Crisis and Continuity at the Abbasid Court

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Crisis and Continuity at the Abbasid Court

Formal and Informal Politics in the Caliphate of al-Muqtadir (295–320/908–32)

By

Maaike van Berkel, Nadia Maria El Cheikh, Hugh Kennedy and Letizia Osti

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Cover illustration: Silver coin bearing the inscription 'al-Muqtadir bi-llāh'. It is unclear whether the image is also intended to portray al-Muqtadir. Münzkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (Kriegsverlust). Copied from: Heinrich Nützel, 'Eine Porträtmedaille des Chalifen el-Muktadir billah', *Zeitschrift für Numismatik* 22 (1900) 259. We would like to thank Michael Bates and Karsten Dahmen for their help with interpreting this coin.

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In Memory of Abdul Karim El Cheikh
In Memory of Susannah Louise Kennedy
For Bernhard and Isabella
For Hannah and Nadia

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TIMELINE

Hugh Kennedy

295[1]

12 Dhū l-Qaʿda/13 August 908: death of al-Muktafī.
13 Dhū l-Qaʿda/14 August 908: *bayʿa* (oath of allegiance) taken to al-Muqtadir.

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19 Rabīʿ I/16 December 908: al-ʿAbbās b. al-Ḥasan, vizier, killed.
28 Rabīʿ I/19 December 908: Ibn al-Furāt appointed vizier for the first time.
15 Shaʿbān/11 May 909: Muʾnis robed and ordered to leave for Tarsus. Appointment of Naṣr al-Qushūrī as chamberlain

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Rabīʿ II/December 909: birth of al-Rāḍī
Ramaḍān/May–June 910: Muʾnis leads expedition to Fārs.

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18 Shawwāl/19 June 911: Subkarā brought from Fārs to Baghdad.

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[1] The dates of major events in Iraq and the Mashriq are taken from ʿArīb b. Saʿd al-Qurṭubī (d. *c.* 370/980), *Tabarî continuatus: Ṣilat tā'rīḫ al-Ṭabarī*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1897); Abū ʿAlī Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Miskawayh (d. 421/1030), *Tajārib al-umam, The Eclipse of the Abbasid Caliphate*, ed. H. F. Amedroz, trans. D. S. Margoliouth, 6 vols. (Oxford, 1920–1); and Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī (d. 335/947), *Mā lam yunshar min awrāq al-Ṣūlī: akhbār al-sanawāt 295–315*, ed. Hilāl Nājī (Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 2000). In general these three sources are in agreement but on occasion there may be a few days' discrepancy, in which case we have preferred al-Ṣūlī's dates because he is often the contemporary source and ʿArīb bases most of his details on al-Ṣūlī. The dates of the appointments and dismissals of viziers are taken from Sourdel, *Vizirat*, II, 387–469. The dates of Muʾnis's expeditions to Egypt are taken from Abū ʿUmar Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Kindī (d. 350/961), *The Governors and Judges of Egypt, or, Kitâb el ʻumarā <el wulâh> wa Kitâb el quḍâh of el Kindî: Together with an Appendix Derived Mostly from Raf ʻ el Iṣr by Ibn Ḥajar [Kitāb al-Wulāh wa-l-quḍāh]*, ed. Rhuvon Guest (London: Gibb Memorial Trust, 1912).

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3 Dhū l-Ḥijja/21 July 912: Ibn al-Furāt arrested.
5 Dhū l-Ḥijja/23 July 912: Muḥammad b. ʿUbayd Allāh al-Khāqānī appointed vizier.

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10 Muḥarram/16 August 913: ʿAlī b.ʿĪsā arrives from Mecca and is immediately appointed vizier. He begins a policy of cuts.
Rabīʿ II/November–December 913: Muʾnis returns to Baghdad with Abū l-Hayjāʾ al-Ḥamdānī.
Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Mādhārāʾī appointed to supervise finances of Egypt and Syria.
22 Ramaḍān/21 April 914: death of Muʾnis al-Khāzin.

302

15 Ramaḍān/3 April 915: Muʾnis arrives in Egypt to resist Fatimid attack.

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8 Rabīʿ II/22 October 915: Muʾnis leaves Egypt.

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January–June, 917: Muʾnis defeated by Ibn Abī l-Sāj.
8 Dhū l-Ḥijja /2 June 917: ʿAlī b.ʿĪsā deposed.
9 Dhū l-Ḥijja /3 June 917: Ibn al-Furāt appointed vizier for the second time.

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2 Muḥarram/25 June 917: arrival of Byzantine embassy in Baghdad.

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28 Jumādā I/17 November 918: Ibn al-Furāt deposed.
3 Jumādā II/22 November 918: Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās vizier.

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5 Muḥarram/28 May 920: Muʾnis arrives in Egypt to repel Fatimid invasion.

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6 Dhū l-Qaʿda/26 March 922: execution of al-Ḥallāj.

310

922–3: Nāzūk appointed *ṣāḥib al-shurṭa.*
922–3: Umm Mūsā arrested.

311

20 Rabīʿ II/7 August 923: Ibn al-Furāt appointed vizier for the third time.
5 Rabīʿ II/11 August 923: Qarāmiṭa enter Basra.
Dhū l-Ḥijja/March–April 924: *ḥajj* caravan attacked by Qarāmiṭa.

312—'Year of Destruction'

7 Rabīʿ I/14 June 924: Muʾnis returns to Baghdad.
9 Rabīʿ I /15 June 924: ʿAbd Allāh al-Khāqānī appointed vizier.
12 Rabīʿ II/18 July 924: Ibn al-Furāt executed.

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11 Ramaḍān/30 November 925: Aḥmad al-Khaṣībī appointed vizier.
Dhū l-Ḥijja/February–March 926: Qarāmiṭa attack *ḥajj* caravan and sack Kufa.

314

11 Dhū l-Qaʿda/18 January 927: al-Khaṣībī deposed.

315

7 Ṣafar/13 April 927: ʿAlī b.ʿĪsā appointed vizier for second time.
8 Shawwāl/7 December 927: Ibn Abī l-Sāj defeated and executed near Kufa by the Qarāmiṭa.

316

13 Rabīʿ I/6 May 928: ʿAlī b.ʿĪsā deposed.
15 Rabīʿ I/8 May 928: Ibn Muqla appointed vizier.
Ramaḍān/October–November 928: Naṣr al-Qushūrī dies.

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8 Muḥarram/21 February 929: rebellion of Mu'nis.
15 Muḥarram/28 February 929: al-Muqtadir deposed, al-Qāhir appointed caliph.
17 Muḥarram/2 March, 929: al-Muqtadir restored.
Dhū l-Ḥijja/January 930: Qarāmiṭa take black stone from Kaʿaba
Dhū l-Ḥijja/January 930: Maṣāffī infantry destroyed.

318

17 Jumādā I/17 June 930: Sulaymān b. al-Ḥasan b. Makhlad appointed vizier.

319

28 Rajab/17 August 931: ʿUbayd Allāh al-Kalwadhānī appointed vizier.
29 Ramaḍān/2 September 931: al-Ḥusayn b. al-Qāsim appointed vizier.

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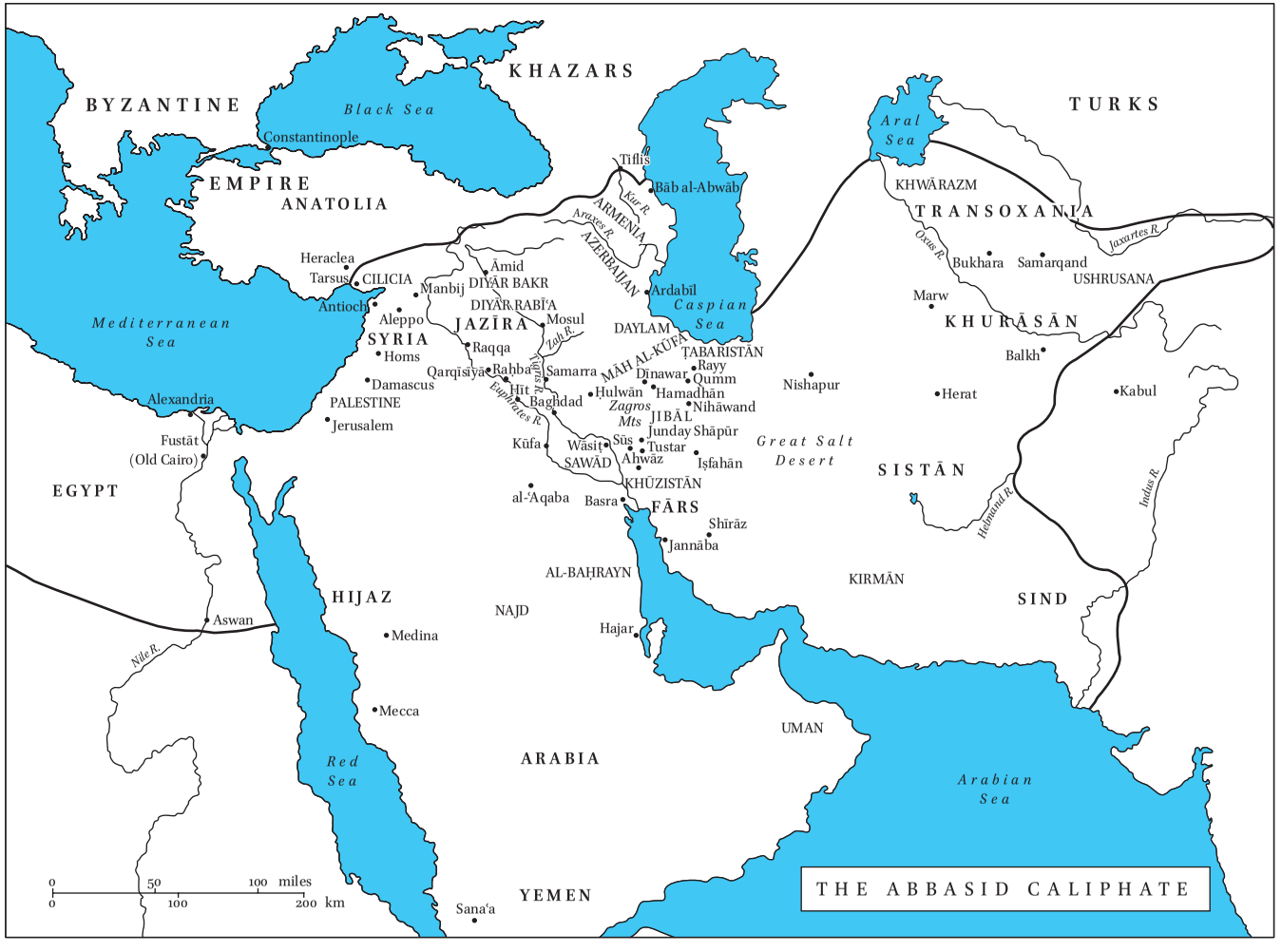
29 Rabīʿ II/May 932: al-Faḍl b. Jaʿfar b. al-Furāt appointed vizier.
26 Shawwāl/30 October 932: death of al-Muqtadir.



MAP OF THE CALIPHATE

INTRODUCTION

The long reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir (295–320/908–32) was a period of dramatic contradiction and paradox. On the one hand it is the reign in which the political power of the Abbasid caliphs was in effect destroyed, the army of the caliphate was broken up and the bureaucracy was reduced to serving the needs of the self-appointed military commanders who increasingly replaced the servants of the dynasty as the leading political actors. On the other hand, it was an age when the cultural life of Baghdad and the caliphal court flourished and attained a richness and variety that has few equals in the history of the pre-modern Middle East. And we are amazingly well informed about the politics and culture of the reign. The writers who recorded the events of the reign were remarkable in their literary skill, the variety of their approaches and, perhaps most strikingly, their interest in the personalities who dominated the life of the court, with all their achievements, foibles and failures. In this book we have attempted to describe and account for the development of this picture, while reflecting on how to reconcile the two discourses of political decline and cultural efflorescence. And if at some points our messages seem to be mixed, that, in a real way reflects the culture of the age.

While the royal court and court culture in medieval and early modern Europe have been for the past three decades 'an important and exciting area of study in history, literature and political theory',[1] studies on the functioning of the Abbasid court are very scarce. It is significant that interpretations of one early modern European court, that of Louis XIV, dominates the academic discussion. This is largely due to the work of Norbert Elias, who 'restored the relevance and legitimacy of the court as a theme of research' and whose interpretation of the court of Versailles 'turned into the single most powerful general model for studies of courts in Europe and elsewhere'.[2] His interpretation of the French court as part

[1] Linda Levy Peck, 'The Mental World of the Jacobean Court: An Introduction', in *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court*, ed. Linda Levy Peck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1–17 and 273–277.

[2] Jeroen Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles: The Courts of Europe's Dynastic Rivals, 1550–1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 7; Jeroen Duindam, 'Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires', in *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires*, ed. Jeroen Duindam, Tulay Artan and Metin Kunt (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 1–23.

of a civilizing process became the norm for court studies until the 1980s, when revisionist studies began to be produced. Historians of the court have pointed to the complexity of the subject. John Larner talks about 'the ease with which any attempt at coherent examination dissolves either into a discussion of one of its parts [. . .] or into a general account of the character and policies of the prince who presided over it'.[3] Any historical investigation of the court faces the problem of definition, because courts were so diverse and also because any ruler's court could be different on different occasions.[4] Historians of the court have also pointed to the vagueness of the terminology, the term 'courtier' being used as a generic term for all people at court from menial servants to the ruler high-ranking intimates and including domestic as well as state servants.[5] These multiple associations of the terms court and courtier complicate our understanding, and this is also the case for the court under study.[6] In this book, we do not start from a theoretical definition of court and courtier but we illustrate figures and functions on the basis of how these are described by normative and narrative sources.

With the almost total absence of court studies for various periods of Islamic history,[7] we endeavour in this project to provide a polyphonic reading of the Abbasid court at a specific historical moment, hoping that it will serve as an example of the functioning of the Abbasid caliphate and also as a case study for further comparative work on medieval courts. Through a detailed and systematic examination of the working of the Abbasid institutions, as well as the court and its domestic world during the early part of the fourth/tenth century, we shall uncover the formal and informal politics of the ruling family and the various power groups surrounding it.

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[3] John Larner, 'Europe of the Courts', *The Journal of Modern History* 55 (1983): 669–681.

[4] Steven Gunn and Antheun Janse, 'Introduction', in *The Court as a Stage: England and the Low Countries in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Steven Gunn and Antheun Janse (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), 1–12.

[5] Duindam, 'Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires'.

[6] For a preliminary investigation, see Nadia Maria El Cheikh, 'The Court of al-Muqtadir: Its Space and its Occupants', in *'Abbāsid Studies II: Occasional Paper of the School of 'Abbāsid Studies, Leuven 28 June–1 July, 2004*, ed. John Nawas (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 319–336.

[7] Most recently, two edited volumes have appeared that deal (partly) with aspects of Muslim court culture, namely, Albrecht Fuess and Jan-Peter Hartung, eds, *Court Cultures in the Muslim World: Seventh to Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2011) and Jeroen Duindam, Tulay Artan and Metin Kunt, eds, *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

The narratives describing the reign of al-Muqtadir are particularly rich for such an investigation due to the wealth of contemporary and near-contemporary sources, historical annals and other literary texts that refer to this period. Written from diverse perspectives, the accounts permit us to reconstruct a balanced and nuanced representation of the period. They are vivid and extensive. They also chronicle the lives of individuals, providing fascinating details about their vicissitudes, successes and failures, so that they leap off the page as real, flesh-and-blood human beings.

Our work owes much to the important studies on the reign of al-Muqtadir published in the first half of the twentieth century: Guy Le Strange's *Baghdad during the Abbasid Caliphate* was published in 1900, Louis Massignon's *La passion d'al-Hosayn-ibn-Mansour al-Hallaj* in 1922, Harold Bowen's *The Life and Times of ʿAlí Ibn ʿÍsà, 'The Good Vizier'* in 1928 and Adam Metz's *The Renaissance of Islam* (looking at the decades following the caliphate of al-Muqtadir) in 1937.[8] In 1959–60, Dominique Sourdel published *Le vizirat abbāside de 749 à 936*, providing a meticulous study of the institution of the Abbasid vizierate, including the reign of al-Muqtadir, which witnessed an especially rapid turnover of viziers.[9] As a result of this painstaking research by some of the most important scholars in the field, the reign of al-Muqtadir was among the best-studied periods of medieval Islamic history, and one in which the widest range of viewpoints and (then) modern methodologies were brought into play. However, in more recent years interest seems to have waned and the last half-century has seen little attempt to reconsider the reign.[10]

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[8] Guy Le Strange, *Baghdad during the Abbasid Caliphate: From Contemporary Arabic and Persian Sources* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900); Louis Massignon, *La passion d'al-Hosayn-ibn-Mansour al-Hallaj: martyr mystique de l'Islam, exécuté à Bagdad le 26 Mars 922: étude d'histoire religieuse*, 2 vols. (Paris: Geuthner, 1922); 2nd edn, 4 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1975) (translated into English as *The Passion of al-Ḥallāj, Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, trans. Herbert Mason [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982]. References in this volume are to this translation); Harold Bowen, *The Life and Times of ʿAlí Ibn ʿÍsà, the 'Good Vizier'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928); Adam Mez, *The Renaissance of Islam* (London: Luzac, 1937).

[9] Dominique Sourdel, *Le vizirat ʿabbāside de 749 à 936*, 2 vols. (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1959–60).

[10] The most recent work devoted to the reign of al-Muqtadir is in Arabic: Ḥamdān ʿAbd al-Majīd al-Kubaysī, *ʿAṣr al- khalīfa al-Muqatdir bi-llāh (295–320/907–932): dirāsa fī aḥwāl al-ʿIrāq al-dākhiliyya* (al-Najaf: Maṭbaʿat al-Nuʿmān, 1975). The most recent work in English, which covers various aspects of the reign of al-Muqtadir, is Hugh Kennedy, *The Court of the Caliphs: The Rise and Fall of Islam's Greatest Dynasty* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004). The Ph.D. dissertation that David Marmer submitted in 1994 at Princeton University, which deals partially with the reign of al-Muqtadir, remains unpublished: David Bruce Jay Marmer, 'The Political Culture of the 'Abbāsid Court, 279–324 (A. H.)'.

The early part of the twentieth century also witnessed the edition and translation of the most important historical works for this period, namely, *Tajārib al-umam* by Miskawayh (d. 421/1030), which was composed at the Buyid court and which covers the years up to 373/983–4. Miskawayh's history, distinguished by an effort towards synthesis and explanation, subjects events and people to critical evaluation. In his capacity as a secretary for a number of Buyid viziers, Miskawayh provides a bureaucratic view that places the great administrators at centre stage.[11] H. F. Amedroz and D. S. Margoliouth provided a partial English translation, including the part recounting the events of the reign of al-Muqtadir.[12]

Al-Ṭabarī's (d. 310/923) *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, a monumental universal history which forms the basis of much of our knowledge of early Islamic history, was continued until the year 302/914–15, but the author's treatment of the events of the reign of al-Muqtadir is brief and contributes little new.[13] Much more important is the *Ṣilat taʾrīkh al-Ṭabari* by ʿArīb b. Saʿd al-Qurṭubī (d. *c.* 370/980) which continues al-Ṭabarī's history down to the end of al-Muqtadir's reign.[14] Despite the fact that he lived all his life in al-Andalus and never, as far as we know, visited the East, his information is extensive and detailed and his work is a major source for the political history of the reign. Al-Ṭabarī's *Taʾrīkh* was published in the late nineteenth century but its systematic translation was only begun in the 1980s and was completed in 2007.[15] ʿArīb's *Ṣilat* has not been translated.

Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī (d. 335/947) presents a contemporary and more personal account of this period. As a boon companion under a number of caliphs, as well as a tutor, he provides a unique picture of life at the caliphal court based on first-hand knowledge. His *Kitāb al-awrāq* consists of historical material, personal recollections and eyewitness accounts. James

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[11] Claude Cahen, 'History and Historians', in *Religion, Learning and Science in the Abbasid Period*, ed. M. J. L. Young et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 188–233; and Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates* (London: Longman, 2004), 363.

[12] Abū ʿAlī Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Miskawayh (d. 421/1030), *Tajārib al-umam, The Eclipse of the Abbasid Caliphate*, ed. H. F. Amedroz, trans. D. S. Margoliouth, 6 vols. (Oxford, 1920–1).

[13] Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk. Annales quos scripsit Abu Djafar Mohammed ibn Djarir at-Tabari*, ed. M. J. de Goeje et al., 15 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1879–1901).

[14] ʿArīb b. Saʿd al-Qurṭubī (d. *c.* 370/980), *Tabarî continuatus: Ṣilat tāʾrīḫ al-Ṭabarī*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1897).

[15] al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, general ed. Ehsan Yarshater, 40 vols. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985–2007).

Heyworth-Dunne edited a number of sections from *Kitāb al-awrāq* in the 1930s, including the chronicles of the years 322–33/933–44. This part was translated by Marius Canard in the late 1940s but received little attention. The part of the *Awrāq* concerning specifically the caliphate of al-Muqtadir was only published in 2000; until then, al-Ṣūlī's accounts were only known through ʿArīb's *Ṣilat*, where he is often quoted as a source.[16]

Another important author is Hilāl al-Ṣābiʾ (d. 448/1056), a secretary and at one point director of chancery at the Buyid court. Hilāl belonged to a dynasty of learned men, a family that illustrates 'the affinity between chronography and ruling courts', since they were commissioned to write dynastic history by the Buyid rulers.[17] His two important works are *Tuḥfat al-umarāʾ fi taʾrīkh al-wuzarā* and *Rusūm dār al-khilāfa*. The latter, redacted in the earlier part of the caliphate of al-Qāʾim (423–68/1031–75), relates the rules and regulations of the Abbasid court. It includes a myriad of material ranging from advice to viziers, secretaries, boon companions and others on how to dress, how to sit, and how to address the caliph, to descriptions of caliphal audiences.[18]

Miskawayh and al-Ṣūlī worked at court and Hilāl al-Ṣābiʾ belonged to a secretarial family that was affiliated to the court over several generations. It is hence not a coincidence that in attempting to understand the history of the Abbasid court, we should fall back on their works, since they were personally interested in including information about the internal organization of the court and the administration. However, this factor also means that the sources were written by an elite group with a particular agenda. Moreover, the exemplary character of the sources makes many of these narratives as much mirrors for good governance as they are histories.

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[16] Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī (d. 335/947), *Akhbār al-Rāḍī bi-llāh wa-l-Muttaqī lillāh, aw, Taʾrīkh al-dawla al-ʿabbāsiyya min sanat 322 ilā sanat 333 hijriyya min Kitāb al-awrāq*, ed. J. Heyworth Dunne (Beirut: Dār al-Masīra, 1934–6); al-Ṣūlī, *Akhbār al-Rāḍī bi-llāh wa-l-Muttaqī lillāh (Histoire de la Dynastie Abbaside de 322 à 333/933 à 944)*, trans. Marius Canard, 2 vols. (Algiers: Institut d'Études Orientales de la Faculté des Lettres, 1946 and 1950); al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar min awrāq al-Ṣūlī: akhbār al-sanawāt 295–315*, ed. Hilāl Nājī (Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 2000).

[17] Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 164–166.

[18] Hilāl al-Ṣābiʾ (d. 448/1056), *Rusūm dār al-khilāfa*, ed. Mīkhāʾīl ʿAwwād (Baghdad: Maṭbaʿat al-ʿĀnī, 1964); al-Ṣābiʾ, *Tuḥfat al-umarāʾ fi taʾrīkh al-wuzarāʾ; the Historical Remains of Hilāl al-Ṣabiʾ 1st Part of his Kitab al-wuzara (Gotha Ms. 1756) and Fragment of his History 389–393 A.H. (B.M. Ms, add. 19360)*, ed. H. F. Amedroz (Beirut: *s.n.*, 1904).

The sources described above differ in format, methodology and aims. Al-Ṣūlī's is a chronicle of events of his own times, many of which he has witnessed; al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh* is a monumental universal history, which ʿArīb's *Ṣilat* seeks to continue. Hilāl's *Wuzarā'* and Miskawayh's *Tajārib al-umam* are histories with a strong focus on the civil administration of the caliphate. Other important sources used in this volume, such as al-Masʿūdī's (d. *c.* 345/956) *Murūj al-dhahab* and al-Tanūkhī's (d. 384/994) *Nishwār al-muḥāḍara*,[19] maintain a rough chronological order but are collections of anecdotes rather than chronicles. Al-Tanūkhī's *al-Faraj baʿd al-shidda* is a collection of stories with an happy ending.[20] In some cases we also use later works such as Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā's *al-Fakhrī*, an eighth-/fourteenth-century digest of history.[21] Despite this variety, these sources share a basic building block, the *khabar* (pl. *akhbār*), a self-contained account of varying but limited length, often introduced by a chain of transmitters validating its authenticity. *Akhbār* can be compiled, shortened, edited, grouped thematically or chronologically, and merged, to suit the purpose and format of a given text. Thus, on a formal level we can distinguish a chronicle, where *akhbār* will succeed one another in rough chronological order, from a collection of instructive stories, where they will be grouped thematically; from a biography, where they will be clustered around particular characteristics or events in a person's life; and from a normative manual, where they will be inserted to illustrate specific rules and practices. On a further level, some sources will convey their portrayal of an event or individual by juxtaposing *akhbār* and leaving the readers to draw their own conclusions, while other sources will reshape their material into one single coherent account or general assessment.

In this volume, we explore various approaches to this vast pool of information, exploiting the sources' sophisticated techniques through the filter of different lenses. In Part I, we look at the image of the reign as it has come down in narrative sources. Chapter 1 by Hugh Kennedy provides an

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[19] Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956), *Les Prairies d'or—Murūj al-dhahab wa-maʿādhin al-jawhar*, ed. Barbier de Meynard et Pavet de Courteille. Revue et corrigée par Charles Pellat, 7 vols. (Beirut: Publications de l'Université Libanaise, 1965–79); Abū ʿAlī al-Muḥassin al-Tanūkhī (d. 384/994), *Nishwār al-muḥādara wa-akhbār al-mudhākara*, ed. ʿAbbūd al-Shālijī, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1971–3 and reprints).

[20] al-Tanūkhī, *Al-Faraj baʿd al-shidda*, ed. ʿAbbūd al-Shālijī, 5 vols. (Beirut, 1978).

[21] Muḥammad b. ʿAlī Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā (d. after 701/1302), *al- Fakhrī. Histoire du khalifat et du vizirat depuis leurs origines jusqu'à la chute du khalifat 'abbāside de Bagdàdh (11–656 de l'hégire = 632–1258 de notre ère) avec les Prolégomènes sur les Principes du Gouvernement*, ed. Hartwig Derenbourg (Paris: E. Bouillon, 1895).

overview of the reign of al-Muqtadir and of the historical sources dealing with it. It gives a brief account of the Abbasid caliphate up to the caliphs's accession as well as a chronological account of the reign and a general discussion of the problems faced by the caliph and his administration during this period. It also discusses the impact of al-Muqtadir's reign on the subsequent history of the Abbasid caliphate and the wider Islamic Middle East. Chapter 2 by Letizia Osti looks at how the contemporary and later sources portray and evaluate the reign of al-Muqtadir as the beginning of the ruin of the Abbasid caliphate. A few centuries after the death of al-Muqtadir, the Arabic sources seem to agree that women and servants are to blame for its weaknesses, owing to the excessive influence they had on the young caliph. However, this opinion is reached gradually, through the editing and reshaping of accounts across different sources and successive times. Juxtaposing different accounts and reconstructing their motives and context help retrace the development of al-Muqtadir's *persona*, and, at the same time, brings out conflicting and articulated views held by his contemporaries before they were assimilated into the general consensus of later centuries.

The second part of the volume focuses on three of the caliphate's main institutions, the vizierate, the bureaucratic apparatus, and the military, looking at prescriptive literature as well as chronicles. Chapter 3 by Maaike van Berkel deals with the highest state official, the vizier. It addresses the viziers' responsibilities, their perceived personalities, politics and networks. The vizier stood at the head of the Abbasid bureaucracy. He kept the caliph informed of the ins and outs of the state's administration and implemented the latter's instructions. This chapter discusses the various ways in which al-Muqtadir's viziers acted in court politics and how they related to other power groups represented at the court, especially the military, the harem and the court servants. Chapter 4, also by van Berkel, deals with the functioning of the bureaucratic apparatus and its officials during the reign of al-Muqtadir. It discusses the institutional organization of the administration, the background education and specialization of its employees and the sometimes conflicting views between their self-representations in the administrative literature and their day-to-day life in the administration. Chapter 5, by Kennedy, discusses the role of another main institution, the military. It provides an account of the army as it existed at al-Muqtadir's accession and discusses the financial strains that the maintenance of this force imposed on the government. The leading figures in the military are investigated, notably Mu'nis al-Muẓaffar and Naṣr al-Qushūrī, as well as the attempt of the government to secure the

services of a local leader such as Ibn Abī l-Sāj. This chapter ends with an investigation of the failure of the military system and its role in the collapse of caliphal power.

The third part of the volume tackles the court, court culture and harem during the reign of al-Muqtadir, again through both prescriptive and descriptive literature. Chapter 6 by Nadia Maria El Cheikh studies the particular functions, roles and influence of chamberlains as examples of courtiers. The investigation of the texts reveals the multiplicity of roles that chamberlains could and did exercise. The extent of power and influence which chamberlains could attain are best reflected in the career of the chamberlain Naṣr al-Qushūrī whose connections with both the bureaucracy and the military establishment and his influential role at the court conferred upon him an impressive amount of political power. Understanding the function of the *ḥājib* (chamberlain), thus, helps us chart the political map of power relations at court in the presence of various circles of courtiers, during the early fourth/tenth century. Chapter 7, also by El Cheikh, examines the harem of al-Muqtadir. Studying the most important woman at the court of al-Muqtadir, his mother Shaghab, the chapter explores her sources of authority, her networks and other channels of influence. Her example is significant as it provides a spectrum of the possibilities open to such indirect exercise of authority while simultaneously revealing much about politics, gender and the interpretation of the past as presented exclusively by men. The chapter also examines the multiplicity of roles that the *qahramānas* (harem stewardesses) and eunuchs exercised, notably in mediations and transactions across boundaries. Chapter 8 by Osti explores how education at court was organized, illustrating how learning and culture were valued by different members of the caliphal household and the kind of political influence that court scholars attained as a result of their proximity to power. This discussion attempts to frame and unify the two standard narratives about the caliphate of al-Muqtadir: that, on the one hand, it was a period of political decline, and, on the other, it was the golden age of Arabic culture.

The Appendix, by Judy Ahola and Letizia Osti, contains a topographical study of Baghdad in the time of al-Muqtadir on the basis of evidence from biographical and historical sources as well as maps and photographs from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Here again the wealth of the narrative sources comes to the fore, complementing the very little archaeological evidence that we have on Abbasid Baghdad.

While our aim in writing this book is to make sense of the sources on the caliphate of al-Muqtadir, providing a model for the functioning of the

court and addressing general issues, certain aspects of the period, inevitably, have been left out of our portrayal, such as foreign diplomacy, some aspects of literary and intellectual life, religious and juridical policies, and material culture. Moreoever, while fundamental economic problems plagued the reign of al-Muqtadir, we did not feel that it was part of this book's goal to outline them here since some important work has already been done by Hugh Kennedy elsewhere.[22] Another feature of this period that this book does not cover are the important trials that took place during the reign of al-Muqtadir, especially, the celebrated trial of the mystic al-Ḥallāj in 308–9/921–2, which was thoroughly studied in the seminal work of Louis Massigon.

The genesis of this collaborative project was a panel on al-Muqtadir organized by Hugh Kennedy at the School of Abbasid Studies meeting in Leuven in 2004.[23] At the following meeting, in St Andrews in 2006, a number of papers again focused on aspects pertaining to the caliphate of al-Muqtadir. Especially refreshing were the various angles and approaches that seemed to offer a critical and comprehensive reassessment of the reign of al-Muqtadir. Our discussions naturally evolved in the decision to put together our different perspectives in a coauthored book. Judy Ahola has been part of this project since its inception and has our warmest gratitude for contributing to it with her precious work in the Appendix.

This is a collective effort. While we realized the difficulties involved in the production of a multi-authored work, the interpenetration of our research on the subject almost dictated that we embark on this risky journey. The complications inherent in the process of collaborative venture such as this one are many, notably the overlap in some of the material presented in different chapters. We have pointed to salient ones in the main text, and have noted parallels in the footnotes. On the other hand, we view the coexistence of our diverse approaches as one of our strengths, as it is not a simple juxtaposition, but rather the result of constant dialogue and discussion over the years.

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[22] Hugh Kennedy, 'The Decline and Fall of the First Muslim Empire', *Der Islam* 81 (2004): 3–30. See also Michele Campopiano, 'State, Land Tax and Agriculture in Iraq from the Arab Conquest to the Crisis of the Abbasid Caliphate (Seventh–Tenth Centuries)', *Studia Islamica* new series 3 (2012): 35–80.

[23] The Proceedings of this conference have recently been published and include a section on the court of al-Muqtadir. See John A. Nawas, ed., *ʿAbbāsid Studies II: Occasional Paper of the School of ʿAbbāsid Studies, Leuven 28 June–1 July, 2004* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010).

The School of Abbasid Studies provided the perfect environment for our exchanges, and its members gave much support and input during the various conferences, starting in Leuven 2004. In this context, it is our intent and hope that this volume contributes to filling an important gap in Abbasid studies, and more broadly, in court studies.

In order to make the primary material more accessible to non-Arabists, we decided to provide references to the English translation of some of the primary sources we refer to, when available. In particular, we constantly refer to Elie Salem's translation of al-Ṣābi''s *Rusūm dār al-khilāfa*, and, when available, to Margoliouth's partial translation of al-Tānūkhī's *Nishwār al-muḥādara*.[24] In the case of Miskawayh's *Tajārib al-umam*, we refer to the original Arabic which, however, is cross-referenced in the English translation by Margoliouth forming part of the same set of volumes under the title of *The Eclipse of the Abbasid Caliphate*. Similarly, in the case of al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, we refer to the original Arabic, which is cross-referenced in the integral English translation *The History of al-Ṭabarī*.[25] Throughout this volume our translations of passages from these sources are based on the above-mentioned English translations, with adjustments in wording and transliteration, unless indicated otherwise.

For rendering Arabic words the transliteration of the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* is used. Familiar geographical names such as Iraq, Mecca and Baghdad are given in their common English spelling; other geographical names are transliterated in agreement with the transliteration of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Both *hijra* and Common Era have been given.

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[24] al-Ṣābi', *Rusūm dār al-khilāfa* (*The Rules and Regulations of the Abbasid Court*), trans. from the Arabic with intro. and notes by Elie A. Salem (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1977); al-Tanūkhī, *The Table-Talk of a Mesopotamian Judge: Being the First Part of the Nishwār al-muḥāḍarah or Jāmi' al-tawārīkh*, ed. and trans. D. S. Margoliouth, 2 vols. (London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1921–2); 'The Table-Talk of a Mesopotamian Judge', trans. D. S. Margoliouth, *Islamic Culture* 3 (1929): 487–522; 4 (1930): 1–28, 223–238, 363–388, 531–557; 5 (1931): 169–193, 352–371, 559–581; 6 (1932): 47–66, 184–205, 370–396.

[25] The part dealing with the caliphate of al-Muqtadir is: al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 38: *The Return of the Caliphate to Baghdad: The Caliphates of al-Mu'taḍid, al-Muktafī and al-Muqtadir A.D. 892–915/A.H. 279–302*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985).

PART ONE

HISTORIES AND STORIES

CHAPTER ONE

THE REIGN OF AL-MUQTADIR (295–320/908–32): A HISTORY

Hugh Kennedy

The Early Abbasid Caliphate

Al-Muqtadir was the eighteenth Abbasid caliph and he reigned for longer than any of his predecessors.[1] He was also the last to have the opportunity of exercising political power over the heartlands of the caliphate. The Abbasids were descendants of the Prophet's paternal uncle, al-ʿAbbās b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib. As such they could claim to be members of the family of the Prophet but, unlike their ʿAlid cousins, they were not his direct descendants. During the rule of the Umayyad caliphs 41–132/661–750, the Abbasids had lived in some comfort as minor members of the new Islamic elite, but by the 120s/740s if not before they had attracted the attention of groups of Muslims, notably in the north-eastern province of Khurāsān, who wanted to replace the ruling dynasty with representatives of the family of the Prophet who could inaugurate a more truly Islamic government.

Between 129/747 and 132/750 the Khurāsāni supporters of the Abbasids marched west, repeatedly defeating the armies of the Umayyads until in 132/750 the first Abbasid caliph, al-Saffāḥ, was installed in Kufa. The new regime, begun under al-Saffāḥ but consolidated under his brother and successor, al-Manṣūr (r. 136–58/754–75), was in many ways a continuation of the Umayyad government under new management. The Abbasids were heavily dependent on the services of the Khurāsānis, who developed into a paid professional army of perhaps 40,000 men. At the same time it was a broad-based regime in which members of the extensive Abbasid family were appointed as governors to major provinces, Basra, Syria, Egypt, and

[1] For general accounts of this period see Kennedy, *Prophet* and Kennedy, *Court of the Caliphs*. For the narrative history of the reign of al-Muqtadir the best secondary work remains Bowen, *Good Vizier*.

important groups who had supported the Umayyads were incorporated into the new elite.

The caliphate stretched from the eastern frontiers of Khurāsān and Sind in the east to Ifriqiya (modern Tunisia) in the west. Of the vast area that had been ruled by the Umayyads, only al-Andalus (Spain and Portugal) and the Maghreb (Morocco and Algeria) remained outside Abbasid control. In all the provinces, governors were appointed, taxes were collected and at least some of these revenues were sent to the caliphs. While the caliphate extended over all this vast area, Iraq was its main resource base. Simple calculations suggest that the alluvial lands of the Sawād of Iraq yielded four times as much in taxation as the next richest province, Egypt, and more than five times the revenues of Syria and Palestine combined. These revenues were essential to sustain the increasingly elaborate court and military establishment being developed by the Abbasids. At the heart of Iraq lay Baghdad. Al-Manṣūr had founded the city in 145/762. Its growth was extremely rapid. The court and the bulk of the Abbasid army was settled there and their purchasing power attracted merchants, artisans, labourers and artists from all over the Muslim world. During the ninth century the population was certainly over 250,000 and may well have reached half a million.

The first phase of the Abbasid caliphate came to an end in the civil war which followed the death of the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd in 193/809. At one level this was a family dispute between his two sons, al-Amīn and the eventual victor, al-Ma'mūn, but it profoundly affected the whole structure of the state. It led to the triumph of an almost entirely new elite of Iranian and Turkish origin from Khurāsān, men with no links to the early Abbasid ruling class. It also led to the dominance of a new sort of soldiery. These were recruited in areas on the fringes of the Muslim world. There were men from the Maghreb and Armenians but the majority of them were drawn from the Iranian principalities of Khurāsān, from Soghdia and Ushrusana and belonged to a class of professional soldiers known in Central Asia as *chākar*s. They came to form a sort of Praetorian guard who surrounded the caliphs in their new capital at Samarra, and like the Praetorians of the Roman empire, they were determined to secure their salaries and rewards and had little hesitation in deposing caliphs who could not provide for them. From 247/861 to 256/870 there were no fewer than five caliphs, three of whom were deposed and killed, largely for being unable to pay the soldiers who were supposed to protect them.

As a result of this chaos, one member of the Abbasid family, al-Muwaffaq, set about building up a new military force which would be loyal

only to him. Most of its members were brought into the Islamic world as slaves and formed into contingents based not on kinship or tribal affiliation but on loyalty to the established soldiers who trained them and gave them opportunities for advancement. These soldiers were known as young men, *ghilmān* (sing. *ghulām*) irrespective of their age. There are two salient points about these new soldiers; they were or could be militarily very effective and they were certainly very expensive. They may have been technically unfree but they were paid cash wages and the provision of these wages was by far the biggest burden on the public purse. If these wages were not forthcoming, they had the power to bring down the government, caliph or vizier, who failed them and they were not afraid to use that power.

When a measure of order was restored after 256/870, the *ghilmān* were firmly established at the centre of the new regime. This army, created by al-Muwaffaq, was developed and expanded by his successors, the caliphs al-Muʿtaḍid (r. 279–89/892–902) and al-Muktafī (r. 289–95/902–8), who made it their business to lead the troops in person and to make sure that they were paid. It was these *ghilmān* who formed the core of the armies of the Abbasid caliphate during the reign of al-Muqtadir.

It was a very diminished empire over which they ruled, however. During the impotence of the Samarra government, vast areas of the caliphate had slipped out of government control. Eastern Iran was ruled by the Ṣaffārids and then, from around 287/900, by the Sāmānids who paid some lip service to the idea of Abbasid rule but little more. The provinces to the south of the Caspian Sea were ruled by ʿAlid princes who vigorously rejected Abbasid claims to sovereignty. Armenia and Azerbaijan were ruled by a warlord of eastern Iranian origin called Ibn Abī l-Sāj. Egypt, Syria and Palestine were taken over by Ibn Ṭūlūn, himself of Turkish *ghulām* origin, and ruled effectively as an independent state. Yemen and South Arabia had gone their own ways under dynasts of local origin. None of these areas made any financial contribution to the caliphs in Samarra and Baghdad. The only areas of the caliphate now under effective Abbasid rule were Iraq, now recovered from the Zanj rebels,[2] Fārs, much of western Iran as far as the strategic city of Rayy (near modern Tehran), and parts of the Jazīra.

[2] The Zanj were black slaves, mostly of east African origin, who were employed as labourers, clearing salt from agricultural estates in the south of Iraq. They rebelled against ʿAbbāsid authority in 255/869 and were finally defeated by al-Muwaffaq and his army of *ghilmān* in 270/883.

Al-Muqtadir's two predecessors, his father al-Muʿtaḍid and his brother al-Muktafī, had systematically used their army to establish, or re-establish, control over marginal areas in the Jazīra, important for the food supply of Baghdad, and areas in the Zagros mountains. This meant that the military were employed and that the increased resources obtained would make an important contribution to their pay. The Abbasid caliphs had substantial assets, and when al-Muktafī died he left a surplus in the treasury. It is true that the empire over which they ruled was certainly less than half (in area) of the caliphate of Hārūn al-Rashīd, but they still controlled a viable and potentially prosperous state, above all with their possession of the Sawād of Iraq. They had an army which, though it was very expensive, was probably the most effective in the Muslim world. Total numbers are difficult to estimate but, faced with the crisis of the attack on Baghdad by the Qarāmiṭa in 315/927,[3] the Abbasids were able to muster some 40,000 troops of variable quality. The army of al-Muqtadir used to defend Baghdad and the Sawād of Iraq was therefore about the same size as the Khurāsāni army with whom the early Abbasids had ruled the entire caliphate. The Abbasids also had an unassailable legitimacy as caliphs. Apart from the minor ʿAlid princes of the south Caspian area, no one seriously challenged the right of the Abbasids to be the true caliphs and successors of the Prophet, though what that meant in practice was less clear.

Accession of al-Muqtadir and the Attempted Coup of Ibn al-Muʿtazz

The beginnings of the reign of al-Muqtadir were surrounded by drama and tragedy and the uncertain conditions of his accession to the caliphate cast a shadow over his rule that was never completely removed. Succession to the caliphate under the Abbasids was always a precarious business, with few fixed rules. In theory at least, there were two ways of becoming caliph, designation by the previous ruler or election. Under the early Abbasid caliphate, designation, usually the designation of one or two of his sons by the previous caliph, had been the normal practice. After the triumph of al-Maʾmūn, however, caliphs had increasing been 'elected'

[3] The Qarāmiṭa, sometimes called the Carmathians in older scholarship, were an Ismaʿīlī group who had attracted a considerable following among the Bedouin of the Syrian desert and north-east Arabia from around 286/899. They were violently opposed to the Abbāsids, and their ability to retreat to their desert fastnesses when faced by the armies of the state meant that they were very difficult to resist. For the history of the movement see the article 'Ḳarmaṭī' by W. Madelung in P. Bearman et al., eds., *Encyclopaedia of Islam. New Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1960–2009; henceforward *EI2*), IV, 660–665.

by elements with in the ruling establishment, a combination of viziers and other civilian administrators and senior elements in the military. Al-Muqtadir's father, al-Muʿtaḍid, had essentially attained the caliphate by a *coup d'état*, when, supported by his *ghilmān*, he pushed aside the children of the legitimate caliph al-Muʿtamid, and took power in his own name. He was in a strong enough position to designate his own son, al-Muktafī, who took power without any opposition. Al-Muktafī, perhaps because he was still a young man at the time of his death or perhaps because he was not yet strong enough to assert his authority, made no clear designation, although some said that he had nominated his brother Jaʿfar (al-Muqtadir) *in articulo mortis*.

Nobody doubted that the new caliph would be a member of the Abbasid family. At al-Muktafī's death there were many Abbasid princes in Baghdad who might in theory be considered eligible, but in practice only the direct descendants of the caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 232–47/847–61) were in the running. That still left a number of men to choose from. This time the power to nominate the new ruler was assumed by the vizier and his advisers among the *kuttāb* (secretaries).

There are two main accounts of his accession and the subsequent attempt to depose him and replace him by ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Muʿtazz, those of Miskawayh[4] and ʿArīb,[5] who bases his account on al-Ṣūlī.[6] According to Miskawayh's account, when al-Muktafī was dying the vizier al-ʿAbbās b. al-Ḥasan began to consider whom he should appoint as caliph. The vizier would ride every day from the palace of the viziers in al-Mukharrim to the Dār al-Sulṭān (caliphal palace) where the caliph resided.[7] Every day he would be accompanied by a senior member of the *kitāba* (secretariat) whose advice he would seek. Muḥammad b. Dāwud b. al-Jarrāḥ was clear: he recommended the appointment of ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Muʿtazz.

Ibn al-Muʿtazz was a grandson of the caliph al-Mutawakkil and son of the short-lived caliph al-Muʿtazz (r. 252–5/866–9).[8] He had been born in 247/861, the year of his grandfather's assassination, and was now some

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[4] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 2–5.

[5] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 19–23

[6] Al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 21–23. The context and implications of al-Ṣūlī's original account in contrast with Miskawayh's are further discussed in Part I, Chapter 2. See also Letizia Osti, "Abbāsid Intrigues: Competing for Influence at the Caliph's Court', *al-Masāq* 20 (2008): 5–15. On the interpretation of Miskawayh's narrative for the position of the vizier, see Part II, Chapter 3.

[7] For the locations, see Map 3 and Appendix.

[8] For Ibn al-Muʿtazz, see the important recent assessment by Julia Bray, 'Ibn al-Muʿtazz and Politics: The Question of the *Fuṣūl Qiṣār*', *Oriens* 38 (2010): 107–143

47 years old. After his father's unhappy death he had been brought up by his grandmother, Qabīḥa, and had been given an excellent literary education. He made a reputation as a poet and literary critic and was prominent in court circles, writing panegyric poetry about his first cousin, the caliph al-Muʿtaḍid. He would have come into contact with many of the military men and *kuttāb* of al-Muʿtaḍid's court but, in common with other Abbasid princes, he had no direct experience of politics. There is every reason to believe that he would have made a good if not outstanding caliph.

The next day the vizier rode with Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. al-Furāt. When asked to give his advice, Ibn al-Furāt was extremely cautious: after all, it could be very dangerous to suggest the name of a man who did not eventually succeed. But the vizier pressed him and Ibn al-Furāt replied with a little homily:

> For God's sake do not appoint to the post a man who knows the house of one, the fortune of another, the gardens of a third, the slave girl of a fourth, the estate of a fifth and the horse of a sixth; nor one who has mixed with the people, has had experience of affairs, has gone through his apprenticeship, and made calculations of people's fortunes.[9]

Ibn al-Furāt, who is also the narrator at this stage, says that the vizier asked him to repeat these words several times and then asked him whom he should appoint as caliph, to which he answers that it should be Jaʿfar son of al-Muʿtaḍid. The vizier objected that he was only a child but Ibn al-Furāt retorted that he was al-Muʿtaḍid's son and besides, he went on,

> Why should you appoint a man who will govern, who knows our resources, who will administer affairs himself and regard himself as independent? Why do you not entrust this matter to someone who will leave you to manage it?[10]

The next day he asked ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā, who refused to be drawn, and there is no record of what the fourth man consulted, Muḥammad b. ʿAbdūn said.

When the caliph al-Muktafī died on 12 Dhū l-Qaʿda 295/13 August 908, the vizier appointed Jaʿfar and a palace *ghulām*, Ṣāfī al-Ḥuramī, was sent to bring him down the river from the palace of Ibn Ṭāhir, where lesser members of the royal house lived (or were confined). Already there were signs of trouble to come. As usual in the Baghdad of the time they went by boat and when the boat was passing the house of the vizier, his *ghilmān*

[9] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 3.
[10] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 3.

called to the party to stop and come in but Ṣāfī ordered the boatman to ignore them, saying that he would cut his head off there and then if he accepted the invitation. Ṣāfī was afraid that the vizier was in the process of changing his mind and that this was a trap. The important thing was to get the young prince to the Dār al-Khilāfa (caliphal palace) as soon as possible since once ensconced there he would be surrounded by the court *ghilmān* and would be in effective control. And so it proved to be: the vizier came to him and he was established.

Miskawayh's narrative is vivid and compelling. It purports to include the actual words of the vizier and Ibn al-Furāt and it may indeed do so. The author gives no source for this narrative but at other points he does say he made use of the work of one Ibn al-Zanjī. Ibn al-Zanjī was a *kātib* working in the entourage of Ibn al-Furāt and it is not impossible that he heard this story and wrote it down. On the other hand it is clear that it is a carefully crafted report. Like much classical Arabic historical writing, it advances the argument by narrative and direct speech rather than discursive analysis. Miskawayh is interested in showing how this apparently inexplicable and, as far as the author was concerned, disastrous decision was made. He is also concerned to put the blame on the arrogant and manipulative Ibn al-Furāt, so sparing his own hero, ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā, from any criticism. But he also puts his finger on some important points. Jaʿfar may have been young but he was the son of the great al-Muʿtaḍid. He would thus command the loyalty of the caliph's military retainers, who effectively controlled the army and the palace guard. They would almost certainly react violently if they felt that the caliphate was passing to another branch of the royal family and that their position was threatened. Ṣāfī's role is to show how determined they were to act swiftly while everyone else hesitated.

When we turn to ʿArīb's narrative we find ourselves in a very different mode. ʿArīb compiled a *mukhtaṣar* (abridgement) of al-Ṭabarī's *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, his immense history of the early Islamic world and continued the great man's work down to the year 320. Despite the fact that he lived in al-Andalus and never, as far as we can tell, ever visited the Middle East, his work is astonishingly well informed and detailed. Like al-Ṭabarī, but in contrast to Miskawayh, his work is a systematic annal, eschewing dramatic narrative for a more methodical record. For the caliphate of al-Muqtadir, he uses many accounts from the chronicle of a contemporary and courtier of the caliph, al-Ṣūlī's *Kitāb al-awrāq*, divesting it from its autobiographical nature and of much of the poetry it contains. In a real sense, ʿArīb normalizes al-Muqtadir's reign, making it seem much more

like a continuation of what had come before in contrast to the dramatic, deeply moralizing and didactic narratives given to us by Miskawayh.

In ʿArīb's narrative, the vizier al-ʿAbbās b. al-Ḥasan plays the major role in the choosing of the new caliph but, in contrast to Miskawayh's account, Ibn al-Furāt is nowhere to be seen. Al-Muktafī, we are told, became sick with stomach pains and vomiting to the extent that he lost consciousness and did not even notice when Ṣāfī al-Ḥuramī took his signet ring from his finger and handed it over to al-ʿAbbās. Al-ʿAbbās realized that the crisis was near and he needed to act fast. His main concern was to prevent Ibn al-Muʿtazz, who must have been discussed as a possible caliph, from succeeding 'because of the great fear (unexplained) that he had of him'.[11] He therefore turned to Muḥammad b. al-Muʿtamid. Muḥammad was the son of the caliph al-Muʿtamid (r. 256–79/870–92) who had lived virtually powerless in Samarra while his brother al-Muwaffaq ran the state and led the war against the Zanj. At the death of al-Muʿtamid, al-Muʿtaḍid, son of al-Muwaffaq, seized power, effectively depriving al-Muʿtamid's son of what he might have felt to have been his birthright. Appointing him as caliph would mark a major movement of power away from al-Muʿtaḍid's *ghilmān* and court officials.

Negotiations began. Both parties proceeded with caution. Muḥammad was summoned to the vizier's palace by night and with him the chief *qāḍī* (judge), Muḥammad b. Yūsuf, on his own. Al-ʿAbbās offered to swear the oath of allegiance (*bayʿa*) to Muḥammad but only on condition that Muḥammad take an oath to him: if he wanted al-ʿAbbās as his vizier, then he would serve him faithfully to the best of his abilities; if he did not, then he should promise not to attack his person or his property or to lay hands on anyone else because of him. It was a prudent move: torturing deposed viziers to extract money was an all too common practice. Muḥammad demurred, saying that his word was enough and an oath was unnecessary and pointless; the *qāḍī* agreed with him, and al-ʿAbbās, reluctantly accepted.[12]

There was, however, another problem: al-Muktafī was not yet dead even though, as al-ʿAbbās said, 'in his last moments'. Muḥammad, prudently as it turned out, refused to allow the oath to be taken to him before the old caliph's death and, once again, the *qāḍī* agreed with him. Sure enough, the caliph rallied and recovered consciousness. Ṣāfī al-Ḥuramī suggested that

[11] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 19.
[12] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 20.

he send for both Ibn al-Muʿtazz and Ibn al-Muʿtamid and take them into custody in the palace because people were talking about both of them as possible caliphs. Al-Muktafī then went on to ask whether either of them had been given the oath of allegiance 'against me' to which Ṣāfī replied in the negative and added that the gossip was not their fault and he should not concern himself with them. These words made a deep impression on the dying caliph who was afraid that power would pass from 'his father's children'.[13]

In the event, Ibn al-Muʿtamid had a stroke after a quarrel with Ibn ʿAmrwayh, the *ṣāḥib al-shurṭa* (chief of police) and was therefore ruled out as a possible caliph. Miskawayh, as we have seen, also reports this but ʿArīb dates it securely to Ramaḍān 295, that is before al-Muktafī's death, which occurred on 13 Dhū l-Qaʿda. Before his death, however, al-Muktafī had enquired about his young brother Jaʿfar. When he was informed that he had reached puberty (*bāligh*) he summoned the *qāḍī*s and told them to witness that he had made Jaʿfar his heir.

So it was in an atmosphere of intrigue and suspicion that al-Muqtadir, then aged just 13 years and 25 days, was acknowledged as caliph. His accession had ultimately depended on his brother's nomination and the determination of al-Muktafī and the *ghilmān* of the palace to keep the highest office in the hands of the children of al-Muʿtaḍid. The oath of allegiance was taken on the hands of Ṣāfī al-Ḥuramī and Fātik al-Muʿtaḍidī. The vizier and his son looked on.

The new government was inaugurated in the traditional fashion, giving an impression of order and continuity. Al-ʿAbbās was appointed as vizier and duly wrote to all the provincial officials with the news. Al-Muktafī had left substantial sums of money in the treasury,[14] which meant that there was no problem in paying the donatives to the army which had become standard practice in the Abbasid period, three months' pay being given to the cavalry, six months' to the infantry.[15] Robes of honour were given to courtiers and military men and the new caliph revived the tradition of giving cash and food-handouts to the Banū Hāshim.[16] An interesting and slightly surprising manifestation of this government piety concerned

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[13] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 21.

[14] Al-Ṭabarī, quoted by ʿArīb, says that there were 15 million *dīnār* in the treasury; al-Ṣūlī, in the same source, says that there were 600,000 in the public treasury (ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 22–23).

[15] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 23, presumably because the infantry were paid less.

[16] That is the family of the Prophet, including the Abbāsids and the descendants of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.

some market buildings erected by al-Muktafī in the square close to Bāb al-Ṭāq in Baghdad.[17] These had been erected on open ground where many poor people used to come to sell their goods without charge. With the erection of this new *sūq*, they were obliged to pay rent or give up trading. A complaint was made to the new caliph. He enquired what the rent on these properties amounted to. On being informed that it was 1,000 *dīnār* per month (the sum seems very high, perhaps exaggerated to emphasize the piety of the deed) he declared that it was a trifling thing compared with the well-being of the Muslims and ordered that the offending buildings be demolished and the site restored to its previous condition. All then was business as usual.[18]

The establishment of al-Muqtadir as caliph did not end the conspiracies and infighting, and those who had supported the candidature of Ibn al-Muʿtazz remained determined to act when the time was ripe. Their determination was increased by the behaviour of the vizier whose conduct became increasingly arrogant as his handling of business grew slapdash. According to ʿArīb, a group of commanders, secretaries and judges met at the time of al-Muktafī's death to discuss whom they should appoint as caliph and they chose Ibn al-Muʿtazz. The chief conspirators are named as Muḥammad b. Dāwud b. al-Jarrāḥ and the vizier al-ʿAbbās b. al-Ḥasan. However, al-ʿAbbās began to distance himself from the group, allegedly because he wanted to try out al-Muqtadir in the hope that he would be able to control and influence him.

Some four months after al-Muqtadir's accession, the conspirators decided to act. The first move was to kill the vizier, and on 19 Rabīʿ I, 296/16 December, 908 al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān, the leader of the Ḥamdānid family of the Jazīra who supplied some troops for the Abbasid army, led a small group who surprised and murdered him as he was riding to his garden outside the city. He then went on to attempt to seize the young caliph at the Ḥasanī palace where he and his military entourage were established. Al-Muqtadir had been playing polo but he now fled to the protection of the palace walls. After a morning spent trying to enter the palace, al-Ḥusayn abruptly retired and, without warning the rest of the conspirators, retreated with his men to the seat of his power in Mosul. In doing so, he left the supporters of Ibn al-Muʿtazz without any credible military support.

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[17] For the location, see Map 3 and Appendix.

[18] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 24; al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 26 and 31.

They now gathered in a house in al-Mukharrim to depose al-Muqtadir formally and pronounce Ibn al-Muʿtazz caliph. There were good legal reasons for this move and at least one of the *qāḍī*s of Baghdad was clear that al-Muqtadir's appointment was illegal because of his youth. The chief supporter of the new caliph was Ibn al-Jarrāḥ, but others had their doubts: one of the *qāḍī*s was executed because he objected and the new caliph himself had qualms about the fate of al-Muqtadir. The conspirators are depicted as having doubts and not being single-minded and determined enough to achieve their ends.

Meanwhile, al-Muqtadir's military supporters in the Ḥasanī palace decided to take the initiative. They were led by the *ḥājib* (chamberlain) Sawsan who encouraged the other leaders of the military, Ṣāfī al-Ḥuramī and Muʾnis al-Khādim (the eunuch, later known as al-Muẓaffar, the victorious) and Muʾnis al-Khāzin (the treasurer) not to give up so easily and to defend the young caliph. Muʾnis al-Khādim took the offensive and led a party of *ghilmān* in boats up the Tigris to the house where Ibn al-Muʿtazz and his supporters had gathered. There is some confusion about what happened next. Miskawayh describes Ibn al-Muʿtazz' supporters as fleeing at the mere sight of the enemy,[19] ʿArīb has Muʾnis' men pouring arrows on them and forcing them to flee.[20] The coup collapsed as all the conspirators scattered, fleeing to hiding places in the city.

In the aftermath of the collapse of the coup, Ibn al-Furāt, who had kept a low profile throughout and was the only senior secretary untainted by any contact with the conspirators, was appointed vizier and he was escorted from his home in Sūq al-ʿAṭash to the palace.[21] The sources suggest that Ibn al-Furāt tried to pursue a conciliatory policy and was allowed to release some of the prisoners, although a large reward was offered to anyone who brought in Ibn al-Jarrāḥ. A further donative, the same size as the one paid at al-Muqtadir's accession, was paid to the troops, who must have felt very satisfied with their day's work. Then the new vizier set about making government appointments.

Although ʿArīb tells us of the arrest and execution of some more of the conspirators,[22] he never mentions the fate of Ibn al-Jarrāḥ or Ibn al-Muʿtazz himself. Instead, for him the big story is the settling of scores among the military with the death of Sawsan the *ḥājib* who had, apparently, done so

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19 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 6.
20 ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 28.
21 For the location, see Map 3 and Appendix.
22 ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 29–30.

much to support al-Muqtadir's cause. He had become tyrannical and arrogant, so al-Muqtadir took the advice of his vizier Ibn al-Furāt and made an offer to Sawsan: he could have whatever men, money and arms he wanted and he could take control of any office (*'amal*) he wanted as long as he left the palace. Sawsan refused, saying 'I came to this power by the sword and I will only leave it by the sword'. Ibn al-Furāt advised that he should be killed. One day returning from the *maydān*, he was ambushed by a group of men led by Ṣāfī al-Ḥuramī. His sword was taken from him, his *ghilmān* dispersed and he was bundled into a house where he died a few days later.

The Years of (Comparative) Tranquility, 296–311/909–23

The first half of al-Muqtadir's reign was a period of some stability, certainly no more disturbed or calamitous that the reigns of his predecessors. Until 311/923–4 the frontiers of the caliphate remained reasonably stable, the Fatimids were prevented from taking Egypt, while Fārs and much of western Iran was brought back under the control of Baghdad and the city itself was mostly safe and secure. The main political events were the appointment and fall of viziers. These were major political upheavals since a change in vizier meant widespread changes in government and administration. Each candidate for the vizierate had, so to speak, his own team who would expect to be rewarded with offices when he was appointed and who could expect to be examined and fined (at best) when he was deposed.[23] As Bowen puts it:

> The Vizier had the appointing of all assistants in office, and it was the practice for him to choose for those posts those whom he knew to be his friends. Every past or prospective Vizier was thus surrounded by his faction, or clique of supporters. When he rose to power, they expected to rise too; and when he fell, they expected to save themselves as best they might from the disgrace, and the actual persecution, which was then the whole party's lot. It was customary at such a time to exact an indemnity from each official that was caught: he was forced, often under torture, to sign a bond in satisfaction, and then kept in confinement until at least a certain proportion of the sum was paid. One who aspired to become vizier would often give a guarantee to the caliph that he would extract a definite sum from the fallen faction.[24]

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[23] See also Part II, Chapter 3.
[24] Bowen, *Good Vizier*, 27–28.

The most important function, indeed in some ways the only important function of the vizier and his team, was to provide sufficient revenue to keep the caliph and his household in the style to which they were accustomed and to pay the military regularly. The problem was that they were obliged to strive to do this on a continuously diminishing resource base. Until 311/923–4 this was almost doable, but after that the administration and the whole caliphate was overwhelmed by the financial crisis which eventually destroyed it.

The first vizierate of Ibn al-Furāt (three years, eight months and 13 days according to Miskawayh or twelve days according to ʿArīb) saw the apogee of the power of the caliphate in this period when it might have seemed that the reign would be long and prosperous.[25] The *ḥajj* was conducted in peace and security and every summer the *ṣāʾifa* (summer expedition against the Byzantines) set out to raid Byzantine territory. The tortuous affairs of Fārs were finally sorted out and the province brought back under the authority of the central government: it was to be an increasingly important source of revenue for the government when so many other provinces slipped from its control or, as Miskawayh puts it, were 'closed to the *sulṭān*'.[26]

Another important achievement of this period was reaching an agreement with al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān who had fled to Mosul after the failure to storm the palace of al-Muqtadir. The government sent 4,000 troops under the command of Qāsim b. Simā to pursue him but they also engaged the services of al-Ḥusayn's brother, Abū l-Hayjāʾ, later himself to be an important figure in the army of the caliphate. al-Ḥusayn defeated the joint force but used his victory as a bargaining counter to secure an *amān* (safe conduct). Another brother Ibrāhīm acted as intermediary, al-Ḥusayn was given an *amān* and allowed to settle on the West Bank of the Tigris in Baghdad though, as Miskawayh notes, he was not permitted to enter the palace and he was soon dispatched to take control in Qumm, well away from his native power-base in the Jazīra.[27]

The same policy of reconciling potential opponents and giving them government responsibilities was pursued in Azerbaijan and Armenia. Here there was no question of using military force against Ibn Abī l-Sāj, who was both too powerful and too distant to be directly attacked.

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[25] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 20; ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 37; al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 28.

[26] The word *sulṭān* is used by writers in this period to mean 'the authorities' or 'the government'. It is not until the next century that it is regularly used as the title of a ruler.

[27] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 15; ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 30–31.

Negotiations were conducted by Ibn Abī l-Sāj's Christian secretary, Ibn Dulayl, who came to Baghdad in Jumādā II, 296/February 909. An agreement was reached: Ibn Abī l-Sāj was to retain all the revenues of the provinces in exchange for an annual payment of 120,000 *dīnār*. A robe of honour was bestowed on Ibn Dulayl and he took another one for his master.[28]

Good, though fairly distant, relations were established with the Sāmānids of Khurāsān. Both parties had a common interest in opposing the attempts of the Ṣaffārids to establish their power in Fārs, Kirmān and Sijistān but there was nearly a diplomatic crisis when Ismāʿīl, the Sāmānid ruler, protested when his *ghulām* Bāris escaped to Baghdad with 4,000 of his followers, requesting asylum, having quarrelled with his master who had pursued him as far as Rayy. Ibn al-Furāt managed to defuse the situation and Bāris was taken into the service of the government and sent to Diyār Rabīʿa in the Jazīra. In Ṣafar 299/October 911 Ismāʿīl the Sāmānid wrote to say that he had conquered the Ṣaffārids' base in Sistān and taken one of their leaders and his followers into custody.[29] The prisoners were sent to Baghdad and paraded through the streets on elephants, so allowing the government to display its power and influence to the people of Baghdad while the messengers who had brought the prisoners were sent back with presents and robes of honour.

