

EDITED BY HANNAH-LENA HAGEMANN
AND ALASDAIR C. GRANT

BETWEEN REBELS
AND RULERS IN
THE EARLY
ISLAMICATE WORLD

POWER, CONTENTION AND IDENTITY



Between Rebels and Rulers in the Early Islamic World

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**Between Rebels and Rulers in
the Early Islamicate World**

Power, Contention and Identity

**Edited by
Hannah-Lena Hagemann
and Alasdair C. Grant**

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Abbreviations

- BSOAS* *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
- EP* *Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd edition*, ed. P. Bearman *et al.* (1960–2005), available at www.brillonline.com
- EF* *Encyclopaedia of Islam, 3rd edition*, ed. K. Fleet *et al.* (2006–), available at www.brillonline.com
- IJMES* *International Journal of Middle East Studies*
- JAOS* *Journal of the American Oriental Society*
- JESHO* *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*
- UW* *Al-‘Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā*

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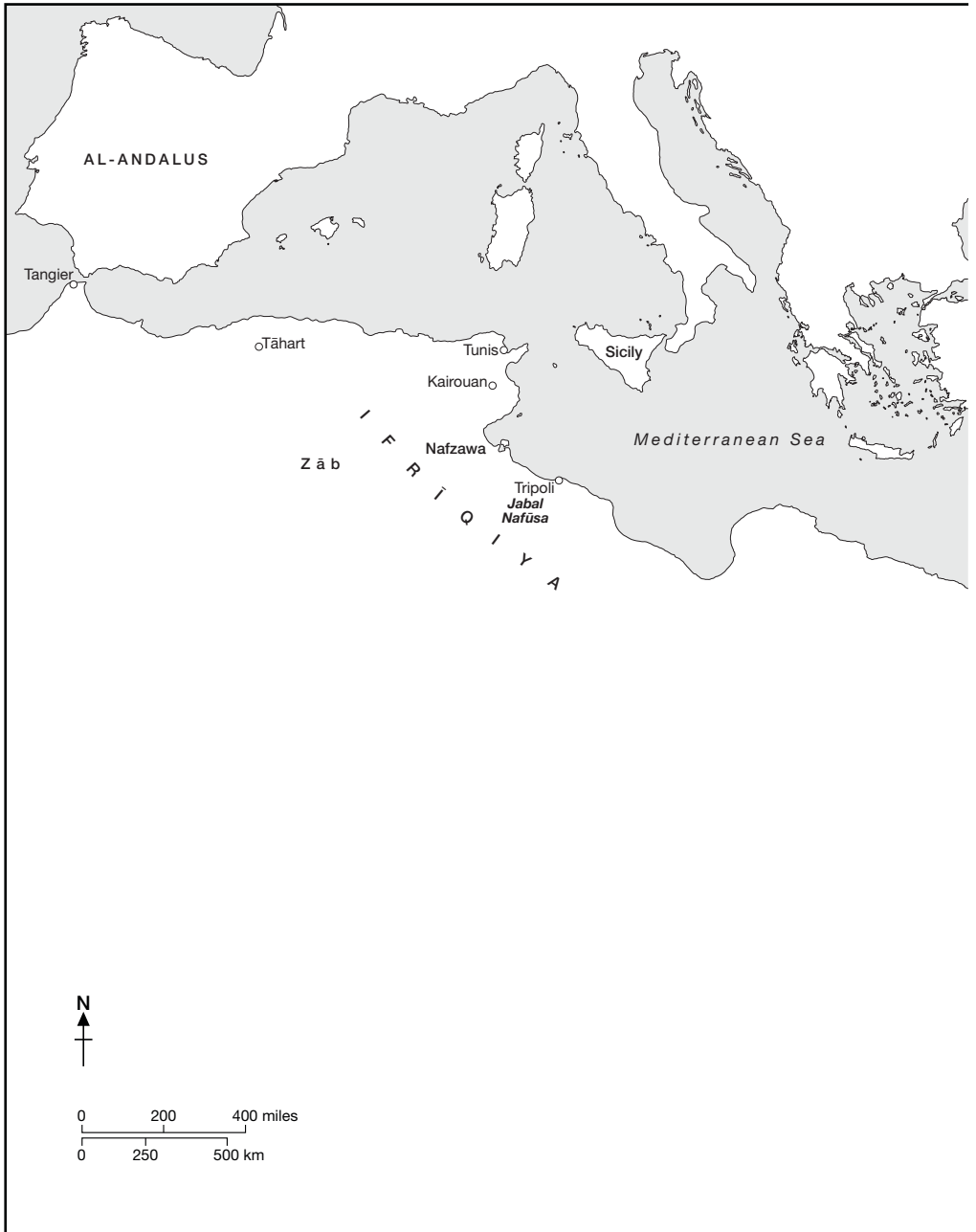
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The early Islamicate world, 7th–9th centuries CE: map of mentioned locations



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Introduction: Approaching Rebellion in the Early Islamicate World*

Hannah-Lena Hagemann and Alasdair C. Grant

Introduction

This volume offers the first dedicated examination of rebellion as a historical phenomenon and literary construct across the early Islamicate world, seeking to re-centre this long-neglected subject as a category in its own right. It combines state-of-the-art discourse analysis with a return to social-historical analysis to offer a holistic approach to the study of contention and the complex ways in which it was narrated and enacted. The scope of this volume is deliberately broad, in order to reflect the complexity and diversity of early Islamicate societies: the fourteen case studies range geographically from North Africa to Central Asia and chronologically from the sixth to tenth centuries.¹ They draw together evidence in Arabic, Syriac and Armenian, and use literary, documentary and material evidence (including coinage and architecture) to illuminate highly diverse contexts and actors. The volume pursues a multidisciplinary approach by bringing together social historians, scholars of religion and literary scholars. Perhaps most importantly, however, this collection transcends traditional confessional boundaries in Islamic Studies by putting into

* The research for this chapter was conducted as part of the Emmy Noether research group ‘Social Contexts of Rebellion in the Early Islamic Period’ (Hamburg), which is funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation; project number 437229168). We are grateful to Christian Sahner, Yannis Stouraitis, and the anonymous reviewer for their insightful comments on an earlier draft. All remaining errors are, of course, our own.

¹ Hijri dates are labelled ‘H’ when they appear alone but unlabelled when combined with CE dates; unlabelled single dates are CE.

conversation scholarship on Sunnī, Shīrī, Ibādī, Khārijite, and non-Muslim historical revolts and narratives of rebellion.

This Introduction will briefly present the main themes, questions and premises underlying and connecting the individual chapters. It will first turn to the issue of terms and definitions as they are applied and understood in this book. The following sections will then discuss past scholarship on rebellion in the Islamicate world and outline the approaches that are adopted in this volume. The Introduction concludes with a discussion of the volume's structure and rationale.

While the case studies explored in the chapters of this volume are bound to specific contexts, they display several common patterns from which we can attempt to sketch some paradigmatic features of rebellion in an early Islamicate context. First, rebellion operated as a normative means of negotiating power and obtaining justice; rather than representing a disruption or breakdown of the socio-political order, it could be a means of improving one's status or righting (perceived) wrongs. Second, the main constituencies of rebellion emerge as local elites – both Muslims and non-Muslims, Arabs and members of pre-conquest societies, separately or together. This volume thus pushes back against the 'othering' of rebels and instead reframes them and their discourses as integral parts of political systems. Third, social ties are revealed as a consistent framework for the mobilisation of rebellious constituencies and the resolution of conflict. The importance of kinship and/or tribal affiliation, oaths of loyalty, or political alliances played a role in many instances of revolt; this is explored at length in several chapters. Fourth, rebellion played an important role in forming and defining confessional communities.

We hope that the paradigms emerging from the chapters as a whole can offer a useful point of comparison both for Islamic historians working on later periods and for historians studying contention in other pre-modern societies, especially scholars interested in mechanisms and expressions of imperial power.

Terms and Definitions

The protagonists of this book are rebels and the rulers against whom they rebelled. All these words appear uncontroversial at first sight, but, like all

categories in scholarship in the humanities, the longer one considers them, the more they seem to dissolve. Our aim in this volume is to be discursive rather than prescriptive; we thus did not impose particular definitions of ‘rebel’, ‘rebellion’, or ‘revolt’ on our contributors, but instead allowed them to consider the possible significances of these terms for their own case studies. That said, in most chapters, ‘rebellion’ generally refers to armed insurrection against a widely accepted public authority. However, the contributions by Hagemann and Beers emphasise that withdrawing from or defying public authorities, without necessarily involving acts of violence, could still make one a rebel in some people’s eyes. If we were to measure the ‘line of best fit’ across these case studies, we could describe ‘rebellion’ as comprising violent or non-violent altercation vis-à-vis the agents of a public authority claiming prerogatives such as hegemony, extraction (tribute, tax, etc.), administration of justice, or delegation of power over and among a given area or group. The actors involved in such altercations explicitly include members of socially dominant groups, that is, religious, political, military and economic elites, both Muslim and non-Muslim.

To reflect this spectrum, we have introduced a further, related term into the title of our book: ‘contention’. This usage follows the sociologist, historian and political scientist Charles Tilly, whose conceptual approach was taken up by the Islamicist Paul Cobb. Cobb’s 2001 book *White Banners*, which investigates Syrian provincial unrest following the ‘Abbāsīd takeover in c.750, presents an important starting point for several chapters in this volume regarding how to approach rebellion in the early Islamic period. Following Tilly, Cobb defined contention as ‘the episodic making of claims that bear on other people’s interests’.² The term ‘contention’ is a more neutral and wider-ranging term that can embrace the full spectrum of oppositional praxis and discourse, from armed insurrection to the mocking of rulers. Furthermore, it does not assume the distinctions between a legitimate public authority and illegitimate malcontents that the vocabulary of rebellion implies – a distinction that we do not believe can be taken for granted in an early Islamicate context.

² Cobb, *White Banners*, 6. For Tilly’s understanding of contention, see the references in *ibid.*, 6–7 notes 7–9.

When we use terms such as ‘rebel’ and ‘rebellion’, we do so because we understand them as reflecting terms, narratives, or implications found in the sources. Early Muslim scholars writing in Arabic employed two main semantic fields when writing about rebellion. The first is connected with physical movement and embraces such root terms as ‘go out against’ (*kharaja ‘alā*), ‘stand’ (*qāma*), ‘leap’ (*wathaba*), ‘throw off’ allegiance (*khala‘a*; also commonly refers to the deposing of an official on the ruler’s part), and ‘pull one’s hand from obedience’ (*kharaja*, *khala‘a* or *naza‘a yadan*). The term *qā‘im*, as derived from the verb ‘to stand’ (*qāma*), also had strong messianic connotations.³ The second semantic field is connected with loyalty and obedience, and thus linked with the institutions of the *bay‘a* (the ‘oath of allegiance/loyalty’) and the *amān* (‘safe-conduct’), both of which feature in several of the chapters (see, e.g., those of Bosanquet, Dar, Kontny-Wendt). It includes such root terms as ‘opposing, disobeying’ (*‘asā*), ‘untwisting a rope’ (and so ‘dissolving a covenant’; *nakatha*), and ‘unravelling’ (a structure, a cord, or a contract/covenant; *naqaḍa*).

There is significant overlap between the two fields at times. One example is the phrase ‘pulling one’s hands from obedience’, discussed by Dar, which references the handclasp that was required for the process of pledging allegiance (giving the *bay‘a*) – pulling one’s hands from obedience translates to withdrawing one’s pledge of loyalty to a leader. The second semantic field in particular highlights the discursive, normative function of rebellion: disobedience and disloyalty were highly charged accusations that served to discredit one’s opponents and were employed by all sides in a conflict. Rebels were portrayed as faithless malcontents, routinely as an etic term and often retrospectively, only once their failure was deemed conclusive. The people labelled as ‘rebels’ in turn justified their resistance by accusing rulers and their agents of having violated their oaths and obligations first.⁴

Modern categories are necessary for interpreting early Islamicate sources on rebellion precisely because the relevant discourses are perspectival constructs. This perspective depended upon the group or cause that a writer sought to

³ Messianic revolts are outside the purview of this volume, but see e.g. Arjomand, ‘Islamic Apocalypticism’; García-Arenal, *Messianism*, ch. 3; Crone, *Nativist Prophets*.

