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## THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF THE MhallAMI ARABS IN TURKEY AS A SUBJECT OF DEBATE

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### **Abstract**

Mhallamis, who are the significant part of the Arabs of Turkey, constitute a significant part of Turkey, predominantly live in Mardin province's Midyat city and its surroundings. Although the exact date of their settlement in this area is unknown, sources indicate the 5th century. It is understood that the Mhallami, who apparently descend from Banu Shaybanid branch of Rabi'a tribe, acted with the Arabs following the spread of Islam in the region. Despite describing themselves as Arabs, they have been associated with different ethnic groups such as Kurds or Assyrians from time to time. In this study, ethnic origins, beliefs, the tribe of which they are a member and some cultural characteristics were discussed.

**Keywords:** The Mhallami, Rabi'a, Shaybanid, Midyat, Assyrian, Tur Abdin.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Mhallami is among the oldest known ethnic groups in Turkey. It is predicted that their ancestors settled in Anatolia by starting in the early periods of the middle ages. The fact that they did not leave any original writings behind that would enlighten the process of settlement and the following early periods made gathering information about them more difficult. It can be assumed that this was historical negligence; however, rather than intentional negligence, it also must have been caused by the nomadic lifestyle of the Mhallami. Accordingly, it is a known matter that nomadic communities inevitably express themselves more through oral tradition rather than written tradition. The fact that the oral tradition is not documented and the threat of assimilation under the influence of higher cultures that this culture would come across were among the crucial problems that the Mhallami encountered. Consequently, researching the history of the Mhallami and obtaining exact information about them is highly difficult. Perhaps for this reason, there has been no detailed research about them until recent history. While several characteristics have been illuminated in recent researches,<sup>1</sup> it is understood that some other topics that have been regarded as

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<sup>1</sup> In the recent past, Halit Yeşilmen conducted the most detailed research about the Mhallami in his doctoral thesis. This study was also published as a book (See. Halit Yeşilmen 2017); about the Mhallami "Der neuaramaische Dialekt des Tur Abdin" (Albert Socin 1844-1899); (Gotthelf Bergstrasser 1866-1933); "Linguistics Analyze des Arabischen Dialekts der Mhallamiye in der Provinz Mardin" (Hans



speculative, particularly their historical origin, have not been explored in depth. Within this context, trying to illuminate the significant details discovered about the Mhallami is among the main objectives of the study.

The existence of Arabian pedigrees (Ensab) is one of the factors that provided the most convenience in terms of accomplishing the objective of the study. These pedigrees that Arabs considered to be of great importance were passed down from generation to generation.<sup>2</sup> In this research that employs pedigrees as well as other resources, primarily the ancestry of Mhallami is discussed and explained through resources that are important in this regard. During the genealogical research, firstly the tribes that had immigrated to the region are discussed and rigorously analyzed. In almost all of the findings acquired from this analysis, there is data that indicates that some branches of the Rabi'a tribe had come and settled in the region where the Mhallami live today. Nevertheless, the speculations about the ethnicity of the Mhallami that are both mentioned in some scientific studies and certain folk wisdom are discussed and subject to scientific analysis to find out whether they have an actual connection to the history of the Mhallami. Meanwhile, the matters that were mentioned above as possibly speculative, particularly "Banu Hilal", "Assyrian" and "Islamization of the Mhallami" stood out as prominent topics. Particularly the claims of the Assyrian resources regarding the Islamization of the Mhallami were found remarkable and subject to some commentary.

In summary, with this research, questions like who are the Mhallami? Where is their homeland? Are they Arabs or do they belong to a different community? Are they Assyrians? Do they belong to the Banu Hilal Tribe as alleged? are aimed to be answered. Firstly, the primary sources relevant to the issues will be included in the study. Aside from these sources, contemporary researchers' views on the subject will also be consulted through reviewed sources. Some personal opinions will also be included in the assessments.

### The Origin of the Name "Mhallami"

Even though they usually call themselves "Mihalleme-Muhalleme", the Mhallami do not also oppose to be called "Mihelme" or "Mahalleme" by outsiders. It is presumed that these differences in pronunciation stem from practicality for speech or the spelling *محلّم* that has no vowel point in Arabian sources. Moreover, it is stated the word is also used in the form of "Muhallim"<sup>3</sup> related to a river name in Bahrain; however, it should be pronounced as "Muhalleme" in case it is used as surname (Hamavi, 1977, 33) Nevertheless, it is understood that the word "Muhalleme" (Mhallami) is typically a relative name rather than its dictionary meaning (derived from the Arabian root "hilm") "mild-mannered, right person" (Turkish Dictionary, 1998, 600). It is stated that since this relativity is used in regard of the name "Muhalleme", son of "Zuhl", in the pedigree of the Mhallami that will be shown below, those who descend from this lineage are called "Muhalleme" (Mhallami) (*محلّمي*) or Mihalleme (H.İsmail, A.Osman 2004, 48-49). As a matter of fact, in Mu'cem Kabaile'l-Arab, the word "Muhalleme" is defined as "one of the branches that descend from the lineage of Zuhl b. Şeyban b. Sa'lebe" (Kahhele 1949, 424-425). Besides that, it is noteworthy that the use of the word "Muhalleme" (Mhallami) is not encountered in the early periods of Islam or before while referring to the Arabs who live in the region (Southeastern Anatolia). Notwithstanding that, instead of this name that was not found until the early 14th century, mostly "Shaybanid Arabs" (Hamdani, 1990, 246-247) is used in reference to the name "Shayban" in the pedigrees.