In Dhū l-Ḥijja 299/July 912 Ibn al-Furāt's administration fell. The immediate reasons for this is said to have been a shortage of ready cash to buy animals for slaughter at the time of the *ḥajj*, leaving the vizier no alternative but to apply to the caliph for a loan from the private purse. It was the first sign of the financial problems which were to come. Ibn al-Furāt certainly had many enemies and there were many more who resented his wealth and arrogance. Al-Ṣūlī, who was an eyewitness to the events, said that Ibn al-Furāt was the only vizier who had ever amassed a fortune of 10 million (*dirham*).[30] At the same time the state finances had deteriorated alarmingly. Ibn al-Furāt had spent lavishly to consolidate the new regime. The two donatives to the army, on top of the normal salaries, was certainly expensive and the war in Fārs, so beneficial in the long run by bringing the area back under government administration, must have been a heavy cost. But the real structural problem seems to have been

[28] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 16; ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 31.
[29] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 16, 19–20; ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 36.
[30] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 37; al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 82.

the irresponsible attitude of the caliph and the court to fiscal difficulties. Miskawayh was clear where the fault lay:

> Al-Muqtadir devoted all his time to his amusements, avoided male companions, even minstrels, and consorted with women so that slaves and women became supreme in the empire (*al-dawla*). Abū l-Ḥasan (Ibn al-Furāt) ceaselessly expended the money in the private treasury (*bayt māl al-khāṣṣa*) and squandered it until he exhausted the whole.[31]

Some of this can be discounted, the casual misogyny which blames all the ills of the state on the influence of women is a trope which runs through much of the historiography of the period, but it also points to a real problem.[32] The caliphal administration worked best under rulers like al-Muʿtaḍid and his son al-Muktafī, who were personally involved and understood the problems and limitations of the economy and revenue gathering. A ruler like al-Muqtadir, who was, so to speak, an internal absentee, had no real appreciation of the constraints and limitations of the financial resources. If a vizier ran short of money to pay the court and the army, there was always another greedy or reckless bureaucrat who would claim that the present vizier was incompetent or dishonest or both and that if he himself was entrusted with power, he could provide the court with all the wealth it could desire.

The arrest of Ibn al-Furāt began a pattern which was to become depressingly common. His houses were pillaged, his women violated (by the police, ʿArīb alleges).[33] He himself was spared but many of his assistants were put to the torture. When a vizier like Ibn al-Furāt fell, most of his subordinates also lost their jobs, their property and sometimes their lives.[34] Even if their master died or decide to retire, they would still form a group determined to be avenged and manoeuvre themselves back into power.

Ibn al-Furāt may have been extravagant and too susceptible to pressure from the court but his successor was much worse. In a way this was strange because Muḥammad b. ʿUbayd Allāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khāqān came from a long line of viziers and bureaucrats and it might be imagined that

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[31] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 13. See Part I, Chapter 2 for other, similar assessments.

[32] See also Part III, Chapter 7.

[33] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 36–37.

[34] On the discharge procedures see also Part II, Chapter 3 and Maaike van Berkel, 'The Vizier and the Harem Stewardess: Mediation in a Discharge Case at the Court of Caliph al-Muqtadir', in *'Abbasid Studies II: Occasional Papers of the School of 'Abbasid Studies, Leuven, 28 June–1 July, 2004*, ed. John Nawas (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 303–318.

he would have been well trained and experienced.[35] In fact he seems to have been incompetent and felt obliged to spend most of his time trying to stay in favour with the court and countering the intrigues of his enemies. The day-to-day administration he entrusted to his son ʿAbd Allāh who, according to Miskawayh,[36] was given to drinking and only paid attention to the army and to making appointments. Both Miskawayh and ʿArīb describe an administration which was descending into farce.[37] Letters were unanswered and important decisions delayed until it was too late. ʿArīb talks of eleven governors being appointed to the small Iraqi town of Bādurāyā in as many months while Miskawayh speaks of seven governors appointed to the district of Māh al-Kūfa in the Zagros mountains within 20 days and of them all meeting in a *khān* (inn) in the town of Ḥulwān all on their way to take up their position.

Al-Khāqānī's administration only survived for a year. The end came when he was unable to pay the army and was forced to ask the caliph for a loan from the privy purse, a sure sign of failure. His short and unsuccessful tenure had made it clear that only men with considerable talents and experience could succeed in this difficult and dangerous office. There were only two men at this stage with the track records which would make them suitable candidates. One, of course, was Ibn al-Furāt; people may have had suspicions about his honesty but his competence was in no doubt. The other was the leader of the Banū l-Jarrāḥ group ʿAlī b.ʿĪsā. The Banū l-Jarrāḥ had been implicated in the conspiracy of Ibn al-Muʿtazz but ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā had been allowed to retire to Mecca and live a life of quiet piety. He was now summoned back to Baghdad to take over the vizierate. The accounts of ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā's management of the finances of the caliphate read like a textbook description of prudent and honest financial management,[38] and it seems as if he was able to restore the revenues of the state and cut down on the expenditure to the extent that the books balanced and, as he himself pointed out to the caliph, he made no demands on the privy purse. Nonetheless, his attempts to cut down on court expenses and his apparent discourtesy to influential women in the royal household led to his dismissal, after four years in office, on 8 Dhū l-Hijja 304/2 June 917.

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[35] See also Part II, Chapter 3.

[36] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 23–24.

[37] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 38–39.

[38] See, for example, Miskawayh's account of the disciplining of the surveyors of the Nahrawān district (*Tajārib*, I, 29–30).

His replacement was Ibn al-Furāt, who now became vizier for the second time. The highlight of his period in office came with the magnificent reception given to two ambassadors from the Byzantine empire in 305/917–18.[39] The processions and court appearances allowed the vizier to demonstrate to all the wealth and power that the Abbasid caliphate could, despite its difficulties, still command. Despite this public relations triumph, his short tenure of office was not a success. It seems that he had made too many promises to the court which in the end he lacked the resources to fulfil. On top of this came the humiliating defeat of the general Mu'nis by Ibn Abī l-Sāj: not only was this a serious setback for the Abbasid army but it also allowed the vizier's enemies to suggest that he was secretly in league with the rebel. News of the defeat arrived in Baghdad in Ṣafar 306/July–August 918 and in Rabīʿ II/October, Ibn al-Furāt was dismissed and taken into custody.

The choice of a replacement was not easy. Al-Muqtadir might have looked to ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā, now in comfortable confinement in the palace, but he could hardly be reinstated so soon after having been dismissed without leading people to question the caliph's judgement. So al-Muqtadir consulted ʿAlī and in the end the choice fell on Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās. Ḥāmid was a well-known figure. For many years he had been a very successful tax-farmer, first in Fārs and then in Wāsiṭ, which was now his power base. He was now invited to Baghdad to take up office. It immediately became apparent that the qualities required of a vizier were not those of a tax-farmer. He is portrayed in the sources as a cheerful buffoon, though with a cruel edge, and no understanding of court etiquette. The problem was solved to some extent by appointing ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā as his deputy, in effect handing over the administration to the old vizier while Ḥāmid enjoyed the title but not much else.

This arrangement soon came under intense strain because Ḥāmid resented his effective exclusion from power while ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā resumed control with the same careful attention to financial detail and rigour as he had previously employed. Meanwhile the caliph continued to consult secretly with Ibn al-Furāt, who was now confined in the same comfortable quarters in the palace that ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā had previously inhabited. This period was not without its successes as far as the wider caliphate was concerned. Another Fatimid attack on Egypt was beaten off in 307/919–20, although the expense of the defence of the country meant that the

[39] See also Part III, Chapter 6.

Baghdad government received no revenue from its taxes for two years. In the same year, in a dramatic reversal of fortunes, Ibn Abī l-Sāj was defeated and captured by Mu'nis al-Muẓaffar and brought in triumph to Baghdad where he was kept in honourable confinement. While both these successes demonstrated the continuing military power of the caliphate, they were at the same time expensive and tended to exacerbate rather than solve the short-term financial problems of the government.

In the next year, 308/920–1, popular riots broke out in Baghdad. These were provoked by misgovernment and above all by the high price of grain. The problem was made worse, if not actually caused, by the activities of the vizier, Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās. In order to recuperate vast sums he had agreed to pay the caliph so as to retain his office (and discredit ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā whom he had now come to loathe), he had been hoarding grain in his own warehouses on the Tigris to force up the prices. There was serious disorder in the city, preachers in the main mosques were pelted with bricks and the houses of leading members of the government, including Ḥāmid himself and the chief of police, were attacked. Attempts to crush the opposition by force were unsuccessful and became impossible when discontent at the high prices spread to the military. It was at this point that the caliph intervened and ordered that the grain stores belonging to Ḥāmid and the Queen Mother should be opened. Ḥāmid himself retired to his base in Wāsiṭ and tried to make up for his mistakes by sending as much grain as he could find to Baghdad.

The next year, 310/922–3, saw things becoming calmer in Baghdad at least. This was partly because of the appointment of a new chief of police, Nāzūk, who dealt with disorder more effectively. He also made himself popular by taking action against the undisciplined and criminal elements in the military.[40]

By this time al-Muqtadir had reigned for 15 years (295–310/908–23). Things had not been easy but the caliphate was still powerful and in many ways well governed. The business of government continued at an everyday level. From Basra in the south to Diyār Bakr in the north, governors were appointed and dismissed. The *ḥajj* was performed every year in the name of the caliph, although he himself never led it in person.[41] Although the last formal *ṣā'ifa* seems to have been in 299/912, the Byzantine frontier remained fairly stable. In 297/892–3 the government paid for major

[40] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 110.

[41] The last reigning caliph to lead the *ḥajj* was Hārūn al-Rashīd over a century earlier.

repairs to the frontier fortress town of Āmid (Diyār Bakr) and the works were commemorated by a series of inscriptions on the city gates in the name of al-Muqtadir.[42] The Fatimids had been prevented from taking Egypt and Ibn Abī l-Sāj was safely confined in Baghdad. The Qarāmiṭa who had caused so much trouble along the desert frontiers of Iraq and sacked Basra had been won over by ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā's conciliatory policy and were, in Bowen's phrase, 'content with a prosperous inactivity'.[43]

It is true that the financial position was a cause for continuous anxiety: in 306/918 ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā, working on the figures for 304/916–17, the last complete year available to him, calculated that that there was an annual deficit of some 2 million *dīnār* or about one-seventh of the entire budget.[44] A budget deficit on that scale was unsustainable. There were none of the mechanisms for public borrowing which modern states, and indeed later medieval European states, would use to manage the deficit. The only choices were reducing state expenditure, which proved very difficult even in peacetime because of the political opposition it aroused, or new sources of income. The most immediate new sources of income were the extravagant promises made by incoming administrators and the increasingly brutal fining and torturing of dismissed officials.

The Abbasid caliphate still had a role in the wider Muslim world beyond the lands over which the authorities (*sulṭān*) exercised direct control. Perhaps the most important of these areas was greater Khurāsān, once the stronghold of Abbasid support, now effectively under Sāmānid rule. There is no evidence that the caliphs enjoyed any practical authority in the area. No Sāmānid ruler ever seems to have come to Baghdad in person. Nonetheless, the Sāmānids continued to acknowledge the Abbasid caliphate in the *khuṭba* (Friday sermon in the main mosque) and on their coinage, while they themselves were content with the title of *amīr* (prince). The idea that the Sāmānids still had a legitimate interest in the affairs of the caliphate is suggested by the role that they might have played in the accession of Ibn al-Muʿtazz to the caliphate.

On the accession of al-Muqtadir, the Sāmānid ruler Ismāʿīl b. Aḥmad had written to Baghdad, presumably to acknowledge the new ruler. He

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[42] See Max van Berchem and Josef Strzygowski, *Amida* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1910). These are the most impressive monumental inscriptions to survive from the entire early Abbāsid period.

[43] Bowen, *Good Vizier*, 205.

[44] Bowen, *Good Vizier*, 200, quoting al-Ṣābi', *al-Wuzarā'*, 323, and Ibn Ḥawqal (d. after 378/988), *Kitāb al-masālik wa-l-mamālik*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1873), 128.

also sent his *ḥājib*, his *ghulām* Bāris. At the time of his coup, the supporters of Ibn al-Muʿtazz hoped that he and his followers would provide a counterweight to the military power of the *ghilmān* of al-Muʿtaḍid, who formed the core of the army support for al-Muqtadir. In the event, Bāris' arrival was long delayed and the attempted coup in favour of Ibn al-Muʿtazz had proceeded without him,[45] but the incident shows that the Sāmānids still took an active interest in Abbasid politics. Abbasid recognition still meant something to the Sāmānids and when Naṣr b. Aḥmad succeeded his murdered father as Sāmānid ruler in 301/914, al-Muqtadir sent a document (*kitāb*) formally confirming him as ruler.[46]

Relations with the Sāmānids remained relatively cordial. When the caliph's ambassador Ibn Faḍlān and his companions travelled to Khurāsān in 309/921 on his way to the Rūs, they had to travel in disguise through the area controlled by the Shiʿi dynasties of the area south of the Caspian Sea, but they were welcomed and treated with respect by the Sāmānids.[47] The only major source of dispute was control of the strategic city of Rayy. In 314/926–7 Miskawayh laconically records that Rayy was attached to (*ʿuqida ilā*) the *ṣāḥib* of Khurāsān who came there.[48] There was talk of the Sāmānids paying some sort of tribute but we are given no indication that there was any agreement or that any money was ever handed over. It seems that this marked the end of any real attempt by the Abbasid government to exercise any authority over the city though Sāmānid rule there continued to be challenged by the Daylamites and others.

Despite the lack of resources, there is some evidence that the government of al-Muqtadir was attempting to spread Abbasid influence even further afield, beyond the borders of the Islamic world. There are signs of a policy of promoting the Abbasid caliph as spokesman for the Muslim community in relations with the non-Muslim world. One example of this was the reception of the Byzantine ambassadors in Baghdad in the year 305/917–18 masterminded by the vizier Ibn al-Furāt. The ambassadors do not seem to have been men of much consequence in the Byzantine hierarchy and the subject of the negotiations was relatively routine, the ransom and exchange of prisoners on each side, but the reception of the ambassadors was lavish and, perhaps more importantly, very well publicized.

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45 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 4–5.

46 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 33.

47 Aḥmad Ibn Faḍlān (d. early fourth/tenth century), *Ibn Faḍlān's Reisebericht*, ed. Ahmed Zeki Velidi Togan (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1939), 4.

48 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 148–149.

The implication is clear: when it came to negotiations with the ancient enemy, it was the Abbasid caliph who could talk on behalf of the Muslim community as a whole (*umma*) on equal terms with the representatives of the empire.

The best-known example of this diplomatic role is the aforementioned embassy of Ibn Faḍlān to the Volga Bulgars and ultimately to the Rūs. The king of the Ṣaqāliba (Slavs) had written to the caliph to request missionaries to teach his people about Islam and builders to construct a mosque and a stone fortress. Here again, the caliph was acting as leader of the Muslims in negotiations with non-Muslim powers. Ibn Faḍlān, of whose origins and biography we know nothing except what is contained in his narrative, set out from Baghdad and was given respect and friendly support in his mission by both the Sāmānids and the rulers of Khwārazm, the implication being that both these rulers acquiesced in the caliph claiming this role. It is also interesting that we have no record of this mission except in Ibn Faḍlān's own account, which in turn only survived in a single manuscript in eastern Iran. It is possible, therefore, that there were other diplomatic initiatives of this sort which have left no trace in the literature.

The Year of Destruction, 311/923–4

The comparative stability of the first 15 years of the reign were shattered in a series of disasters which came thick and fast in the year 311/923–4 and led people to refer to it as the 'year of destruction' (*sanat al-damār*).[49] The long-term weaknesses of the caliphate, notably the critical financial position and the failure of military leadership, were cruelly exposed by short-term crisis.

The year began (April 923) with the reappointment of Ibn al-Furāt as vizier for the third and, as it turned out, the final time as the result of an intrigue in which he promised to extract vast sums from Ḥāmid, ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā and their supporters. As usual, the caliph was prepared to agree to any measures which increased the income of the *sulṭān*. Ibn al-Furāt immediately set about extracting money from former officials with unparalleled ferocity. He was urged on and encouraged by his son al-Muḥassin. Al-Muḥassin had been put to the torture himself by Ḥāmid after the fall of his father's second administration and it is possible that the experience

[49] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 110.

had warped and embittered him to the extent that he recognized no limits on the cruelty he could inflict on his victims. His father seems to have been unable or unwilling to restrain him and the caliph applauded his efforts as long as they produced money. In the event, little more money could be extracted from the fallen officials while the day-to-day functioning of the financial administration virtually collapsed. Ḥāmid himself was killed, allegedly by poison, and only ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā was allowed to retire to Mecca. Even there he was considered a potential threat and he was moved on to Yemen where he was welcomed by the local Yuʿfirid ruler.

The short-term crisis was caused by the sack of Basra by the Qarāmiṭa. For the previous decade, the Qarāmiṭa had been quiescent in their base in Hajar in Eastern Arabia but under their new ambitious young ruler, Abū Ṭāhir al-Jannābī, they returned to the offensive. Just four days after Ibn al-Furāt became vizier again, they entered and sacked the city of Basra. The local governor was killed and for ten days the rebels moved through the city, burning and looting, retiring each night to their camp outside the city walls. Finally they disappeared into the desert once more, laden with booty and captives. The new vizier immediately sent military forces from Baghdad, but they arrived too late to confront the invaders.

Ibn al-Furāt meanwhile was more concerned to bolster his own political position than to restore the defences of the caliphate. The only man in the state who could really rival him in power and prestige was the general Muʾnis al-Muẓaffar. Muʾnis was consistently an ally and supporter of ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā and the vizier was determined to get him out of the way. He achieved this by sending Muʾnis and his army to Raqqa on the Middle Euphrates where they were to remain, living on the revenues of the Jazīra. His son al-Muḥassin then turned his attention to the other leading figure in the military, the *ḥājib* Naṣr al-Qushūrī, with the intention of having him killed. Naṣr, however, was a wily operator and had powerful friends at court, notably the Queen Mother, and so the caliph hesitated. Eventually he was persuaded that Naṣr was treacherous and was trying to depose him and sanctioned his execution.[50]

Naṣr was saved by the arrival of bad news. The *ḥajj* caravan had been attacked by the Qarāmiṭa while making its way across the Arabian desert. The escort provided by Ibn al-Furāt to guard against this had been defeated and its leader captured. When the news, and the few survivors, reached Baghdad there was a popular uproar. The safe passage of the *ḥajj*

[50] For a detailed analysis of this powerful chamberlain, see also Part III, Chapter 6.

was a fundamental duty of the *sulṭān* and Ibn al-Furāt's government was shown to be not just cruel but incompetent as well, failing in its basic obligations to protect Muslims. There were riots and the pulpits in the mosques were destroyed, a characteristic anti-authority gesture.

The crisis gave the vizier's enemies their chance. Naṣr *al-ḥājib* suggested that Ibn al-Furāt himself might be in league with the Qarāmiṭa and some of the *ghilmān* threatened revolt if Ibn al-Furāt were not arrested. Naṣr summoned Mu'nis to return from his exile in Raqqa and at the beginning of Rabīʿ I 312/June 924 he was back in the capital. It was now all up for Ibn al-Furāt and his son. The military made it clear that the vizier would have to be deposed and many of them were determined that he should be executed to prevent him re-establishing himself for a fourth term because of all the damage he had caused.[51] On 9 Rabīʿ II/16 July, Ibn al-Furāt was arrested and examined by his enemies. Despite his pleading both he and his son al-Muḥassin, who had gone into disguise as a women, were executed, and their heads put into a sack and thrown into the Tigris.

The death of Ibn al-Furāt cured some of the bitter divisions within the administration and the confiscation of his vast wealth and estates had a beneficial, but temporary effect, on the finances of the *sulṭān*; but all the underlying problems still remained. His death also marked the end of the great days of the vizierate. None of his short-serving successors had his ability or attained his political power. Al-Muḥassin's ferocious purges had killed off men who might have risen to be the next generation of ministers. Authority within the state, which had lain with the viziers, now passed to the military and especially to Mu'nis and the *ḥājib* Naṣr, who now became firm allies,[52] and it was they who made and unmade state secretaries. The long struggle between the military and civilian elite to control the resources of the Abbasid state had been decisively won by the military and subsequent viziers could do little more than try to satisfy the financial demands of the army leaders.

The Struggle with the Qarāmiṭa

The political landscape was dominated by the threat of the Qarāmiṭa. The rebels were small in number but extremely mobile, striking apparently at will and without warning and then retreating to their base in Hajar where

[51] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 121.
[52] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 126–127.

the Abbasid forces were quite unable to pursue them. The threat was made more alarming by the rumours, probably untrue, that there were elements in the Abbasid *sulṭān* who were secretly in league with them. The easiest and most effective way of discrediting a political opponent was to accuse him a being a secret Qarmaṭī sympathizer. In 313/926 the *ḥajj* was again attacked by the Qarāmiṭa who then moved on to take Kufa, which was sacked as ruthlessly as Basra had been. Kufa was certainly a city in decline by this stage as its commerce and population had been lured away to Baghdad, but it was still venerated as one of the great ancient cities of Iraq. The failure of the government to defend it was made worse by the fact that it was much closer than Basra to Baghdad and many of the inhabitants of the West Bank of the capital abandoned their homes.

In the event, the Qarāmiṭa returned to Hajar long before Mu'nis and the Abbasid army could reach the stricken city. For the next two years they disappeared, but everyone knew they would return and the *sulṭān* made desperate efforts to restore the finances and recruit more effective soldiers. Two short-serving viziers, al-Khāqānī and al-Khaṣībī, failed to make any real progress with the finances, and no one now presented themselves with the sort of extravagant promises which Ibn al-Furāt and others had made earlier in the caliphate. Al-Khaṣībī, indeed, attracted widespread scorn and dislike for his confiscation of the property of the widows of dead ministers, including the widow of the hated al-Muḥassin, but in truth there was probably no real alternative.

It was in these dire circumstances that al-Muqtadir finally brought himself to accept the advice of Mu'nis and recall ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā to the vizierate. After his exile to Mecca and later Yemen he had been instructed to go to Egypt where, with his usual determination, he set about restoring the financial administration of the country after the disturbances caused by the Fatimid invasions and frequent changes of military governors. He was actually in Damascus when the summons came and he set out reaching the Euphrates at Manbij and then going on by boat, finally reaching Baghdad on 5 Ṣafar 314/11 April 927.[53]

Once he had been formally invested ʿAlī set out to form a government of all the talents he could find, including Kalwadhānī, who had held the administration together under his two incompetent predecessors, al-Faḍl b. Jaʿfar who was a nephew of Ibn al-Furāt and Ibn Muqla, a one-time protégé of Ibn al-Furāt who was brought back from exile in Shīrāz.

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[53] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 129.

The most pressing concern of the new administration was to prepare a military force to defend Iraq against the inevitable attack of the Qarāmiṭa. The task was made more difficult by the Byzantines, who renewed their attacks on the northern frontier at the same time. It was clear that the established forces in Baghdad were not up to the task of defeating the Qarāmiṭa. More soldiers and to be recruited and, more difficult, paid. The previous vizier al-Khaṣībī had tried to solve the problem by engaging the services of Ibn Abī l-Sāj, who was to lead his army from the cool mountains of Armenia and Azerbaijan to the deserts of Arabia. They were to be paid by assigning them all the revenues of the eastern provinces except Iṣfahān, some 3 million *dīnār* per year. There were a number of reasons why this was a foolish idea; for a start the soldiers were used to an upland environment and had no experience of desert warfare. Secondly, the new commander's new-found loyalty to the Abbasid cause was very doubtful and would certainly survive only as long as he and his men were paid. Ibn Abī l-Sāj now refused to lead them into battle against the Qarāmiṭa until they received their money, and that would take time. ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā tried to persuade Ibn Abī l-Sāj to return to the north but he refused and he and his army settled in Wāsiṭ, where they terrorized and oppressed the local population.

ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā had proposed that a force of some 10,000 men should be recruited from the Bedouin tribes of Asad and Shaybān, on the desert margins of Iraq, who were just as threatened by the Qarāmiṭa as the people of the settled lands. They would be better adapted to desert warfare and, perhaps even more important, they would only cost a quarter of the money demanded by Ibn Abī l-Sāj. But again, this project would take time.

And time was exactly what the new administration did not have. In Ramaḍān 315/October–November 927, just six months after ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā's return to office, the Qarāmiṭa arrived in force, heading once again for Kufa. The vizier immediately recalled Mu'nis, who had set out for the Byzantine frontier, and ordered Ibn Abī l-Sāj to go immediately to Kufa to forestall the Qarāmiṭa. Large quantities of arms and supplies were sent there. But Ibn Abī l-Sāj took his time and the Qarāmiṭa reached the city first, taking it and all the supplies and equipment which had been collected. Despite these setbacks, Ibn Abī l-Sāj was now determined to do battle, confident in his ability to overwhelm the Qarāmiṭa, whose numbers, variously estimated at between 1,500 and 2,300,[54] were vastly smaller than his own. The

[54] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 179.

battle, which took place on 8 Shawwāl 315/7 December, 927, was a fiasco for the government forces. Ibn Abī l-Sāj's men fled and he himself was captured, fighting courageously, and taken to the Qarmaṭī camp.

This unexpected turn of events led to a panic in Baghdad as the population became convinced that the Qarāmiṭa would take the city and it would suffer the terrible fate of Basra and Kufa. ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā who, as vizier, was in overall charge of operations, realized that it was vital for the forces of the *sulṭān* to control the waterways which could offer some protection to the city. In order to do so he had to engage boatmen to serve in the defence. To do this, they needed to be paid: there seems to have been no idea that they might be conscripted or, indeed, that they might volunteer. Everything had to be paid for. In this desperate situation ʿAlī was compelled to ask the caliph and his mother for subventions from their private treasuries. This had always been the kiss of death for the career of viziers but, as ʿAlī pointed out to al-Muqtadir:

> Previous caliphs collected money for the sole purpose of suppressing the enemies of our religion, such as the Khawārij, and protecting Islam and the Muslims. Now since the death of the blessed Prophet no more serious disaster has befallen the Muslims than this. For this man (al-Jannābī) is an infidel who attacked the pilgrims in the year 311/924 in an unheard of fashion. Terror of him has gained possession of the hearts of your servants, and of high and low. Now al-Muʿtaḍid and al-Muktafī hoarded treasure in their private treasury for emergencies of this sort. Not very much remains in the private treasury. Fear God, O Commander of the Faithful, and speak to the Queen Mother, who is a pious and excellent woman and if she has any hoard which she has amassed against any necessity that may overtake her or the empire, then this is the time to bring it out. And if the other thing come about (i.e. no money is forthcoming) you and your household should leave for the remotest parts of Khurāsān.[55]

The speech had its desired effect and the Queen Mother was persuaded to provide half a million *dīnār* for the defence of the city.

After the victory at Kufa, the Qarāmiṭa moved north along the desert side of the Euphrates, looking for an opportunity to cross the river and attack the capital. By 15 Shawwāl/14 December they had reached a place opposite al-Anbār. The defenders of al-Anbār broke down the bridge to prevent the rebels from crossing but a small group managed to do so in boats and then restored the bridge. The Qarāmiṭa now crossed the river but left their baggage, and their prisoner Ibn Abī l-Sāj, on the West Bank. The Abbasid forces then burned the bridge at night, effectively marooning

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[55] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 180–181.

the Qarmaṭī forces on the East Bank. Nothing daunted, they set out for Baghdad, causing another wave of panic. The defenders of the city, led by Mu'nis, Naṣr the *ḥājib* and Abū l-Hayjā' al-Ḥamdānī, are said to have commanded some 40,000 troops but made no effort to engage the enemy. Instead they broke bridges and canal levees to flood the land and prevent the invaders from making progress. Meanwhile the Abbasid forces decided to attack the Qarmaṭī camp and free Ibn Abī l-Sāj, while the Qarmaṭī army was stuck on the East Bank, but their commander, al-Jannābī, bribed a boatman to take him across the river and put his camp in a state of defence. The Abbasid forces were driven off and the remainder of the Qarmaṭī army managed to get back to the West Bank. It was, however, the end for Ibn Abī l-Sāj, for al-Jannābī realized that the Abbasids were determined to rescue him. He was unceremoniously put to death.

No one could have known it at the time, but this was the high point of Qarāmiṭa attacks. Mu'nis and the main Abbasid army now advanced towards them and, as ever, they retreated into the desert where they knew their enemies could not reach them. They then moved up the Euphrates to Hīt, where the local inhabitants, aided by Abbasid forces, erected siege engines on the walls and drove off the attackers. They then moved on to Qarqīsīyā and Raḥba, massacring the local Bedouin and seizing their camels and sheep. Next they came to Raqqa, where the inhabitants put up a vigorous defence, firing poisoned arrows and pelting the attackers with bricks, driving them back into the desert. Finally they made another attack on Kufa. They were met by an army led by Naṣr *al-ḥājib*, by now very sick with fever. Naṣr, too ill to ride, was being taken to Baghdad in a litter when, in Ramaḍān 316/October–November 928, he died. His death was a major blow to the caliphate. While a considerable intriguer in his own right, he was also widely respected at court and was a very important link between the caliph and the military.[56] Had he lived longer, the catastrophic breakdown of relations between the two might not have occurred.

The Descent into Chaos (*316–20/928–32*)

In Baghdad, the disappearance of the immediate threat from the Qarāmiṭa led to the fall of ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā's government. He was arrested on 13 Rabīʿ I 316/6 May 928, just over a year after his return to Baghdad. His replacement was

[56] See also Part III, Chapter 6.

the young and ambitious Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Muqla, a brilliant calligrapher but a man with limited experience of government and no personal following. It was not the affairs of the vizierate, however, which dominated political life, but the activities of the army and its leaders. Muʾnis was in Raqqa where he had gone to help the defence of the town against the Qarāmiṭa. After Naṣr's death, the leadership of the Abbasid forces in the Kufa area had been entrusted to the Queen Mother's maternal cousin Hārūn b. Gharīb and it was he who was given the credit for the final driving away of the Qarāmiṭa. He now saw his opportunity to take supreme command of the army. It was arranged that the resources of all the provinces of western Iran should be dedicated to maintaining his forces and he was given, in effect, complete control of the government of these areas. This in turn aroused the deep hostility of Abū l-Hayjāʾ al-Ḥamdānī who had been governor of Dīnawar and was summarily ejected from his post. He came in high dudgeon to Baghdad where he made common cause with the chief of police, Nāzūk. Nāzūk had fallen out with Hārūn b. Gharīb because their followers had had a dispute about the possession of a particularly attractive boy, and this had led to fighting between their supporters in the streets of the capital. Nāzūk was furious that his authority in the city was challenged and it seems to have been at this time that he began to consider the possibility of deposing al-Muqtadir, who, he felt, had failed to support him.

Meanwhile, Muʾnis had returned from Raqqa, fearing that Hārūn was planning to replace him as the leading figure in the military. His apprehensions were fuelled when the Maṣāffī infantry,[57] probably instigated by Nāzūk, attacked his house. Muʾnis was furious and he and his supporters camped at the Shammāsiyya parade ground in the north-east of the city,[58] and sent the caliph an open letter demanding reforms and that the expenses of the household, and especially those of the Queen Mother, be curtailed. This was a clear attack on Hārūn who, as a relative of the Queen Mother, was a prime beneficiary of this perceived extravagance. The caliph sent away his guards and retainers, opened the gates of his palace and received the petitioners in person, sitting on this throne, reading the Quran with his young sons by him. It was brilliant *coup de théâtre*, reminding everyone of the final moments of the caliph ʿUthmān

[57] A description of this and other regiments of the army is given in Part II, Chapter 3.
[58] For the location of this gate, see Map 3 and Appendix.

and Nāzūk and Abū l-Hayjā' could only accept his assurances that their grievances would be met.

The reckoning was only postponed for a day, and on the morning of 14 Muḥarram 317/27 February 929 the army, led by Mu'nis and Nāzūk, arrived at the palace in force. They pillaged the whole vast building, including the harem areas, and took everything of value. Most of the courtiers and attendants fled and the caliph himself was rescued by Mu'nis, taken into custody and removed to his own house. His half-brother Muḥammad was then proclaimed caliph with the title of al-Qāhir bi-llāh. Nāzūk became *ḥājib* as well as chief of police and Ibn Muqla was confirmed as vizier. Mu'nis and Abū l-Hayjā' commanded the army outside. It seemed as if the new regime was firmly in place.

Two days later trouble began. Essentially it was a dispute between two groups of soldiers, the Maṣāffī and Ḥujarī regulars and Nāzūk's men. The regulars demanded more pay and were not prepared to wait. The Maṣāffīs and Ḥujarīs forced their way into the palace and Nāzūk, who was very hung over from heavy drinking the previous night, panicked. Faced by the angry soldiery he tried to flee but found that the exit from the palace he was heading for had been walled up, on his own orders, to improve security. He was cornered and rapidly put to death.[59] His men fled, leaving the new caliph alone, only Abū l-Hayjā' remaining to protect him.

Meanwhile the Maṣāffīs and Ḥujarīs gathered at Mu'nis's house to demand that al-Muqtadir should be restored. Mu'nis, who had played a very ambiguous role in the whole episode and resented Nāzūk's dominance of the new government, now produced the deposed caliph who was carried in triumph back to the palace. He treated his half brother with considerable generosity, allowing him a comfortable confinement with the Queen Mother. He even tried to amnesty Abū l-Hayjā' but he had already been done to death by the army.

The restoration of al-Muqtadir in Muḥarram 317/February 929 did not mean business as usual. The three and a half years between his restoration and his defeat and death in Shawwāl 320/November 932 were a period of continuous crisis. The state was effectively bankrupt. Viziers followed each other in rapid succession as each one in turn found it impossible to fulfil his financial obligations. The military was riven by feuds as they competed for resources, with Mu'nis and his followers on one hand being opposed by one Yāqūt, now emerging as a powerful leader among the *ghilmān*, and

[59] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 142–143.

his family, along with Hārūn b. Gharīb on the other. Each faction within the military tried to secure the appointment of its own protégé as vizier and the army, both cavalry and infantry, mutinied and had to be paid off with money the government did not really have.[60]

The weakness of the caliphate was made even clearer by events in Mecca. The Qarāmiṭa never again launched a major attack on Iraq but they committed an outrage against Muslim sensibilities which further emphasized the weakness of the caliph and his government. At the time of the *ḥajj* in 317/January 929 they attacked Mecca itself, sacking the Kaʿba, stripping off its cover and taking the Black Stone with them when they left and returned to Hajar. Numerous pilgrims were killed and the sacred well Zamzam was filled up with corpses. Nothing could have illustrated more clearly the weakness of the caliphate at this stage.

It was the problems of paying the army which made government almost impossible. The Maṣāffī infantry in particular felt it was they who had restored the caliph, and they expected to be rewarded. They camped around the palace and encouraged every sort of law-breaking and mayhem. They were joined by numerous hangers-on who also demanded money. They were aided by the divisions within the military command. Nāzūk had been succeeded as chief of police by two brothers, the sons of Rāʾiq, a *ghulām* of the caliph's father al-Muʿtaḍid, who were protégés of Muʾnis. Al-Muqtadir, in an attempt to break free from the irksome control exercised by Muʾnis, appointed the main rivals of the Banū Rāʾiq among the younger generation of *ghilmān*, the sons of Yāqūt. By Jumādā II 319/June–July 931 there was virtual war between Muʾnis and Yāqūt. In the end, after a trial of strength, Yāqūt and his sons were forced to flee and their houses in Baghdad were burned to the ground.

At his restoration, al-Muqtadir had pledged that he would 'sell what remained of his garments and fabrics and sell his estates',[61] and the vizier Ibn Muqla responded by selling off all the state assets he could find. This included fabrics and garments from the palace stores,[62] and above all estates sold for knockdown prices with the added concession that they would pay tax at the *ʿushr* (tenth) rate while collecting income at the *kharāj* rate.

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[60] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 202.
[61] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 144.
[62] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 199–200.

An anecdote attributed to Thābit b. Sinān tells us much about these problems. He states that he was present in the office of the vizier Ibn Muqla when he was entirely occupied in the signing of sales of estates to the army (*al-tawqīʿ lil-jund bi-bayʿi l-ḍiyāʿ*) and the assignation of the difference between the two assessments (*al-muʿāmilatayn*) as a gift (*bi-l-ṣila*). The officials of the bureaux (*dawāwīn*, sing. *dīwān*) were also kept at work hunting out the assessments (*al-ʿibar*) of what was being sold. The purchasers were crowding round the vizier and the vizier was signing when ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā was announced. He was admitted and when the vizier saw him he rose to his full height and made him sit on the same bench, leaving the business in which he was engaged to receive him. When the vizier asked ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā about himself, he, seeing the people pressing upon Ibn Muqla said, 'Let the vizier, may God help him, get on with his work.' Then Ibn Muqla turned to the crowd and carried on signing. ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā noticed a case (*khurj*) which had been brought out containing the assessment of the *ḍiyāʿ* of Jibrīl, the father of Bukhtīshūʿ,[63] and found that the price which they fetched small compared with the price for which they had been bought (by Jibrīl and his family). He exclaimed: 'There is no god but Allāh: has it come to this?' Ibn Muqla put down what was in his hand and came over to him and said:

> I was told by my chief (*shaykh*) Abū l-Qāsim (that is ʿĪsā b. Dāwūd, father of ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā), that when al-Mutawakkil became angry with the physician Bukhtīshūʿ, he sent to his house to make an inventory of the contents of his stores. There was found in his clothes store a statement of the *ḍiyāʿ* he had purchased and the price was more than ten million *dirham*. They have now come to be sold for this trifling sum. Both expressed their surprise, then Ibn Muqla returned to his work and ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā rose to go.[64]

The story vividly illustrates and brings to life the collapse of the Abbasid fiscal administration in the face of the insistent demands of the military following al-Muqtadir's restoration. The *ḍiyāʿ*, the government estates in the Sawād of Iraq, had been one of the main sources of revenue for the *sulṭān*. Built up by purchase and confiscation throughout the early Abbasid period, the yields were a mainstay of government finance. Now they were being sold off as speedily as possible, a veritable fire-sale of the assets of the caliphate, in the face of a short-term financial crisis.

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[63] Bukhtishūʿ b. Jibrīl b. Bukhtishūʿ (d.256/870) from the famous family of court physicians.

[64] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 200.

Meanwhile, the extent of the lands under the control of the caliphate were shrinking. The rivalry between Mu'nis al-Muẓaffar and Yāqūt and his family for the control of the army and the administration eventually led to the semi-exile of Yāqūt to Fārs, where he was appointed governor. From his base in Shīrāz, Yāqūt, in alliance with local tax officials now (319/931) prevented any revenues reaching the *sulṭān* in Baghdad.[65] In the same year Hārūn b. Gharīb, leading Abbasid forces in western Iran, was defeated by Mardawīj the Daylamite near Hamadhān and the whole of the Jibāl as far as Ḥulwān on the edge of the Iraqi plain was lost to the Abbasids. Both these two valuable provinces were now contributing nothing to the resources of the caliphate.[66] Furthermore, while Egypt and Syria remained nominally under the control of the caliphate, no revenues were brought from them to Baghdad after 315/927.[67] The departure of Mu'nis to Mosul in Muḥarram 320/January 932 meant that no money arrived from the Jazīra either. By the end of the reign, the only areas from which the *sulṭān* could hope to collect revenue were the Sawād of Iraq and parts of Khūzistān. At one stage it was revealed that, because of local corruption, even the city of Basra was costing more to administer than it was sending in revenue,[68] while the governor of Kufa was defeated by an uprising of the bedouin tribes of Asad and Shaybān and many leading Abbasids and ʿAlids held to ransom.[69]

The final crisis of the reign was precipitated by the complete alienation of Mu'nis al-Muẓaffar and the caliph. At the beginning of Jumādā II 319/June–July 931 there was yet another mutiny by the cavalry and at the beginning of Rajab/20 July Mu'nis lost patience and wrote to al-Muqtadir demanding that Yāqūt and his sons be dismissed from their offices and expelled from the city. Mu'nis camped with his army at Shammāsiyya and refused all attempts at compromise; a week later the caliph reluctantly ordered Yāqūt and his followers to leave.[70]

Mu'nis now appeared to be in unchallenged control of the affairs of the caliphate, but in practice his power led to a new coalition of enemies, encouraged by the caliph who did not want to be dominated by a single individual. The two sons of Rā'iq, his protégés among the leading *ghilmān*,

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[65] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 211.
[66] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 213.
[67] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 227.
[68] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 223n.
[69] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 146–147.
[70] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 160.

deserted to his enemies, ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā, no longer vizier but still active in the administration, was exiled to his home town of Dayr Qunnā and the new vizier, al-Ḥusayn b. al-Qāsim, worked tirelessly to exclude the old general from any position of influence in court or government. Disgusted by the way things had turned out, Muʾnis and his forces left Baghdad in Muḥarram 320/January–February 932, heading north, leaving his enemies in control of the capital.

Despite this triumph, the old pattern of shifting alliances and well-established rivalries soon began to assert itself again. While Muʾnis waged war on the Ḥamdānids of Mosul and attempted to defend the Syrian frontier from the Byzantines, his opponents in Baghdad fell out among each other. As so often, the fundamental problem was shortage of money and the inability of the vizier to find sufficient funds to pay the military, and the opposition was led by the caliph's cousin, Hārūn b. Gharīb. In Rabīʿ II 320/May 932 al-Faḍl b. Jaʿfar, nephew of the famous Ibn al-Furāt, became vizier. He found himself beset by impossible problems, especially because control of the Jazīra by Muʾnis and much of the south of Iraq by the Qarāmiṭa in the south meant that food supplies in the capital were very scarce. Al-Faḍl, supported by Hārūn b. Gharīb, now invited Muʾnis to return to the capital and he accepted. The move was opposed by Muḥammad b. Yāqūt, who had now come back to Baghdad, and by the two sons of Rāʾiq. The caliph hesitated, unable to make up his mind, but in the end he listened to the blandishments of the Yāqūt faction and decided to oppose Muʾnis.

There are two main narrative accounts of the death of al-Muqtadir. Miskawayh,[71] apparently based in large measure on the account of Thābit b. Sinān, whose father, Sinān b. Thābit, had been an eyewitness of events in the capital, concentrates heavily on the politics of the court of the caliph. ʿArīb makes extensive use of the now lost *Mudhayyal ta'rīkh al-Ṭabarī* of ʿAbd Allāh b. Aḥmad al-Farghānī (d. 362/972–3),[72] who in turn made use of the accounts of one Aḥmad b. al-Muḥassin al-Zaʿfarānī who was an eyewitness (*shāhid*) in Muʾnis' camp.[73] This account describes Muʾnis' expedition to Mosul and his return to Baghdad in much greater detail. Both accounts are in broad agreement about the main outlines of events but while in Miskawayh's account, the caliph is hesitant to the point of

[71] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 233–237.
[72] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 174–180.
[73] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 170.

paralysis and dies a shameful death, ʿArīb stresses the heroic and tragic aspects of his last hours as if 'nothing in his life became him like the leaving of it'.

It was the only time the caliph had ever taken the lead of an army. He tried to make use of all the prestige which, despite everything, still attached to his office. ʿArīb describes his progress from his palace through Baghdad to confront Muʾnis' army outside the Shammāsiyya gate on the north-east of the city:[74]

> He wore a caftan of silver brocade from Tustar. On his head was a plain black turban and the mantle that had belonged to the Prophet was on his shoulders, covering his chest and his back. He was girded with Dhū l-Fiqār, the sword of the Apostle with its red leather straps. In his right hand was the seal and staff (of the Prophet). Under him was the horse called al-Iqbāl (good fortune) which was known as al-Qābūs because Abū Qābūs had given it to him.[75] On the horse there was a red Maghribī saddle with new decoration and under his left thigh was the 'sword of the stirrup'.[76] In front of him rode his son Abū Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Wāḥid wearing an embroidered caftan of Byzantine brocade and a white turban while behind him rode his vizier al-Faḍl b. Jaʿfar b. al-Furāt. In front of them went a white banner (*liwā*) and a black flag (*rāya*) carried by Abū Naṣr al-Lābī and another banner carried by Aḥmad b. Khafīf al-Samarqandī.[77] There were also two white standards (*ʿalam*) and two yellow ones carried by the *anṣār*[78] who also carried spears with leaves of the Quran on their points.[79]

According to Miskawayh, the caliph found the battle well under way. At first he stood at a vantage point to overlook the battle but when things began to go badly for his men, outfought by Muʾnis and his *ḥājib* Yalbaq, he descended to the fray himself, holding not a sword but a copy of the Quran in his hand. Even then some of his opponents sought his blessing and forgiveness but others, notably Berber troops in Muʾnis' following, were less in awe of the cousin and successor of the Prophet. The cloak was

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[74] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 176–177. Cf. the similar but less detailed account in Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 235.

[75] Abū Qābūs al-Khurāsānī was an officer who had fought under Muʾnis' command in Egypt in 302/914.

[76] *sayf lil-rikāb*, presumably a secondary sword, perhaps more useful in battle than Dhū l-Fiqār.

[77] It is not clear whether the different words for flags imply different sizes or shapes or whether the words are essentially synonymous and the translations I have used are essentially arbitrary.

[78] Perhaps guards recruited from the people of al-Madīna (cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, iii, 483).

[79] Presumably to remind people of the leaves of Quran attached to their spears by Muʿāwiya's supporters during the battle of Ṣiffīn as an appeal to negotiation.

torn from his back, he was cut down and stabbed in the throat. His head was cut off and the Berbers rushed off to take their trophy to Mu'nis.[80]

According to ʿArīb's version,[81] the caliph was reluctant to enter the battle and at one stage was tempted to return to his tent or a boat on the river but was dissuaded by one of his officers who said that it would cause a rout. Some of his followers, including his son ʿAbd al-Wāḥid, fought bravely but others, notably the Ḥujarīs, supposedly the elite troops of the caliphate, fled at the first opportunity. In the end the caliph was left on his own with a group of the common people (*ʿāmma*) whom he urged to stand firm with him for the sake of God, his Prophet and his mantle, but despite this he was attacked by three mounted warriors who grabbed the regalia from him. One of them slashed his forehead with his sword and as the caliph tried to wipe the blood off his face with his sleeve, he was hit by another blow which severed his left thumb. He fell from his horse and his assailants gathered round and chopped off his head and took it in triumph to Mu'nis. What followed can best be described in Bowen's words:

> As night drew over the plain, a man with a load of thorns drove his donkey across the field of battle, and saw lying among the killed a headless body stripped of every garment. In pity for its nakedness, and that it might not be devoured by jackals or birds of prey, he threw it over some of the thorns he had gathered, and went on to into the hospitable city to tell of what he had seen. Such was the miserable end of al-Muqtadir. But people afterwards remembered the caliph, and forgot the man. On the place that he lay that night under his shroud of thorns they set up a shrine, whither for many a day pious citizens would come out as on a pilgrimage, and say their prayers.[82]

[80] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 236–237.
[81] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 178–179.
[82] Bowen, *Good Vizier*, 320, following ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 180.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CALIPH

Letizia Osti

> A star shone on us from the Palace, bright, and a clear morning rose for the world and religion[1]

When in 295/908 Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī composed these celebratory lines on the accession of Jaʿfar b. al-Muʿtaḍid as caliph al-Muqtadir, he could hardly have known what was in store for the next 25 years. In later periods however, in the chronicles written after the death of the caliph, al-Ṣūlī and many of his younger contemporaries project back to this very time a sense of uneasiness about the appointment of a barely-of-age boy to head the *umma*, an ill omen for the ruinous times ahead. This chapter looks at how the caliph and his times were seen by different types of sources over time, focusing on how information available to all authors is selected and used to form specific portrayals suited to their format and aims, as has been described in the Introduction.

Since the 1970s, a significant amount of scholarship has been devoted to investigating the narrative techniques employed by classical Arabic literature, tracing strands or clusters of *akhbār* across sources and analysing the implications of their different uses. Some studies of this type have been carried out on caliphs.[2] Besides conclusions on specific cases, a general result obtained through this kind of analysis is that it was able to isolate an authorial voice in works which had been considered mere compilations of older material. Thus, such studies could isolate opinions and

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[1] Al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 24 (*ṭawīl*). The first line plays on the double meanings of *wajh* (face/face of a star), *qaṣr* (castle/dusk) and *mushriq* (bright, but from the same root as Oriental).

[2] See for example, on the caliph al-Muʿtaḍid, Fedwa Malti-Douglas, 'The Classical Arabic Detective', *Arabica* 35 (1988): 59–91; and *eadem*, 'Texts and Tortures: The Reign of al-Muʿtaḍid and the Construction of Historical Meaning', *Arabica* 46 (1999): 313–336; on Umayyad caliphs, Hilary Kilpatrick, "Umar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, al-Walīd ibn Yazīd and their Kin: Images of the Umayyads in the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*', in *Umayyad Legacies: Medieval Memories from Syria to Spain*, ed. Antoine Borrut and P. M. Cobb (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 63–88. More general bibliography on this topic will be cited in the course of the chapter.

reputations and how they are shaped and changed over time. In other words, this kind of analysis helps to understand how medieval Arabic sources make sense of history. Within this framework, this chapter investigates recurrent traits in the image of al-Muqtadir, some of which have persisted into our own time, beginning with general evaluations of the period in later sources and then looking at more detailed accounts in earlier ones.

The Disastrous Caliph

It has been argued that classical Arabic literature has a tendency to highlight the negative aspects of rulers;[3] in late digests such as that of the eighth-/thirteenth-century historian Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā this seems to be the case for al-Muqtadir, whose caliphate is summarized thus:

> The oath of allegiance was given to him in 295, when he was thirteen years of age. Al-Muqtadir was generous, munificent and a squanderer. He brought back the [old] ways [*rusūm*] of the caliphate, [restoring its] pomp, giving out large donations and pensions, numerous robes of honour and presents. In his palace there were eleven thousand Byzantine and black eunuchs. The treasure in his days was full of precious jewels, among which was the hyacinth stone which al-Rashīd had bought for 300,000 *dīnār* [. . .] He squandered all of those and wasted them in the shortest of times. [. . .] Know that the reign of al-Muqtadir was a turbulent reign, because of his young age and of the hold his mother, the women of his household and his servants had on him. The matters concerning his reign were run by women and servants, while he was busy satisfying his pleasure. The world went to ruin during his time, the treasuries were emptied and there were [religious] divisions.[4]

This evaluation of al-Muqtadir, prefacing Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā's chronicle of his caliphate, is not far from that given by an author much closer to al-Muqtadir's time, al-Masʿūdī. His evaluation, introducing a long and detailed section on the caliphate of al-Muqtadir, is in fact harsher than Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā's and unequivocally identifies al-Muqtadir as the reason for the caliphate's ruin:

> He became caliph when he was still young, inexperienced and eager to indulge in luxuries. He did not concern himself with State affairs, nor did

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[3] Joseph Sadan, 'Vine, Women and Seas: Some Images of the Ruler in Medieval Arabic Literature', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 34 (1989): 133–152, p. 134.

[4] Ibn al- Ṭiqṭaqā, *al-Fakhrī*, 352 and 355. Translations from this source are my own unless otherwise stated.

> he attend to the matters of the reign; instead, commanders, viziers and secretaries conducted the affairs of the State, in which he did not have a say or influence, nor was he credited with the qualities of a ruler or administrator. Those who had power were women, servants and others, and this faulty leadership, which befell the empire, swept away whatever wealth or provisions were in the treasuries of the caliphate. This led to his blood being shed; affairs were unsettled after [his time] and many of the caliphate's ways were abandoned.[5]

Writing in the first half of the fourth/tenth century, al-Masʿūdī makes it clear that, only a few years after the death of al-Muqtadir, his reign was seen as catastrophic and that it had precipitated the (material and political) fortunes of the caliphate. This view is traced back to comments made in al-Muqtadir's own entourage from his very infancy. However, al-Masʿūdī's contemporaries, though negative on many aspects of al-Muqtadir's person, return more nuanced images of this caliph,[6] where cynical criticism is tempered by attempts to find justifications and redeeming qualities in the man.

Both cynical and sympathetic attitudes will be illustrated below, in an attempt to establish why, mere decades after his death, al-Muqtadir's persona was crystallized into that of a prodigal boy, interested only in drinking and women. After all, crystallization could go either way: while al-Muqtadir became the paradigm of the disastrous caliph, Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170–93/786–809) had become, a few generations earlier, the paradigm of the good ruler, and his caliphate that of prosperous times. Despite this, the two caliphs and their reigns had much in common: they were the longest-reigning caliphs at the time of their death, they had influential women at their side, they were known to be generous. And in fact the comparison is made very early on: Miskawayh, at the end of his account of the death of al-Muqtadir, lists all the possessions of the caliph and how he had wasted them. He compares al-Muqtadir's expenses with those of Hārūn, underlining the difference between Hārūn's generosity

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[5] Al-Masʿūdī, *Kitāb al-tanbīh wa-l-ishrāf*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1894), 377.

[6] Portrayals and evaluations of al-Muqtadir can also be found in the following primary sources: al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 114–119; Abū l-Faraj ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAlī Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1202), *al-Muntaẓam fī taʾrīkh al-mulūk wa-l-umam*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā and Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā, 19 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1992–1993), VI, 243–244; ʿAlī b. Muḥammad ʿIzz al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1232), *al-Kāmil fī l-taʾrīkh*, ed. Carolus Johannes Tornberg, 14 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1851–1876 and reprints), VIII, 243–244; Ibn Shākir al-Kutubī (d. 764/1363), *Fawāt al-wafayāt*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās, 5 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1973–4), I, 284–285; al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, I, 287–291; al-Tanūkhī, *Table-Talk*, trans. Margoliouth (1921–2), II, 152–156.

and al-Muqtadir's prodigality.[7] As has been seen in the passages by Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā and al-Masʿūdī, this prodigality is one of the recurring features in portrayals of al-Muqtadir and is viewed as one of the main causes for the decline of the caliphate. However, Hārūn himself had laid down the premises for civil war when, with the Meccan settlements, he had divided the empire between his two sons. Finally, mentions of al-Muqtadir are indissolubly tied to mentions not only of his viziers,[8] but also of his female household, in the same way as Hārūn is rarely mentioned without reference to his wife Zubayda and his vizier's family, the Barmakids.

The different directions the reputations of the two caliphs took may be due to what happened after their deaths. Hārūn's caliphate was followed by a period of civil strife which, inevitably, led to the idealization of his times. On the other hand, after the death of al-Muqtadir and the bloody interlude of his brother al-Qāhir (r. 320–2/932–4), a more likeable caliph was appointed. Al-Rāḍī (r. 322–9/934–40), while responsible for the caliphate's definitive loss of political power with his appointment of an *amīr al-umarā'* in 324/936, seems to have possessed few of the quirks which made his father stand out in the imagination of his contemporaries. Moreover, al-Rāḍī, with his love of scholarship and promotion of cultured men, must have been seen in a very positive light by those who were in charge of maintaining collective memory, such as *udabā'* (men of letters and authors of *adab*), chroniclers, and courtiers in general. On the other hand, his reign was relatively short and ended peacefully, without the excitement of al-Muqtadir's end. Thus, while Miskawayh, with the benefit of hindsight, identifies the appointment of an *amīr al-umarā'* with the end of the vizierate,[9] chroniclers closer to al-Rāḍī's time—such as al-Ṣūlī—seem to have been more interested in the caliph's personal qualities, such as his intelligence and amiability.

In the early twentieth century, the edition and translation of several primary sources made it possible to investigate the caliphate of al-Muqtadir closely.[10] Harold Bowen's portrayal of the period through the biography of one of its protagonists sanctioned the evaluation conveyed by most medieval sources: the caliphate of al-Muqtadir, starting with the very events

[7] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 238–241.

[8] See Malti-Douglas' remarks on *al-Fakhrī*: 'the caliphate is a diarchy. Power is shared, and history is made, by both caliph and vizier' (Malti-Douglas, 'Texts and Tortures', 318).

[9] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 352.

[10] See the Introduction for a comprehensive list and a discussion of the legacy left by these studies.

which led to his accession, had been the battlefield of a war between good and evil, impersonated by the several-times viziers ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā and Ibn al-Furāt respectively, with various members of the court and the army as secondary characters.[11] In the end ʿAlī, for all his fairness and honesty, had not been able to repair the damage done by greedy and corrupt Ibn al-Furāt and his cronies; the state, led by a young and inept caliph, had suffered blows from which it would never recover. These somewhat naive reconstructions are certainly outdated, and more recent scholarship has made it clear that there were global reasons for the decline of the Abbasid caliphate, which could never have been avoided completely even by an older, more mature and more experienced caliph who paid no heed to bad advice and had no drinking and spending habits to feed. However, it would be difficult to ignore the fact that the narrative sources which we have at our disposal *do*, with their different formats and aims, illustrate (and in some cases explain) events through the portrayal of character traits and personal conflicts. Whether such character sketches and stories describe in detail real historical facts or not is not a question modern historians can ask profitably, and in any case it can never be resolved. What seems more important is that the premise on which contemporary and later sources received them was that they were true, and that these accounts served as a tool to make sense of the past. This may not necessarily mean that all information contained in them was perceived as the absolute truth; rather, one did not ask oneself such a question—it was, in other words, irrelevant.[12] Thus, while factually it is a backward projection to claim that many contemporaries had foreseen al-Muqtadir's weaknesses as a caliph from his very infancy, such projection frames and defines the sources' view of the period as a whole.

Opinions

When al-Muqtadir was appointed caliph, he became the first underage (or barely-of-age) leader of the *umma.* Therefore, the events which led to his appointment, and his immaturity at the time of his accession, are

[11] See, for instance, Amedroz's introductory remarks to his 1904 edition of al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 10. The two viziers are discussed in more depth in Part II, Chapter 3.

[12] See the discussion in Hilary Kilpatrick, 'The "genuine" Ashʿāb. The Relativity of Fact and Fiction in Early *adab* Texts', in *Story-Telling in the Framework of Non-fictional Arabic Literature*, ed. Stefan Leder (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), 94–117.

given particular attention by many sources. Two stories, found respectively in a work of *adab* and in a chronicle, show descriptions of Jaʿfar as a young boy and comment on the consequences of his appointment. These stories, beside displaying the different approaches characteristic of the two genres, define the camps in which opinions on al-Muqtadir can be divided, the one cold and practical, as seen above in al-Masʿūdī, the other lenient and regretful.

The first anecdote, which was discussed by Kennedy in the previous chapter, gives the first opinions reported on al-Muqtadir by one of his contemporaries, where he is barely mentioned by name: while the caliph al-Muktafī (r. 289–95/902–8) was ailing, says Miskawayh, the vizier al-ʿAbbās b. al-Ḥasan, on the advice of the then head of the *diwān al-Sawād*, Ibn al-Furāt,[13] decided that the next caliph should be Jaʿfar who, because of his young age, would be ignorant of the administrators' secrets and amenable to their wise decisions. This passage, which Miskawayh sets prominently at the beginning of his account of the death of al-Muktafī, overshadows a more conventional succession of events, which is indicated at the end of this story:

> al-ʿAbbās b. al-Ḥasan inclined to Ibn al-Furāt's view, and with this there coincided the testament of al-Muktafī, which assigned to his brother Jaʿfar the succession to the caliphate.[14]

In other words, the succession had been after all determined by the dying caliph as much as, or more than, by his vizier, as al-Ṣūlī, an eyewitness, had indicated,[15] and that the reasons for Jaʿfar's appointment had as much to do with his genealogy—he was al-Muktafī's only brother and thus, as Kennedy highlights, would more easily command the loyalty of his father's army—as with his age. Miskawayh gives so much prominence to al-Muqtadir's age and to the influence of bureaucrats because these elements will form the historian's judgement on this period, as discussed by van Berkel later in this volume. Ultimately, one may argue, this is a

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[13] See Sourdel, *Vizirat*, 362. This and the other bureaux of the administration are discussed extensively in Part II, Chapter 4.

[14] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 3.

[15] The two main, conflicting accounts can be found in al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 21–23 and Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 2–4. Other sources follow either of the above: ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 19–21; al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 114–117; Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Malik al-Hamadhānī (d. 521/1127), *Takmilat tāʾrīkh al-Ṭabarī*, ed. Albert Kanʿān (Beirut: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Kāthūlīkiyya, 1959), 4. See above, Part I, Chapter 1.

better story and will in fact be the one to remain in the collective memory of the sources.[16]

Despite having allegedly been instrumental in the appointment of Jaʿfar, Ibn al-Furāt is heard complaining about the implications of the appointment. Hilāl al-Ṣābiʾ, whose chronicle focuses on viziers and who agrees with Miskawayh's version of events, attaches to the story of al-Muktafī's succession an account where Ibn al-Furāt comments on the difficulties of working with a young caliph of such a changeable mind.[17]

A second episode, set even earlier, is found in al-Tanūkhī's *Nishwār*:[18] the supervisor of the harem, Ṣāfī al-Ḥuramī, narrates that one day the caliph al-Muʿtaḍid passed by a room where his son Jaʿfar was sitting with other children. He saw that his son was eating from a bunch of grapes and, instead of keeping it for himself, passed it around to share it with his companions. At this, al-Muʿtaḍid began to weep, saying that, if this son of his ever became caliph, his generosity would bring the caliphate to ruin. Years later, after the accession of al-Muqtadir,[19] Ṣāfī is reminded of his old master's words when he sees the young caliph wasting precious perfume which had been preserved and used sparingly by generations of his ancestors since the time of al-Wāthiq.[20] Ṣāfī cries, as he realizes that al-Muʿtaḍid had been right in his worries.

Tears of despair for the state of affairs are seen elsewhere;[21] they signal an attitude shared by some courtiers and officials, who love the caliph and are profoundly loyal to the institution he represents, and therefore try to limit the damage done by his shortcomings, at the same time finding justifications for his misdeeds. Examples of such attempts are illustrated below.

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16 Narratives of succession for other caliphs have been analysed along similar lines. In particular, see Richard Kimber, 'The Succession to the Caliph Mūsā al-Hādī', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 121 (2001): 428–448, where a close reading of al-Ṭabarī is paired with the numismatic evidence.

17 Al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 118–119.

18 Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, I, 287–291; trans. *Table-Talk* (1921–2), II, 152–156.

19 It cannot have been long after the accession because Ṣāfī died only three years later in 298/910.

20 See also the story on musk in Part II, Chapter 3. Al-Muʿtaḍid seems to have been generous with predictions about his son. When al-Ṣūlī sees Subkarā brought to Baghdad in pomp in 298/311 (see Part I, Chapter 1), he recalls a story he and others had been told by Ṣāfī: 'I saw the caliph al-Muqtadir when he was a child in the apartments of al-Muʿtaḍid bi-llāh. Al-Muʿtaḍid was looking at a notebook he often looked at, saying, while hitting his shoulder: it's as if I saw Persian kings being introduced to you on elephants and camels, wearing mantles, until there will be none left in Fārs (al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 65).

21 See Naṣr in Part III, Chapter 8, and Muʾnis in Part II, Chapter 5.

A Boy Full of Vices

The two episodes described above also highlight the two main characteristics attached to al-Muqtadir: youth and prodigality.

Despite al-Muqtadir's long reign and the mature age of 38 which he reached while in office, his reputation never seems to recover from his youth on his appointment, which in turn is openly linked to his shortcomings as a caliph.[22] The only historian who seems to defend this trait is al-Muqtadir's courtier al-Ṣūlī who, in a spirited defence of the caliph and his qualities, says that 'he took charge of affairs already at this young age'.[23] On the other hand, in an episode narrated by al-Tanūkhī, Ibn al-Furāt tells a story about his imprisonment (299/312) after his first vizierate. When the masters (*al-sāda*) are mentioned, the narrator of the anecdote specifies: 'by *sāda* it is meant: al-Muqtadir, his mother, his maternal aunt Khāṭif, and Dustunbawayh, the concubine of al-Muʿtaḍid, because at that time they ran things (*yudabbirūna l-umūr*) due to al-Muqtadir's young age'.[24]

The dichotomy between good and evil which seems to underlie all narratives on al-Muqtadir and his times is first seen on this very level: while remarks such as Ibn al-Furāt's on the appointment of young Jaʿfar represent a cynical and dismissive view of the caliph and his role, other contemporaries of al-Muqtadir seem to be, on the one hand, reluctant to speak ill of their ruler and, on the other, ambivalent about his human qualities. For instance Ibn al-Furāt's nemesis, ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā, is quoted as having said that, when al-Muqtadir managed to stay away from alcohol for five consecutive days, he had as much perspicacity (*ṣiḥḥat al-ʿaql*) as al-Muʿtaḍid and al-Maʾmūn.[25]

However, even the defenders of the caliph had to admit that al-Muqtadir's reputation was already problematic amongst his contemporaries. Besides youth and drinking, ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā is shown mentioning openly the third problem, extravagance: after his appointment as vizier in 301/913,

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[22] For instance, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071), *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, ed. Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā, 21 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1997), VII, 222: 'He was at that time thirteen years, one month and twenty days old. Before him nobody had ruled so young'. Reasons given for his first deposition were 'his young age (*ṣughr sinnihi*) and the short time since he had reached puberty'; al-Kutubī, *Fawāt al-wafayāt*, I, 284: 'He was thirteen years old; nobody younger than he had ever ruled the *umma* before. Because of this the caliphate (*al-niẓām*) collapsed in his days'.

[23] Al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 27. See Letizia Osti, 'The Wisdom of Youth: Legitimising the Caliph al-Muqtadir', *Al-Masāq* 19 (2007): 17–27.

[24] Al-Tanūkhī, *al-Faraj*, II, 45–46.

[25] Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, I, 282; trans. *Table-Talk* (1921–2), II, 149–150. It is quoted by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, VII, 226. See also Part III, Chapter 8.