⁴ See, on this last point in particular, Landau-Tasseron, *Religious Foundations*, 26–7.

champion or denigrate. For instance, a historiographer detailing the conquest and government of the Islamic Empire might choose to discredit certain actors who disrupted the imperialist narrative or threatened social stability by depicting them as ‘rebels’ against rightful authority. This is the predominant perspective of many Arabic works that were written at or from the perspective of imperial centres.⁵ On the other hand, an author might embrace the language of rebellion to legitimise claims to authority, such as in the case of the *Zaydī-Shīʿī imāms*.⁶ The study of ‘heresy’ in the European Middle Ages has emphasised that such discourses of ‘othering’ are vital for constructing ideas of legitimate religious belief and practice; this insight works equally well for the study of rebellion, where writing about political malcontents is a vital step in defining political orthodoxy.⁷ Sometimes, casting groups of people as heretics could even serve pragmatic monetary purposes, as Beers notes in his contribution to this volume. This relativism does not mean that scholars should abandon the analytical categories of ‘rebellion’ and ‘rebel’, but it does mean that we should acknowledge that we are to a large degree beholden to the biases and limitations of the narrative sources we employ.

Arguably, the prime test-case for the dangers of uncritically accepting the ideological positions of narrative sources is that of the Khārijites, the early Islamic rebels *par excellence*. The portrayal of Khārijites by early Arabic historiography as intrinsically rebellious, pietist militants has been widely adopted by scholars, and someone labelled a Khārijite is therefore assumed *a fortiori* to be a rebel. This assumption leads to deterministic and potentially circular reasoning. That certain strands of Khārijism were closely associated with violence in the Islamic tradition is shown in the contribution by Baptiste and Gaiser,⁸ which discusses Ibāḍī identity-formation as against a shared Khārijite history. Hagemann’s contribution seeks to break the resulting circular and deterministic chain of reasoning by presenting an episode from Khārijite history that does not conform to received notions of Khārijism, presenting a figure to whom this label is applied but to whom no violence is attributed.

⁵ Excellent examples of this general tendency are studied in Vacca, ‘Rebels’; Noth, ‘Futūḥ-History’.

⁶ See Kontny-Wendt in this volume; Haider, *Shīʿī Islam*, 40.

⁷ Mazel *et al.*, ‘Introduction’; a similar point will be made in Damián Fernández’s forthcoming monograph on revolts and coups in the Visigothic kingdom.

⁸ See on this also Hagemann, *Khārijites*, 89–105 and *passim*.

Next, in describing the socio-political remit of this book, we have chosen the word ‘Islamicate’. This term, still (and perhaps increasingly) popular among historians of the Islamic world, was coined by Marshall Hodgson (1922–68) to refer to all things associated with society and culture under Islamic rule that were not strictly to do with religion.⁹ This socio-cultural situation contrasted with the relative uniformity of the Latin Christian West, where Jews were the only substantial minority group.¹⁰ Among recent critics of the term, Sahner has pointed out that it foregrounds the religion of Islam in an age when Muslims were in most places a minority, to say nothing of the fact that religion was not the only identifier for people and groups in the ‘early Islamic period’, and perhaps not the most important identifier, either.¹¹ We agree with these critiques, but believe that the term ‘Islamicate’ is, among established scholarly categories, the best suited to describing the socio-cultural nexus to which our subject matter belonged, expressed, for instance, in shared features and discourses of rebellion that transcend ethnic, religious, or social boundaries.

This discussion leads naturally to an explanation of the final term in our title, ‘identity’. Acts of contention might be accompanied by discourses that criticise ruling authorities, such as the critique of the Umayyads examined by Marsham, or might imply preference for an alternative authority altogether, such as the Zaydīs studied by Kontny-Wendt. As part of these processes, such groups might engage in identity-building, as in the case of early Shīʿīs.¹² Hurvitz’s contribution makes the case that some groups, such as the Zanj and the Qarāmiṭa, do not appear to have had a distinct collective identity until acts of rebellion brought them together and marked them out as belonging together. These considerations allow us to examine anew the relationship between confessionalism and contention without assuming that confessional labels are in and of themselves explanations.

This point is illustrated particularly well in Baptiste and Gaiser’s chapter, which examines early Ibāḍī identity-formation as a process of distinguishing between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Khārijite rebels – the ‘good’ ones being incorporated

⁹ For a recent critical appraisal of the term with references, see Morrissey, ‘Venture’.

¹⁰ A point raised in Mazel *et al.*, ‘Introduction’.

¹¹ Sahner, ‘What is Islamic History?’

¹² Haider, *Rebel*.

into the Ibādī canon of righteous ancestors and the ‘bad’ ones being rejected as the wicked ‘other’. That the Ibādī tradition increasingly adopted the negative connotations of the label ‘Khārijite’ put forward by (proto-)Sunnīs and (proto-)Shīʿīs and therefore tried to distance Ibādīsm from Khārijism,¹³ highlights the close links between contention and identity formation: articulating protest *against* something or someone can lead to the creation of distinct groups built around support *for* something or someone else.

Previous Scholarship

Despite the high frequency of contention in the early Islamic period, including no fewer than four civil wars in the first two centuries, research on this subject remains surprisingly scarce and limited. There is no synthetic study of the historical phenomenon of rebellion in the Umayyad or ‘Abbāsīd periods, for example,¹⁴ and even major instances of contention remain understudied.¹⁵ Following a number of works published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, scholarly interest in early Islamicate rebellion declined and is yet to experience a revival; several of these early works still constitute the most detailed studies of particular revolts to date, despite the fact that many new sources have since become available.¹⁶ Probably the most recent and comprehensive attempt to return rebellion to the limelight is a 2022 journal special issue,¹⁷ a collection of studies representing the proceedings of a workshop on ‘acts of rebellion’ in Leiden in 2019. It investigates the practice of and scholarly attitudes to rebellion in the eighth and ninth centuries, but while the papers give important insights into specific case studies, only the editors’ introduction undertakes to approach rebellion as a historical and literary phenomenon in

¹³ See also Hoffman, ‘Historical Memory’ (modern focus).

¹⁴ Abou el Fadl, *Rebellion*, focuses on rebellion in Islamic law rather than the historical circumstances of particular revolts. Gündoğdu, ‘Problems’, 459, notes the same problem concerning the history of rebellion in the Ottoman period and the lack of attempts to ‘construct an explanatory template for “rebellions” in the Ottoman context’.

¹⁵ For instance, there exists only one research monograph on an ‘Alid rebel in this period in a European language, and it was only published in 2016 (Elad, *Rebellion*).

¹⁶ For example, the last somewhat comprehensive work on historical Khārijism was published in 1901 (Wellhausen, *Oppositionsparteien*). It also focused on the Umayyad period – research on ‘Abbāsīd-era Khārijism is even more limited. A few survey articles (Veccia Vaglieri, ‘Vicende’; Watt, ‘Significance’; Skladanek, ‘Khārijites, II’, the most recent 1985) and individual case studies (e.g. Skladanek, ‘Elements’; C. Robinson, ‘Al-‘Aṭṭāf’) aside, the subject remains understudied.

¹⁷ Sijpesteijn and Dar, eds, *UW* 30 (2022), 435–602.

a more structured fashion. The introduction's more general questions and observations are an important step forward, but only a point of departure for a more sustained engagement with rebellion and contention.

There are, however, some exceptions to the general trend just described. The recurrent revolts in the Egyptian Delta during the Umayyad and early 'Abbāsīd period, for instance, have attracted considerable attention,¹⁸ as have the events surrounding the so-called 'Abbāsīd Revolution.¹⁹ More recent studies of rebellion have also overwhelmingly focused on historiography,²⁰ which aligns with broader developments within the field of Islamic Studies since the 1980s but has also contributed to the prevailing neglect of the historical phenomenon of rebellion. Finally, there is now increasing interest in rebellion and related phenomena (e.g. banditry) in Ottoman history;²¹ insights gained from these studies can inform our general understanding of early Islamicate rebellion, but they do not help much with the specifics.

Another issue is that much existing scholarship tends to focus on the religious, that is doctrinal/confessional aspects of rebellion.²² This applies especially where the sources give labels to rebellious groups that already imply a religious motivation, particularly in the case of Khārījism and early (pro-) 'Alid/Shī'ī rebels, but also regarding non-Muslim revolts. Too often, historians of Islam have internalised these emphases of the Islamic tradition. It is perhaps no coincidence, either, that these groups are seen in opposition to Sunnī Islam, retrospectively interpreted by Islamicists as the 'orthodoxy' against which all other groups may be measured.²³ As noted, this can distort our understanding of the motives and contexts that characterise individual revolts and lead to the uncritical adoption of our authors' explanatory paradigms and worldviews. As a result of this particular research focus, we frequently encounter rebels as subjects of study in closely related fields such as heresy, apocalypticism/

¹⁸ E.g. Lev, 'Coptic Rebellions'; Dunn, 'Struggle'; Ohta, 'Coptic Church'.

¹⁹ Important references in *EF*, 'Abbāsīd Revolution' (E. Daniel).

²⁰ E.g. Keaney, *Medieval*; Haider, *Rebel*; Hagemann, *Khārījites*; Hagler, *Echoes*.

²¹ E.g. Gündoğdu, 'Problems'; Soyudoğan, 'Tribal Banditry'; Zarinebaf, 'Rebels'.

²² Hurvitz, 'Where Have All the People Gone?' identifies this as a general tendency in Shī'ī Studies beyond the immediate context of rebellion. For similar concerns in other fields, see Arnold, 'Religion'; Cohn, *Lust*.

²³ Sahner, 'What is Islamic History?'; on the attribution of normativity to Sunnī Islam, see also Haider, *Rebel*.

millenarism, or martyrdom, which have been studied more extensively than rebellion in general and its social contexts in particular.²⁴

This is not to say that religion should play no role in the study of rebellion, just that it is not the only or even primary framework in which rebellion might be understood. In this volume, the chapters by Hurvitz, Baptiste and Gaiser, and Chenganakkattil in particular show that (appeals to) religion were important for the mobilisation, definition and symbolic expression of opposition, among other aspects. Nevertheless, social-historical and socio-political approaches to early Islamicate rebellion are still far and few between, with notable exceptions like Cobb's *White Banners* or Majied Robinson's study of the marriage patterns underlying the support networks of the eighth-century rebel 'Abdallāh b. Mu'āwiya (d. c.748–9).²⁵

This volume is intended to respond to some of these desiderata and thus to contribute to a renewal of interest in the subject of rebellion within Islamic Studies. It emphasises a broad and inclusive understanding of this phenomenon that acknowledges the diversity and multivalence of expressions of dissent by early Islamicate actors. Its scope is more ambitious than existing scholarship on rebellion in the field of early Islamic Studies, which is limited to single case studies. Here we have taken inspiration from scholarly endeavours in other fields, which have produced more comprehensive and structured surveys of the historical phenomenon of rebellion before modernity (occasionally including case studies from the Islamicate world).²⁶ In so doing, we hope that this volume will serve not only Islamicists but also historians of rebellion in adjacent fields – and social historians more broadly – who wish to contextualise or compare their own topics of study.

Approaches

The most immediate methodological challenge for the study of rebellion in an early Islamicate context is a familiar one, and by no means unique to this topic: being trapped in narratives with no way out. Most research is necessarily carried out mainly through the reading of narrative texts, which in

²⁴ E.g. Tucker, *Mahdīs*; Heck, 'Eschatological Scripturalism'; Gaiser, *Shurāt Legends*.

²⁵ M. Robinson, 'Qurashi Marriage'.