It is determined that the name "Muhalleme" referring to the Arabs who lived in the region was first used in Hasankeyf Chronicle ("Vakayiname") by Hasankeyf Eyyübi Meliki in the el-Melikü'z Zahir Hasan Period (700-703/1301-1303). The Chronicle gives information about the ascendance of El-Melikü'l Kâmil Seyfeddin Ebubekir's brother el-Melikü'z Zahir Hasan to the throne following his death; how he sent his two nephews who were seven and eight years old (Ebubekir's children) to where the Mhallami lived because he was afraid of them.<sup>4</sup> It is understood that the aforementioned region the Mhallami lived in (Mhallami

Jürgen Sasse 1971); etc. studies are more about language and dialect structures. In addition, the work named H. İsmail, A. Osman 2004) is among the important sources. Apart from these, the papers presented by Adnan Demircan and Ahmet Abdülhadioglu at the Midyat Symposium (dated 7-9 October 2011) are important local sources for the Mhallami.

<sup>2</sup> This assessment of Muhammed Hamidullah on pedigrees is interesting. "Arabs had books about genealogy before Islam. Arabs have been occupied with this science for a long time and every individual knew by heart the names of their ancestors ten or twenty generations back".... For more information, see Hamidullah, 2007, 102.

<sup>3</sup> Suyuti spelled the name "Muhallim" , which he said was a branch of Benî Şeyban (Banu Shayban). See (Suyuti, (undated), 238).

<sup>4</sup> It is reported that the incident took place as follows: Al-Melikü'l Kâmil Seyfeddin Ebubekir's sons, seven-year-old el-Melikü Salih, and eight-year-old al-Melikü'l Mdil Muciruddin Muhammed, had to put up with this situation because of their young age. However, the new melik was worried that they would be loved by senior palace officials and soldiers because of their father. For this reason, al-Melikü'z Zahir gave the administration of the Mahalmi region to them in order to keep his nephews away from the center. This policy of Melikü'z Zahir's was not very successful, and the two brothers continued to gain the sympathy of the people and soldiers in the Mahalmi region that they went. Melikü'z Zahir, who was not able to stand idle by these developments and under the influence of emirs around him, decided to bring them back to the capital. Stating that he missed his nephews, he ordered his messenger to bring them to Hasankeyf. Melikü'z Zahir actually aims to imprison or kill them when they come back. One of the commanders found out about this



Region) was "the Mardin-Midyat region of Diyarbekir" (Akbayar, 2001, 111). Şerefhan Bidlisi who also presumably refers to the same region informs about the existence of "Muhallimi" Arab tribe in the aforementioned region which has oak forests and good grapes in its lands (Şerafeddin Han, 2009, 137). Particularly the fact that the name "Muhallimi" is used in the Hasankeyf Chronicle is important in the sense that it shows that the aforementioned community is identified with where they live, and the name was also known before the time of the Chronicle.

### 1-The Ethnic Origin of the Mhallami

The most crucial sources that inform about the lineage and migratory routes of the Arabs are no doubt the pedigrees that are called "el-ensab" by the Arabs. In the research that started with the name "Muhallim", gradually a very crucial name linked to the Mhallami was found through aforementioned sources, that is Rabi'a ibn Nizar. There are two important branches of the great tribe that is named after Nizar who is known to be descendants of Adnanites (Kalkaşendi, 1980, 77). These branches are called Rabi'a and Mudar (Ibn Haldun 2000, 359)<sup>5</sup> and there are large tribes that belong to them (Kahhele, 1949, 424-425). While every single personal record that is mentioned in the sources and of which names are written below constituted a branch that belongs to Rabi'a ibn Nizar in time, it is also possible to find the pedigree of the Mhallami from here. According to the sources, names that are descendants of Ibn Nizar are, Rabi'a, Asad, Huzeyfe, Da'me, Afsa, Heneb, Kasıt, Vail, Bekir, Ali, Sa'b, Ukabe, Se'lebe, Şeyban, Zuhl, and **Muhellem** (Mhallami) (Ibn Hazm 1998, 322; Ibn Saib al-Kelbi (n.d), 196, 208, 209, 210; Sem'ani 1988, 215-216; Kuteybe ed-Dinveri (n.d), 61; Suyuti (n.d), 238; H. İsmail, A. Osman, 2004, 44).<sup>6</sup>

It certainly would not be sufficient to claim that today's Mhallami descend from this individual solely based on the name "Muhallim" being mentioned here. It is clear that personal recordings are not enough to make such a claim either. For this reason, on the one hand acquired personal recordings should be combined with geographical locations together with historical recordings and every single branch's migration route should be followed, on the other hand it is thought that comparing with Arab tribal traditions would be enlightening. It is seen that in the research that has been conducted accordingly, for the communities that lived where the Mhallami live today usually the term "Benî Şeyban" (Banu Shayban, Children of Shayban) descending from Rabi'a or Bakr ibn Wa'il was used until a certain period.

### 2-The Homeland and the Migrations of "Banu Shayban"

Before starting with the main subject, there is a need to explain the locations such as "Tur el-Berri", "Baarbaya" and "Turabidin" which are among the named geography migrated by Banu Shayban who are seen as the ancestors of the Mhallami. These three geographical locations which are predicted to be the same place are thought to be crucial in terms of both being the geography where the Mhallami live and making the Arabian migration more understandable that will be mentioned below. Accordingly, while Yakût el-Hamevî uses the statement "the name of a small town located in the mountain overlooking Nusaybin adjacent to Mount Judi" for Turabidin (Hamavi, 1977, 48), Adnan Çevik, who is one of today's researchers, states that the region named as the Mardin-Midyat threshold is the area covering the places from the surrounding of Midyat to Nusaybin (Çevik, 2002, 67). An Assyrian reverend, Adday Şer states that "Bâ-Arbaya" or "Beyt Arbaya" is the area between Bâzebda (İdil) and Nusaybin (Adday Şer, 2008, 15), while another researcher states that the same geographical location is called "the homeland of the Arabs" or "Arab country", the residents belong to the Rabi'a (Benî Rebia) tribe and thus it is called Diyar Rabi'a (Diyar-ı Rebia) (Şümeysani, 1987, 43-44) Yakût el-Hamevî also points out that Baarbaya is one of the villages of Mosul (Hamavi, 1977, 324), and the area was part of Mosul at the time.