ʿAlī had scrapped increases in taxes which had been set by his predecessor to meet the court's expenses; he had instead opted to reduce the court's expenditure. Years later, Ibn al-Furāt is said to have reproached him for eliminating this source of revenue; ʿAlī, in an account narrated by himself, replies: 'I do not consider this a large sum if compared with the burdens whereof I have eased the Commander of the Faithful, and the stains and blots which I have removed from his rule'. He adds that, under his administration, expenditure did not exceed revenue, in contrast to the situation under Ibn al-Furāt.[26]

A Good and Noble Muslim

Of course, the line between generosity and prodigality is very easily crossed, and can be especially ambiguous when those who decide on the matter are potential beneficiaries of such behaviour. Thus, while al-Tanūkhī, and many after him, identify al-Muqtadir's generosity as a sign of his unsuitability, Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī is proud to highlight the religious piety which led the caliph to devote a large sum to the restoration of the market at Bāb al-Ṭāq,[27] but also to enumerate the gifts he received from al-Muqtadir for composing a poem or reading a letter with a loud, clear voice.[28] Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that, at the beginning of his chronicle, after his account of the accession, al-Ṣūlī sets out to enumerate al-Muqtadir's good qualities, which may not have been known widely but will certainly please the current caliph, al-Muqtadir's son al-Rāḍī: 'I inserted here a section on his good qualities [*maḥāsin*], so that he who perhaps ignored these may become aware of them.'[29]

As has been seen, al-Ṣūlī describes al-Muqtadir's age on his accession as a quality; he substantiates his claim with a long excursus on the wisdom and positive qualities of youth, citing a treatise which had been commissioned to him by al-ʿAbbās b. al-Ḥasan, and which he finished writing for Ibn al-Furāt after al-ʿAbbās's death.[30] Moreover, says al-Ṣūlī, al-Muqtadir had the perfect genealogy for a caliph, being descended from an uninterrupted chain of six caliphs and having a brother, al-Muktafī, who had

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[26] Al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 322–323; Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 29.
[27] See Part I, Chapter 1 and Appendix.
[28] See also Part III, Chapter 8.
[29] Al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 32.
[30] Al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 26–27; the treatise is also mentioned by Muḥammad b. Isḥāq Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 380/990), *Kitāb al-fihrist lil-Nadīm*, 2nd edn., ed. Riḍā Tajaddud (Tehran: Marvi Offset Printing, 1973), 168.

been caliph before him. This ancestry gave him the right to succession and the best possible starting point. Al-Ṣūlī also mentions an initiative which al-Muqtadir had taken, following his ancestor al-Mutawakkil, out of religious piety. This refers to a law forbidding the employment of Christians and Jews at court, which had been implemented by al-Mutawakkil and then reinstated by al-Muqtadir.[31] During his reign there were other decisions taken on religious policy which shaped the future of the *umma*,[32] but al-Ṣūlī does not say whether these are to be abscribed to the caliph himself. In fact, the execution of al-Ḥallāj for instance seems to have happened despite al-Muqtadir rather than thanks to him.[33]

The final redeeming quality of the caliph was his 'martyrdom, with which his purity was completed'. However, although it is undisputed that al-Muqtadir was killed by rebels, the circumstances are not clear. All sources chronicling the death of al-Muqtadir portray him as unwilling to go into the battle. When he finally is convinced, most sources show him succumbing to his aggressors without being able to defend himself, as helpless in the face of death as al-Amīn had been decades before:[34]

> Just then the Berber followers of Mu'nis came up, and surrounded al-Muqtadir; one of them struck him from behind a blow that brought him to the ground. He cried out: Curse you, I am the caliph! The Berber said: It's you I'm after! He made the caliph lie on the ground and cut his throat with a sword.[35]

On the other hand, 'Arīb shows al-Muqtadir trying to fight back, defending himself from three aggressors at first with a sword and then with his bare hands, only falling to the ground after his thumb had been cut off.[36]

A Good Son and Father

A final topic which is very prominent, in both historical and literary sources, is al-Muqtadir's female household. The Queen Mother Shaghab and her stewardesses play an important role not only in the caliph's

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[31] See Kennedy, *Prophet*, 167–168. Such measures did not reach as far as purging Christians from the court, as shown in Part II, Chapter 2.

[32] See for instance Christopher Melchert, 'Religious Policies of the Caliphs from al-Mutawakkil to al-Muqtadir, A.H. 232–95/A.D. 847–908', *Islamic Law and Society* 3 (1996): 316–342.

[33] See also Part II, Chapter 5 and Part III, Chapters 6 and 8.

[34] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, iii, 923.

[35] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 236–237.

[36] 'Arīb, *Ṣilat*, 179. For a more detailed discussion of sources on the death of al-Muqtadir, see Part I, Chapter 1.

youth but also later in his life and up to his death. This will be explored in a later chapter,[37] but it is worth underlining here how the figure of Shaghab, usually portrayed as a rapacious and short-sighted schemer in the chronicles, is given a more nuanced personality in the other types of source. Al-Tanūkhī is particularly detailed in this respect: he portrays her Ladyship as generous and caring with her familiars,[38] a quality that she transmits to her slave girls,[39] and gives a moving description of her last days, imprisoned by the new caliph, al-Qāhir.[40] Al-Muqtadir is seen in one of these stories going to visit his mother and being curious about new clothes which she has bought, but, at the same time, being feared lest he know that Shaghab is smuggling his slave's lover into the harem;[41] in a reversal of roles, another story shows Shaghab as completely insensitive to the plight of her slave girl, in love with the secretary of her grandson al-Muttaqī but destined for the caliph's harem, whereas this time it is al-Muqtadir who, once he hears the story, is moved and delivers the slave girl to her lover.[42]

There are also rarer accounts, showing al-Muqtadir as a loving father, affectionate with his small children, mindful of their feelings and able to instruct them in family lore. Detailed stories come from the same source, al-Ṣūlī, who reports them on the authority of al-Rāḍī, al-Muqtadir's eldest surviving child, within his excursus on the virtues of the caliph. In one of the anecdotes, al-Muqtadir is sitting in his *majlis* surrounded by all his children. He has the youngest, al-Faḍl, near him on his seat (*sarīr*) and kisses and cuddles him from time to time.[43] However, when he sees that al-Rāḍī is upset, he reassures him that he remains the closest to his father's heart, and that he is cuddling al-Faḍl only because he is a baby.

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[37] See Part III, Chapter 7.

[38] al-Tanūkhī, *al-Faraj*, IV, 358–369, where Shaghab is the *deus ex machina* through which two lovers are reunited. This story is discussed in three articles: Julia Ashtiany [Bray], 'al-Tanūkhī's *al-Faraj ba'd al-shidda* as a Literary Source', in *Arabicus Felix, Luminosus Britannicus: Essays in Honour of A. F. L. Beeston on his Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Alan Jones (Reading: Ithaca for the Board of the Faculty of Oriental Studies, Oxford University, 1991), 108–128; Muhsin Mahdi, 'From History to Fiction: The Tale Told by the King's Steward in *The Thousand and One Nights*', in *The 'Thousand and one Nights' in Arabic Literature and Society*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 164–180; Julia Bray, 'A Caliph and his Public Relations', *Middle Eastern Literatures* 7 (2004): 159–70.

[39] Al-Tanūkhī, *al-Faraj*, III, 99.

[40] Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, II, 77. See also Part III, Chapter 7.

[41] Al-Tanūkhī, *al-Faraj*, IV, 358–369.

[42] Al-Tanūkhī, *al-Faraj*, IV, 309–315.

[43] This is the future caliph al-Muṭī', who reigned from 334/946 until his death in 364/974.

In the final story, the caliph scolds a young al-Rāḍī because he has not invited his brother al-ʿAbbās to a party which he has organized at al-Zubaydiyya.[44] At al-Rāḍī's protestation that al-ʿAbbās has indeed been invited but has decided not to come, al-Muqtadir explains: 'You should have gone to him personally to take him with you, because you are the eldest and the leader of all of them, so you must flatter and tolerate them and be kind to them!' Al-Ṣūlī comments: 'I marvelled, by God, at this total understanding, and good inclination.'[45]

Good Intentions

Whatever the moral and political judgement on al-Muqtadir, it is clear that his main characteristics are to be found not in his public acts, where his autonomy remains in doubt, but in the private spaces of the palace, in the harem and the bureaux of the administration, where an incessant stream of advisers of dubious intentions jostles for influence on the caliph. Again, the division is portrayed as one between cynical pursuers of their own advantage and defenders of the caliph despite his shortcomings. Al-Ṣūlī illustrates the situation by relating an opinion which was conveyed to him personally. After discussing al-Muqtadir's new policies on Christians at court, he continues:

> The chamberlain Naṣr, known as al-Qushūrī,[46] who used to tell me many things, confided the following to me and to those who were close to him: 'If others did not give their opinion to the commander of the faithful, if they did not stray from his will, people would have an easy life and excellent conditions under him. Because, what can we say of a caliph who prays most of the night, and fasts far beyond the required time? But opinions abound, and following those he strays from his own disposition, because he's a youth, not used to preside over a *majlis*, or to deal with the state affairs, administering its small details so as to judge its big questions; nor has he read the biographies and the chronicles. Except for this, he has the best intentions (*ajmal al-nās niyyatan*), the noblest conscience, and is the most pious of people.'[47]

Naṣr's sad remarks confirm that diverging opinions on the caliph as an individual did not matter because they all agreed on one point: whatever

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[44] This area on the left bank of the Tigris, which comprised the palace of Zubayda, also served for a time as residence for al-Muqtadir's household (see Appendix).

[45] Al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 32.

[46] d. 316/928. The various functions of Naṣr during the reign of al-Muqtadir are explored in Part II, Chapter 5, and Part III, Chapters 6 and 8.

[47] Al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 31.

his intentions, whatever his selfless love of the *umma* and his religious fervour, whatever his personal will, he was doomed to fail as a leader.

Conclusions

Despite the universal consensus on al-Muqtadir as a failed caliph, two views, the private and the public one, remain divergent to this day: in our modern historical imagination, al-Muqtadir is as described by Miskawayh. In the literary memory his figure is more ambivalent; here we seem to find some trace of the caliph in his private, family spaces, where we are also able to view him from afar, stepping away from the doors of the palace to evaluate the power that the caliph still evoked in the streets and houses of Baghdad, in spite of the riots (which were against viziers rather than caliphs). It is important, in every investigation of al-Muqtadir and his time, to keep in mind these distinct views, each of which undoubtedly contains elements of one *topos* or another, but, which, equally, probably contains similar amounts of factual historical information.

Naṣr is the first to suggest that al-Muqtadir, despite his intentions, was led astray by the people who surrounded him and was not strong enough to impose his own authority. However, whatever the ineffectualness of al-Muqtadir, the very fact that his officials had to devise stories and explanations to obtain what they wanted shows that the caliph had indeed powers of decision-making that the officials could not bypass.

After the end of the civil war between al-Amīn and al-Maʾmūn, the caliphate recovered and the empire enjoyed some decades of relative prosperity. Yet, during the reign of al-Muqtadir, the caliphate received its final blow. By the time historians came to chronicle the years of al-Rāḍī, the political power of the caliphate had in practice sunk into irrelevance. It was not important whether al-Rāḍī had been a good or bad caliph, because real power had not resided with him. Al-Muqtadir, for all his ineptitude, was at the time of his death the longest-reigning caliph of all time, and therefore, in his qualities as well as his shortcomings, he was influential. His person as portrayed in the sources reflects the troubled times the caliphate endured during his rule, and he became a symbol of impending decadence. In the next chapters we shall see how, under this unified image, lay a fully functioning administration, army, courtly life and city, which underwent changes over time even beyond those summarily described by the sources but which would have probably taken place independently of the individual mentioned as the caliph during the Friday prayer.

PART TWO

SCRIBES AND SOLDIERS

CHAPTER THREE

THE VIZIER

Maaike van Berkel

In the year 295/908 Jaʿfar b. al-Muʿtaḍid ascended the throne at the age of 13 as caliph al-Muqtadir.[1] The vivid descriptions of this event have been discussed in detail by Kennedy and Osti in the previous two chapters, highlighting various opinions on the reasons behind Jaʿfar's nomination for the caliphate. The narrative which set the tone for most later interpretations of the accession is Miskawayh's (d. 421/1030). Most striking is the part in which Miskawayh relates how the then head of the land tax bureau of the Sawād and later vizier,[2] Ibn al-Furāt, recommended the appointment of the young and unexperienced Jaʿfar, precisely because of his young age and lack of knowledge. 'Why not entrust [the caliphate] to someone who will leave you to manage it?'[3] were allegedly Ibn al-Furāt's famous words to the vizier al-ʿAbbās b. al-Ḥasan.

The details of Miskawayh's description of the accession of al-Muqtadir may not be historically reliable. Yet what the anecdote does show is that Miskawayh characterized the period of al-Muqtadir's reign as one of weak caliphal power, with an inexperienced youngster who could reign only with the help of clever bureaucrats. Indeed, this anecdote not only sets the tone for the characterization of al-Muqtadir as a weak ruler, it also typified this era as the heyday of the caliph's most important minister, the vizier. It was the vizier al-ʿAbbās b. al-Ḥasan who started to discuss the caliph's succession with the four leaders of the administration: Muḥammad b. Dāwūd, ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā, Muḥammad b. ʿAbdūn and Abū l-Ḥasan b. al-Furāt. Five bureaucrats decided the nomination of this new caliph. Any possible influence on that decision from army leaders, court members or the royal family itself, is not mentioned by al-Miskawayh in this

[1] This chapter is partly based upon my dissertation, 'Accountants and Men of Letters: Status and Position of Civil Servants in Early Tenth Century Baghdad' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Amsterdam, 2003).

[2] This and the other bureaux of the administration are discussed extesively in Part II, Chapter 4.

[3] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 3.

anecdote. Reading through the rest of his chronicle one cannot escape the impression that it is the military, rather than the bureaucrats, who dictate court politics.[4] Yet to put this particular narrative at the very beginning of al-Muqtadir's reign gives for very powerful reading: this is the era of the all-powerful vizier and his main allies, the heads of the administrative apparatus. These are the vibrant heroes of his chronicle.[5]

Similarly, other contemporaries and near-contemporaries paid a lot of attention to the viziers of al-Muqtadir's reign. Chronicles describe their political decisions, while books on their vicissitudes circulated as examples of good and bad governance for later generations, and anthologies afforded entertaining material about their deeds and lives. Although many of these works were compiled a few decades and even a century or more after the events of al-Muqtadir's reign, their authors relied on earlier (written) sources and seem to have been well informed.[6] Clearly, the characters of the viziers are sometimes pictured as stereotypes which function as mirrors to later generations. Nevertheless, we can generate enough information from these texts to allow a reconstruction of their deeds, their networks and successes and to describe the functioning of the vizier's office in more general terms.

A Janus Figure

The vizier was the highest civil official under the Abbasids. The office of the vizier had been introduced by the first Abbasid caliphs. Its introduction and later development form a clear indication of the increasing centralization of the administration. In the early decades of the Abbasid era caliphs still often granted audiences to other high officials within the administration, such as the heads of the various departments. However, from the end of the third/ninth century they relied for all administrative matters almost exclusively upon the accounts of their viziers. The vizier became the intermediary between the caliph and his administration, and

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[4] On the dominance of the military during al-Muqtadir's reign, see Part II, Chapter 5.

[5] For an interesting different reading of this episode by a contemporary of al-Muqtadir, see al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 21–23. See also Part I, Chapter 2 and Osti, 'The Wisdom of Youth'. For a different interpretation on the influence of the military during this period, see Part II, Chapter 5.

[6] Both Hilāl al-Ṣābi' and Miskawayh relied on the history of Thābit b. Sinān (d. probably 363/974), who continued the work of al-Ṭabarī. Hilāl al-Ṣābi' also relies on Abū 'Abd Allāh Zanjī (or Zinjī), the private secretary and companion of one of al-Muqtadir's most influential viziers, Ibn al-Furāt.

while the caliphs retreated more and more behind the walls of their palaces and became less accessible to the outside world, the office of vizier gained in prestige.

The functioning of the vizier can best be understood by describing the nature and origin of his position. He was a Janus figure, facing in two opposing directions. On the one hand he was a personal servant of the caliph, dependent on his whims and fancies, always trying to please his master. On the other hand, he was the head of a large and hierarchical administrative apparatus, equipped with extensive executive powers and job responsibilities that required technical training.

The vizierate had developed under the first Abbasid caliphs from the institution of the personal tutor. As heirs apparent, sons of caliphs were put under the supervision of experienced and educated men, who introduced them to the state administration, prepared them for their future tasks and became their personal advisors and prime ministers after their accession to the throne. These first viziers were sometimes manumitted slaves and rose up in the caliphal household. They were therefore strongly dependent upon their masters.[7]

In the days of the caliph al-Muqtadir, viziers no longer started their careers as personal tutors to the crown princes.[8] But even in the absence of a tutor–pupil bond, the element of personal service remained a prominent characteristic of the relation between the caliph and his vizier and we still find some of the old features in their relationship. This is especially true for the early days of al-Muqtadir's reign when he was still very young; we read that his mother invited the vizier Ibn al-Furāt to call the young caliph 'his son' and take him on his lap during meetings.[9] Furthermore, during al-Muqtadir's later years the viziers still acted as his main personal advisors. In turn, viziers remained highly dependent upon the goodwill of their master. In the end it was the caliph who decided that a vizier's term was over, and therefore the vizier constantly had to please the caliph and his entourage. Moreover, the constant presence of new aspirants to this function made the replacement of inconvenient viziers an easy solution. Al-Muqtadir used his right to dismiss his viziers rather

[7] The origin of the vizierate is studied in detail by S. D. Goitein, *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 168–196. See also Sourdel, *Vizirat*, 41–61.

[8] Al-Muqtadir put one of his sons under the aegis of a military official, the head of the police forces in Baghdad. See Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, VIII, 76. On education at court see also Part III, Chapter 8.

[9] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 13; al-Ṣābi', *al-Wuzarā'*, 117.

often, which corroborates Osti's argument in the previous chapter that, in spite of his weaknesses, the caliph still had powers of decision-making that the officials could not bypass.

The other face of the vizierate, the leadership of the administration, involved the appointment of scribes and control of the vast bureaucratic machine whose tasks and functioning will be described in detail in the next chapter. It was the vizier who had final responsibility for all administrative affairs. He had to provide all-important documents with his signature (*ʿalāma*).[10] He also informed the caliph of the ins and outs of the administrative departments. He had to give him accounts of the state expenses and income and presented important petitions and documents to him. Finally, he was responsible for the implementation of the caliph's orders.

On top of this, the vizier, especially in the first part of al-Muqtadir's reign, took over some of the governmental responsibilities and tasks that previously had belonged to the domain of the caliph. The repeated financial crises forced the caliph to leave economic policy, for example, to his technically more skilled viziers, who thus gained considerable freedom in imposing and raising taxes. In addition, viziers exercised ever more influence on the appointment and dismissal of provincial governors, judges and military leaders.[11] Even military matters, which had long remained the prerogative of the caliph, came now within the vizier's sphere of influence. The crisis in this period with the Qarāmiṭa, a Shīʿite movement operating from al-Baḥrayn,[12] for example, called for the vizier to perform an active and executive role in military decision-making.

In the field of jurisdiction, the vizier was responsible for the examination of petitions as part of the so-called *maẓālim*.[13] During *maẓālim* sessions headed by the vizier or one of his representatives complaints submitted by subjects of the empire were heard, especially petitions against unlawful

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[10] See, for example, al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 238.

[11] See al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, I, 231–233; trans. *Table-Talk* (1921–2), II, 133–135. As an exception to the rule, caliph al-Muqtadir is said to have instructed ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā at the beginning of his second vizierate in 315/927 not to dismiss two prominent officials, a judge and head of a department. ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 129–130.

[12] Note that al-Baḥrayn at this time was not just the modern island but the mainland opposite it as well.

[13] See also Maaike van Berkel, 'Embezzlement and Reimbursement: Disciplining Officials in ʿAbbāsid Baghdad (8th–10th centuries A.D.)', *International Journal of Public Administration* 34–11 (2011): 712–719.

acts by revenue officers.[14] One of the purposes of the institution was to force officials to follow their instructions without exceeding the limits of their competence. The vizier held *maẓālim* meetings on specific days. Ibn al-Furāt, for example, seems to have held sessions during his first vizierate on Sundays and during his second vizierate on Tuesdays.[15]

For all his power, the precise extent of the vizier's competence was, nevertheless, not clearly defined or fixed. Like all other officials within the empire, he was ultimately dependent upon the goodwill and support of his superior, the caliph. However, being in favour with the caliph in itself was not enough to ensure survival. The vizier's authority and success were also influenced by the balance of power between the various groups of state servants: the military, the bureaucrats and members of the court. The vizier's ability to build personal networks and create political support with them also determined his success.

Fifteen Viziers in 25 Years

During the reign of al-Muqtadir the vizierate changed hands frequently. While most of his predecessors worked with one or two viziers, no less than 15 vizieral inaugurations took place under al-Muqtadir. The vizieral term lasted only a few years and sometimes not even more than a few months. The growing financial deficits in the course of this period directly influenced the position and functioning of the viziers. In the second part of al-Muqtadir's reign the periods of office became ever shorter and viziers were no longer able to organize the administration properly and balance the accounts.

Most of al-Muqtadir's viziers came from a select group of secretarial families that had worked for some generations in the central administration in Baghdad. Al-Muqtadir's vizierate saw relatively few newcomers. Dominant within the administration as a whole were two secretarial families who competed with one another for important jobs and influential positions: the Banū l-Jarrāḥ, with its main representative ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā, and the Banū l-Furāt family, under the headship of Ibn al-Furāt. Ibn al-Furāt was vizier three times before his final dismissal and decapitation

[14] See, for example, Qudāma b. Jaʿfar (d. 337/948), *Kitāb al-kharāj wa-ṣināʿat al-kitāba*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Zubaydī (Baghdad: Dār al-Rashīd lil-Nashr, 1981), 63–64.

[15] See al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 66, 107.

in 312/924 and ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā formally held office twice but informally many times more.

The Banū l-Jarrāḥ had entered the bureaucratic arena in the middle of the third/ninth century. The first member of the family known to be employed as a scribe was Dāwūd b. al-Jarrāḥ, who was in charge of an audit office (*dīwān al-zimām*) under the caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 232–47/847–61).[16] During the next century the Banū l-Jarrāḥ became one of the most influential and eminent secretarial families. The head of the family in the days of al-Muqtadir, ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā, was said to have been employed in the administrative service since he was a child.[17] He had held high positions in the land tax bureau before he was appointed vizier. On top of his two official vizierates, ʿAlī assisted many of the less experienced viziers of his days such as Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās (306–11/918–23), Ibn Muqla (316–18/928–30) and Sulaymān b. al-Ḥasan (318–19/930–2).[18] Serving them as head of the administration or as deputy vizier, he was able to exercise much influence on their policy. In real terms it was often ʿAlī who pulled the strings instead of the vizier.

Unlike his main rival, Ibn al-Furāt, ʿAlī b ʿĪsā was notorious for his lack of affability. Offending some, humiliating others and cutting down the allowances of all, he endeared himself neither to his subordinates nor to the caliph and his attendants. But despite his grumpiness, ʿAlī was judged very positively by both contemporary and later authors. His long career in governmental service, his modesty and his professional skills served as a paragon of good secretaryship.

A less well-known member of the Banū l-Jarrāḥ who reached the vizierate under the caliph al-Muqtadir was Sulaymān b. al-Ḥasan, son of al-Muʿtamid's (r. 256–79/870–92) vizier al-Ḥasan b. Makhlad. Sulaymān, a relative of ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā—their grandfathers were brothers—had, interestingly enough, learned the tricks of the trade under ʿAlī's main rival, Ibn al-Furāt. Sulaymān and Ibn al-Furāt initially seem to have been closely associated due to the good relations that Ibn al-Furāt had enjoyed with Sulaymān's father. For that reason Ibn al-Furāt provided him with profitable positions in the administration. Yet Sulaymān betrayed his benefactor and rejoined his own family. In 318/930 ʿAlī refused the vizierate, but instead nominated his relative Sulaymān. For one year and two months

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[16] Al-Tanūkhī, *al-Faraj*, I, 212. See also Bowen, *Good Vizier*, 33–34; Sourdel, *Vizirat*, 313, 317 n. 3, 734. On the functioning of the various offices, see also Part II, Chapter 4.

[17] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 107; al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 290.

[18] See, for example, Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 200–201, 205, 212, 337.

Sulaymān was allowed to experience the pleasures of the vizierate. Contemporaries and later generations do not view this vizier in a particularly favourable light: he has gone down in history for his insolence and lack of eloquence.[19]

The strongest rivals of the Banū l-Jarrāḥ were the Banū l-Furāt. They had played an important role among the bureaucrats of Baghdad since the caliphate of al-Muʿtamid. The sources disagree about the first member of this family to be employed in governmental service. Some identified Muḥammad b. Mūsā b. al-Furāt, the father of the famous brothers Aḥmad and ʿAlī, as the first official in this family. Others pointed to the elder brother Aḥmad, and yet another source mentions that a great-uncle or great-great-uncle of the brothers was already employed as scribe in Baghdad at the beginning of the third/ninth century. Many of the other family members worked as merchants and financiers.[20]

In the days of the caliph al-Muqtadir, the Banū l-Furāt were led by Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. al-Furāt (d. 312/924). He had entered the financial administration under the auspices of his brother Aḥmad during the office of the vizier Ismāʿīl b. Bulbul, who was Shīʿite like the Banū l-Furāt. Under the caliph al-Muqtadir he became vizier three times. His policy and style provoked the admiration as well as disapproval of contemporaries and later generations. As he amply rewarded his friends and supporters with profitable jobs and expensive gifts, he was often praised for his kindness and generosity. Unlike his rival ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā, he seems to have been a charming and courteous person. These characteristics contributed to his popularity at the caliphal court. Like his opponent he was, however, above all praised for his administrative skills, specifically his financial expertise. His talent for raising money and his creativity in tapping new sources of taxation were skills that were highly appreciated

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[19] See ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 161.

[20] Al-Hamadhānī mentions the father as the first member of the family to be employed in governmental service: al-Hamadhānī, *Takmilat*, 46. Hilāl al-Ṣābiʾ notes that the elder of the two brothers Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Mūsā b. al-Furāt, was the first of his family to reach important governmental posts: al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 8. Massignon mentions also a certain ʿUmar b. al-Furāt, an uncle or great-uncle of Muḥammad b. Mūsā b. al-Furāt. Louis Massignon, 'Les origines shīʿites de la famille vizirale des Banū l-Furāt', in *Mélanges Gaudefroy-Demombynes* (Cairo: IFAO, 1935–40), 25–29, 28; Louis Massignon, 'Recherches sur les shīʿites extrémistes à Baghdad à la fin du troisième siècle de l'Hégire', *Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 92 (new series 17) (1938): 378–382, 380–381. See also Kennedy, *Prophet*, 175.

by those willing to spend—that is, the members of the court.[21] His corruption and favouritism, however, were widely criticized in the sources. The way in which he arranged well-paid jobs for unsuitable candidates in exchange for services rendered is, for example, clearly illustrated by al-Tanūkhī. Al-Tanūkhī relates a story of how Ibn al-Furāt rewarded a cloth merchant, in whose house he had previously taken refuge, with the judgeship of Basra, Wāsiṭ and seven districts of Ahwāz.[22]

The Arab chroniclers were unanimously negative about Ibn al-Furāt's third and last vizierate (311–2/923–4), 'the year of destruction'. While during his previous terms Ibn al-Furāt had always been praised for his mild conduct towards his predecessors and rivals, his last vizierate was said to have been dominated by brutal and ruthless violence against any potential opponent and former employee of the Abbasid state.[23] In 312/924 Ibn al-Furāt and his son al-Muḥassin, the vizier's right hand and the main instigator of the violence, were put to death by caliphal order. From that moment onwards the most important scribe in the Banū l-Furāt was al-Faḍl b. Jaʿfar b. al-Furāt, the nephew of the former vizier, who had been employed as a director of the land tax bureau of the eastern provinces (*dīwān al-mashriq*) under his uncle. For some years the name of his family was tainted with blood, and al-Faḍl b. Jaʿfar remained in concealment. He appeared again during ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā's second vizierate (315–16/927–8) and finally became al-Muqtadir's last vizier (320/932).[24]

Influential during the early years of al-Muqtadir's reign was yet another vizieral family, the Banū Khāqān. The family's history in administration can be traced back to the first half of the third/ninth century, when the brothers Yaḥyā and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān were employed as clerks under the caliph al-Maʾmūn (r. 198–218/813–33). The first vizier in the family, ʿUbayd Allāh, served al-Mutawakkil (r. 232–47/847–61) and later al-Muʿtamid.[25] The leaders of the family during the reign of the caliph al-Muqtadir were father Muḥammad and son ʿAbd Allāh al-Khāqānī. Muḥammad occupied the vizierate from 299/912 until 301/913 and ʿAbd Allāh from 312/924 until 313/925. Whereas ʿUbayd Allāh, the father of Muḥammad and grandfather

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[21] Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282), *Wafayāt al-aʿyān*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās, 8 vols (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1977), III, 421–424; al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 8–11, 219, 142–143.

[22] Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, I, 231–233; trans. *Table-Talk* (1921–2), II, 133–135.

[23] For Ibn al-Furāt's kindness towards his colleagues, see, for example, his treatment of those who had conspired against Caliph al-Muqtadir in favour of Ibn al-Muʿtazz: Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 9–14; al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 23–25.

[24] See ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 134; Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 149, 152, 184, 212, 219, 228–237.

[25] See Sourdel, *Vizirat*, 219, 238, 273, 274–286, 305–309.

of ʿAbd Allāh, was generally praised for his competence, the sources are full of criticism about the son and grandson.[26] Contemporaries and later generations especially denounce Muḥammad's and ʿAbd Allāh's lack of interest and expertise. Enjoying the privileges of their position and giving themselves up to drinking, father and son were said to have left daily business to subordinates.[27]

Descended from yet another well-known secretarial family was al-Muqtadir's ninth vizier: Aḥmad al-Khaṣībī (313–4/925–7). Al-Khaṣībī had no experience in the administrative departments when he was nominated for the vizierate: he had been working as private secretary for one of the court ladies, Thumal, and subsequently for the caliph's mother.[28] Yet he was considered a suitable candidate, probably because he was a vizier's grandson and thus belonged to the reservoir from which the caliph recruited most of his high officials. His grandfather, Aḥmad b. al-Khaṣīb, had been the vizier of the eleventh Abbasid caliph, al-Muntaṣir (r. 247–8/861–2).[29] Aḥmad al- Khaṣībī was rather unsuccessful as a vizier. Unfamiliar with the central administration, he is said to have left daily affairs to his closest employees. According to Miskawayh, he 'drank wine throughout his tenure of office all night and slept during the day; when he woke he was fuddled and had no energy left for work'.[30]

In 319/931, at the end of al-Muqtadir's reign, the vizierate was occupied by al-Ḥusayn b. al-Qāsim, a member of one of oldest secretarial families, the Banū Wahb. Members of this family had worked as scribes for the state since the days of the early Umayyads. The family's achievements until the early fourth/tenth century are recorded in detail in the sources.[31] During most of the reign of al-Muqtadir the Banū Wahb were out of the picture,

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[26] For a description of ʿUbayd Allāh, see Ibn al-Najjār al-Baghdādī (d. 643/1245), *Dhayl ta'rīkh Baghdād*, ed. Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā (al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta'rīkh Baghdad aw madinat al-salām*, XVI–XXII) (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1997), XVII, 109–115; al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, VIII, 12–16; trans. *Table-Talk* (1929), 492–494.

[27] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 23. See also Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 31–32 and al-Ṣābi', *al-Wuzarā'*, 278–280.

[28] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 126–127.

[29] See Sourdel, *Vizirat*, 287–289, 439.

[30] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 143.

[31] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 136; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, II, 415. See also H. F. Amedroz, 'Tales of Official Life from the "Tadhkira" of Ibn Ḥamdūn, etc.', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1908): 409–470, 418–419; and I. I. Blay-Abramski, 'From Damascus to Baghdad: The 'Abbāsid Administrative System as a Product of the Umayyad Heritage (41/661–320/932)' (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1982), 264–265. For a thorough analysis of the reputation of Ḥusayn b. al-Qāsim, see Letizia Osti, 'al-Qasim b. 'Ubayd Allāh—the Vizier as Villain: On Classical Arabic Gossip', in *'Abbāsid Studies. Occasional Papers of the School*

passed over in favour of the Banū l-Jarrāḥ, the Banū l-Furāt and the Banū Khāqān. However, in the last days of al-Muqtadir's reign new generations of the Banū Wahb gained a firm foothold. Al-Ḥusayn b. al-Qāsim, the head of the family in these days, was able to gain the caliph's attention in an ingenious way. He made a deal with a certain charlatan, who produced prophetical texts in ancient script, ascribing them to the Prophet Daniel. This man agreed to create a document in which he would enter a description of the peculiarities of al-Ḥusayn's appearance—his height, the pockmarks on his face, the deformity on his upper lip and the thinness of the hair on his lip—together with the statement that

> if this man became vizier to the eighteenth of the Abbasids [al-Muqtadir], that caliph would be successful in all his affairs, would gain the victory over his enemies, would conquer new countries and see the world flourish in his days.[32]

From the moment this pamphlet was brought to al-Muqtadir's attention and he identified the man described in it as al-Ḥusayn b. al-Qāsim, the caliph supported the latter's candidature for the vizierate.[33] Sources differ in their judgements on al-Ḥusayn's vizierate. Some concentrate upon his alleged inability to deal with money matters, while others comment rather favourably on his policy.[34]

Although al-Muqtadir recruited his viziers mainly from among the families mentioned above, some ambitious newcomers were also able to enter the vizierate. We know of at least two viziers who reached their position without influential relatives preceding them in administrative service: Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās and Ibn Muqla. Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās, who was born in Khurāsān in 223/837, was not only the first and only member of his family to become vizier; he was also an outsider in the bureaucratic circles of Baghdad. He claimed to have started his career humbly as vendor of water, dates and pomegranates, but somehow gained great wealth. His fortune made him one of the main financiers of the Abbasid state and he was able to lay his hands on lucrative tax farming contracts in Fārs and Wāsiṭ.[35] His luxurious lifestyle, extravagance and generosity impressed

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of ʿAbbāsid Studies, Cambridge, 6–10 July 2002, ed. James E. Montgomery (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 233–245.

[32] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 215. The translation of this quotation is by H. F. Amedroz and D. S. Margoliouth.

[33] Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, VIII, 230–231; Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 215–217.

[34] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 164; Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 223; al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, I, 260–261; trans. *Table-Talk* (1921–2), II, 140–141.

[35] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 25, 57. See also Bowen, *Good Vizier*, 159.

his contemporaries and the sources record many stories about his display of wealth.[36] When he came into conflict with the vizier Ibn al-Furāt, he secretly started to intrigue for the vizierate himself. He sought contact with attendants at the caliphal court by sending agents to Baghdad. In Wāsiṭ he showered the local representative of the Queen Mother with gifts. His plots turned out to be successful and in 306/918 he became al-Muqtadir's sixth vizier.[37]

Ḥāmid is said to have been over 80 when he became vizier. His ignorance of administrative procedures, of the vizier's duties and of court etiquette were no secret to his contemporaries. ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā was appointed as his deputy over the administrative bureaux. After only a few months in office, it became clear to everyone that Ḥāmid was only nominally vizier, while in fact ʿAlī was pulling the strings. During audiences at the palace, al-Muqtadir addressed ʿAlī. Moreover, Ḥāmid was not allowed to give orders of any kind. A bitter rivalry between ʿAlī and Ḥāmid resulted from this situation and both tried to plot against the other. Ḥāmid got the worst of it. In the end he saw that no honour could be achieved for him in Baghdad and he asked permission to retire to Wāsiṭ and to take care of his former tax farming operations. Al-Muqtadir granted him permission and he left Baghdad, keeping the title of vizier until his final dismissal in 311/923.[38]

Much more successful was the newcomer Ibn Muqla. Ibn Muqla was born in Baghdad in 272/885–6. Under the supervision of the influential scribes Muḥammad b. ʿAbdūn and Ibn al-Furāt, Ibn Muqla started working in various land tax bureaux from the age of 16 onwards.[39] When Ibn al-Furāt was nominated to the vizierate in 296/908, Ibn Muqla had already gained so much favour with his patron that he was offered a prestigious job as director of one of the administrative bureaux (*dīwān al-khātam wa-l-faḍḍ*).[40] Ibn al-Furāt also helped him to accumulate a fortune of his own. A deal was concluded with some merchants on the price of produce from state landholdings, after which the crops were made over at a rebate of one or two *dīnār* per measure to Ibn Muqla, who was in charge of the

[36] al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, I, 22–23, 24, 41; trans. *Table-Talk* (1921–2), II, 14–15, 15–16, 25–26; al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 3.

[37] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 73; Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 57; al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 32–33. See also Osti, "Abbāsid Intrigues'.

[38] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 59–60, 69–72, 75, 86. On Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās see also Part I, Chapter 1.

[39] Ibn al- Ṭiqṭaqā, *al-Fakhrī*, 368; al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 119–120; al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, II, 120; trans. *Table-Talk* (1921–2), II, 184–185.

[40] al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 178.

negotiations. Through him the crops were again resold to the merchants for the agreed price.[41] When there ceased to be a relationship of trust between Ibn Muqla and his patron, the former successfully allied himself to other viziers. In 316/928, during the latter part of al-Muqtadir's reign, Ibn Muqla finally became vizier himself and was able to start his own secretarial family. Right from his accession, he started to distribute offices among his relatives and friends. Both his two brothers and his three sons received influential adminstrative posts.[42] During most of his vizierate Ibn Muqla was, however, unable to steer his own course. He was completely dependent upon the support of General Mu'nis and during the second part of his rule all his decisions had to be controlled and approved by ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā. In 318/930 he was arrested and had to wait until after al-Muqtadir's death before he was invited for a second term in office.[43]

There were also two viziers, al-ʿAbbās b. al-Ḥasan and al-Kalwadhānī, who were probably newcomers to the higher echelons of the central administration, but their precise family background is unknown. Al-ʿAbbās b. al-Ḥasan was al-Muqtadir's vizier at his inauguration day. After consultation with the four eminent scribes of his administration al-ʿAbbās had inclined to Ibn al-Furāt's view and nominated 'the man who would leave him to administer the empire'. However, al-ʿAbbās hardly received the benefits from his decision. After two months in office, he was killed by a group of officers who were conducting a coup against the caliph.

The second vizier of unknown background, al-Kalwadhānī, first appears in the sources in the wake of Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās and is described as one of his most trustworthy employees. It is likely that al-Kalwadhānī came to Baghdad with Ḥāmid when the latter became vizier. When Ḥāmid withdrew to Wāsiṭ, he left al-Kalwadhānī behind as his representative. Contemporaries praise al-Kalwadhānī's competence, and soon he was able to build a career of his own. During the viziers of ʿAbd Allāh al-Khāqānī and al-Khaṣībī he occupied directorships of the tax departments, and in 315/927 he acted as interim vizier in anticipation of ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā's arrival in the capital. From that moment onwards he was a serious candidate for the vizierate himself and in 319/931 it was indeed his turn. Al-Kalwadhānī's deeds are generally judged positively by contemporaries and later genera-

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41 al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, II, 120–121; trans. *Table-Talk* (1921–2), II, 184–185. See also al-Ṣābi', *al-Wuzarā'*, 215.

42 ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 134–135.

43 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 259–264.

tions. However, in the insecure final years of al-Muqtadir's reign, he was unable to turn the tide. After two months in office he was dismissed from the vizierate, but continued working in top administrative positions.

Allies and Enemies

To a great extent it was the military leaders and the courtiers who determined the political latitude and personal achievements of al-Muqtadir's viziers. They could and constantly did plead or denounce a vizier's case with the caliph or those close to him. Contemporary sources provide us with detailed information on their (sometimes unsolicited) advice and interferences. Generally, the members of the Banū l-Furāt were more closely associated with the court, while the members of the Banū l-Jarrāḥ had built up an alliance with the military. The networking activities of their main representatives, Ibn al-Furāt and ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā, will function here as examples of how this system worked at large. Other viziers generally operated in a similar fashion.

In the absence of a clear distinction between the caliphal household and the official state administration, the importance and influence of the courtiers cannot be overestimated. Ibn al-Furāt was well aware of this. He tried to maintain friendly relations with as many high courtiers as possible. At the beginning of his first vizierate he set the tone by promising a pension to all members of the royal family, and at a later stage he increased their allowances and pensions. The non-royal courtiers also benefitted from Ibn al-Furāt's generosity: at feasts and festivals he showered them with gifts.[44] The enormous amounts that were involved in such strategic generosity can be inferred from an account of another vizier, al-Khaṣībī, who was said to have spent 35,000 *dīnār* on presents for the caliph, his family and the courtiers on the occasion of the Persian New Year.[45]

Yet not all Ibn al-Furāt's relationships at court were friendly. He maintained strained relations with two of al-Muqtadir's successive chamberlains, Sawsan and Naṣr al-Qushūrī. The superintendent of the palace, the chamberlain (*ḥājib*) was often the natural rival of the vizier.[46] Chroniclers give interesting accounts of the chamberlain's informal influence on the

[44] See, for example, Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 43.
[45] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 156.
[46] See also Part III, Chapter 6.

appointment of viziers. As the commander of an important part of the palace guard, chamberlains also competed with army leaders.[47] Just as the military, the chamberlains of the late third/ninth and early fourth/tenth centuries were recruited among the Turkish slaves of the caliph. Sawsan, who had enjoyed much influence on the administration during the office of al-Muqtadir's first vizier, al-ʿAbbās b. al-Ḥasan, felt excluded from political decision-making once Ibn al-Furāt had assumed the vizierate in 296/908. Then a rumour was circulated around the palace that Sawsan was preparing a conspiracy against the vizier with the help of some of the Ḥujarī guard. Ibn al-Furāt, who had got wind of the conspiracy, was able to outwit the chamberlain by persuading al-Muqtadir that Sawsan had been one of the chief supporters of Ibn al-Muʿtazz during the coup against him. Thereupon Sawsan was arrested and executed.[48] Al-Muqtadir's next chamberlain, Naṣr, who held office from 296/908 until 317/929, also disliked Ibn al-Furāt and generally supported his rivals. Thus, when he was approached by an agent of the tax farmer and aspirant for the vizierate Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās, for example, he enthusiastically intrigued for Ḥāmid's nomination and brought about the fall of Ibn al-Furāt.[49]

The relations between the Banū l-Jarrāḥ and the members of the caliphal court were in general far from friendly. The growing expenses at the court were a thorn in the flesh of the leader of the Banū l-Jarrāḥ, ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā. ʿAlī's attempts to reduce allowances and palace costs seem to have made him very unpopular at court, and many courtiers plotted against him.[50] Obviously, ʿAlī's disapproval of exorbitant court expenses also influenced his relationship with the caliph. A vizier could never openly raise objections against the caliph's will, but ʿAlī's ingenious attempts to somehow find a way out of this trap were famous among contemporaries and later generations. On a very cold day, when al-Muqtadir had received him bare-headed in one of the courtyards, the vizier was said to have exclaimed:

> O Commander of the Faithful, you come out on such a cold morning, and sit in such an open courtyard bare-headed, while others, in such a case, would sit in sheltered places, under cover, and by the fire. I believe you are taking an excessive amount of hot drinks and food rich in musk.[51]

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47 See also Part II, Chapter 5.
48 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 12.
49 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 44, 47, 52, 57, 144. See also Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 143, 184.
50 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 29; al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 278–280, 349–350, 353–354.
51 Al-Ṣābiʾ, *Rusūm*, 27; trans. *Rules and Regulations*, 26.

The caliph answered:

> No, by Allah, I do not do this, nor do I eat musk. The musk is never offered to me with any food except in small amounts in the *khuskhanānaj* dessert,[52] of which I eat once in a while.[53]

ʿAlī thereupon grasped the opportunity and suggested that the caliph should remove musk from the kitchen budget. Al-Muqtadir laughed and said:

> I wish you would not, for those *dīnār* may be spent on the food and expenses of some people, and I do not wish it to be stopped.[54]

Women are of special interest in the networking activities of viziers at court, including the relatives of the caliph, his concubines and the *qahramāna*s, the managers of the caliphal household. As has been seen in Part I and will be explored in more detail in Part III, their influence in the first half of the reign of caliph al-Muqtadir is comprehensively commented upon by contemporaries.[55] Because of their closeness to the caliph, they were able to set their stamp on policy and became important parties with whom viziers sought to conclude deals and alliances. The most important woman at court was the caliph's mother, Shaghab. At the beginning of his reign, she functioned as a kind of regent for her young son. She made her influence felt in nominations as well as in political decisions. Al-Khaṣībī, who used to work as her personal scribe, owed his nomination to the vizierate to her,[56] while ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā wrote a letter to her rather than to the caliph to give an account of his policy and to defend himself against the accusations made by his political enemies.[57] One of the other politically active ladies was Umm Mūsā al-Hāshimiyya. Her relationship with ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā was unfriendly and became intolerable after she had burst into a meeting of the highest state officials demanding attention for a list of petty requirements.[58] In the second part of al-Muqtadir's reign, when

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[52] A kind of Arab pastry similar to *baqlāwa*.

[53] Al-Ṣābiʾ, *Rusūm*, 27–28; trans. *Rules and Regulations*, 352.

[54] Al-Ṣābiʾ, *Rusūm*, 28; trans. *Rules and Regulations*, 26. ʿAlī's further attempts to reduce the expenses on the royal ducks were hilarious. He was said to have discussed in detail the quality of grain supplied to these birds. Al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 351.

[55] See, for example, al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, I, 287–288; trans. *Table-Talk* (1921–2), II, 152–154; Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 13. See also Part I, Chapter 1 and Part III, Chapter 7.

[56] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 143.

[57] Al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 283–285.

[58] Al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 353–354.

he had grown older and had become more involved in politics himself, the women of his household became less visible in the political arena.

Another major power bloc in state affairs, the army, most clearly displayed its influence through the lobbying of the commander in chief, Muʾnis. Muʾnis' main concern was to ensure a steady income for the troops; his principal weapon was the threat of mutiny. The military was the heaviest burden on the state treasury and in the course of al-Muqtadir's reign, financial deficits were the order of the day and uproar was the military's second nature and the main reason for the dismissal of viziers. It was therefore very important for viziers to seek the support of the army.

The military generally supported the Banū l-Jarrāḥ and all those linked to them. Ibn al-Furāt maintained strained relations with Muʾnis from the very beginning. In 297/909–10 Ibn al-Furāt offended the commander by rejecting a deal the latter had arranged with rebels in the province of Fārs.[59] After this incident both parties were suspicious of each other's intentions, and during the rest of Ibn al-Furāt's career Muʾnis always favoured Ibn al-Furāt's rivals. ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā, on the other hand, owed much of his professional success to Muʾnis' support. For example in 300/912–13 Muʾnis saved the vizierate for ʿAlī, while the latter was outside the capital.[60] On many other occasions he defended or pleaded ʿAlī's case with the caliph against his competitors.[61] It was only after Muʾnis had left town on an expedition against the Fatimids in North Africa that ʿAlī fell from power. ʿAlī in his turn secured a steady income for the troops by granting the commander the tax revenues from the provinces of Egypt and Syria. Throughout al-Muqtadir's reign, Muʾnis and the Banū l-Jarrāḥ supported each other, and as long as Muʾnis and his troops were in Baghdad or nearby, this team proved almost invincible.[62]

Next to finding support at court and in the military, it was essential for viziers to set up a team of allies within their own bureaucratic apparatus. Providing relatives and clients with strategic and profitable positions in the administrative departments worked in two ways. First, viziers could rely upon trustworthy personnel willing to implement their policy. Secondly, by providing their allies and kinsfolk with security of employment and income, the viziers rewarded them for previous services and were able to retain their services for future enterprises.

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[59] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 16–19, 25.
[60] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 25–26.
[61] See, for example, Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 43–44; al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 30.
[62] On Muʾnis see also Part II, Chapter 5.

Immediately after the installation of a new vizier most of the directors of the departments were dismissed and replaced by the relatives and clients of the new vizier. Thus ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā employed his brothers, Ibn al-Furāt assigned posts to his son al-Muḥassin and his nephew al-Faḍl b. Jaʿfar, Muḥammad al-Khāqānī favoured his two sons ʿAbd Allāh and ʿAbd al-Wāḥid and Ibn Muqla introduced his two brothers and later on his three sons into the administrative service. Some of these relatives, such as ʿAlī's brother Muḥammad, were only temporarily employed during the vizierate of their influential relative and never seem to have built a career of their own. Others were able to survive without the help of their relatives and owed their careers to personal qualities. Al-Faḍl b. Jaʿfar, of the Banū l-Furāt, is the best example of a talented relative. He entered the administration thanks to the influence of his famous uncles, Aḥmad and ʿAlī b. al-Furāt, and his first important position was during the vizierate of his uncle, who appointed him as director of the tax department for the eastern provinces. He owed his impressive career, however, to his own intelligence and talent for administrative affairs.

Other than through family ties, the distribution of administrative positions was arranged by means of patronage. Viziers also entered into alliances with non-related subordinates. Indeed, the cooperation between patrons and clients was to the benefit of all parties. Outsiders, such as Ibn Muqla, owed their impressive careers to the support of their patron-viziers. However, a patron and his clients formed no closed entity. Family ties were generally much stronger than the relationships between a patron and his clients. However, some of these alliances seemed to have resembled a father–son relationship. Ibn Muqla, for example, allied himself to Ibn al-Furāt at an early age. When much later in his career he betrayed his patron and Ibn al-Furāt found out about his double-dealing, the latter was said to have replied 'that he might as well have doubted his own children or his nephew as Abū ʿAlī b. Muqla, whom he had brought up and protected'.[63]

Thus the successes of al-Muqtadir's viziers were dependent on their ability to build networks of allies and supporters around strategic positions, to help them to defend and enforce their policies. These alliances could be ad hoc agreements or long-lasting collaborations. Obviously, none of them were selfless. They were all based on the expectation of a favour in return. The supporters had to be rewarded, and this was done

[63] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 52.

by providing them or their relatives and clientele with remunerative positions and financial gain. The army supported the viziers who guaranteed their monthly payments and the court members backed up those viziers who raised their allowances or gave them more financial scope or political influence. All alliances had to be maintained on a regular basis.

Rewards and Risks

Not only did viziers take care of their allies and relatives, they also feathered their own nests. Any office in the Abbasid administration was generally regarded as a source of financial gain and the highest office, the vizierate, was especially lucrative. At the same time, the vizierate was a potentially dangerous position. Competitors constantly lay in wait to attack and once a vizier had fallen from power, he and his relatives were generally exposed to imprisonment, heavy interrogation and confiscation of their fortunes.

We are well informed about both the official and unofficial revenues of viziers. Under al-Muqtadir, the vizier's monthly allowance varied between 5,000 and 7,000 *dīnār*.[64] In 296/908, at the start of his first vizierate, Ibn al-Furāt received a salary of 5,000 *dīnār*. The same amount was assigned to his successors, Muḥammad al-Khāqānī (299–301/912–3) and ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā, during the latter's first vizierate (3014/913–17) and probably became the customary amount until the vizierate of al-Khaṣībī (313–14/925–7). During his second vizierate (315–16/927–8) ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā received 7,000 *dīnār* a month, which was composed of the customary 5,000 *dīnār* assigned to his predecessors and increased by the amount of 2,000 *dīnār* that had been given to al-Khaṣībī's son. Some scattered data from the previous period indicate that this salary had increased enormously under al-Muqtadir, from the 10,000 *dirham* (roughly 690 *dīnār*) a month assigned to al-Mutawakkil's vizier ʿUbayd Allāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khāqān (237/851–2 until 247/861) through 1,000 *dīnār* a month for al-Muʿtaḍid's vizier ʿUbayd Allāh b. Sulaymān (279–88/892–901) to the 5,000 *dīnār* a month Ibn al-Furāt received in 296/908 at the beginning of his first vizierate.[65]

With this monthly salary the vizier stood head and shoulders above the rest of the administrative staff, who seem to have earned a monthly

[64] See Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 154–155, 159; al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 23, 261–262, 351.

[65] al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, VIII, 15; trans. *Table-Talk* (1929), 493–494; al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 20, 23.

salary that varied between 500 *dīnār* for the director of one of the important financial departments to 6 *dīnār* for a junior scribe.[66] Moreover, on top of his monthly allowance, the vizier had at his disposal the revenues of estates that had been attached to his function, probably since the vizierate of ʿUbayd Allāh b. Sulaymān (279–88/892–901).[67] During the reign of the caliph al-Muqtadir the revenues of the vizieral estates seem to have fluctuated between 50,000 and 170,000 *dīnār* a year.[68]

In addition to this regular income, most viziers also received irregular gifts. Such presents were often in kind and varied from furniture for the decoration of their houses and expensive clothes to large estates for private use.[69] Moreover, the sons of a vizier who assisted their father in his administrative tasks also received generous allowances. Al-Khāqānī's sons ʿAbd Allāh and ʿAbd al-Wāḥid, for example, were paid sums of 1,000 and 500 *dīnār* a month respectively, while the son of the vizier al-Khaṣībī (313–14/925–7) received a monthly allowance of 2,000 *dīnār*.[70]

Again, on top of their official salaries and allowances, viziers were able to add considerable sums to their income by means of embezzlement, extortion and bribery. We know about these illegal revenues through the detailed descriptions of the discharge procedures which were instigated after the dismissal of a vizier from office.[71] This calling to account of discharged officials for their spoils of office had been a common

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[66] For a more detailed description of the revenues of the various scribes see Part II, Chapter 4.

[67] al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 20.

[68] The figures indicating revenues from the vizieral estates are difficult to compare since gross revenues are sometimes mentioned in the sources, while at other times the permanent expenses have already been subtracted. Moreover, the revenues from private estates are often included. According to Miskawayh, al-ʿAbbās b. al-Ḥasan, al-Muktafī's last and al-Muqtadir's first vizier, received from his estates, probably including his private landed property, 120,000 *dīnār* a year, while Hilāl al-Ṣābiʾ mentions an income of only 50,000 *dīnār* a year. Al-Khaṣībī, who was interrogated by ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā after his fall from the vizierate, was said to have received from his estates the total sum of 180,000 *dīnār* for the 14 months he was in office. This brought him in approximately 154,000 *dīnār* a year. However, probably part of the estates referred to in these interrogations were private. Under ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā in the year 315/927 the vizieral estate (*iqṭāʿ al-wuzarāʾ*) yielded 170,000 *dīnār*, even after the payment of permanent expenses. Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 155, 159, 239; al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 23, 139, 322–323. See also ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dūrī, *Taʾrīkh al-ʿIrāq al-iqtiṣādī fī l-qarn al-rābiʿ al-hijrī* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-ʿArabiyya, 1999), 276–278.

[69] See, for example, al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 65.

[70] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 154; al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 261–262.

[71] A more detailed analysis of discharge procedures is given in van Berkel, 'The Vizier and the Harem Stewardess'.

procedure since Umayyad times.[72] The main goal was the mulcting of both the secretly and the legally acquired fortunes of dismissed officials. Generally no criminal procedures took place. Once a vizier had fallen from power, his private finances were investigated in detail by his successors, who also negotiated with the dismissed vizier about the amount of reimbursement.

Illegal revenues seem to have influenced almost every aspect of the professional life of viziers. From lucrative deals with governors and tax farmers through fees for discharging another person's debts to the state to the drawing of salaries of non-existent subordinates, it was the vizier's private purse that was lavishly filled and the state treasury that lost out. The illegal appropriation of state money took place in various ingenious ways, but was sometimes also remarkably simple. At the beginning of his first vizierate, Ibn al-Furāt, for example, was said to have ordered the transfer of 70,000 *dīnār* directly from the state treasury to his private purse, registering it in the account as a payment for the military.[73] The total amounts viziers obtained through bribery and embezzlement of state funds could rise far above that of their official income. Ibn al-Furāt was said to have received each year of his second vizierate (304–6/917–18) 1.2 million *dīnār* of illegal revenues.[74]

Indeed, acquiring revenues seem to have been relatively easy. Holding on to these fortunes was a different, and much more difficult, matter. The aim of investigating dismissed officials was first and foremost to establish the amounts that they had embezzled from state funds and had to repay to the treasury. Yet, in an era of financial crisis and need for immediate cash, even the legally obtained riches of dismissed viziers were not safe from confiscation, as they helped the new administrators to balance their books. In pursuit of a moderate reimbursement sum, viziers became very clever at hiding their fortunes, both secretly and legally acquired. When their downfall was near, they sometimes destroyed their archives and stashed their money in wells and barns or deposited it with relatives and money-dealers. Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās, for example, was said to have thrown his account books into the Tigris and stowed away 400,000 *dīnār* in a well

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[72] Frede Løkkegaard, *Islamic Taxation in the Classical Period: With Special Reference to Circumstances in Iraq* (Copenhagen: Branner & Korch, 1950; reprint, Middle East collection), 162.

[73] Al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 117.

[74] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 64. See also Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 61, 128 and al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 124, 133–134, 154.

under one of his private chambers.[75] Even so, many lost their fortunes and some were even forced to sign for the repayment of a sum they could not raise.

Finally, the confiscations played a role in the factional strife between competing viziers and their families and allies. During the investigations, the new bureaucratic faction tried to discredit its predecessors as much as possible in order to strengthen its own position. Therefore investigations could be very brutal and even life-threatening. After their fall from power, many viziers and their entourage were humiliated and physically abused. Some were even killed after their dismissal. Ibn al-Furāt was decapitated after a harsh trial in 312/924 and Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās was said to have been poisoned in 311/923.[76]

Conclusions

No Abbasid caliph wore out as many viziers as al-Muqtadir. The number of viziers, their short terms in office and the harsh interrogations after their dismissal are clear indications that the highest civil office had become a risky position. At the same time, al-Muqtadir's caliphate is often characterized as the heyday of the vizierate. Dominique Sourdel, for example, refers to the period as 'la grande époque du vizirat',[77] inspired by the detailed and lively descriptions of individual viziers and their deeds in sources such as Miskawayh's *Tajārib al-umam* and the *Tuḥfat al-umarāʾ* by Hilāl al-Ṣābiʾ. These sources, especially Miskawayh's, most certainly exaggerated the role of 'the people of the pen' in al-Muqtadir's age to counterpoint and lament their loss of influence in his own. In a later chapter of this volume Kennedy will contest Miskawayh's narrative by arguing that the military rather than civil officials dominated the politics of al-Muqtadir's reign. Yet it is thanks to the Miskawayh's and Hilāl al-Ṣābiʾ's focus on these individuals that al-Muqtadir's viziers are among the best known of the era.

Their tasks were diverse: advising the caliph on each and every decision, appointing and dismissing provincial leaders, leading the extensive administrative apparatus, answering the petitions in the *maẓālim* sessions

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[75] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 100; al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, I, 24; trans. *Table-Talk* (1921–2), II, 15–16. For other examples, see Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 102, 158, 230.

[76] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 104, 138–139.

[77] Sourdel, *Vizirat*, 385.

and deciding on military operations. Above all they were called to account for the financial administration of the caliphate. Their accountability in financial matters became more and more stressful in the second part of al-Muqtadir's reign when the empire was on the verge of bankruptcy and most of the viziers' energies seem to have been spent on raising funds for the payment of the military. With the threats of the Qarāmiṭa in Baghdad's hinterland and the soldiers' revolts in the city itself, the second part of al-Muqtadir's reign saw an increasing influence of the the military on the appointment and dismissal of viziers.

In general, the successes and competences of the viziers of the era were highly dependent upon their abilities to build networks of allies. Within the bureaucratic class they formed factions consisting of relatives and clients, trustworthy subordinates, who provided them with political support. In his turn, the vizier offered his junior relatives and clients jobs and security. The various bureaucratic factions competed with one another for political influence, offices and the income that came with them. However, viziers needed the support of members of the two other power blocs in state affairs, the court and the military. Many political decisions of this period were initiated by the military or courtiers or were meant to promote the interests of both groups. Viziers could only survive by flattering some and increasing the funds of others, while at the same time playing their enemies off against one another.

The risks they took were high, but so too were the rewards. Power warranted taking such risks. Compared with other officials' income, viziers' salaries were very high. Moreover, on top of their official salaries, they often accumulated large fortunes by means of illegal practices. Embezzlement of state revenues, extortion from and bribery by subjects were routine practice and enriched them and their families. Their riches were stashed away to protect them from confiscation after their downfall. A new faction that came to power would undoubtedly try to lay its hands on their fortunes, because they, in their turn, needed these extra funds to balance the accounts.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BUREAUCRACY

Maaike van Berkel

The Abbasid state servants were divided into two main groups: 'the people of the pen', the civil servants, and 'the people of the sword', the soldiers.[1] The long-standing distinction between these two types of servants and the various roles they were supposed to perform in society have come down to us in numerous texts of many genres, from chronicles to poetry.[2] Illustrative is the description of the behaviour of the late third-/ninth-century vizier ʿUbayd Allāh b. Sulaymān by Hilāl al-Ṣābiʾ:

> Nothing is worse for the people of the pen than to appear courageous or to assume the attributes of the military. It has been said that while ʿUbayd Allāh b. Sulaymān was standing in the presence of al-Muʿtaḍid bi-llāh, may the blessings of God be upon him, a lion escaped from his trainer. The people ran in fear, and ʿUbayd Allāh ran in terror and hid under a bed; but al-Muʿtaḍid bi-llāh did not move. When the beast was taken away and ʿUbayd Allāh returned, al-Muʿtaḍid said: 'How weak is your spirit, O ʿUbayd Allāh! The beast was not going to reach you, nor would it be allowed to reach you, and yet you behaved as you did!' ʿUbayd Allāh answered: 'My heart, O Commander of the Faithful, is the heart of a scribe and my spirit is that of attendants and not that of companions.' When ʿUbayd Allāh left, his friends questioned him on his behaviour, but he replied as follows: 'I behaved correctly and you have erred in your thinking. By God, I did not fear the beast because I knew it could not reach me, but I wanted the caliph to see my lack of power and courage in order that he might trust and not fear me. Had I behaved differently, I would have made the caliph fear me.'[3]

Bureaucrats were not supposed to display great courage since fearless behaviour was considered to belong to the military. To act in accordance

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[1] This chapter is partly based upon my dissertation, van Berkel, 'Accountants and Men of Letters'.

[2] For an outline of the antithesis between pen and sword and a general introduction to the genre of the literary debate, see Geert Jan van Gelder, 'The Conceit of Pen and Sword: On an Arabic Literary Debate', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 32 (1987): 329–360, and Ewald Wagner, 'Die arabische Rangstreitdichtung und ihre Einordnung in die allgemeine Literaturgeschichte', *Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, Mainz–geistes- und sozialwissenschaftliche Klasse* 8 (1962): 435–476.

[3] al-Ṣābiʾ, *Rusūm*, 27; trans. *Rules and Regulations*, 43–44.

with the ethos of his occupational group and to prevent the caliph from fearing him, ʿUbayd Allāh had to pretend to be a coward.

While the ethos of scribes and the criteria of administrative procedure can easily be reconstructed from the sources, the day-to-day routine of the bureaucracy is much more difficult to grasp. The administrative literature—treatises, manuals and exposés generally written for and by scribes—is prescriptive in nature. These texts lay down codes for the ideal bureaucrat and guidelines for a smooth administrative machine. The authors of chronicles and anthologies had different interests, but their texts similarly have prescriptive elements. In their descriptions of the vicissitudes of various individuals working within the Abbasid administration, the authors of the chronicles and anthologies provide examples of both incompetent and competent scribes, which, at face value, seem to be based upon genuine observations of historical figures. We should, however, be aware that these texts often formulate the lives and careers of scribes in the form of clichés to be understood as positive and negative examples of secretaryship. Notwithstanding these limitations, the historical and the administrative texts still contain a wealth of information on the functioning of the bureaucracy under the caliph al-Muqtadir.

An Extensive and Specialized Apparatus

The Abbasid administration was an extensive apparatus with numerous specialized divisions which were staffed by salaried professionals. The first systematic account of the structure of the Abbasid administration was written by a scribe working in the bureaucracy under the caliph al-Muqtadir: Qudāma b. Jaʿfar (d. 337/948). By arranging his *Kitāb al-kharāj wa ṣināʿat al-kitāba* ('Book of the Land Tax and Craft of Writing') according to impersonal administrative bureaux (*dīwān*s), rather than according to the individuals working within the various administrative units, Qudāma provided an extraordinarily clear insight into the various areas of administrative writing and the extent of the specializations within these areas. However, the *dīwān*s discussed by Qudāma are not necessarily conterminous with organizational and spatial units. The narrative sources complement Qudāma's prescriptive picture by their documentation of the actual organizational structure and the various changes in the course of this period such as the introduction of new administrative divisions, the merging or the seemingly dormant or marginal position of others.

Qudāma classified the administration into 13 main units: a bureau administering the land taxes of the *kharāj* lands (*dīwān al-kharāj*); a

bureau for state landholdings (*dīwān al-ḍiyāʿ*); a bureau charged with the appointment and payment of the army (*dīwān al-jaysh*); an expenses bureau dealing mainly with the expenditure of the caliph's court (*dīwān al-nafaqāt*); a bureau for the supervision of the accounts of the state treasury (*dīwān bayt al-māl*); a chancery in which official letters and documents were composed (*dīwān al-rasāʾil*); a bureau responsible for composing the caliph's edicts, orders and responses (*dīwān al-tawqīʿ wa-l-dār*); a bureau of the seal providing executive authority to the caliph's letters and orders (*dīwān al-khātam*); a bureau of the breaking of the seal responsible for receiving, filing, examining and copying all incoming letters (*dīwān al-faḍḍ*); the mint, which was concerned with the standards of currency and of weights and measures (*fī l-nuqūd wa-l-ʿiyār wa-l-awzān wa-dīwān dār al-ḍarb*); a bureau supporting hearing and responding to petitions (*dīwān al-maẓālim*); a bureau responsible for composing legal documents for criminal law (*kitābat al-shurṭa wa-l-aḥdāth*), and, finally, a post bureau (*dīwān al-barīd*), charged with gathering intelligence from letters sent from all regions.[4]

The land tax bureau (*dīwān al-kharāj*) was by far the most important administrative unit. It underwent some organizational changes in the course of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries. Until the end of the third/ninth century the land tax administration was organized according to province or district, and every local administrative unit had its own *dīwān al-kharāj* in the capital. During the reign of the caliph al-Muʿtaḍid (278–89/891–902) these various bureaux merged into one coordinating bureau, the bureau of the palace (*dīwān al-dār*), which was at that time headed by Aḥmad b. al-Furāt, the elder brother of al-Muqtadir's famous vizier ʿAlī b. al-Furāt. Under the caliph al-Muktafī (r. 289–95/902–8) this coordinating *dīwān* was broken up again into three separate units, the *dīwān al-mashriq* (for the eastern provinces), the *dīwān al-maghrib* (for the western provinces) and the *dīwān al-Sawād* (for Iraq). This threefold division continued during the reign of the caliph al-Muqtadir. Of

[4] The first two bureaux (*dīwān al-kharāj* and *dīwān al-ḍiyāʿ*) were described in section IV of the *Kitāb al-kharāj*. Unfortunately, this section has been lost. See Qudāma b. Jaʿfar, *al-Kharāj*, 20, 37. The bureaux three to thirteen are described in section V of the book, Qudāma, *al-Kharāj*, 19–129. For an analysis of section V as a whole, see Paul L. Heck, *The Construction of Knowledge in Islamic Civilization: Qudāma b. Jaʿfar and his Kitāb al-kharāj wa-ṣināʿat al-kitāba* (Leiden: Brill, 2002). For a detailed outline of the first chapter of section IV, the *dīwān al-jaysh*, see Wilhelm Hoenerbach, 'Zur Heeresverwaltung der ʿAbbāsiden. Studie über Abulfarağ Qudāma: Dīwān al-ğaiš', *Der Islam* 29 (1950): 257–290.

these three bureaux the *dīwān al-Sawād* seems to have been the most important.[5]

Some of the bureaux on Qudāma's list are either completely absent or play a very marginal role in the chronicles and anthologies, such as the mint, while others, such as the bureaux of *khātam* and *faḍḍ*, had merged into one.[6] Additions to Qudāma's list from other sources include some miscellaneous bureaux. Hilāl al-Ṣābiʾ, for example, mentions the establishment during the first vizierate of ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā (301–4/913–17) of a bureau for charitable gifts and religious endowments (*dīwān al-birr*).[7] There were also bureaux set up temporarily for specific needs, such as a bureau for illegal profits (*dīwān lil-marāfiq*). This latter bureau, established by Ibn al-Furāt at the beginning of his second vizierate in 304/916, was responsible for the refunding of illegal profits from discharged officials. It was again abolished by ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā two years later.[8]

These bureaux were not the only specialized administrative units since there was also specialization within them. Subdivisions or offices within a bureau were sometimes referred to as *majlis* and sometimes also as *dīwān*. The most systematic survey of the specialized fields of these subdivisions is again provided by Qudāma b. Jaʿfar. Clearly, some specialized tasks were carried out in each and every administrative bureau. Almost all bureaux had, for example, an office for drafts (*majlis al-inshāʾ*), an office turning drafts into fair copies (*majlis al-taḥrīr*), an office providing copies of documents meant for preservation in the state archives (*majlis al-naskh*) and a registry office for incoming and outgoing mail (*majlis al-askudār*).[9] Other administrative tasks were specific to particular administrative bureaux. The bureau for the expenditure of the caliph's court (*dīwān al-nafaqāt*), for example, had an office of the quadrupeds (*majlis al-kurāʿ*). This office was charged with the administration of the royal stables and among its tasks were the provision of the fodder, harnesses, training, medical treat-

[5] Qudāma's description of this bureau is unknown to us, as it was part of the lost section IV of his book. The many internal reorganizations of the tax administration often obscure a comprehensive definition of the spheres of competence of the separate bureaux. Some eastern provinces (Ahwāz, Fārs and Kirmān), for example, seem to have been placed under the supervision of the *dīwān al-Sawād* instead of the *dīwān al-mashriq* in 318/930. On the development of the land tax bureau, see, for example, Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 151–152, and al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 77, 123–124, 131, 133.