²⁶ Most importantly, Collins and Manning, eds, *Revolt*; Firnhaber-Baker and Schoenaers, eds, *Medieval Revolt*; Société des historiens médiévistes, eds, *Contester*.

turn curate, pass on, and inherit units and arcs of storytelling. As such, it is sometimes concluded that only two paths are open to the historian: either to accept that some semblance of ‘what actually happened’ can be recovered, or to reject the empiricist project in favour of literary analysis; in this second option, understanding how narratives are constructed and could have been read is more important than seeking realities outside the text.²⁷ This problem is especially acute for the early Islamicate context due to the prominence of narrative sources written centuries later. It is, however, not unique to this context, and scholarship on European medieval revolts has likewise acknowledged the mediating and obscuring qualities of narrative texts.²⁸

This volume attempts to combine multiple approaches. Sometimes, other types of evidence are available that allow the historian to step outside literary narrative – usually coins (in this volume, see the chapters by Haug and Bosanquet) or papyrus documents,²⁹ but also (more rarely) objects, such as buildings, pottery, glassware, or jewellery (in this volume, see Chenganakkattil’s contribution). While these objects come with their own interpretive challenges, the analysis of ‘rebel coins’ in particular can tether people and stories to tangible historical contexts.³⁰ Another way of sidestepping the narrative trap is to focus on the analysis of basic biographical information, or prosopography: Arabic texts contain an exceptional wealth of biographical and prosopographical information, which, when brought together, can demonstrate trends that may not be explicitly remarked upon by the authors of the sources (see Pecorini Goodall’s chapter).³¹

Conceptually, this volume approaches rebellion by bringing it from the margins into the centre of society. The fundamental thesis of Cobb’s *White Banners* is that contention was an internal feature of ‘Abbāsid provincial administration rather than an external challenge to it. For the province of Syria, the former heartland of the Umayyad dynasty, Cobb identified a co-dependency between those who held office locally and those who granted office centrally;

²⁷ For ‘working within’ or rejecting these traditions, see Crone, *Slaves on Horses*; Cook and Crone, *Hagarism*. For more recent narrative criticism, see Haider, *Rebel*; Sahner, ‘What is Islamic History?’.

²⁸ Firnhaber-Baker, ‘Introduction’, 1.

²⁹ An excellent example from the field of early Islamicate administrative history is Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*.

³⁰ E.g. Bernheimer, ‘Revolt’; Gaiser, ‘What Do We Learn’; Wurtzel, ‘Coinage’.

³¹ E.g. M. Robinson, *Marriage*; Ahmed, *Religious Elite*.

this co-dependency meant that give-and-take, mediated through contention, was important for both sides, but revolutionary action that attempted to overthrow the provincial administrative system was in the interests of neither party.³² This model also reflects trends seen in medieval Europe, where one major cause of revolt appears to have been the encroachment of statist power at the expense of subjects.³³ The chapters of this volume suggest that this model can be appropriately exported to other provincial contexts, from Ifrīqīya to Iraq to Armenia and everywhere in between, and that it is broadly valid for the whole period under study. This kind of contention – what might be termed ‘stakeholder revolts’ – seems to have been the dominant form of contention in the early Islamic world, though it is possible that the elite-focused biases of historiography have inflated its prominence.

Cobb’s model also has value in interrogating source problems and biases. Whether texts construct ‘rebels’ to condemn them (see the chapters by P. Grant, Baptiste and Gaiser), to celebrate them (see Kontny-Wendt), or to use them as didactic tools for discussions of good and bad government (see Asi, Marsham), they inevitably leave us with the impression that rebels were or became ‘outsiders’ to the societies against which they rebelled. This image would suggest the existence of a clear binary between ‘state actors’ and ‘non-state’ or ‘anti-state’ actors, something that we cannot assume existed in the early Islamic period as it does in many contemporary nation states.³⁴ Constructed in this way, such a binary might imply that ‘rebels’ were revolutionaries, seeking to damage or even overthrow a governmental or administrative status quo. On the contrary, however, people called ‘rebels’ often appear upon close analysis to be themselves members of what we might term ‘the establishment’, concerned with obtaining a larger slice of the proverbial pie rather than of swapping the pie for another. Implicit in this formulation is that rebellion was part of a political negotiation process. This can be seen in the cases of both Muslims (see Bosanquet, Dar) and non-Muslims (see A. Grant).³⁵ In the field of medieval European history, this point has been made forcefully and much

³² See on this also Huseini, ‘Rebellion’, and the general remarks in Sijpesteijn and Dar, ‘Introduction’, 440–1.

³³ Firnhaber-Baker, ‘Introduction’, 3–4.

³⁴ Paul, ‘Violence’, 2; Firnhaber-Baker, ‘Introduction’, 1.

³⁵ See on this also Sijpesteijn and Dar, ‘Introduction’, 438; Huseini, ‘Rebellion’.

earlier compared to Islamic Studies; as a recent study argues, rebellion was not a disturbance of but instrumental to the process of state-building, a political instrument especially for those who for various reasons could not make themselves be heard through other channels.³⁶

Rebels were therefore not a fundamental ‘other’. Rather, revolts appear as actions driven by sets of contingencies and closely mirroring the tactics and behaviours of counter-insurgents.³⁷ In the case of the Zanj, P. Grant demonstrates that both their tactics and their aims were consistent with the Cobb model of rebellion. This observation is important because the Zanj comprise the only constituency in this volume that might be considered ‘subaltern’, since they were enslaved people. In this case, both rebels and counter-insurgents fought among the canals of southern Iraq in similar ways, while the Zanj are said to have aspired to owning rather than being slaves. This analysis puts paid to any notion that they were fundamentally different from the society against which they rebelled.³⁸ Later examples corroborate this, such as the 1416 revolt that shook the Ottoman Empire: the peasants, nomads and urban poor that took up arms as part of the rebel constituency did not reject Ottoman rule as such, but rather protested harsh economic conditions and exploitation by the landowners and other elites.³⁹ Likewise, late medieval European popular revolts often claimed to be acting for the good of king and country, and the rebels took care to articulate their claims and protests in the language of the official discourse of power.⁴⁰ To adopt a position where rebels are externalised or ‘othered’ is therefore, arguably, to accept uncritically the frameworks of narrative texts that seek to delegitimise certain actors and their aspirations. Understanding rebellious actors as stakeholders is thus a useful approach to problematise polemical literary constructs and sharpen our understanding of pre-modern political culture and state-society interaction.

As noted, the early Islamic world was an environment in which radical socio-political alternatives were rarely considered. There were revolutionary movements, of which the so-called ‘Abbāsīd Revolution is the most salient

³⁶ Challet, ‘Dialogue’, paragraph three and *passim*.

³⁷ Also noted in Sijpesteijn and Dar, ‘Introduction’, 439.

³⁸ See also P. Grant, ‘Entangled Symbols’.

³⁹ Salgirdi, ‘Rebellion’.

⁴⁰ Challet, ‘Dialogue’, paragraphs four and seven.

example, while the nativist messianic revolts of post-Sasanian Iran are arguably another.⁴¹ While the Zanj did not have any kind of revolutionary social programme, the Miaphysite Christians addressed in Beers' chapter came to comprise a community that presented an alternative to imperial Roman rule but did not espouse violent rebellion. Meanwhile, the revolts that occurred in early 'Abbāsīd Armenia (studied in A. Grant's chapter), while enjoying the support of commoners, were initiatives led by noblemen and primarily in their interests. The main goal of these nobles was to maintain or else to establish (greater) control over tributary and taxation systems, and not to abolish them. Furthermore, these rebels seem to have entertained throwing in their lot with the Eastern Roman Empire – merely an alternative imperial system, at various times in control of parts of Armenia, and which would exert its own claims on the region's resources. Time and again, instances of rebellion in the early Islamic world appear as thoroughly conservative in their aspirations and frames of reference.

Features and Trends

Throughout the case studies presented in this volume, several recurring features suggest certain trends in the theory and practice of rebellion. These trends may be grouped into tactical-, procedural- and discourse-based categories.

Tactically, revolts responded to certain circumstantial opportunities (what P. Grant describes as 'affordance') created by humans and the world around them. Perhaps the most obvious of these in an early Islamic context is the opportunity offered by tribal and kinship ties for the forging of constituencies, whether in the case of a fleeing Khārījite (Hagemann) or a rebellious *jund* (Bosanquet).⁴² Kontny-Wendt demonstrates the possibilities of prosopographical research for illuminating the composition of rebel followings; Pecorini Goodall, meanwhile, applies such methods to explain the crisis of opportunities for power and prestige within the Umayyad clan in its last generation in power.

⁴¹ *EF*, 'Abbāsīd Revolution' (E. Daniel); Crone, *Nativist Prophets*.

⁴² Sijpesteijn, 'Closing Ranks', studies another case in which tribal factionalism was a decisive factor in mobilising support for a particular revolt.

Timing was equally important. Haug's chapter makes the case for rebellion on the far northeast reaches of the Islamic conquest area as occurring in response to power vacuums emanating from the imperial centre. There, both Arab settlers and pre-conquest elites alike asserted their power locally; even then, however, such movements appear as attempts to regain some sort of stability through alternative power structures, rather than an attempt to secede. Likewise, the rebel studied in Marsham's chapter utilised the instability of a succession crisis and civil war to voice his discontent with the authorities. Regime change, whether the accession of a new caliph or simply the turnover of regional governors, often introduced moments of weakness that granted local actors greater leverage (see chapters by Dar, P. Grant, Kontny-Wendt, and Hurvitz in addition to Haug). The proximity of strong third parties could also provide affordance to rebels or potential rebels on the premise that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' (see A. Grant; also Haug).⁴³

Rebels could also use familiarity with and control over local landscapes to their advantage. This is particularly seen in Beers' and A. Grant's contributions and may also be applied to the the Ibādī communities, studied in Baptiste and Gaiser's chapter: in these cases, groups literally retreated to inaccessible regions, often mountainous zones and sometimes mountain fortresses, where counter-insurgents would find it difficult to dislodge them. This was (and is) a well-known and widely practised tactic of oppositional groups across time and space, whether these were on the more violent end of the spectrum of contention or tended towards seclusion and evasion.⁴⁴ In the Iraqi Ibādīs who moved to the largely inaccessible interior of Oman, for instance, we have an example of withdrawal from state reach without resorting to overt violence.

As P. Grant notes with reference to the Zanj, however, it is important not to impute to rebel constituencies some kind of unique or special facility with landscape. He emphasises that both the Zanj rebels and the imperial 'Abbāsīd armies sent against them faced similar challenges and took similar

⁴³ For a neighbouring case involving Khazar interactions with the Muslims on the Caucasian Albanian frontier, see Vacca, 'Rebels'.

⁴⁴ An already classic discussion of the importance of inaccessible mountainous landscapes ('shatter zones') in the avoidance of state interference is Scott, *Art*. For the Islamic world, see van Staëvel, ed., 'Sociétés de montagne' (with a focus on religious reformers in such regions); Crone, *Nativist Prophets*; Hagemann, 'Limits'; Huseini, 'Rebellion'. Shaw, 'Bandit Highlands' discusses the connections between landscape and contention in the late antique Roman case.

opportunities in their navigation of the marshy, canal-crossed landscapes of southern Iraq. Previous commentators who have described the Zanj as being tactical experts in working with this challenging landscape have thus internalised a basic idea of the Zanj as fundamentally different from the counter-insurgents, though this is not supported by the available evidence. This point further supports our argument that rebels were more ‘insiders’ than ‘outsiders’ to the societies within and against which they rebelled. Historians should therefore seek to understand landscapes’ range of affordances and barriers to insurgents and counter-insurgents alike, as well as the full breadth of interplay between humans and their environment.

Next, certain points of procedure recur across multiple contexts: what Cobb, again following Tilly, has called ‘repertoires’.⁴⁵ This term acknowledges the complex – often chicken-and-egg – relationship between actions and discourses (including narrative accounts) of rebellion. Notable among such procedural trends is the swearing of an oath of allegiance to a leading figure, called *bay‘a* in Arabic: this social practice, discussed in depth by Marsham,⁴⁶ was common to multiple societies of the (late) antique Near East and is found, for example, in sworn associations pledged to rebels in the Zaydī case (Kontny-Wendt’s chapter). Dar’s chapter illustrates how rebels might seek to legitimate an insurgency against a local governor by claiming that they ‘had not taken their hands from obedience’ to the caliph. Marsham further shows in his contribution to this volume how a rebel against the Umayyads cited abuse of the fisc (*fay‘*) as a means of delegitimising the loyalty claims exerted by the caliph. This is mirrored in the use of discourses of the common good in medieval Europe as a means of criticising figures in positions of authority and justifying contentious actions.⁴⁷

In an early Islamicate context, discourses of good and bad government also turn on the notion of justice. Marsham’s chapter is an important example of this: the process of the Islamic conquests had created a concentration of wealth among an elite, whose accumulation was resented by those excluded from it; this inequality caused revolt, expressed in terms of the purported

⁴⁵ Cobb, *White Banners*, 6–7.

⁴⁶ Marsham, *Rituals*.