According to some Arabian geographers who give notable information about both Nizar Tribe's Rabi'a branch and other branches' homelands and immigration to the mentioned regions, the homeland of Rabi'a is Tihame, el-Hima and Yemame. After immigrating out of fear from revenge because of a matter about a woman (Bekri, 1945, 568) the new homeland of the Rabi'a was between Gezira and Iraq (İbn Haldun

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plan and immediately let Emir Menkeli know. Emir Menkeli who was also worried about his son Abdullah's life who was employed in al-Melikü Salih's Mahalmiler reported the situation to his son. Afterwards the two brothers will fight against their uncle with the support of the Mhallami, and after defeating their uncle, one of the brothers, Melikü-Salih, will ascend the throne of Hasankeyf Eyyübi despite his young age. It is told that he was called "sultancuk" because of its young age. For more information, see Miynat 2008, 99-100).

<sup>5</sup> Ibn Khaldun also says that the tribes of İyad and Enmar can also be branches of the Nizar Tribe. See (İbn Haldun, 2000, 359).

<sup>6</sup> İrfan Aycan, one of our modern-day researchers says "The lineage of the tribe, the ancestry of Rabi'a goes back to Adnan through his father Nizar ibn Ma'ad. After Adnan and Kahtan, Rabi'a which is one of the Arabs' four main branches (others are Mudar, Kudaa and Yemen), has many branches such as Esed, Tağlib, Vail, Bekr, Şeyban, Hanife, Abdülkays, Kasıt, ve Ahmes." For more information, see, (Aycan, 2007, 499).



2000, 359) or in other words between Al-Hirah and Damascus (Bekri 1945, 568).<sup>7</sup> One of the older Mamluk historians Kalkaşandı (d.1418), stated that between Yamama and Bahrain and the lands of Iraq were the homeland of Rabi'a, but following the immigrations "Ceziretü'l-Furatiyye" became the new homeland of the Rabi'a (Kalkaşandı 1980, 77,261). Notable and important information can be found in different sources that have a similar approach. For example, one of the prominent "ensab" scribes of the Arabs Kahhale says: "*The first homeland of this tribe which is also known as "Rebiatü 'l-Faras" (Rabi'a Horseman) was the settlement around Najd and Tihamah. They were occupied with looting in the region, sometimes going as far as Damascus and Yemen. Many of them died after a while because of a great civil war. After this war, Rabi'a started to separate and migrate into different areas. Some settled into Bahrain, some near the outside Najd; while some went to Hedjaz, a significant number settled between Gezira and Iraq lands*" (Kahhele, 1949, 424-425).

Ibn Khaldun confirms the information in the sources by stating that after the mentioned Arab migrations, the homeland of Rabi'a was overall "between Gezira and Iraq lands" (Ibn Khaldun 2000, 359). Ibn Khordadbeh (d.912) considers Nusaybin, Erzen, Amed, Meyyafarikin, Mardin, Baarbaya, Beled, Sincar, Karda, Bazebe, Ra'sü'l-Ayn and Turabidin<sup>8</sup> to be important centers of this geography which he describes as the new homeland of Rabi'a. Ibn Khordadbeh also uses the expression of "center/core" of Rabi'a while referring to the mentioned settlements (Ibn Hurdezbih, 1881, 95). Al-Bakri adds Karkisya and Samsat to Khordadbeh's list (Bekri 1945, 568). Hamdani, an Islamic geographer also defined where the Rabi'a lived mentioning that the Mount Judi in the north of Mosul was inhabited by Rabi'a, while in the backside of the same mountain Kurds and Armenians had settled. Hamdani also says "*Bevazic and Sin are bought lands from Rabi'a. Tur el-Berri (Probably Turabidin) follows them which is accepted as the first border of Diyar-ı Bekir. This land belongs to the Banu Shayban (Ben-i Şeyban) and their relatives. Only Kurds intervene with them here to Khorasan*" (Hamdani 1990, 247; İshak Armale (n.d.), 6). In particular about Banu Shayban, Kahhele states, "Children of Shayban, son of Adnanite Zühl are one of the branches of Rabi'a" (Kahhele, 1949, 420) while Kindermann says "these are the two greatest and strongest clans of the old northern Arabia (Rabi'a and Bakr) about the same tribe (Kinderman, 1964, 653).

Western researcher Schliefer also states in his observations about both Bakr bin Wa'il and Banu Bakr that, their slow advance to the Yemen, Yamama and Bahrain with the tribes of Ismaili branch of Arabs who follow Bakr bin Wa'il occurred at the periods of Abu Bakr and Umar, and in the following periods they moved in the same destination and settled in northern Mesopotamia and named it Diyar-ı Bekir. Schliefer also reports that because of civil strife (Basus Wars)<sup>9</sup> Banu Taghlib, an important branch of the Rabi'a Tribe had settled into the area well in advance (around 490), and Banu Bakr has become their neighbours (J.Schliefer, 1997, 454-455). Evaluations of Hasan eş-Şümeysani, another researcher who informs about the Arab migrations to the area are also notable: "*It must be remarked that following the fall of Ma'reb wall, nomadic Arab tribes from Yemen started to set foot to all of these lands (Mardin and surroundings). The mentioned tribes settled into this valley after the mentioned date, mixed with the locals and started to build homes there. Both the Rum and Persians tried to win them over. Later, they separated their settlements into principalities and seigniories, and appointed one of their own men as the ruler. Following that, they made them subjects of the general ruler (Merzuban) who lived in the region's capital (Ba'arbaya). Such a policy was implemented by both Persians and the Greeks from time to time*" (Şümeysani, 1987, 43-44). These assessments also support Schliefer. It is understood that the mobility that started in 422 had resulted in settlement in the region towards the end of the century. Attacks by the Byzantine and the Sassanians towards these communities were caused by the area being the border between the two sides.<sup>10</sup>

