

## THE TOPOS OF AMALECITE SUPREMACY OVER EGYPT IN ARAB HISTORICAL TRADITION (I MILLENIUM A.D.)

The Arab historical tradition keeps an amount of quite interesting data not only on the history of Haliphat proper and the life of the Prophet, but also on the history, culture and peculiarities of subjugated countries. It has even produced a specific genre of literature – *fadail*, which means “virtues, sights or miracles” of some country. Speaking about Egypt, this genre became extremely popular and widespread: first, because of the country’s importance in Muslim *orbis mundi* and the originality of its culture; second, for the reasons of religious piety (good attitude to Egyptians is recommended in the holy texts); and also as a result of rapidly growing separatism of Muslim-Egyptian rulers. Narratives, which can be ascribed to the genre *fadail Misr* – “virtues, merits of Egypt” – include not only descriptions of Egyptian wonders, like pyramids or Nile beasts, but also a corpus of folklore and semifolklore information, collected by the Arab scholars, including valuable observations on the ancient history of Egypt.

The Arab-Muslim scheme of Egypt’s history fits surprisingly well the real history in case of the most important chronological points dividing different periods and in case of these periods’ duration and their content. However, the inner filling of this scheme is highly folklorized or fantastic. We will turn our attention to the topos of Amalecite rule in Egypt, its idea and historical correspondences. From the chronological point of view, Amalecite supremacy fell on the border between the Middle and the New Kingdoms, which matches essentially and chronologically the Hyksos invasion to Egypt (moreover, further we will see that the place of this event in the Arab scheme of Egyptian history and in the historical reality are agreeing in terms of absolute dates as well).

The main narratives which deal with this topos are Ibn Abd al-Hakam’s “Conquest of Egypt, al-Maghrif and al-Andalus” (eleventh century AD),<sup>1</sup> “History” by at-Tabari (ninth century AD),<sup>2</sup> “Golden Meadows” and “Book of Edifications” by al-Masudi (tenth century AD).<sup>3</sup> All these authors

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<sup>1</sup> Абд ар-Рахман ибн 'Абд ал-Хакам. *Завоевание Египта, ал-Магриба и ал-Андалуса* [Abd ar-Rahman ibn Abd al-Hakam. *Conquest of Egypt, al-Magrib and al-Andalus*], Moscow, 1985 (henceforward abbreviated *Ibn Abd al-Hakam*).

<sup>2</sup> Muhammad ibn Jarir Tabari, *Chronique de Tabari*, traduite par M. H. Zotenberg, Paris, 1867-74.

<sup>3</sup> Ali b. Husayn al-Masudi, *Les praires d'Or (Kitab Murug ad-dahab)*. Texte et traduction par C. Barbier de Meynard et Pavet de Courteille, Paris, 1861-77 (henceforward abbreviated al-Masudi, *Les praires d'Or*); *Le livre de l'avertissement*. Texte et traduction par Carra de Vaux. Paris, 1896 (henceforward abbreviated al-Masudi, *Le livre de l'avertissement*).

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trace the history of the Arab tribe, Amalec, from its earliest steps – according to some legends, their ancestor, Amalec, was a grand grandson of Noy;<sup>4</sup> pityingly, all these texts examine the Amalecite supremacy over Egypt not from the Egyptian point of view, but as a part of proper history of the Arab tribes, one of which they are supposed to be. Vasilyev and Nemirovskij<sup>5</sup> proved that the Amalecites were assimilated by the Arabs, and that the Arab tradition describing them (including the invasion of Egypt), first, is historically adequate, second, is not borrowed from Egypt (the Egyptians were not aware about the tribal identification of invaders), since it has developed not absolutely without Egyptian influence, as we will see further. As the assimilation of the Amalecites by the Arabs developed, this tradition was absorbed by the Arab historical folklore, and the place of this tribe in Semitic world, well-known from the Bible, additionally explains the attention of the Arab Semitic tradition.