[6] al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 178.

[7] al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 286.

[8] See Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 42, 44, 108, and al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 31–32, 81.

[9] See, for example, Qudāma, *al-Kharāj*, 21, 22, 33–35.

ment and the welfare of the riding animals and beasts of burden, as well as the salaries of their keepers.[10]

Each bureau dealing with financial administration had an audit office. These auditing offices were attached to the bureau for expenses, for military affairs, for state landholdings and the various sections of the land tax bureau. The main office (*majlis* or *dīwān al-aṣl*) and its auditing section (*dīwān* or *majlis al-zimām*) were supposedly headed by separate officials. The audit office checked all accounts of the main division to make sure they balanced. It also kept a second copy of each outgoing document in order to prevent forgery.[11] Hilāl al-Ṣābiʾ illustrates the functioning and influence of the auditing office in an amusing anecdote. When the caliph al-Muʿtaḍid granted a piece of land to one of his concubines, the vizier immediately signed for it. The next person in charge, the director of the bureau of the palace, approved this decision within two hours' time. The director of the relevant audit office, however, dragged his feet, arguing that the legality of the grant should be investigated thoroughly in the records of his office before he could approve it. When the concubine complained about this delay to the caliph, he advised her to do what all people do, which is to shower the official with gifts and presents. She did so, the matter was settled and the director of the audit office boasted of having accepted a bribe at the caliph's order.[12]

The bureaux had to collaborate closely with one another. Most of them seem to have been located next to each other in the vizieral palace, also known as the palace of vizier Sulaymān b. Wahb (d. 272/885), which was situated in the Mukharrim district, close to the caliphal palace.[13] The bureaux had been transferred to this palace either during the first vizierate of ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā or during the second vizierate of Ibn al-Furāt (304–6/917–18).[14] Illustrative of the cooperation between the various bureaux is Qudāma's description of a request entering the *dīwān al-tawqīʿ wa-l-dār*:

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[10] Qudāma, *al-Kharāj*, 34. See also C. E. Bosworth, 'Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Khwārazmī on the Technical Terms of the Secretary's Art: A Contribution to the Administrative History of Mediaeval Islam', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 12 (1969): 130–131.

[11] See, for example, Qudāma, *al-Kharāj*, 55; Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 5–6, 57 152, 226–227, 244; al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 66, 181–184, 261, 271, 353; and al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, iii, 2192, 2274. See also Løkkegaard, *Islamic Taxation*, 148–150, and Sourdel, *Vizirat*, 599–605.

[12] al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 182–184.

[13] For the location, see Map 3 and Appendix.

[14] al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 31, 121, 184, 341.

> If a case of someone from the provinces requesting something from the caliph is submitted to the latter, this is done in the form of a research report[15] presented by the vizier to the caliph and prepared in the bureau of the palace (*dīwān al-dār*). This research report contains the petition,[16] the case,[17] an explanation of the case,[18] a proposal of what could be done in this case, [a list of the documents] that must be issued by the relevant bureaux with regard to what the applicant petitioned, and a request for the consultation of the caliph about the matter. If the caliph attaches his device (seal) to the research report, [thus] authorising the execution of what is requested by the applicant, the decree is drawn up and made enforceable in the bureau responsible for composing the caliph's edicts, orders and responses (*dīwān al-tawqīʿ*). A document is then issued from the bureau of the edicts to the director of the bureau of the palace (*dīwān al-dār*) containing a copy of the research report and a résumé of its contents. From the bureau of the palace it is forwarded to the director of the relevant bureau—If the affair involves inviolable land,[19] a remittance, an exemption or reduction granted as an occasional act or an exemption of part of the taxes,[20] the document will be sent to the director of the bureau of the land tax (*dīwān al-kharāj*); if it involves a land grant[21] or land which returns to the state after the death

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[15] In Arabic *muʾāmara*. The term *muʾāmara* had a wide range of meanings. Originally it meant 'consultation'. See Régis Blachère, Moustafa Chouémi and Claude Denizeau, *Dictionnaire arabe-francais-anglais*, 4 vols. (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1967–1988), I, 209. This original meaning seems to have shifted towards 'document that had to be presented to the caliph for consultation' or 'document containing an application or request'. In sources related to the administrative practices of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, a *muʾāmara* also often refers to a report, order or even process in which an official is brought to account for his receipts and liabilities by means of surcharging him; see Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Yūsuf al-Khwārazmī (wr. 365/976), *Mafātīḥ al-ʿulūm*, ed. Jawdat Fahr al-Dīn (Beirut, 1991), 70; al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 35, 76, 77, 128–130, 167–169, 304. See also H. F. Amedroz, "Abbāsid Administration in its Decay, from the *Tajārib al-umam*", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1913): 823–842, 826–827, 835–836 and 839; Bosworth, 'Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Khwārazmī', 126; Løkkegaard, *Islamic Taxation*, 183; Sourdel, *Vizirat*, 610.

[16] In Arabic: *iqtiṣāṣ al-masʾala*.

[17] In Arabic: *waqīʿa*.

[18] In Arabic: *sharḥ al-ḥāl*.

[19] In Arabic: *īghār*. An *īghār* is an estate or province from which a fixed tribute is paid directly to the treasury and in which no fiscal officer of the state may set foot. See, for example, al-Khwārazmī, *Mafātiḥ*, 73; Bosworth, 'Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Khwārazmī', 133–134; Løkkegaard, *Islamic Taxation*, index.

[20] A *ḥaṭīṭa* (what is remitted), a *taswīgh* (what is excused) and a *tarika* (what is left out of account) are terms that all referred to agreements when a man was excused part of the tax due from him that year. See, for example, al-Khwārazmī, *Mafātiḥ*, 73; Bosworth, 'Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Khwārazmī', 134; Heck, *Construction of Knowledge*, 74; Løkkegaard, *Islamic Taxation*, 69–70, 152, 189–190.

[21] In Arabic: *iqṭāʿ*. *Iqṭāʿ* is used here as a synonym for the term *qaṭīʿa* in the meaning of a hereditary land grant from which only the tithe is due. See al-Khwārazmī, *Mafātiḥ*, 72; Bosworth, 'Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Khwārazmī', 133.

> of the beneficiary of the usufruct,[22] to the director of the bureau of state landholdings (*dīwān al-ḍiyāʿ*); if it involves an additional fee[23] or a gift,[24] to the director of the bureau in which the accounts of the state treasury were supervised (*dīwān bayt al-māl*); if it involves the salary of the royal retinue or a subsistence money or billet,[25] to the director of the bureau for the expenditure of the caliph's court (*dīwān al-nafaqāt*); if it involves wages of the irregular soldiers,[26] to the director of the army bureau (*dīwān al-jaysh*).[27]

Next to *dīwān al-tawqīʿ wa-l-dār*, which was in itself subdivided into two separate spheres of administration (*dār* and *tawqīʿ*), Qudāma mentions in this example five other administrative units with which this bureau closely cooperated. These are five areas of financial specialization: managing land taxes, state landholding, the treasury, expenses of the court and the payment of the military. The divisions of tasks between these five units and the procedures that had to be followed after the submission of a certain request are clearly defined by Qudāma. Obviously, Qudāma is presenting a normative situation. It is not known whether these clear-cut assignments always corresponded to actual practice. However, the number and types of documents used within the apparatus as well as the variety of financial regulations mentioned in this one example at least suggest the presence of a well-trained and specialized staff.

The Scribes

The administrative bureaux had a heterogeneous staff. First of all, a strong hierarchical differentiation existed. There are numerous general references to the existence of secretarial ranks, but these lack a precise specification of the tasks of these scribes.[28] Fortunately, some of the layers at the top

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[22] In Arabic: *ṭuʿma*. A *ṭuʿma* thus differed from an *iqṭāʿ* or a *qaṭīʿa* in that it remained in possession of the grantee only during his lifetime and was thereafter resumed by his heirs. See Heck, *Construction of Knowledge*, 74; al-Khwārazmī, *Mafātiḥ*, 72; Bosworth, 'Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Khwārazmī', 133; Løkkegaard, *Islamic Taxation*, 60, 152.

[23] In Arabic: *ṣila*. See Løkkegaard, *Islamic Taxation*, 152.

[24] In Arabic: *ḥibwa*. See Løkkegaard, *Islamic Taxation*, 152.

[25] In Arabic: *iqāmat nuzl*. See Løkkegaard, *Islamic Taxation*, 152.

[26] In Arabic: *awliyāʾ*. See Heck, *Construction of Knowledge*, 74.

[27] Qudāma, *al-Kharāj*, 53–54. Qudāma goes on to provide a specimen document.

[28] See, for example, the letter that, according to Miskawayh, was sent by the vizier Ibn al-Furāt to the provinces announcing his restoration to the vizierate in 304/917 which says: 'the scribes of the bureaux in their different ranks acknowledge Ibn al-Furāt's mastery'. Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 42.

of the bureaucratic hierarchy are described in more detail. The apparatus was headed by the vizier. His immediate subordinates were the heads of the main administrative units, the *dīwān*s. These officials were generally referred to in Arabic as *ṣāhib al-dīwān* and they were the managing directors of the specialized administrative bureaux. At the next level, some of the bureaux' subdivisions were headed by subordinate managers. These were generally referred to as *ṣāhib al-majlis*.

Hierarchical differentiation also existed between the various bureaucratic units. The land tax bureaux, registering the revenues of the empire, were the most important units. Generally, its directors were among the most influential officials of their time. The significance of the land tax bureaux is reflected in Qudāma's discussion of them in a separate section of his book, preceding all other bureaux. Unfortunately, it is precisely this section of the book that has been lost, but the fact that its directors held strategic positions in the empire is further corroborated by the description of their role in the day-to-day decision-making processes and by the fact that most of them were close relatives or trustworthy clients of the vizier. For that matter, many of al-Muqtadir's viziers had at some point in their careers been employed as directors of one of the tax bureaux themselves, a position which evidently made them fit for the vizierate.

The subordinate scribes who actually carried out the daily work, who wrote the documents, assessed the taxes and entered them in registers, remain largely unknown to us.[29] Information on their number can only be inferred from the extent of the specializations of the administrative apparatus as a whole. The sources are also silent about any hierarchy that might have existed among these lower-grade scribes of the apparatus. As among so many other groups, seniority seems to have been an important classifying factor. Lowest down on the ladder were probably errand-boys collecting the scraps of paper (*awlād al-kuttāl*).[30]

In addition to hierarchical differentiation, we may assume a certain division of labour consistent with the diversity of assigned tasks between and within the administrative units. Various classifications of the types of scribes have been handed down by contemporary administrative texts. A comprehensive classification is, for example, found in the *Kitāb al-kuttāb wa ṣifat al-dawāt wa-l-qalam wa taṣrīfuhā* ('The Book of Scribes

[29] For an example of a subordinate scribe starting to work in one of the *dīwān*s see the last paragraph of this chapter.

[30] See al-Ṣābi', *al-Wuzarā'*, 314. Hilāl al-Ṣābi' refers to these boys without mentioning what became of the scraps of paper, but they might have been gathered for recycling.

and the Description of the Inkwell and the Pen and their Use') written by the scribe and former tutor of al-Muhtadī's (252–5/866–9) children, ʿAbd Allāh al-Baghdādī (d. after 255/869). ʿAbd Allāh al-Baghdādī distinguishes five types of scribes and their related specialities. The first speciality is calculating the land taxes (*kātib kharāj*). This scribe must be 'knowledgeable in the system of taxes and the land survey and experienced in accounting and calculating the [system of] proportional taxation'. The second scribe is a specialist in correspondence (*kātib rasāʾil*). He knows the bureaucratic formulae used in the composition of letters. Scribes appointed to assist judges are the third type (*kātib ḥākim*). They are 'trained in the law, versed in the formulations of contracts and skilled in disputes'. Scribes appointed to assist the army (*kātib jund*) know 'the distinguishing marks of riding animals and the particular features of men'. The last type is the police scribe (*kātib maʿūna*). He is well read in 'the rules of retaliation, injuries, sanctions, the subtleties of discretionary punishment and the aspects of precaution to be used with those who have committed crimes and serious infractions'.[31] Not all scribes of this classification seem to have been employed in the central administrative bureaux. However, by emphasizing all these areas of expertise, al-Baghdādī's typology affords a good overview of the administrative tasks which were considered part of the scribe's occupational sphere.

A pupil of al-Muqtadir's vizier ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā, Abū l-Ḥusayn Isḥāq b. Ibrāhīm b. Sulaymān b. Wahb al-Kātib (fl. mid-fourth/tenth century), provided even more detailed information about specializations and subdivisions in his administrative manual *Al-burhān fī wujūh al-bayān* ('The Proof concerning the Means of Communication'). He also starts with five main categories, which are slightly different from those of his colleague ʿAbd Allāh al-Baghdādī. He distinguishes, for example, between the mere writer or copyist, trained in the various kinds of scripts, grammar and orthography, and the one who composes letters and therefore also requires a good style. He also refers to an administrative scribe (*kātib al-tadbīr*) who acts as political advisor to officials at the top of the bureaucracy. Ibn Wahb further subdivides his five main categories into fields of administrative specialization. His financial scribe (*kātib al-ʿaqd*), for example, appears in three types: one working in the central administration (*kātib al-majlis*),

[31] ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Azīz al-Baghdādī (d. after 255/869) in: Dominique Sourdel, 'Le "Livre des secrétaires" de ʿAbd Allāh al-Baġdādī', *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 14 (1954): 115–153, 149–150. The translations of these quotations are by Heck, *Construction of Knowledge*, 63.

another assisting the tax administrator or provincial governor (*kātib al-ʿāmil*) and yet another working for the army (*kātib al-jund*). The first must be a specialist in accounting and tax regulations, the second requires knowledge of land surveys and agriculture, while the third is an expert in identifying soldiers and their appropriate wages.[32]

The authors of most sources merely refer to two of the types mentioned in al-Baghdādī's and Ibn Wahb's classifications: the financial scribe and his epistolary colleague. These two officials can be seen as the prototypes of pre-modern Arabic administration, appearing in literature from the third/ninth century until the ninth/fifteenth century. The financial scribe calculated the revenues and expenses of the empire, entered the amounts in the registers and filed them away. He was employed in one of the land tax bureaux or in one of the many financial subdivisions of the apparatus. The epistolary scribe wrote and composed official letters and orders and worked in the chancery or in the offices of other bureaux in which official documents were composed. The financial official was a man of figures, an accountant. His epistolary colleague was a man of letters.

The ethnic and religious background of the scribes of al-Muqtadir's bureaucracy was also heterogeneous. Most of the high-ranking scribes—again we lack information on the subordinate anonymous scribes—came from families of large landowners and merchants in the Sawād. As most of the revenues were drawn from the Sawād, the central administration relied heavily on experts from this area. Although the sources offer little information on the administration outside Baghdad, we can imagine them to have kept close relationships and maintained networks of patronage with local officials from their home regions.

The fertile districts of the Sawād were inhabited by a large diversity of ethnic, religious and linguistic groups. The Banū l-Jarrāḥ, for example, from which many high-ranking scribes were recruited, were of Persian origin.[33] They had settled in the Sawād at Dayr Qunnā, a town close to the Tigris, some 90 kilometres south of Baghdad. They had a Christian background. Dayr Qunnā, the village from which they came, was a town built around a large Nestorian monastery, and many of the inhabitants of this town were Christians who made a living from the wine trade. It is

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[32] Abū l-Ḥusayn Isḥāq b. Ibrāhīm Ibn Wahb (d. after 335/946), *al-Burhān fī wujūh al-bayān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Maṭlūb and Khadīja Ḥadīthī (Baghdad: Jāmiʿat Baghdād, 1967), 315–425. For Ibn Wahb's classification, see also Heck, *Construction of Knowledge*, 82–85.

[33] For an analysis of the influence of this and other bureaucratic families see also Part II, Chapter 3.

likely that in the days of the caliph al-Muqtadir all members of the Banū l-Jarrāḥ converted to Islam.[34]

The other famous secretarial family, the Banū l-Furāt, was Shīʿite and probably came from a village in the district of Upper Nahrawān in the Sawād.[35] Louis Massignon gathered interesting details about their religious orientation. The family was affiliated to a Shīʿite extremist group, from which the Nuṣayriyya sect evolved. This sect originated in the third/ninth century in the Sawād at the instigation of a man named Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr al-Namīrī (d. 270/883), who declared the divine nature of the tenth *imām* ʿAlī al-Hādī (d. 254/868) and saw himself as his prophet. The eleventh *imām* al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī (d. 260/874) adopted Ibn Nuṣayr as his senior disciple. According to Massignon, the father of al-Muqtadir's vizier Ibn al-Furāt was one of Ibn Nuṣayr's main supporters at the caliphal court in Baghdad, while his elder brother, Aḥmad b. al-Furāt, himself an influential scribe, occupied for some time one of the highest positions in the sect of Ibn Nuṣayr.[36]

A third secretarial family, the Banū Khāqān, came originally from the province of Khurāsān, probably from the city of Marw, before they moved to the Sawād. Matthew Gordon has demonstrated that, unlike the other Khāqānid family of this period, the relatives of Khāqān ʿUrṭāj (d. 233/847), these bureaucrats and descendants of Yaḥyā b. Khāqān (d. 240/854) were probably of Iranian, not Turkish, origin.[37]

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[34] Yāqūt b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥamawī (d. 626/1229), *Muʿjam al-buldān. Jacut's geographisches Wörterbuch*, ed. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld, 6 vols. (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1866–73. Reprint, Beirut, 1984), II, 528–529. See also Bowen, *Good Vizier*, 35; Louis Massignon, 'La politique islamo-chrétienne des scribes nestoriens de Deïr Qunnā a la court de Baghdad au ixe siècle de notre ère', *Vivre et Penser*, 2nd series (1942): 7–14.

[35] Upper Nahrawān was situated on the eastern shore of the Tigris, close to Baghdad. According to Ibn al-Najjār, the origins of the Furāt family lay in a village called Hamīnbā (or Hamīltā), which was situated between Baghdad and Wāsiṭ: Ibn al-Najjār, *Dhayl*, XIX, 66. Al-Ṣūlī states that Ibn al-Furāt was from a village called Bābillā, which belonged to a region called Ṣarifūn in the district of Upper Nahrawān. Al-Ṣūlī is cited by Ibn al-Najjār, *Dhayl*, XIX, 66. Hilāl al-Ṣābiʾ placed the roots of the Furāt family in a village named Ablā Ṣarifūn in the same district of Upper Nahrawān: al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 8. Al-Hamadhānī mentions a village called Bayk in the region of Ṣarifūn: al-Hamadhānī, *Takmilat*, 46.

[36] An elder member of the Furāt family had also held a high position in the extremist Shīʿite hierarchy. A certain ʿUmar b. al-Furāt, who was either the uncle or great-uncle of Muḥammad b. Mūsā b. al-Furāt, is identified as senior disciple (*bāb*) of the ninth *imām* ʿAlī al-Riḍā and head of yet another extremist sect, the *Khaṭṭābiyya*. He was killed in Baghdad at the beginning of the third/ninth century. See Massignon, 'Les origines shīʿites', 25–29; Massignon, 'Recherches sur les shīʿites extrémistes à Baghdad à la fin du troisième siècle de l'Hégire'.

[37] For information on the background of the Banū Khāqān, see Matthew S. Gordon, 'The Khāqānid Families of the Early ʿAbbāsid Period', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 121 (2001): 236–255. Sourdel, *Vizirat*, 273 and 576, refers to the Banū Khāqān as Turkish.

The Banū Wahb, finally, lived in Syria under the Umayyads and then moved to Iraq.[38] They were at one time Christian and yet despite the conversion to Islam of most of the family's members, the chroniclers still refer to their former religious affiliation.[39]

Many other scribes of al-Muqtadir's bureaucracy were openly Christian. In spite of the caliph's official ordinance that no Jews or Christians were to be allowed a position in state service except as physicians and bankers, numerous Christians reached influential positions such as head of a *dīwān* or *majlis*.[40] No fewer than four Christians, for example, were among the nine scribes whom Ibn al-Furāt invited each day at his dinner table for consultation.[41]

The non-Muslim and non-Arab background of the earliest generations of scribes had given their professional group as a whole a reputation of being lukewarm towards the Arab and Islamic cause. By the time of the caliph al-Muqtadir, however, the non-Arab background of the scribes was no longer a reason for accusation. Although the support of scribes for the translation movement and their interests in pre-Islamic, mainly Greek, disciplines had not faded,[42] and in the administrative literature they

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[38] For information on the Banū Wahb, see Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā, *al-Fakhrī*, 337–341. See also Massignon, 'Politique', 8. Many other scribes were also from the Sawād. The families of the viziers al-ʿAbbās b. al-Ḥasan (295/908–296/908) and Aḥmad al-Khaṣībī (313/925–314/927), for example, came from Jarjarāyā, a village on the Tigris south of Baghdad, while Ibn Muqla and his sons were born in Baghdad. The geographical origins of other scribes are not mentioned explicitly in the sources, but can be traced through their *nisba*s (names). The influential Mādharā'ī family of scribes, for example, came from Mādharāya, a village near the city of Wāsiṭ, and the family of ʿUbayd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Kalwadhānī probably originated from Kalwādhā, a village on the left bank of the Tigris, close to Baghdad. See also H. L. Gottschalk, *Die Mādharā'ijjūn. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte Ägyptens unter dem Islam* (Berlin and Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1931).

[39] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 164; Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā, *al-Fakhrī*, 337–341; Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 218. See also Massignon, 'Politique', 8. One of the members of the Wahb family, Abū Ḥusayn Isḥāq b. Ibrāhīm b. Sulaymān b. Wahb al-Kātib, the author of the administrative manual *al-Burhān fī wujūh al-bayān* (see note 32 above), was a Shīʿite. See Heck, *Construction of Knowledge*, 79.

[40] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 29; Abū l-Maḥāsin Yūsuf Ibn Taghrībirdī (d. 874/1470), *al-Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Shams al-Dīn, 16 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1992), III, 183–184.

[41] They were Abū Bishr ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Farrukhān, Abū l-Ḥusayn Saʿīd b. Ibrāhīm al-Tustarī, Abū Manṣūr ʿAbd Allāh b. Jubayr and Abū ʿAmr Saʿīd b. al-Farrukhān. See al-Ṣābi', *al-Wuzarā'*, 240.

[42] ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā, for example, took the translator Abū ʿUthmān al-Dimashqī into his service, while his son ʿĪsā b. ʿAlī was a scholar of ancient sciences. See Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ʿAbbāsid Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th centuries)* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), 132–133; J. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: The Cultural Revival During the Buyid Age*, 2nd edn (Leiden: Brill, 1992; 1st edn. 1986), 134–136.

continued to emphasize the Sasanian heritage of their profession,[43] by the early fourth/tenth century Persian or Greek traditions were no longer seen as competing with Arabic traditions. Religious orientation, on the other hand, sometimes remained an important reason for denunciation. For all their devastating effects on individual careers it is important to qualify these imputations. Most of them were politically motivated and meant to discredit political adversaries. Accusing someone of sympathy for the Qarāmiṭa, a Shīʿite movement operating from Baḥrayn, was probably the most effective slander in the days of al-Muqtadir. Founded on inaccurate information, these imputations often proved false, but by then they had already undermined the person's status and position and so had achieved their ends.[44]

The Ideal: Erudite Men of Letters

Despite their heterogeneous background and specializations, the bureaucracy's scribes consciously shared a distinct occupational ethos, which is described in detail in the administrative literature. This literature reached a peak during the late third/ninth and early fourth/tenth centuries with texts such as *Adab al-kātib* ('The Education of the Scribe') by Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), *Ṣināʾat al-kuttāb* ('The Scribe's Craft') by al-Naḥḥās (d. 318/930), *Adab al-kuttāb* ('The Education of the Scribe') by al-Ṣūlī (d. 335/947), a book of the same title by Ibn Durustawayh (d. 346/957) and the previously mentioned manuals by Ibn Wahb, Qudāma b. Jaʿfar and ʿAbd Allāh al-Baghdādī.[45]

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[43] See, for example, al-Jahshiyārī's introduction to his *Kitāb al-wuzarāʾ wa-l-kuttāb* (Muḥammad b. ʿAbdūs al-Jahshiyārī [d. 331/942], *Kitāb al-wuzarāʾ wa-l-kuttāb*, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā [Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1938. Reprint, 1980], 1–11). See also Heck, *Construction of Knowledge*, 28. On the status of *dhimmīs* in the bureaucracy, see Mun'im Sirry, 'The Public Role of *Dhimmīs* during ʿAbbāsid Times', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 74 (2011): 187–204.

[44] See also Ibn al-Nadīm, who, in his *Fihrist*, immediately after his exposé on Mānī and his creed, appends a list of kings, poets, theologians and high officials who were accused of Manichaean sympathies: Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 401. However, F. C. de Blois mentions that 'it is impossible to confirm that any of these people were really Manichaeans and it is more likely that the only thing they have in common is that their enemies accused them of not being good Muslims': see the article 'Zindīḳ', *EI*2, XI, 510–513.

[45] For a detailed analysis of the administrative genre in this period, see Heck, *Construction of Knowledge*, 26–93. For an outline of the representatives of the genre, see Walther Björkman, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Staatskanzlei im islamischen Ägypten* (Hamburg: L. Friedrichsen, 1928), 6–16.

The authors of these texts emphasized the importance of a correct usage of the language by discussing lexicology, orthography, morphology and grammar. They provided the technical vocabularies to be used in records and registers, from the description of different kinds of bread and their prices, useful for scribes of the bureau of expenses, to catalogues describing the various parts of the human body, specifically its defects, which were indispensable for the identification of soldiers in military registers. Further, they noted concrete examples of good composition, such as model letters of appointment, and provided lists of the appropriate forms of address. They described the terms for the various bureaucratic documents and registers and set forth proper administrative procedure.

The education of scribes is one of the main fields of interest of these works. Through their constant emphasis on the expertise required of scribes, their skills and qualifications, the authors of the administrative literature created an image of the group's consummate professionalism. The most important message of the genre as a whole is that good government is only possible through a strong and well-trained bureaucratic class. The central feature of scribal training is expertise in writing. Thus we find sections in praise of writing in general and bureaucratic writing in particular, and descriptions of writing tools, such as inkwells, paper and pens.[46] The scribe's identity is also demarcated by the emphases on prose writing in contrast with poetry. The antithesis between prose and poetry and the social distinction between the governmental scribe and the poet became important themes in literary debates.[47] Arguments in favour of prose and the scribe were, for example, that prose was more useful, that the scribe was a more valuable member of society and that the Quran, God's word, has come down to us in prose. Arguments in favour of the poet were, for example, the poet's eloquence and skilfulness. Despite these disputes in literary debates, some scribes proved to be skilful poets too.[48]

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[46] See also Heck, *Construction of Knowledge*, 28–30.

[47] See, for example, Ḍiyāʾ ad-Dīn Naṣrallāh Ibn Muḥammad Ibn al-Athīr (d. 637/1239), *al-Mathal al-sāʾir fī adab al-kātib wa-l-shāʿir*, ed. Badawī Ṭabāna, 4 vols. (Cairo, n.d.), IV, 5; Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418), *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā fī ṣināʿat al-inshā*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Shams al-Dīn, 14 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1987), I, 80–92; Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. 414/1023), *Kitāb al-imtāʿ wa-l-muʾānasa*, ed. Khalīl al-Manṣūr (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1997), 247–255.

[48] Some members of the Wahb secretarial family, the brothers Sulaymān (d. 272/885) and al-Ḥasan b. Wahb (d. 248/862–3) and Sulaymān's grandson al-Qāsim b. ʿUbayd Allāh (d. 288/901), were known as poets. Ibn al-Nadīm devoted a whole subsection of his *Fihrist* to poets who worked as scribes: Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 190–194.

The ideal of the scribe as a man of letters, as an expert in writing, is also very prominent in another literary debate: the competition between financial and epistolary scribes. Throughout the centuries, from the late Umayyad period until the days of Mamlūk rule in Egypt, these two prototypes of the pre-modern administrator fought with one another on paper. One of the strongest examples of this polemic was written by Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. 414/1023). In his *al-Imtāʿ wa-l-muʾānasa* ('Pleasure and Cordiality'), al-Tawḥīdī relates his discussion with an opponent, a certain scribe called Ibn ʿUbayd. While the author defends the epistolary scribe, his opponent praises the qualities of the financial secretary. The main argument of al-Tawḥīdī's opponent is that accountancy is more useful to a ruler than eloquent writing, 'the former is a serious matter, while the latter is mere fun: a lot of orotund prolixity, trumpery and swindling, is it not?'; 'Think only of the fact', Ibn ʿUbayd continues, 'that in a large kingdom one single chancery official would be sufficient, whereas a hundred accountants would not be enough!'[49]

After having listed the arguments of his opponent, al-Tawḥīdī formulates an extensive reply. Against his opponent's statement that accountancy is the more useful discipline he argues that the financial and epistolary business of an empire are connected with each other and cannot do without each other. 'An accountancy official must know about the different types of revenue so that, after levying and collecting them, he can work at his computations on them. But he can levy taxes only by means of eloquent letters with cogent arguments and employing various subtleties.'[50] 'If someone were to think the government hinges upon accountancy, he is right,' al-Tawḥīdī continues, 'but it comes *after* the eloquence of the letter-writer, because the ruler commands, forbids, cajoles, orates, argues, rebukes, threatens, promises, warrants, raises hopes, gives assurance of expectations, eliminates harmful matters, lets his subjects taste the sweetness of justice and wards off from them the bitterness of oppression. *Then*

[49] al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Imtāʿ*, 74. The translation of this quotation is by Geert Jan van Gelder, 'Man of Letters vs. Man of Figures. The Seventh Night from al-Tawḥīdī's *al-Imtāʿ wa-l-muʾānasa*', in *Scripta Signa Vocis: Studies about Script, Scriptures, Scribes and Languages in the Near East, presented to J. H. Hospers by his Pupils, Colleagues and Friends*, ed. H. L. J. Vanstiphout et al. (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1986), 53.

[50] al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Imtāʿ*, 75. The translation of this quotation is by van Gelder, 'Man of Letters', 54.

he raises taxes and when he does so, he needs accountancy in order to know the total returns.'[51]

It is clear that the author leaves us in no doubt about the winner of this debate, the epistolary clerk. Not surprisingly, the author of this literary polemic, al-Tawḥīdī, was himself a man of letters. That the financial scribe gets the worst of it is, however, not unique to al-Tawḥīdī's presentation of the discussion. On the contrary, in each and every text dealing with the polemic between these two types of officials, in the end the epistolary scribe turns out to be the most prestigious, influential, intelligent and indispensable of the two.[52] At the same time these polemical texts provide us with an interesting image of the epistolary scribe by an outsider, the financial scribe. The image of the eloquent writer as an inadequate, foolish and woolly word painter counterbalances not only the self-image expressed by al-Tawḥīdī but also the ideal descriptions of the administrative texts.

Although good penmanship might have been the main requirement for each and every scribe, it was certainly not his only baggage. Next to an eloquent style he was expected to be trained in the theoretical knowledge of the humanities and in religious matters. He had to be knowledgeable in history and geography, to be widely read in prose and poetry, to be well educated in political theory, to be trained in the traditions issuing from the Prophet and know the Quran by heart. Although the scribe's professional life most certainly required a specialized training in technical skills, the administrative literature presents him not as a specialist but as a generalist, educated in a wide range of disciplines. In other words, scribes portrayed themselves as cultivated men. A scribe was supposed to be an *adīb*, on the pattern of the words as stated by Ibn Qutayba: 'He who wishes to become a scholar (*ʿālim*), let him pursue one branch of knowledge. But he who wishes to become an *adīb*, let him take the best of everything.'[53]

Finally, the administrative texts also set forth the ideal characteristics of the scribe's social behaviour. A scribe was not only employed as scribe, he was supposed to behave like one as well. Part of the scribe's moral code,

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[51] al-Tawhīdī, *al-Imtāʿ*, 77. The translation of this quotation is by van Gelder, 'Man of Letters', 56.

[52] See, for example, al-Ḥarīrī's (d. 516/1122) 22nd *maqāma* and al-Qalqashandī's (d. 1418) *maqāma* which he included in his administrative manual *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, XIV, 127–145.

[53] ʿAbd Allāh b. Muslim Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), *Kitāb ʿuyūn al-akhbār*, ed. Yūsuf ʿAlī Ṭawīl, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, n.d.), II, 145.

for example, was his loyalty towards the other members of his professional group, especially in times of need. This code created and enhanced a group consciousness. Another recurrent theme was the scribe's behaviour at audiences with his superiors and his demeanour towards those lower on the hierarchical ladder.

Naturally, the image of the scribe sketched in the administrative literature was an ideal one, meant to set a normative example for the group as a whole and to consolidate its position and prestige in society. The expansion of the administrative literature in the late third/ninth was an expression of the growing self-awareness of scribes. Through these texts they created a distinct profile for themselves among the other power groups in society. The image they portrayed was one that would gain the highest prestige in society: the indispensable, erudite, sincere, well-mannered and cultured man of letters, the *adīb* par excellence. The most prominent skills of this idealized cultured man were his expertise in writing and his eloquence. This ideal image was more in accordance with the daily tasks of the epistolary scribe than with the professional activities of his financial counterpart. In the administrative literature the epistolary scribe therefore epitomized the ideal.

Everyday Practice: Clever Accountants

The administrative manuals unmistakably describe a well-oiled bureaucratic machinery, in which well-trained scribes in specialized bureaux cooperated smoothly with their colleagues in other administrative units according to well-defined procedures and regulations. In everyday life numerous obstacles seem to have impeded this machinery, first and foremost because its staff often turned out less qualified and less motivated for the general good than the manuals prescribe.

The main problem of the era was the constant lack of cash. Cash was needed to maintain a luxurious court and an enormous army indispensable for the defence of a disintegrating empire. The main task of the scribes in the central bureaux in Baghdad was to establish a yearly balance between the revenues from taxes and the expenses incurred by the army and the court. During al-Muqtadir's reign such a balancing of the books seems never to have been achieved, a source of great concern not only to high-ranking bureaucrats and viziers but also to courtiers and army generals. References by chroniclers to lack of money and major financial deficits are countless. In the second part of al-Muqtadir's reign, no year seems to have passed without a new financial crisis.

Despite the newly regained revenues from Fārs and Egypt, a pressing decrease in the revenues of the land tax in general became apparent. The reason for this decline is not entirely clear. It is probable that the problems were due in part to long-term developments: lack of investment in irrigation and infrastructure in the main source of income, the Sawād, the hinterland of Baghdad. al-Muqtadir's immediate predecessors had, however, been able to pursue a healthy financial policy. Another reason for the decline of income was mismanagement and short-term policy. Indeed most of the reactions to the financial deficits were inspired by ad hoc political motives and seem to have caused further problems. Obviously, more structural solutions, such as ʿAlī b.ʿĪsā's reduction of salaries, were politically dangerous. The need for immediate cash, mainly to pay the army, urged viziers to introduce fiscal privileges for large landowners and to enter into unfavourable contracts with tax farmers and rich merchants, which not only led to loss of income but also to a decline of authority. The attacks by the Qarāmiṭa during the second part of al-Muqtadir's reign caused even greater financial problems and finally led to the political and financial chaos of the last years, which has been discussed by Kennedy in Chapter 1.

While the epistolary scribe and his training in the humanities epitomized the ideal image in the administrative literature, in everyday life the caliph was in need of cunning accountants. Financial administration was at the core of the bureaucratic machine and in times of constant lack of cash, arithmetical skills were in great demand. This demand is reflected in the salaries of financial and epistolary scribes. The satirical treatise *Fī dhamm akhlāq al-kuttāb* ('On Criticizing the Morals of Scribes'), usually, but perhaps erroneously ascribed to al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255–869), throws some light on the income of the epistolary writer vis-à-vis his financial colleague:[54]

> It suffices to say that among these people the most noble hold the lowest rank in wealth, while the richest are the least intelligent in the eyes of the authorities. The director of the chancery—and it is through his tongue that

[54] According to Charles Pellat this treatise is not original. He argues that the text is a compilation of which only a few passages were actually written by al- Jāḥiẓ. Charles Pellat, 'Nouvel essai d'inventaire de l'oeuvre ǧāḥiẓienne', *Arabica* 31 (1984): 117–164, 145, no. 123. Moreover, images created by al-Jāḥiẓ—an author known for his enthusiastic production of literary debates—should always be taken with a pinch of salt. Apart from the treatise (*Fī dhamm akhlāq al-kuttāb*), a treatise in praise of scribes (*Fī madḥ al-kuttāb*) is also ascribed to him, see van Gelder, 'The Conceit of Pen and Sword', 333–334 and Pellat, 'Nouvel Essai', 145, no. 124.

> he [the ruler] addresses his people—earns only a tenth of the wages of the director of the land tax bureau. And the letter-writer (*muḥarrir*)—thanks to whose handwriting the caliphal letters possess such fineness—earns only a fraction of the wages of the scribe (*ṣāhib al-naskh*) in the land tax bureau.[55]

Unfortunately, we cannot check the amounts mentioned by the author of this treatise, since the information on salaries in other sources is fragmentary. However, other texts by, for example, Hilāl al-Ṣābi', Miskawayh and al-Tanūkhī corroborate the existence of large differences in income between scribes in general and the directors of the various bureaux. They also confirm that the highest salaries were earned in the land tax bureau. A junior scribe might have started with a salary of 6 *dīnār* a month.[56] In subsequent years he probably received an income of between 10 and 30 *dīnār* a month.[57] Directors of a subordinate office (*majlis*) earned salaries of between 20 and 100 *dīnār*, while directors of the main administrative units received an income of between 50 and 500 *dīnār* a month.[58] At the top of the hierarchy stood the vizier with a monthly allowance of between 5,000 and 7,000 *dīnār*. The latter's revenues have been discussed in detail in the previous chapter.

The education of scribes in everyday life seems to have been organized by their seniors. Senior scribes constantly assigned posts to their junior relatives and clients and these junior scribes received at least part of their training from them. We have many references to this on-the-job training. Illustrative is the story of the scribe Ibn Shīrzād who entered the bureaucracy at a young age under the auspices of his father, when the latter was employed as director of a bureau administering the estates of

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[55] ['Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ], 'Dhamm akhlāq al-kuttāb', in *Three Essays*, ed. J. Finkel (Cairo: al-Maṭba'at al-Salafiyya, 1926), 48–49.

[56] The later vizier Ibn Muqla, for example, was said to have received at the very beginning of his career a salary of 6 *dīnār* a month for working as junior scribe with the Banū l-Jarrāḥ. See al-Ṣābi', *al-Wuzarā'*, English summary, 45, n. 2. We do not know the exact date of Ibn Muqla's employment with the Banū l-Jarrāḥ, but since Ibn Muqla was born in 272/885–6, it must have been only a few years before al-Muqtadir's reign.

[57] See, for example, al-Ṣābi', *al-Wuzarā'*, 119, 140; al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, VIII, 54–55; trans. *Table-Talk* (1929), 511–512. For further information on salaries of subordinate officials, see also Eliahu Ashtor, *Histoire des prix et des salaires dans l'orient médiéval* (Paris: SEVPEN, 1969), 65–66.

[58] The largest allowances, 500 *dīnār* a month, were generally allotted to the heads of the most important tax bureau, the *dīwān al-Sawād*. By 315/927 the amount of 500 *dīnār* a month had become the standard stipend for the director of the *dīwān al-Sawād*. Thereupon 'Alī b. 'Īsā reduced it by one third as part of his austerity policy. For the salaries of those at the top of the bureaucracy, see Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 152; al-Ṣābi', *Wuzarā'*, 63, 86, 140, 177–178, 314; al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, VIII, 54–55; trans. *Table-Talk* (1929), 511–512.

an important member of the royal family, al-Muqtadir's uncle Gharīb. The young Ibn Shīrzād was obstinate and went his own way. He decided to leave his father's office and try his luck in another bureau. In the account of his adventures, Ibn Shīrzād relates the way in which he was trained as a scribe:

> When my father was put in charge of the bureau of the state landholdings (*dīwān al-ḍiyāʿ*) known as those of Gharīb the Uncle [of al-Muqtadir],[59] he appointed my brother Abū l-Ḥusayn Zakariyyā b. Yaḥyā as his deputy over the bureau. He gave Zakariyyā a stipend of 20 *dīnār* a month and 10 *dīnār* to me for the writing of letters in the same bureau.
>
> I went off to the office of the caliph's private estates (*dīwān al-ḍiyāʿ al-khāṣṣa*), which was headed by Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan, called Sūdāniyya. I did not meet him, nor did I seek to gain access to him by using the relations between my father and him. I attached myself to the office under the supervision of Abū Yūsuf ʿAbd al-Raḥman b. Muḥammad b. Sahl, called Murammad, who was in charge of the account's chamber (*majlis al-ḥisāb*) in that office. I studied the business for a month.
>
> Then the head of the office, Abū Ḥāmid, heard about me and, although I was at that time not even 20 years of age, he approached me and summoned me. So I went to him and he reprimanded me for failing to call on him and make myself known to him as the son of my father. From that moment on he constantly bade me into his presence. He provided me each day with two scrolls, an official deed and a piece of paper and he told me to practice on these and acquire a proper handwriting.[60]

The majority of the scribes were unable to live up to the high moral expectations described in the administrative literature. In everyday life collegiality and good manners were often put aside in favour of self-interest. According to the treatise *Fī dhamm akhlāq al-kuttāb* there was no mutual loyalty among scribes. 'On the contrary, they only tried to belittle and scorn each other.'[61] In this treatise scribes are even compared with dogs: 'If human beings pass them, they don't move. Yet, if a dog like them passes by, all of them attack him until they have killed him.'[62]

Indeed, many narrative sources relate how scribes constantly tried to outdo their colleagues and how they plotted against each other. Administrative jobs were lucrative sources of income and so in great demand. Competition and strife between the various secretarial families and their

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59 Apparently Gharīb's estates were administered by a separate office.
60 al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, VIII, 54–55; trans. *Table-Talk* (1929), 511–512.
61 [al-Jāḥiẓ], *Dhamm akhlāq*, 46.
62 [al-Jāḥiẓ], *Dhamm akhlāq*, 46.

allies were the order of the day. The best-known rivalry of the age was between the Banū l-Jarrāḥ and the Banū l-Furāt. During the first half of the reign of the caliph al-Muqtadir, the vizierate (and with it most of the leading positions) had virtually alternated between them, and both families were constantly trying to score points at the other's expenses. They accused each other of conspiracy against the state, fraud, mismanagement and professional incapability.[63]

Moreover, many alliances between patrons and clients ended in disagreement and betrayal. Ibn Muqla, for example, broke up with his patron Ibn al-Furāt, secretly revealing information about his patron's hidden treasures and subsequently allying himself with the rival faction, the Banū l-Jarrāḥ. The later vizier Sulaymān b. al-Ḥasan, a member of the Banū l-Jarrāḥ, who worked as scribe for the Furāt faction during Ibn al-Furāt's first vizierate (296–9/908–12), also betrayed his patron. For years Sulaymān and Ibn al-Furāt had been close associates. Ibn al-Furāt had even covered up for Sulaymān's support of the coup against al-Muqtadir at the beginning of his reign. But Sulaymān had higher ambitions and he decided to attack his patron's reputation by sending a personal letter to the caliph, in which he criticized Ibn al-Furāt's wealth. According to contemporary sources, his treason was discovered by accident before it could have any effect:

> This letter [to the caliph] was in his sleeve when he paid a visit to Ibn al-Furāt. Standing up to perform the evening prayer with a number of scribes in the house of Ibn al-Furāt, the note dropped out of his sleeve. It was picked up by the scribe al-Ṣaqr b. Muḥammad, who was praying at his side. He hastened to bring it to Ibn al-Furāt, who had the man arrested and taken downstream in a covered boat to Wāsiṭ. There he was put into custody and fined.[64]

Conclusion

Unlike the famous system of civil service examinations used in the Chinese empire, the Abbasid caliphs had no formal system to test a scribal candidate on his qualifications and suitability for the civil service.[65] There

[63] See, for example, Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 60–68, 105–113; al-Ṣābi', *al-Wuzarā'*, 129–130.
[64] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 15.
[65] In China from the Tang dynasty (618–907) onwards bureaucrats were selected through official examinations. Both for recruitment and at fixed intervals throughout the career, examinations were taken to test a candidate's writing skills, talent for arithmetic and composition of formal judgements on legal and administrative topics. Valerie Hansen,

were neither official entrance examinations for aspirant scribes nor official proficiency tests in the course of their careers.[66] Instead, scribes received their training on the job, and their entrance into the ranks of the occupational group was generally motivated by principles other than professional expertise. Nonetheless, the bureaucracy under the caliph al-Muqtadir appeared to be a smoothly functioning machine with a strong hierarchical structure and a high degree of specialization among its employees.

Al-Muqtadir's administrative staff were of diverse religious and ethnic background. Most of the posts in the administrative bureaus and offices, from the director down to junior officials, were appointed through a system of (informal) relationships between a scribe and his seniors. The two main factors in the processes of recruitment and promotion were kinship and patronage. Senior officials organized the appointments, training and promotion of their junior relatives and clients. Of these two systems, kinship was the easiest road to success. Generally, junior relatives of influential senior officials were able to reach a similar position in the administrative hierarchy. Sometimes they became directors of an important bureau even without much experience, talent or interest. Outsiders who had allied themselves to a family, generally had a longer road ahead of them. Before they reached the highest positions, their professional skills and loyalty had to be established.

Notwithstanding their differences in status, function and background, scribes seem to have looked upon themselves as members of a group, a professional group with a shared ethos. The identity of the members of this group was described in detail in the administrative literature of the era. These works emphasize the scribes' professionalism, expertise in writing, loyalty towards their colleagues and and their indispensabile value for the well-being of the state. The ideal scribe was an *adīb*, a well-read gentleman and a man of letters, not only a consumer and patron of arts but also a maker of culture. And indeed some of the scribes of al-Muqtadir's administration were also well-known scholars, poets and calligraphers, as will be discussed by Osti later in this volume.[67]

The Open Empire: A History of China to 1600 (New York & London: Norton, 2000), 206–208 and 267–268, and Denis Crispin Twitchett, *The Birth of the Chinese Meritocracy: Bureaucrats and Examinations in T'ang China* (London: China Society, 1976).

[66] Unlike the very interesting example of the professional tests the cavalry of the caliph al-Muʿtaḍid had to take (see on this Part II, Chapter 5), we do not have any reference to professional examinations taken by scribes.

[67] See Part III, Chapter 8.

However, they seem to have been in the minority. In everyday practice we rarely come across such cultured and respectable servants of the state. During the financial crises of the early fourth/tenth century the state seems to have been better served by financial specialists, men of figures instead of erudite men of letters. Moreover, mutual loyalty and good manners were probably not a scribe's main concern in this insecure era. Administration was the work of clever accountants rather than witty men of letters, and many bureaucratic ideals easily vanished into thin air.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MILITARY[1]

Hugh Kennedy

The political history of the reign of al-Muqtadir was dominated by the affairs of the military, and above all by the need to pay the soldiers on a regular basis. Although many sources for this period, as has been described in the previous two chapters, put great emphasis on the influence and activities of civil adminstrators, it is clear that the military increasingly controlled the political life of the caliphate. By the end of the reign, different elements of the military had come to dominate the politics of Baghdad, presaging the rise of the *amīr al- umarā* in the year's following al-Muqtadir's death.

The Abbasid army during the reign of al-Muqtadir can be divided into two distinct groups. The first was the regular military based in Baghdad, paid by the *dīwān al-jaysh* (bureau of the army) and commanded by men appointed by the caliph or his vizier. The second group were soldiers raised by military contractors and paid by them, often with moneys taken from provinces over which they had been granted the rights to collect taxation and other government revenues. The allegiance of such groups to the Abbasids was variable: rebels could join the Abbasid cause and then, if things did not work out, could abandon the armies of the caliphs and return home. The most important of these contractors were the Ḥamdānids, whose forces at this stage seem to have been largely Arabs recruited in the Jazīra, and the Sājids, followers of Yūsuf b. Abī l-Sāj, mostly recruited among the inhabitants of the mountain regions of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

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[1] For the armies of the middle Abbasid period, see Hugh Kennedy, *The Armies of the Caliphs: Military and Society in the Early Islamic State* (London: Routledge, 2001), esp. 118–167, and Fukuzo Amabe, *The Emergence of the ʿAbbāsid Autocracy* (Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 1995). On the armies of the Samarra period, Matthew S. Gordon, *The Breaking of a Thousand Swords: A History of the Turkish Military of Samarra (A.H. 200–275/815–889)* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), and, more recently, E. de La Vaissière, *Samarcande et Samarra: élites d'Asie centrale dans l'empire ʿabbāside* (Paris: Association pour l'Avancement des Études Iraniennes, 2007).

This chapter is largely concerned with the regular Abbasid army. It begins with a general description of the forces available and of the role of *ghilmān* and the 'regiments' of the Ḥujarīs and Maṣāffīs. It then discusses the careers of individual commanders, Mu'nis al-Muẓaffar, Naṣr al-Qushūrī, the long-serving *ḥājib* (chamberlain), and successive *aṣḥāb al-shurṭa* (chiefs of police) and uses their biographies as a way of illustrating the use and limitations of military power.

The caliph al-Muqtadir inherited a large, expensive and potentially effective military organization which had been built up by his predecessors. The army developed from the forces which had emerged at the end of the period of anarchy in Samarra in 256/870. The creation of this army was largely the work of al-Muwaffaq, never caliph himself but effectively both regent and military commander for his brother al-Mu'tamid (r. 256–79/870–92). Al-Muwaffaq's great achievement was to re-establish a personal bond between the Abbasid family and the military which had fallen into abeyance after the death of the warrior caliph al-Mu'taṣim (218/833). The close relations were strengthened during the long and hard campaigns which al-Muwaffaq led against the Zanj rebels in southern Iraq. He led the army in person and was tirelessly in the field. During the latter part of these campaigns, he was assisted by his son, later the caliph al-Mu'taḍid, who, like his father, was an active military leader. Both al-Muwaffaq and his son built up their own corps of *ghilmān* whose loyalties lay with their masters. At the end of al-Muwaffaq's life (279/892) there is evidence of some tension between him and his son, and of rivalry between the two groups of *ghilmān*, which ended in al-Mu'taḍid's arrest and his liberation by his own supporters. The *ghilmān* of al-Mu'taḍid formed the backbone of al-Muqtadir's army and they developed a strong group loyalty to each other and to maintaining their interests and privileged position against any individuals or groups who set out to challenge them. Almost all the important military leaders of the reign, such as Mu'nis al-Muẓaffar, Naṣr al-Qushūrī and Yāqūt, had begun their careers in al-Mu'taḍid's military following.

The policy of direct Abbasid military leadership continued during the short reign of his son al-Muktafī (r. 289–95/902–8), who had been entrusted with military command by his father during his lifetime and who continued to lead the troops in person when he was caliph.

These soldiers are usually described as *ghilmān* (sing. *ghulām*). The word means simply 'boys' but at this time it is used in the Arabic sources to mean soldiers, often of slave origin, who had been purchased or recruited

into the caliph's forces.[2] The word *mamlūk*, later of course the usual designation of such slave soldiers, is seldom used in the sources of the period. We know very little of their origins. They do not have ethnic, tribal or family affiliations in their names. Their names only tell us about the master who trained them and under whom they first served. Their masters and fellow *ghilmān* were effectively their kin, with whom they developed a strong sense of group loyalty. The probability is that most of them were of Turkic origin, from the steppe lands of what is now Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, others were Khazars from north of the Caucasus,[3] but none of them seem to have maintained any links with their places of origin, nor are they recorded as speaking Turkic languages.

The *ghilmān* had two other characteristics that were important. The first is that they always fought as horsemen. While the evidence is not entirely clear, it seems as if they mostly served as mounted archers, mastering the very difficult skills of firing arrows from a short bow on a fast-moving horse.[4] This was a technique that needed intensive training from an early age and was certainly not something that could be picked up by any peasant or bedouin. They were, in fact, a caste of specialist warriors and, when they were well led, they could be very effective. The second point is that, although they may have been of servile origin, they were paid in cash salaries, salaries which put them among the upper strata of Abbasid society. They were wholly dependent on these salaries for their livelihood and believed strongly that they were entitled to them, whatever financial problems the government of the day might be experiencing.

There survives a unique snapshot of the Abbasid army at the time of al-Muʿtaḍid's succession when an attempt was made to balance the budget.[5] The raising of taxation was entrusted to Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ṭā'i, who gave a guarantee (*ḍamān*) that he would provide 7,000 *dīnār* per day from the revenues of the Sawād of Iraq and surrounding areas to pay all the expenses of government. We are given no details of how this money was collected, perhaps because the *sulṭān* kept no records. Expenditure

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[2] See also Part I, Chapter 1.

[3] Peter B. Golden, 'Khazar Turkic Ghulâms in Caliphal Service', *Journal Asiatique* 292 (2004): 279–309.

[4] The importance of archery in the military success of the *ghilmān* is made clear in the account of their victory over the Maṣāffī infantry in Baghdad in 318/930 ('Arīb, *Ṣilat*, 148–149).

[5] For the text, al-Ṣābī, *al-Wuzarā'*, 15–28. See also the discussion in H. Busse, 'Das Hofbudget des Chalifen al-Muʿtaḍid billāh (279/892–289/902)', *Der Islam* 43 (1967): 11–36.

is recorded in considerable detail. The overwhelming bulk of the expenditure is directly concerned with the military. Of the total expenditure of 7,915 *dīnār* per day, 5,121 are entirely military, 1,943 in areas (like riding animals and stables) that served both military and non-military and only 851 in areas like the bureaucracy which can be described as truly civilian (though even in this case, the main function of the bureaucracy was to arrange payment of the army). It seems as if over 80 per cent of recorded government expenditure was spent on maintaining the army. We have no comparable record from the reign of al-Muqtadir. It is unlikely that the level of military expenditure decreased significantly but, to judge by the constant stream of complaints from the military and chroniclers, it is likely that the level of expenditure on the harem and the caliph's household was significantly higher.

The document gives considerable detail about the different categories of troops on the payroll. Troops were paid 'monthly' and the system seems to have worked on the basis that all soldiers were paid the same each 'month' but that the 'month' was essentially an artificial unit of account and varied in length according to the status of the payee. Each payment was known as a *nawba.* Thus a man with a 40-day 'month' was in effect paid three times as much as a man with a 120-day 'month.' The first group discussed were the *Aṣḥāb al-Maṣāff* or Maṣāffīs so called because they stood in ranks (*ṣufūf*, sing. *ṣaff*) on ceremonial occasions. These were in two groups. The most numerous and best paid were the 'whites', comprising the Jannābīs and the Basrans and those who served at the gates (*ʿala l-abwāb*) of the commanders, the Mufliḥīs, Daylamites, Ṭabarīs and Maghāriba. Of these the Ṭabarīs and the Daylamites came from the mountains of northern Iran, as probably did the Mufliḥīs. The Basrans may have been ex-supporters of the Zanj rebels, as many of the black soldiers were. Jannāba was the place of origin of the Qarmaṭī leader Abū Ṭāhir al-Jannābī and it is probable that many of the Jannābīs were ex-supporters of the Qarāmiṭa. The 'black' foot soldiers were slaves, originally from Nubia and purchased in Mecca and Egypt. There were also the Zaghāwa, Berber speakers originally from the Chad area and non-Arab supporters of the Zanj. These were clearly of low status and were paid very little, their salaries being supplemented by a bread ration. They all guarded the Bāb al-Khāṣṣa or inner gate. The total daily pay was 300 *dīnār* for the blacks and 7,000 for the whites, that is, some 30,000 per month.

The next group were the *ghilmān* who had been freed by al-Muwaffaq and their names added to the free men; in the same group were the *quwwād* (elite military commanders) and *mawālī* (originally freedmen or clients but

by this time probably military officers with a direct relationship with the caliph). They had a 40-day pay interval but this was increased to 50 because of bad behaviour and eventually al-Muʿtaḍid transferred them to the body of the freemen and gave them a 60-day interval (i.e. their salaries were progressively reduced). They were commanded by the *ḥājib* and 25 deputies. On campaign, they were provided with riding animals from the stables.

In addition, al-Muʿtaḍid acquired *ghilmān* who were stationed in the palace and its rooms (*ḥujar*) and were consequently known as the Ḥujarīs. They were put under the command of eunuch tutors (*al-khudum al-ustādhīn*) and they were not allowed to go out or ride without them. They soon moved on from their role in the palace to being important members of the caliphate's field army.

The *mawālī* of al-Muwaffaq and the *mamlūk*s of al-Muʿtaḍid formed the 'cavalry, freemen and select', whose salary bill was 1,500 *dīnār* per day. They were reviewed by the caliph in person and the document provides us with the only account we have of training and promotion within the military in the early Abbasid period. The review took place in the square (*maydān*) in front of one of the palaces. The caliph al-Muʿtaḍid and his vizier ʿUbayd Allāh b. Sulaymān watched from an elevated position. Below them, and hidden from the soldiers performing in the square were the clerks of the pay office (*kuttāb al-ʿaṭā*). Each officer (*qā'id*) came forward with a list on which were written the names of his men and their salaries. A servant collected this and brought it to al-Muʿtadid. Then ʿUbayd Allāh b. Sulaymān summoned them one after the other. Each one entered the *maydān* and was tested on the *birjās* (quintain or target on a pole). If he shot well, was in control of himself and his mount, firmly seated in his saddle and his shot hit the target, or came near, his name was marked with a J, meaning *jayyid* (good). One who was less good was given a Ṭ, meaning *mutawassiṭ* (middling). One who lagged behind and could not ride well or hit his target was given a D, meaning *dūn* (inferior). The most competent were called the Special Forces (*ʿaskar al-khāṣṣa*) with a pay interval of 90 days, the next were called Service Forces (*ʿaskar al-khidma*) and these were entrusted with security duties in and around Baghdad under the command of Badr, the caliph's leading military commander. They had a pay interval of 120 days. The third category were appointed to help tax collecting and for police duties in Baghdad, Kufa and Wāsiṭ. It seems that this last group were paid from contribution from the districts in which they served.

It is not clear whether this review was common practice and conducted on a regular basis or whether it was a one-off event, and there is

certainly no indication that al-Muqtadir ever participated in such a procedure. However, a clear indication that the regular payment and supervision of the military did still continue through most of al-Muqtadir's reign comes from the year 315/927 and the examination of the deposed vizier al-Khaṣībī by ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā and others. In the search for troops to defend the caliphate against the Qarāmiṭa he had invited the de facto ruler of Armenia and Azerbaijan, Ibn Abī l-Sāj, to come to Iraq with his men. In order to pay them, al-Khaṣībī had assigned them the revenues of all the provinces of the Zagros mountains 'for his [Ibn Abī l-Sāj's] table' (that is, for his and his men's expenses).[6] In his examination he was asked about this irregular procedure.

> When you took that step' ʿAlī asked him, 'why did you not content yourself with making him muster his troops and his *ghilmān* letting them be paid on the same principle as the army of Mu'nis, to which certain revenues are assigned? Payment is made by the paymasters appointed by the *sulṭān* (*munaffiqīn min qibal al-sulṭan*) who have to render their account (*ḥisāb*) to the clerks of the army *dīwān*. There are no increases except through the regular procedures of promotion (*al-istiqbāl al-maʿrūf*).[7]

This pattern of the payment of the military by the civilian *kuttāb* and the close supervision of promotion looks very like the procedures described in the document of al-Muʿtaḍid's reign. It was the classic pattern of Abbasid administration; but this control of the military by the civil bureaucracy was not to survive the disasters of the end of al-Muqtadir's reign.

The Ḥujarīs and the Maṣāffīs

Some of the military were formed into two regiments which developed their own group indentity. The Ḥujarīs were formed to guard the *ḥujar* or chambers of the caliphs, but they were used in other areas of warfare too. The other main regiment was the Maṣāffīs, who mostly seem to have fought on foot. As the reign progressed, and resources became tighter and tighter, tension and violence between the Ḥujarīs and other horsemen and the Maṣāffī foot soldiers became a major source of political instability.

The Ḥujarīs were an elite group within the wider body of the *ghilmān* and are recorded as being on campaign in 287/900,[8] and in 293/903–4

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[6] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 148.
[7] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 153–154.
[8] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, iii, 2198.

the *ghilmān al-ḥujar* were part of the forces sent out in pursuit of the Qarāmiṭa in the Syrian desert.[9] By the reign of al-Muqtadir, the Ḥujarīs were the most powerful group of cavalry in the army. They behaved like an elite guard. Al-Muktafī had increased their salaries, apparently to win them over from their loyalty to his father's right-hand military man, Badr, whom he had executed. The senior ones were paid 16 *dīnār* and the younger 12. The events surrounding the attempted coup in favour of Ibn al-Muʿtazz further confirmed their position. It was they and their commanders, above all Muʾnis al-Khādim, who led the resistance to the coup and it was they who returned al-Muqtadir to the throne. They used their position to thwart any threat to their privileged status and were not averse to using violence. In 303/915–16, 700 of them rioted and burned the stables of the vizier ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā in a protest over pay and were satisfied in the end with a pay rise of three *dīnār* per month for the *ghilmān* among them and three-quarters of a *dīnār* for the foot soldiers.[10] The next year a group of them were appointed as a permanent escort for the vizier Ibn al-Furāt, newly reappointed to office.[11] In 307/919–20, when Baghdad was seriously disturbed by riots against high grain prices, it was the Ḥujarī *ghilmān* who were sent out to restore order.[12] In 311/923 Nāzūk led the Ḥujarī *ghilmān* to arrest the fallen vizier Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās and the next year, 312/924, Ibn al-Furāt, faced by the Qarmaṭī attack on Kufa sent the Ḥujarīs under the command of Yāqūt to defend the city, though in the event they arrived after the enemy had sacked the town and made off with their loot.[13] The relationship between the Ḥujarīs and the vizier rapidly turned sour when Ibn al-Furāt was unable to find the money to pay them. By 312/924 they were demanding his dismissal,[14] and they were among the leaders of the military who threatened to mutiny if Ibn al-Furāt and his son al-Muḥassin were allowed to live; the caliph gave in and ordered that they both be executed. We next hear of the Ḥujarīs when they were mobilized to defend the capital against the Qarāmiṭa during the crisis of 315/927–8 when they were sent to prevent the enemy from crossing the Euphrates and approaching Baghdad. By this time they were said to have numbered 12,000 in a total Abbasid army of some 40,000 men. In 317/929 they initially supported

[9] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 12.
[10] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 38.
[11] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 62.
[12] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 74.
[13] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 122.
[14] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 124–125.

the coup which deposed al-Muqtadir and replaced him with al-Qāhir but turned against the new caliph's chief supporter, Nāzūk, because he was about to bring in men of his own to replace them.[15] Their status was confirmed the next year when, led by the *sāḥib al-shurṭa* Yāqūt, they were responsible for the destruction of their long-standing rivals, the Maṣāffī infantry.[16] Their victory over their rivals meant that the Ḥujarīs were the dominant element in the army. They supported al-Muqtadir against Mu'nis, who had commanded them so often: perhaps a new generation of Ḥujarīs were no longer in awe of the old general and knew nothing of his past achievements. Their military effciciency however, had not improved and a chronicler notes, laconically, that the Ḥujarīs were the first group in the caliph's army to flee from the battlefield.[17] In the event the regiment survived the turmoil at the end of al-Muqtadir's reign but were finally broken up and dispersed by Ibn Rā'iq in 325/936. Their disappearance marks the effective end of the army which had been built up by al-Muʿtaḍid and with it the final collapse of Abbasid military power. They had formed the backbone of al-Muqtadir's army and, in general, they supported the caliph because he was his father's son; but in the end their loyalty lay with the Ḥujarīs as a group rather than to the Abbasid caliphs and they would strike against any one who threatened their position. While they served under commanders such as Mu'nis and Naṣr al-Qushūrī, they do not seem to have had an officer class of their own, and the *nisba* Ḥujarī never seems to be used by prominent commanders.

Their rivals, the Maṣāffī infantry, are less often mentioned by name but there are numerous references to the foot soldiers of Baghdad, the *rijjāla* which may be another term for the same group. They were more numerous than the Ḥujarī *ghilmān* but paid less. Like the Ḥujarīs, they were most active in defending their own interests. At the time of the grain crisis of 307/919–20 it was only when the Maṣāffī infantry began to riot against the high prices that the caliph knew he had to take action and open the granaries. The incident also makes it clear that these soldiers were using their salaries to buy food in the markets, rather than being supplied with grain by the government.[18] They too were mobilized to defend Baghdad from the Qarāmiṭa in the winter of 315/927–8 but are otherwise mostly encountered in accounts of palace intrigues and pay mutinies. They

[15] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 194–195.
[16] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 148–149.
[17] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 178.
[18] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 74.

played a crucial part in the deposition of al-Qāhir and the restoration of al-Muqtadir in 317/929 and the execution of Nāzūk.

ʿArīb describes how their behaviour became intolerable.