According to the orientalist author Kindermann who shares similar opinions, certain Rabi'a tribes who invaded Hedjaz and Tihamah frontiers alongside the Najd plateau, chose these as their permanent place of residence. After this settlement, as a result of a civil war, various tribe branches who advanced slowly, separated from each other and most of them went to Gezira (Mesopotamia) and settled into the region that is named after them (Diyar Rabi'a<sup>11</sup> and Diyar-ı Bekr) (H. Kindermann 1997, 654-655).<sup>12</sup> While

<sup>7</sup>According to late period local sources, the borders of the Rabi'a region stretched out from Mardin to the center of Habur, and from Raqqa to Saara. See (Abdusselam Efendi 2007,11).

<sup>8</sup> It is the name of a small town located inside a mountain that overlooks Nusaybin adjacent to Judi mountain see (Hamavi, 1977, 324).

<sup>9</sup> Ibn Khaldun writes that these wars among themselves lasted 40 years. For more information, see (Ibn Khaldun ,2000, 360).

<sup>10</sup> For the Romans' interest in the residents of the region, see. (Maurice Sartre, 2005, 510).

<sup>11</sup> Diyar Rabi'a refers to the region in the north of Arabian peninsula, extending from Mosul to the Euphrates where there are settlements such as Mosul, Nusaybin, Sincar and Cizre. This region was the homeland of Wail, Bakr and Taghlib, the major branches of Rabi'a (Aycan, 2007, 498).

<sup>12</sup>Adnan Çevik, a modern-day researcher who has similar approaches explains the certain immigration of the Adnanites in the 7th century from Gezira based on the wars that took place between the Taghlib and Shayban (of Bakr tribes) which also involve the Mudar



Hindermann does not inform about the dates of the said migrations, another western author Kaegi points out that these migrations possibly started in the 9th century (Kaegi, 2000, 259). Besides that, westerner researcher Street who, as Hamdani mentions above, makes similar comments about Kurds being involved with Banu Shayban without giving any dates, points out that nomadic Arab tribes set up tents in the southern parts of Tûr Abidin and the most important tribe among these tribes was the Arab-Kurdish "Muhallemiye", (M.Streck 1997, 100)<sup>13</sup> which emphasized both the migration to the area and revealed a crucial information about the identity of "Benî Şeyban" (Banu Shayban).

On the other hand, in the print of Sharafnama annotated by François Bernard Charmoy; it is reported that the Kurdish tribe "Mahlibi" or "Muhlibi" was spelled "Mohallami" in "Master of Science", whereas Hammer regarded the "Mohallemi" to be Arabs. In the same source, in a quote from Hassel it is stated that *after Mardin, Nusaybin and Sincar Sanjaks left the military government in the Principality of Diyarbakır there were no Arab tribes left inside the principality except "Benû Muhalleme"* (Şerafeddin Han 2009, 39). This explanation is important fundamentally in the sense that it reveals that the Mhallami maintained their settlements uninterrupted in the region as old residents. Kâtip Çelebi (1609-1657) who traveled in the region shortly after Sharafkhan (1543-1603) states that *there was an Arab Tribe called "Muhallemi" in an oak forest near Batman River.* (Celebi, 2009, 439) *also confirming this settlement.*

Assyrian Efrem Barsawmo, one of the best narrators of the region's history where the Mhallami lived, (1933-1957) said: *El-Muhallemiye Region occupies a large area in the south of Tur-Abidin. More than 500 villages exist there. The villages known today are: Estel, Keferhuvar (Gelinkaya), Deyrizbine (Acırlı), keferark, Kinderib (Söğütlü), Kefersem, Epsi (Şenköy), Şorızbah (Çavuşlu), Deyrındıb (Yolağzı), Tafo (Erişti), Teffi (İçören), Kafaralleb (Yolbaşı), Nunıb (Yenice), Aynkaf (Kayapınar), Kefercevez (Gercüş), Akfarcevsen, Kafarsulta, of which residents were mostly Assyrians. Muslim Kurds live in these villages together with the Mhallami. Also besides a large number of churches, there was Deyr (Monastery) in Kafersem' Village"* (Barsawmo, 1996, 56). The Mhallami still lives in most of the aforementioned villages, however it is presumed that either the Kurdish population was Arabicized or possibly the Arab population was Kurdicized.

As a matter of fact, Ziya Gökalp also gives similar examples and states that there are possible Arab tribes who have Kurdish roots, Kurdish tribes who are Turkish or Turks who are Kurdish (Gökalp, 2009, 93). Besides, what Adnan Demircan who knows the region the best and who is also one of the most notable historians of our times has written about Kurdish-Mhallami association is quite important. According to Demircan, after the Arabs in the region have lived a nomadic life for centuries, both because of internal struggles and the emergence of different political elements some of them adopted a sedentary life; in the meantime established relationships with ethnic groups which are particularly their coreligionists through marriages or political alliances. In this context, there are many examples of Arabizations of Kurdish families who settled in Arab villages or Kurdicization of the Arabs who settled in Kurdish villages (Demircan, 2012, 477).<sup>14</sup> However, despite the occurrence of such factual consequences, it is clear that this is more important to confirm the existence of said communities rather than similarizing different ethnic groups.