So, the Arab sources narrate as follows. The situation at the moment of invasion is described by Ibn Abd al-Hakam and Masudi in very similar ways: Egypt was ruled consequently by two women – Charuba, daughter of Tutis and Mamum, daughter of Charuba's uncle. The only reason for invasion is explained by Ibn Abd al-Hakam: “All the land of Egypt became abundant, and rich, and filled. And the Amalecites wanted [to seize] it”.<sup>6</sup>

The first Amalecite king – al-Valid – intruded in Egypt. The lists of Amalecite kings coincide in details in works of Ibn Abd al-Hakam and Masudi, but the former briefly mentions some features of the invader's rules, or his personal qualities, the latter just lists them in an order.<sup>7</sup> Er-Rijan ben al-Valid, succeeded to his father al-Valid, was the lord of Jusuf-Iosif, mentioned in Koran; thanks to this fact he was well-known to the Arab historians. He was followed by Darim ben er-Rijan, and after him this dynastic line had broken. Darim was succeeded by some Kasham ben Madan (Kames ben Madan according to Masudi).

The next ruler was the Pharaoh of Moses, who ruled four or five hundred years and sunk in the Red Sea during the pursuit of the people of Israel. There is no single opinion on his provenance, Ibn Abd al-Hakam deals

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<sup>4</sup> al-Masudi, *Les praires d'Or*, vol. 3, p. 272.

<sup>5</sup> A. Vasilyev, *Amalek in the Arab Tradition*, in *Еврейская цивилизация. Проблемы и исследования* [The Jewish Civilization: Problems and Research]. 3. Moscow, 1998 (henceforward abbreviated Vasilyev, *Amalek*); A.A. Nemirovskij *Гиксосы: к вопросам наименования и происхождения* [The Hyksos: Their Name and Origin], in *Древний Восток: общность и своеобразие культурных традиций* [The Ancient East: Similarity and Peculiarities of Cultural Traditions], Moscow, 2001 (henceforward abbreviated Nemirovskij, *The Hyksos*).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibn Abd al-Hakam*, p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 30-32; al-Masudi, *Les praires d'Or*, vol. 2, p. 396-400.

with four different versions: his name is Talma and he is Copt; he is Amalecite and he has cunja<sup>8</sup> Abu Murra; his name is al-Balid ben Mosab and he is from the kin of Faran ben Bali; he is from the Arab tribe "lachm".<sup>9</sup> In Masudi's text we can find a similar in sparseness, but divergent in details, corpus of opinions, the author inclines to one of them, the identification of the Pharaoh of Exodus as al-Valid ben Mosab.<sup>10</sup> His rule ended the Amalecite supremacy over Egypt; further the country is governed by the elected Egyptian queen. In his other work Masudi mentions that several ancient kings, who ruled in Egypt in the past, were "from primitive Arabs, Amalecites and others".<sup>11</sup>

Let us find out the place of this plot in the Arab-Egyptian chronological and dynastic scheme of Egyptian history and its correspondence to the real history of the country. First, we should take into account Masudi's comment on the ruling persons all over the Egyptian history, which reflects durability and stability of the Amalecite's rule topos: "The chronicles, in spite of all their discrepancies in data, are of one opinion concerning the number of kings in Egypt, namely thirty two pharaohs, five kings from Babylon, four kings from the kings of Maghreb or Amalecites arrived from Syria, seven kings from the country of Rome, and finally ten Greek kings. Thus is the situation for the time before Messiah, but without mentioning Persian kings, which conquered Egypt before Chosro. The duration of the rule of all these kings, pharaohs, Persians, Romans, Amalecites and Greeks – was 2300 years".<sup>12</sup> It is well-established that the reference to thirty two proper Egyptian pharaohs corresponds almost precisely to the number of historic dynasties, misunderstood or simplified.

So, Egyptian history in its Arab version begins with the direct descendants of Noy-Misr, from whom the country is named after in Arabian. Further governed Misr's descendants (their names are analogous to that of some Egyptian cities), when male heirs failed power passed to female ones – to above mentioned Charuba and Mamum.<sup>13</sup> The phase of autochthonous Egyptian reigns ended with Amalecite's invasion and the rule of four Amalecite kings (Pharaoh of Moses is excluded from their range by Masudi, because he is oriented on other version of his provenance). After the reign of Pharaoh of Moses lasting four or five hundred years, the queen Delukeh and her descendants ruled four hundred years bringing an age of stability and prosperity, broken by Nebuchadnezzar's invasion.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> A part of traditional Arab name which designates its bearer by the name of his son; in this particular case "the father of Murra".

<sup>9</sup> *Ibn Abd al-Hakam*, p. 38.

<sup>10</sup> al-Masudi, *Les praires d'Or*, vol. cit., p. 400.