> When they had received the six bonus payments (*nawā'ib*) and the increase they had demanded, they took control of the caliphate and pitched their tents around the palace. They said 'We were more important than the (mounted) *ghilmān* in protecting the caliph and his palace.' Many men who were not of their number, flocked to join them and their number increased to more than 20,000.[19] They took control of the judges and demanded that the disolving of the charitable endowments (*ḥabāsāt*) and that *awqāf* be taken out of their hands.[20] They consorted with criminals, prevented the administration of justice and lorded it over the Muslims. Their commanders took liberties with the caliph and the vizier to the extent that they could not keep them away from them at any time of the of the night or day or refuse them any request.[21]

Needless to say, this provoked the anger of the mounted *ghilmān* who camped at the Muṣallā and demanded their wages.[22] Some of them entered Baghdad, heading for the house of the vizier's son, but they were repulsed by the foot soldiers who were surrounding it who prevented them from passing along the street. The horsemen gathered and showered arrows on them, putting them to flight. They contacted the Ḥujarīs who joined them in the attack and they were supported by Yāqūt, the *ṣāḥib al-shurṭa* and the vizier, who knew how fed up the caliph had become with them. On 21 of Muḥarram, 318/25 February 930, the Ḥujarī *ghilmān* drove the Maṣāffīs out of the guard posts, showering them with arrows while the son of Yāqūt sent large numbers of his *ghilmān* in boats on the river so that none of them could cross and any boatmen who crossed was shot at. An announcement was made that none of them should remain in Baghdad and they scattered in the directions of Wāsiṭ, Kufa and Basra. Some of them tried to regroup at Wāsiṭ but were defeated and massacred by Mu'nis and never again operated as a fighting force.

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[19] Twice as many as the 10,000 recorded in 305–6/917–18. Their total pay bill had also increased enormously. In the military budget of al-Muʿtaḍid's reign their monthly wages had amounted to 30,000 *dīnār*. When ʿĀlī b. ʿĪsā became vizier for the second time in 314–15/927, he found that their pay was 80,000 (presumably per month), while at the time of their destruction it had risen to '130,000 *dīnār* for every month of the lunar year' (i.e. calendar months not fiscal months), and it was direct competition for money between them and the cavalry that led to their destruction.

[20] Presumably so that the resources could be released to fund their pay.

[21] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 148.

[22] On the Muṣallā see also Map 3 and Appendix.

Mu'nis al-Khādim, Called al-Muẓaffar (the Victorious)

The commanders of the armies and other military leaders were among the most important figures in the political life of the Abbasid state during the reign of al-Muqtadir. Compared with the civilian elite of viziers and other leading figures in the *kitāba* many of the military leaders had long and uninterrupted careers at the top, ended only by death.

The most famous and influential of the leaders of the Baghdad army was Mu'nis, known as Mu'nis al-Khādim (the eunuch) but later, and more respectfully as al-Muẓaffar (the victorious), to distinguish him from other Mu'nises, notably Mu'nis al-Khāzin (the treasurer). His long career in the army lasted for half a century and he was still taking an active part in politics and military affairs at the time of his execution by the caliph al-Qāhir in 321/933. He dominates the military history of the caliphate of al-Muqtadir and plays an important role in the tangled politics of the administration. In the narrative tradition represented by Miskawayh, he is the perfect soldier, efficient and honest, working in partnership with that paragon of administrative virtue, ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā. He also earned the respect of the Queen Mother, who described him to her son as 'your sword and the one you can rely on' (*sayfuka wa-thiqatuka*),[23] while his colleague, and occasional rival, the *ḥājib* Naṣr, described him 'the man who kept enemies at bay and defended the state' (*yunāḍil al-aʿdāʾ wa-yadfaʿa ʿan al-dawla*).[24] His status as a eunuch, unusual among the highest ranks of the military, may have contributed to the trust he enjoyed because, unlike other senior officers such as Naṣr the *ḥājib* or Yāqūt, he had no ambitious children to look after. On the other hand, it may have been a problem for him as he grew older that he, unlike his rivals Yāqūt and Rā'iq, had no children who might offer long-term prospects to his followers. Jokes may have been made about his beardlessness but he was generally recognized as the leading general of his generation.[25]

It is worth tracing his career in some detail because it tells us much about the nature and limitations of military power in this period. We have no idea about his origins but like many of the *ghilmān* of the period he probably came from Central Asia (modern Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan)

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[23] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 117.

[24] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 121.

[25] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 160, where ʿAbd Allāh b. Ḥamdān says, 'We will fight before you, O Ustadh [the title given to military leaders by their *ghilmān* and others] until your beard grows'.

and was of Turkic stock. If so, he would have been captured or sold and taken west via the Sāmānid capital at Samarqand. It was possibly there that he was castrated before being sold on to al-Muʿtaḍid, then building up his forces for his campaign against the Zanj rebels in southern Iraq. It is here in 267/880 that he first enters the historical record, fighting in the campaign against the rebels.[26] In 287/900 we find him campaigning in the caliph's army on the Byzantine frontier with Muʾnis al-Khāzin and Khāqān al-Mufliḥī, who were to be important associates in later years.

His big breakthrough came at the time of the attempted coup against al-Muqtadir in favour of Ibn al-Muʿtazz. The course of events is reasonably clear.[27] While Ibn al-Muʿtazz and his supporters were celebrating and distributing offices, it was Muʾnis who led the palace *ghilmān* who had remained with al-Muqtadir, going by boat up the Tigris to the riverside palace where the new caliph was staying and, according to one account, started firing volleys of arrows. The supporters of Ibn al-Muʿtazz panicked, fled and dispersed. Muʾnis then restored al-Muqtadir to the throne and invited the one leading figure in the bureaucracy who had not supported the coup, Ibn al-Furāt, to serve as vizier. As a result of this Muʾnis became the effective leader of the Baghdad military and began his close alliance with Muʾnis al-Khāzin, the palace *ghilmān* and the Queen Mother's brother, Gharīb, which was to serve as the corner-stone of al-Muqtadir's support for the first years of his reign.

After the collapse of Ibn al-Muʿtazz's coup, the first years of the reign were comparatively peaceful. In 297/910 we hear of Muʾnis leading the traditional summer raid, the *ṣāʾifa*, against the Byzantines in the name of the Abbasid caliphate.[28] He had with him a large army and a group of *quwwād*. He based himself in Tarsus. According to the dispatch he sent to Baghdad, which was read out in public, he killed many Byzantines and won a notable victory. Leading the *ṣāʾifa* was an ancient tradition that went back at least to the beginning of the Umayyad caliphate and was one of the rituals by which the caliph legitimized his leadership of the Muslim *umma*. At the same time Muʾnis was a jealous leader who did not want to share the limelight with anyone. Among the troops accompanying him was one Abū l-Agharr Khalīfa b. Mubārak al-Sulamī, of whom everyone agreed that 'there was at this time no knight (*fāris*) among the Arabs or

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[26] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, iii, 1953.

[27] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, iii, 2282–2283; Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 6–7; ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 27–29; al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 38–42.

[28] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, iii, 2284–2285; ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 31–32.

Persians (*ʿajam*) braver, stronger or more steadfast than him.' Muʾnis complained to the caliph about him and as a result he was ordered back to Baghdad and imprisoned. He may have objected to Abū l-Agharr because he was an Arab of Bedouin stock or simply because he was so popular: we shall never know.

The next important campaign followed the next year.[29] Fārs was a very important province for the Abbasids at this time because it was one of the few areas that could be expected to send reasonable quantities of revenue to the capital. It had been ruled in the Abbasid interest by one Subkarā who paid a fixed sum of money every year, but when it fell into the hands of Layth b. ʿAlī the Ṣaffārid something had to be done. In Ramaḍān 297/early summer 910, Muʾnis with an army of 5,000 elite troops, *awliyāʾ* and *ghilmān*, set out for the province. The *aṣḥāb al-maʿūna* (officers in charge of collecting supplies for the military) of Iṣfahān and Ahwāz were ordered to provide supplies. Even as the army was en route, problems emerged because the army were not paid their salaries (*arzāq*) and so they sacked the camp of the financial administrator Muʾnis had brought with him. Despite these troubles, the campaign was a success: Layth was defeated and sent as a prisoner to Baghdad, entering the city on the back of an elephant so that all the citizens could witness his defeat and the power of the caliphal armies.

This, however, was not the end of the story, and what followed illustrates some of the problems of enforcing government policy and the role Muʾnis played. Muʾnis seems to have believed that it would be in his interests for Subkarā to remain as governor of Fārs, and when Subkarā offered to increase the amount of money he paid, Muʾnis opened negotiations.[30] Some years earlier the province had paid 4 million *dirham* per year to the Abbasid government; Subkarā now offered seven. The vizier Ibn al-Furāt refused, Muʾnis raised the bid to nine pointing out that Subkarā needed the rest to pay the army in the province. Ibn al-Furāt refused to accept anything less than thirteen. Muʾnis advised Subkarā to agree but he refused to offer anything more than ten. Negotiations broke down, Muʾnis was ordered back to Baghdad and a new military expedition was sent out which eventually captured Subkarā, but the negotiations left a nasty taste in the mouth and were one of the reasons for the growing estrangement

[29] For the Fārs campaign, al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, iii, 2285; ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 32–33; Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 16–19.

[30] The negotiations are described in Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 18–19.

between Mu'nis and Ibn al-Furāt. Provincial government was not a systematic business, nor was it arranged by caliphal decree but by a complex series of bargains and compromises among the various interested parties; Mu'nis was as much a diplomat and businessman as he was a soldier.

Mu'nis now became one of the young caliph's closest advisers. When, in the year 300/913, the vizier al-Khāqānī's government began to run into serious financial difficulties and there was widespread unrest in Baghdad, it was to Mu'nis that al-Muqtadir turned. He had thought of bringing back Ibn al-Furāt as vizier but Mu'nis advised against: it would look very bad to restore to office a man who had so recently been dismissed. Instead he recommended the appointment of ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā, and this cemented the relationship of Mu'nis with ʿAlī, which was to be one of the most important power axes in the turbulent and fissiparous court.[31]

He was soon entrusted with another important command and was sent in 304/916 with an army to impose terms on Ibn Abī l-Sāj, effective ruler of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The mission was not a success. Mu'nis suffered the only major military defeat of his long career, his army was routed and he himself taken prisoner. But Ibn Abī l-Sāj was too clever to humiliate or injure so influential a figure and instead allowed him and 300 of his *ghilmān* to return to Baghdad.[32] He may or may not have regretted his decision when, the next year, Mu'nis returned and defeated him at Ardabīl and took him as a prisoner to the capital.[33] However, this was all part of the complex negotiation and bargaining that was typical of relations between the caliph and the provinces nominally under his rule, and there seems to have been no lasting ill-feeling. His defeat did not mean that the areas came back under direct Abbasid rule, for one of his *ghilmān* stepped into Ibn Abī l-Sāj's shoes, agreeing to contribute an annual sum to Baghdad, which, in fact, he never paid.

Mu'nis's next important military mission, in 302–3/915–16, was to Egypt, which was under threat from the Fatimids, now ruling in Ifrīqiya (Tunisia) but determined to extend their power to the East and overthrow the Abbasids as universal caliphs. Here again he was successful and the Fatimid forces were driven back.[34]

In 305/917 Mu'nis was now back in Baghdad with a place of honour at the magnificent reception which Ibn al-Furāt laid on for the Byzantine

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31 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 25–27.
32 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 46.
33 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 47.
34 al-Kindī, *Wulāt Miṣr*, 273.

ambassadors, and as soon as the visit was over it was he who went to the frontier to put into effect the prisoner swap which had been agreed.[35] In 309/921 he was again in Egypt, organizing the defences against another Fatimid attack,[36] and he was given some financial control over both Egypt and Syria (*uqṭiʿa lahu*).

When he returned to Baghdad in 310/922–3 he was in high favour with the caliph, being invited to drink with the monarch (*shariba bayn yadayhi*). It is not stated what was being drunk but, bearing in mind the caliph's known proclivities, it is likely to have been wine. He also secured the release of his old sparring partner, Ibn Abī l-Sāj, who returned to Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, he seems to have left some of his men behind because from this time on we find Sājī *ghilmān* serving under Muʾnis's command.[37]

No one's political position was secure in the snake-pit of al-Muqtadir's court. When Ibn al-Furāt became vizier for the third time in 311/923 he set out to undermine Muʾnis' position with the caliph because the general had openly criticized the cruelty and excesses of the vizier and his son al-Muḥassin. Since it was impossible to take direct action against so powerful and respected a figure he decided to send him and his army to Raqqa on the Euphrates. He argued that there were insufficient financial resources to allow them to remain in Baghdad. Ibn Abī l-Sāj was sending nothing from the areas he controlled and Rayy and most of the Jibāl was equally producing no revenue. The resources of the Sawād, Ahwāz and Fārs, which were available, were insufficient. If he went to Raqqa, the resources of the Jazīra and Syria would be available to pay his army. Muʾnis recognized this specious argument for what it was, a ruse to get him away from the capital and allow the vizier a free hand to act against Naṣr the *ḥājib* and others.[38]

All the vizier's calculations were upset by the attack on the *ḥajj* by the Qarāmiṭa and the outrage this provoked in Baghdad. He was forced to write to Muʾnis, asking him to return and show him the greatest respect when he arrived. The tables were now turned, Muʾnis and Naṣr *al-ḥājib* taking Ibn al-Furāt and his son into custody. Interestingly, Ibn al-Furāt wanted to be handed over to Muʾnis 'even though he is my enemy' because

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35 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 55–56.
36 al-Kindī, *Wulāt Miṣr*, 277–279.
37 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 116.
38 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 115–116; ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 112.

he trusted him not to ill-treat him. In the end, though, the execution of the veteran vizier was left to others.[39]

After the death of Ibn al-Furāt, Mu'nis became once more the key figure in the administration and once more he championed the cause of ʿAlī b. Īsā. In 313/925 he secured the appointment of ʿAlī as superintendant (*mushrif*) of the finances of Syria and Egypt and in 315/927 he secured his appointment to the vizierate for the second time. Mu'nis himself was given a robe of honour when he was dispatched to the Byzantine frontier where the emperor himself had led his armies to take the city of Samsat and, to the scandal of the Muslims, celebrated church services in the mosque.[40] But the year was also marked by an unpleasant incident after which, in the words of the chronicler, 'the loyalty of Mu'nis al-Muẓaffar showed signs of failing'.[41] One of the caliph's eunuchs revealed to Mu'nis that there was a plot to lure him into the palace where a pit had been prepared for him to fall into. The caliph was obliged to write in his own hand denying this and Mu'nis in turn wrote accepting his version but was careful not to visit the palace. Relations between the caliph and his leading general were always rather fraught. Al-Muqtadir certainly resented the general esteem in which Mu'nis was held and his firm support for ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā in his attempt to curtail palace spending. And Mu'nis, for his part, would have been only too aware of the fate of his father's military right-hand man, Badr, swiftly put to death by his brother al-Muktafī when he became caliph.

These tensions were put on one side by the other main event of the year. 315/927 saw the most serious military crisis of the reign this far when the Qarāmiṭa seemed to be on the verge of taking Baghdad itself. Needless to say Mu'nis, along with Naṣr the *ḥājib*, played a leading role in the defence, going to al-Anbār to prevent the Qarāmiṭa from crossing the Euphrates and then shadowing them up the river and supporting the people of Raqqa in driving the enemy off.[42]

The retreat of the Qarāmiṭa did little to solve the internal conflicts within the administration. No sooner had they disappeared than elements of the army mutinied for more pay. There was also the choice of a new vizier to replace the incompetent al-Khaṣībī. Once again al-Muqtadir turned to Mu'nis and once again Mu'nis recommended ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā, but the

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[39] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 130.
[40] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 159.
[41] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 159.
[42] On this episode, see also Part I, Chapter 1.

latter refused, saying that he would only take on the office if Mu'nis was to remain in the capital whereas Mu'nis was bound for Raqqa and the Byzantine frontier. So the office was offered to the able but young and inexperienced Ibn Muqla.

Mu'nis could not afford to be away from Baghdad for long. When he was away there were rumours that Hārūn b. Gharīb was to be appointed *amīr al-umarā*.[43] Hārūn was the Queen Mother's nephew. His father, Gharīb, her brother, had established himself as a military commander in Baghdad without, apparently leading any major expeditions or enjoying any widespread support among the soldiery. His rather fragile position had been inherited by his son Hārūn, who now tried to supplant Mu'nis as the leading figure in the military. The title of *amīr al-umarā* seems to have been a new invention and no one had held it thus far, but the implications of the office were generally understood. The appointment of such a figure would be, in essence, a military coup subordinating the whole civil administration, including the vizier, to the dictates of the military. The precarious balance between the bureaucracy and the army commanders would be lost, probably for ever. This is indeed what happened a decade later in 324/936 when Ibn Rā'iq formally adopted the title; but for the moment these were just ideas in the wind.

The whole situation rapidly descended into farce as Hārūn's men came to blows with the troops of Nāzūk, the chief of police, over a pretty boy they both coveted. On 8 Muḥarram 317/21 February 929 Mu'nis returned from the frontier to confront the caliph and secure his own position. He was joined by Nāzūk and his men, as well as the Ḥamdānids. Hārūn b. Gharīb and his men, along with the Ḥujarīs and Maṣāffīs, remained with the caliph in the palace. There then began an exchange of correspondence. Mu'nis stated the army's grievances 'about the amount of money and land wasted upon the eunuchs and women of the court and their interference in the administration' and he went on to demand their removal from the palace and the seizure of their possessions. The caliph replied with a long letter, the text of which has been preserved in full in Miskawayh's chronicle and in part in 'Arīb's annals: it was obviously very well publicized. In it he expressed his devotion to and admiration for Mu'nis in the most fulsome terms. He went to explain that while he could cut back on allowances, he could not abolish them altogether. He would strive his utmost to meet Mu'nis's demands. Furthermore, he had remained neutral

[43] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 188–189.

between Hārūn and Nāzūk, favouring neither one nor the other. Finally, if this was not enough, he would accept his fate just as the caliph ʿUthmān had accepted his, without making any effort to defend himself.[44]

It was a desperate attempt to save his position and emphasize the centrality of Muʾnis's role. He, Nāzūk and Abū l-Hayjāʾ al-Ḥamdānī considered the reply and agreed to demand the removal of Hārūn b. Gharīb, who was accordingly ordered to the Byzantine frontier, although in the end he did not go.[45] On 10 Muḥarram 317/23 February 929 Muʾnis and his friends and supporters entered the city but, typically, avoided the palace in case it was damaged by the troops. Two days later, however, the whole palace was occupied by the army and the now deposed caliph, his mother and his womenfolk were taken upriver to Muʾnis's house where they were to be lodged in safety.[46]

The next stage was to find a new caliph in the palace of Ibn Ṭāhir where redundant members of the Abbasid family were housed. Al-Muqtadir's younger brother Muḥammad was chosen, but the man in charge of the house would not release him from his effective imprisonment without a direct order from Muʾnis, now clearly regarded as arbiter of the fate of the caliphate. The new caliph was duly installed in the palace with the title of al-Qāhir under the protection of Nāzūk. But Muʾnis, as often, played a cautious game. He avoided the palace himself and watched the disastrous collapse of Nāzūk's attempted coup from a safe distance, telling people that he had never wanted the complete deposition of al-Muqtadir. When it was all over, and Nāzūk was dead, it was Muʾnis who arranged for the return of the caliph to the palace.[47]

At first, relations between Muʾnis and the restored caliph seem to have been cordial. At his suggestion the two sons of Rāʾiq were given charge of the *shurṭa* and re-established order in the city. The harmony did not last long. The main bone of contention was the presence of Yāqūt and his sons in the city and the favour that the caliph had shown them. In the end, Muʾnis forced al-Muqtadir to expel them: they and their followers left by water 'with more than forty ships, laden with money, arms, saddles, swords, belts and other things'. Their houses were promptly burned down.[48] They were not to be gone for long.

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[44] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 189–192; ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 140.
[45] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 192.
[46] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 141.
[47] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 143–144.
[48] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 160.

The cause of the final breach between Mu'nis and the caliph was rivalries over power in Baghdad. Mu'nis was by this time an old man. He had had an active military role for more than 50 years. He was suffering from gout or arthritis and rarely left his house but he still wanted to be in charge. Having secured the expulsion of Yāqūt, he had his protégés, the sons of Rā'iq, restored to the all-important *shurṭa* but they now enjoyed the caliph's favour and wanted to assert their own power. And they became suspicious that Mu'nis wanted to replace them with his new favourite, his *ghulām* Yalbaq.[49] And so it was that Mu'nis and his remaining followers left for Mosul while his enemies in Baghdad, including the returned Yāqūt and the Banū Rā'iq, plotted his downfall.

It was this alienation which led to the tragic battle in which Mu'nis' soldiers killed the caliph he had served so well for 30 years.[50] The events that led up to al-Muqtadir's death and Mu'nis' role in them have already been described, but ʿArīb adds some details which give an insight into the feelings of the old, sick general at this time. He had always attempted to keep the door open for reconciliation with the caliph. He had been brought up in the Abbasid court and army and had known al-Muqtadir when he was a boy. When he was away from Baghdad just before the final battle, he and his followers had stayed in the deserted imperial capital at Samarra in the palace known as the Qaṣr al-Jiṣṣ. While they were there an accidental fire destroyed one of the ceilings and 'this upset Mu'nis and he made great efforts to put out the fire but it proved impossible and when he left on his way to Mosul, he was overcome with sadness about the fire'.[51] It is hard not to see this as a symptom of a wider melancholy about the collapse of the caliphate. When al-Muqtadir's head was brought to him, he was overwhelmed with grief despite all the quarrels and strife they had endured.[52] Indeed the death of the caliph led almost directly to his own when, the next year, the new caliph al-Qāhir had him slaughtered 'like a sheep'.

The Ḥājib *(Chamberlain)*

The *ḥājib* was a central figure in the administration and leadership of the army and a key figure in the often difficult relationship between the palace

49 ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 166.
50 See also Part I, Chapter 1.
51 ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 168–169.
52 ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 180.

and the military. After the vizier, he was, along with the *ṣāḥib al-shurṭa*, the most important figure in the Baghdad administration. In this chapter I look at the role of the *ḥājib* as a link between the court and the military. His role in the palace and harem is discussed in the next chapter.[53] The office of *ḥājib* was an ancient one and the core of the *ḥājib*'s responsibilities was controlling access to the caliph and admission to the royal court assembly (*majlis*). In reality, this apparently menial position gave the holder of the office enormous power. Despite the extensive authority of viziers such as Ibn al-Furāt and ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā, who effectively ran the state for much of the time, there were numerous decisions to be made and documents to be signed that could only be done by the monarch in person. Without the cooperation of the *ḥājib*, this sort of business was impossible. The *ḥājib* himself could not enter the harem because he was not a eunuch, but he did have close contacts with the eunuchs who could.[54] Operating from his office in the palace, the *dār al-ḥajaba*,[55] he was also in charge of other aspects of court protocol. At the grand reception laid on for the Byzantine ambassadors in 305/917–18, it was the *ḥājib* who told them where to stand.[56] He was also responsible for keeping the palace safe from intruders.[57]

Judging by their names, and the apparent absence of family contacts, the chamberlains seem to have come from *ghulām* backgrounds. After the execution of Sawsan during the reprisals against the supporters of Ibn al-Muʿtazz, the office was given to Naṣr al-Qushūrī,[58] who held it uninterruptedly for 18 years, much longer than any vizier held office. Described as 'distinguished for his intelligence and virtue',[59] he had served in the army of al-Muqtadir's father, the caliph al-Muʿtaḍid, service which undoubtedly explains his close relationship with the military. We first hear of Naṣr in 292/895 when al-Muʿtaḍid sent him along in command of military expedition against Ḥamdān b. Ḥamdūn in the northern Jazīra.[60] In 291/903 he was fighting against the Qarāmiṭa under the command of Muḥammad b. Sulaymān.[61] His appointment as *ḥājib* meant inevitably that his role was

[53] See Part III, Chapter 6.
[54] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 90.
[55] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 90.
[56] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 55.
[57] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 118.
[58] It is not clear what the *nisba* Qushūrī refers to.
[59] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 30.
[60] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, iii, 2144.
[61] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, iii, 2241.

now as much political as military. In 301/913–14 he was appointed as *wālī* for a large part of Khūzistān including the cities of Sūs and Junday Shāpūr. He, of course, continued to reside in Baghdad and sent a eunuch called Yumn al-Hilālī to manage the governorate.[62] He was consistently hostile to Ibn al-Furāt and Ibn Abī l-Sāj but worked well with Mu'nis and, usually with ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā. In 304/916–17 he was working with Gharīb, brother of the caliph's mother Shaghab, to defend the position of ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā when Mu'nis al-Muẓaffar was away in Egypt fighting the Fatimids. This set up a pattern of alliances which was to last for the rest of Naṣr's career. Later in the same year he was intriguing against Ibn al-Furāt, who had deprived him of most of his offices. He had been told by the young Ibn Muqla that Ibn al-Furāt had concealed some 500,000 *dīnār* when he had been removed from office. Naṣr now determined to use this information to undermine the vizier, by telling al-Muqtadir about this.[63] In the end nothing seems to have come of this intrigue but it must have increased Ibn al-Furāt's hostility to the chamberlain.

The next year, 305/917–18, saw the high point of Ibn al-Furāt's influence with the grand reception for the Byzantine ambassadors, and Naṣr played his part in this, instructing the visitors when to stand up.[64] The year after that it was business as usual. Ibn al-Furāt's administration got into financial difficulties and, faced by unrest among the unpaid military, was obliged to ask the caliph for 200,000 *dīnār* from the private treasury. If there was anything designed to arouse the anger of the monarch, it was having to dip into his own resources to fund the expenses of government. When Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās, Wāsiṭ's vastly rich tax farmer, saw his opportunity to assume the vizierate for himself, he sent one of his men to Naṣr to explain how suitable he was for the office and, perhaps more importantly, how much money he would be able to extract from Ibn al-Furāt and his family and officials. As Ḥāmid approached the capital, Naṣr was sent to arrest Ibn al-Furāt and his dependents.[65] It must have been a sweet moment for him. Soon after we find him making use of his privileges of access to make sure that the caliph received a sealed letter from Ḥāmid criticizing ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā,[66] demonstrating again how important the question of access to the caliph was.

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62 ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 42.
63 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 52.
64 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 55.
65 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 57–58.
66 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 72.

Being at the heart of government was not always plain sailing. When popular discontent broke out because of rising prices in 307/919–20, Naṣr faced an angry crowd in the palace mosque who pelted him with bricks, but it was partly his advice and common sense which helped to solve the problem: when the *sulṭān* wanted to impose price controls, he objected, arguing that it would bear hardest on the people 'and that', said the chronicler 'was correct'.[67] His career faced other crises as well. The historian al-Ṭabarī says that he was seduced by the preaching of the mystic al-Ḥallāj,[68] and Miskawayh describes him as looking after him in a room in the palace and allowing him visitors;[69] so his condemnation and execution must have been something of an embarrassment. More dangerous was the hostility of Ibn al-Furāt during his third and last vizierate and the threats of violence from his wayward son al-Muḥassin. In his unending quest for money, the vizier had his eye on Naṣr's wealth and asked the caliph to hand the chamberlain over to him so that he could get his hands on it. The caliph, as ever, was tempted by the prospect of ready cash and was quite prepared to hand this old servant of his family to his enemies. Naṣr was able to appeal to the Queen Mother, relying no doubt on the unofficial political alliance between her and the military who had served al-Muʿtaḍid. She interceded with the caliph, asking him whom he could look to if he permitted the destruction of one of the mainstays of his regime, especially as Ibn al-Furāt had just secured the effective banishment of the other main pillar of the military, Mu'nis. Naṣr was allowed to present himself to Ibn al-Furāt and his son and prostrate himself before them and plead his cause.[70]

He had obtained a respite, but the danger was still there. Ibn al-Furāt was at this time pursuing his policy of allying with Ibn Abī l-Sāj, presumably in the hope of attracting a military force which would enable him to dispense with Mu'nis and Naṣr. Al-Muḥassin kept telling the caliph that Naṣr was an obstacle to this and had lost the caliphate vast amounts of money thereby.[71] The incident of the Persian discovered on the roof of the palace, as will also be pointed out in the next chapter, was a breach of security for which the *ḥājib* could reasonably be blamed.[72]

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[67] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 73; ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 84.
[68] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, iii, 2289.
[69] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 71.
[70] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 117.
[71] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 117.
[72] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 118. See on this episode Part III, Chapter 6.

In the end, Naṣr was saved by the news that the Qarāmiṭa had once again attacked the *ḥajj*. The vizier now had more immediate problem on his hands and could hardly dispense with military support from any quarter and Naṣr was safe. The caliph effected a sort of reconciliation between the two.[73] The tables were soon turned. The fall of Ibn al-Furāt and the executions of the vizier and his sons were one of the most dramatic episodes in the entire caliphate, in which Naṣr played a major part. Ibn al-Furāt's administration was brought down, essentially by financial problems and by the failure to put an end to the threat from the Qarāmiṭa rather than by a palace intrigue, but Naṣr was instrumental in the arrest and interrogation that followed.

Ibn al-Furāt and his son were first detained in Rabi I 312/June 924 when they visited the caliph for an audience. As they were leaving, Naṣr detained them, in response to the demands of the Ḥujarī *ghilmān*. This time al-Muqtadir ordered that they be released and they fled to their homes, al-Muḥassin going into hiding. When Ibn al-Furāt was re-arrested the next day, he was initially put into the custody of Naṣr.[74] Al-Muḥassin had gone into hiding and Naṣr took charge of the hunt for him, and when the woman who betrayed his whereabouts wanted to speak with the authorities, it was to Naṣr that she came.[75] The inquisition of the fallen vizier was conducted by the new vizier, al-Khāqāni, who had been appointed on the advice of Naṣr and others, in the presence of his enemies headed by Mu'nis and Nasr, Shafīʿ Lu'lu'ī, Shafīʿ al-Muqtadirī (both senior military officers) and Nāzūk,[76] and it was Naṣr who asked many of the most telling questions but the physical torturing of the two was left to the chief of police, the thuggish Nāzūk,[77] and it was he who executed the two and disposed of their bodies.[78]

Politically Naṣr and his colleagues were now in the ascendant at court but none of the problems of the state had been solved. There was a chronic shortage of money and, more immediately, the problem of defending Iraq against the Qarāmiṭa who were now openly threatening Baghdad. Ibn Abī l-Sāj, invited by Ibn al-Furāt to lead the campaign, had now arrived and was making his military preparations. The trouble was that he came with

[73] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 122.
[74] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 126.
[75] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 132; ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 120.
[76] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 133; ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 121.
[77] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 136; ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 121.
[78] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 138–139.

his army of mountain people from Azerbaijan and he expected them to be paid. This could only be seen as a threat by Naṣr and the Ḥujarī *ghilmān* and Naṣr made it his business to undermine Ibn Abī l-Sāj with the caliph, claiming that the general had no intention of marching against the enemy and even that he was conspiring with them to overthrow the Abbasids. Before any of this could be put to the test, the debacle of Ibn Abī l-Sāj in the face of the Qarāmiṭa, his defeat, capture and death mean that Mu'nis and Naṣr had a virtual monopoly of military power. Naṣr commanded the Ḥujarī *ghilmān*, the Maṣāffī infantry and other troops. There were more than 40,000 of them, many times more than the recorded numbers of the Qarāmiṭa. Preceded by the black banner of the caliph with its white inscription 'Muḥammad is the apostle of God', Naṣr led the main bulk of the Abbasid forces and, along with Mu'nis, he was in charge of the *dīwān*s which listed the names of all the troops.[79] It was while he was still in the field and actively leading the army that Naṣr died of fever some time in the year 316/928. He had had a long and in many ways distinguished career in the service of the Abbasids. He must have been one of the last serving officers to remember the days when al-Muʿtaḍid had made the Abbasid army a formidable force which dominated the lands of the Fertile Crescent and beyond. His role in politics showed his loyalty to the caliph and his family, but above all, the army of al-Muʿtaḍid and the Ḥujarī *ghilmān*. He opposed and undermined anyone who threatened their status, be they ambitious viziers such as Ibn al-Furāt or leaders of rival military groups such as Ibn Abī l-Sāj.

He had at least two sons, one of whom, Muḥammad, had served as his deputy. However, Muḥammad had died around the time of the fall of Ibn al-Furāt. Al-Ṣūlī, who knew him personally, described him as a man with many qualities, generous and eager for knowledge. He transmitted *ḥadīth* and left books worth more than 2,000 *dīnār*.[80] His other son, Aḥmad b. Naṣr, who was in charge of the *maʿāwin* (military supplies but perhaps, more generally, tax collecting) in Ahwāz had hoped to succeed him, but for reasons which are not specified he had incurred the caliph's displeasure.[81] Instead, he was succeeded as *ḥājib* by Abū l-Fawāris Yāqūt, *mawlā* of al-Muʿtaḍid,[82] who is described as *ḥājib* in 318/930 when he held court in the Dār al-Ḥajaba when the new vizier, Sulaymān b. al-Ḥasan and

[79] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 180.
[80] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 121. See also Part III, Chapter 8.
[81] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 205–206.
[82] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 136.

ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā examined Ibn Muqla after his removal from office.[83] The family of Yāqūt was rapidly becoming the most powerful at court. Muḥammad b. Yāqūt was chief of police and the next year, 319/931, became *muḥtasib* (market supervisor) as well.[84] Unfortunately for them they incurred the fierce hostility of Muʾnis and the caliph was obliged to remove them from office; Yāqūt was sent to Fārs to take charge of the *kharāj* and *maʿāwin*, safely out of the way. Apparently the brothers Ibn Rāʾiq, sons of another of al-Muʿtaḍid's *ghilmān*, were appointed to all the offices held by Yāqūt and his sons[85] but there is no other evidence that they held the title of *ḥājib*. No other *ḥājib* is named for the remainder of al-Muqtadir's reign.

The ṣāḥib al-shurṭa *(Chief of Police)*

After the *ḥājib*, the most important quasi-military officer at court was the *ṣāḥib shurṭat madīnat al-salām* (the chief of police of Baghdad). He had a regular force of troops under his command and was responsible for the maintenance of law and order in the capital. He was also in charge of prisons. There seem to have been two of these at least. One was known as the *maṭbaq* (dungeon) which was used for political prisoners,[86] and the other as the *ḥabs al-jarāʾim*,[87] presumably for common criminals. The *ṣāḥib al-ṣhurṭa* had substantial military forces at his disposal, 9,000 being recorded on one occasion but they seem to have been of lower quality and worse paid than the Ḥujarīs or Maṣāffīs. In the budget the troops of the *shurṭa*, those who were in charge of the prisons and the guards at the gates of the city cost a mere 50 *dīnār* a day compared with the Ḥujarīs and Maṣāffīs who cost 1,000. In emergency, it seems that the *ṣāḥib al-ṣhurṭa* could call on the elite forces to support his men in restoring order.

At the time of al-Muqtadir's succession, the *ṣāḥib al-ṣhurṭa* was Muḥammad b. ʿAmrawayh who had held the office at least since 293/906,[88] but he made the mistake of joining the attempted coup in favour of Ibn al-Muʿtazz and, although his life was spared, he was removed from office

[83] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 209.
[84] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 209.
[85] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 211.
[86] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 181–182.
[87] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 187.
[88] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, iii, 2268.

and replaced by Muʾnis al-Khāzin.[89] Muʾnis had commanded troops in the armies of al-Muʿtaḍid and al-Muktafī since 286/899,[90] and, along with Muʾnis al-Muẓaffar, he had been one of the few commanders who had stayed loyal to al-Muqtadir. His first acts in his new office were to execute and punish the leading supporters of Ibn al-Muʿtazz, including Muḥammad b. Dāwud b. al-Jarrāḥ.[91] During the popular unrest in Baghdad at the time of the dismissal of Ibn al-Furāt from his first vizierate in 299/912 Muʾnis patrolled the streets with 9,000 mounted troops which were attached to him by virtue of his office and, at least while he was doing this, the pillaging stopped.[92] When he died in Ramaḍān 301/April 914 'all the important people (*ruʾasā*) attended his funeral' and the *qāḍī* led the prayers 'for he had a very high status in the government (*jalīl al-qadr ʿinda l-sulṭān*)'.[93] At first his offices were passed to his son al-Ḥasan but he was dismissed after two months and apparently succeeded by Yumn al-Ṭūlūnī.[94] In 304/916–17 Nizār b. Muḥammad al-Ḍabbī,[95] another veteran of al-Muʿtaḍid's armies,[96] was appointed.[97] He had been among the supporters of Ibn al-Muʿtazz who were released on the orders of Ibn al-Furāt after the failure of the coup.[98] It seems that he was now back in favour and it was he who commanded the *shurṭa* at the reception of the Byzantine ambassadors in 305/917–18.[99]

There is some confusion about who was the next *ṣāḥib al-ṣhurṭa*. According to Miskawayh, Nizār was dismissed in 306/918–19 and replaced by Nujḥ al-Ṭūlūnī, who had previously been *wālī* of Kufa.[100] He arranged for *fuqahāʾ* (experts in Islamic law) to be appointed in the various quarters of the city to tell the members of the *shurṭa* what they could and could not do. As a result of this pious measure and equitable measure, the prestige of the police declined and crime increased alarmingly.[101] ʿArīb

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89 al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, iii, 2283; Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 14; ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 29, but Khādim must be a mistake for Khāzin in the text.
90 al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, iii, 2190.
91 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 7; ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 30.
92 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 20.
93 ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 45; al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 94.
94 ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 63 records his dismissal and the appointment of Nizār.
95 See ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 63 for this *nisba* which suggests that he was of Arab descent.
96 al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, iii, 2205.
97 ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 63.
98 ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 29.
99 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 54.
100 ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 29.
101 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 69.

agrees that he was dismissed in 306 but has as his successor Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Ṣamad, son-in-law of Takīn. He was one of the *quwwād* of Naṣr *al-ḥājib*, who presumably secured his appointment.[102] Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Ṣamad is mostly remembered as the man who executed al-Ḥallāj later in the same year.[103] In 308/920–1 he was responsible for putting down a popular demonstration against high food prices which he did with a large, well-armed military force.[104] He was removed from office in 310/922–3,[105] and by 315/927 he seems to have been transferred away from Baghdad and we find him variously in Kirmān and Hamadhān and Nihāwand.[106]

The next *ṣāḥib al-shurṭa*, Abū Manṣūr Nāzūk al-Muʿtaḍidī,[107] appointed in 310/922–3 was the longest serving and best known of the men who headed the Baghdad police al-Muqtadir's reign. His full name shows that he, like Mu'nis and Naṣr al-Qushūrī, was a veteran of al-Muʿtaḍid's army. Alone of the *aṣḥāb al-shurṭa* of the period, he emerges in the sources as a distinct character. On one hand he is brutal and boorish, willing to torture the 71-year-old Ibn al-Furāt when more squeamish colleagues have left the room. He was also a heavy drinker, a failing which led to the undoing of his political ambitions and his own death. On the other hand, he revived the prestige of the *shurṭa* in Baghdad when he was appointed and was able to spend long hours in the saddle with his men to restore law and order. He first appears in 309/921–2 along with Yāqūt and Hārūn b. Gharīb trying to suppress the price riots in Baghdad.[108] The previous *ṣāḥib al-shurṭa*, presumably Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Ṣamad, had been weak in the face of popular discontent but Nāzūk was made of sterner stuff; from day one his severity became apparent (*bānat ṣarāmatuhu*) and he undertook the business like no one else ever had.[109] The story of his appointment tells us something of law and order or lack of it, in Baghdad at the time. He confronted the infantry (*rijjāla*) who were in a state of semi-mutiny and responsible for many offences against public order. Matters came to a climax when one of them, aided and abetted by his comrades, abducted a bride on the way to meet her groom, took her to his house and raped her

102 ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 76.
103 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 82; ʿArīb 106–107.
104 ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 84.
105 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 83.
106 ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 133, 138.
107 For the *nisba* al-Mutaḍidī, ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 109; for the *kunya* Abū Manṣūr, Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 138.
108 ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 85.
109 ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 109.

before returning her to her kin. There was great public outrage against this but all that Naṣr *al-ḥājib* could do was to dock the pay of the offenders. Then Nāzūk took firm action against them which earned the gratitude of the public and his appointment as *ṣāḥib al-ṣhurṭa*. The soldiers then attempted to burn his house on the Tigris. With the aid of Naṣr *al-ḥājib* and the *ghilmān*, always antagonistic to the foot soldiers, they were driven off.[110] The next year Nāzūk with the Ḥujarī *ghilmān*, was in action again, leading a party to arrest the deposed vizier, Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās. The operation was not a complete success: Nāzūk made the mistake of arresting the first of Ḥāmid's men he came across and the ex-vizier was warned and escaped, but his goods were plundered and all his papers seized and taken to Baghdad.[111]

The next year (312/924) Ibn al-Furāt gave immensely generous presents to various *mawālī*,[112] including Nāzūk, in an attempt to win their loyalty and support, but without effect.[113]

The destruction of the *ḥajj* caravan of that year by the Qarāmiṭa led to further unrest in the city with bare-headed, barefooted women in the streets shrieking and wailing in protest at the failure of the authorities to protect this most fundamental of Muslim rituals. Ibn al-Furāt sent Nāzūk to quell the disorder and he rode to the public mosques (*masājid al-jāmiʿa*) on both sides of the river with his army (*jaysh*), including cavalry, infantry and *naffāṭīn*,[114] and succeeded in calming the people.[115]

Nāzūk and Ibn al-Furāt may have cooperated in the suppression of popular discontent but there was no love lost between them and it was Nāzūk, along with his companion Yalbaq, who arrested Ibn al-Furāt when he finally lost the caliph's confidence, and brought him in for interrogation.[116] Later, when they had proved obdurate in refusing to divulge their wealth, Ibn al-Furāt and his son al-Muḥassin were handed over to Nāzūk who tortured them (*basaṭa al-makrūh ʿalayhima*).[117] Then Nāzūk, along with Hārūn b. Gharīb and Yalbaq, led the Ḥujarī troops in swearing that they would shake

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110 ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 109–110.

111 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 95.

112 The term *mawālī* here must be short for *mawālī amīr al-muʾminīn* or freedmen of the Commander of the Faithful (al-Muʿtaḍid) and was used in this context as a title of honour, implying a direct personal connection with the caliph himself.

113 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 120.

114 *naffāṭīn* were soldiers skilled in the use of *naft* (crude oil) incendiary arrows and other devices.

115 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 121.

116 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 126.

117 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 136.

off their allegiance to al-Muqtadir if Ibn al-Furāt was not executed,[118] and finally, at the end of the drama, it was Nāzūk in person who supervised the execution of the old vizier.

We next find Nāzūk mentioned among the senior *ghilmān*, including Naṣr *al-ḥājib*, Shafiʿ Luʾluʾī and Hārūn b. Gharīb who opposed allowing Ibn Abī l-Sāj, when he had been summoned to Iraq to aid in the fight against the Qarāmiṭa to enter Baghdad and had him sent to Wāsiṭ instead.[119] Once again we see the determination of the Baghdad *ghilmān* and their leaders to resist any threat, real or perceived, to their monopoly of military power in the city. In the aftermath of Ibn Abī l-Sāj's defeat and death, the security situation in the capital became extremely dangerous and Nāzūk was ordered by the vizier ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā to mount regular patrols to deter brigands and deserters:

> Nāzūk, in accordance with ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā's orders, remained on horse-back from early morning until the first part of the night was passed; neither he nor his followers dismounted except to perform their devotions. Tents were pitched for he and them to occupy at night. These measures kept the city safe.[120]

The diminution of the immediate threat from the Qarāmiṭa and the destruction of their common enemy, Ibn al-Furāt, led to the break-up of the tightly knit group of Muʿtaḍidī *ghilmān* who had controlled the military affairs of the caliphate, among them Nāzūk, who, after the death of Naṣr al-Qushūrī, now held the office of *ḥājib* as well as that of *ṣāḥib al-shurṭa*.[121] As noted above, the disintegration began in farce and ended in tragedy. A dispute broke out between the grooms (*sawās*) of Nāzūk and Hārūn b. Gharīb over a beardless boy. Nāzūk used his powers to beat Hārūn's men and confine them in the criminals' jail. Hārūn's men then went to the *majlis al-shurṭa*, attacked Nāzūk's men and rescued their comrades. Nāzūk appealed to the caliph who refused to support him, leaving Nāzūk very resentful. Overnight both parties prepared for battle and the next morning there was a sharp conflict in which some of Hārūn's men were killed. At this point the vizier Ibn Muqla arrived with a letter from the caliph ordering them both to desist. An uneasy peace was established.[122]

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[118] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 136–137. *Makrūh* (hated thing) is regularly used as a euphemism for physical torture in the sources of the period.

[119] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 128.

[120] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 179–180.

[121] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 142.

[122] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 187–188.

This dispute set in motion a complex series of events which was to lead, amongst other things, to Nāzūk's death. Nāzūk had entered into an alliance with Abū l-Hayjāʾ the Ḥamdānid, who was angry about being dismissed as governor of Dīnawar. Muʾnis, meanwhile, had returned from semi-exile in Raqqa, determined to play a role. While Nāzūk and the Ḥamdānid wanted to depose al-Muqtadir, Muʾnis as we have seen, was more cautious and seems to have only wanted reform. In his reply to Muʾnis, the caliph attempted to mollify Nāzūk and Abū l-Hayjāʾ, saying that he had never supported Hārūn b. Gharīb against Nāzūk and that he had not realized how important Dinawar had been to the Ḥamdānid.

It was too little and too late. An agreement was made between Muʾnis, Nāzūk and Abū l-Hayjāʾ to choose a new caliph and on 10 Muḥarram 317 (23 February 929) the army moved into the palace. A new caliph was chosen and given the title of al-Qāhir and Muʾnis set about forming a new government with Ibn Muqla as vizier and Nāzūk as both *ḥājib* and *ṣāḥib al-ṣhurṭa.*[123]

It did not take very long for Nāzūk's plan to unravel. Relations between him and Muʾnis, and his supporters and Muʾnis' troops were very uneasy. Muʾnis had taken the deposed al-Muqtadir under guard to his own house.[124] Meanwhile the palace was pillaged and the city was plagued by burning and looting; it was, according to one contemporary, 'the worst of nights for the people of Baghdad'.[125] Nāzūk managed to restore order but the real problems were, as usual, not military but financial. The army was demanding payment and would accept nothing less than six *nawbas* (i.e. six months' salary). There was no possibility of Nāzūk being able to find such sums, especially after the pillaging of the palace. Muʾnis stayed in his palace and offered no support. Just a week after the accession of al-Qāhir, the Maṣāffī infantry gathered at the palace to demand payment. Nāzūk ordered his men not to attack them or provoke violence but his conciliatory attitude was taken for weakness. It did not help that he was very hung-over, having been drinking heavily the night before. His death is described in some detail. He had caused many of the entrances to the palace to be bricked up to make it easier to defend. When the infantry failed to receive payment, some of them became violent and pursued Nāzūk who found his way blocked by the bricking-up he himself had ordered

123 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 193.
124 ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 141.
125 ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 142.

and was overpowered and killed, his body being gibbeted on one of the wooden poles which lined the Tigris bank at this point.

After Nāzūk's demise and the restoration of al-Muqtadir, Yāqūt was appointed *sāḥib al-shurṭa* but he incurred the unrelenting hostility of Mu'nis, for reasons that are not entirely clear. Although they must have known each other very well and had been comrades in arms for many years, Mu'nis secured his expulsion from the city along with his children.[126] Yāqūt was replaced by the Banū Rā'iq, who were at first loyal to Mu'nis, but opposed them in the final battle.

The *shurṭa* functioned very much like the security police of a modern authoritarian state, suppressing popular unrest and arresting figures who had fallen out of favour with the *sulṭān*, and they also maintained law and order on the streets of Baghdad and kept criminal prisoners locked up. We hear about riots and outbreaks of disorder but the fact that these were reported and commented on suggests that the streets of the capital were normally safe and well ordered. The chief of police was always an important figure, although he lacked the position at court and access to the caliph enjoyed by the *ḥājib* and his soldiers did not have either the status or the salaries of elite *ghilmān.*

Conclusion

The military were an essential part of the Abbasid state and by far the most expensive, consuming much more of the resources of the state than the harem, whose extravagance military leaders so roundly condemned. The professional army was very expensive and tended to grow as more and more people, including many non-combattants, found their way onto the payroll. The army was too large for the resources of the state, especially when it brought in neither booty nor new sources of revenue. Having said that, for much of the reign the army was reasonably effective in protecting the state. Twice the Fatimids were driven out of Egypt and the Syrian frontier was effectively defended against newly aggressive Byzantines. In other areas, however, the army was less successful. The most significant of these were the repeated failures against the Qarāmiṭa. This was not new to al-Muqtadir's reign: the Qarāmiṭa had ravaged the countryside and attacked the *ḥajj* during the reign of his brother al-Muktafī, but the

[126] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 159.

repeated sackings of cities like Kufa and Basra and the immediate threat to Baghdad, the pillaging of the *ḥajj* caravans and the blasphemous assault on Mecca and the Kaʿba, laid bare the failure of the military machine, despite the huge amount of money that was lavished on it.

Partly this was because the Qarāmiṭa were so elusive and mobile, able to traverse the desert with remarkable speed and disappear into the wilderness where their enemies could not pursue them. In fact, they enjoyed many of the strategic advantages over the armies of the settled states that the original Arab conquerors of the Fertile Crescent had in the first/seventh century. Contemporaries were not all impressed by the quality of the Abbasid forces. It is perhaps worth remembering the verdict on the army in Baghdad alleged to have been uttered by Ibn Abī l-Sāj:

> The soldiers are like women, accustomed to houses overlooking the Tigris, with their drinks and their ice and their pankas (hanging fans), and their singing women.[127]

Fighting the Qarāmiṭa involved hardship, danger, thirst and exhaustion without any prospect of booty.

But there was another major problem with the military of al-Muqtadir's reign and that was the lack of leadership from the caliph himself. As argued above, the revival of the caliphate after the anarchy at Samarra was achieved by the close personal involvement of members of the Abbasid family with the army, a tradition continued by al-Muʿtaḍid and al-Muktafī. Al-Muqtadir never led the army until the last encounter when he was killed, and even then his contribution was unimpressive. He never left Baghdad and never accompanied the army when it left the capital. While this might have been understandable and excusable when he was a boy ruler, it must have been much less so as he grew older. Many men in the army, and civilian inhabitants of Baghdad, must have felt let down and even betrayed by the fact that their monarch could not bring himself to lead his armies when the entire existence of the Abbasid state was threatened by the Qarāmiṭa. In the end, it was the breakdown of relations between the caliph and the military leadership which, more than any other signle factor, led to the collapse of Abbasid power.

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[127] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 167–168.

PART THREE

WOMEN AND COURTIERS

CHAPTER SIX

THE CHAMBERLAINS

Nadia Maria El Cheikh

The establishment of a new capital in Samarra in the third/ninth century ushered in a conception of a royal palace that was totally new in Islam: hidden, secluded and self-sufficient.[1] The caliphs were increasingly kept away from the public and their appearances became more theatrically staged events. With the move back to Baghdad in the late third/ninth century, a new palatial city was gradually constructed. Starting with the reign of al-Muʿtamid (256–79/870–92), the Ḥasanī palace, built during the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd (170–93/786–809), came to form the centre of a huge mass of buildings, which were to constitute the core of Dār al-Khilāfa. Al-Muʿtaḍid (279–89/892–902) built two palaces, al-Thurayyā and al-Firdaws, and laid foundations of a third, Qaṣr al-Tāj. All three buildings stood on the bank of the Tigris, with great gardens stretching to the back, enclosing many minor palaces within their precincts. Al-Muqtadir enlarged al-Tāj, which became the principal caliphal residence.[2]

The new palace complex in Baghdad helped fourth-/tenth-century caliphs to complete the process of distancing themselves from the general populace, removing themselves architecturally and ceremonially. The ritual of the caliph's audience had become elaborate. Forms of visual and aural display, including specific manners and colours of dress, a particular etiquette, precise spatial and temporal disposition of the body, were all deployed in the enunciation of royal power. They served to dramatize the locus of power and to amplify absolutism.[3] Descriptions of early fourth-/tenth-century ceremonials reveal the highly complex subdivision of spaces consisting of increasingly secluded courts in which authority and inaccessibility augmented the more deeply one penetrated into the heart of the palace. The passage from one court to another, with periods

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[1] Richard Ettinghausen and Oleg Grabar, *The Art and Architecture of Islam: 650–1250* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987), 86.

[2] Le Strange, *Baghdad during the Abbasid Caliphate*, 252–255.

[3] Aziz al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian and Pagan Polities* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997), 131.

of extended sequestration and waiting, assisted in establishing a narrative which culminated in the audience with the caliph himself.[4] Distance from the caliph was expressed in the distances traversed before entry to the palace gate itself as well as in temporal terms.

The whole aspect of caliphal appearance bespoke distance. From the Samarra period onwards, Abbasid caliphs rarely appeared in public. The sight of the caliph had become an exceptionally rare and controlled event. As has been described in the previous chapter, until the reign of al-Muktafī (r. 289–95/902–8), caliphs continued, at times, to lead the troops in person. However, al-Muqtadir himself rarely left the palace, not even to conduct military campaigns. He did not lead public prayers, did not attend important funerals, and did not preside over *maẓālim* sessions.[5] By keeping to himself the caliph gained in prestige but lost contact with his subjects. One major consequence of the caliphs' remoteness was that potential power lay in the hands of those who were intermediaries, both formal and informal. The seclusion of the Abbasid caliphs thus opened the door to the influence of chamberlains, who therefore met a distinct need, the need of the absolutely isolated caliph for information and human contact. Serving the caliph, the chamberlains would not only liaise between him and his subjects but would also gather vital information for him. Being a channel of information and the point of contact, chamberlains expanded their power through the exploitation of informal influence.

This chapter investigates the role and position of the chamberlains (*ḥājib/ḥujjāb*). While the previous chapter discussed the military background and aspects of the chamberlain's position, this chapter focuses on their role in the palace by analysing first their capacity as guardians of the doors and gates of Dār al-Khilāfa (caliphal palace);[6] second, their role in court ceremonial; and third, their role as political actors. The chapter concentrates on the career of Naṣr al-Qushūrī, chamberlain of al-Muqtadir for the long period stretching from 296/908 until his own death in 316/928.[7]

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[4] al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, 146; Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, 2nd edn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 164; Marcus Milwright, 'Fixtures and Fittings: The Role of Decoration in Abbasid Palace Design', in *A Medieval Islamic City Reconsidered: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Samarra*, ed. Chase F. Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 79–109.

[5] Marmer, 'Political Culture', 70–71. Instead, the *maẓālim* was presided over by the vizier, see Part II, Chapter 3.

[6] On its location see Appendix and Map 3.

[7] Six chamberlains served al-Muqtadir during his long reign: Sawsan, Naṣr al-Qushūrī, Aḥmad b. Naṣr al-Qushūrī, Yāqūt, Muḥammad and Ibrāhīm the sons of Rā'iq. See Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, III, 62.

Understanding the function of the *ḥājib* helps us chart the political map of power relations at court during the early fourth/tenth century.

The Chamberlain: Overview of the Function

In the third/ninth century al-Jāḥiẓ composed an epistle concerning chamberlains entitled 'Kitāb al-ḥujjāb'. It includes a subsection on 'who should be taken as chamberlain', which provides descriptions of the qualities deemed necessary in a chamberlain. The Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān (r. 65–86/685–705) tells his brother ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, whom he appointed governor over Egypt:

> Be careful as to whom you appoint as your chamberlain. Let him be sensitive, perceptive, honest, and capable of performing for you and on your behalf. Instruct him to inform you about any freeman who comes to your door, so that you may be the one who gives or denies permission. If he does not act likewise, then he is the governor and you are the chamberlain.[8]

Al-Jāḥiẓ also quotes the Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 136–58/754–75) telling the future caliph al-Mahdī (r. 158–69/775–85): 'It is desirable that the chamberlain not be ignorant, stupid, incapable, neglectful, distracted, undistinguished, gloomy or frowning.'[9] Sahl b. Hārūn, an early third / ninth-century author and poet, also declares that:

> the chamberlain is one of the two faces of rule [...] let your chamberlain be of a kind predisposition, be known for his compassion [...] let him be good-looking.[10]

Hilāl al-Ṣābi' reiterates, more than a century later, the qualities that are desired in a chamberlain in a chapter in *Rusūm dār al-khilāfa* entitled 'The rules and regulations of the office of the chamberlain':

> The chamberlain must be a middle-aged man, wise and experienced; or a sturdy elderly man who has been tested and moulded by time. He must be endowed with reason and determination, so that he may know what to do and what to avoid. He must know the methods of handling what comes in and what goes out. He must know how to assign duties to the members of the retinue according to their ranks, and must avoid asking them to do things that are beyond their capacities. He must supervise them in

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[8] ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868), 'Kitāb al-ḥujjāb', in *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1991), II, 38.

[9] al-Jāḥiẓ, 'Kitāb al-ḥujjāb', 37.

[10] al-Jāḥiẓ, 'Kitāb al-ḥujjāb', 38–39.

> a manner that will make them cautious in their work, perseverant in their service without fail, and diligent in applying the mores of diffidence without undue exaggeration.[11]

The chamberlain, in this description, is expected to be mature, wise and tested by time. His responsibilities include assigning duties to members of the caliph's retinue and making sure that they execute them properly.

The inherently sensitive and powerful role of chamberlains is highlighted in al-Jāḥiẓ's epistle. One anecdote has a caliph telling his *ḥājib*: 'You are my eyes through which I look, the shield on which I rely. I have put you in charge of my door, how, I wonder, are you treating my subjects?' The *ḥājib* answered:

> I look at them through your eyes, I uphold them according to their standing with you [...]. I determine their order according to the positions (*tartīb*) in which you have placed them.[12]

Indeed, this was the primary duty of the chamberlain, that is, arranging audiences, determining precisely the positions of the various dignitaries and courtiers. However, this was a most sensitive duty as an *amīr* enjoining his chamberlain stated:

> fulfilling trust in matters of honour is more necessary than in matters of money. That is, because money constitutes a protection for honour whereas honor is not a protection for money. I have entrusted you with the honour of those who come to my door; this honour is their rank, so protect it for them [...] and protect thereby my honour.[13]

The various hierarchies that converged on the court tended towards the conceptual classification of servant and master.[14] The viziers, the chamberlains, and various courtiers, irrespective of their different privileges, duties and ranks, were all ultimately the caliph's servants. The functions of the caliph's men, grounded as they were, in personal obligation to the caliph, meant that the most valuable quality for those in service was

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[11] al-Ṣābiʾ, *Rusūm*, 71; trans. *Rules and Regulations*, 59.

[12] al-Jāḥiẓ, 'Kitāb al-ḥujjāb', 33. This passage is found in Ibn Qutayba, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, I, 155. The first book of *ʿUyūn al-Akhbār* entitled *Kitāb al-Ṣulṭān* includes a subsection on chamberlains.

[13] al-Jāḥiẓ, 'Kitāb al-ḥujjāb', 34. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih includes in *al-ʿIqd al-farīd* a section on chamberlains: Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (d. 320/940), *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, ed. Aḥmad Amīn et al. (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Lajnat al-Taʾlīf wa-l-Tarjama wa-l-Nashr, 1940–9), I, 83–91.

[14] Daud Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 104–106.

loyalty. This, in turn, implied the necessary goal of pleasing the caliph. In keeping the company of a caliph, those who were almost constantly in attendance, specifically, the chamberlains, had to watch out for his moods, being constantly vigilant for any signs of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Caprice was a prerogative of absolute power, as reflected in the work of Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), who devotes a section to the topic of royal caprice and inconstancy.[15] The chamberlains were thus subject to fluctuations in favour and disfavour. *Rusūm dār al-khilāfa* highlights this matter in advice to the caliph's entourage:

> Beware of arguing with the *sulṭān* when he is angry or of urging him to leniency when he is obstinate [...] Try to avoid him when you detect his wrath mounting. Wait to present your excuse [...] until his anger is calmed [...] guard against the temptation of speech. Let your answer about matters with risky consequences be more of a hint than a direct expression; more of the probable than of the definite. It is easier for you to say what you have not said than to retract what you have already uttered [...]. Beware of excessive informality with the *sulṭān*[...] If he gives you a gift do not disparage it, and if he performs a good deed towards you do not belittle it. Do not complain [...] do not persist [...] be thankful [...] be patient.[16]

Moreover, al-Ṣābi' states that:

> [T]he chamberlain should not be friendly to a person who is not in the favour of the *sulṭān*, nor should he favour a man of whom the *sulṭān* disapproves, nor should he show him any kindness or generosity.[17]

This statement is illustrated by the example of chamberlain Naṣr who declined to rise for the ex-vizier Ḥāmid b. al-'Abbās on the grounds that the latter had brought the caliph's disapproval:

> When he [Ḥāmid] entered and Naṣr saw him, the latter did not rise for him, nor did he accord him as good a reception as he used to [...]. Naṣr said [...] apologetically: 'I cannot, knowing of the caliph's disapproval of you, treat you differently.'[18]

Social intercourse at the caliphal court presupposed certain codes of speech, gesture and manner. In the words of al-Azmeh:

> it is as if the entire art of ruling, and of playing court, consists of prophylactic speech, observation and behaviour in a situation where individuals find

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15 al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, 125; Ibn Qutayba, *'Uyūn al-akhbār*, I, 73–82.
16 al-Ṣābi', *Rusūm*, 87–88; trans. *Rules and Regulations*, 70–71.
17 al-Ṣābi', *Rusūm*, 77; trans. *Rules and Regulations*, 63.
18 al-Ṣābi', *Rusūm*, 77–78; trans. *Rules and Regulations*, 63; al-Hamadhānī, *Takmilat*, 44.

> themselves entrapped by a precariousness stemming from a power whose arbitrariness [...] is a manifestation of its boundlessness.[19]

By not standing up, Naṣr was adhering to the strict language of sign and gesture. But while personal attendants, and more specifically chamberlains, might endure personal abuse, they could also amass political power and receive rich rewards from proximity to the caliph.

The Chamberlains' Duties

By the time of al-Muqtadir, the caliphal residence had expanded into a vast complex of palaces, public reception and banqueting halls, residential quarters, prayer halls and mosques, baths, pavilions, sports grounds, pleasure and vegetable gardens and orchards. It occupied an area nearly a square mile in extent, surrounded by a wall with many gates.[20] The expansion of the palace complex allowed for the spatial articulation of political hierarchy. The elaborate system of courtyards and walls within the palace meant that the palace complex was arranged into successively enclosed spaces of increasingly difficult access. The chamberlains' role expanded in importance with the growing complexity of Dār al-Khilāfa.

The court was a locus of various centres of power and so the caliph was under pressure from different groups and constituencies. Among the circles of officials and courtiers, there was a distinction between those who resided at the palace and those who did not. Unlike other courts, such as Versailles for instance, which was self-contained, outside the city and made up of both the prince's household and the administration, the court of al-Muqtadir was an integral part of the city, a factor manifested by the sheer amount of coming and going between the Dār al-Khilāfa and the city of Baghdad. We know that the viziers lived outside the caliphal residence and that they went to court on audience days. The palace of the general commander Mu'nis was located in the Shammāsiyya quarter,[21] while the office of the police chief was across the river from the palace complex.[22] The residence of the chamberlain Naṣr was, by contrast, inside Dār al-Khilāfa. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071) provides a description

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[19] al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, 126.
[20] Le Strange, *Baghdad during the Abbasid Caliphate*, 263.
[21] For its location see Appendix and Map 3.
[22] al-Ṣābi', *Rusūm*, 31; trans. *Rules and Regulations*, 16.

of the chamberlain's residence in connection with the Byzantine ambassador's visit.[23] Having reached the caliphal palace:

> he [the ambassador]came to the Palace of Naṣr al-Qushūrī, the chamberlain. Observing so large a party and so marvelous a sight, he thought Naṣr al-Qushūrī to be the caliph, and was seized with awe and fear until he was told that this was the chamberlain.[24]

Thus the chamberlain's own court seems to have been the site of much lavishness and impressive ceremonial. The location of the chamberlain's residence inside the palace complex underscores a physical proximity that was necessary given the chamberlain's main duties: regulating access, providing security and organizing ceremonial.

The chamberlain's primary role was control over access to the caliph. Dominique Sourdel defines the *ḥājib* as 'the person responsible for guarding the door of access to the ruler, so that only approved visitors may approach him'.[25] The root *ḥ-j-b* means to screen, to veil or cover. The numerous entrances and gates had to be guarded and it was the chamberlain who was responsible for overseeing these doors and who guarded the points of access to the ruler from the outside. The chamberlain was the official who commanded access to the caliph everywhere except when the caliph was in his private chambers, which were accessible only by eunuchs.[26] Various anecdotes relate that people entering Dār al-Khilāfa were taken first to the residence of the chamberlain. For instance, upon his arrival in Baghdad in 306/918, the tax farmer Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās spent his first night in the chamberlain's apartment. Similarly, a woman who wanted to report the hiding place of Ibn al-Furāt's son al-Muḥassin 'immediately proceeded to the palace, and continued until she reached the chamberlain's apartment and explained to him the matter'.[27] Viziers and all levels of bureaucrats could only reach the caliph's presence through him and usually had to wait in his chambers. Al-Khāqānī, sensing an intrigue to have himself replaced, asked Naṣr to secure for him an audience with the caliph. Naṣr did indeed get him the necessary permission.[28]

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[23] On this episode see also Part I, Chapter 1 and Part II, Chapter 5.

[24] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, I, 116–117; trans. Jacob Lassner, *The Topography of Baghdad in the Early Middle Ages* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970), 87.

[25] Dominique Sourdel, 'Ḥādjib', *EI*2, III, 45–46.

[26] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 96.

[27] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 132; al-Hamadānī, *Takmilat*, 58; see also ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 73.

[28] al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 269.

In addition to the above duties, chamberlains were in charge of the palace security. The previous chapter by Hugh Kennedy has detailed the chamberlain's major military duties. Here I restrict myself to mentioning the chamberlain's specific functions around the person of the caliph and within the palace itself. The sources relate how Naṣr's predecessor, the chamberlain Sawsan, performed such a function at the outset of al-Muqtadir's reign. Sawsan had joined the conspiracy of Ibn al-Muʿtazz on condition that he be made chamberlain of the pretender. However, news reached him that Yumn, a *ghulām* of al-Muktafī, was behaving as if he were the chamberlain of the pretender Ibn al-Muʿtazz, a provocation made all the worse by the fact that Sawsan and Yumn were enemies.[29] Sawsan abandoned Ibn al-Muʿtazz and went over again to al-Muqtadir, who confirmed him as his chamberlain. Sawsan now encouraged the caliph's entourage to resist. Sawsan defended the caliph, promised the *ghilmān* pay raises, heartened Ṣāfī al-Ḥuramī, Muʾnis al-Khādim and Muʾnis al Khāzin until they prevailed in maintaining al-Muqtadir in his position as caliph.[30] Sawsan's initiative was a determining factor in the defeat of the conspiracy against al-Muqtadir.