Therefore, it is also possible to discuss other factors that might reveal that the Mhallami who position themselves differently in terms of ethnicity might be from Hejaz aside from the historical information mentioned above about both their ancestry and geographic and demographic travel route. For instance, the language used by this community is one of the aforementioned elements. Although the mentioned language differs in terms of pronunciation today, there is a common opinion about its proximity to Modern Written Arabic etymologically (Abdulahadioğlu, 2012, 791). Aside from this, they also have cultural similarities to pre-Islamic Hijaz Arabs. This tradition that is still alive despite the amount of time that passed is interesting: In order to replace their deciduous teeth, children in the pre-Islamic Arabia took their teeth that fell out between their thumb and index finger and chanted "replace this with something more beautiful than this" (خذی ضرس الحمار واعطيني ضرس الغزال)<sup>15</sup> and threw it towards the sunlight, believing that this will ensure their new teeth will come out straight and strong and also they will not suffer from any

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tribes. In another source on the subject; 7th Another source tells that following the VII. century wars that eradicated the tribes in Arabia particularly Rabi'a immigrated towards Lakhmid Kingdom in Al-Hirah in groups of three Rabi'a -Taghlib ibn Wa'il, Nemr b. Kasit and Shaybani- and that one of the most important branches that makes up the brother of Taghlibi, Shaybani, spread all the way to the northern border of the Al-Hirah Kingdom and came across the Islamic conquests, while others were between Kufe and Basra. For more information, see: (Çevik, 2002, 52-53).

<sup>13</sup> For similar information see. (Sayks 2007, 80; Gökalp, 2009, 93).

<sup>14</sup> For example, there is almost no Arab population left in the settlement known as Kefercevez (Gercüş) today and the entire city has been Kurdicized.

<sup>15</sup>It is an idiom said among Mhallami children. It must have been a rumor from the days of ignorance (Meaning: O Sun, I am giving you donkey teeth, give me gazelle teeth).



toothache during their lifetime (Çağatay, 1982, 139). Although currently there is no such tradition, a similar tradition widely common among Mhallami children was witnessed until about thirty years ago. Aside from this, it is understood from the real stories that the tradition of pillage called "Çazu" which is one of the important elements of Arab traditions, was also common among the Mhallami until recently. Aside from these examples, some of the idioms used by the Mhallami, the superstitions they used to have, their attitudes towards girls, attributing meanings to shooting stars, their rituals of asking for the girl's hand and marriage; the culture of fair that is still alive, the lullabies song to the children, obituary and loss announcements and cultural similarities such as nicknaming/family names (Abdulahadioğlu, 2012, 794-802), are a few of the examples that reflect the previous Arab culture.

### 3-The Matter of Banu Hilal

Today, aside from seeing themselves as Arabs it is found that The Mhallami mostly prefer to be associated with Banu Hilal Tribe.<sup>16</sup> Whereas in historical records, there are not many mentions of Arab tribes who immigrated to the Gezira Region aside from the Banu Rabi'a Tribe. There have been no serious mentions of Banu Hilal tribes immigrating to Southeastern Anatolia aside from a rumor quoted by Işıltan. The rumor in question is about Diyar Mudar and Mudar Tribe, and three Mudar Tribes Kilab, Hilal and Ukayl who resided in Diyar Mudar since the first period of Islam (Işıltan 1960, 31; Çevik, 2002, 59). If the location historically known as Diyar Mudar is presumed to be around Euphrates as claimed by a western geographer; (D'anville, 1791, 433), or according to Makdisi a geography that involves Raqqa, Suruç, Harran and Ruha (Makdisi 1906), it is understood that the geography in question is far away from where the Mhallami lived. For this reason, lack of information that supports the rumor and the fact that geography that was claimed to be immigrated does not coincide with where the Mhallami live today, makes it hard to claim that "The Mhallami are descendants of Banu Hilal".

Another finding regarding this is the data about said tribe's migration path. According to research conducted about the subject, the main center of the tribe, just as with Banu Rabi'a tribe was Hedjaz Region; Gazvan mountain around Ta'if. However, it is said that starting with IX. century they expanded to various regions by migrating particularly to Najd, Iraq and Levant, and eventually left these regions as well and went to Africa. Banu Hilal who lived in Iraq and Syria had been banished to Egypt for the first time by Umayyad caliph Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik (724-743) because of their banditry and robbery against the groups who were in Arabia to make a pilgrimage. Banu Hilal, who cause destruction wherever they go and who became financially very powerful because of their banditry and robbery, were brought to Iraq region by the Abbasid to be used against Umayyads. Nevertheless, when their presence caused disturbance again, they were forced to immigrate all way to the westernmost point of Africa (Kavas, 1998, 15-19). As can be seen, when both their lineage and immigration paths and dates are considered it can be seen that, overall, Mesopotamia is not among the places heavily visited by Banu Hilal Tribe.

On the other hand, in a text with an unknown source that claims that the Mhallami belong to the Banu Hilal Tribe,<sup>17</sup> another remark is made based on the word "Muhallemiye". It is remarked that the word Muhallemiye, rather than the above explanation of "descendants of Muhellem" is related to the type of settlement in the region. Whereas the name of the community known as "Muhallemi" (Mhallami) and spelled as (محلّمي) seems farther from the word that means "a hundred settlements" (مائة محل) "miet mahal" (H. İsmail and A. Osman 2004, 139-144). Moreover, the Mhallami did not only make up a hundred houses, as remarked above, they made up most of the 500 houses in the village (Barsawmo, 1996, 56). Thus, according to the acquired information, it is understood that the common opinion of the Mhallami connection to the Banu Hilal does not reflect the truth for now.