<sup>11</sup> al-Masudi, *Le livre de l'avertissement*, p. 31-32.

<sup>12</sup> al-Masudi, *Les praires d'Or*, vol. cit., p. 413.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibn Abd al-Hakam*, p. 30.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 30-53.

Let us turn our attention to historical events. At the beginning of the seventeenth century B.C., Egypt was intruded by tribes called Hyksos (the formation of their tribe union took place in Southern Palestine, Northern Arabia and Sinai). This was the first large-scaled conquest of the country, determined as Amalecitan by the Arab authors.<sup>15</sup> The Hyksos constitute the fifteenth and sixteenth Egyptian dynasties (relatively 1675-1554); this fact corresponds to four Amalecite kings in the Arab narratives. While comparing various places in Ibn Abd al-Hakam's texts we can trace that the end of Amalecite rule in Egypt dates back for 820-920 years before Nebuchadnezzar invasion (historical 567 B.C.), exactly to the middle or the beginning of the third quarter of the second millenium B.C. Thus, the previous period of Amalecite rule falls on the end of the second quarter or the mid-second millenium B.C., corresponding in general to the real Hyksos rule in Egypt.<sup>16</sup>

The figure of the Pharaoh of Moses, who had ruled almost half millennium solely, represents the New Kingdom period (1554-1075 B.C.) and absorbed all its rulers, being a collective, assembled image. The New Kingdom begins with expulsion of the Hyksos by the kings of the seventeenth dynasty, respectively with the substitution of foreign rule into native one: since it is remarkable that the Pharaoh of Moses is not ascribed precisely Amalecite provenance - this version is just one of quite equal versions, while other version provides his proper Egyptian origin, corresponding thus unquestionably to the native origin of the New Kingdom dynasties.

So, the key moments of the Arab scheme of Egyptian history correspond to those of historical truth even chronologically. Standard mistakes in one or two hundred years in the period's duration can be easily attributed to inaccuracy, taking into account phenomenal stability of key points, which divide these periods. However, the filling of this scheme is sometimes of supernatural and folklore character.

As it has been already mentioned, Ibn Abd al-Hakam briefly describes the activity and deeds of every Amalecite king, or mentions his personal qualities as a ruler. It is impossible to neglect completely the negative character of these remarks (except er-Rijan, the lord of Joseph, and the Pharaoh of Moses). They are as follows: 1) al-Valid ben Daumag "practiced injustice, was arrogant and depraved";<sup>17</sup> 2) Darim ben er-Rijan "started to practice injustice, became arrogant and worshiped idols";<sup>18</sup> 3) Kasham ben Madan "was an arrogant tyrant".<sup>19</sup> In these descriptions "injustice" and "arrogance are

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<sup>15</sup> Vasilyev, *Amalek*; Nemirovskij, *The Hyksos*, p. 112-114.

<sup>16</sup> Nemirovskij, *The Hyksos*, p. 112.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibn Abd al-Hakam*, p. 37.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.

repeated: both qualities are not defined or proved by the facts, and they look more like subjective psychological reactions than like historical commentaries.

Moreover, two of three Amalecite kings died not by natural reasons: as for al-Valid, "Allah sent a lion, which had torn him to pieces",<sup>20</sup> Darim "sailed on Nile, and Allah sent a storm, which had sunken him and all people who were with him, between Tura and a place where Chulwan [now]".<sup>21</sup> In both cases death is accidental, and caused by powers of nature (lion and storm), if we add this fact to basically negative remarks on the rule of these pharaohs, we can't avoid the impression of final punishment for their injustice and arrogance, thus it is clearly expressed in the narrative - "Allah sent a lion, who had torn to pieces", "Allah sent a storm, which had sunken".

So why all the above-mentioned relates only to these three pharaohs and do not concern er-Rijan and the Pharaoh of Exodus, since the whereabouts of their activities are much more detailed? Thus, the stories about Jusuf-Joseph and Musa-Moses are connected with these two individuals; their stories are kept both in the Old Testament and Koran, and are considered sacred for both nations. So, when these kings became the background figures, somewhat loosing their own historical image, they were depicted only relatively to Joseph and Moses, and not independently. In case of these two kings, the Arab authors wittingly based their knowledge not only on proper Arab and Egyptian tradition, but also on those of Old Testament and Aghada, since the characters are significant for each of them. That is why in the narrations about the Pharaoh of Joseph and the Pharaoh of Moses, Egyptian traces are quite negligible; the narratives are dedicated to Joseph and Moses proper.