⁴⁷ Firnhaber-Baker, ‘Introduction’, 4, 8.

excesses and hedonism of the ruling Umayyad dynasty. In Dar's chapter, the historiographical tradition surrounding a revolt against the governor of Tunis appears sympathetic to the rebels because the governor had appointed an abusive official. In this chapter, as similarly in Bosanquet's, it is possible to see rebellion acting as a kind of violent negotiation between stakeholders in the governmental apparatus in the context of a breakdown of the social contract. Sometimes, individual governors became so notorious for abuses that they appear in the historiography as a sort of 'bogey man', repeatedly prompting contention by their unjust behaviour.⁴⁸

Procedurally, violence was a common but not a necessary feature of rebellion. The contingency of violence is particularly evident in the chapters by Beers, Hagemann, and to some extent also Chenganakkattil: physical withdrawal, mocking a ruler, or suggesting alternative devotional practices, respectively, are all examples of 'contention' and might be understood by public authorities as acts of defiance. The broader issue of whether opposition to the ruler was permissible in an Islamic social order, and what such opposition should or could entail, exactly, is discussed in Asi's contribution, which shows that the memory of important Muslim scholars was tied to their stance on this question.⁴⁹ We would also caution against understanding rebel violence as irrational or arbitrary: while there was certainly an element of gratuitous force to many revolts, Dar, for instance, shows that it was often also carefully calculated and not necessarily a rebellious actor's first choice. The use of violence was a political tactic, an established means of communicating claims and demands that we also find on the side of state power, for example, in forms of public punishment like crucifixion.⁵⁰ Rebel violence as political language is another avenue of research that remains to be explored in an early Islamicate context, perhaps utilising scholarship from other fields that has fruitfully suggested that 'violence should not be considered antagonistic to the social order but, on the contrary, as an integrative force for communities, states, and power more generally'.⁵¹

⁴⁸ See most recently Klasova, 'Tyrant's Legacy', esp. 137–9.

⁴⁹ On this complicated issue, see also Şimşek, 'Portrait'.

⁵⁰ On which, see Marsham, 'Public Execution' and Anthony, *Crucifixion*.

⁵¹ Challet, 'Violence', 280. See also his 'Dialogue'.

One last procedural trend to note is the granting of a safe-conduct (*amān*). The safe-conduct appears to have been one way of ending rebellion in an early Islamicate context; as it in theory allowed the grantee a safe ‘exit ramp’ from rebellion, it is perhaps unsurprising that some individuals appear as serial rebels, repeatedly occurring in – and surviving – different conflicts.⁵² Safe-conducts appear occasionally in this volume, but we have not yet had the opportunity to study the phenomenon in depth; the question of the reintegration of rebels more broadly remains a desideratum for future research.⁵³

The Structure of this Book

The volume follows a thematic structure. Part I examines how early Islamic sources constructed discourses and evaluates scholarly responses to them. Part II discusses rebellion in the context of early Islamicate political culture. Parts III to V focus on how various constituencies engaged in contention to negotiate their positions within the early Islamicate and at times also Eastern Roman imperial systems. They simultaneously address how contentious acts or behaviours could shape or respond to the formation of group identities, and how leaders mobilised constituencies through shared interests and rhetoric (or failed to do so). Part III also pays particular attention to religion as a mobilising force that contributed to identity-making processes among particular constituencies. Part IV addresses the position of the imperial dynasty itself within this system both as competitors for power and as a focus of critique. The final part offers up new perspectives on the study of rebellion by conceptualising the relationship between rebellious actors and their natural and built environment.

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⁵² E.g. Hagemann, ‘Muṭarrif’; Sijpesteijn and Dar, ‘Introduction’, 441–2.

⁵³ An important first step is Herrero Soto, *Perdón*, which studies the institution of the *amān* in eighth- to eleventh-century al-Andalus and devotes a chapter to safe-conducts extended to rebels.

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PART I
**DISCOURSES OF
REBELLION**

1

Islamic Scholarly Giants and (Anti-)Rebellion *Ḥadīths*

Marjan Asi

Introduction

The corpus of Prophetic sayings known as *ḥadīths* has served as a major source of Islamic knowledge from the early Islamic period until today. This *ḥadīth* literature has been approached in western scholarship by various means in the past centuries though arguably through limited methodologies yielding partial results. Consequently, a need for more comprehensive engagement with this body of literature remains, specifically through *isnād-cum-matn* analysis.

This study uses that type of analysis to illustrate the importance of the *ḥadīth* works in understanding ideas in the early Muslim world, in this case regarding the unjust ruler – either to obey or oppose him.¹ While many patterns were found in studying these *ḥadīths*, for example, the time and place in which they proliferate,² this chapter focuses on some of the key figures responsible in their propagation who were and continue to be regarded as major scholars, with the aim of illustrating the importance of applying the *ḥadīth* literature to a better understanding of the ideological leanings of these figures.

¹ Messages supporting opposition to the authorities are described as ‘activist’, while those with a non-oppositional stance are labelled ‘quietist’. Though the terminology is admittedly vague, it is also the mainstream understanding of these political views and therefore employed in this study. For more on this terminology, see Asi, *Obeying*.

² For a full discussion of these findings, see *ibid*.

They are al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778), al-Aʿmash (d. 147–8/764–5), and to a lesser extent Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767).

The following section briefly discusses the method of *ḥadīth* analysis employed here, followed by the role played by the above figures in the spread of these pro- and anti-rebellion *ḥadīths*. These figures are analysed in relation to the political *ḥadīths* they spread as well as the biographical reports on their political characters. The incorporation of the *ḥadīth* genre in understanding the politics of these Islamic scholarly giants, in addition to the more commonly applied biographical literature, contributes to a more accurate understanding of these figures. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the importance of the *ḥadīth* literature in better understanding Islamic political and ideological history.

Isnād-cum-Matn: A Tool for Understanding Islamic Ideas

The *ḥadīths* serve as a primary source of information for Islamic history. However, *ḥadīth* sceptics argue these traditions are transmitted orally and therefore unreliable.³ This position is based on an understanding that *ḥadīths* are analysed through individual variants and not through the different versions and variants that exist in the large body of *ḥadīth* literature.

Prominent early western scholarship engaged with the *ḥadīth* corpus in a limited way, either through partial methodologies or through partial uses of the body of *ḥadīth* in employing the *isnād-cum-matn* method, as seen in the works of G. H. A. Juynboll.⁴ The inaccurate analyses of *ḥadīths* increased scepticism toward the literature, leading to a general neglect until recently, particularly from the time of Harald Motzki, who employed a more refined,

³ E.g. Juynboll, *Studies*; Schacht, *Origins*; Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*; Cook, *Early*; Crone, *Meccan Trade*.

⁴ Juynboll's *Encyclopedia of Canonical Hadith* is littered with partially analysed *ḥadīths*. For instance, he concludes that one *ḥadīth* about a ruler's responsibility to the people has a seeming common link of Shu'ba b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 776). He comes to this conclusion through the analysis of a handful of *ḥadīths* and as a result states that even linking Shu'ba to this *ḥadīth* is 'hazardous' (547). However, a more comprehensive analysis of the *ḥadīth* finds over 100 variants linked to the tradition, sixteen of which are transmitted through Shu'ba. While he is a key figure in the *ḥadīth*'s transmission, the common link is found in the generation before him. For more, see Asi, *Obeying*, 'Section 1.1.1.: Simāk b. Ḥarb as Common Link'.

comprehensive methodology.⁵ This methodology, known as *isnād-cum-matn*, includes all variants of a *ḥadīth* found and compares them with each other in both the chain of transmission (*isnād*) and text of the narration (*matn*). If the *ḥadīth* is well-attested, with dozens of variants analysed, it usually yields consistent results, linking the *ḥadīth* to a few key figures responsible in its spread.⁶ These figures place a *ḥadīth* within a particular location and time, giving historical context to the ideas it propounds.⁷

The *ḥadīths* studied in this chapter regarding the bad or unjust ruler draw from the Sunnī *ḥadīth* works. The debate at the centre of this chapter focuses on arguments of Sunnī political quietism. As a result, only Sunnī sources are utilised. The *ḥadīths* are also well-attested.⁸ The many variants of a *ḥadīth* grouped together are known as a *ḥadīth* bundle. These *ḥadīth* bundles allow for a robust analysis, improving our understanding of the origins and spread of pro- and anti-rebellion ideas in the *ḥadīth* literature as well as the political environment in which they are propagated. This chapter evidences the need to engage with *ḥadīths* as primary sources alongside the biographical literature in order to better understand rebellion in the early Islamic world, and more broadly, Islamic political history.

To Obey or Confront: Scholarly Giants Propagating Political *Ḥadīths*

The central question of whether an unjust Muslim ruler should be obeyed or opposed has been debated in Sunnī political discourse for over a millennium. *Ḥadīths* supporting both political quietism and activism are found throughout the Sunnī *ḥadīth* corpus, though more *ḥadīths* and larger *ḥadīth* bundles are observed in relation to the quietist ideas,⁹ that is, the ruler cannot

⁵ For more on this debate, see Shoemaker, 'In Search'; Görke *et al.*, 'First Century Sources'; Görke and Motzki, 'Tilman Nagels Kritik'.

⁶ For more on consistent and inconsistent *ḥadīths*, see Görke, 'Eschatology', 179–208.

⁷ For a more detailed explanation of *isnād-cum-matn*, see Motzki, 'Dating'.

⁸ The smallest *ḥadīth* bundle analysed includes forty variants, while the largest consists of 114 variants.

⁹ In the study of *ḥadīths* regarding one's relationship with the unjust ruler, four of the six *ḥadīth* bundles analysed emphasise the duty to obey the ruler while the other two allow for opposition. Together, the four quietist bundles include around 400 variants while the two activist ones include ninety-one. The quietist bundles have more than double the number of variants found in the activist bundles. See Asi, *Obeying*.

be opposed. These *ḥadīths* are found spreading mainly from the Iraqī centres of Baṣra and Kūfa in the early to mid-second/eighth century.

The historiographical literature sheds light on why political *ḥadīths* are found spreading overwhelmingly from Iraq. It describes the political environment of second-century Iraq as a highly dynamic, and sometimes chaotic, atmosphere. The mainstream narrative paints Baṣra as a city broadly aligned with the Umayyads while Kūfa is seen as the centre of rebellion to Umayyad rule.¹⁰ This is generally reflected in the *ḥadīths* being spread from these cities. Most quietist messaging is found spreading from Baṣra, while the majority of the activist *ḥadīths* spread from Kūfa. However, prominent opposing views also spread from these cities, illustrating the highly dynamic political discourse emerging from second/eighth-century Iraq.¹¹

Of the many figures connected to these *ḥadīths*, four major Muslim scholars emerge, each propagating a different political position. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī is a key figure found in the spread of a quietist *ḥadīth* forbidding armed opposition against the ruler who prays. Sufyān al-Thawrī propagates two activist *ḥadīths*. One *ḥadīth* encourages verbal opposition to the ruler, while another allows for a more direct approach in which the oppressor or wrongdoer's hand is forcefully placed within the framework of *al-ḥaqq* (see below). Al-A'mash is a third figure who eliminates the political aspects of the *ḥadīths* he transmits, depoliticising *ḥadīths* spreading both quietist and activist messages. Abū Ḥanīfa is also found in one variant of the *ḥadīth* defining the greatest *jihād* as a word of truth to the tyrant.