### 4-The Matter of Assyrians

The claims that the Mhallami have Assyrian roots continue to stay relevant today. Claims particularly brought up by Assyrian sources such as the Mhallami being both ethnically and denominationally Assyrian (Akyüz, 1998, 53) and even if that is not the case, at least possibly denominationally Assyrian (Sayks; Barsawmo et al.) are prominent. It is believed that before analyzing these, describing Assyrians properly would be to the point. According to the definitions, although Assyrians themselves define the term with five different meanings, the common opinion of the experts offers the most reasonable explanation. According to this opinion, despite the name "Assyrian" (Süryani) evoking the image of "Syrians" (Suriyeliler), use of this nickname is based on a religious obligation. As a result of the missionary efforts

<sup>16</sup> For more information, see (Yeşilmen, 2017, 84-86).

<sup>17</sup> Some names were mentioned in the bibliography section of the document, but the mentioned information was not found in the stated sources.



intensified towards the idolaters in Syria and Palestine following Pavlos' embrace of Christianity, some of Aramaeans who were also the residents of this region embraced Christianity as well. Aramaeans who embraced Christianity started to use the name "Suryoyé-Süryaniler (Assyrians) to differentiate themselves from the idolater Aramaeans and in time this nickname became the name of a new sect". Despite their links to certain races, the name Assyrian is used as a Christian sect and also the name for church followers.<sup>18</sup>

When the claims and the descriptions are evaluated together, solving the link between the Mhallami and the Assyrians raises some questions. For example, if Assyrians are a race, can the Mhallami be called Muslim Assyrians? Or if Assyrians are a sect, are there any Mhallami Assyrians? Why are there no Aramaic speaking Mhallami? Or why did the Mhallami gave up their language and learn Arabic after becoming Muslims and from whom did they learn? Perchance if they started to speak Arabic because it is the language of Koran, why did not Kurds and Turks started to speak Arabic after becoming Muslims? (H.İsmail, A.Osman 2004, 175-176). Perhaps the answers the Assyrians researchers have would be enlightening for analyzing the relationships. In addition, based on the existing information, some analyses can be performed, particularly about the beliefs of Arab tribes who migrated to the region. For example, Bakr, Taghlib, Nemr and Abdul Qays of the Banu Rabi'a tribe were Christians but reportedly had branches that were idolaters (Aycan, 2007, 499).<sup>19</sup> Of these, it is said that the Bakr used to be idolaters in Arabia, in fact despite having an idol called "Avd" (al-Bekri, 1998, 109), as a result of the interaction caused by being neighbors with Byzantine they embraced Christianity (Ibn Haldun 2000, 360). Therefore, it is natural that the nomadic tribe Rabi'a came and settled to a region where Assyrians lived and came under the influence of them regarding their beliefs as in many other areas. Perhaps, because of this naturality, the aforementioned Arab tribes were reported to occupy an important place in the Byzantine army and fought against zoroastrian Persians (Kaegi, 2000, 253). Thus, it is in the realm of possibility that the Mhallami who were a branch of the Rabi'a tribe became neighbors with Assyrians and embraced Christianity/Assyrian beliefs before turning to Islam. However, it is clear that this does not mean the Mhallami are not ethnically Assyrians or Aramaeans.

#### 5-Islamization of the Mhallami

Although it can be said that before Islam, Arab tribes who interacted with Assyrians or other Christian communities in the region embraced Christianity, it should be remembered that there was also a rapid process of Islamization following the arrival of Islam. Although it is not known when exactly Islamization took place, it is known to have accelerated after the conquests which is confirmed by some orientalist as well. Kaegi points out to the unifying force of Islam as the fundamental factor that led the Islam conquests and (Kaegi, 2000, 255) draws attention to the first Islamization movement. The same author states "Losing Mesopotamia severed the bond between the Byzantium and the Arab tribe allies and created the need to deploy armies to fight Muslims requiring significant manpower and more efficient strategies and tactics. It was revealed that, unlike previous centuries, in this century the empire would no longer be able to fight Muslims by paying other Arabs to do so" (Kaegi, 2000, 259) and points out that Arab tribes started to embrace Islam in 639 (or close) when Islam conquerors came to the region and started their conquests.<sup>20</sup> It is also believed that this early Islamization, which occurred so intensely that it affected the Byzantine army negatively, may have been influenced by the perception of "Arab means Islam, Islam means Arab" (Zeydan, 2004, 109).

Although it is not known whether the ancestors of Mhallami were among the Arab tribes who embraced Islam early, it is known that the Rabi'a mostly embraced being Kharijites in the Ummayyad period. In fact, in Dara during the Umayyad period<sup>21</sup> when the rebelling Salih b. the Müserrih<sup>22</sup> b. (76/695) contacted Şebîb Yazid al-Shaybani, among his men were Abraham b. Hacer Abu's-Sukayr from Banu Muhalleme and Fazl bin Amir from Banu Shayban bin Zuhl. According to Tabari, who narrated about this event, one of the sources of the Historian Abu Mihnef was one of the Benî Muhalleme (Tabari, 1964, 219, 221). Sükeyn, one of the Khawarij who rebelled in the same period and in the same place, was from Benî Muhalleme and was caught by the cavalry of Mohammed b. Marwan, sent to Haccâc and later executed by his order. It is known that Dahhâk b. Kays eş-Şeybânî rebelling at the end of the same dynasty period was

<sup>18</sup> For the topic, see (Barsawmo 1983, 15; Günel, 1970, 30; Aksoy, Çelik, 2013,188; M. Çelik, 1996, 16).

<sup>19</sup> The author informs that the name of one of the two idols that said branches worshiped in the days of ignorance are "Muharrak" and "Zü'l-Keabât".

<sup>20</sup> Undoubtedly, there were exceptions. For example, one of the conquerors Al-Walid ibn Uqba, after conquering the places where the Taghlib Tribe had been, gave them no alternative but to embrace Islam. Following this the Taghlib Tribe threatened to take refuge with the Byzantines, and wrote a letter to Umar that explained their situation. Umar stated that the rule "Any Arab must embrace Islam" is only valid for the Arabs who lived in Arabia, and decided that Al-Walid ibn Uqba was wrong (See Ibn al-Esir tr. (Without date); Kaegi, 2000, 257).