The responsibilities of the chamberlain in insuring the security of the palace are highlighted in an episode involving the vizier Ibn al-Furāt and Naṣr the chamberlain. Ibn al-Furāt accused Naṣr of collusion with the rebel Ibn Abī l-Sāj. This allegation was supported by the uncovering of a 'Persian' hiding in the secluded part of the palace in 'an apartment belonging to al-Sayyida [the Queen Mother], a space frequently used by the caliph when he sat with her'.[31] Although Ibn al-Furāt may have contrived the whole scene, he convinced the caliph that Naṣr was to blame. The safety of the palace was in the chamberlain's care. Ibn al-Furāt explicitly told Naṣr: 'you are his [the caliph's] chamberlain and the guardian of his residence'.[32] The fact that a strange man was found wondering around was a demonstration that Naṣr was not doing his job of ensuring the caliph's safety. He was either incompetent or a traitor.

As part of their security duties, chamberlains were also responsible for state prisoners. One of the most famous such prisoners during the reign of al-Muqtadir was the mystic al-Ḥallāj who had been brought to Baghdad under arrest in 301/913, on the accusation of heresy and was held for years

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[29] al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 39.
[30] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 12; ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 127–128; al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 39.
[31] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 118. On this episode see also Part II, Chapter 5.
[32] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 118; al-Hamadhānī, *Takmilat*, 55.

in Naṣr's custody.[33] By 306/918 al-Ḥallāj had quite a following at the court. The most influential of his friends was in fact Naṣr, who openly revered him, calling him *al-shaykh al-ṣāliḥ.* Naṣr obtained the caliph's consent that al-Ḥallāj be interned in the palace under special conditions, communicating freely with the outside world and receiving whomsoever he pleased.[34] On another occasion, the sources mention that Naṣr was sent to arrest Ibn al-Furāt and some of his supporters, in 306/918. They were brought to the palace 'where Ibn al-Furāt was placed in the custody of the *qahramāna* (harem stewardess) Zaydān while the rest were put in the charge of Naṣr'.[35] A few years later, Mu'nis arrested Ibn al-Furāt and ordered that Ibn al-Furāt's two sons be put in Naṣr's custody.[36]

In addition to controlling access to the caliph, guarding the palace, and being in charge of certain state prisoners, chamberlains had important ceremonial duties. In spite of hesitant beginnings, reflecting their initial ambivalence concerning lavish ceremonial, the early Muslims gradually understood the importance of ceremonial and as their empire expanded they started imitating the splendour that they witnessed in Byzantine lands.[37] Scholars analysing the European medieval and early modern courts have emphasized the performative quality of court life and have tended to think about the court in terms of theatre: spaces prepared like theatre sets, bodies moving in choreographed motions, scripted speech and gesture, and formal structures including the arrangement of spectators.[38] The court of the Abbasid caliphs shared some of these theatrical and performative qualities. More particularly, etiquette at the Abbasid court served the main purpose of providing a safe distance from the throne.[39] The ceremonies not only codified the internal structure of the court but also presented to the public an idealized image of the caliphate.[40] In a recent

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[33] 'Arīb, *Ṣilat*, 88.

[34] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 77; Massignon, *Passion*, I, 236–237.

[35] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 57–58.

[36] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 126; al-Hamadhānī, *Takmilat*, 57.

[37] Muḥammad al-Azdī, *Kitāb futūḥ al-shām* ed. Ensign Lees (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1854), 101–102. See also Nadia Maria El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* (Cambridge, MA: Center for Middle Eastern Studies of Harvard University, 2004), 153–155.

[38] Janette Dillon, *The Language of Space in Court Performance, 1400–1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 10 and 13.

[39] Samer Ali, *Arabic Literary Salons in the Islamic Middle Ages: Poetry, Public Performance, and the Presentation of the Past* (Notre Dame, IN, University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 82–83.

[40] For the Byzantine court, see Henry Maguire, 'Images of the Court', in *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843–1261* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997), 182–191.

article Dominique Sourdel confirmed that by the fourth/tenth century, ceremonials had became more sumptuous, the caliphs seeking to compensate for the loss of their powers by a greater magnificence.[41]

Obedience and veneration were premised on royal distance. The maintenance of distance between the ruler and his subjects had become an accepted feature of Islamic monarchical tradition. The prescriptions of *Rusūm dār al-khilāfa* and its descriptions of actual ceremonial occasions indicate a developed and regulated court ritual. The attributes of the ceremonial contributed to glorify the caliph. First there was a huge palace complex, which provided the stage and the décor. Then there was a large number of 'courtiers' and servants who were simultaneously performers, extras and the first row of audience. The caliph was the star of the show.

Our knowledge of daily ceremonial is slight. The invisible caliph was occasionally made officially visible to members of his court, although we do not have information on his routine daily visibility to his officials and courtiers. The rules that governed appearance and behaviour in the presence of the caliph constituted a repertoire of restraint, mixed with regulations of distance from the caliph to be kept by different categories of courtiers. It was the chamberlain who was in charge of keeping an eye on these regulations,[42] making sure that those who sought an audience with the caliph were properly attired and were wearing the appropriate colour of dress; and ensuring that the people in the hallways and corridors of the residence had a proper demeanour, with heads covered and not sitting with one leg upon the other.[43]

The *ḥājib* was the master of ceremonies supervising the organization of solemn audiences. He had a special attire and wore a particular costume on procession days: black robe and black turban, with sword and belt.[44] The role of chamberlains in court ceremonial is outlined by Hilāl al-Ṣābi':

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[41] See Dominique Sourdel, 'Robes of Honor in 'Abbāsid Baghdad during the Eighth to the Eleventh Century', in *The Medieval World of Investiture*, ed. Stewart Gordon (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 137–145. No major studies on the development of 'Abbāsid ceremonial exist and the one important attempt by Dominique Sourdel, in 1960, expressed that we are badly informed with respect to Abbasid ceremonial. Dominique Sourdel, 'Questions de cérémonial abbaside', *Revue des études islamiques* 28 (1960): 122–148. In his article entitled 'Le cérémonial fatimide et le cérémonial byzantin: Essai de comparaison', *Byzantion* 2 (1951): 355–420, Marius Canard had stated that such a comparative effort is not possible with respect to Abbasid ceremonial, due to the paucity of information.

[42] al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, 138–139.

[43] al-Ṣābi', *Rusūm*, 76–77; trans. *Rules and Regulations*, 62.

[44] al-Ṣābi', *Rusūm*, 78; trans. *Rules and Regulations*, 63. Al-Jahshyārī mentions that caliph al-Manṣūr (136–58/754–75), having appointed al-Rabī 'a as chamberlain, sent him

> On procession days, the chief chamberlain (*ḥājib al-ḥujjāb*) [...] with the chamberlains and their lieutenants marching in front of him, sits in the corridor behind the screen. [...] If the caliph wishes to give a general audience, he sends his private servant in charge of correspondence to bring the chief chamberlain. The latter enters alone, stands in the courtyard, and kisses the ground. He is then ordered to admit people according to their respective ranks. [...] The *vizier* enters accompanied by chamberlains.[45]

Hilāl al-Ṣābi' describes the pomp and ceremonial surrounding the occasion of the reception of Byzantine envoys to Baghdad during the reign of al-Muqtadir, as well as the role that the chamberlains played in such receptions:

> In honour of the envoy, the residence was furnished with beautiful trappings and decorated with splendid implements. The chamberlains and their lieutenants and the retinues, in accordance with their ranks, were all in proper formation at its gates, corridors, passageways, crossways, courtyards and courts.[46]

Al Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī relates the same episode and states that:

> the order was given to conduct the ambassador about the palace which was staffed by eunuchs, chamberlains and black pages [...]. There were 700 chamberlains.[47]

Naṣr acted as the master of ceremonies on this occasion for when the envoys entered the presence of the caliph 'they kissed the ground and stationed themselves where they were told by Naṣr the chamberlain to stand'.[48] Naṣr with, at his disposal hundreds of lieutenants, was entrusted with organizing a splendid ceremony and enjoyed considerable influence over its content, especially since he seems to have acted as an interpreter.

Naṣr was present on other major state occasions. During this period, every vizier at his nomination received a robe of honour from the caliph. The vizier so honoured was escorted back to his dwelling by the high officers of the state, including the chief chamberlain.[49] Important personalities and officials were similarly escorted. Thus, when on one occasion al-Muqtadir gave Ibn Abī l-Sāj a gift of money and clothing, the latter was

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the costume that he was supposed to wear to present himself in the palace: al-Jahshiyārī, *al-Wuzarā'*, 90.

[45] al-Ṣābi', *Rusūm*, 78; trans. *Rules and Regulations*, 63. The title *ḥājib al-ḥujjāb* is mentioned by Miskawayh in reference to an event later in the century (*Tajārib*, II, 329).

[46] al-Ṣābi', *Rusūm*, 11–12; trans. *Rules and Regulations*, 16–17.

[47] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, I, 116.

[48] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 55.

[49] Sourdel, 'Robes of Honor'.

escorted by, among major officers and retainers, the chamberlain Naṣr.[50] In 311/923, returning from an important victory against the Byzantines, Mu'nis was met by Naṣr.[51] In the procession celebrating the appointment of the caliph's son Abū l-ʿAbbās, in 301/913, as heir apparent over Egypt and Syria, Naṣr rode immediately in front of the prince.[52] His position mirrored his function in the palace, namely, separating royalty from outsiders and being in the vanguard of protection.[53]

Chamberlains as Political Actors: The Role of Naṣr

Chamberlains became influential during this period due to al-Muqtadir's style of rulership. More specifically, because al-Muqtadir was a private rather than a public ruler, it was more difficult to acquire access to him.[54] Everything to and from the caliph had to pass through the filter of his entourage before it could reach him. The caliph could exert influence only through the mediation of people closest to him. Proximity had real advantages. Those 'known at court' had the privilege of presenting petitions to the caliph,[55] or introducing someone to the caliph or to an influential personality at the court. Courtiers of all sorts, personnel in the palace, chamberlains and eunuchs, and women in the harem stepped in as patronage brokers. Control of access enabled the caliph to establish a hierarchy of personal favour. Entry was reserved for a select group of individuals and it was the chamberlains who held the keys of access. Ceremonials and distance transformed the men who served the caliph, especially, chamberlains, into 'magicians who could open secret doors and knew their ways in mazes'.[56]

The position of the chamberlain was both institutionally and individually powered. A lot depended on the individual chamberlain's relationship with both the caliph and with other powerful elements at the court.

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[50] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 83.
[51] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 115.
[52] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 43.
[53] Marmer, 'Political Culture', 197.
[54] Marmer, 'Political Culture', 220.
[55] The expression used by Ragnhild Hatton in 'Louis XIV: At the Court of the Sun King', in *The Courts of Europe: Politics, Patronage and Royalty, 1400–1800*, ed. A. G. Dickens (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 233–261.
[56] Oleg Grabar, 'Palaces, Citadels and Fortification', in *Architecture of the Islamic World: Its History and Social Meaning*, ed. George Michell (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 65–79.

The brief career of chamberlain Sawsan reflects the precariousness of the position. Confirmed in his functions as chamberlain upon the accession of al-Muqtadir to the caliphate, Sawsan grew powerful and tyrannical. The young caliph and his chamberlain drifted apart and al-Muqtadir was at some point so keen on being released from Sawsan that he is said to have told him:

> Take as many men and weapons as you wish, take the governorship of the province that you please but leave the *Dār* [the palace complex] so that we may appoint whom we want.[57]

Sawsan, however, refused to leave. Ibn al-Furāt convinced the caliph that Sawsan had become a threat to both their lives and it was decided to eliminate him.[58] Indeed, the difference between fortune and extinction lay in the arbitrary will of the sovereign. Accounts of *taghayyur*, unexpected reversals of royal favour and mood, also communicated and amplified the singular prerogatives of the sovereign.[59]

The tension between the various powers of the state, the seclusion of the caliph behind a formalized court ritual, as well as the need of various power groups around the caliph for intermediaries allowed for the appropriation by the chamberlain of some of the power of controlling the distribution of favours. The example of Naṣr provides an illustration of the political possibilities available to chamberlains in the fourth/tenth century. Hilāl al-Ṣābiʾ lists Naṣr as one of the highest officials of the state,[60] a position which he consolidated over the years. Indeed, whereas during the early fourth/tenth century viziers were constantly changing, Naṣr maintained himself in his position as *ḥājib* for 20 years. Because of his role, position and occupation at the court, the *ḥājib* kept abreast of developments and played a part in governmental decision-making. A distinction thus needs to be made between the chamberlain's duties and his actual activities since the latter exceeded the duties and responsibilities expected from him.

Naṣr's effective political involvement is illustrated in the role he played in the appointment, protection and removal of particular viziers:[61] in 306/918 he worked for the dismissal of Ibn al-Furāt and the appointment

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57 al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 58.
58 ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 29–30. See also Part I, Chapter 1 and Part II, Chapter 3.
59 al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, 134.
60 al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 353–354.
61 On the relations between viziers and chamberlains see also Part II, Chapter 3.

of Ḥāmid; in 313/925 he schemed for al-Khaṣībī to replace al-Khāqānī; in 316/928 he plotted against ʿAlī b. ʿĪsa on behalf of Ibn Muqla.[62] Naṣr was also repeatedly involved in major military appointments. In the year 301/913, for instance, the new chief of police who was appointed for the capital was one of Naṣr's military commanders. We also hear, in the year 310/922, of Naṣr's interference in the appointment of Nāzūk as chief of police.[63]

Another instance of such interference occurred in 315/927 when the caliph consulted Naṣr about three nominees to the office of vizier. Naṣr advised him to appoint Muḥammad b. Khalaf who had previously written to Naṣr requesting that he recommend him to al-Muqtadir for the vizierate instead of ʿAlī b. ʿĪsa. When al-Muqtadir disapproved of this choice, one of the other two candidates, Ibn Muqla, stepped in and proceeded to curry favour with Naṣr, who ended up by recommending him to the caliph on a trial basis. Al-Muqtadir, according to Miskawayh, was thus 'compelled to confer the vizierate on Abū 'Alī b. Muqla'.[64]

Naṣr also helped particular courtiers, notably al-Ṣūlī, who was tutor to Naṣr's son.[65] Al-Ṣūlī's closeness to Naṣr gave him indirect access to the caliph. Having composed verses on a particular occasion, he was rewarded by the caliph with a gift of 5000 *dirham*. Al-Ṣūlī acknowledged Naṣr as having been the person who connected him (*awṣalanī*) to the caliph.[66] This may explain al-Ṣūlī's description of Naṣr as intelligent, trustworthy and generous.[67] Elsewhere al-Ṣūlī states that Naṣr 'was a man of merit and intelligence'.[68]

The struggle between Ibn al-Furāt and Naṣr is informative about the power of chamberlains in the early fourth/tenth century, their actual strength and weaknesses as well as their alliances within the court. When a section of the palace retainers threatened revolt if Ibn al-Furāt were not immediately arrested, Naṣr approved their action and even detained the vizier and his son as they left the caliph's presence. The eunuch Mufliḥ, however, advised al-Muqtadir to agree to their demand in principle, yet, by procrastination, to preserve his majesty from the reproach

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62 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 57, 127, and ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 126.
63 ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 76 and 109.
64 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 166, 185–186; see also al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 315.
65 al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 141 and 136.
66 al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 119.
67 al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 31.
68 al-Ṣūli, *Mā lam yunshar*, 58. See also Part III, Chapter 8.

of appearing to yield to threats.[69] This episode reveals the influence that Naṣr had over the retinue. When Ibn al-Furāt fled, it was Naṣr who found him and brought him back to Dār al-Khilāfa. According to al-Ṣūlī, 'the leaders (*al-ru'asā'*)' met to discuss his fate. Among the leaders were General Mu'nis, the chamberlain Naṣr and Nazūk, the chief of police. It seems that it was Naṣr who suggested that the *ghilmān* riot, take up arms and demand the execution of Ibn al-Furāt.[70]

Life at the caliphal court was rife with intrigue and conflict as people around the caliph struggled to keep their place in the hierarchy. Everyone had to seek alliances and avoid unnecessary enmities. How were factions composed and from which social or political circles? Referring to the memoirs of Saint-Simon in relation to the court of Louis XIV at Versailles, Le Roy Ladurie uses the term 'cabal' which he defines as:

> a temporary structure the aim of which in court circles or in the higher reaches of the state is to obtain certain advantages such as power, prestige, money, appointments to high office.[71]

The cabal takes the form of a network, its participants bound by relations of kinship, clienthood, friendship, and negative relationships created by enmity. The networks that formed at the court of al-Muqtadir fit this general description. Naṣr's power stemmed from his alliances within the court, in particular with the caliph's mother and her stewardesses. It also stemmed from the intelligence reports brought to him by eunuchs and servants in the palace, as a specific reference is made to a 'servant upon whom I [Naṣr] rely to get information on the caliph'.[72]

Naṣr's relations with the Queen Mother protected him on more than one occasion. Hoping to have Naṣr arrested, Ibn al-Furāt gave al-Muqtadir an account of the wealth and estates in Naṣr's possession, of the vast revenues which he received from the administrative positions which he held, and of his secret profits. Al-Muqtadir was about to acquiesce when the intervention of his mother not only saved Naṣr but, more importantly, redressed the balance of power among the caliph's courtiers. She reminded her son that Ibn al-Furāt had already removed General Mu'nis from his entourage. His current wish to ruin Naṣr is 'in order to get you under his

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[69] Bowen, *Good Vizier*, 237–239.

[70] al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 141.

[71] Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, 'Versailles Observed: The Court of Louis XIV in 1709', in *The Mind and Method of the Historian* (Brighton: Harvester, 1981), 149–173.

[72] al-Ṣābi', *al-Wuzarā'*, 267. On his networking with the Queen Mother and *the qahramānas*, see Part III, Chapter 7.

power'. She then asked him: 'On whom, I should like to know, will you call for aid if he means mischief and plots your dethronement?'[73] This last statement emphasizes the chamberlain's most important function, namely, the personal safety of the caliph. Umm al-Muqtadir successfully convinced the caliph that Naṣr's contribution to his security was more important than his money. Naṣr's favourable relationship with her was crucial for his survival.

Naṣr had other important connections in the harem. He had allied himself with the *qahramāna* Umm Mūsā. Following her fall from favour, Naṣr needed to create new connections inside the harem. Al-Ṣūlī advised him to connect with the *qahramāna* Thumal.[74] Together with Thumal, Naṣr suggested at some point that al-Khaṣībī be the candidate for the vizierate.[75] His connections inside the harem are indications of the influence exerted through intimate contacts with leading figures of the hierarchy who powerfully interceded between the caliph and the chamberlain.

Naṣr had another major ally, namely, the commander of the army, Mu'nis. The sources relate how in 312/924, the new vizier al-Khāqānī, provoked the caliph against Naṣr, mistakenly believing that Naṣr and Mu'nis were at odds whereas in reality, 'they were like one soul'. Mu'nis supported the chamberlain arguing against his dismissal addressing al-Muqtadir in the following way: 'you have never had any substitute for Naṣr. If not for his role as your advisor and servant, I would never be willing to leave your palace or be absent from your affairs.'[76] Once again Naṣr escaped dismissal due to the intervention of a prominent member of the caliph's entourage. The alliance, however, worked both ways. Earlier that same year, following the Qarmaṭī attack on the *ḥajj* pilgrims in 311–12/924, the caliph had summoned Naṣr to take part in consultations. Naṣr attacked the vizier Ibn al-Furāt saying: 'Now you are asking what is to be done? After having shaken the columns of the empire and exposed it to destruction by removing its champion Mu'nis?' Naṣr, in support of Mu'nis, advised the caliph to summon him at once to Baghdad. The caliph ordered a letter to be written to that effect.[77]

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[73] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 117; see also al-Ṣābi', *al-Wuzarā'*, 47.

[74] al-Ṣūli, *Mā lam yunshar*, 149. On the career of *qahramāna* Umm Mūsā see Part III, Chapter 7.

[75] al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 149. More on the *qahramānas* in Part III, Chapter 7.

[76] 'Arīb, *Ṣilat*, 123–125.

[77] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 121–122.

The influential courtiers and the members of the household not only advanced themselves but promoted others, fostering a series of subordinate patronage networks. Naṣr had his own micro-court, with emissaries, secretaries and advisors.[78] This was achieved not only through the influence he exerted but also through his distribution of money in various kinds. Indeed, while chamberlains might endure abuse, as signalled by Hilāl al-Ṣābi', they could also receive rich rewards from relationships of proximity. Court society's complex structure of personal and institutional allegiances was cemented by tips and gratuities. We know that Naṣr had access to important revenues, having been granted the governorship of Sūs, Junday Shāpūr, Manādhir al-Kubrā and Manādhir al-Ṣughrā.[79] Such revenue provided Naṣr with the opportunity to build networks of support in both the military and civilian spheres.

Conclusion

In his discussion of the medieval court in India, Daud Ali conceived of the state as 'existing in the activities and ideas of the individual men who composed it rather than any self-evident functional structure'. In other words, it was the activities of the court, composed of dependents and retainers, which constituted government.[80] These comments can serve to explain to a large extent the power and influence of the chamberlains at the court of al-Muqtadir. The court was an institution of complex agencies, a situation which furthered a variety of courtly agendas, thus allowing chamberlains to negotiate their relationships at court. It seems as if there were no clear demarcations among the caliph's associates regarding their tasks.

Although the bureaucracy had greatly expanded, the Abbasid state continued to be a personal world in which the exercise of power significantly depended on 'clout' and 'connections'. The privatization of the caliphate under al-Muqtadir increased the secrecy of court politics. The result was that courtiers were reduced to intrigue and influence-broking. Indeed, much of the activity of the state bureaucracy in the fourth/tenth century seems to have been based on relationships of personal service. Service at court was ultimately grounded in personal obligation and loyalty. The caliph's advisors and collaborators were primarily the reflection of a

[78] al-Hamadhānī, *Takmilat*, 73.
[79] 'Arīb, *Ṣilat*, 42; al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 98.
[80] Ali, *Courtly Culture*, 6.

personal choice. The influence of the courtier was, thus, not proportional to the responsibility which his place in the mechanics of the court conferred upon him. It depended, rather, on his familiarity with the sovereign and his access to him.

The reign of al-Muqtadir exposed the tension between the various powers of the state. This allowed the palace officials, notably chamberlains, to become power brokers, a situation rendered more advantageous still by the constant removals of viziers, which increased competition among the bureaucrats. The seclusion of the caliph behind a highly formalized court ritual accentuated the need of various power groups around the caliph for intermediaries. Chamberlains exploited this situation by appropriating to themselves some of the power of controlling the distribution of favours by bringing information to the caliph which bureaucrats could not deliver by themselves. Indeed, while the caliph's relations with his subjects, including his officials, were impersonal and mediated through a variety of institutional arrangements, his relation to his chamberlains was direct, personal and unmediated. Beyond managing the caliph's public audiences and elaborate ceremonial, it was Naṣr's intimate access to al-Muqtadir that rendered him politically influential and allowed him to arrange favours.

Finding oneself in the caliph's entourage, sharing an intimate association with the caliph were, however, circumstances that could provoke profound jealousy. The interlocking relationship between the caliph and his closest officials was delicate and easily ruptured. The power of chamberlains was, thus, precarious. Ibn al-Muʿtazz alludes, in a verse, to the risks of courtly life: 'The most miserable of men is he who is closest to the sovereign; just as the closest thing to fire is the first to burn.'[81] The intrigues at court meant that Naṣr had to develop other layers of protection, and he held on to power by forming networks of alliances and manipulating relationships.

The official duties of the chamberlain were to supervise the persons concerned with serving or guarding the caliph and to control all that went on within the palace.[82] Chamberlains oversaw caliphal protocol and ceremonial and regulated procedures at audiences, ensuring that visitors behaved according to rank and title. The chamberlain used his particular position

[81] In George Makdisi, *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West with Special Reference to Scholasticism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), 237.

[82] Dominique Sourdel, 'Ḥādjib', *EI*2.

and duties to mediate between the caliph and those who had no direct access to him. The degree of power wielded by those in the palace corresponded not to the hierarchy of positions but, rather, to the frequency of access to the caliph. Indeed, proximity to the caliph and the assurance of his favour were the crucial basis of the chamberlain's power.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE HAREM

Nadia Maria El Cheikh

The topic of the caliphal harem has received scant historical attention. This is on one level related to the primary sources, which internalize the forbidden, revealing the caliphal harem through a thick prism of convention and code.[1] This problem has been compounded by the decontextualization and fetishization of the harem as practised by Western observers and the projection of the Arab cultural heritage as something absolutely exemplary, timeless and outside history, as practised by Arab 'medievalism'.[2] As Reina Lewis has noted 'the harem is a space with an overburdened signification in several clashing discourses'.[3] A more detailed investigation of the harem of al- Muqtadir allows us to steer away from convention and cliché. In this chapter I discuss the harem of caliph al-Muqtadir, analysing its structure as well as the social, economic and political power that a number of harem women were able to exercise, most notably the caliph's mother. I also highlight the roles of the harem's top administrators, namely the stewardesses and the eunuchs. This chapter challenges the idea that gender segregation precluded women from exercising a real influence within and/or beyond the physical boundaries of the harem.

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[1] Jocelyne Dakhlia, 'Entrées derobées: l'historiographie du harem', *Clio* 9 (1999): 37–55. Dakhlia points to the surprisingly small number of studies that the caliphal/sultanic harem has instigated. A recent notable contribution is the edited volume by Marilyn Booth, *Harem Histories: Envisioning Places and Living Spaces* (Duke: Duke University Press, 2010) which covers the period from early Islam until the twentieth century.

[2] Abdallah Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual: Traditionalism or Historicism?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 156–158. Mohammed Arkoun has also asserted that 'all of the contemporary discourse emerging in Islamic contexts inevitably refers to the emerging period of Islam': Mohammed Arkoun, *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought* (London: Saqi, 2002), 10.

[3] Reina Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2004), 179.

Harem

The *Encyclopedia of Islam* defines *ḥarīm* as a 'term applied to those parts of the household to which access is forbidden, and hence more particularly the women's quarters'. Hugh Kennedy has pointed out that the term *ḥarīm* is seldom used in the Abbasid sources. The texts refer to the caliph's *ḥuram*, his women, and to those under his control. Thus, the reference is to a group of people rather than a particular building or physical location.[4] Al-Masʿūdī, for instance, talks about *dār al-ḥuram*, and does not use the term *ḥarīm* to refer spatially to the women's quarters.[5] Al-Tanūkhī's *Nishwār* mentions the women's quarters in an anecdote involving the celebrated jeweller and financier Ibn al-Jaṣṣāṣ who had been imprisoned in the caliphal palace. A eunuch accompanied him through various areas of the palace, guiding him to the Queen Mother's quarters (*dār al-Sayyida*), so that she might be the one to release him, as she had previously interceded on his behalf.[6] Similarly, when al Muqtadir decided to have the vizier Ibn al-Furāt imprisoned, the vizier's palace was pillaged; the sources refer to the private areas of Ibn al-Furāt's palace by using the term *dūr* (pl. of *dār*); al-Ṣābiʾ talks about the dwellings of his children and wives (*dūr awlādihi wa-ahlihi*); ʿArīb also refers to the *dūr* and Miskawayh states that his *ḥuram* were disgraced and his dwellings (*dūrahu*) pillaged.[7] Other references in the *Nishwār* also refer to the women's quarters as *dūr al-ḥuram*.[8] Thus, in contemporary and near contemporary sources, the term *ḥarīm* generally does not obtain while the term *ḥuram* seems to have been used to refer to a specific group of people rather than a spatial location within the house.

Very few allusions are made to the harem section of the palatial complex. A rare description of the interior of the women's quarter in the palace of al-Muqtadir is given in the fourth-/tenth-century *adab* work, *al-Faraj baʿda al-shidda* by al-Tanūkhī. A young cloth merchant was sneaked inside al-Muqtadir's palace for an interview with the caliph's mother, one of whose stewardesses, *qahramāna*, he wished to marry. The merchant concealed himself inside a box shipped inside the palace

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[4] Kennedy, *Court of the Caliphs*, 160.
[5] al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj*, IV, 4, 248 (§2593) and V, 215 (§3457).
[6] al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, VII, 233.
[7] al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 37; ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 29.
[8] al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, I, 287 and III, 101; trans. *Table-Talk* (1921–2), II, 152–153, and *Table-Talk* (1931), 370–371.

along with other boxes in which the *qahramāna* pretended to be bringing clothes and other effects to Umm al-Muqtadir. The *qahramāna* had to pass through numerous corridors, doors and apartments, guarded by eunuchs. The young man managed to reach the harem quarters and meet Umm al-Muqtadir the following day.[9] Another source includes a yet more intimate description of al-Muqtadir's harem: it was the duty of palace attendants to occasionally enter the women's quarters (*dūr al-ḥuram*) in order to clean the sleeping areas. One of the attendants on duty entered the quarters of an important concubine of al-Muqtadir while he was drunk. The attendant fell asleep and was left behind while the other attendants evacuated the private quarters. He was awakened in the evening by the voices of women who came in to clean up the quarters and set it up as a drinking *majlis*. Al-Muqtadir arrived with a number of slave girls who started singing. Al-Muqtadir then chose the concubine 'who lived in these quarters' and the rest left. The attendant who remained in hiding witnessed the amorous behaviour of al-Muqtadir and his concubine.[10]

Another spatial reference to the caliphal harem pertains to the visit of the Buyid ruler ʿAḍud al-Dawla to the caliphal complex, much later on, in 364/974. The complex was by now deserted and falling into ruin. The chamberlain showed him around until they reached the secret abode allocated to the caliph's women *(dūr al-sirr al-marsūma bi-l-ḥuram*). Tactfully, ʿAḍud al-Dawla declined to see it and continued his tour of the complex.[11]

The Abbasid caliphal harem of the early fourth/tenth century included family members and the administrative/service hierarchy. The former included the caliph's mother, the wives of the caliph, his concubines, the children, but also the unmarried, widowed or divorced sisters and aunts. The administrative hierarchy included the high-ranking administrative officers of the harem (stewardesses and eunuchs), the female servants who performed the housekeeping tasks of the harem, and female slaves. The sources relate that the harem women were the recipients of a significant allowance. We read that Ibn al-Furāt interrogated ʿAlī b. ʿĪsa stating: 'You, he said, in the five years of your administration, reduced the allowances of the *ḥuram*.'[12] Similarly, the budget statement prepared by ʿAlī b. ʿĪsa

[9] al-Tanūkhī, *al-Faraj*, IV, 362–368. On this episode see also Part I, Chapter 2.
[10] al-Tanūkhī, *al-Faraj*, II, 137–139.
[11] al-Ṣābi', *Rusūm*, 87.
[12] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 108.

for the year 306/918 includes the monthly allowance prescribed to Umm al-Muqtadir, to the princes, to the female relatives and to the servants.[13]

Umm al-Muqtadir

Known in our texts as Shaghab or as *al-Sayyida* (the Lady), the caliph's mother played a remarkably important role in the history of the period.[14] Al-Tanūkhī lists Shaghab, along with the *qahramāna* Umm Mūsā, al-Muqtadir's aunt Khāṭif and Dastanbuwayh (*umm walad*[15] of al-Muʿtaḍid) as *al-sāda*, a term connoting the proto-regency council which was in charge of affairs upon the accession to the caliphate of the 13-year old al-Muqtadir.[16] A Byzantine by birth, Umm al-Muqtadir was bought by the caliph al-Muʿtaḍid (r. 279–89/892–902). In 282/895, she gave birth to a son, Jaʿfar. She was freed as *umm walad* on al-Muʿtaḍid's death, becoming the most influential person at the court. The Queen Mother dominated her son to the exclusion of the other women in his harem, including his wives and concubines.

Umm al-Muqtadir promoted her own family, notably her sister Khāṭif, her brother Gharīb and her nephew Hārūn.[17] Khāṭif, as already mentioned, was one of *al-sāda* and exerted, as such, some influence in the appointment of the vizier in 313/925.[18] Gharīb *al-khāl* (the maternal uncle) was among the highest ranking generals of the period. He was appointed in 298/910 governor of the Syrian frontiers, and provinces in Eastern Arabia in 300/912.[19] His importance can be assessed in the notification of his death in 305/917. His funeral was attended by the leading officials of the state, notably the vizier Ibn al-Furāt and his circle of courtiers, the generals and the judges.[20] A number of Gharīb's children achieved prominence,

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13 al-Ṣābiʾ, *Rusūm*, 21–25; trans. *Rules and Regulations*, 23–25.

14 The first extensive modern portrait of Umm al-Muqtadir, including her networks of family and household members, was undertaken by Massignon, in *Passion.* Bowen also includes, throughout his *Good Vizier*, important material on the significant women in al-Muqtadir's harem.

15 A concubine who bore her master a child achieved the status of *umm walad* and could no longer be sold or given away. Most jurists agreed that the *umm walad* was automatically freed on her master's death.

16 al-Tanūkhī, *al-Faraj*, II, 44–45. The text is also discussed in Part I, Chapter 2.

17 al-Tanūkhī, *al-Faraj*, II, 45.

18 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 143.

19 al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 77 and 90; al-Hamadhānī, *Takmilat*, 14.

20 ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 69; al-Hamadhānī, *Takmilat*, 27.

notably, Hārūn.[21] We also read of Gharīb's daughters: one source mentions that in the year 307/919 the harem stewardess Umm Mūsā carried, in a lavish cortège, gifts from the daughters of Gharīb to their husbands. The impressive cortège consisted of cavaliers and men on foot. The gift included twelve horses saddled magnificently, sumptuous cloths and 100,000 *dīnārs*.[22]

Shaghab and her female retinue operated from within the harem. This, however, did not constitute any real restriction, for, in reality, major politics was conducted from the private rooms of the caliphal palace.[23] The sources highlight the closeness between the caliph and his mother, stating that the caliph used to spend a lot of time at his mother's quarters in the harem. Miskawayh mentions 'an apartment belonging to al-Sayyida, a space frequently used by the caliph when he sat with her'.[24]

That access to the caliph's mother was particularly important during the reign of al-Muqtadir is shown by the prominence with which she figures in the annals of this period. They mention her political interference, her financial contributions to the reign and her wide philanthropic activities. Umm al-Muqtadir surrounded herself with the trappings of authority. She behaved as a professional, establishing a bureau with secretaries who handled political and military affairs. The first such secretary was Aḥmad b. al-'Abbās b. al-Ḥasan.[25] Later, she took on Aḥmad al-Khaṣībī as her *kātib*, (secretary). One source states that upon hearing of his new appointment as vizier, al-Khaṣībī 'wished that he had not taken charge of the vizierate', realizing that being a *kātib* for Umm al-Muqtadir was more beneficial to him than being the caliph's vizier.[26] Al-Khaṣībī's appointment as vizier was related to his closeness to Umm al-Muqtadir. It was she, together with her sister Khāṭif, who suggested that al-Khaṣībī be

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[21] al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 117.

[22] 'Arīb, *Ṣilat*, 78.

[23] If the palace of the Abbasid caliphs at Samarra is any indication, we are dealing with huge compounds with endless successions of apartments, courts, rooms, halls and passageways. The palace at Samarra consisted of two major structures: a public palace with official administrative functions and another unit that consisted almost entirely of residential accommodation and functioned as the private residence of the caliph and his women. Alastair Northedge, 'An Interpretation of the Palace of the Caliph at Samarra (*Dar al-Khilāfa* or *Jawsaq al-Khaqānī*)', *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993): 143–70, and more recently *The Historical Topography of Samarra*, 2nd rev. edn (London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 2007).

[24] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 118.

[25] 'Arīb, *Ṣilat*, 23.

[26] 'Arīb, *Ṣilat*, 128.

appointed vizier in 313/925.[27] According to the *Ṣilat ta'rīkh al-Ṭabarī*, he used to be the *kātib* of the *qahramāna* Thumal. Thus, his political career owed a great deal to harem women.[28]

Umm al-Muqtadir intervened on behalf of many viziers, administrators and courtiers. Her influence was so great and fear of her was such that any negative mention of her, even in her absence, had sinister consequences. The vizier Ibn al-Furāt, during his third term in office, once claimed to fear no woman. The reference was meant to be to Umm al-Muqtadir. Those present perceived that his fall was now near at hand.[29] On another occasion, fearing that he would be dismissed from the vizierate, he consulted with the secretary of Umm al-Muqtadir on how to pacify her and avert loss of his office.[30] Conciliating her was, evidently, essential for his political survival.

As was discussed in Part I of this volume, Umm al-Muqtadir's involvement in making political appointments, whether direct or indirect, has been estimated in negative terms. If one emphasizes different aspects of her involvement, though, the picture that emerges is far more nuanced.[31] Indeed, from the outset, Umm al-Muqtadir devoted herself to supporting the reign of her son, the legitimate Abbasid caliph. Very shortly after his accession, in 296/908 , al-Muqtadir was deposed because 'of his youth, his inability to administer the caliphate and the taking over of affairs by his mother and the *qahramāna*'.[32] The plot aimed at replacing the inexperienced young caliph with the older and more experienced Ibn al-Mu'tazz. Sensing the danger, the Queen Mother ordered that Mu'nis, the loyal commander of the army, be brought back from Mecca. The intervention of Mu'nis on behalf of al-Muqtadir, coupled with the loyalty of the young caliph's palace retinue, saved the reign. Upon the failure of the conspiracy and the reinstatement of al-Muqtadir, generous gifts were made by Umm al-Muqtadir to the army, the public officials and other supporters.[33]

Unlike her son, she came to understand the dangers of the excessive taxation imposed by Ibn al-Furāt and the need for equitable economic policies recommended by 'Alī b. 'Īsa. She increasingly supported the latter and defended him throughout his tenure of office. As early as

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[27] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 143.
[28] On al-Khaṣībī and his relations to Umm al-Muqtadir, see also Part II, Chapter 3.
[29] al-Ṣābī', *al-Wuzarā'*, 67.
[30] al-Ṣābi', *al-Wuzarā'*, 97.
[31] See Part I, Chapter 2 for other accounts and evaluations of Shaghab.
[32] Ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Nujūm*, III, 182.
[33] Massignon, *Passion*, I, 336. See Part I, Chapter 1.

304/916, feeling himself threatened, ʿAlī b. ʿĪsa wrote an apology to Umm al-Muqtadir reminding her of his merits and of the fact that, unlike his predecessors, he had never taken one *dirham* from the private treasury of the caliph.[34] When, in 316/928, ʿAlī b. ʿĪsa was accused of being in communication with the Qarāmiṭa and was near to being tortured, it was the Sayyida who found the means of getting at the facts behind the accusation and was able to convince her son of its falsity.[35] Following ʿAlī b. ʿĪsa's fall from power, Ibn al-Furāt's vindictive son al-Muḥassin besought the caliph to deliver ʿAlī b.ʿĪsa into his hands. One more time, Umm al-Muqtadir took the 'good vizier's' side reminding the caliph of his long service and piety.

In addition to providing sound judgement to guard her son's position, al-Sayyida used her wealth to buttress his reign. The dominant problem of this period was the bankruptcy of the treasury. Historians have blamed al-Muqtadir's close female circle for being indirectly responsible for this state of affairs. Without minimizing the financial profligacy of the reign, one ought to point out that Umm al-Muqtadir used her private money to support the state. In 311/923 the Qarāmiṭa of Baḥrayn began raiding Iraq. Under Abū Ṭāhir al-Jannābī they sacked Basra. The following year the *ḥajj* caravan was attacked. The raids of the Qarāmiṭa continued until they attacked Baghdad in 315/927 and, for a while, it seemed that the capital would fall. During these critical circumstances, Umm al-Muqtadir supported the treasury with her own private wealth. ʿAlī b. ʿĪsa addressed al-Muqtadir in the following terms:

> Fear God, O Commander of the Faithful, and speak to the Queen Mother, who is a pious, excellent woman and if she has any hoard she has amassed against any necessity that may overtake her or the empire, then, this is the time to bring it out.[36]

Umm al-Muqtadir ordered the transfer of half a million *dīnār* of her own to the public treasury to be spent on the troops fighting the Qarāmiṭa. Her act was momentous for, in the words of the vizier, 'since the demise of the Blessed Prophet no more serious disaster has befallen the Muslims than this'.[37]

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[34] al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 283–285.
[35] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 186–187.
[36] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 180. See Part I, Chapter 1.
[37] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 180.

Her generosity also supported the state in its holy war against Byzantium. The largest lodging complex for Muslim volunteers in the war against Byzantium along the Arab–Byzantine frontier was founded by Umm al-Muqtadir in Tarsus. It housed 150 slave warriors; it had attached to it blacksmiths and armorers for the repairs of equipment and weapons. Shaghab was emulating one of her forerunners, Qabīḥa, the slave concubine of al-Mutawakkil (r. 232–47/847–61) who had founded such a complex in the street of Bāb al-Ṣafṣāf.[38]

In addition to supporting the reign financially on various critical occasions, Shaghab was described as the most generous woman since Zubayda—wife of caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd—in her concern for the welfare of pilgrims and holy places. Religious and charitable works were the dominant forms of women's philanthropy. Such pious gestures, the sources hint, exemplify the role that a woman can and perhaps should have in the public sphere. Julia Bray confirms that the image of Shaghab as pious and charitable is calqued on that of her predecessor by the Mamlūk obituarist al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1362).[39] Umm al-Muqtadir's energies focused on pious deeds and on means to provide comfort for those Muslims attempting to accomplish their religious duties. While the lavishness served political and public relations ends, it was also part of a devotional demonstration. Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201) states that:

> Shaghab is said to have devoted one million *dīnār* each year from her private estates to the pilgrimage. She was devoted to the pilgrims' welfare sending water tanks and doctors and ordering that the reservoirs be repaired.[40]

The third holiest place in Islam, the Ḥaram of Jerusalem, profited also from her generosity. She had the roof of the sanctuary repaired and endowed it with four beautifully worked doors of pinewood.[41] Moreover, she endowed

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[38] Iḥsān ʿAbbās, *Shadharāt min kutub mafqūda fī l-taʾrīkh* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1988), 37–38 and 439–459. Volunteers from various parts of the Muslim world came to the frontier regions to serve the cause of Islam. The volunteers were put up at houses in Tarsus maintained by *awqāf* endowed for this purpose. See J. F. Haldon and Hugh Kennedy, 'The Arab-Byzantine Frontier in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries: Military Organization and Society in the Borderlands', *Receuil des travaux de l'institut d'études byzantines* 19 (1980): 79–114.

[39] Julia Bray, 'Men, Women and Slaves in Abbasid Society', in *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300–900*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 122–146, at 144.

[40] Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, XIII, 321.

[41] Christel Kessler, 'Above the Ceiling of the Outer Ambulatory in the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 96 (1964): 83–103.

pious endowments, *awqāf*, to Mecca and Medina and founded a hospital in Baghdad.[42]

Shaghab's enhanced status was thus made manifest to the population of the empire through her munificence and numerous endowments. Engaging in philanthropy was one of the few ways in which women were permitted to assert their power openly. Umm al-Muqtadir took full advantage of it, using it towards a variety of ends, political, social and religious. She was a visible patron and gained prestige through philanthropic deeds. Her work mainly served to assert the political authority of the dynasty through religious benefaction. In addition to legitimizing her power and that of her son by funding the pilgrimage and by taking care of Islam's holy places, the numerous endowments for public welfare testified to the ruling family's piety and its concern for the welfare of their subjects.

While the above information stresses her multiple charitable roles, the texts also make it clear that her financial dealings were not all upright and virtuous. Al-Tanūkhī includes the following anecdote, which shows the Queen Mother attempting to cancel a charitable endowment (*waqf*):

> Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī [...] told me that al-Sayyida Umm al-Muqtadir asked my grand-father for a *waqf* deed for a village she had bought. The deed was in the *Dīwān* of justice and she wanted to retrieve it in order to tear it and cancel the *waqf*. My grandfather, not knowing her intent, brought it to the palace and told the *qahramāna*: I have brought the deed as she has ordered, what does she want? They answered: we want to keep the deed. He realized what they were up to and told Umm Mūsa the *qahramāna:* please tell the Sayyida [...] that this, by God, is totally out of the question ... The *qahramāna* conveyed the letter to al-Sayyida who complained to al-Muqtadir [...] It has come to our ear that when she brought it up again, [al-Muqtadir] told her [...] if this were permissible, he would not have forbidden you. Al-Sayyida asked for the opinion of her *kātib* Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd, explaining to him the matter [...] He told her that this was a known stratagem [...] and is unlawful. She then retrieved her money, annulled the purchase and returned to thank my grandfather.[43]

As expected, not all her financial dealings were of a charitable nature and some writers are quite negative about her general role in emptying the state treasury. In any event, Umm al-Muqtadir's wealth became proverbial as she clearly had access to important resources. A significant portion of her income came from her estates. Miskawayh mentions a bureau of the

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[42] Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, XIII, 178, and Ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Nujūm*, III, 216.

[43] al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, I, 242–244; trans. *Table-Talk* (1921–2), II, 129–131.

Queen Mother's estate and a bureau of the Queen Mother sister's estate.[44] Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1232) talks about a *qahramāna* who was in charge of the income and expenditures of Umm al-Muqtadir's vast property.[45] Shaghab had also private property in Ahwāz. Its overseer was Abū Yūsuf b. al-Barīdī.[46] Her income from Ahwāz must have been significant since, from the fiscal standpoint, Ahwāz was the granary of the empire.

She also accumulated income by exercising her influence. In return for exerting her sway in appointing high officials, Umm al-Muqtadir was compensated by payments. ʿUbayd Allāh al-Khāqānī guaranteed her 100,000 *dīnār* as a reward for conferring upon him the vizierate in 299/911.[47] Ibn al-Furāt, having been reappointed vizier for a second time in 304/916, fulfilled his promise towards the caliph and his mother, ensuring the significant daily payment of 1,500 *dīnār*. Of that amount, 1,000 *dīnār* went to al-Muqtadir; 333.3 to the Queen Mother; and the rest to al-Muqtadir's two sons.[48] Umm al-Muqtadir accumulated some of her wealth, moreover, through confiscating the money of her own retinue. In 307/919 her secretary Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd died. She took 100,000 *dīnār* out of his legacy.[49] More spectacular was the confiscation of the wealth of her *qahramāna* Umm Mūsā, indicating the vast amount of money that the harem stewardess managed to amass because of the power which her closeness to Umm al-Muqtadir had bought.

Umm Mūsā

The harem had a complex and elaborate structure where food and water had to be organized and stipends had to be given to women by the hundreds, perhaps thousands. This immense household had to be fed, clothed and its daily needs provided for. High-ranking administrative officers of the harem enjoyed considerable prestige and influence. One of the most influential female activities involved them in the harems as *qahramānas*, who exercised a number of executive and managerial roles which ensured

44 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 164.
45 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, V, 138.
46 Massignon, *Passion*, I, 148. See Part I, Chapter 1.
47 Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, VI, 109.
48 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 42.
49 ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 80.

the smooth running of the household.[50] During a large part of the reign of al-Muqtadir, many of the arrangements of the harem were in the hands of *qahramāna* Umm Mūsā who answered directly to Umm al-Muqtadir. In 299/911 Umm al-Muqtadir had appointed Umm Mūsā, who belonged to a minor branch of the Hāshimite family (members of the Abbasid house), upon the death of the *qahramāna* Fāṭima. For the years to come and until her dismissal from office on the accusation of disloyalty, Umm Mūsā's influence grew progressively.

Umm Mūsā held the purse of the harem and was, generally, in charge of paying the palace servants.[51] The sums involved were significant. We know this from the figures mentioned by Ibn al-Furāt in the course of his examination of ʿAlī b.ʿĪsa's financial decisions during his vizierate:

> You, he said, in the five years of your administration, reduced the allowances of the harem, the princes, the attendants, and the horsemen, which were regularly paid by me during my first and second vizierate, by 45,000 *dīnār* a month [...] making a yearly total of 540,000 *dīnār*.[52]

Umm Mūsā's financial role is alluded to in several instances. She visited at the end of Dhū l-Qaʿda 304/25 May 917 the vizier ʿAlī b. ʿĪsa to arrange with him the expenses and apparel to be distributed among the harem and attendants at the Feast of the Sacrifice.[53] On another occasion Umm Mūsā gave the vizier the list of wants for Shaghab, for a small increase in the lodging allowance of one of the retinues and a slight rise of pay for one of the eunuchs.[54]

Another main function of the *qahramāna* was that of messenger between the harem and the court. Umm Mūsā acted principally as intermediary between the Queen Mother and al-Muqtadir and other officials of the court.[55] During the vizierate of Abū ʿAlī al-Khāqānī 'various knaves managed to write letters and convey them through Umm Mūsā to al-Muqtadir requesting posts and promising money'.[56] When deficiencies

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[50] Harold Bowen acknowledged the difficulty of translating the term *qahramāna.* 'Stewardess', he says, is too nautical; 'housekeeper', too humble. Perhaps 'pay-mistress' most nearly expresses the meaning. He also suggests 'lady in waiting'. Bowen, *Good Vizier*, 100, n. 2.

[51] al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 353.

[52] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 108.

[53] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 40, and Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, VIII, 98.

[54] al-Ṣabiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 353–354.

[55] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 20; al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, I, 242–244; trans. *Table-Talk* (1921–2), II, 129–131.

[56] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 25.

appeared during the vizierate of al-Khāqānī, Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. Rūḥ wrote to al-Muqtadir criticizing al-Khāqānī and suggesting himself as candidate for the vizierate. He handed over the letter to Umm Mūsā so that she might carry it to the caliph. Instead, Umm Mūsā delivered it to al-Khāqānī, who had him arrested and dismissed him from his post in the *dīwān ḍiyaʿ al-khāṣṣa*, which administered caliphal and newly acquired domains.[57]

Umm Mūsā is described, in one anecdote, as strolling in the streets of Baghdad in a lavish cortège.[58] The *qahramāna* had the privilege of going in and out of the palace to get things since the harem women, even the concubines, were not allowed to leave the palace. One story reported in al-Tanūkhī's *al-Faraj baʿda al-shidda* concerns a slave girl who

> was brought up by al-Sayyida, mother of the Prince of the Faithful, al-Muqtadir bi-llāh. She was her favourite slave girl [...] Longing to see people and circulate freely she managed to become a *qahramāna* and started to go out for the everyday necessities and see people.[59]

The mobility of the *qahramānas* was crucial for their attainment of influence. For it was through mediations and the brokering of messages that they managed to exercise a significant level of influence.

Umm Mūsā's influence is clearly illustrated in her successful plotting against viziers and aiding their candidates to achieve influential positions. In fact she acquired enough power to stand up against viziers. In cases when she quarrelled with them, she managed at times to have them dismissed, imprisoned, tortured and their property confiscated.[60] The story concerning the dismissal from office of the powerful vizier ʿAlī b. ʿĪsa is related in the sources to an angry Umm Mūsā who was refused an audience. ʿAlī b. ʿĪsa was not receiving visitors and so his chamberlain did not venture to announce Umm Mūsā, dismissing her courteously instead. Naturally this made her very angry. When ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā learned of her arrival and dismissal, he ordered someone to find her and make his excuses, hoping that she might come back. Despite his belated excuses, she managed to have him removed from office by setting the Queen Mother and her son

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[57] al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 275–276. See Part II, Chapter 4.

[58] The occasion was related to the marriages of the nieces of Umm al-Muqtadir who sent on their behalf an expensive gift to their husbands. The impressive cortège consisted of horsemen and men on foot. The gift included twelve horses saddled magnificently, sumptuous cloths and 100,000 *dīnār*. ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 78.

[59] al-Tanūkhī, *al-Faraj*, IV, 362.

[60] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 90.

against him.[61] The problems between Umm Mūsā and the 'good vizier' ʿAlī b. ʿĪsa were indeed grave. The history of her relations with ʿAlī was, on the whole, negative. The sources relate, for instance, that Umm Mūsā burst into an emergency meeting presided over by the vizier in which deliberations focused on the Fatimid threat. Ignoring their grave demeanour, Umm Mūsā seated herself and produced a list of petty wants for Umm al-Muqtadir. The vizier reprimanded her saying: 'We are engaged in affairs of life and death, the preservation and the very foundations of the state and you distract us with matters of no importance!'[62]

Relations between the vizier and Umm Mūsā's family were also poor.[63] The vizier seems to have been implacable in the face of the corruption and wastefulness of Umm Mūsā and her entourage. That she was able, nevertheless, to remove him from his office reveals the notable influence she achieved at the court and the remarkable impact her actions had on the course of the vizierate and the administration. Miskawayh relates that, consequently, al-Muqtadir removed him from office and had him arrested on Monday morning 8 Dhū l-Ḥijja 304/2 June 917 as he was riding to the palace.[64]

It is difficult to understand the nature of the networks that managed to bring about such appointments or dismissals. They were not permanent but were rather the result of the events and developments which contributed to make and unmake them. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the impression given in the sources is that plots were the product of the moment; as soon as a plot achieved its particular objective, the participants would dismantle it. What is clear, though, is that Umm Mūsā's wealth and connections with both the bureaucracy and the military establishment, and her influential role at the court by the side of the caliph and his mother, all conferred upon her considerable power; and it was this increasing power and wealth of Umm Mūsā that led to her downfall. Umm Mūsā had become linked with centres of power through the marriage of her niece to Abū l-ʿAbbās, 'a prince of royal blood, and a man of wealth, sumptuous in his living and attire'.[65] This was an important signal that perhaps Umm Mūsā was transferring her loyalty away from

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61 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 20, and al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 285.
62 al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 353–354.
63 See also Part II, Chapter 3.
64 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 40.
65 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 83.

the palace. Once the alliance between Umm Mūsā and the prince became a fact:

> the stewardess spent extravagantly on the distribution of largesses and entertainment to which she invited the officers of the empire both great and small for a period of more than ten days.[66]

Umm Mūsā's power became so great, her display of wealth so ostentatious that Umm al-Muqtadir accused her of plotting against her son: 'you have become related in marriage to the son of al-Mutawakkil in order to install him in the caliphate'.[67] Umm Mūsā was arrested in the year 310/922–3 and was handed over to the *qahramāna* Thumal, who was famous for her cruelty. Thumal tortured Umm Mūsā, Umm Mūsā's sister and brother, extorting money from them, wearing apparel, furniture, perfume and jewels.[68] The vizier ʿAlī b. ʿĪsa created a special bureau to deal with the property confiscated from Umm Mūsā and her dependants, from whom it was said that about a million *dīnār* were obtained.[69] This confiscation was spectacular for what it reveals about the amounts of money amassed by the *qahramāna* thanks to the power she was able to exercise through her special position in the harem and the wider caliphal complex.

Between Harem and Court: The Eunuchs

In addition to the *qahramānas*, the other important administrative element in the harem were the eunuchs who served as go-betweens in transactions between men and women of the court and between the court and the outside world. It was the seclusion of the Muslim women that made the employment of eunuchs inevitable. Accepted as a functionally legitimate group, this distinctive gender group flourished in spite of the fact that Islamic law prohibited the making of eunuchs within the lands of Islam.[70] The eunuchs' castration 'rendered them neither male nor female

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[66] Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, VIII, 137.

[67] Ibn Tagrībirdī, *al-Nujūm*, III, 229.

[68] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 84; IbnTagrībirdī, *al-Nujūm*, III, 229. See Bowen, *Good Vizier*, 198.

[69] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 84.

[70] Cristina de la Puente, 'Sin linaje, sin alcurnia, sin hogar: eunuchos en el andalus en época Omeya', in *Identidades Marginales* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas, 2003), 147–193. For a more detailed analysis of the role of eunuchs at the court of al-Muqtadir, see Nadia Maria El Cheikh, 'Servants at the Gate: Eunuchs at the Court of al-Muqtadir', *The Journal of the Social and Economic History of the Orient* 48 (2005): 234–252.

in a male-dominated culture defined by gender hierarchies and spatial differentiation'.[71] The eunuchs had no roots in the society over which the caliph exercised dominion, being cut off from their original environment with no family or tribe, a situation that made them safer, dependent and loyal. Existing outside of the dominant social values and institutions of family, offspring and procreation, eunuchs were ideally suited to serve as servants, agents and proxies for their masters. An important part of their gender construct was grounded on their perceived loyalty and trustworthiness.

The harems of the Abbasid caliphs were populated by a diverse community, numbering thousands. Caring for them and guarding them required large numbers of slaves and eunuchs. Eunuchs played an important role as servants and guardians within the caliph's women's quarters. The eunuchs' castration gave them access to the harem, where they were entrusted with the task of protecting and serving the women and educating the children. The sizeable number of eunuchs at the court of al-Muqtadir is signalled in a number of sources. Hilāl al- Ṣābiʾ states that: 'It is generally believed that in the days of al-Muqtadir bi-llāh [...] the residence contained 11,000 eunuchs (*khādim*)—7,000 blacks and 4,000 white Slavs.'[72]

Eunuchs, in their capacity as 'servants', accumulated different roles and offices, a factor that explains the multifaceted character of their performance.[73] Eunuch servants were permitted to move freely in all parts of the complex. Their duties embraced the whole compound of the court so that they served as intermediaries between their master and his wives, concubines and female relatives. These circumstances gave eunuchs direct access to the person of the ruler whose living quarters were connected to the harem by an exclusive entrance used only by women and eunuchs.[74] Access to women gave eunuchs opportunities to influence men in high positions by means of their connections within the harem.

The power of eunuchs is conspicuous in the episode that followed the dismissal of the vizier Ḥāmid. Trying to have an audience with the caliph, Ḥāmid came to the palace and met with Naṣr the chamberlain.

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[71] Susan Babaie et al., *Slaves of the Shah: New Elites of Safavid Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 21.

[72] al-Ṣābiʾ, *Rusūm*, 8; trans. *Rules and Regulations*, 14.

[73] Ruby Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 77.

[74] David Ayalon, 'On the Eunuchs in Islam', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 1 (1979): 67–124. Reprinted in *Outsiders in the Lands of Islam: Mamluks, Mongols and Eunuchs* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1988).

The reliance on the eunuch Mufliḥ was, however, inescapable, he 'being the official who demanded admissions to al-Muqtadir when the latter was in his private apartments'. Naṣr pleaded Ḥāmid's cause with him: 'he is now, he said, an object of pity, and it would be like you to be merciful to him and not to punish him for what he did on those occasions'. Ḥāmid asked Mufliḥ to deliver his message to the caliph. Mufliḥ promised Ḥāmid to take his message to the caliph but instead he spoke to al-Muqtadir on the subject of Ḥāmid in a style that was contrary to the one promised. Al-Muqtadir, upon the recommendation of Mufliḥ, ordered Naṣr to dispatch Ḥāmid to Ibn al-Furāt.[75]

This episode gives a picture of the relative power of individuals holding positions within the palace. The interventions, which seem to have been carried on through Mufliḥ, led to Ḥāmid's downfall. Mufliḥ, as the leading eunuch, had control over access to the caliph when the latter was in the harem. Naṣr the chamberlain had to call on Mufliḥ precisely because he, Naṣr, could not enter the harem. Mufliḥ had greater access to the caliph and this made a great deal of difference, perhaps, all the difference. It was his status as eunuch, in other words, his gender, which gave Mufliḥ precious access. The power of the eunuchs stemmed directly from this one factor: they had spatial access to the caliph in his private quarters, the harem, when everyone else—all the other men, that is—did not. Indeed, Miskawayh states that 'Mufliḥ was high in Muqtadir's favour, and constantly in attendance'.[76]

A major product of the eunuchs' closeness to the caliph was that those who wanted favours from the caliph could and did obtain them by greasing the eunuch's palm to get him to espouse their cause, convinced as they were of the persuasive powers of the eunuchs. These activities were lucrative and paid dividends. We know from Miskawayh that Mufliḥ's position allowed him to accumulate wealth: he became the owner of vast estates.[77]

The eunuchs' power depended on and fuelled the tension between the caliph and the other power elements in the state. One of the main poles of power during the reign of al-Muqtadir, was the leading military commander Mu'nis, who achieved eminence in leading the defence in 296/908 of the Ḥasanī palace at Baghdad for al-Muqtadir against the pretender

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[75] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, VIII, 140–141.
[76] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 87.
[77] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 87 and 155–156.

Ibn al-Muʿtazz.[78] Muʾnis' authority was subsequently confirmed through his successful generalship. He became all-powerful, was consulted on the appointment of viziers and was increasingly in control of the government. Blaming the caliph for squandering and wasting money, Muʾnis addressed a letter to the caliph stating that the army complained bitterly about the money and land wasted upon the eunuchs and the women of the court, and of their participation in the administration. He demanded their dismissal and removal from the palace, with seizure of their possessions.[79] In his reply to Muʾnis, al-Muqtadir came to the defence of the eunuchs and women:

> Now what our friends propose in the matter of the eunuchs and women, whom they would cast out of the palace and remove far away, and whose emoluments for their service they hold should lapse, so that they should be precluded and deprived of their fortunes and kept at a distance from them until they deliver up the money and the estates which are in their hands, and restore them to their rightful owners—that is, a proposal which, if they properly considered and examined it, they would know to be unjust and one whose iniquity is obvious to me. Still, so anxious am I to agree with them [...] that I am giving orders for the seizure of some of their fiefs, for the abolition of their privileges [...] and for the removal from the palace of all whom it is permissible to expel while those who remain shall not be permitted to interfere with my administration or counsels.[80]

The answer acknowledges the power of eunuchs and women as fief-holders and points to their privileges, and explicit reference is made to their interference in the administration. The caliph promised to curb their political influence but only in order to appease Muʾnis.

Mufliḥ's resistance to Muʾnis is understandable given the latter's effort to curb the influence and wealth of the eunuchs and the women in the harem. Miskawayh states that at the head of the conspirators against Muʾnis stood the eunuch Mufliḥ. The caliph's confidence in Mufliḥ was such that when Muʾnis wrote in 319/931 to al-Muqtadir that Mufliḥ was conspiring against him, and that Mufliḥ should be sent to him, al-Muqtadir replied that Mufliḥ was a faithful servant in whom he had confidence, and not the man to be mixed up in what Muʾnis was suggesting.[81] The caliph's belief in the eunuch's loyalty and devotion was absolute.

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[78] For the Qaṣr al-Ḥasanī see Map 3. See also Part II, Chapter 4.
[79] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 189, and Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, VIII, 200.
[80] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 189–190.
[81] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 222.

In the end it was Mufliḥ and other courtiers who resented Mu'nis who prevailed in convincing the caliph to confront Mu'nis militarily—and this against the caliph's mother's better judgement:[82] the caliph was killed during the confrontation.

Conclusion

The references to al-Muqtadir's harem project first and foremost a political arena in which high-positioned women interfered in caliphal high politics. This is clearly not the male-dominated harem of the traditional narrative. Such a vision is also at odds with the Western fixation on it as a brothel-like sexual prison. Moreover, the information found in the sources supports the assertion that the lines between family, community and the public sphere of politics and power were blurred in this, as in many, pre-modern societies.[83] Although women did not hold actual political positions, they were well placed to influence public affairs, even if inconspicuously.

Indeed, evidence from the reign of al-Muqtadir subverts the private–public binary and popular perceptions of the harem, especially as lodged in the Western consciousness and fostered by a peculiar anthropology of the Muslim Orient.[84] In his discussion of women in the fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries Abbasid court, Eric Hanne has stated that power is often described as a concept that moves along a vertical plane. However, 'in dealing with household politics one should also incorporate the notion of a horizontal plane in which the closer one is to the main source of power the more influence one may have over events'.[85] In line with these conclusions, the harem of al-Muqtadir brings into question the nature of political power and the location of political activity. The image of the harem as one of sequestration collapses in the light of the anecdotes and historical information put forward by the sources. The walls of the harem

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[82] 'Arīb, *Ṣilat*, 165–166, 175.

[83] Margaret Lee Meriwether and Judith E. Tucker, 'Introduction', in *A Social History of Women and Gender in the Middle East* (Boulder, CO, and Oxford: Westview, 1998), 6.

[84] Asma Afsaruddin, 'Introduction: The Hermeneutics of Gendered Space and Discourse', in *Hermeneutics and Honor: Negotiating Female 'Public' Space in Islamic/ate Societies*, ed. Asma Afsaruddin (Cambridge, MA: Distributed for the Center for Middle Eastern Studies of Harvard University by Harvard University Press, 1999), 1–28.

[85] Eric J. Hanne, 'Women, Power, and the Eleventh and Twelfth Century Abbasid Court', *Hawwa* 3 (2005): 80–110.

were semi-porous, allowing contact with the exterior via the *qahramāna*s and the eunuchs.

In the early part of the fourth/tenth century, particular circumstances existed which allowed women's power and influence to develop. That they are not always, at first sight, obvious, may be because the sources often deal in feminine stereotypes and are often uninterested in the very type of politics with which women were likely to be most active.[86] Moreover, drawing upon a discursive tradition on female involvement in politics, contemporary discourse, which in the final analysis controls the public memory of the reign, ascribed to harem women negative influence, linking them to the string of disasters that befell the Abbasid caliphate. Modern Arab historians have adhered to this assessment. Muṣṭafā Jawād repeats almost verbatim the criticism that occurs in the medieval historical works. He stresses the all-important role of the caliph's mother and her harem stewardesses, which, he claims, led to confusion in the administration and to unfortunate consequences. ʿAlī Ibrāhīm Ḥasan singles out the increasing involvement of women in political matters and the absence of competent viziers to explain the general context behind the decline of the Abbasid caliphate. In his view, this situation reached a climax during the reign of al-Muqtadir when supreme authority passed to his mother. Similarly, in discussing the conditions that played a role in the breaking up of the Abbasid empire, ʿA. al-Dūrī mentions first 'the weakness of al-Muqtadir and his fall under the influence of the *ḥarīm*'. He points that Shaghab's influence was generally damaging for 'she spoiled her son by encouraging him to abandon himself to the pleasures and to squander money'. Although al-Dūrī points to other long-term and decisive factors leading to the decline of the caliphate, the general judgement that we find in Abbasid and later sources tends to imply that women, overstepping boundaries and capturing authority, were the symptom of collapse and the principal cause of corruption and the general decline of the state.[87]

It is therefore necessary to uncover the mechanisms women used to exercise authority and power and to understand how the rhetorical stereotypes were established. A closer reading of individual texts, reveals

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[86] Pauline Stafford, 'Powerful Women in the Early Middle Ages: Queens and Abbesses', in *The Medieval World*, ed. Peter Linehan and Janet Wilson (London: Routledge, 2001), 398–415.