In the field of Islamic Studies, information on these figures is drawn primarily from the classical biographical literature. However, given the controversial nature of a person's political character, many reports on these figures are confused or outright contradictory. In many cases, as the prominence of a figure increases, so too do the disputes surrounding their political leanings. Identifying the role of these figures in the spread of *ḥadīths* is key to understanding their politics. The following expands on our knowledge of the role of these prominent scholars in spreading messages for or against rebellion through

¹⁰ For more on this, see *ibid.*, 'Chapter 7: Conclusion'.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

the medium of *ḥadīths* and its contribution to the discourse surrounding their political characters.¹²

The selection criteria for the *ḥadīths* consist of two factors. The first regards the proliferation of the traditions in the *ḥadīth* corpus. They are well-attested enough to allow for a thorough analysis. The second is the message of the *ḥadīths*: the quietist *ḥadīths* specifically state that the disliked or unjust ruler cannot be opposed. These *ḥadīths* and the different versions of them are analysed. Some versions do not specify the ruler, as in the case with al-A‘mash discussed below, but fall within the broader *ḥadīth* bundle that does specify the ruler as the one to be obeyed. The activist *ḥadīths* were chosen for their focus on different aspects of opposition, both verbal and physical.¹³

Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī: The Quietist Negotiator

Of the well-attested *ḥadīths* describing one’s relation with the unjust ruler, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī is found in the spread of one *ḥadīth* bundle. The version of the *ḥadīth* transmitted by al-Ḥasan states:

You will have leaders you will approve of and others you will denounce. Whoever denounces such leaders is innocent, and whoever dislikes [that leader] has done a sound thing except for he who acquiesces and follows [that leader]. It was said: O Messenger of Allah, should we not fight them? He said: No, not as long as they pray.¹⁴

This *ḥadīth* forbids physical opposition to the unjust ruler. At first glance, it appears that al-Ḥasan is something of a political activist as the *ḥadīth* allows for verbal opposition to the ruler. However, although al-Ḥasan transmits the

¹² As *isnād-cum-matn* is increasingly employed, these and other prominent early figures will be found in the spread of *ḥadīths* that allow for a better understanding of their ideological inclinations. It is possible that a different understanding of their political characters will emerge if they are connected to the spread of *ḥadīths* with various political messages. To date, this study analyses these figures based on the *ḥadīths* that are confidently connected to them as well as those that are not.

¹³ No well-attested *ḥadīth* was found in the Sunnī corpus specifying that the ruler may be confronted through armed opposition. The *ḥadīth* requiring that the hand of the oppressor be placed within a framework of truth or right (*al-ḥaqq*) is the closest in political messaging allowing for physical opposition. For more, see Asi, *Obeying*, ‘Chapter 6: Take the Oppressor by the Hand’.

¹⁴ Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, Bāb 78 (#2265). For the full analysis of this *ḥadīth* and its spread by al-Ḥasan, see Asi, *Obeying*, ‘Section 2.1.3.: Ḥasan al-Baṣrī as CL’.

ḥadīth with a neutral stance toward verbal confrontation, he is not found in the transmission of the more activist *ḥadīth* encouraging speaking out against said ruler. Here we find a negotiation between the activists and quietists where the bad ruler is allowed to be disliked and spoken out against. However, the ultimate judgment is that the ruler cannot be physically opposed. Al-Ḥasan is allowing space for political confrontation, not with the purpose of opposing the bad rulers, but to ultimately accept them. It is perhaps why he is not found in the transmission of the activist *ḥadīth* about speaking truth to the tyrant, which was also spread in his city of Baṣra, likely during his lifetime.¹⁵ That *ḥadīth* praises verbal confrontation with the bad rulers, while the ‘as long as he prays’ *ḥadīth* disseminated by al-Ḥasan simply permits it as a means of accepting them. While no *ḥadīths* spreading politically activist messages are linked to al-Ḥasan to date, we find this *ḥadīth* with a decidedly anti-rebellion slant being propagated by him.

Reports on al-Ḥasan’s political life are contradictory. In both the classical biographical sources and modern studies on this figure, he is claimed by quietists and activists alike. The following highlights the political reports on al-Ḥasan in both the biographical sources and in more recent scholarship. It concludes with the link between al-Ḥasan of the biographies and al-Ḥasan of the *ḥadīth*.

Abū Saʿīd al-Ḥasan b. Yasār al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) was born in Medina in 21/642 but moved to Baṣra as a young man.¹⁶ There he spent the remainder of his life as a scholar and jurist. Al-Ḥasan built a reputation as one of the most knowledgeable men of his time. His name is found in virtually every field of the Islamic sciences, from *tafsīr* (Qurʾān exegesis) and *ḥadīth* to *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and Islamic mysticism.

Al-Ḥasan is portrayed in the Sunnī sources as one who opposed the authorities when necessary. However, his relationship with the Umayyads appears to have been more conciliatory. As a young man, al-Ḥasan participated in the Islamic campaigns in Iran. He worked in an administrative role, setting up the *dīwān* of taxes under the governor Rabīʿ b. Ziyād (d. 51/671) in

¹⁵ Four sources were found in the *ḥadīth* stating that the greatest jihad is a word of truth to the tyrant. Two of these are Baṣran from the same generation as al-Ḥasan: Abū Ghālib Ḥazzawr al-Baṣrī (d. unknown) and ‘Alī b. Zayd b. Judʿān (d. 131/749). See Asi, *Obeying*.

¹⁶ He moved the year after the Battle of Ṣiffīn (657), making him sixteen years old at the time of his move. *EP*, ‘Ḥasan al-Baṣrī’ (H. Ritter).

46/666 under the first Umayyad ruler, Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān (d. 60/680). He also served as a *qādī* in Baṣra under 'Umar II (r. 717–20).¹⁷

Notably, al-Ḥasan lived through many uprisings against the Umayyads and participated in none of them. Even when these uprisings reached his city, and even family, he was still tellingly absent. When the caliphal rival of the Umayyads, 'Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr (d. 73/692), succeeded in taking control of Baṣra during the Second *Fitna* (c.680–92), al-Ḥasan only reminded him of the duties of the ruler. Al-Ḥasan's own brother took part in the uprising of Muḥammad b. al-Ash'ath (d. 85/704) in 700–4, but al-Ḥasan stayed away. And with the uprising of Yazīd b. al-Muhallab (d. 102/720) in 720, al-Ḥasan is found in the service of the Umayyads. When Yazīd was defeated, al-Ḥasan participated in a delegation to the rebel's brothers to dissuade them from further revolt. He is even believed to have succeeded in this.¹⁸

His only opposition to the rulers recorded by the classical biographers was against al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf (d. 95/714), the Umayyad governor of Iraq, for his move of the Iraqi seat of power from Baṣra to Wāsiṭ.¹⁹ His harsh language against al-Ḥajjāj is recorded on a few occasions, but most notably regarding the administrative move to Wāsiṭ. Van Ess suggests this was because al-Ḥasan worked for the Umayyads and a move in administration between cities would also affect administration officials.²⁰

It has been argued that al-Ḥasan did participate in the revolt of Ibn al-Ash'ath (d. c.85/704). Mourad wrote perhaps the most thorough modern work on al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī with the purpose of dispelling some of the myths surrounding the legendary figure. In it, he defends the political activism of al-Ḥasan based mainly on three non-Sunnī sources – al-Ya'qūbī (d. after 295/908), Ibn al-Nadīm (d. c.388/998) and Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 626/1229). While Mourad does mention these figures may have a bias in connecting al-Ḥasan to the revolt of Ibn al-Ash'ath,²¹ he maintains that the Sunnī sources'

¹⁷ Van Ess, *Theology and Society*, II:47.

¹⁸ Ibid., II:47–8.

¹⁹ Ritter describes al-Ḥasan as having 'criticized fearlessly the rulers of his time, the governors of Irak', but only gives the criticism of al-Ḥajjāj's move to Wāsiṭ as an example. *EP*, 'Ḥasan al-Baṣrī' (H. Ritter).

²⁰ Van Ess, *Theology and Society*, II:48.

²¹ Mourad concedes that al-Ya'qūbī was a Shī'ī and Ibn al-Nadīm Mu'tazilī. For more information on Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī's Khārijite tendencies, see 'Yāqūt Al-Ḥamawī', *Complete Dictionary*, XIV:546–8.

insistence on al-Ḥasan's quietism makes him more likely to have been an activist. He concludes, 'it is the particularly awkward whitewashing of Ḥasan orchestrated by proto-Sunni and Sunni sources that leaves little doubt that he was involved, especially in the uprising of Ibn al-Ash'ath'.²²

This argument is not enough to establish al-Ḥasan's political views. While it is reasonable to state that many different schools of thought try to claim al-Ḥasan as one of their own, it cannot be reasoned that the Sunni claim for his quietism makes him a political activist. In fact, other revered figures in the Sunni sources are described as having taken part in the same revolt. Many of the *qurrā'* of Baṣra in the time of Ibn al-Ash'ath are viewed as respectable figures in the classical Sunni sources, despite their large numbers participating in the revolt of Ibn al-Ash'ath.²³ Had al-Ḥasan taken part in this revolt, why would his name not be included with such highly praised figures as Sa'īd b. Jubayr (d. 93/712), Dharr b. 'Abdallāh (d. 111/729), 'Awn b. 'Abdallāh (d. c.110–20/728–38), Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. 104/722), al-Sha'bī (d. 103–10/721–8) and Muṭarrif b. 'Abdallāh (d. c.95/714)? Sa'īd b. Jubayr is arguably more revered in the Sunni sources than al-Ḥasan and is explicitly mentioned as fighting for Ibn al-Ash'ath and being killed for it.²⁴ He is even described as a martyr.²⁵ If the Sunni sources were so biased as to conspire an image of a quietist al-Ḥasan, why not do the same for the more prominent Sa'īd b. Jubayr?

Mourad also argues that al-Ḥasan went into hiding from al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf as a result of his participation in the revolt. However, al-Ḥasan is reported to have fled from al-Ḥajjāj for other matters.²⁶ Mourad dismisses Sunni claims of al-Ḥasan's praise of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib or his criticism of al-Ḥajjāj as legitimate reasons that incurred al-Ḥajjāj's anger.²⁷ However, many other scholars fled from the reputedly brutal governor for saying far

²² Mourad, *Early Islam*, 49–50.

²³ Five hundred *qurrā'* reportedly participated in the revolt. Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, 287.

²⁴ Klasova remarks on the significant impact of Ibn Jubayr's political activism on later Sunni classical (and modern) sources: 'The drama revolving around a revered Companion [sic] Sa'īd b. Jubayr, who rebelled against his ruler and who remains a hero of the pious Sunnis even today, as we have seen with al-Qaraḍāwī's book, is for Ibn 'Asākir more important than the whole rebellion of Ibn al-Ash'ath.' Klasova, 'Empire', 169–70.

²⁵ Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 'Bāb Sa'īd b. Jubayr' (#2317), VI:273; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 'Bāb Sa'īd b. Jubayr' (#484), IV:321; al-Suyūṭī, *Is'āf*, 'Bāb ḥarf al-sīn', 12.

²⁶ Namely, in criticising the founding of Wāsiṭ. *EP*, 'Ḥasan al-Baṣrī' (H. Ritter).

²⁷ Mourad, *Early Islam*, 48–9.

less than al-Ḥasan. Finally, al-Ḥasan's quietism is also reflected in his lack of participation in other revolts, such as the counter-caliphate of Ibn al-Zubayr (d. 692), which is presented as a legitimate Islamic government in (proto-) Sunnī sources.²⁸

The above information available about al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī illustrates that he was a man of knowledge and high standing in his time. For this reason, many schools of thought have tried to claim him for themselves and place him within their various ideological camps, leading to much contradictory information surrounding this figure. Most sources portray him as an extraordinarily eloquent figure who spoke against rulers when he felt it necessary to do so. However, with regard to physical opposition, only a few Shī'ī or Mu'tazilī sources link him to the revolt of Ibn al-Ash'ath. They do not even attempt to link him to the numerous other revolts in his lifetime. It can therefore be concluded that he was not physically confrontational with those in power.

Rather, he appears to have taken a cautious approach and worked within the power structures of his time, placing him on middle ground between the total political quietism of unquestioning obedience to the ruler and total political activism allowing for violent overthrow of the government. Al-Ḥasan likely stayed away from activist elements within his surroundings. His role within Umayyad administration during the rule of Mu'āwiya I and 'Umar II is not particularly surprising as neither ruler is perceived in Sunnī Muslim sources as illegitimate or oppressive.²⁹ This is perhaps why his participation in their administrations is mentioned by his biographers. His strong stance against the moving of the seat of Iraqi power does suggest he was an official within the Umayyad administration of that time as well. Additionally, al-Ḥasan's reported participation in the quelling of the Muhallabid revolt further supports his working with the Umayyads.

The above *ḥadīth* as transmitted by al-Ḥasan reflects this image of him very well. In it, vocal opposition to the ruler is allowed. However, armed opposition

²⁸ Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 'Bāb 'Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr' (#1377). For more on the fluctuations of Ibn al-Zubayr's legitimacy within classical Islamic scholarship, see Lynch, 'Sons'.