Returning to the direct negative descriptions of al-Valid, Darim and Kasham, it is supposed that in this case the tradition of Old Testaments in no way could influence their appearance: this tradition is interested and reflects information only on those pharaohs, who played any role in life and activeness of proper Judean prophets or other significant persons, but not in some Amalecites ruling in Egypt. Thus we can conclude that the Arab author keeps proper Egyptian attitude to invaders retained in folklore: if it is so, we can easily explain revenge by forces of nature for their injustice. So, on folklore level, in Egypt people saved memories not only about the invasions of Kambyzes and Nebuchadnezzar (sixth century B.C), but also about much earlier, the first Asiatic conquest of the country.

After their expulsion from Egypt, the Amalecites continued their rule in Syria: es-Sameida is named as a last Amalecite king there. He sustained a fearsome defeat from Judeans. After that, as it is represented in the sources, Amalecites "were joined to the empire of the kings of Rome". Egyptian Turin

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 30.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 37.

king's list retained the name of the last king of the fifteenth Hyksos dynasty - Hamudi, which in its Coptic version would fit exactly Arabian "Sameida". The second coincidence is found in the similarity of names of Rijan, the master of Joseph, and Chijan, the most powerful Hyksos king.<sup>22</sup> The third - coincidence of names of Hyksos's historical antagonist pharaoh Kamos and the third Amalecite king in Masudi's version - was Kames ben Madan.<sup>23</sup>

Separately, each of these cases is nothing more than an accident, but together they show that the Arab-Muslim tradition in topos of Amalecite's supremacy over Egypt is based not only on proper Arab material (Amalecites - the tribe of "pure origin".<sup>24</sup> they ruled in Mecca and thus controlled Kaaba stone for some time),<sup>25</sup> and not only on the Old Testament tradition (unquestionable concerning Jusuf and Musa plots), but also on the Egyptian one as well. In favor of this we have two arguments: 1) The strong negative component in Amalecite rulers' description and its specific, unjustified by facts, appearance; only for the Egyptian side such an information could be actual and relevant; 2) Coincidence or overlap on names of Amalecite rulers in Arab sources and Hyksos kings in Egyptian ones (the Turin king's list) and even the name of Hyksos adversary Kamos with that of one of their leaders. The latter especially underlines the character of transmitting of such data: the name of Kamos on one hand was not forgotten and kept it's link with this proper historical event (Hyksos supremacy), but on the other hand the king had changed his side - he became Amalecite and not their enemy - as a result of mistake, consequent folklorization and loss of historical facts. Nevertheless, the vitality of this tradition is surprising; since the period of its origin in seventeenth-sixteenth centuries B.C. till its recording by the Arab authors in the ninth-tenth centuries A.D.

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<sup>22</sup> A. Kempinski, "Some Observations on the Hyksos (XV) Dynasty and its Canaanite origins", in *Pharaonic Egypt. The Bible and Christianity*, Jerusalem, 1990, p. 128-137.

<sup>23</sup> al-Masudi, *Les praires d'Or*, vol. cit., p. 396-400.

<sup>24</sup> al-Masudi, *Les praires d'Or*, vol. 3, p. 103.

<sup>25</sup> al-Masudi, *Le livre de l'avertissement*, p. 272.

TOPOSUL SUPREMAȚIEI AMALECITE ASUPRA EGIPTULUI ÎN TRADIȚIA  
ISTORICĂ ARABĂ (PRIMUL MILENIU CREȘTIN)  
Rezumat

Această lucrare se ocupă de toposul stăpânirii amalecite asupra Egiptului, ideea sa și corespondențele sale istorice. Schema arabo-islamică a istoriei Egiptului se potrivește în chip surprinzător istoriei reale în ceea ce privește cele mai importante momente cronologice care separă principalele perioade, a duratei și a conținutului epocilor. Totuși, detaliile interne ale acestei scheme sunt în mare măsură preluate din tradiția orală ori sunt fanteziste. Putem detecta corespondențe accentuat negative ale stăpânirii amalecite în Egipt, care asociate cu alte aspecte, conduc la concluzia că autorii arabi păstrează atitudinea tipic egipteană față de invadatori reținută de tradiția orală.

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