[87] ʿAlī Ibrāhīm Ḥasan, *Nisāʾ lahunna fī l-tāʾrīkh al-islāmī naṣīb* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1950), 96; Muṣṭafā Jawād, *Sayyidāt al-balāṭ al-ʿabbāsī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kashshāf, 1950), 81; ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dūrī, *Dirāsāt fī l-ʿuṣūr al-ʿabbāsiyya al-mutaʾakhkhira* (Baghdad: Sharikat al-Rābiṭa, 1945), 193–197.

significant nuances. Julia Bray calls on us to take notice of paradigm shifts or 'narrative transformations' by writers such as Ibn al-Jawzī who uses Umm al-Muqtadir's obituary in *al-Muntaẓam* to highlight her virtues. The reason for remodelling her image was part of his project to restore the caliphate to an active role.[88]

Although it is difficult to assess whether Shaghab's influence affected the overall decline of the caliphate, specific incidents—such as her sound political advice to her son, her financial contribution to thwarting the threat of the Qarāmiṭa, and her philanthropic activities—illustrate some aspects of her positive influence and power. Her example is significant in that it provides a spectrum of the possibilities open to such indirect exercise of authority. Umm al-Muqtadir was a main pole of influence at court. She was powerful and was a channel for caliphal favour. No one could ignore her since throughout her son's reign she was in a position to exert influence. The ambitions and strategies of courtiers, bureaucrats and a variety of candidates for office converged on Umm al-Muqtadir, her *qahramānas*, and her other influential allies. Umm al-Muqtadir did not have an exclusive influence; at times, her power did not even carry the day. This situation, however, was useful for the caliph. Through her he was kept informed and he could control negotiations, take decisions and embark on actions while preserving a slightly comfortable remoteness and distance.

Many of the roles and functions ascribed primarily to harem stewardesses and eunuchs involved mediation and transaction across boundaries. It was through their mobility to move outside the confines of the harem and to travel between the harem and the court that they managed to form networks and develop links that furthered their interests, mainly through their intercession with the caliph and his mother. Umm Mūsā and Mufliḥ offered favours to others and advanced their friends and dependants. The harem was thus a locus of opportunity where individuals of diverse birth could make their fortunes and careers.

The harem was an institution of complex agencies, a situation which furthered a variety of agendas. The seclusion of the caliph behind a highly formalized court ritual accentuated the need of various power groups around the caliph for intermediaries. Umm al-Muqtadir, the stewardesses and the eunuchs exploited this situation, appropriating to themselves some of the power of controlling the distribution of favours through their

[88] Bray, 'A Caliph and his Public Relations'.

privileged proximity to the caliph. Their role as confidants gave them access to influential positions as requests were passed into their hands. Thus an examination of al-Muqtadir's harem shows that, through the role of women and the eunuchs, it could be active in politics and that its actions were often integral to policymaking and governance. Its role needs therefore to be incorporated into our understanding of Abbasid politics and the Abbasid court.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CULTURE, EDUCATION AND THE COURT

Letizia Osti[1]

The topics of culture and learning in the classical Islamic world have intrigued many modern scholars. George Makdisi, and many in his wake, describe a sophisticated and surprisingly homogenous education system,[2] while quantitative studies illustrate its geography and social makeup.[3] Few studies, however, focus on the time which preceded the advent of *madrasa*s as the standard educational institution, legal learning centres greatly promoted in Baghdad by the Saljūq vizier Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092).

The production of culture in the pre-*madrasa* period was a fluid process, not codified enough to make for easy systematization.[4] It is possible,

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[1] This chapter contains material reworked from my 'The Practical Matters of Culture in Pre-*madrasa* Baghdad', *Oriens* 38 (2010): 145–164.

[2] See Joseph E. Lowry, Devin Stewart and Shawkat Toorawa, 'Colleges of Law and the Institutions of Medieval Sunni Islam', in their *Law and Education in Medieval Islam: Studies in Memory of Professor George Makdisi* (London: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2004), 3 for a list of works on this subject. In particular, see the doctoral dissertation of Munir-ud-Din Ahmed, *Muslim Education and the Scholars' Social Status up to the 5th Century Muslim Era (11th century Christian Era) in the Light of Ta'rīkh Baghdād* (Zürich: Verl. 'Der Islam', 1968), and Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Some important essays on the subject were recently collected in a volume edited by Claude Gilliot, *Education and Learning in the Early Islamic World* (London: Ashgate, 2012).

[3] Amongst the latest examples in this field is Monique Bernards, '*Ṭalab al-ʿIlm* amongst the Linguists of Arabic during the 'Abbāsid Period', in *ʿAbbāsid Studies. Occasional Papers of the School of ʿAbbāsid Studies. Cambridge, 6–10 July 2002*, ed. James E. Montgomery (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 33–46. See also Manuela Marín, ed., *Arab-Islamic Medieval Culture. Special Issue of Medieval Prosopography*, 23 (2002) (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 2002), and, more recently, Paul Auchterlonie, 'Historians and the Arabic Biographical Dictionary: Some New Approaches', in *Islamic Reflections, Arabic Musings: Studies in Honour of Professor Alan Jones*, ed. Robert Hoyland and Philip F. Kennedy (Warminster: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2004), 186–200.

[4] See for instance Christopher Melchert, 'The Etiquette of Learning in the Early Islamic Study Circle', in *Law and Education in Medieval Islam: Studies in Memory of Professor George Makdisi*, ed. Joseph E. Lowry, Devin Stewart and Shawkat Toorawa (Warminster: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2004), 33–44 (reprinted in Gilliot, *Education and Learning*, 1–12), and, within the larger-scope debate on the transmission of knowledge in the first centuries of Islam, on which Gregor Schoeler has worked extensively, see his 'The Relationship of Literacy and Memory in the Second/Eighth Century', in *The Development of Arabic as*

however, to identify recurring patterns in the lives and careers of scholars of various disciplines and in the knowledge they produced. The caliphate of al-Muqtadir is often described as the golden age of Arabic culture; it therefore provides plenty of examples of lives which, in retrospect, can be seen as caught between an effervescent cultural debate and the struggle to make a living, between the munificence of patrons and the dwindling financial and political prosperity of Baghdad. It is a precarious balance destined to be disturbed a few decades after the death of al-Muqtadir, when Baghdad will lose forever its standing as the main cultural magnet for the fragmented empire. The present chapter attempts to contextualize this moment of equilibrium by looking at the cultural and scholarly environment surrounding the court of al-Muqtadir and identifying there elements of continuity and change which may have had repercussions in a broader context.

Career Patterns and Sources

Although students did not have standardized institutions to refer to in the pre-*madrasa* period, their careers followed recognizable patterns, the first of which can be identified by looking at their connection with the city of Baghdad. A young man, either local or arriving from the provinces, found himself teachers, as well as means to pay them if he was poor; through these teachers he hoped not only to further his knowledge but also to be introduced to greater sources of income. Of course, the more famous the teacher, the higher the probability of achieving one's scholarly and financial aims; therefore, it was crucial to choose well.

One successful example of this pattern is the career of the grammarian Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm b. al-Sarī al-Zajjāj (d. 311/922). When al-Zajjāj met the Basran grammarian al-Mubarrad (d. 286/898), shortly after the latter's arrival from Samarra,[5] he understood that this was an excellent teacher

a Written Language, ed. M. C. A. Macdonald (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010), 121–130. The field of *'ulūm adabiyya* itself, as has been illustrated by Heinrichs, was not codified until two centuries after the death of al-Muqtadir, by al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144). Also taking this into account, in this chapter I use 'scholar' as a blanket term for professionals in any discipline. Wolfhart Heinrichs, 'The Classification of the Sciences and the Consolidation of Philology in Classical Islam', in *Centres of Learning: Learning and Location in Pre-Modern Europe and the Near East*, ed. Jan Willem Drijvers and Alasdair A. MacDonald (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 119–139.

[5] In or shortly after 247/861, when the caliph al-Mutawakkil died. Al-Zajjāj was then in his teens.

and undertook heavy financial sacrifices to be able to afford his lessons. All was to be repaid, because it was through al-Mubarrad that al-Zajjāj was introduced to the vizier ʿUbayd Allāh b. Sulaymān b. Wahb (d. 288/901) and became the private tutor of his children, thanks to a public dispute in which he humiliated a faithful student of al-Mubarrad's rival, Thaʿlab (d. 291/904). The fortunes of al-Zajjāj went further: on the advice of the vizier, the caliph al-Muʿtaḍid appointed him tutor of the young princes.

The names of al-Zajjāj's two old teachers figure prominently in his biography. The rivalry between Thaʿlab and al-Mubarrad epitomizes a well-known divide in classical Arabic culture, that between Basrans and Kufans; this distinction reflected differences in grammatical theory, but was also a literary *topos* and, what concerns us most here, related to the struggle to earn a comfortable living, which was ideally achieved by making oneself attractive to a generous patron.[6] By the time Thaʿlab and al-Mubarrad came to represent the two rival currents, it was common practice for students to attend the lessons of both; many of the students never took sides, opting to be described as grammarians who mixed methods. Having studied with both Thaʿlab and al-Mubarrad, and being therefore able to pass on the teachings of both, was a source of prestige rather than a sign of indecision.[7]

An unsuccessful version of the same pattern is exemplified by the grammarian al-Qālī (d. 356/967), who, on his arrival in Baghdad in 305/917, at the age of 16, adopted the *nisba* of the frontier town of Qālī Qalā, in the hope of being able to attract some sort of pension more easily. He remained there until 328/939, but 'once he had received an education in

[6] See Geert Jan van Gelder, 'Kūfa *vs* Baṣra: the Literary Debate', *Asiatischen Studien. Études Asiatiques* 50 (1996): 339–362; M. G. Carter, 'The Struggle for Authority: A Re-examination of the Baṣran and Kūfan Debate', in *Tradition and Innovation: Norm and Deviation in Arabic and Semitic Linguistics*, ed. L. Edzard and M. Nekroumi (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999), 55–70; Monique Bernards, 'Medieval Muslim Scholarship and Social Network Analysis: A Study of the Baṣra/Kūfa Dichotomy in Arabic Grammar', in *Ideas, Images, and Methods of Portrayal: Insights into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam*, ed. Sebastian Günther, Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 129–140; and Letizia Osti, 'Scholarly Competition in Ninth Century Baghdad: The Case of Thaʿlab and al-Mubarrad', *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 1 (n.s.) (2006): 87–112.

[7] In Chapter Two of his *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, which deals with *naḥw* and *lugha*, Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 380/990) devotes the first section to Basran grammarians and lexicographers, the second to Kufan ones, and the third to a group of scholars who 'mixed schools' (*khalaṭū al-madhhabayn*) (Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 45–71, 71–85 and 85–93 respectively).

Baghdad and seen that he had no luck in Iraq, he moved west'.[8] In Cordoba he went on to become the tutor of the Umayyad caliph's son.

A second pattern is represented by the careers of many traditionists. By the fourth/tenth century the *ḥadīth* transmission system was already firmly in place and continued to attract practitioners; these were many in number, and many were not professional scholars and did not necessarily reside in Baghdad, even though they passed through it and exchanged *ḥadīth*.[9] Of those scholars who did live in Baghdad and made *ḥadīth* transmission their main activity, many seem to have had little wish for a rich patron, especially after the *miḥna* in the third/ninth century, when religious scholars who refused to adhere to the muʿtazilī creed were persecuted by the caliphal authority. Such tangible persecutions built on a well-established *topos*, according to which it is best for a religious scholar to refuse an official appointment in order to preserve his own integrity.[10] Despite inevitable exceptions, the sentiments conventionally attributed to religious scholars towards the court and its environs remained one of diffidence and dislike.[11]

A similar attitude towards money and power in general can be also detected in prestigious scholars who, besides transmitting *ḥadīth*, specialized in other disciplines. The most prominent of these is perhaps Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, the famous historian, jurist and Quran scholar who, we are told, would not accept gifts or stipends from any patron unless an agreed fee for a specific commission.[12] Al-Ṭabarī earned his living exclusively through his scholarly work and his private means, as his biographers say: 'For 40 years, Muḥammad b. Jarīr wrote 40 pages

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[8] Yāqūt b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥamawī (d. 626/1229), *Muʿjam al-udabā': irshād al-arīb ilā maʿrifat al-adīb (irshād al-alibbā' fī maʿrifat al-udabā')*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās, 7 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1993), 729–730.

[9] See work carried out in this direction in the unpublished Ph.D. dissertation of Judith Ahola, 'The Community of Scholars: An Analysis of the Biographical Data from the *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*' (University of St Andrews, 2005).

[10] See A. J. Wensinck, 'The Refused Dignity', in *A Volume of Oriental Studies Presented to Edward G. Browne on his 60th Birthday*, ed. T. W. Arnold and R. A. Nicholson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 491–499.

[11] For instance, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), the champion of the opposition to Muʿtazilism, is described as having regarded the court as polluted as illustrated in Abu Nuʿaym's account of Ibn Ḥanbal's trial: Aḥmad b. Abd Allāh Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī (d. 430/1038), *Ḥilyat al-awliyā' wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā'*, 10 vols. (Cairo: Khānjī, 1932–8), IX, 205.

[12] See the examples in Claude Gilliot, 'La formation intellectuelle de Ṭabarī (224/5–310/839–923)', *Journal Asiatique* 276 (1988): 203–44, especially 233–236.

every day',[13] besides receiving regularly the revenue of his family estate in Ṭabaristān.[14]

Al-Ṭabarī's younger contemporary al-Sīrāfī (d. 368/979) epitomizes the character of both a grammarian and a judge: on the one hand, he counted al-Zajjāj amongst his teachers, and like his master he frequented the *majālis* held by wealthy patrons, as is illustrated by his famous debate with the philosopher Mattā b. Yūnus (d. 328/940).[15] On the other, he is described as 'abstemious and pious'; he practised as a judge but refused any payment for this activity, 'earn[ing] his living through the books [copied by] his hand. He did not go out, to give legal opinions or to scholarly gatherings, until he had copied ten pages, for which he earned ten *dirham* which served him for his maintenance. After that he would go out.'[16]

Religious principles and *topoi* aside, both references to the scholars' self-sufficiency mention one important element, writing (on paper), thanks to which they were able to earn money. This is not a coincidence, but the indication of a third pattern: by the late third/ninth century, the emergence of what has been described as literary culture had brought about a new kind of intellectual, able to support himself without the aid of a patron, and to survive by means of his own work as bookman, or *warrāq*.[17] While this situation would not guarantee such a comfortable living as that provided by a wealthy employer, it had both intellectual and practical advantages: first, it gave the freedom to express one's literary tastes, religious affiliations, and scholarly interests. Secondly, not tying oneself to a specific patron may have afforded long-term security: being affiliated to a powerful man in times of political unrest could expose one to the risk of falling from grace together with one's protector.

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[13] Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 2442.

[14] Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 2464–2465. See also C. E. Bosworth, 'al-Ṭabarī', *EI2*, X, 11–15.

[15] Abū Saʿīd al-Sīrāfī and Abū Bishr Mattā b. Yūnus were the protagonists in a famous debate in 326/938, where the former defended the excellence of grammatical studies against philosophical ones. See al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Imtāʿ*, 82–98. The discussion is also reported by Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 894–908. It was also translated into English by D. S. Margoliouth, 'Abū Bishr Mattā and Abū Saʿīd al-Sīrāfī on the Merits of Logic and Grammar', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1905): 79–129, and into French by Taha Abderrahmane, 'Discussion entre Abu Saʿīd al-Sirafi, le grammairien et Matta b. Yunus, le philosophe', *Arabica* 25 (1978): 310–323. See also Gerhard Endress, 'Grammatik und Logik. Arabische Philologie und griechische Philosophie im Widerstreit', in *Sprachphilosophie in Antike und Mittelalter*, ed. Burkhard Mojsisch (Amsterdam: B.R. Grüner, 1986), 163–299.

[16] Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 876–877.

[17] Shawkat M. Toorawa, *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr and Arabic Writerly Culture: A Ninth Century Bookman in Baghdad* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005); in particular, for the translation of *warrāq*, see p. 46.

Whether financial and intellectual independence were a personal choice or the result of not being able to secure a patron, 'independent' scholars shared two characteristics with their colleagues: first, traditions and grammar remained an essential part of any sound intellectual activity; secondly, securing a source of income continued to be a constant preoccupation for scholars at all levels, as is illustrated by the attention that the sources devote to detailing the monetary value of salaries, pensions, rewards and sales. Those scholars who accepted, or managed to secure, a patron often had two parallel roles: on the one hand, they had their scholarly *madhhab* teaching, which was undertaken with students at their home or in the mosque; and, on the other, they worked at their patron's home, where they would tutor the children but also act as *nadīm*s, as animators of the patron's social life, entertaining the guests of his *majlis* with witty debates and interesting anecdotes.[18]

Social historians confirm that the patterns described above are not casual examples; they also deal with cases of scholars of Baghdad emigrating from the city when money for patronage began to run out and the political and practical situation became unstable.[19] This type of data, however, mainly concerns traditionists (who did not normally have contacts with the court) and grammarians such as al-Zajjāj and al-Qālī, about whom biographical dictionaries give us abundant information,[20] but not necessarily the more fluid categories of scholars who gravitated around the court.

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[18] J. C. Vadet, *L'esprit courtois en Orient dans les cinq premier siècles de l'Hegire* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1968), 282 for a list of the main families who liked 'jolies historiettes d'amour encadrant de brèves pièces de vers où le sens de l'apologue, sinon celui de la composition, tend à refouler les qualités primitives du goût arabe'. These included the Banū Ṭāhir, the Madharā'ī family and the 'dynasties' of viziers: the Banū Wahb, Banū l-Jarrāḥ, Banū Muqla and Banū Nawbakht. For a discussion of the term *majlis* as opposed to *mujālasa* (which, however, does not always apply to the sources used for the present study), see Samer M. Ali, *Arabic Literary Salons*, 13–19. See also Dominic P. Brookshaw, 'Palaces, Pavilions and Pleasure-gardens: The Context and Setting of the Medieval *Majlis*', *Middle Eastern Literatures* 6 (2003): 199–223.

[19] Eliahu Ashtor, 'Un mouvement migratoire au haut moyen âge, migrations de l'Irak vers les pays Méditerranéens', *Revue des Annales* 27 (1972): 185–214, esp. 194–201.

[20] Grammarians (usually divided into *lughawiyyūn* and *naḥwiyyūn*) are the scholars about whom we have most information because their discipline continued to be taught informally into the post-*madrasa* period. See Kees Versteegh, 'A Sociological View of the Arab Grammatical Tradition: Grammarians and their Professions', in *Studia Linguistica et Orientalia Memoriae Haim Blanc Dedicata* ed. Paul Wexler, Alexander Borg and Sasson Somekh (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1989), 289–382, esp. 295.

As for the court itself, there is a blind spot in the sources. In biographical collections we find many stories about scholars and litterateurs—such as poets, *udabāʾ, muḥaddithūn*. Members of the caliphal household figure mainly as secondary characters. On the other hand, chronicles are often not very interested in education and scholarship, and only occasionally mention that this or that vizier or chamberlain was a patron of the arts and hosted *majālis*.

The rest of this chapter is an attempt to fill this blind spot, reconstructing careers falling into the first of the patterns described above, and focusing in particular on scholars who worked at court or made a living in connection to it. Given the data at our disposal, the category which is most traceable across different kinds of sources is that of the high-level *kātib*: these were the authors of most of the chronicles for our period, and naturally their work usually reveals detailed knowledge of, and interest in, the activities of colleagues.

Scholarship, Patronage and Politics

Viziers, kuttāb

As has been seen in Part II, *kitāba* required a particular education, and most viziers were *kuttāb*; those who were not, such as Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās, could not do without secretarial aid.[21] In fact, most viziers were *awlād al-kuttāb*, being born into secretarial families. Their education began at home,[22] but already in their teens they were assigned to a *diwān* as apprentices.[23] By the fourth/tenth century the vizier had to be well grounded in religious sciences, because he was involved in juridical decisions such as those connected with the *maẓālim* sessions; he was expected to know the history of the Arabs and non-Arabs; and of course he was expected to have mastered the arts of calligraphy and letter-writing.[24] In other words, the *kātib* was supposed to have a solid, well-rounded education which would usually be given to him from a very young age by reliable teachers employed by his family. This is why many viziers not only had a reputation as patrons,

[21] Sourdel, *Vizirat*, 566. See also Part II, Chapter 3.

[22] See above on the children of ʿUbayd Allāh b. Sulaymān, and also Part II, Chapter 4.

[23] See, for example, al-Tanūkhī, *al-Faraj*, II, 172: 'as a young man I studied in the audit office for the Sawād' (*'kuntu wa-anā ḥadath ataʿallam fī dīwān zimām al-Sawād'*). The words are spoken by the *kātib* Abū l-Ḥasan Aḥmad b. Yūsuf, who lived around the time of al-Muqtadir.

[24] Sourdel, *Vizirat*, 565–577.

but also as scholars in their own right. This is particularly true of ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā (d. 334/946), from the Jarrāḥid family, who has his own short biographical entry in the *Kitāb al-fihrist*;[25] there, he is credited with works on religious matters, among which is a *Kitāb maʿānī l-Qurʾān wa-tafsīrihi*, 'in the composition of which he was helped by (*aʿānahu ʿalayhi*) Abū l-Ḥasan al-Khazzāz and Abū Bakr Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324/936)'.[26] He also appears curious about foreign subjects and is recorded as having had a book on the Sabean religion located and translated.[27] Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī (d. 335/947), who was attached for a time to ʿAlī's rival, Ibn al-Furāt (d.312/924), comments: 'I do not know that anyone else served as vizier under the Abbasids who resembled him in his asceticism, his integrity (*ʿiffa*), his memory (*ḥifẓ*) of the Quran, and his knowledge of its meanings [...] Nor do I know that I addressed anyone more knowledgeable than he was of poetry.'[28]

Many of the Banū l-Jarrāḥ were known as authors of works on poetry and history: ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā's uncle, Muḥammad b. Dāwūd, the vizier's son Abū l-Qāsim, his cousin ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAlī and his brother ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, who was also vizier for a short period of time in 324/936.[29] This cultural production is not peculiar to the Jarrāḥid family: the Banū Ṭāhir boasted, for example, the governor of Baghdad and poet ʿUbayd Allāh b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Ṭāhir (d. 300/913), while the three-times vizier Ibn Muqla (d. 328/940),[30] besides being one of the most important calligraphers of the age, is seen taking notes from the grammarian Ibn Durayd (d. 321/933).[31]

Salaries, Pensions, Rewards

Quantitative history has been able to establish with some precision the kinds of professions and trades practised in the medieval Islamic world, as well as the economic and professional background of some types of

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[25] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 142.

[26] The latter was the leading Quran expert of the time, who established the seven canonical readings of the Quran. The former was a grammarian and a teacher in the home of the vizier (see Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 90, where his *kunya* is given as Abū l-Ḥusayn).

[27] See Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 327. ʿAlī, whose family had been Christian, maintained an interest in the foreign sciences and also had his son instructed in them (see Bowen, *Good Vizier*, 71–82).

[28] Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 1823–1824.

[29] They and their works are listed in Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 128–129. For ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's vizierate, see Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 336–338.

[30] His first term as a vizier was under al-Muqtadir (316–18/928–30). Later he served under al-Qāhir (320–1/932–3) and al-Rāḍī (322–4/934–6).

[31] He was in Baghdad from *c.* 300/913. See Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 67.

scholars.[32] The chapters in Part II have discussed the average salaries of civil servants and soldiers; we also have some idea of what kind of income would allow an intellectual to make a living.[33] However, whenever the court or its environs were involved, one single gift from a generous and appreciative patron could be enough to survive on for a whole year.

For instance, Thaʿlab, who was one of the most prestigious and better paid scholars of his times, was given by his employer Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Ṭāhir (d. 253/867), whose son he tutored daily for four hours, a salary of 1,000 *dirham* a month; he also stayed for meals—fulfilling, presumably, the function of *nadīm* at the table of his young charge—and took home food provisions.[34] His younger contemporary and former student, al-Zajjāj, found—through his teacher al-Mubarrad, as mentioned above—a first teaching job for about 30 *dirham* per month, which was not much more than he had made as a glass maker. Later, still through al-Mubarrad he began working for al-Muʿtaḍid's vizier, ʿUbayd Allāh b. Sulaymān b. Wahb, and became tutor of his son al-Qāsim (d. 291/904), although he still kept his own scholarly students.[35] Finally he arrived at court, where al-Muʿtaḍid gave him a salary of about 300 *dīnār* (about 4,500 *dirham*),[36] which made him rich. Al-Zajjāj could be heard claiming that he had continued to give one *dirham* a month to his old teacher, as a repayment for his first years as student, when he was too poor to pay

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[32] See Hayyim J. Cohen, 'The Economic Background and the Secular Occupations of Muslim Jurisprudents and Traditionists in the Classical Period of Islam (until the Middle of the Eleventh Century)', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 13 (1970): 16–61. See also Ashtor, 'Un mouvement migratoire', and Maya Shatzmiller, *Labour in the Medieval Islamic World* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

[33] See Toorawa, *Writerly Culture*, 54–55.

[34] Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Zubaydī (d. 379/989), *Ṭabaqāt al-naḥwiyyīn wa-l-lughawiyyīn*, ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 2nd edn (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1975), 148–149. This of course was in addition to what Thaʿlab earned from teaching his regular students.

[35] For instance, he was the teacher of the famous late fourth-/tenth-century grammarian Abū ʿAlī al-Fārisī (d. 377/987). On al-Zajjāj's profession, see Wadād al-Qāḍī, 'al-Zajjāj and Glassmaking: An Expanded Range of Options in a Comparative Context', in *In the Shadow of Arabic: The Centrality of Language to Arabic Culture*, ed. Bilal Orfali (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 221–248.

[36] The exchange rate between *dīnār* and *dirham* changed constantly. It seems that at the time of al-Muqtadir, one *dīnār* was about 15 *dirham*. See Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 239, while enumerating al-Muqtadir's expenses: 'there remains 400 million *dirham*, worth 28 million *dīnār*'. See also Miskawayh, Tajārib, I, 71 and 165; al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 227, and al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, VIII, 55; trans. *Table-Talk* (1929), 511. This conversion rate is also mentioned by Ashtor, *Prix*, 40–41.

a proper price for his lessons.[37] When another renowned grammarian, Ibn Durayd, arrived in Baghdad in 308/920–1, he was helped by the *kātib* ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Ḥawārī (d. 311/923), who informed al-Muqtadir of his standing. The caliph ordered that a monthly pension of 50 *dīnār* should be given to him, which he received until his death.[38] The caliph also assigned his physician Sinān b. Thābit (d. 331/943) 200 *dīnār* a month when he opened the hospital dedicated to his name in 306/918–19.[39] The salary of 300 *dīnār*, the pension of 50 *dīnār* and the funding of 200 *dīnār* can be contrasted with a reward of 5,000 *dirham* (about 333 *dīnār*) which Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī obtained for composing a *qaṣīda* for a reception in 306/918,[40] or the 500 *dīnār* he earned in 309/921 for reading a message aloud with a good voice in front of the caliph al-Muqtadir.[41] In 312/924–5, tutoring two sons of al-Muqtadir twice a week earned him 2,000 *dirham* (*c.* 133 *dīnār*) a month, while the traditionist engaged to transmit *ḥadīth* to them received 400 *dīnār* for two months.

Private and Public Patrons

The examples above outline several ways in which a scholar could be patronized. First, the caliph and his household could decide to offer pensions, salaries or rewards out of their private treasury. Secondly, wealthy private individuals could do the same on a smaller scale, commissioning books, hiring teachers or organizing *majālis*. Thirdly, viziers and heads of *dīwān*s were able to use both their private money and the public treasury, not necessarily being consistent in the two spheres. The behaviour of the two principal political protagonists of the period, Ibn al-Furāt and ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā, illustrates this last point.[42]

Besides being a scholar in his own right, ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā liked to surround himself with scholars.[43] The guest list of assemblies at his house at Bāb al-Bustān included many religious scholars; but given ʿAlī's interests in poetry and foreign science one can imagine that these disciplines were

[37] *'wa-ju'ila lahu rizq fī l-nudamā' wa-rizq fī l-fuqahā' wa-rizq fī l-'ulamā' naḥw thalāthumi'at dīnār'* (al-Zubaydī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 148–149; Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 51–63).

[38] Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, IV 325–326. This is also mentioned by Ashtor, *Prix*, 68.

[39] Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa (d. 668/1270), *'Uyūn al-anbā' fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā'*, ed. Muḥammad Bāsil ʿUyūn al-Sūd (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1998), 278.

[40] al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 119–120. See also Part III, Chapter 6.

[41] al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 126.

[42] See also Part II, Chapter 3 on other characteristics of the two famous viziers.

[43] See al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, XII, 14.

also represented amongst his guests.[44] As well as organizing *majālis*, ʿAlī looked after the practical needs of some scholars. Some were fellow *kātib*s, like his chamberlain and historian al-Jahshiyārī.[45] But we also hear of him sending his son ʿĪsā to visit Ibn Mujāhid when he was ill,[46] and dispatching a doctor to al-Ṭabarī on the latter's deathbed.[47] The traditionist Ibn al-Qaṭṭān (d. 349/960) relates an exemplary episode: he had accompanied ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā when the latter had been sent away from Baghdad.[48] In time they stayed with a prominent *amīr* in Syria, who presented ʿAlī with a silver fish ornamented with precious stones. ʿAlī, as was his habit, refused the valuable present and sent it back. However, with ʿAlī's permission the host let al-Qaṭṭān have the gift, thus securing his financial situation.[49] Even in his old age, ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā seems to have maintained his interest in *majālis*, as he is listed amongst those present at the debate between Mattā b. Yūnus and al-Sīrāfī in 326/938.[50]

There are records of Ibn al-Furāt's activity as patron of culture. The *Fihrist*, for instance, mentions him within the biography of the astronomer al-Battānī (d. 317/929–30), known in Europe as Albatenius, who wrote a book dedicated to or commissioned by him.[51] Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī is credited with a celebratory book for the vizier, *Manāqib Ibn al-Furāt* ('The virtues of Ibn al-Furāt'),[52] and poetry in his praise is plentiful.[53] We also know that al-Ṣūlī had begun writing his book *On Youth* in connection with the appointment of al-Muqtadir, on the orders of his first vizier, al-ʿAbbās b. al-Ḥasan, but after the latter's death in 296/908 during the first attempt at a coup in favour of Ibn al-Muʿtazz, al-Ṣūlī recycled his work and pitched it at Ibn al-Furāt. This is an illustration of the risks of being affiliated to a powerful patron: one had to be ready to adapt to political change very quickly. Al-Ṣūlī dedicated this unsolicited book to Ibn al-Furāt in the hope

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[44] See above, note 27.

[45] Al-Jahshiyārī was later attached to Ibn Muqla as well. See Maria Giovanna Stasolla, *Come legge la storia un letterato del X secolo: al-Jahshiyārī e i Barmecidi* (Rome: Aracne, 2007), 17–22.

[46] See al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, V, 146.

[47] Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 2468. ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā was, at that time, advisor of the vizier Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās.

[48] See Part I, Chapter 1.

[49] Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 2329–2330.

[50] See above, note 15.

[51] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 338.

[52] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 167.

[53] See for instance al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj*, V, 194 (§3400) for Ibn al-Muʿtazz's grateful lines.

of making a profit from an enterprise that would have been otherwise wasted.[54]

The treatise on youth is also interesting because it is not clear whether its author would be paid from Ibn al-Furāt's private purse or with public funds. In fact, it is exactly in the handling of private funds that the two viziers differ dramatically. For ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā, his appointment as vizier seems to have marked a turning point in his dealings with scholars. Al-Ṣūlī relates:

> When he was in charge of the *dīwān al-maghrib*, a group of scholars (*min ahl al-ʿilm*) would attend his table every night. Then, says al-Ṣūlī, I saw that this group had decreased after he became vizier. I asked Aḥmad b. Ṭūmār al-Hāshimī the reason for this, and he answered: 'He restricted his expenses and gave most of it to the descendants of the Companions [of the Prophet] in Medina'.[55]

As has been seen in previous chapters, this attitude was not restricted to ʿAlī's private arrangements and cultural tastes: he had already made himself unpopular during his first vizierate when, in 301/914, he had cut extra payments to 'the courtiers, the public and the retinue (*al-khāṣṣa wa-l-ʿāmma wa-l-ḥāshiya*)';[56] in 315/928, during his second term of office, he once again set about reducing expenses: he decreased the salaries and allowances of officials in the provinces, of the army, and of several professional figures connected to the court: 'the eunuchs (*al-khadam*), attendants (*al-ḥasham*), table-companions (*al-julasāʾ*), boon-companions (*nudamāʾ*), singers (*mughannūn*), traders (*tujjār*), intercessors (*aṣḥāb al-shafāʿāt*), and retainers (*ghilmān*)'.[57] While some of the above categories are not connected with culture and learning, and singers and similar performers were not necessarily considered as belonging to high culture—as we shall see below, there was a distinction between high and low culture—*nadīm*s were also scholars. The cuts described in this passage were not only aimed

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[54] This is a practice not dissimilar from that described by Kilito for pre-Islamic panegyrists who, if their patron did not pay up, could get their revenge by reusing the same poem for another patron. See Abdelfattah Kilito, *L' auteur et ses doubles. Essai sur la culture arabe classique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1985), 31–40.

[55] Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 1824.

[56] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 32.

[57] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 152. See also Shmuel Moreh, *Live Theatre and Dramatic Literature in the Medieval Arab World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 79, n. 15. Clowns, together with other entertainers, apparently received regular pensions during the reign of al-Mutawakkil (p. 66). 'Alī's budget is quoted extensively by al-Ṣābi', *Rusūm*, 21–27 (trans. *Rules and Regulations*, 23–25). On p. 24 it is mentioned that 'to the boon-companions and to others in their category' he had assigned a total of 200,315 *dīnār*.

at entertainers and servants, but also at producers of culture and, ultimately, at any form of lax generosity, as an episode set at around this time illustrates.

The grammarian al-Akhfash al-Ṣaghīr (d. 315/927) was a regular guest of Abū ʿAlī b. Muqla,[58] who held him in great esteem. When al-Akhfash found himself in dire straits, he asked his host to persuade ʿAlī to give him an allowance. Thus, Ibn Muqla suggested to ʿAlī that al-Akhfash be given the salary reserved to jurists. ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā, outraged that his underling should propose such a dishonest shortcut, replied harshly to Ibn Muqla in the middle of a crowded assembly, so that Ibn Muqla had to leave in haste.[59] Al-Akhfash died shortly afterwards in poverty.[60]

ʿAlī's proverbial strictness and honesty are in stark contrast with the doings of Ibn al-Furāt only a few years before, during his third and last term in office. Miskawayh relates how Ibn al-Furāt, hearing about the poverty of many scholars, gave them 20,000 *dirham*. Only the Umayyad prince Maslama (d. 121/738), comments Miskawayh, had been so generous before. He then goes on to illustrate other manifestations of the vizier's largesse.

The above information is particularly significant when examined in context: the year in which Ibn al-Furāt established generous pensions for scholars was 312/924–5, described by the sources as 'the year of destruction'. As has been described in detail in Chapter 1, in that year Ibn al-Furāt and his son, desperate for funds to pay the army, mercilessly arrested and tortured political rivals. Immediately after describing Ibn al-Furāt's generosity in helping scholars, Miskawayh relates how the people of Baghdad came out in the streets to revolt against the vizier after the *ḥajj* caravan was attacked by the Qarāmiṭa and how, eventually, Ibn al-Furāt and his son were themselves arrested and executed.

As the examples above illustrate, some controversy has to be expected from different sources. While biographies of scholars and litterateurs offer many stories where generous givers are praised and misers are ridiculed,

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[58] During ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā's second vizierate (314/927–316/928), Ibn Muqla was in charge of the *dīwān* of public estates. Given al-Akhfash's date of death, this application must have been submitted just after the vizier's instalment (see Dominique Sourdel, 'Ibn Muḳla', *EI2*, III, 886–887).

[59] The relationship between ʿAlī and Ibn Muqla was a difficult one. It was on the latter's suggestion that ʿAlī was arrested after the accession of al-Rāḍī (H. Bowen, "Alī b. ʿĪsā b. Dāʾūd b. al-Ḏjarrāh', *EI2*, I, 386–387).

[60] The story is related in al-Akhfash's biography in Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 1770–1774; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, III, 301–303.

chroniclers are often critical of excessive expenditure, not only when squandered for less than virtuous purposes, but also when well meant. Conversely, ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā's cutting of expenses is praised by Miskawayh, but it is difficult to imagine that it could be appreciated by those who were affected personally by the cuts; in fact, ʿAlī was openly attacked for his avarice.[61]

The Ignorant Caliph

At the end of the seventh/thirteenth century, Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā was able to formulate a global evaluation of the relationship between rulers and culture:

> Knowledge adorns kings more than it adorns the people, and when the king is learned, the learned man becomes king. The most useful studies to a king are those which include the principles of government (*al-ādāb al-sulṭaniyya*), and historical biographies (*al-siyar al-ta'rīkhiyya*) including remarkable reports (*ẓarā'if al-akhbār*) and wonderful records (*'ajā'ib al-āthār*) of the past, though viziers of old used to dislike kings studying biography (*al-siyar*) and history (*al-tawārīkh*),[62] from fear that the kings would understand matters which the ministers did not want them to understand [...] They disapproved of caliphs or kings being clever, or knowing much about state affairs.[63]

Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā uses two reports to contextualize the above statements, both connected with the caliph al-Muktafī, al-Muqtadir's brother and predecessor. One day, we are told, the caliph asked his vizier to procure books to amuse and entertain him. The vizier ordered his assistants to carry out this task, and he was shown a selection of books he could deliver to the caliph: 'They brought him some historical books containing accounts of past happenings, battles of kings, chronicles of viziers, and knowledge of methods by which to extract wealth.' The vizier was enraged at seeing these books, which may have given the caliph too much insight into his doings, and ordered the caliph to be brought books with 'stories (*ḥikāyāt*) to amuse him, and poetry to delight him'. Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā goes on to illustrate his

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[61] See Bowen, *Good Vizier*, 132 and 203.

[62] See the description of the three 'genres' of history, biography, prosopography and chronography, in Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 55–79.

[63] Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā, *al-Fakhrī*, 6. I base my translation on C. E. J. Whitting's: Muḥammad b. ʿAlī Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā (d. 701/1302), *al Fakhri: On the Systems of Government and the Moslem Dynasties*, trans. C. E. J. Whitting (London: Luzac, 1947), 3.

second point, describing the scheming amongst secretaries which had led to the appointment of a child, al-Muqtadir, to the caliphate.[64] This link between culture, especially knowledge of the past, and rulership, and its particular significance in the case of al-Muqtadir, is already highlighted by sources much closer to the caliph's time. Naṣr al-Qushūrī's evaluation of al-Muqtadir as a ruler clearly indicates that his main shortcoming,[65] beside his youth and consequent inexperience, is that 'he has not read the biographies (*siyar*) and does not know the chronicles (*akhbār*)'.[66] Moreover, the source reporting Naṣr's opinion, al-Ṣūlī, in his attempt to show the caliph under an uncharacteristically good light, relates an episode, narrated by the future caliph al-Rāḍī, where al-Muqtadir tells his children an account (*khabar*) regarding Hārūn al-Rashīd and his two sons, al-Amīn (d. 198/813) and al-Ma'mūn (d. 218/833). That the caliph knew at least something of the history of his family needed to be highlighted, and to drive the point home, al-Ṣūlī adds:

> This is a famous *khabar*, but we report it here because al-Muqtadir was clever to relate it when something similar happened in his own time. Probably most people do not know that al-Muqtadir had this kind of quality. I received this information from the Commander of the Faithful al-Rāḍī in the year 313/925–6.[67]

Another episode, related by al-Tanūkhī, states that al-Muqtadir's ineptitude was not due to his ignorance but, rather, to his alcoholism. ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā is quoted as saying that when al-Muqtadir managed to stay away form *nabīdh* for five days he would be as acute and knowledgeable about affairs as al-Muʿtaḍid or al-Maʿmūn.[68] And in fact al-Ṣūlī shows al-Muqtadir as outraged at his courtiers when Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās is revealed as unsuitable for the office of vizier and has to be put under the tutorship of ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā in 306/918.[69]

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[64] On this episode see also Part I, Chapters 1 and 2, and Part II, Chapter 3.

[65] See also Part I, Chapter 2.

[66] al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 31. A similar, but more openly critical, remark on a young ruler and his need to go to school rather than sit on the throne is mentioned by Konrad Hirschler, '"He is a Child and this Land is a Borderland of Islam": Underage Rule and the Quest for Political Stability in the Ayyūbid period', *al-Masāq* 19 (2007): 29–46, 42. In later centuries underage rule and regency became as common a practice in the Islamic world as they were in Europe.

[67] al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 31–32. This story was then related when al-Rāḍī was a child and al-Ṣūlī was his teacher. That al-Ṣūlī remembers it many years later and uses it for his chronicle is sure to please the caliph.

[68] See also Part I, Chapter 2.

[69] al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 121. See Part I, Chapter 1.

On the other hand, there are indications of al-Muqtadir's gullibility: al-Ḥusayn b. al-Qāsim (vizier 319–20/931–2), of the Banū Wahb, is said to have got himself appointed as vizier with the help of a charlatan and a forged prophecy;[70] and sources hostile to al-Ḥallāj say that he had taken in the caliph and his household by posing as a healer and 'resuscitating' al-Rāḍī's parrot.[71]

There is indeed one instance where sharpness of mind and attention to detail are attributed to al-Muqtadir: in his encyclopaedia, al-Ābī (d. 421/1030) relates an episode where al-Muqtadir, seeing a letter composed in his name by ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā and addressed to the Byzantine emperor, has it amended: instead of saying 'if you draw closer to the Commander of the Faithful, he will draw closer to you, and if you turn away he will turn away from you', it should have said 'if you draw closer, he will draw you closer, and if you turn away he will turn you away', because the caliph has no business in getting closer to the emperor. However, in relating this story al-Ābī adds that nothing as clever as this is known to have been uttered by al-Muqtadir, so it should probably be attributed to another caliph.[72]

The Education of Young Jaʿfar

Not much is known about the training given to al-Muqtadir in his childhood. However, young Jaʿfar must have received at least the beginnings of a solid education. His father al-Muʿtaḍid is said to have asked Sinān b. Thābit, the court physician, to help him select from the caliphal collections books, astronomical instruments, and equipment connected to "foreign" sciences (i.e. non-Islamic disciplines such as medicine, mathematics and philosophy) which would be suitable for his two sons, as well as books on law, lexicography, biographies (*siyar*), and history (*akhbār al-mulūk wa-ayyām al-nās wa-akhbār al-dawla al-ʿabbāsiyya*).[73] The

[70] See also Part II, Chapter 3.

[71] Massignon, *Passion*, I, 502. This may be the same 'Chinese bird which could talk Persian and Hindi better than a parrot', which had been sent to al-Muqtadir amongst other gifts from Oman in 305/917–18 (al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 114).

[72] Abū Saʿd Manṣūr b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ābī (d. 421/1030), *Nathr al-durr*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAlī Qarna and ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Bajāwī, 7 vols. (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma lil-Kitāb, 1980–91), III, 142.

[73] Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, 2nd edn (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 48, quoting Ibn al-ʿAdīm's *Bughya*; the Arabic text is on pp. 541–542. See also Arthur Stanley Tritton, *Materials on Muslim Education in the Middle Ages* (London: Luzac and Co., 1957), 168. On classical Islamic educational theory in general, see recent work by Sebastian

sources also explain how al-Muʿtaḍid chose a grammar tutor for his children: he wanted to commission a commentary on a long work on speech (*nuṭq*) written by one of his courtiers. He therefore asked his vizier ʿUbayd Allāh b. Sulaymān to find a scholar to carry out this task. The vizier, on the advice of al-Mubarrad, approached his old teacher al-Zajjāj, who accepted the job immediately without even seeing the manuscript, nor knowing much about its subject. Nevertheless, he managed to complete the task to the caliph's satisfaction, so that he was given a reward of 300 *dīnār* and employed as a teacher of the caliph's sons.[74]

Al-Zajjāj is the teacher about whom we have the most information. We do not know whether he continued tutoring young Jaʿfar after he became caliph, but it is recorded that he did remain at court in some capacity, because al-Zubaydī calls him a *nadīm* of al-Muqtadir's brother and predecessor, al-Muktafī;[75] he may also have been appointed to oversee the teaching of al-Muqtadir's children when they started their education in 302/915.[76] This multiplicity of roles is a confirmation of the blurring between the role of tutor/teacher and that of *nadīm*, which has already been touched upon.

Little is known about Al-Zajjāj's teaching method with his caliphal charge. However, we are given a glimpse of the approach which captivated al-Zajjāj himself when he became a pupil of al-Mubarrad:

> [al-Zajjāj] asked him a question, and he answered convincingly. Al-Zajjāj turned to his companions, surprised at the perfection of Abū l-ʿAbbās [al-Mubarrad]'s answer. When he had finished, Abū l-ʿAbbās asked him: 'Are you happy with this answer?' 'Yes.' 'And if someone objected such-and-such, what would you say in return?' And he started to criticize [his own] answer to the question and to find faults in it. Ibrāhīm, confused, could not reply. Then he said: 'What if the *shaykh* [al-Mubarrad], may God exalt him, commented on this?' Abū l-ʿAbbās said: 'Grammar says so-and-so,' and he confirmed the first answer and criticised the argument with which he had

Günther, and in particular: 'The 9th Century Muslim Scholars Ibn Saḥnūn and al-Jāḥiẓ on Pedagogy and Didactics', in *Ideas, Images, and Methods of Portrayal: Insights into Arabic Literature and Islam*, ed. Sebastian Günther (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 89–128; and 'Be Masters in that You Teach and Continue to Learn: Medieval Muslim Thinkers on Educational Theory', *Comparative Educational Review* 50 (2006): 367–388.

74 Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 66.

75 al-Zubaydī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 111.

76 Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, XIII, 151: '*wa-fī shahr Ramaḍān* [March 915] *udkhila awlād al-Muqtadir al-kuttāb wa-kāna l-muʾaddib Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm b. al-Sarī al-Zajjāj*'. The future al-Rāḍī, who was born in 297/309, was then five years old (al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 68).

> objected to it. [...] The same went on] for about 14 questions: [al-Mubarrad] would answer each one of them satisfactorily, then he would criticize the answer, then he would go back to confirming the first statement.[77]

Al-Zajjāj is an ambiguous individual, not averse to bending the principles of honesty in order to make as much as he can of his position close to power.[78] As shall be seen below, his relationship with Jaʿfar was probably cool, but we know that he was close to his former pupil al-Qāsim b. ʿUbayd Allāh and did not hesitate to encourage him to take shortcuts. In one account, narrated by al-Zajjāj himself, he asks al-Qāsim what he will give him when he becomes vizier. Al- Qāsim enquires what al-Zajjāj wants, and the teacher wishes for 20,000 *dīnār*. Once appointed, with al-Zajjāj in his service as *nadīm*, al-Qāsim is afraid that the caliph will not allow him to be so liberal with the treasury's money, so he gives the promised money to al-Zajjāj by way of appointing him to oversee people's petitions (*riqāʿ*) and encouraging him to ask for payments to the amount he thinks proper. When al-Zajjāj reaches the 20,000 *dīnār* that were originally promised to him, he is so fond of the job that al-Qāsim lets him continue indefinitely.[79]

A second teacher hired to assist al-Zajjāj in the education of Jaʿfar was Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-ʿArūḍī (d. 342/953–4), who became the prince's favourite tutor.[80] Al-ʿArūḍī was known as the author of a *Gharīb al-Qurʾān* ('Rare expressions in the Quran'),[81] but, as his nickname suggests, his speciality was prosody. Centuries after his death, Yāqūt claims to have seen a book of his on this subject bearing an authorization in his own hand in the year 336/947–8 (*'wa-qad quriʾa ʿalayhi'*). Al-ʿArūḍī continued his work in the court *kuttāb* (school) for a third generation: Yāqūt mentions him as the teacher of al-Rāḍī's children.[82]

Sinān b. Thābit does not seem to have been one of Jaʿfar's regular teachers. However, after the episode mentioned above, he remained a constant presence throughout al-Muqtadir's caliphate, being, according to Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa, 'in his service'. Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa's biography also cites several episodes in which the physician consults ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā on ethical issues and

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[77] al-Zubaydī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 111–112. See also the secondary literature mentioned in note 73 above.

[78] See the damning judgement in his obituary, Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, XIII, 226.

[79] al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, I, 75–77; trans. *Table-Talk* (1921–2), II, 46–48; Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 52–54. See also Osti, 'al-Qasim b. 'Ubayd Allāh'.

[80] al-Ṣūlī, *Akhbār al-Rāḍī wa-l-Muttaqī*, 8–9.

[81] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 37.

[82] Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 471–472. See also al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, V, 347.

financial matters. As late as 319/931, after hearing of a medical mistake which caused the death of a man, it was ordered that physicians should be examined by Sinān before they were allowed to practise medicine.[83]

Another individual connected with the education of al-Muqtadir is Abū l-Ḥusayn Isḥāq b. Ibrāhīm al-Barbarī al-Muḥarrir (i.e. the copyist or letter-writer),[84] author of a *risāla* on calligraphy and said to be the best calligrapher of his time. Besides teaching al-Muqtadir, and later his children, together with his brother Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī, he was the teacher of the vizier and great calligrapher Abū ʿAlī b. Muqla.[85]

Al-Muʿtaḍid died in 289/902, and al-Qāsim b. ʿUbayd Allāh had only become vizier one year previously. We know, therefore, that Jaʿfar had begun studying grammar and foreign sciences around the age of seven, and that he was also trained in calligraphy.

Education in al-Muqtadir's Household

Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī, who had been a chess player at the court of al-Muʿtaḍid,[86] a *nadīm*, and later a part-time tutor of two of al-Muqtadir's children, seems to have had a difficult time in securing a stable patron. After the death of Ibn al-Furāt, who shared his ʿAlid sympathies, he was close to the sunnī

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[83] Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa, *ʿUyūn*, 276–280. On the role of Sinān, see also Peter E. Pormann, 'Islamic Hospitals in the Time of al-Muqtadir', in *ʿAbbāsid Studies II: Occasional Paper of the School of ʿAbbāsid Studies, Leuven 28 June–1 July, 2004*, ed. John Nawas (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 337–381, and, by the same author, 'Medical Methodology and Hospital Practice: The Case of Tenth-Century Baghdad', in *In the Age of al-Farabi: Arabic Philosophy in the 4th/10th Century*, ed. Peter Adamson (London: Warburg Institute, 2008), 95–118. Both articles were republished in *Islamic Medical and Scientific Tradition: Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies*, ed. Peter E. Pormann, 4 vols. (London: Routledge, 2010).

[84] Shatzmiller, *Labour*, 279–280: 'The profession of calligraphy [*khaṭṭāṭ*] was a highly specialised literary occupation, and one around which the whole book trade occupations hinged. Historians have linked the development of calligraphy as a specialised occupation to the growing demand for secretarial skills which originated under the impact of the continuing diversification in the central administrations across the Islamic regions. The occupation of calligrapher does not appear to have existed at the court on a regular basis, and did not depend on it entirely to survive. […]. Calligraphy was also one of the few occupations whose practitioners received training in a professional school, the first of which was reported to have been built in the 8th century, the second Hidjra century.' Shatzmiller quotes Ibn Durustawayh (d. 346/957), *Kitāb al-Kuttāb*, ed. Louis Cheikho (Beirut: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Kathūlīkiyya, 1921), 85.

[85] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 11; Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 616–617.

[86] al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj*, V, 218 (§ 3470). Shatzmiller, *Labour*, 279: 'The chess player, *shaṭranjī*, was indeed a trade, not a pastime, and the practitioner could make a living either by playing in a tournament, or by teaching the game.'

court officials ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā,[87] and the ḥanbalī chamberlain Naṣr, of whose son Muḥammad he was the teacher.[88] But his most beloved benefactor was his former pupil, al-Rāḍī.

In his chronicle of the caliphate of al-Rāḍī,[89] al-Ṣūlī relates that in the year 322/934, having disposed of the immediate dangers connected to his office, the newly appointed caliph al-Rāḍī asked him to help put together a group of boon companions.[90] Al-Ṣūlī details the composition of al-Rāḍī's table: beside al-Ṣūlī himself, who sat at the second place at the right hand of the caliph, the list of *nudamā'* included the caliph's uncle Isḥāq b. al-Muʿtamid, Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Ḥamdūn (d. 309/922), three members of the al-Munajjim family—the brothers Yūsuf and Abū l-Ḥasan Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā,[91] and their nephew Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Hārūn b. ʿAlī b. Yaḥyā (d. 352/963–4)[92]—Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-ʿArūḍī, and the brothers Isḥāq and ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Barbarī.[93] Three of the boon companions had been tutors of the caliph in his youth, and two of these had

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[87] See the episode in al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 126, mentioned above, in which ʿAlī instructs al-Ṣūlī to read a message aloud in the presence of the caliph, who then rewards al-Ṣūlī handsomely. But see also later, pp. 136–138: in 311/923–4, al-Ṣūlī, by now firmly attached to Naṣr, remains grateful to Ibn al-Furāt, and even to al-Muḥassin to a certain extent.

[88] al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 141. Muḥammad died in 312/924–5. Naṣr's other son Aḥmad, who succeded his father briefly, may have been taught by al-Ṣūlī too. See also Part III, Chapter 6.

[89] al-Ṣūlī, *Akhbār al-Rāḍī wa-l-Muttaqī*, 8–9. This and other accounts concerning the education of al-Rāḍī are discussed in Nadia Maria El Cheikh, 'To be a Prince in the Fourth/Tenth-Century Abbasid Court', in *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires: A Global Perspective*, ed. Jeroen Duindam, Tülay Artan and Metin Kunt (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 199–216.

[90] al-Qāhir had not wanted al-Ṣūlī as boon companion, deeming him too close to al-Rāḍī. See the translator's introduction to al-Ṣūlī, *Akhbār al-Rāḍī wa-l-Muttaqī (Histoire)*, trans. Canard, I, 31–32. The antipathy seems to have been reciprocated; see Ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Nujūm*, III, 245.

[91] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 219–220.

[92] He was *nadīm* of a number of caliphs (Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 161).

[93] Heyworth-Dunne's edition has 'al-Yazīdī', but circumstantial evidence suggests that this may have been a scribal or editing mistake. The first reason is that al-Ṣūlī describes the two brothers as saying '*wa-kānā yuʿallimāni l-jamāʿa l-khaṭṭ*', which implies that they were calligraphers; there does not seem to be any member of the Yazīdī family with this name, who sat as a boon companion of al-Rādī, and even if there had been, one would expect that they would be listed together with the other Yazīdī sitting in the *majlis*, as with the three Munajjim. See Franz Rosenthal, 'Abū Ḥayyān at-Tawḥīdī on Penmanship', in his, *Four Essays on Art and Literature in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 20–49. This is an introduction and translation of al-Tawḥīdī's *risāla* on calligraphy; pp. 22–25 describe the Barbarī family, giving a family tree. See also Manfred Fleischhammer, 'Die Familie Yazīdī, ihre literarische Wirksamkeit und ihre Stellung am Abbasidenhof', *Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 112 (1962): 299–308, with a family tree on p. 307.

taught al-Muqtadir as well. This gives al-Ṣūlī the opportunity to illustrate the educational arrangements in al-Muqtadir's household.

When al-Muqtadir had begun organizing the schooling of his children in 302/915,[94] he gave his old favourite teacher al-ʿArūḍī charge of Abū Isḥāq (al-Muttaqī) and his brother ʿAlī, together with somebody called Ibn Ghālib. Al-Muqtadir also chose Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. al-ʿAbbās al-Yazīdī (d. 310/922) as teacher for al-Rāḍī and his brother Hārūn. His other son al-ʿAbbās was given to somebody called Ibn Ghudāna al-ʿUmānī. When ʿAlī b. al-Muqtadir died, al-ʿArūḍī took on al-Rāḍī and Hārūn as well; the two youths, like their father, were very fond of him. When both their other teachers Ibn Ghālib and al-Yazīdī died, the two princes were left only with al-ʿArūḍī and ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Barbarī, who took it in turn to sit with the pair. Finally, ʿAbd al-Wāḥid b. al-Muqtadir's teacher was the renowned grammarian Ibn al-Anbārī (d. 328/940).[95]

This list suggests two preliminary considerations: first, we see that tutors also fulfilled the function of *nadīm* for their charges at court. Secondly, those mentioned were not the only teachers of the young princes, but rather their main tutors and *nadīm*s. Collating the information provided by al-Ṣūlī and Ibn al-Jawzī above, we may hypothesize that there was a coordinator above those main tutors, a head of teaching for the whole household; this was al-Zajjāj, who remained in place for about ten years, until his death in 311/922. From al-Ṣūlī's description it also seems that, as children became older, there were fewer teachers attached to them; whether this was usual or a result of successive financial cuts it is not clear. Al-Ṣūlī himself later became part of a third tier of teachers, who spent only a few hours a week with the children. A story which will be illustrated below suggests that, even as teenagers, the princes continued to have a main tutor as well as these more occasional teachers. Finally, thanks to the list of names provided by al-Ṣulī, it is possible to look into the subjects studied by the princes by examining the scholarly expertise of their teachers.

Although in al-Ṣūlī's account Ibn al-Anbārī, a grammarian pledging allegiance to the Kufan School, and especially famous for his powers of memory, was appointed to teach the prince ʿAbd al-Wāḥid, there are a few stories about him and the caliph al-Rāḍī,[96] suggesting that he must

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[94] See note 76 above.

[95] al-Zubaydī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 153–154; Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 82; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, III, 399–403; Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 2614–2618; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, IV 341–343.

[96] Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 2614–2618.

have been connected to this prince as well. These stories, usually praising al-Rāḍī's scholarly disposition, are transmitted by his fellow teacher and *nadīm* Abū l-Ḥasan al-ʿArūḍī. Al-Masʿūdī relates several accounts of al-Ṣūlī and al-ʿArūḍī on the same topic.[97]

Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. al-ʿAbbās al-Yazīdī,[98] another grammarian, was called upon to teach the children of al-Muqtadir in his old age. Unlike al-Zajjāj, he seems to have abandoned scholarly teaching when he began to work at court.[99]

Finally, the *Fihrist* mentions another teacher, Muḥammad b. Ghālib b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Iṣfahānī, known as Bāḥ, as the author of 70 leaves of poetry.[100]

Frustrated Teachers, Ignorant Parents

The information outlined above gives us an idea of how teaching was structured—around two children, usually by the same mother, who were assigned two main teachers—and which subjects were preferred. We also know that education began at an early age; al-Rāḍī, for instance, entered the *kuttāb* at five.[101] Beside this, al-Ṣūlī comments extensively on his dealings with his charges and their family, affording us a glimpse of the true tastes of different members of the caliphal household. Three stories summarize the situation, the first one recorded in the chronicle of the year 312/924–5 in *Akhbār al-Muqtadir*, where al-Ṣūlī relates that he began to teach al-Rāḍī and his brother Hārūn, who were then 17 and 15 years of age respectively:

> In that year I became connected with the two sons of al-Muqtadir bi-llāh, the princes Abū l-ʿAbbās [al-Rāḍī] and Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Hārūn]. I served them and they treated me well, they raised my station and let me become intimate with them. I taught them to use notebooks [*dafātir*][102] and to investigate the sciences of the Arabs. They did this and reached excellent

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97 al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj*, V, 222–226 (§3482–3493).

98 al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, III, 328–329; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, IV, 337–339.

99 'After he became attached to the caliph, one of his disciples met him and asked him to teach him (*an yuqriʾahu*), but he said: "I am too busy for that" ' (al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, III, 328–329.

100 Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 151.

101 See above, note 76.

102 According to Bernard Lewis ('daftar', *EI2*, II, 77–81), by the third/ninth century this term had come to indicate exclusively registers connected to the administration. In this context, however, it seems more appropriate to understand it as a generic term for notebook. See Letizia Osti, 'Notes on a Private Library in Fourth/Tenth-Century Baghdad', *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 12 (2012): 215–223.

> results, especially the prince Abū l-ʿAbbās, who was the most intelligent and genial of people, and had the quickest memory. I introduced to them the *muḥaddith* Ibn Bint Manīʿ [d. 317/929–30],[103] who during several sessions taught them traditions which they memorised. The price of notebooks went as high as it had ever been in a long time because these two used so many, so that the paper and bookmen [*warrāqūn*] became rich. An enormous quantity of them was collected for the prince Abū l-ʿAbbās.[104]

The two princes were prepared to reward their teacher. Al-Ṣūlī asked them to talk to the vizier on his behalf and as a result was given a post in the *dīwān al-jaysh*,[105] which earned him an additional income of 2,000 *dirham* per month. The account ends with the *qaṣīda* poem through which al-Ṣūlī asks the two princes to intercede on his behalf. It is particularly interesting that al-Ṣūlī, himself famously a book collector,[106] is seen here passing on his passion to his pupils.

As can be deduced from al-Ṣūlī's remarks earlier in the book,[107] this passage was written during the caliphate of al-Rāḍī. Al-Ṣūlī returns on the same topic later, after the death of this favourite caliph, with a second story. In al-Rāḍī's profile at the beginning of *Akhbār al-Rāḍī wa-l-Muttaqī*,[108] while praising the caliph's knowledge of poetry and other disciplines, al-Ṣūlī relates that the chamberlain Naṣr al-Qushūrī had put him in charge of the boys for two days a week. He adds that he found the two boys, and especially Abū l-ʿAbbās, intelligent, but lacking in knowledge of the Islamic sciences (*al-ʿulūm*), so he scolded their main teacher Ibn Ghālib and set about instilling in them the love of *ʿilm*, buying for them a good number of books on jurisprudence, poetry, lexicography and chronicles. The two boys competed in buying books, so that each of them came to possess his own library and would study *akhbār* and poetry. At this point al-Ṣūlī felt that the two boys were ready to study *ḥadīth*, so he brought to them the best traditionist of the time, Abū l-Qāsim Ibn Bint Manīʿ, who went to them frequently, while al-Ṣūlī himself would copy out the text of the *ḥadīth* which were transmitted to them. The *muḥaddith* needed now to be rewarded with money, but the mother of the two boys let it be known that she had nothing to give him. Al-Ṣūlī then went to Naṣr the

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103 al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, X, 110–115.
104 al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 144.
105 This may have been ʿAbd Allāh b. Khāqān (d. 312/924–5), who was vizier for part of that and the following year.
106 Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 167–168.
107 al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 28.
108 al-Ṣūlī, *Akhbār al-Rāḍī wa-l-Muttaqī*, 25.

chamberlain, who gave him 400 *dīnār* for two months from his private funds. However, things were not so simple:

> With me [the two boys] studied several books of lexicography, among which was the *Creation of Man* (*khalq al-insān*) by al-Aṣmaʿī.[109] Some servant who had heard this went to al-Muqtadir and his mother and told them: 'Al-Ṣūlī teaches them the names of genitalia!' Al-Muqtadir summoned the chamberlain Naṣr and informed him of this, and Naṣr, who was a very intelligent person, summoned me to enquire about this matter. I gave my reasons, and he said: 'Bring me the book.' I did so, explaining that this was one of the sciences which was indispensable for jurists and judges, who resorted to the lexicographers for such questions. Naṣr took the book and gave it to al-Muqtadir, relating my explanations.[110]

Danger appeared to have been averted. Encouraged by this, al-Ṣūlī thought that he must show his employers how well his pupils were doing. He organized a *majlis* in the apartment of Shaghab, the caliph's mother, where al-Rāḍī recited the *ḥadīth* he had learned in front of a religious scholar, who was impressed by the young prince and praised him as the best scholar in his family, all thanks to al-Ṣūlī. However, some time later al-Ṣūlī received a verbal message from the *qahramāna* Zaydān, saying:

> Tell this man [al-Ṣūlī]: hey, you, we don't want our children to become men of letters, nor religious scholars! Look at their father: there's nothing wrong with him, although he is no scholar! See that you act on this![111]

When Naṣr heard about this, he wept and despaired of the future.[112] Al-Ṣūlī wished to stop teaching the two princes, but Naṣr advised him to do it gradually. Now in disgrace, al-Ṣūlī was still able to secure the gift of a

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[109] The Basran philologist and lexicographer, d. 213/828. Given the outcome of al- Ṣūlī's adventure, it is ironic that al-Aṣmaʿī himself worked at the court of Hārūn al-Rashīd (see B. Lewin, 'al-Aṣmaʿī', *EI*2, I, 717–719).

[110] al-Ṣūlī, *Akhbār al-Rāḍī wa-l-Muttaqī*, 25–26. Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, 48–49, mentions this *khabar* within a list of instances where caliphs are shown ensuring that their children are instructed in history (the passage on books chosen for young Jaʿfar belongs to the same list. See note 73 above). Rosenthal fails, however, to relate the end of this story, which signals a sharp break with tradition.

[111] al-Ṣūlī, *Akhbār al-Rāḍī wa-l-Muttaqī*, 26.

[112] That of the chamberlain weeping at the deeds of al-Muqtadir and his court may be a *topos*. Naṣr is seen elsewhere crying at the fate of the caliphate (al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 137–138). See also the long *khabar* narrated by Ṣāfī al-Ḥuramī in al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, I, 287–291; trans. *Table-Talk* (1921–2), II, 152–156, where he weeps when he sees perfume being wasted by al-Muqtadir and remembers a prediction made by his father when he saw child Jaʿfar being too generous with his grapes. See also Part I, Chapter 2.

precious ringstone, *faṣṣ*, which al-Rāḍī had promised him, in exchange for a *qaṣīda* rhyming with its name.

This later story adds several elements to the earlier one: first, al-Ṣūlī does not refrain from expressing bitterness towards the caliphal family, now that his benefactor is dead. Secondly, the two young princes are confirmed to have been the only members of their family with a passion for scholarship. Thirdly, the chamberlain Naṣr al-Qushūrī is portrayed as the actual organizer of education at court, although this was not included in the standard tasks of a chamberlain.[113] Naṣr does not appear often in collections of scholarly biographies, but the *Fihrist* does mention him once as the addressee of an epistle on juridic matters,[114] and al-Ṣūlī depicts his son Muḥammad, whom he taught, as a lover of knowledge and a bibliophile who left a library worth 2,000 *dīnār*.[115] Al-Ṣūlī, energetically hostile to the 'ignorant' mystic and alleged miracle worker al-Ḥallāj, is even prepared to justify Naṣr for being taken in by the impostor, citing his sectarian loyalties.[116] After all, it was through his duties as chamberlain that Naṣr let al-Ṣūlī earn his first handsome reward from al-Muqtadir, by allowing him to compose a *qaṣīda* and delivering it to the caliph, as we have already seen.