²⁹ 'Umar II is viewed as a pious, legitimate ruler and working for him did not require justification. Al-Ḥasan's participation in Mu'āwiya I's administration may have caused some hesitation. Unease with this association might explain the (likely mistaken) attribution to al-Ḥasan of the not well-attested *ḥadīth*, 'If you see Mu'āwiya on the pulpit then kill him!' (van Ess, *Theology and Society*, II:326).

against him is forbidden as long as he upholds the prayer. Al-Ḥasan is recorded as having spoken out against a governor of his time, though he never took a violent stand against anyone. This may create the appearance of a pro-Umayyad figure. But neither did al-Ḥasan oppose the short rule of Ibn al-Zubayr over Baṣra, making it more likely that he was a supporter of consolidated power in general rather than a particular dynasty or group. The political messaging of the *ḥadīth* al-Ḥasan transmits coupled with the biographical reports on his character reflects a general quietism, no matter who was in control. But as he lived all his adult life under Umayyad rule, his quietism worked mostly to their benefit.

Al-A‘mash: Politics by Omission

Al-A‘mash is a key figure in the spread of a quietist *ḥadīth* bundle calling on people to give the bad ruler his right, that is, to obey him. His version of the *ḥadīth* states,

There will be selfishness and things that you will dislike. They said, ‘Oh Messenger of God, what do you command us to do?’ He said, ‘Give the right that is due upon you and ask God for that [right] due to you.’³⁰

There are three main versions of this *ḥadīth* linked to three different figures. The two other common links in this bundle explicitly require that the people obey the bad ruler.³¹ These common links are also from the same city and same generation as, or before, al-A‘mash.³² However, the version transmitted by al-A‘mash omits the ruler entirely from the narration. Rather, his version describes in vague terms things that will be disliked from selfish people who

³⁰ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ‘Bāb ‘alāmāt al-nubuwwa fī-l-Isām’ (#3603). For more, see Asi, *Obeying*, ‘Section 1.1.3.: Al-A‘mash as CL’.

³¹ One version states: ‘A man asked, “Oh Messenger of God! If we have rulers who ask us for their rights but do not give us our rights, what should we do?” He said, “Listen and obey them for on them is their responsibility and on you your responsibility.”’ Al-Bukhārī, *Tārīkh*, ‘Bāb Muḥammad b. Abī Isrā‘īl’ (#77). A second version states, “‘The Children of Israel were guided by prophets. Whenever a prophet died, another would take his place. There will be no prophet after me, but there will be caliphs who will increase in number.’” They asked, “What do you order us to do?” He said, “Give *bay‘a* to the first [caliph], for he was first. Give them their right, for God will ask them about that which they took.”’ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ‘Bāb mā dhukira ‘an Banī Isrā‘īl’ (#3455).

³² Simāk b. Ḥarb is a Kūfan figure who died in 123/741, twenty-four years before al-A‘mash, likely giving his version of the *ḥadīth* precedence. The other common link, Furāt al-Qazzāz, is not given a death date but is from the same generation as al-A‘mash.

must nevertheless be given their right. This would indicate a kind of covert activism within the quietist tradition. While the other versions of the *ḥadīth* relay a strong message of political quietism and obedience to those in power, this version does not. This lack of political messaging in the *ḥadīth* indicates a political neutrality by al-A‘mash, who simply wishes to relay a message of patience with the negative traits of people.

Al-A‘mash’s name is found in two other *ḥadīth* bundles regarding the unjust ruler. In a *ḥadīth* about obeying the ruler or else dying a *jābīlī* (pre-Islamic, ‘ignorant’) death, he is found in a single-strand narration that cannot be linked to him but only to a figure after him.³³ As a result, not much can be said about his role in the spread of this *ḥadīth*. However, he is found in three variants in the activist *ḥadīth* bundle about staying the oppressor’s hand. Interestingly, all three variants omit the oppressor as the one to be taken by the hand. This version simply states one must ‘bend them in conformity to *al-ḥaqq* (right, truth, justice)’.³⁴ Similarly to the other *ḥadīth* bundle, the subject is omitted. While this may be a stylistic characteristic of al-A‘mash’s narrations, it is curious that the most political aspects of the political *ḥadīths* relayed by him (either in mentioning the bad ruler or the oppressor) are the features absent from the *ḥadīths*.

In short, al-A‘mash is a key transmitter of a politically quietist *ḥadīth* bundle as well as a minor transmitter in a politically activist one. However, the versions of the *ḥadīths* transmitted by him do not include the elements that make them political. In both cases, we find him transmitting depoliticised *ḥadīths* – both the quietist and the activist.

The biographical literature describes the prominence of this figure in depth. Sulaymān b. Mihrān al-A‘mash (d. 148/765) lived in Kūfa from the mid-first/seventh to mid-second/eighth century and is categorised as an Iraqi figure. He is considered among the *qurrā’*, or Qur’ān reciters of Kūfa. It was there that he established himself as one of the foremost authorities of *ḥadīth*.

³³ Abū Bakr b. ‘Ayyāsh is possibly responsible for the dissemination of that version of the *ḥadīth*, which simply states that to die without an *imām* is dying a *jābīlī* death. However, al-A‘mash cannot with any certainty be linked to the *ḥadīth*. In any case, the *ḥadīth* simply relays the message of the importance of leadership, not the quietism of obeying any (bad) ruler.

³⁴ ‘No, by Him in Whose Hand my soul resides, not until you bend them in conformity with *al-ḥaqq*.’ Al-Ṭabarānī, *Mu‘jam*, ‘Bāb (ba’d) al-ikhtilāf ‘an al-A‘mash fī ḥadīth ‘Abdallāh’ (#10264).

Classical sources number his Prophetic narrations in the thousands.³⁵ As such, books have been written on him.³⁶ Even in modern scholarship, al-A‘mash is regarded as an imposing figure. Juynboll describes him as ‘the most outstanding among the common links of hadith’.³⁷ Haider states that he is one of only three transmitters to be claimed by later Sunnīs, Zaydis and Imāmīs.³⁸ It is therefore safe to say that al-A‘mash played a large role within the scholarly circles of second-century Kūfa.

The classical reports regarding the life of this figure reflect this aversion to politics characteristic of *ḥadīths* found to be transmitted by al-A‘mash. He was reportedly opposed to the renowned Kūfan Zayd b. ‘Alī (d. 122/740) for revolting from that unstable city with its unsteady inhabitants.³⁹ He is also described as a follower of the quietist Shī‘ī *imāms* Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 114/732) and Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765),⁴⁰ the latter being the strongest voice in favour of a quietist approach, whether in or outside of Kūfa. He is also reported in dialogues that illustrate a politically cautious, quietist belief in relation to the rulers of his day.⁴¹ But he also reportedly supported al-Nafs al-Zakiyya’s (d. 145/762) uprising from Medina in 762,⁴² spoke out against the rulers when forced to interact with them,⁴³ and hinted at support for Zayd had he had a larger following.⁴⁴ These differing accounts of al-A‘mash do not allow for his categorisation as either an activist or quietist.

³⁵ Al-Dhahabī states that he narrated 1300 *ḥadīths*: *Tārikh*, ‘Bāb Sulaymān b. Mihrān al-A‘mash al-imām Abū Muḥammad al-Asadī mawlāhum al-Kāhili al-Kūfi al-ḥāfiẓ al-muqri’ (#200), III:883. Other sources put the figure as high as 4000 *ḥadīths*: Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, ‘Bāb al-A‘mash’ (#2530), VI:332.

³⁶ Ibn Tūlūn, *al-Zabr*; al-Ḍubayb, *al-A‘mash*.

³⁷ *EF*, ‘al-A‘mash’ (G. H. A. Juynboll).

³⁸ Haider, *Origins*, 190.

³⁹ Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, ‘Bāb amara Zayd b. ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn’, III:239. On the revolt of Zayd’s son Yahyā, see Kontny-Wendt’s chapter in this volume.

⁴⁰ Al-Dhahabī, *Tārikh* (#200), III:883.

⁴¹ When the Umayyad caliph al-Walid II was killed in 743 and some of Kūfa’s tribal leaders asked al-A‘mash for counsel, he reportedly advised them to stay away from any political activity. ‘A person who is conscious of his Sustainer’s presence withholds his hand (from action), keeps quiet, and stays at home.’ Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, IX:184.

⁴² Kohlberg, ‘A‘maš, Abū Moḥammad’, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

⁴³ Al-Dhahabī, *Tārikh* (#200), III:883.

⁴⁴ Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, III:239.

While the biographical literature on this figure shows al-A‘mash to be a pragmatist who nonetheless had his conflictual encounters with the authorities, the *ḥadīths* illustrate an individual who actively sought to stay out of political issues. As he was a very prominent scholar in his own time, it would probably have been impossible to keep entirely apolitical, having lived in one of the most politically dynamic cities within a highly volatile period. It is perhaps because of this somewhat chaotic environment that al-A‘mash is linked to Prophetic narrations lacking the feature of relations with the authorities.

Sufyān al-Thawrī: Overt Activist

Sufyān al-Thawrī is the only key figure found in the spread of two *ḥadīth* bundles – both with activist messaging. He also features in the transmission of the *ḥadīth* about ‘giving them their right’. He transmits that *ḥadīth* from al-A‘mash, who was found to spread a version of the ‘give the ruler their right’ *ḥadīth* without mentioning the ruler. In effect, al-A‘mash depoliticises the quietist messaging of the *ḥadīth* and Sufyān transmits this version from him.

Sufyān is one of the most prolific transmitters of *ḥadīths* in this study regarding unjust rulers, and the *ḥadīths* he transmits relay the same consistent political messaging. These *ḥadīths* require taking the hand of the oppressor (i.e. restraining him) and speaking truth to the tyrant. The first *ḥadīth* states,

The Messenger of Allāh said: ‘When the Children of Israel became deficient in religious commitment, a man would see his brother committing sin and would tell him not to do it, but the next day, what he had seen him do did not prevent him from eating or drinking or mixing with him. So God struck their hearts against each other, and He revealed Qur’ān concerning them and said: “Those among the Children of Israel who disbelieved were cursed by the tongue of David and Jesus, son of Mary” until he reached “And had they believed in God, and in the Prophet and in what has been revealed to him, never would they have taken them [the disbelievers] as their friends; but many of them are disobedient.” [al-Mā’ida:78–81] The Messenger of Allāh was reclined and sat up and said: ‘No, not until they take the hand of the *ẓālim* [oppressor] and force him to follow the right way.’⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Ibn Māja, *Sunan* (#4006).

The second *ḥadīth* states, ‘A man asked the Prophet, while putting his leg in the stirrup, “Which *jihād* is greatest?” He said, “A word of truth spoken before a tyrannical sultan.”’⁴⁶

These results evidence Sufyān as a thoroughly activist figure, which is also reflected in the literature about him. The classical sources mostly depict him as a man at odds with the authorities who spent much of his life as a fugitive.⁴⁷ As these negative interactions mostly took place under ‘Abbāsīd rule, there is little doubt that Sufyān was not friendly with that dynasty.⁴⁸ This is further reinforced by other *ḥadīth* studies, where Sufyān is a prominent transmitter of two anti-‘Abbāsīd *ḥadīths* (perhaps even the inventor of one of them).⁴⁹

Some modern scholarship argues that Sufyān was pro-Umayyad.⁵⁰ This is mostly an *ex silentio* argument, based on the scarcity of information in the classical sources on his relations with the Umayyads. Judd states that his move from Kūfa to Baṣra to study under some pro-Umayyad scholars evidences his support for the dynasty. However, if that were the case, Sufyān should be found transmitting politically quietist *ḥadīth* bundles spreading from Baṣra. Instead, Sufyān takes a prominent role in the spread of every *ḥadīth* bundle regarding the bad ruler found to be transmitting from Kūfa. These bundles are narrated to him by other Kūfans in his earlier years, years spent under Umayyad rule.⁵¹ The political messaging of these *ḥadīths* was likely directed at the Umayyads. In contrast, Sufyān is found in none of the quietist *ḥadīth* bundles disseminated

⁴⁶ Al-Nasā’ī, *Sunan*, ‘Bāb faḍl min takallum bi-l ḥaqq ‘inda imām jā’ir’ (#7786).

⁴⁷ He reportedly died while in hiding from the authorities. Al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar*, ‘Bāb Sufyān b. Sa’īd b. Masrūq al-Thawrī’ (#82), VII:229.

⁴⁸ Van Ess, *Theology and Society*, I:254–62.

