd b. al-Muhallab fought against the so-called “Azraqī” Khārijite rebels. Now, the Azāriqa seem to have belonged mainly to Tamīm, that is, Muḍar. If Yemenis dyed their bodies and/or faces yellow, it might have been the case that the Azāriqa were so called because they also used

⁷⁰ Art. cit., p. 72.

⁷¹ “Al-Alwān wa-dalālatuhā al-siyāsiyya,” p. 256. In the short section devoted to the yellow colour (p. 258), ‘Umar considers it of lesser importance than white, red or green, as he has found not enough evidence for its partisan use. ‘Umar only points out that the Prophet was known to have had a yellow banner, that al-Nafs al-Zakiyya used a yellow jubbah and *qalansuwwa* when he rebelled, that al-Aṭṭas had a yellow banner with a snake in it and that the Šufyānī will come from al-Andalus together with the yellow banners.

⁷² On this rebel see above, n. 56.

⁷³ See ‘Umar, “al-Alwān wa-dalālatu-hā al-siyāsiyya,” pp. 248–49.

⁷⁴ On the connection between Khārijism and tribalism, see J.C. Wilkinson, “The Early Development of the Ibādī Movement in Baṣra,” in G.H. Juynboll (ed.), *Studies on the First Century of Islamic society* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), pp. 125–44, especially pp. 138–44.

a particular colour (blue).⁷⁵ The Yemeni generals fighting them might have started using as their slogan the colour "yellow" associated with Yemeni tribalism. Later, they would have kept that colour in their Iraqi anti-Umayyad rebellions. After Yazīd b. al-Muhallab's defeat, there were Muhallabids who sought refuge in the Maghrib and Oman, two regions where Khārijism had penetrated. Lewinstein has pointed out that: "The label 'Šufriyya' is attested in the Maghrib and Oman from the second century A.H., when historians begin to speak of Khārijite tribal groups as either Šufrite or Ibādī."⁷⁶ Thābit b. Nu'aym al-Judhāmī, who had fought Šufri Khārijites in the Maghrib, adopted "al-Ašfar" as an anti-Umayyad slogan when he rebelled in Syria. In his case, there is evidence indicating that the onomastic slogan corresponded to a physical yellowness, which seems to have been produced by dyeing. In the later case of Abū l-Sarāyā, his banners were yellow.⁷⁷ This and other possible reconstructions, given the data now available, are, of course, all highly speculative.

Oblivion and Memory

Any study about colours makes clear the huge variations to which the meaning of each colour is subject to, so that each name might refer to different colours and so that the same colour might be referred to by different names. It is then possible to say that colours do not have meaning, but only uses.⁷⁸ In spite of this polyvalence, colours have constituted effective taxonomic tools: "Pour l'homme médiéval, comme pour celui de bon nombre de sociétés, la couleur, c'est d'abord ce qui sert à classer, à mettre de l'ordre, à désigner, à distinguer, à associer, à opposer, à hiérarchiser. La couleur est une étiquette; sa fonction est avant tout emblématique et taxinomique; elle sert à indiquer à qui ou à quoi on a affaire."⁷⁹

It is clear that in the first two centuries of Islam, the slogan "al-Ašfar" provided a focus for loyalty and identity, and it seems to have

⁷⁵ Indigo was used by men in Yemen for protection against the sun and the cold in the same way as wars; see F. Stark, *Die Südtore Arabiens: Abenteuerliche Reise einer Europäerin auf den Spuren der Weihrauchstrasse* (Stuttgart and Wien, 1992). I owe this reference to H. Schönig.

⁷⁶ "Making and Unmaking a Sect," p. 76.

⁷⁷ See Fierro, "Al-Ašfar," p. 177.

⁷⁸ "...les couleurs n'ont pas de sens mais seulement des emplois, leur dimension symbolique étant la somme de ces emplois": M. Pastoureau, "Les couleurs aussi ont une histoire," *L'Histoire* 92 (1986): 46–54, especially p. 53. I owe this reference to P. Shinar.

⁷⁹ Pastoureau, "Les couleurs aussi ont une histoire," p. 50. It is worth noting his comment that the yellow colour has been subject to a process of devaluation — from being highly regarded in Antiquity and even being considered a sacred colour. It is nowadays among the least preferred colours: "L'homme antique aime le jaune, comme il aime toutes les couleurs chaudes; l'homme moderne, non" (p. 52).

been associated in the first/seventh century with an actual use of the colour yellow, consisting of the Yemeni practice of dyeing one's body or face; later on with yellow "colours" (banners). But those who adopted the name "al-Ašfar" were eventually losers and their failure has obviously blurred the meaning of their slogan. In my 1993 article, I tried to explain the fact that the Arabic sources available to me then did not give any explanation of that meaning, stating: "I am convinced that, in the case of the late sources, it is so because the explanation had been forgotten by then; in the case of an early source like Khalifa b. Khayyāt [he died in 240/854⁸⁰], the lack of any comment could be due to the fact that its meaning was still clear and well known." Now, al-Jāhiz (d. 255/868) was a contemporary of Khalifa b. Khayyāt, and he states clearly that he does not know the exact meaning of the term. We have here a case where the significance of a slogan which had been used by very influential political figures of the first/seventh century, but also of the second/eighth century (Abū l-Sarāyā's rebellion was in 199/815), was lost to historians writing in the first half of the third/ninth century. That this could happen (namely, that such a loss could take place) has to be connected with that lost meaning: if it was a term connected with tribal practices and values, the disappearance or transformation of the tribal context took away its meaning for urban historians. It is worth noting that the sources at our disposal did not try to fill the gap: al-Jāhiz clearly states that he does not know the meaning and the other sources just keep silent.⁸¹

"Al-Ašfar" appeared as a slogan coupled with "al-Qaṭānī." The latter had a longer and more successful story than the former. But even for "al-Ašfar" oblivion was not complete. The cases I have collected, in which either the name "al-Ašfar" or yellow symbols were used in later periods, seem to point to the fact that, if the original meaning of the slogan had been forgotten, its memory lasted and it could resurface to serve new needs.

⁸⁰ He is the earliest source where I have found information about Thābit calling himself "al-Ašfar." The same information appears in Yazīd b. Muḥammad al-Azdi (d. 334/945) and in Ibn 'Asākir (d. 571/1176), whereas it is not found in al-Balādhuri (d. ca. 279/892), nor in al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923). Regarding Abū l-Sarāyā, the information is given in al-Muṭahhar al-Maqdisī (fl. 355/966) and al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), apart from the fact that Abū l-Sarāyā minted coins with that slogan.

⁸¹ On the issue of how men remember and give meaning to past ages, how they resolve the discontinuity that they perceive with the past and how they forget those questions which they cannot longer understand, see P.J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the end of the First Millennium* (Princeton: University Press, 1994).