<sup>21</sup> Today, Oğuz Village of Mardin.

<sup>22</sup> For more information on the uprising see. (Ağırakça, 1992, 225-235).



also from Benî Muhalleem (Halife b. Hayyat, 1985, 376). Although Dahhâk provided great support and domineered a large area, the last Umayyad caliphate Muhammad ibn Marwan's was killed (744-750) in a raid which he participated personally in Kefertusa near Ras al-Ayn (128/746) (İbnü'l-Esir 1987, 22; Yakubi, 1883, 405; Halife b. Hayyat, 1985, 371,375-380; Wellhausen, 1963, 186; KV. Zettersteen, 1979, 459). Moreover, there is mentioned of a poet named İtbân el Haruri İbn Asîle eş-Şeybânî (or İbn Vasîle), who was also a Gezira Khawarij and whose mother was also from Benî Muhalleem (Ibn Hallikân, 1969, 456). It is known that the khawarij riots continued after the Ummayad in the Gezira region. One of these riots was Harici Velid b. Tarif eş-Şeybani uprising. This rebellion, which corresponded to the first 50 years of the Abbasid period, was suppressed by another Shaybani, Yezid b. Mezid, and Tarif was killed (H.178/794) (Halife b. Hayyat 1969, 451; Zehebi, (n.f.), 395; İbn Haldun 2000, 360). The suppression of the revolt had a tremendous effect, leading one of the poets of the period to state: "The Vailis kill each other; for iron cuts iron only" (İbnü'l-Esir tr. (n.d.), 131; Halife B. Hayyat, 1969, 451). It is understood that although many of the kharijite riots in the region was led by Banu Shayban of Bakr ibn Wa'il branch, the political attitude of the Banu Rabi'a was not same in every period. Other developments confirms that the Shaybani who are presumably the ancestors of the Mhallami embraced Islam in a very early period and their existence in the geography goes back a long time.

However, there are many differing opinions regarding the Islamization of the Mhallami particularly in Assyrian sources. Regarding this Barsavm tells: "*Around the years 1609 (or 1583) as a result of the oppression and persecution inflicted on Christians by the Turkish rulers, Mhallami tribes were being harmed and thus became Muslims in order to be freed of oppression. The Mhallami being Muslims does not go back more than 300 years ago.*" From the same source, according to another rumor though not believed even by the author himself, as told by the Mardin Patriarch Ismail whose bad management of the church is mentioned, in the years of wheat scarcity, the Mhallami asked the patriarch (Patriarch Ismail) for a meal of meat in their day of Great Lent. However, when the patriarch said that was not possible, they got angry with the patriarch and embraced Islam. This claim, not even satisfying the author of the book he says "*this is a claim made up by the opponents of Patriarch Ismail in order to discredit him*" (Barsawmo, 1996, 56). In fact no further comments are necessary but it should be known that, instead of a fast that forbids certain food choosing a belief that forbids all food should be more difficult.

A strong response to these claims uttered by Mor İğnatiyos Barsawmo is also in the Ottoman archives which serve as official documents. It is notable that the Mhallami villages (mentioned above by the same author) in the table below, which is an inventory of the official state records of the year 1526, are referred entirely as Muslim villages.





	VILLAGES	MUSLIM/NON MUSLİM	1526		1567	
			D	S	D	S
1	Midyad	N	167	53	205	149
2	Enhil (Encil)	N	68	21	108	24
3	Epsi (Elkin)	M	27	12	76	20
4	Hapsanas (Habisnar)	N	59	19	102	63
5	Salah	N	16	7	55	13
6	Ardnas (Amas)	N	85	43	188	50
7	Zaz	N	85	22	219	100
8	Salah-ı Diğer	N	72	26	109	96
9	Babişlü (Bahişi)	M	10	4	27	8
10	Kefra	N	38	16	57	43
11	Aynverd	N	46	25	136	29
12	Kaferboran	Mix	15+40	4+15	29+68	14+15
13	Kaferşah/Şam	N	53	16	88	46
14	Mizizah	M	30	11	61	20
15	Istirgan	N	21	9	65	21
16	Keferzi	M	25	8	89	36
17	Allin	N	27	12	37	14
18	Bâti	N	-	-	149	100
19	Estel	M	28	8	93	29
20	Belbin	M	-	-	27	14
21	Habab	N	1	9	165	8
22	Bakisyân	N	3	3	69	5
23	Ellin-i Müslüman	M	-	-	136	7
24	Kırkat	-	-	-	-	-
25	Yar Musa	M	-	-	6	-
26	Erba'a	N	13	5	33	4
27	Sa'id	N	4	4	23	7
28	Teffi	M	Mezra	-	5	4
29	Deşti	M	5	1	6	2
30	Keferhuvar	M	19	4	68	27
31	Deyrizbina	M	22	5	100	12
32	Şorizbah	M	15	4	37	9
33	Kefer'allab	M	15	2	24	12
34	Tunat	M	-	-	3	-
35	Aynkaf	-	-	-	-	-
36	Kasr-ı Fâris	M	-	-	8	-
	<b>TOPLAM</b>		<b>1152</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>2660</b>	<b>1079</b>

For the table<sup>23</sup>

When the Mhallami villages are examined, thesis of Mor İğnatiyos claiming that communities who lived here embraced Islam in later periods is clearly debunked. Because the data of the table shows that the villages of Mhallami embraced Islam long before the date they mentioned. This can also be inferred from the Hasankeyf Vakayinamesi aforementioned above. Aside from that, some of the modern-day researchers particularly oppose claims such as "The Mhallami was Islamized as a result of oppression from Turkish rulers" and state that Islamization occurred more as a result of reactions against the practices inside the community (Çevik, 2007, 129-130).