⁴⁹ Juynboll argues that Sufyān is the likely inventor of one anti-Baghdad (and therefore anti-‘Abbāsīd) tradition which portrays the builders of Baghdad and their future rulers in a negative light. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, 206–213. Because Juynboll is not as comprehensive in his *isnād-cum-matn* analysis, it is possible that Sufyān was not the originator of the *ḥadīth*. However, he remains a key figure in its transmission. Görke similarly finds transmissions of an activist eschatological *ḥadīth* supporting the revolt of al-Nafs al-Zakiyya (which is therefore anti-‘Abbāsīd) by both Sufyān and al-A’mash. Görke, ‘Eschatology’, 179–209.

⁵⁰ He is described as having a ‘political, pro-Umayyad commitment’. EF, ‘Sufyān al-Thawrī’ (H. P. Raddatz).

⁵¹ All three teachers of Sufyān from the *ḥadīth* bundles he is found transmitting are Kūfan. Two are linked to the activist *ḥadīths* and are labelled by biographers as having questionable ties: ‘Alqama b. Marthad (d. 120/738) is described as an early Murji’ite, while ‘Alī b. Badhīma (d. 133–6/751–3) is described as having Shī’i tendencies. Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Jāmi’*, ‘Bāb ‘Alqama b. Marthad al-Ḥaḍramī’ (#68183) and ‘Bāb ‘Alī b. Badhīma al-Ḥarrānī’ (#69225).

from Baṣra. This negates the view of him as being conciliatory with the authorities, whether Umayyad or ‘Abbāsīd. It also illustrates his lack of neutrality in the transmission of political *ḥadīths*, evidencing his intentional transmission of activist narrations – most likely while the Umayyads were still in power.

In short, the mainstream view of Sufyān al-Thawrī based on the classical sources shows a figure who was oppositional to those in power and spent much of his life on the run from them. Some modern scholarship has attempted to challenge this view, making him a more complex figure who was pro-Umayyad and anti-‘Abbāsīd. The results of this study contradict this view. Sufyān may have studied in Baṣra with some pro-Umayyad scholars. However, he is not found narrating Baṣran *ḥadīths* that would legitimise their rule and require obedience to them. On the contrary, he spreads *ḥadīths* praising opposition to the rulers. This is further supported by the biographical literature in which Sufyān al-Thawrī is portrayed as a figure in opposition with the authorities, whether Umayyad or ‘Abbāsīd.

Abū Ḥanīfa: Quietist-Made-Activist?

Abū Ḥanīfa’s name is found in only one variant of the *ḥadīths* analysed regarding the ruler, the activist *ḥadīth* praising speaking truth to the tyrant.⁵² As this is the only variant linked to him, it does not provide clear evidence for his political views. However, coupled with the reports found in the biographical sources as well as the discussions surrounding him in the research literature, a better picture of Abū Ḥanīfa’s political views emerges.

The classical sources portray Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) variously in an activist and in a quietist light. He is cited as having allowed for physical confrontation if there is a strong support base.⁵³ He is also reported to have financially and verbally supported two major revolts in his lifetime – that of Zayd b. ‘Alī and al-Nafs al-Zakiyya. Reports of his quietism, however, are also found in the classical sources.⁵⁴

⁵² ‘The greatest *jihād* is a word of truth to a tyrannical sultan.’ Abū Ḥanīfa, *Musnad*, ‘Bāb Kitāb al-Adab’ (#25). For more, see Asi, *Obeying*, ‘Section 5.1.3: Key Figure ‘Alqama b. Marthad’.

⁵³ Al-Rāzī al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370/981), *Abkām*, II:34.17, taken from Cook, *Commanding Right*, 7. For more on his political views, see Tsafir, ‘Abu Ḥanīfa’, 14–15.

⁵⁴ Abū Ḥanīfa (attrib.), *al-Fiqh al-abyat*, ed. al-Kawtharī, in a collection of which the first item is Abū Ḥanīfa (attrib.), *al-‘Ālim wa-l-muta‘allim*. Taken from Cook, *Commanding Right*, 8. Cook

Recent scholarship has attempted to reconcile these conflicting images of Abū Ḥanīfa, arguing that his students may in fact be responsible for the quietist views attributed to him. For instance, a work ascribed to Abū Ḥanīfa, the *Fiqh al-abṣat*, argues against armed opposition to the ruler. However, as van Ess has shown, the *Fiqh al-abṣat* ‘in its basic core goes back to Abū Muṭīʿ al-Balkhī (d. 199/814)’.⁵⁵ A second prominent student of Abū Ḥanīfa, Abū Yūsuf (d. 183/798), was also a known quietist.⁵⁶

The *ḥadīths* analysed in this study reinforce this position. Abū Ḥanīfa is found in the transmission of an activist *ḥadīth* in one of the earliest *ḥadīth* works available.⁵⁷ Perhaps more telling, he is not found in any transmissions of the quietist *ḥadīths*. He was a prolific scholar who lived in a time and place where quietist narrations were spreading. Had he supported politically quietist views, it should be expected that he also transmitted *ḥadīths* supporting those views. His absence from the quietist *ḥadīth* bundles suggests that he was not a quietist.

In short, the primary sources highlight Abū Ḥanīfa’s activism through reports of his direct support of armed opposition to the rulers as well as through statements allowing for pragmatic physical confrontation. Recent findings also show that much of the quietism attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa may have originated with his students. The *ḥadīth* works support this analysis as Abū Ḥanīfa is absent from the quietist *ḥadīths* yet included in an activist transmission. The Abū Ḥanīfa of the *ḥadīth* presents a clearer political messaging than the Abū Ḥanīfa of the legal and historical works. As more analysis into the *ḥadīths* spread by this figure takes place, the conflictual accounts of Abū Ḥanīfa may be corrected. For now, these various facets tentatively indicate that Abū Ḥanīfa stood on the activist side of the political spectrum.

describes his encounters with a particularly zealous dissident in detail, concluding that Abū Ḥanīfa ‘was not a political activist’.

⁵⁵ Van Ess, *Theology and Society*, I:221.

⁵⁶ He states that following the ruler in good would earn one reward, while following him in bad would place the blame on the ruler. Abū Yūsuf, *Kharāj*, no. 17, taken from Crone, *Medieval*, 138. A similar argument is found in Şimşek, *Portrait*.

⁵⁷ Abū Ḥanīfa, *Musnad*, ‘Bāb Kitāb al-Adab’ (#25).

Conclusion

The above four scholars of the early Muslim world were highly reputed figures in their own time. The centuries only increased their reputations to the extent that they have become legendary. As with all legendary figures, much analysis has been dedicated to their personages, resulting in oftentimes contradictory information. This especially holds true of their political characters, as the subject of scholarly relations with the authorities was and remains a sensitive issue in Islamic history.⁵⁸

The results of this study's *ḥadīth* analyses illustrate the importance of the *ḥadīth* works in contributing to a better understanding of the political character of several early figures. This source of information is an important addition to the current discourse which otherwise relies almost entirely on the sometimes confused and often contradictory biographical sources. By utilising the database of information in the *ḥadīth* genre, we can begin to identify those responsible in the spread of certain ideas, including the particular wording transmitted by them and its implications. As a result, we find the *ḥadīth* corpus serves as a more concrete source of information regarding these figures and their ideological leanings than the more commonly utilised biographical literature.

As a more comprehensive approach to the *ḥadīth* corpus is increasingly employed, more information will be available with regards to the spread of ideas by these and other prominent figures, allowing for a better understanding of their personages. This extends to the overall political environment of the early Islamic world. Answering the questions of where and when these and other political *ḥadīths* flourish provides insight into the question of why they found such keen audiences in those locales and what that means for the wider political landscape.

⁵⁸ This sensitivity is reflected in the fixation of the biographical literature with this topic: 'The single most prominent theme in the biographical material is confrontation with the authorities.' Cook, *Commanding*, 50.

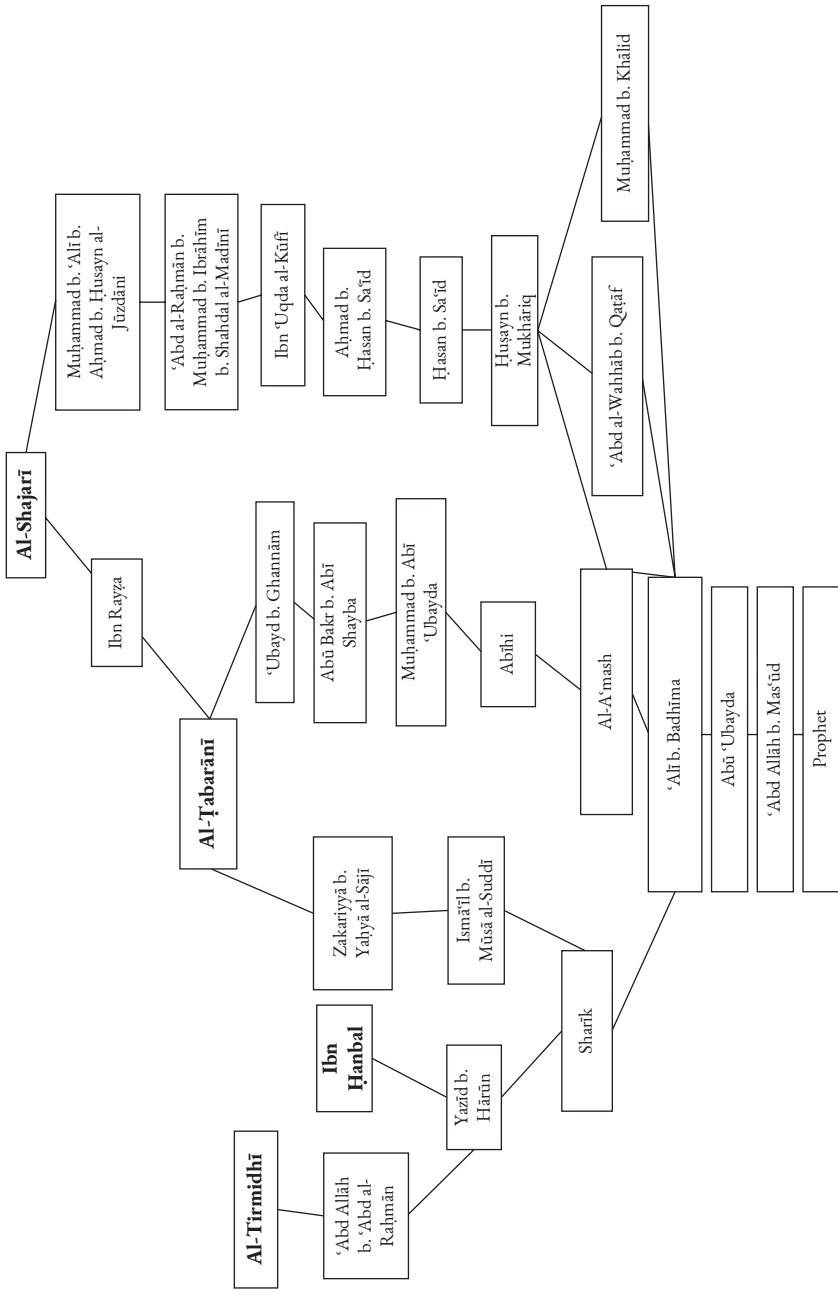


Figure 1.5 "Take oppressor by the hand" *ḥadīth* with al-A'mash as minor transmitter