Trashy vs. Highbrow

That al-Muqtadir and his female household were not interested in learning has been made clear by the second of the two stories analysed above. A third account, also related by al-Ṣūlī,[117] illustrates how al-Rāḍī despised the kind of culture favoured by his grandmother Shaghab: one day, al-Ṣūlī says, he was with his pupil, Muḥammad b. al-Muqtadir, who was to become the caliph al-Rāḍī. The young prince was studying some poetry

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[113] See also Part III, Chapters 6 and 8.

[114] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 242.

[115] al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 141.

[116] Naṣr was told that al-Ḥallāj was sunnī, while the *kuttāb* were *rāfiḍa* (i.e. shīʿī) and this was why they were trying to kill him (al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 127).

[117] al-Ṣūlī, *Akhbār al-Rāḍī wa-l-Muttaqī*, 5–6. Besides being discussed in Nadia El Cheikh's reconstruction of the early life of al-Raḍī (El Cheikh, 'To be a Prince'), the story is also mentioned by Joseph Sadan, 'Arabic Tom 'n Jerry Compositions: A Popular Composition on a War between Cats and Mice and a Maqāma on Negotiations and Concluding Peace between a Cat and a Mouse', in *Compilation and Creation in Adab and Luġa: Studies in Memory of Naphtali Kinberg (1948–1997)*, ed. A. Arazi, Joseph Sadan, and David Wasserstein (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 173–205, 192, n. 47, who cites several secondary studies discussing the story, where this episode is taken as the description of books a young prince should not read.

by Bashshār b. Burd (d. *c.* 167/784) and had in front of him books of lexicography and chronicles (*akhbār*). Some of his grandmother's servants entered and, without saying a word, took away all the books that he was using. Al-Ṣūlī, seeing that the prince was upset by this, tried to soothe him, explaining that they (his father and grandmother) had been told that he was looking at things which he should not see, and wanted to check for themselves. This should be considered a good thing, because it would allow them to see that there was nothing wrong in the material al-Rāḍī was studying. After a few hours the servants returned all the books, but before they went al-Rāḍī gave them a message:

> Tell whomever has given you these orders: 'You have seen that these are books of Traditions, jurisprudence, poetry, lexicography and chronicles. They were composed by scholars, people who were given by God insight on these matters, which they employed fruitfully. They are not like those books you are obsessed with, on the marvels of the sea, and the stories of Sindbad, and the cat and the mouse.'

Al-Ṣūlī, fearing that he would be suspected of instigating such a message, prayed the servants not to deliver it. The servants reassured him that they would not dream of it.

That fictional stories of the kind found in the *Arabian Nights* were a passion of the harem of al-Muqtadir, and that such a passion was frowned upon, is confirmed by Ibn al-Nadīm:

> Evening stories (*asmār*) and fables (*khurāfāt*) were very much in demand in the days of the Abbasid caliphs, and especially at the time of al-Muqtadir. It was the bookmen (*warrāqūn*) who put together these lies. Amongst those who invented such stories were a man known as Ibn Dalāl, whose name was Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Dilān, and another known as Ibn al-ʿAṭṭār.[118]

Conclusions

The information illustrated above suggests that during the caliphate of al-Muqtadir the production and dissemination of culture and learning, both at and around the court, functioned according to the standards

[118] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 367. The passage is discussed in Toorawa, *Writerly Culture*, 46–50. See also Muhsin al-Musawi, "Abbāsid Popular Narrative: The Formation of Readership and Cultural Production', *Journal of Arabic Literature* 38 (2007): 261–292, 262, where al-Rāḍī's comment is cited as one of the first signs of the existence of the genre of popular literature.

which had been in place with the caliphs's predecessors. On the other hand, some stories suggest that, within the caliphal family, such standards were upheld not by the caliph himself, as had been the case only one generation previously, nor by his immediate household, but by the chamberlain and some of the tutors. In this respect, there seems to be a stark contrast between the year 302/915, when al-Muqtadir personally chooses his children's tutors according to what his taste had been as a pupil, and his mother's hostility ten years later, when al-Ṣūlī attempts to show off the children's progress. Whether Shaghab's aversion to study was actively shared by the caliph or not, the episodes related by al-Ṣūlī suggests that, at this point, al-Muqtadir was at best uninterested in his children's education.

It is not clear whether al-Muqtadir had continued his education after becoming caliph, but even if this is the case, it is difficult to imagine that it could have been a full-time occupation. When his eldest living son al-Rāḍī entered the *kuttāb*, at five years of age, the caliph was barely twenty and had been in office for several years already, possibly having long since abandoned any personal pursuit of learning. On the other hand, his son would remain a prince until well into his twenties.

All sources show an unequivocal contempt for al-Muqtadir's lack of culture and contrast it with the intellectual qualities of al-Muqtadir's father and son. However, there seems to have been less of an agreement over financial matters relating to culture and those who produced it: how much should scholars be paid? Who deserved pensions and rewards, and how high? Which funds should be cut?

The latter question seems the crucial one. From al-Ṣūlī's description, it seems that, as older teachers died, they were not necessarily replaced. It also seems that the pupils' parents and grandparents were not always willing to pay for such teachers. It must not be forgotten that 312/924–5, when al-Ṣūlī began teaching at court, was, as we have seen, a catastrophic year for the political and financial situation of the caliphate. The caliphal household, seeing its expenses endangered, may have felt that teachers' salaries, and therefore the children's education, were not a priority and could be dispensed with in an effort to cut costs; hence the intervention of those courtiers who adhered to a different set of priorities, intervention which may have become weaker after the death of Naṣr al-Qushūrī in 316/928.[119] In other words, the difference between 302 and 312 may have

[119] See Part II, Chapter 5.

been primarily a financial one. In any case, if this was indeed the rationale, it did not have an impact on the cuts to the court's budget operated by ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā in 315/928.

Whether the caliphate of al-Muqtadir marked the beginning of a cultural decline for Baghdad and Iraq is disputable: al-Rāḍī's disposition to learning, as we have seen, was very different from that of his father. His successor, al-Muttaqī, apparently did not want to be entertained by *nadīm*s. On the other hand al-Ṣūlī, who for this reason had asked to be dismissed from his job at court, found a new patron in the foreigner Bajkam who, despite his poor knowledge of the Arabic language, appreciated the company of lettered men;[120] and of course not many decades later the Buyid family inaugurated a new era of cultural patronage, a 'Renaissance of Islam'.[121] In al-Muqtadir's time, as has been seen, even the uncultured caliph had been enraged by the demeanour of Ḥāmid b. al-ʿAbbās, the uncouth vizier, and had made sure he was swiftly marginalized and replaced with more competent professionals.

What is beyond dispute, however, is that lettered men themselves began during this time to recognize that the court may not be the most advantageous place in which to work and that the reasons for this were largely financial.

[120] al-Ṣūlī, *Akhbār al-Rāḍī wa-l-Muttaqī*, 193–194.

[121] The expression is borrowed from the eponymous monograph by Adam Mez and has become the standard description of this period.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

On 12 Dhū l-Qaʿda 296/13 August 908 a 13-year-old prince named Jaʿfar ascended the throne of the Abbasid empire as the caliph al-Muqtadir. This 18th Abbasid caliph would go down in history as one of the longest reigning, but at the same time most incompetent and damaging rulers of Abbasid history. The 25 years of his reign have, with some justice, been seen as disastrous years, during which the caliphate was pulled deeper and deeper into a crisis from which it was never able to recover and which finally resulted in the political downfall of the Abbasids. The sources blame the repeated failure of the caliph to surmount these problems on the factions and rivalries which festered at the court as a result of the ruler's youth and weakness.

In this book, we have exploited the—mainly narrative—sources available for the caliphate of al-Muqtadir in order to explore the complex dynamics at play at his court and in the city of Baghdad. The picture that emerges is of a handful of powerful, almost larger than life, individuals as the main actors in the politics of the caliphate and as causes for its collapse. Next to the caliph himself, they include his mother Shaghab, supported by her own relatives, the *qahramāna* Umm Mūsā, the military leader Muʾnis al-Khādim and other commanders in the caliphal army, the bureaucrats ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā and Ibn al-Furāt and the chamberlain Naṣr al-Qushūrī. We have tried to elucidate the characters, motives and actions of these key figures and place them in their social and institutional context.

The sources present us with a very personality-centred history. The main players are shown to be responsible for their own misfortunes and the more general problems of the government. It is a lively and vigorous tableau, full of incidents, rivalries and drama. It is at the same time a limited, even claustrophobic, narrative. Events at court dominate the stories and the explanations. Other important factors in the decline of the caliphate are hardly mentioned. We are told, for example, of the shortage of money and its effects on court and army but mostly our authors limit themselves to blaming the caliph and the women of his harem for their extravagance. They show us short-term policies which resulted in what they see as a tragedy but leave out long-term causes prior to al-Muqtadir's time such as the lack of maintenance of irrigation systems, and imperial overstretch which led to the absence of actual caliphal power in large parts of the empire and the consequent withholding of taxes by

local elites. In their discussion of financial problems the sources also pay little attention to elements specific to the reign of al-Muqtadir, such as the devastating attacks by the Qarāmiṭa in the heartland of the empire, the financial mismanagement by some of al-Muqtadir's viziers, and a caliph who had lost a personal relationship with his troops due to his absence from the battlefield and his withdrawal to the palace. The financial and political crisis resulting from these developments became particularly pressing during the second part of al-Muqtadir's reign, interestingly enough when his age could no longer be described as very young.

We must remember, too, that the chroniclers we rely on largely belong to one single professional group, that of *kuttāb*, and may not be expected to provide a balanced account of the motivations of other groups. However, their portrayals of individual characters do indeed illustrate principles, practices and aspirations of the various groups within the political class during a period of transition. They do this by portraying individuals both as themselves and as representative figures for the group to which they belong: the caliphal family, the harem, the courtiers, the military and the bureaucracy. Thus, accounts of several individual lives can be read as paradigms of an entire category but, at the same time, as a sign of strife within the category. For instance, the heads of the secretarial families are pictured as the representatives of a powerful administrative apparatus with a strong *esprit de corps*, entangled in a titanic struggle with other power groups, especially the military. At the same time, they are shown constantly trying to discredit each other, while fighting for influence and support at the court. Similar patterns can be observed within the military and, in perhaps a more fluid manner, amongst scholars and courtiers.

Despite their specific personalities, displaying different talents, manners, and characters, in the political arena these model-figures generally are portrayed as operating with similar strategies and according to similar mechanisms. The most important of these are their endeavours to build up and carefully maintain an extensive network of allies, consisting of relatives, dependants, political friends and connections. The two main factors in the process of network building were kinship and patronage. Patronage could work within categories (among clerks, soldiers, etc.) or between members of different categories. Mutual relations were directed by principles such as gratitude for benefit and shared interests. Many alliances, especially those between members of distinct categories, were based on short-term benefit and did not last long. Some, however, such as that between the bureaucrat ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā and the general Muʾnis, survived most of the internal turmoil of the era. Inevitably, this intense web of ties

and allies also led to conflicting loyalties, and these are expatiated upon by the authors of our sources.

As has been stressed, the sources for the reign of al-Muqtadir give us a very detailed and nuanced picture of Abbasid court life. We get a much fuller portrayal of characters and motivations for this period than we do, for example, from the much more famous reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd (170–93/786–809), where the sources portray the main political actors essentially as one-dimensional individuals playing their parts in the tableau of court life. We are then confronted with the problem of how far we can regard the mechanisms and strategies of the court in the reign of al-Muqtadir as typical of the Abbasid, and indeed other, early Islamic courts. Perhaps the best we can say is that it gives us a vivid snapshot which can, if viewed with caution, suggest how these other courts might have operated. Obviously, there were different individuals at the helm, but their strategies of network building to find support and attain access to the caliph were probably similar to those of their predecessors and successors. Moreover, the institutions and the ceremonial of the court were built up under al-Muqtadir's predecessors and seem to have functioned even in this period of hardships and without a strong leadership. In fact, centuries after his death al-Muqtadir is said to have 'brought back the [old] ways (*rusūm*) of the caliphate', especially for what concerns pomp, luxury and largesse.[1] Thus, the model described in so much detail in the sources for the reign of al-Muqtadir can potentially be seen as emblematic of the functioning of the Abbasid court in general.

One of the main questions we asked ourselves while writing this book was whether the functioning of the formal and informal institutions during al-Muqtadir's reign reflects, and accounts for, the reality of decline—institutional as well as political and financial. In 295/908, the Abbasid caliphate was enjoying a period of political revival. It had firmly recovered from an era of military anarchy (247–56/861–70) when caliphs had been deposed and murdered by the army with astonishing frequency. Al-Muqtadir's immediate predecessors had been able to regain control over the army, discouraging it from further rebellions against the caliphs and directing its forces to reconquer some of the lost provinces and regions of the empire. Thus, Abbasid authority had been restored in Egypt and Syria, while agreements had been reached with Iranian local dynasties about tribute and cooperation. Control was also re-established in the heartland

[1] Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā, *al-Fakhrī*, 352.

of the empire: the caliphs had managed to suppress a threatening and large-scale revolt of slave-peasants in southern Iraq and put a temporary stop to mutinies of discontented Bedouins from the Syrian desert. To mark the end of the military dominance the caliphal throne, since the reign of al-Muʿtaṣim (218–27/833–42) established in the city of Samarra, had returned to Baghdad (279/892), where a new and magnificent palace complex was erected on the eastern shore of the Tigris.[2] Tax administration was controlled by a small group of experienced families and the treasury was abundantly supplied. The court and its capital continued to be the intellectual hub of the entire Islamic world, attracting scholars from all corners of the empire and beyond.

Such was the situation at the time of al-Muqtadir's accession to the throne: it was a period of revival of caliphal power and of high expectations for the future. Yet only 25 years later, at the end of al-Muqtadir's long reign, the situation had changed drastically. Revenues from the distant provinces had dwindled into a small trickle and even revenues from the Sawād, the fertile land between the Euphrates and the Tigris, were only a small fraction of those which had been collected a century before. Baghdad's hinterland was exhausted by many years of campaigns against the Qarāmiṭa and the lack of investments. As a result, the treasury was empty and most important sources of revenue had run dry. The empire was on the verge of bankruptcy. Inflation was high, bread prices raced up, and a disastrous plague had broken out. Riots and army rebellions had become a common sight in the city. Viziers, unable to reverse the tide, had to step down one after the other and military leaders held the real power. Even scholars had slowly begun to look elsewhere for sources of income. And, finally, the physical city of Baghdad also declined, as we shall see in the Appendix. In other words, at the end of al-Muqtadir's reign decline seems to have crept into every aspect of the caliphate.

However, at the same time the institutions and routine underlying the Abbasid court—the vizierate, the sophisticated bureaucratic apparatus, the military, the court ceremonial and its numerous inhabitants and servants—had continued to function, showing far less dramatic signs of decline. We are able to reconstruct this dichotomy thanks to the variety of sources at our disposal and their specific interests: while courtly and state life tend to be portrayed in miscellaneous mirrors, manuals and *adab* works in a way which is almost seamlessly connected to the past in its stability, and

[2] See also Map 3 and Appendix.

reassuring in its tradition, chronicles display changes in their narrative as the reign of al-Muqtadir progresses. As the financial situation worsens and the threat of the Qarāmiṭa gets closer, the streets of Baghdad come to the fore in the chronicles—the narrative goes out of the palace and offers sketches of an angry and panicked population. And while almost all the political communication during al-Muqtadir's long reign had taken place either in the caliphal palace or in the palaces of one of state's highest servants, the final act, the tragedy of al-Muqtadir's assassination, happens outside, on the battlefield. There the caliph is killed in a skirmish with the troops of one of his own generals, and his head is raised upon a spear in triumph.

Over the course of this book, we have constantly referred to al-Muqtadir as a private ruler on a physical as well as a political level: he hardly left the enclosed spaces of his residences, never having contact with his subjects or visiting his domains except through mediators from amongst his entourage of bureaucrats, attendants and generals. In this final scene as it is recorded by the chronicler Miskawayh, it is as if the palace and its power games were shrinking physically, to make space for the city and the powers outside. In this perspective, this is the portrayal of the end, or at least of *an* end.

Not only is the great variety of sources related to the reign of al-Muqtadir essential for our depiction of his court; it also presents the exceptional advantage of having both sources contemporary to this caliph and later ones. Through these we can observe how the portrayal of decline changes with time, gradually growing over the years and becoming, by the times of Miskawayh, a coherent narrative of an ever deteriorating situation, with crucial points such as the 'year of destruction' and the murder of al-Muqtadir leading inexorably to the next key event: when Ibn Rā'iq, the military governor of Wāsiṭ, is made the first *amīr al-umarā'* and becomes the de facto ruler in Baghdad, or, alternatively, when Aḥmad b. Būya occupies the city in 334/945 and the Buyid dynasty replaces the Abbasids as the holders of real power in Iraq. Thus, while the contemporary sources focus on short-term policies, intrigues and day-to-day events, the later sources depict the crisis during al-Muqtadir's reign as one from which the Abbasid caliphate was never able to recover.

For all this teleological narrative of decline it must, however be kept in mind that the caliphate survived until 655–6/1258 and that it even regained a certain degree of power and independence. And finally it is perhaps worth reflecting that periods of crisis and stress often give us much more interesting and perceptive insights into the workings of a political system than periods of complacent prosperity.

APPENDIX: BAGHDAD AT THE TIME OF AL-MUQTADIR[1]

Judith Ahola and Letizia Osti

Apart from a few landmark structures, the medieval city of Baghdad has disappeared. The network of canals which once covered the city and its suburbs has been erased, and the course of the Tigris along which the city was built has changed. The modern city of Baghdad now occupies much of the same land as its medieval foundation, and although limited archaeological investigations were made during the twentieth century, the prospects for further excavations are poor.

The fortified citadel or Round City of Baghdad was situated on the West Bank of the Tigris and, throughout the medieval period, was surrounded by a network of canals, residential quarters, gardens and markets. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries contemporary maps show this same area as having reverted to agricultural land. During the First World War, Iraq was the subject of extensive aerial reconnaissance photography. The photographs were used by specialist units of the Indian and British armies of the time to create detailed maps.[2] These and the earlier maps, together with a number of published works from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries cataloguing archaeological remains in the area of Baghdad,[3] were consulted in the hope of discovering evidence of the major canals that linked the Euphrates to the Tigris at Baghdad and of the secondary canals that crossed the city. Map 1 shows the results of this survey and illustrates the extent to which the evidence of canals near the city has been entirely effaced by flood water.

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[1] The material for this appendix was gathered and analysed with the help of a grant from the British Academy. The project, 'Baghdād, Mapping the Textual Evidence', was directed by Hugh Kennedy and carried out by Judith Ahola and Letizia Osti, with assistance from Michael Kimber. Much of the material was first presented at the meeting of the School of 'Abbāsid Studies in St Andrews in June 2006.

[2] *Tigris Corps Maps 1915–1919*, in particular Sketch Map T[igris] C[orps] 86.(B), dated 26 September 1917 and TC 99.(B), dated 21 June 1918, National Archives, Kew.

[3] Le Strange, *Baghdad during the Abbasid Caliphate*; Muṣṭafā Jawād and Aḥmad Sūsah, *Dalīl kharīṭat Baghdād al-mufaṣṣal fi khiṭaṭ Baghdād qadīman wa-ḥadīthan* (Baghdad: al-Majmaʿ al-ʿIlmī al-ʿIrāqī, 1958).

Map 2 shows the canal evidence in the context of the medieval remains. The position of the Round City is that which Herzfeld first proposed,[4] and which has been followed by both Le Strange and Jawād and Sūsa. Tel Mantiqa is located in an area where Herzfeld reported the presence of 'ruin hills'. Fixed landmarks are the Kāẓimayn region, where a shrine was built in the fourth/tenth century over the tombs of Muḥammad b. Kāẓim and his grandson; the shrine erected over the tomb of Abū Ḥanīfa; and the tomb of Maʿrūf al-Karkhī. The illustration demonstrates the importance of the literary evidence for establishing the topography of the city between the site of al-Muḥawwal and the Tigris.

In addition to the landmarks mentioned above, there are also the remains of a small part of the Dār al-Khilāfa.[5] There is another tomb, that of Shaykh Junayd, which is said to be original, but its precise location cannot be established with certainty.

Our knowledge of the early topography of Baghdad relies heavily on descriptions of the city by authors of the third/ninth to seventh/thirteenth centuries. The early writers summarize the topography of the city as it was laid out by the caliph al-Manṣūr at its foundation and include some incidental contemporary information.[6] The later writers recapitulate these early works, again with some contemporary references.[7]

These careful descriptions of Baghdad focus on the built environment, and suggest that it was a densely populated, thoroughly urbanized area, tightly clustered around al-Manṣūr's citadel on the West Bank, clinging to the Tigris shore on the East. Both Le Strange and Aḥmad Sūsa have created maps using these descriptive sources. However, by combining different historical periods within a single illustration they make it difficult to visualize the dramatic and sometimes devastating changes to the topography and the toponymy of the city. Sūsa, a resident of Baghdad, had the advantage of a close inspection of the ground, as well as access to

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[4] Friedrich Sarre and Ernst Herzfeld, *Archäologische Reise im Euphrat- und Tigris-Gebiet*, 4 vols. (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1911).

[5] Iraq Directorate-General of Antiquities, *Remains of the 'Abbāsid Palace in the Baghdād Citadel* (Baghdad: Maṭbaʿat al-Ḥukūma, 1935).

[6] Aḥmad b. Abī Yaʿqūb b. Wāḍiḥ al-Yaʿqūbī (d. 282/897), *Kitāb al-buldān*, 2nd edn., ed. M. J. de Goeje, Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum, 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1892), 233–269; Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Faqīh (fl. third/ninth century), 'Kitāb al-buldān', in *Collection of Geographical Works by Ibn al-Faqīh, Ibn Faḍlān, Abū Dulāf al-Khazrajī*, ed. Fuat Sezgin (Frankfurt: Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science, 1987), 1–346; Ibn Serapion (d. fourth/tenth century), *Description of Mesopotamia and Baghdād Written about the Year 900 A.D.*, ed. and trans. Guy Le Strange (London: Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1895).

[7] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*.

contemporary archaeology and to the aerial photography of Iraq undertaken during the First World War. The map included in this Appendix is based on Aḥmad Sūsa's map, but has been amended to emphasize topographical features for which dated evidence can be found in our sources.[8]

Two types of textual sources have been used in this study: biographical collections and historical chronicles. The greatest contribution from the first group comes from the biographies in the *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*. These have been supplemented by material from the biographical dictionaries of Ibn Khallikān and Yāqūt, from Ibn al-Jawzī's *Muntaẓam*, and from Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist*.[9]

The second group include Miskawayh's *Tajārib al-umam*, for the years covering the caliphate of al-Muqtadir, ʿArīb's *Continuation* of al-Ṭabarī, and al-Ṣūlī's *Akhbār al-Muqtadir* covering the years 295–315/908–28.[10]

The collected references were assigned to one of five categories—canals and bridges; open spaces (market gardens, troop encampments and cemeteries); mosques; markets; neighbourhoods and quarters. Map 3 displays many of the features identified for the caliphate of al-Muqtadir. Some, marked in red, are discussed below. Canals shown with a broken line are those for which no contemporary references were found.

Canals

Analysis of the references to the names of canals revealed that many of these referred to the quarter named after the canal rather than to the canal itself. For example 'he lived in the Dajjāj Canal [quarter]' (*sakana bi-nahr al-dajjāj*) seems to be a clear reference to the quarter which grew up around the canal of that name, not as evidence that the canal itself was still a functioning waterway. On the other hand, a reference which stated 'his house was on the Mahdī Canal' (*manziluhu ʿalā nahr al-Mahdī*) or 'a grave on the ʿĪsā Canal' (*maqbara ʿalā nahr ʿĪsā*), suggests a house or a grave near an existing canal.[11]

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[8] The maps shown here and all other illustrations are the work of M. W. Kimber, FAAI&S.

[9] Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*; Yāqūt, *Irshād*; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*; Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*.

[10] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*; ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*; al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*.

[11] On Map 3, those canals we have definitely identified as waterways are defined by a solid blue line, those about which we have some doubt, with a broken line.

One of the canal names cited, the Nahr Ṭābiq, is an interesting case. The name is said to predate Baghdad, and more than one source cites the story that a canal was excavated by and named after a Persian called Babak or Tabak.[12] It is usually understood as a name given to the continuation of the Karkhāyā after the Nahr al-Qallā'īn branches off. This explanation is due in the first instance to Le Strange, who edited and translated Ibn Serapion's (d. *c.* fourth/tenth century) description of the rivers of Baghdad. In the Arabic text, however, Ibn Serapion suggests that the Nahr Ṭābiq at the time of his writing is not a waterway but a place through which the Karkhāyā flows on its way to the Nahr ʿĪsā. He follows the Karkhāyā as it passes through a place called Nahr Ṭābiq before it empties into the Nahr ʿĪsā.[13] Le Strange translates this as 'a place where it becomes the Nahr Ṭābiq'.[14] The evidence here suggests that the river remained the Karkhāyā, and the name Nahr Ṭābiq had been attached to this particular piece of land probably before the foundation of Baghdad. Whether the actual canal existed either as an offshoot or a continuation of the Karkhāyā is not attested for this period. Where it is mentioned in the sources it is always as a place where people lived, and never explicitly as a stream or a canal by which they lived. There are in any case few dated references to the Nahr Ṭābiq neighbourhood in the sources until the fourth/tenth century when they increase substantially, suggesting that it only became a significant Muslim neighbourhood at this time.

The 'Ṭāhirid Trench' presents a second problem. Ibn Serapion is the first to mention the Khandaq Ṭāhir. He describes a canal (*nahr*) branching off the Ṣarāt one parasang (*farsakh*) from that canal's own beginning, and travelling through the agricultural estates surrounding the city, cutting through the middle of Umm Jaʿfar's (i.e. Zubayda, wife of Hārūn al-Rashīd) estate and emptying into the Tigris at the port above the Ṭāhirid palace.[15]

He does not give an explanation of how it came by its name. His description is repeated by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī and by Yāqūt,[16] although Yāqūt

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[12] See, for example, al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, iii, 280.

[13] 'The main canal flows from the Ṣāliḥ quarter to a place known as Nahr Ṭābiq, then it empties into the Nahr ʿĪsā' (*yamurru al-nahr al-kabīr min murabbaʿat Ṣāliḥ ilā mawḍūʿ yuʿrafu bi-nahr ṭābiq thumma yaṣubb fī-nahr ʿĪsā*). Ibn Serapion, *Description*, 26 (Arabic). For this book we refer to the original Arabic, cross-referenced in Le Strange's translation which is part of the same volume. We only refer to the translation when we discuss Le Strange's interpretation.

[14] Ibn Serapion, *Description*, 288 (English).

[15] Ibn Serapion, *Description*, 24 (Arabic).

[16] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, I, 111; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, III, 378.

calls it 'Khandaq Ṭāhir b. al-Ḥusayn'. Le Strange, who translated it as the 'Ṭāhirid Trench', called into evidence al-Ṭabarī's account of the first civil war between al-Amīn and al-Maʾmūn and suggested that it was excavated by Ṭāhir b. al-Ḥusayn during his siege of the city in 198/813.

According to al-Ṭabarī, Ṭāhir camped with his troops in the gardens around the Bāb al-Anbār. In order to increase pressure on Baghdad he ordered the impoundment of foodstuffs shipped to Baghdad along the Greater ʿĪsā Canal. He diverted the vessels onto the Ṣarāt at al-Muḥawwal and brought all the supplies to the *khandaq* at Bab al-Anbār.[17] Al-Ṭabarī never uses the phrase 'Khandaq Ṭāhir'. There is no evidence to show that this was other than the classical defensive *barrier* around a troop encampment, and certainly no evidence that this was a canal dug to encircle the city. The word *khandaq* is generally used to mean a defensive enclosure around a troop encampment. It may be made of earth, in which case the excavation of the earth may produce a ditch as well as an embankment, or it may be made of any other material to hand, soil stuffed into goatskins, or brushwood, for example.[18]

Al-Ṭabarī reports that in the year 251/865 the caliph al-Mustaʿīn ordered Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Ṭāhir to build walls around both east and west Baghdad to defend the city from the forces loyal to al-Muʿtazz.[19] He further ordered that he dig *khanādiq* outside the walls, presumably as encampments for the troops who were to defend the wall and its gates. There is no mention of water with regard to these *khanādiq*, apart from the description of Ibn Serapion.

In sources later than Ibn Serapion, the only dated reference to the Khandaq Ṭāhir is in Hilāl al-Ṣābiʾ's *Tuḥfat al-umarāʾ fī taʾrīkh al-wuzarāʾ*. He reports on a disagreement between two drunken men, one an Abbasid and one an ʿAlid. This argument, during which one of them was killed, took place in the Khandaq Ṭāhir. The incident is dated to 350/961.[20] There is no mention of water.

We have not found any other dated references to the Khandaq Ṭāhir, either in the biographies of the *Taʾrīkh Baghdad*, or in any other of the sources we have used. This may be in part because this was merely a wide or deep ditch which occasionally filled with water, or it may

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17 al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, iii, 890.
18 Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kāmil*, VI, 179.
19 al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, iii, 1550–1551.
20 al-Ṣābiʾ, *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 331. The story also occurs in al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, I, 86; trans. *Table-Talk* (1921–2), II, 53.

be because the land through which it passed was largely agricultural, very lightly populated and did not feature in the daily life of the city's inhabitants.

Bridges

Most references to the bridges crossing the Tigris in this period generally refer only to the 'the bridge' (*al-jisr*). One reference mentions the Upper Bridge—presumably one crossing from Shammāsiyya to the Ṭāhirid residence—and one the 'new bridge' (*al-jisr al-jadīd*).[21] The latter reference may refer to a lower bridge, as it speaks of crossing to the East Bank below al-Mukharrim. This may have been the bridge described by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī as crossing from the Wharf of the Water Carriers (Mashraʿat al-Rawāyā) near the Bāb al-Shaʿīr to the area of the Sūq al-Thalāthāʾ, the Tuesday Market.[22] This would put the bridge at one end of the Darb al-Zaʿfarānī, the great street which connected the Bāb al-Shaʿīr with Karkh.

On the East Bank of the Tigris only two bridges are mentioned: the Baradān Bridge (Qanṭarat al-Baradān) over the Nahr al-Mahdī and the Anṣār Bridge (Qanṭarat al-Anṣār) over the Nahr Mūsā. The neighbourhood of the Baradān Bridge had been a popular residential area from the early days of Baghdad's foundation. Khālid al-Barmakī, vizier of Hārūn al-Rashīd (d. 165/781–2), had a residence near the Baradān Gate and the tombs (*maqābir*) of the Barmakids were also located there.[23] The Maqābir al-Barāmika was known and referred to in our period.

The Qanṭarat al-Anṣār, located on the upper reaches of the Nahr Mūsā, is attested for this period as the site of the house of al-Khaṣībī, who became vizier in 313/925.[24] There are also references in the biographies of the *Taʾrīkh Baghdād* for this period to a quarter called Rabaḍ al-Anṣār, but no information as to whether it is related to the bridge.

On the West Bank we have found evidence for only a few of the bridges mentioned in al-Yaʿqūbī's description of the city.

The only bridge over the Ṣarāt is called Qanṭarat al-Ṣarāt, which we have taken to mean the bridge called formerly al-Qanṭara al-Jadīda opposite

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[21] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 39; al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 109.
[22] al-Khaṭīb, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, I, 115.
[23] Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, XIII, 76.
[24] On al-Khaṣībī see also Part II, Chapter 3.

the Basran gate of al-Manṣūr's citadel. The old bridge, al-Qanṭara al-ʿAtīqa, located at the spot where the lesser Ṣarat rejoined the main canal, must also have been in use as, according to Ibn al-Jawzi, in the year 329/940–1 the Euphrates flood brought down both the new and old bridges, and submerged ʿAbbāsiyya Island as well.[25]

The other bridges for which we have references are all on the ʿĪsā Canal: The Qanṭarat al-Yāsiriyya, the Qanṭarat al-Shawk and the Qanṭarat al-Ushnān. Of the others there is no evidence for this period.

It is of particular interest that no references were found mentioning the bridges said to have been built over the excavations outside the western wall of al-Mustaʿīn (r. 248–52/862–6), and indeed although the gates are mentioned before and after this period, the bridges associated with them are only mentioned by Ibn Serapion, and only in connection with the aqueducts which brought water from the Batātāya river into the city.

Gardens and Other Open Spaces

The second topographical feature, and one closely connected to the canals, is made up of the gardens and other open spaces referred to in the sources. We have divided these into three categories: gardens, *muṣallāt* or public assembly grounds, and cemeteries.

Gardens

The Bustān al-Zāhir, often referred to simply as al-Zāhir, was a large area on the East Bank of the Tigris. According to Miskawayh, it was equidistant between the northern and southern quarters of Baghdad.[26] The earliest references to the Bustān al-Zāhir are by Ibn Serapion, al-Ṣūlī, and ʿArīb, our contemporary sources. The garden appears to have belonged to the caliph, who received a good rental income from the gardens, an income curtailed in 318/930 when a compound belonging to Ibn Muqla within the garden burned down and its wood, iron and lead looted.[27] The resultant wreckage caused the caliph to order the public access to be closed.

Prior to this period the garden occupying this spot on the Tigris was called the Bustān Mūsā, or the Bustān Mūsā al-Hādī (r. 169–70/785–6),

[25] Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, XIV, 6–7.
[26] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, II, 405.
[27] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 154.

said to be located opposite the Qarār palace.[28] The last dated reference we could find to the Bustān Mūsā is by al-Ṭabarī, who says that it served as the mustering point for the troops setting off to fight the Zanj in 267/880.[29] At some point between 267/880 and 295/907 the name seems to have changed. At the latter date the vizier al-ʿAbbās b. al-Ḥasan al-Jarjarāʾī (d. 296/908) had a residence on the Tigris described as backing onto the Bustān al-Zāhir.[30]

The Bustān Ḥafṣ was, according to Ibn Serapion, situated between the Ruṣāfa mosque and the palace.[31] Le Strange suggests that the name was applied to some or all of the original palace gardens.[32] The name does not seem to occur outside this period. There is no suggestion as to who Ḥafṣ was.

The Bustān Umm Jaʿfar may refer to the Qaṭīʿat Umm Jaʿfar. This was a large estate on the Tigris shore above what became the Ṭāhirid residence. The term al-Zubaydiyya, which Le Strange suggests is an alternative name for the same area, seems to have been used only for that part of the estate where the palace and its grounds were located—neighbouring the Ṭāhirid compound. It is mentioned by al-Ṣūlī, by ʿArīb and once by al-Ṭabarī. The palace here was restored by al-Muqtadir in 306/918 for the use of his womenfolk.[33]

Bustān Umm Jaʿfar is also used to refer to the land on which the Qarār palace had been built. This was located where the Ṣarāt met the Tigris, a place known as Qarn al-Ṣarāt. The garden is mentioned in the biographies of the *Taʾrīkh Baghdād* as a place of residence for a number of traditionists, beginning with the caliphate of al-Muqtadir. We have not been able to resolve this anomaly with the information so far collected.

The Bustān al-Najmī is attested in the sources for the first time during the caliphate of al-Muqtadir. It was located on the Tigris shore below the Nahr ʿĪsā, possibly between it and the area called al-ʿAqaba. It is twice mentioned, in 317/929 and 320/932, as the place where Hārūn b. Gharīb, the maternal uncle of al-Muqtadir, camped with his men.[34] After this period Bustān al-Najmī is cited more than once in contexts which suggest

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28 al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, iii, 913.
29 al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, iii, 1948.
30 On al-ʿAbbās b. al-Ḥasan see also Part II, Chapter 3. Al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 23.
31 Ibn Serapion, *Description*, 23 (Arabic), 280 (English).
32 Le Strange, *Baghdad during the Abbasid Caliphate*, 189.
33 ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 71.
34 Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 188; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, iii, 167.

that it is at the outermost edge of Baghdad, and that it remained a convenient place for troops to be mustered.

Muṣallāt

Any of the large garden areas of Baghdad could be used as assembly grounds and encampments for troops. Troops were at various times camped on the West Bank at the Bāb al-Kunāsa, in the grounds of the Qaṣr ʿĪsā, at Bāb Ḥarb, and in the Maydān al-Ushnān. On the East Bank the area around the Bāb ʿAmmār was where the black troops (*al-sūdān*) were quartered. The empty areas around the Dār al-Khilāfa (caliphal palace) were also used to house and assemble troops. The official sites for troop assembly, however, were the *muṣallāt*.

Muṣalla is usually translated as 'oratory', a place for prayer or for celebrating great public festivities. They were essentially dedicated public areas where large numbers of people could be accommodated. During this period two different places are referred to, the *muṣallā* outside the Shammāsiyya gate where Muʾnis would muster his troops, and the Muṣallā al-ʿAtīq at the Bāb Khurāsān which al-Muqtadir renovated in 296/908.

Burial Grounds

Much of the open space in and around Baghdad was taken up by cemeteries. The ones for which we have found references are indicated on the map, but here we only discuss two.

One, on the West Bank, illustrates the difficulties encountered in trying to determine the location and history of a particular toponym. The largest cemetery south of the round city was that known as the Shūnīzī or Shūnīziyya. It was located beyond the village called al-Tūtha, said to be a quarter (*maḥalla*) facing the Qanṭarat al-Shawk. We find references to the Shūnīziyya from earliest times, but the Qanṭarat al-Shawk only appears in the record in this period, while al-Tūtha only appears much later. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī retails an anecdote on the authority of 'some scholars of old', stating that the Quraysh cemetery had also been known as Shūnīzī, and that the two cemeteries were linked having been named after two brothers called al-Shūnīzī.[35] We could find no evidence to support this anecdote.

[35] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, I, 121.

The extent of the Shūnīziyya is unknown, although a later burial ground situated between the Qanṭarat al-Shawk and the Qanṭarat al-Ushnān suggests a possible western boundary.[36]

There was a mosque here, known as the Shūnīzī mosque and located on the desert road (Darb al-Ṣaḥrāʾ). It was established before 270/883,[37] and was still being used towards the middle of the fourth/tenth century.[38] There is some evidence to show that al-Shūnīzī had by this time also become a place of residence for the poor.[39]

A number of ṣūfīs were buried here in this period, including al-Junayd in 297/909. However, as mentioned above, there is an existent monument in Baghdad called the tomb of Shaykh Junayd, which unfortunately is not in the place traditionally thought to be that of the Shūnīziyya cemetery. It is located less than 500 metres from the tomb of Maʿrūf al-Karkhī, north of the Nahr ʿĪsā. There are two possible solutions: either the tomb of al-Junayd was moved from the Shūnīzī cemetery to its present location, or the cemetery and its neighbouring features were located much further to the east than we have proposed.

On the East Bank, the cemeteries in northern quarters were by far the most heavily used. The cemeteries at or near the Baradān Bridge comprise the Barmakid cemetery, the Mālikī cemetery, just outside the Baradān Gate, and the Baradān Bridge cemetery itself. There are no attested burials in the Baradān Bridge cemetery after 315/927, although the Baradān Bridge quarter remained a popular residential area well into the fourth/tenth century.[40]

Above Ruṣāfa, the Khayzurān cemetery is said to be the oldest cemetery on the East Side. It was also one of the most popular both before and after this period. It was named after al-Khayzurān, wife of al-Mahdī and mother of Hārūn al-Rashīd, who was buried there, and it was famously the burial place of the jurist Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767), whose tomb is said to be preserved there.

The Ruṣāfa palace was still in use at this time and afterwards, as the residence of the caliph's women, so it is unsurprising that they are

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36 al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, III, 48.

37 al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, V, 189.

38 al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, I, 358. It must have fallen into disuse soon after. Sometime in the first quarter of the fifth/eleventh century it was rebuilt and lived in by a wandering preacher from Shīrāz along with a number of the poor.

39 al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, XIV, 411.

40 al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, I, 282; IV, 308, 346, 410.

buried in or near the palace compound.[41] The daughter and mother of al-Muqtadir are said to have been buried in Ruṣāfa (*bi-l-Ruṣāfa*), while Muʾnis al-Muẓaffar is buried beside it. It seems likely that by this time the burial grounds around the tomb of Abū Ḥanīfa, known as the Khayzurān cemetery, and the family burial ground around and within the palace, had run together.

Only two more cemeteries are named as such on the East Bank. The Maqbarat Bāb al-Bustān appears for the first time during this period. It is not clear precisely where it was, although Le Strange places the gate itself in the eastern wall of the Dār al-Khilāfa. A cemetery at the Bāb al-Mukharrim is also mentioned once.

There are also a number of individuals who are buried within their own residential compounds. Al-Ṭabarī was one of them, buried in his house in Raḥbat Yaʿqūb, on the East Bank in the Mukharrim quarter.[42] According to al-Yaʿqūbī the Raḥbat Yaʿqūb was near Bāb al-Muqayyar which lay on the route of the road between the 'First Bridge' (*al-jisr al-awwal*) and al-Mukharrim.[43]

Mosques

It would be difficult to justify al-Yaʿqūbī's claim that there were 35,000 mosques in Baghdad.[44] During the caliphate of al-Muqtadir we have been able to identify 15 in addition to the congregational mosques in Ruṣāfa, in the Round City and in the Dār al-Khilāfa. Seven of these are on the West Bank.

The Masjid al-Anbāriyyīn first appears in this period, as does the street (*shāriʿ*) al-Anbāriyyīn.[45] Both are in the quarter called al-Anbāriyyīn. Al-Yaʿqūbī states that these were the quarter and the mosque of the secretaries of the *dīwān al-kharāj*. Both the quarter and the mosque seem to be new to this period. The mosque, which was where the grammarian Abū ʿAbd Allāh Nifṭawayh (d. 323/935) taught, was located near Birkat Zalzal, the pond watered by the Razīn canal. This mosque also appears in later biographies. As we mentioned above, there are very few references

[41] See, for example, the death of al-Muʿtaḍid's wife in Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, XII, 413.
[42] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, II, 165.
[43] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, II, 165; IV, 283; al-Yaʿqūbī, *al-Buldān*, 253–254.
[44] al-Yaʿqūbī, *al-Buldān*, 250, 254, quoted in Lassner, *Topography*, 283.
[45] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, II, 232, 246.

in the sources to the Razīn canal. This reference suggests that, although the canal remained, the name was lost.

The *mosque* of the Nahr Ṭābiq quarter is mentioned only once, as the site of a heavily attended *ḥadīth* recital.[46] Given the popularity of the Nahr Ṭābiq quarter as a residential area it seems odd that the mosque, which has no particular name, should be so seldom referenced.

There is a single reference to a mosque by the Mashraʿat al-Rawāyā. This wharf, called by Le Strange and Lassner the Wharf of the Water Jars,[47] may be better translated as the Wharf of the Water Carriers, *rawāyā* being the plural of *rāwiya*, a water carrier. It was near the Bāb al-Shaʿīr, just south of the Ṣarāt outflow,[48] and may have been the site of the lower bridge across the Tigris. The unnamed mosque found here was the site of the tomb of the theologian al-Ashʿarī, who died in 324/936. From the description of his burial we also know that there was a bathhouse near the mosque and, near both, a market through which ran the road leading to the Tigris.[49]

The Masjid al-Sharqiyya, for which one reference was found, was the mosque built near the palace of Waḍḍāḥ on the orders of al-Manṣūr, as a headquarters for his heir al-Mahdī.[50] It was located roughly between the Bāb al-Shaʿīr and the Ṭāq al-Ḥarrānī. The last appointment of a judge to this mosque that we have found was dated at 334/945.[51] The mosque itself remained in use at least until the last quarter of the fourth/tenth century.

On the East Bank we find the same mixture of neighbourhood and personal mosques as on the west. The mosque in the quarter known as Aṣḥāb al-Bārizī may be identical with one referred to as Masjid Abī ʿUbayd Allāh Ibn Balīl. According to al-Dhahabī, Ibn Balīl was also known as al-Bārizī, a term defined as one who sells beads and rings.[52] The mosque was situated on the East Bank and we may hazard a guess that it was in or near Sūq

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[46] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, X, 113.
[47] Le Strange, *Baghdad during the Abbasid Caliphate*, 181; Lassner, *Topography*, 106, 174.
[48] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, VIII, 104; XI, 345.
[49] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, XI, 345.
[50] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, I, 80.
[51] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, I, 313.
[52] Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), *Taʾrīkh al-Islām wa-wafayāt al-mashāhīr wa-l-aʿlām: ḥawādith wa-wafayāt 501–510 H, 511–520 H*, ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1994), 347–348, *s.a.* 513.

al-ʿAṭash.[53] There is a slightly later report of a Darb al-Bāriziyyīn within the Sūq al-ʿAṭash.[54]

The mosque of Abū Bakr Ibn Mujāhid was probably located in or near his residence compound which was in the neighbourhood of Sūq al-ʿAṭash near the Murabbaʿat al-Kharasī.[55] This was at the lower end of the Sūq al-ʿAṭash, and along with it was becoming a popular place of residence for Muslims in this period. At the upper end was the compound of Ibn al-Furāt. In addition to these great houses there are a large number of references to people who are not government officials or connected to the court but who live in or have business in this area.

There are also numerous mentions of the congregational mosques at Ruṣāfa and within the walls of al-Manṣūr's citadel, as well as a single reference to something called *al-masjid al-jāmiʿ bi-bāb al ṭāq*. It occurs in Miskawayh's report of the riots in 307/919, when people took refuge in the mosque from the troops sent by the caliph to restore order.[56] It may be that this simply refers to the Ruṣāfa mosque.

The congregational mosque in the Dār al-Khilāfa is cited only once in this period. The reference details the appointment of ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Faḍl al-Hāshimī in 312/924 as leader of the Friday prayer in the Dār al-Khilāfa.[57]

Markets

The markets mentioned in our examples are most often cited as places of residence or of frequentation—as neighbourhoods—and occasionally as places of burial. There is seldom any reference made to the business carried on in each market, although some are named after workers in specific industries. Markets on the East Bank are the most frequently mentioned in our sources so far. Going from the north to the south, Sūq Yaḥyā was located above Ruṣāfa and opposite the Ṭāhirid compound. One reference cites a sweetmaker plying his wares here,[58] and there are several

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[53] On the somewhat tenuous evidence that the mosque appears in a dream reported by Aḥmad b. Kāmil al-Qāḍī, who was a friend and associate of al-Ṭabarī, see al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*,IV, 356.

[54] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, XI, 322.

[55] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, V, 144.

[56] Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, I, 74.

[57] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, X, 41.

[58] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, XIV, 394.

references to the compound of Ibn al-Jaṣṣāṣ, jeweller and financier, which was located in the Sūq Yaḥyā area.[59]

There are several references also for the Suwayqat Naṣr which was adjacent to the Ruṣāfa mosque and was home to several scholars as well as being a place where traditions were exchanged.

The Sūq or Suwayqat Qaṭūṭā is known from a single reference here,[60] but is mentioned in earlier and later times by both al-Ṭabarī and by al-Samʿānī.[61] It was located near the area called the Duwar where the Barmakids had property, and close to the Nahr al-Mahdī. According to Ibn al-Faqīh, there was at one time a bridge in place between the fief of Umm Jaʿfar and the wharf near the Sūq Qaṭūṭā.[62]

The Sūq al-Silāḥ or weapons market, the Sūq al-Ṣāgha, the goldsmiths' market, and the Sūq al-Ṣaffārīn, the metalworkers market, are part of the Bāb al-Ṭāq commercial quarter. All are mentioned for the first time in this period, and may have been established after the redevelopment of the area in 296/908.[63] There must have been a general market also at the Bāb al-Ṭāq. One reference mentions a clothes peddler who was expelled from the Bāb al-Ṭāq market and moved to the textile market, Sūq al-Bazzāzīn, in Karkh.[64]

The Sūq al-ʿAṭash was located just south of the Nahr Mūsā. It was established by al-Mahdī but only begins to be frequently cited during the caliphate of al-Muqtadir. A small number of traditionists resided here or frequented the area, among them both Ibn Shanabūdh (d. 328/940), the champion of variant readings of the Quran, and Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324/936), the authority on the canonical readings who was responsible for Ibn Shanabūdh's arrest, trial and flogging. It is also said that Ibn al-Furāt had a compound here.

The Sūq al-Thalāthāʾ, located along the shore of the Tigris, may well have pre-dated the foundation of Baghdad. It was a largely Christian neighbourhood and remained so for some time after this period. There was at least one church here, and a Christian cemetery.[65] This *sūq* is

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[59] ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 40.

[60] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, XII, 389.

[61] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, iii, 1603–1604; ʿAbd al-Karīm b. Muḥammad al-Samʿānī (d. 562/1166), *al-Ansāb*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Yaḥyā al-Muʿallimī, 13 vols. (Hayderabad: Maṭbaʿat Majlis Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1962–82), X, 200 and XI, 179.

[62] Ibn al-Faqīh, 'al-Buldān', 80.

[63] al-Ṣūlī, *Mā lam yunshar*, 26 and 31; ʿArīb, *Ṣilat*, 24. See Part I, Chapter 1.

[64] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, XIII, 189.

[65] Mārī b. Sulaymān (d. fifth/twelfth century), *Akhbār fatārikat kursī al-mashriq: li-kitāb al-mijdal lī-ʿAmr b. Mattā*, ed. Enrico Gismondi (Rome: F. De Luigi, 1899), 106–107.

mentioned for the first time in this period as a place where traditionists might meet.

The last of the markets mentioned are the Suq al-Dawābb, where riding animals were sold, and the Sūq al-Shā', the sheep market, both on the eastern edge of the city, near the Nahr Mūsā. Both are mentioned for the first time in this period.

On the West Bank fewer markets are specifically cited. Suwayqat Ghālib, located near the junction of the Karkhāyā and the Nahr al-Dajjāj, is the most frequently mentioned and is the only general market, non-specific as to what was sold there. It was founded in the first half of the third century and was located south of the popular quarter known as Qaṭī'at al-Rabī'. It is mentioned here as a place of residence and of burial. The Sūq al-Bazzāzīn, the cloth market, was presumably located along the Nahr al-Bazzāzīn in Karkh, where there was also a Sūq al-Ṣaffārīn for metalwork. For both these areas the references suggest that commercial activity was still taking place. In the Nahr Ṭābiq quarter we have found one reference to the moneychangers (*al-ṣayārif*) around the Dār al-Batīkh.[66] There are of course other areas which were certainly the site of commercial or industrial activity. The Bāb al-Tibn may still have been an important area for the provision of fodder, the Bāb al-Sha'īr may well have been the area where grain was offloaded and the Aṣḥāb al-Sāj where teak was landed, but we cannot be certain. Otherwise the information on markets is somewhat disappointing, and apart from the concentration of various market and industrial sectors at the Bāb al-Ṭāq there is little in our sources that would enhance our knowledge of trade and commerce. Where we have access to information on occupations, however, we find that nearly twice as many of those whose names include an occupational ascription (*nisba*) lived on the West Bank (150) as lived on the East Bank (79). It may be possible to infer from this that there was greater and more varied commercial activity on the West Bank, but that it is not reflected in the toponymy.

Quarters and Neighbourhoods

There are more references to people living and frequenting the quarters of the West Bank than those of the East. In addition there are more West Bank quarters (70) named in the sources. However, most of them are concentrated either between the Ṣarāt and the 'Īsā canals, with a smaller number

[66] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, VII, 455.

in the neighbourhoods between the Bāb al-Shām and the Bāb Ḥarb. The remaining few are scattered in and around al-Manṣūr's great mosque. On the East Bank, about 50 quarters have been identified, again clustered in two distinct areas. In the north the area bounded by Bāb al-Shammāsiyya, the area around the Bāb al-Baradān, and the area around the Ruṣāfa mosque account for most references; while in the south the areas around Sūq al-ʿAṭash and Murabbaʿat al-Kharasī are beginning to encroach on Sūq al-Thalāthā'. There are few references to the Dār al-Khilāfa.

Many of these references come from the biographies of traditionists who, although they represent a broad range of occupations, include very few people connected to the court or army, and almost none of those engaged in agriculture or market gardening.

The Population

Estimates of the population of Baghdad during the medieval period are contradictory and contentious. The sources offer wildly varying estimates. Hilāl al-Ṣābi' criticizes his predecessors who have 'greatly exaggerated their descriptions of Baghdad without giving us proof and without increasing our knowledge' or offering 'reasonable or dependable arguments'. He cites a lost local history counting the public baths and the residents they presumably served, on the basis of which one would reach an unbevlievable estimate of 96 million.[67] Other sources provided estimates based on the number of bathouses, the quantity of soap consumed in them, or the number of male and female singers.[68]

We cannot offer any new method of estimating the total population of the city, but there is some evidence tracking the growth and decline in the Muslim population of Baghdād over the first 300 years of the city's existence. This information comes from the biographies in the *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*. Figure 1 shows the number of those traditionists allocated to each 25-year period beginning with the foundation of the city and ending in the lifetime of the author. The number of biographies falling into the period of the caliphate of al-Muqtadir is the highest of any 25-year period covered in *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*.

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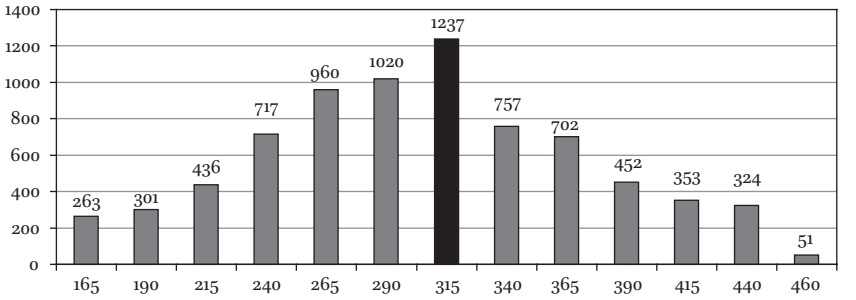
[67] al-Ṣābi', *Rusūm*, 19–23; trans. *Rules and Regulations*, 21–22.

[68] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, I, 130; al-Ṣābi', *Rusūm*, 18–21; trans. *Rules and Regulations*, 20–22.



From Ahola, 'The Community of Scholars'

Figure 1. Number of entries per 25-year period.

Material collected from the *Ta'rīkh Baghdād* shows that the Muslim population of the city was socially diverse. There are 171 distinct occupations recorded for this period, more than in any other. Baghdad also attracted a steady stream of incomers, around a quarter of whom remained in the city; and its resident population—that is to say, those interested in *ḥadīth*, who are the subject of *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*—increased substantially. The city itself was widely populated during this period. Topographical references taken from the biographies are evidence of residence or frequentation in every major quarter.

As illustrated in Map 1, the defensive walls built by al-Mustaʿīn were still in place at the time of al-Muqtadir,[69] and we can infer from the wide residence patterns drawn from the biographies that the infrastructure of the city, the canals, roads and bridges were being maintained. There was new building in the city, largely within the area known as the Dār al-Khilāfa. Four new hospitals were also built, three of which were on the West Bank.[70] In short, Baghdad in the time of Muqtadir appears to be a prosperous and secure city with a large and active *ḥadīth* community.

Nevertheless, life in Baghdad was not free of trouble. Ibn al-Athīr tells us of an epidemic (possibly plague) in Ḥarbiyya in 301/913 which saw families locked into their houses to die. He mentions fires which destroyed property and lives on the West Bank in 303/915, 307/919 and 309/921, and also on the East Bank in 315/926–7. In 316/928 the Tigris flooded with the loss

[69] They fell in 330 when the Ṣarāt flooded.
[70] Lassner, *Topography*, 278. See also Pormann, 'Islamic Hospitals'.

of many lives. And in 307/919 and again in 312/924 there were riots in protest at the high prices charged at a time of food shortages.[71]

Figure 1 demonstrates that at the end of this period there is a dramatic decline in the numbers of traditionists which slows, but is never reversed. The events reported above suggest this decline was not restricted to traditionists, but was the beginning of a long-term decline both in the general population and in the built environment.

Al-Tanūkhī, for example, recorded a conversation in which he was told that a comparison of census figures showed that the population of Baghdad in 345/956 was one tenth of what it had been in the time of al-Muqtadir.[72]

This Appendix does not present a complete picture of Baghdad during the time of al-Muqtadir. Instead we have proposed a topography and toponymy of the city that highlights both long-established features and changes in the physical environment which may be a basis for comparison with both preceding and subsequent periods, serving to enhance our understanding of political and social changes over time.

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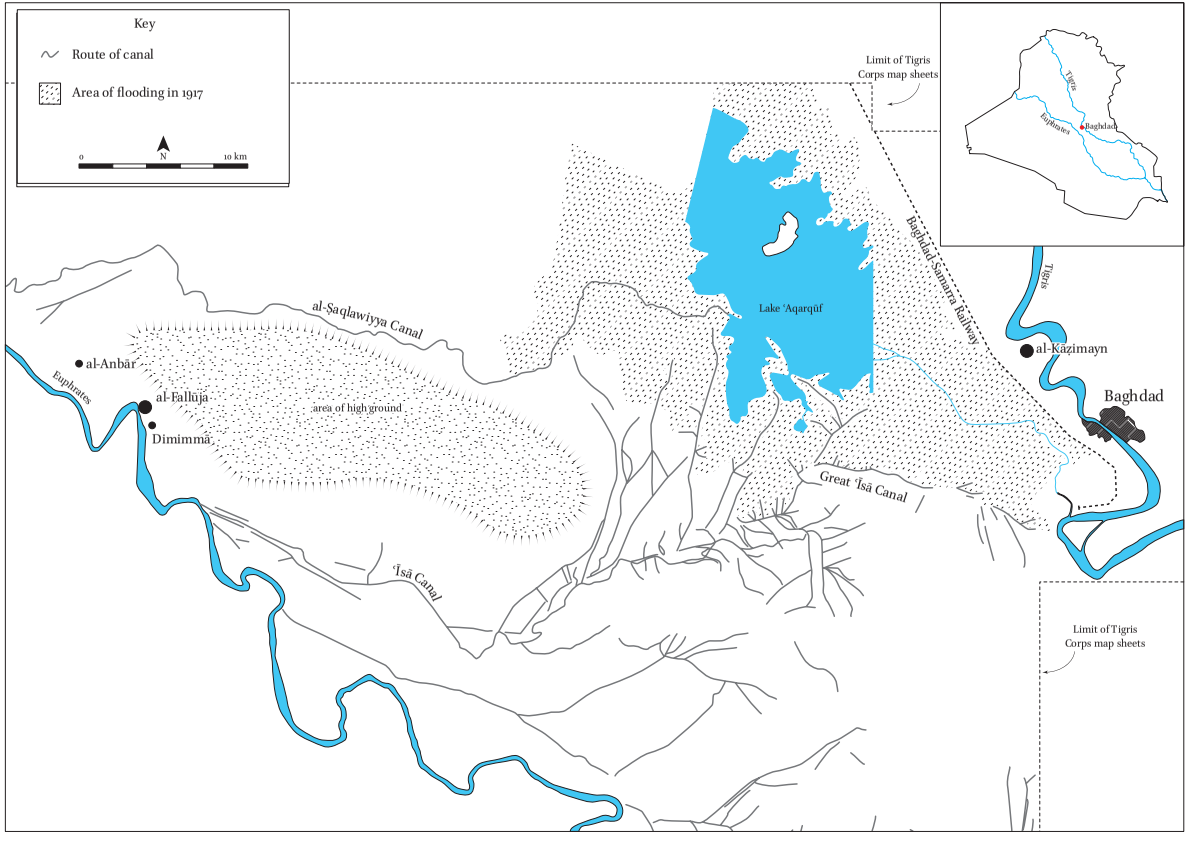
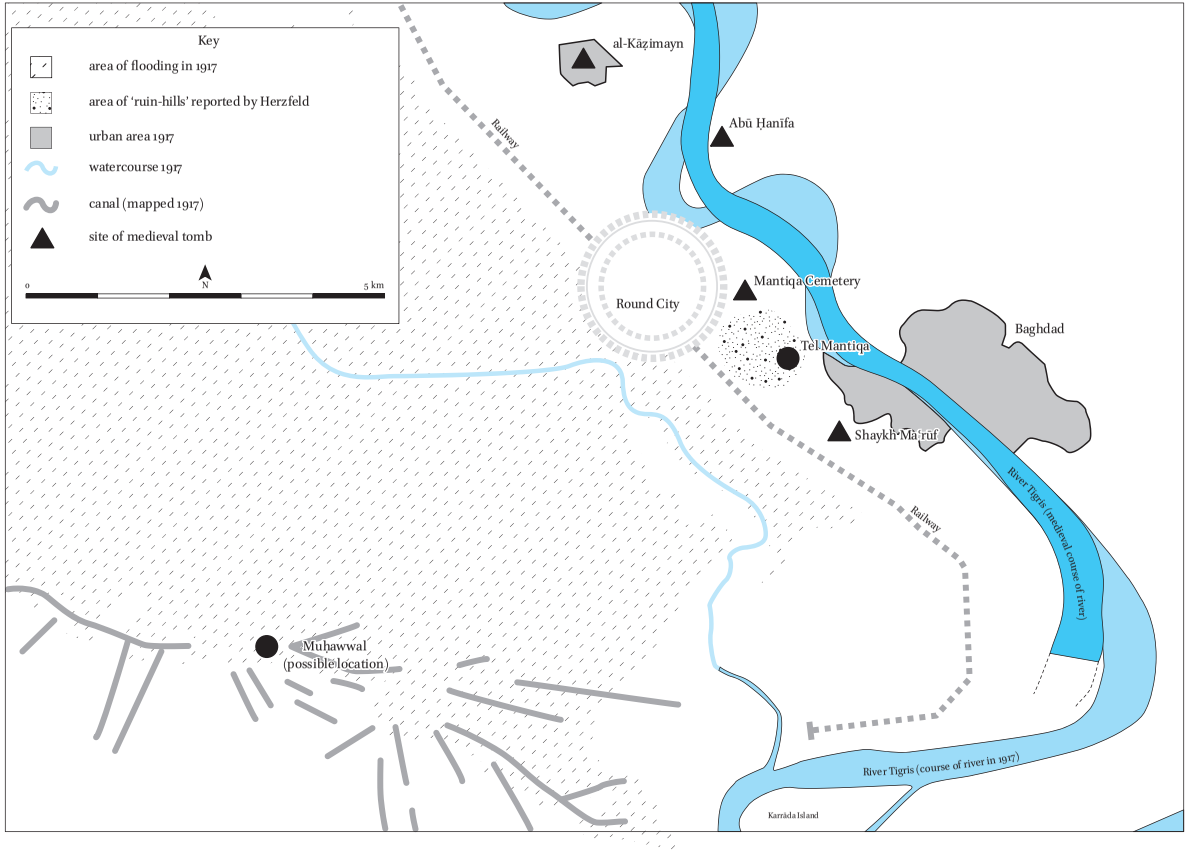
[71] Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, VIII, 85, 96, 121, 129.

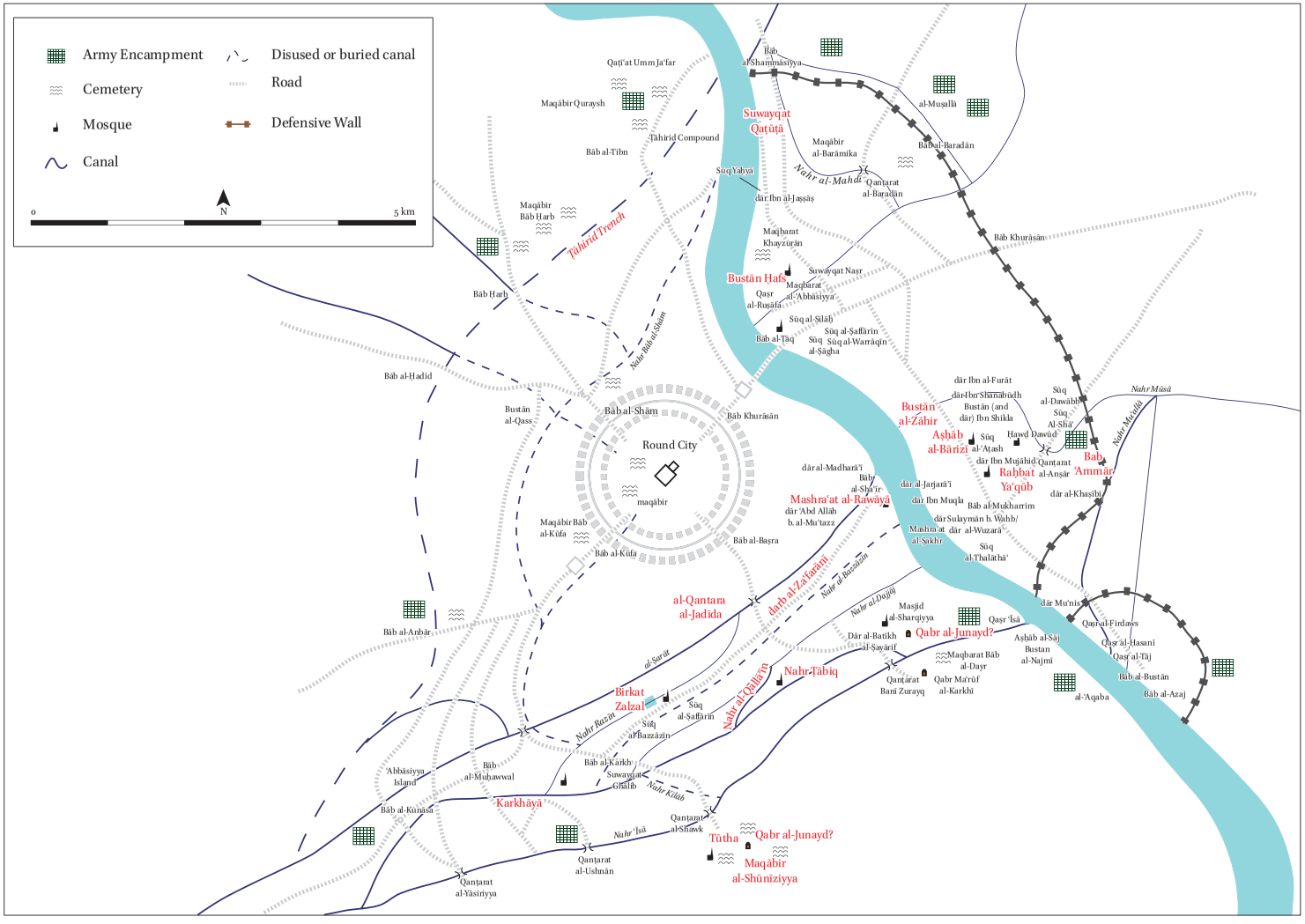
[72] al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, I, 130; trans. *Table-Talk* (1921–2), II, 71.



Map 1. Ancient canals between the Tigris and Euphrates as mapped during the First World War. (Based on 1917 Tigris Corps maps)



Map 2. The Round City, as located by Susah, and the remains of canals mapped in 1917.



Map 3. Baghdad during the reign of al-Muqtadir (295–320).

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