#### 6-An Overall Assessment

The information above regarding historical origins of the Mhallami are put together from information with sources rather than personal opinions. It was thought that with the purpose of using the acquired information efficiently, stating some personal opinions about certain topics in this section would be more accurate. In this context, there will be certain personal assessments about some issues that are mentioned above.

Some western pilgrims have described the Mhallami they came across while visiting the region as "Kurds" or "Arabic-speaking Kurds". However, accepting the transivities mentioned above as exceptions, it is thought that this may not be the case based on several reasons. One of these reasons is the language used by the aforementioned communities. First of all, it should be remarked that, the Mhallami claim the language they use is Arabic. Regardless of the partial differences in terms of pronunciation between this language and the Arabic used in Arabia, it is commonly accepted that they are essentially the same language. Particularly, sharing many botanic and animal names with Hidjaz region indicates that this cannot be an acquired language for the once nomadic Mhallami, on the contrary, it comes from a long-established

<sup>23</sup> Abbreviations in the table should be read as M, Muslim; N, Non-Muslim; D, Digit; S, Single Male. In addition, Kindirib Village, is not included in the table, because it was part of the City District (Tur District) in the 16th century (Erpolat, 2007, 392-393).



source, that is, the native language. Nevertheless, some contemporary examples of geography and demographic structure can be seen to support this case. For example, despite the Mhallami villages usually being built consecutively on a particular stipe, in contrast to these the Barbunus Village of Midyat (Pelitli) is surrounded by villages of Kurdish origin. Regardless, the residents of said village speak Arabic. Whereas, based on the existing location, Barbunus Village should have also been speaking Kurdish. Not only this, but it is remarked that there are not only linguistic but also significant cultural differences between the village in question and the surrounding villages.

Indeed, the fact that the Mhallami kept their language despite the surrounding influences should not be underestimated. Because being away from people who speak like themselves for a long time, being educated in different languages and being neighbours with people who speak a different language and yet speaking a separate language themselves are enough for a language to become extinct.

Perhaps the geography they live is one of the fundamental reasons that they were able to preserve their language even with partial or incorrect pronunciations despite these problems. The Mhallami mostly live in rural areas and villages. It is possible to say that this life affected them both positively and negatively. Rural life kept the people in question from interacting with communities that are too different, thus helping them preserve both their linguistic and cultural authenticity partially. This authenticity also implies being influenced in a positive way. On the other hand, the same lifestyle, due to the limits of the environment led the number of words used in day to day life to decrease and thus affected the language negatively. Such a case causes the words that are not used to be forgotten or be replaced with words from another language when needed. This will naturally cause the native language to regress and open the door for it to be get mixed with other languages. In this sense, it is observed especially recently that the words borrowed are mostly from Turkish. Even though there have been some words passed from Kurdish and Assyrian, they are much smaller in number compared to Turkish.

In a geography like Mesopotamia where interaction is inevitable, it is impossible for communities to live together and not be influenced by one another. In this context, while it is understood that Assyrians had the most part in the interactions of the Mhallami, language, lifestyle and particularly religion have been affected the most. It also should not be forgotten that the mispronunciations mentioned before might have been caused by the Aramaic influence. Because especially the rounded letters "o" and "é" (a sound between e and i) used in Aramaic were heavily used in the language of the Mhallami. Therefore, the sounds of "e" and "i" in Arabic are not pronounced sharply, but rather used in a way that is very similar to their use in Syriac. This has been an important factor that reveals the influence or Aramaic on the Mhallami language. However as explained above, it does not seem probable to infer that the Mhallami are Assyrians based on this.

While it seems possible that the ancestors of the Mhallami who were known to be ethnically different than the Assyrians embraced Christianity, religion of the Assyrians who were the residents of their new geography to which they arrived as idolaters; it is understood that this situation that affected the Mhallami regarding religion continued until the arrival of Islam, it started to change when Islam reached the region and the Mhallami were Islamicized in a short time. The claims that the Mhallami are both ethnically and denominationally Assyrians are considered to be hard to prove.

Regarding the issue of belonging with Banu Hilal which is mentioned when it comes to the tribe which Mhallami belong to, it can be said that both cultural association and sentimentality play an active role. Because the issue here is a nomadic community that has not been researched at all, that has been isolated from their original geography and thus forgot their history, following Arabic tradition and identifying with a noble and strong tribe. It is believed that particularly reading the Taghribat Bani Hilal (Teğribe) every night in a house as if a tv serial at the times with no electricity (before 1980) contributed to this crucially.

### **Conclusion**

Ultimately, lack of qualified historical documents about the lives of the Mhallami in the region caused the information about this community to mostly stay as rumor based narratives. The pedigrees from the rumors and comparisons of the Arab tribes' immigration paths, led to the opinion that the historical root of the Mhallami goes back to Banu Shayban branch of the Banu Rabi'a Tribe. These immigrated from the Arabian Peninsula, and after settling in Iraq (Mosul) some of them moved to the area between Euphrates and Tigris and settled into the region that was named after them, that is, Diyar Rabi'a. Although they are mistaken for different ethnic groups, they have unique language and culture that is more similar to Arabs. Despite having different believes first when they settled in the region, first they embraced Christianity under the influence of Assyrians; and embraced Islam following the arrival of Islam. That aside, in this geography



that is part of Mesopotamia which has hosted few dozen civilizations, and which is as old as human history, transitions between the peoples are inevitable. For this reason, it is clear that talking about a pure race is not possible in the region. Nonetheless, it is important to define communities mainly the way communities define themselves, and it is of great value in terms of reassuring social peace and prosperity.

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