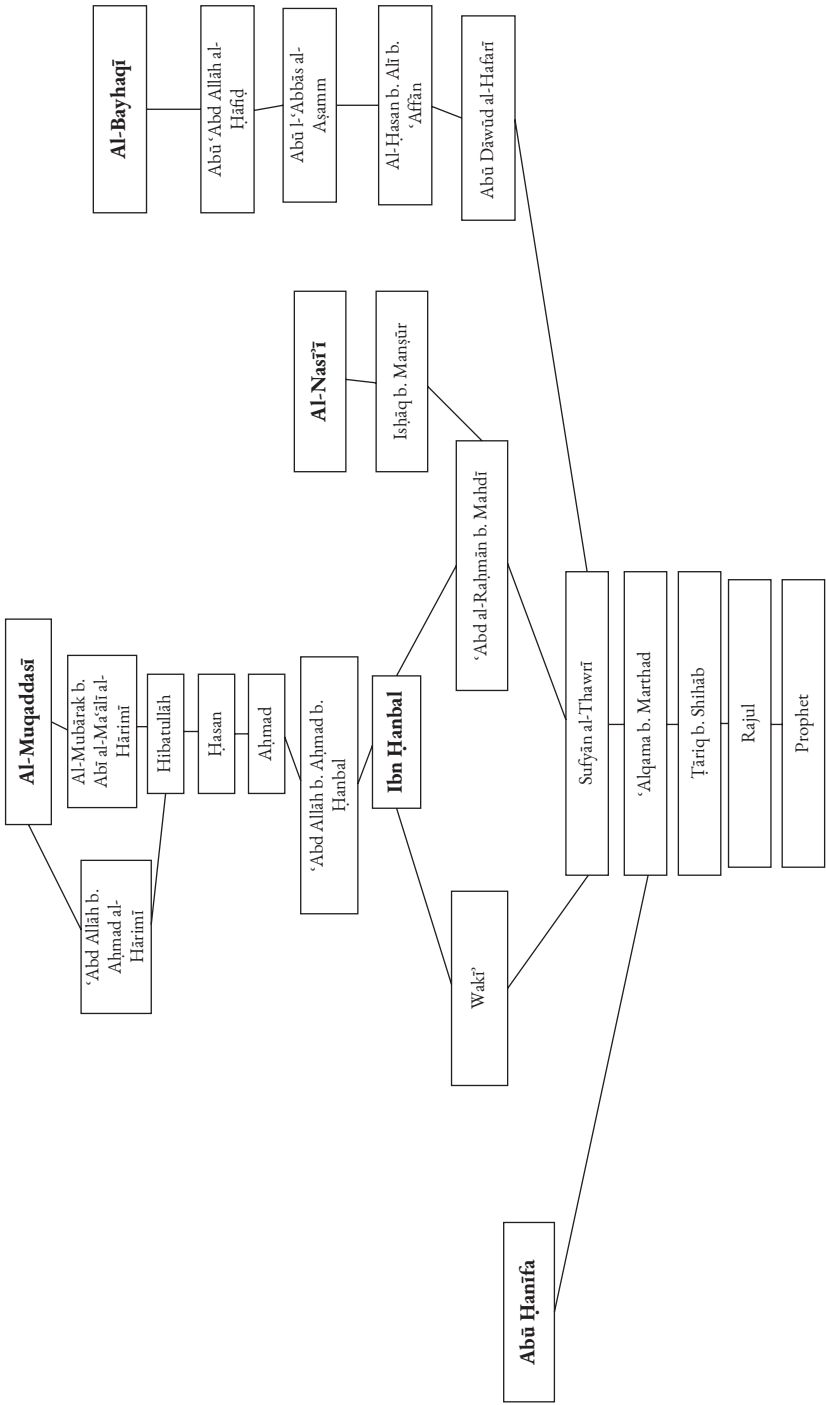


Figure 1.6 'Speak truth to tyrant' *ḥadīth* including Sufyān al-Thawrī and Abū Ḥanīfa

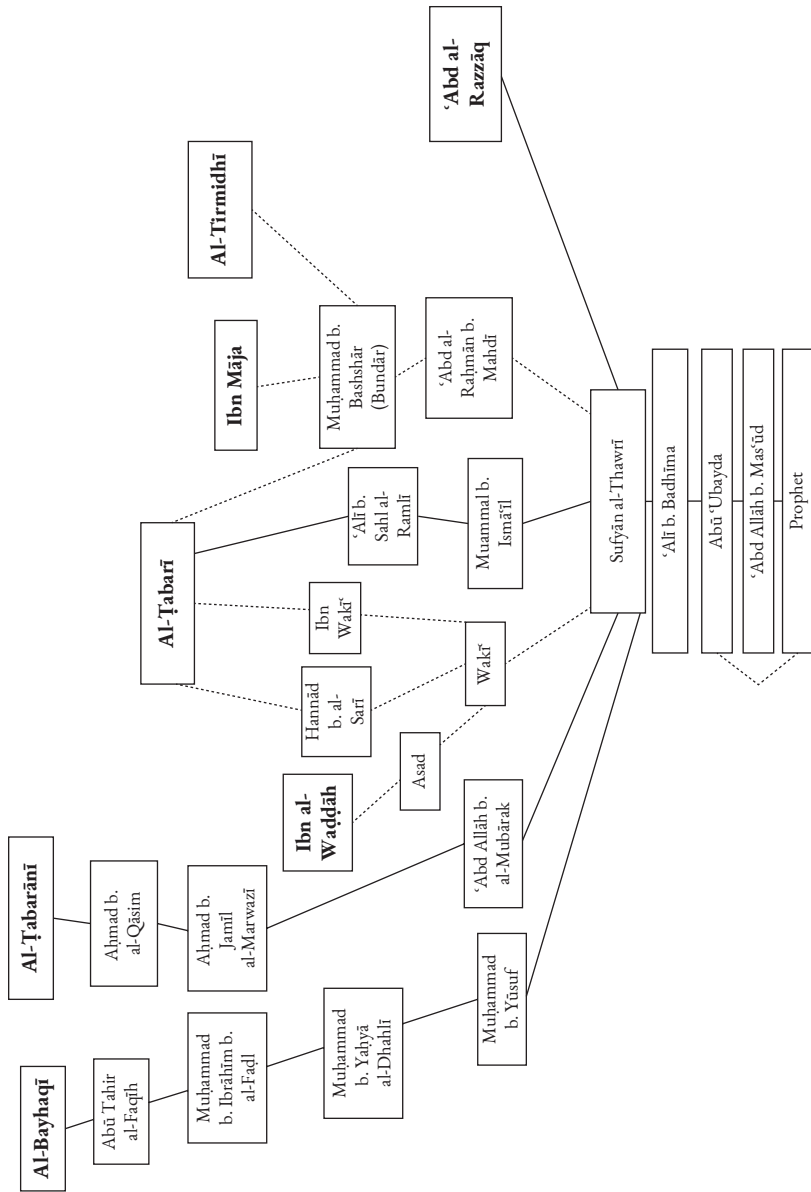


Figure 1.7 ‘Take oppressor by the hand’ ḥadīth disseminated by Sufyān al-Thawrī

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2

Early Ibādī Historiography: The Case of the *Khawārij*

Enki Baptiste and Adam Gaiser

Introduction

As important as the history of any given rebellion or rebellious group might be, the memory of the event or group, and the framing of that memory, remains equally significant. This chapter delves into how a rebellious group among early Muslims, the Khārijites (Ar. *khawārij*), was remembered in various ways by another group, the Ibāḍiyya, who was associated with them in the wider historical memory of most Muslims. Groups of Muslims later identified as *khawārij* were said to have originated with the rebellion against the caliph ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān (d. 35/656), and more specifically with those who seceded from ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) after the arbitration (*taḥkīm*) with his enemy and ‘Uthmān’s relative, Mu‘āwiya b. Abī Sufyān (d. 60/680), at the Battle of Ṣiffīn (37/657) during the first Muslim *fitna* (civil war). Sources claim that these ‘secessionists’ (the meaning of the term *khawārij*) were the first Khārijites. Although most of the initial Khārijites were killed shortly thereafter fighting against ‘Alī at the Battle of Nahrawān (38/658), small groups of these rebels continued their resistance against him, and later against Mu‘āwiya and the Umayyads.

Especially in the Umayyad period, but also into the ‘Abbāsīd era, groups of Khārijites fomented or joined various rebellions and split into several sub-groups.¹ If anything could be said to have united these disparate rebels

¹ Hagemann and Verkinderen, ‘Kharijism’, 489ff; *EP*, ‘Khārijīs’ (A. Gaiser).

(keeping in mind that the sources preserving information about the Khārijites remain deeply problematic), it could be argued that it was the rejection of an exclusively Qurayshī candidate (see below) for the caliphate, as well as the insistence that the full measure of faith involved proper action, rendering those who did not fully satisfy the Khārijī requirements for faith unbelievers (*kuffār*), or something close to unbelievers. Given that most early Islamic history was written by non-Khārijites, it is unsurprising that the Khārijites appear as lawless deviants, reviled and despised by the later mainstream Muslim tradition. It is also unsurprising that the later mainstream Muslim tradition elevated the most violent and uncompromising of the early Khārijites as the representatives of ‘Khārijism’ in the pages of their writing.²

The Ibādiyya were one of the sub-groups of *khawārij* who likely emerged from among the moderates in Baṣra in the early half of the second/eighth century.³ As moderates, they had opposed some of the most militant Khārijite groups, such as the Azāriqa and Najdiyya, right from their beginnings. Yet the wider tradition remembered all of these groups alike as ‘Khārijites’. For this and other reasons, Ibādism and its relationship to the groups later identified as the *khawārij* remains one of the more complicated issues to resolve in the field of early Islamic sectarianism. Any scholar wishing to understand the association between these groups confronts at least two major hurdles. First, there are the difficulties surrounding the study of the Khārijites. Most of the information on them survives in late and hostile sources, thus forcing a wide-ranging and painstaking historiographical analysis of those sources before any serious history might be attempted.⁴

Second, the evidence (such as it is) supporting the idea of a sectarian relationship between the Khārijites and the Ibādiyya is not as straightforward as it might seem. To be sure, the Ibādiyya do share several characteristics with the groups that later became subsumed under the moniker *khawārij*. For example, like the wider *khawārij*, the Ibādiyya do not require a Qurayshī candidate for the imāmate, considering piety the highest qualification for it.

² For example, Muslim heresiographers such as al-Ash‘arī (*Maqālāt*, I:170–7) and al-Shahrastānī (*al-Milāl*, 118–25) provide a lengthy discussion of the militant Khārijites, despite the fact that most of these groups lasted not twenty years.

³ *EP*, ‘Ibādiyya’ (A. Gaiser).

⁴ See Hagemann, *Khārijites*, 3–15.

Likewise, they hold non-Ibādīs to be less-than-full-Muslims, using a variation of the term *kufr* (infidelity) (i.e. *kufr al-ni'ma* (infidelity towards God's blessings), or *kufr al-nifāq* (infidelity of hypocrisy)) to describe this shortcoming of faith.⁵ Moreover, the Ibāḍiyya trace their origins to the rebellion against the caliph 'Uthmān and those who seceded from 'Alī after the arbitration at the Battle of Šiffīn, and they further locate their history through many of the *imāms*, heroes and martyrs who constituted, in the mainstream tradition, the earliest of the Khārijite movements.⁶ For these reasons (among others), the mainstream Muslim tradition characterises the Ibāḍiyya as a sub-sect of the *khawārij*. Indeed, even some early modern Ibāḍī scholars themselves identified Ibāḍism as a sub-sect of the Khārijites.⁷

Nevertheless, and in the context of early Islam, such characteristics do not automatically point toward a simple relation between *khawārij* and Ibāḍiyya. The qualification for a Qurashī *imām* is first attested in al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058), and it is not altogether clear how many of the earliest Muslims understood it to be an absolute requirement.⁸ So too, accusations of *kufr* of one sort or another were common among medieval Muslims (and might not have been literal accusations in the first place).⁹ The Khārijites and Ibāḍiyya only appear unique in these two stances once the nascent Sunnī (and later Shī'ī) community began to work out the ramifications of faith and disbelief, a process that, on the one hand, subsumed a great deal of previously Murji'ite¹⁰ thinking on the issue, and, on the other hand, explicitly used the memory of the Khārijites as a foil for deviant theology.

As to the historical connections between so-called Khārijites and the Ibāḍiyya, Wilkinson and Gaiser have attempted to trace out ways that early

⁵ On the terms *kufr al-ni'ma* and *kufr al-nifāq*, see Crone and Zimmermann, *Epistle*, 198–202; on Ibāḍī taxonomies of unbelief in general, see Gaiser, *Shurāt*, 160–8.

⁶ Hoffman, 'Historical', 186–7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 188–92.

⁸ Al-Māwardī, *Aḥkām*, 6. The Quraysh were the Prophet Muḥammad's tribal group, and membership in the Quraysh became a requirement for being caliph. However, scholars need not assume an early consensus on the necessity of a Qurayshī candidate to the imāmate simply because later works, such as al-Māwardī, claim it as such. More research is surely needed to determine what portion of early Muslims held the candidacy of a Qurayshī to be a requirement.

⁹ Gaiser, *Shurāt*, 35.

¹⁰ On the Murji'ites, and the process of Murji'ī thinking being subsumed under the nascent Sunnī consensus, see Gaiser, *Sectarianism*, 126–36, 156–7.

Ibādīs linked themselves to some of the figures that we would now identify as early Khārijites, noting in the process that there were few if any actual genealogical/tribal connections between these movements on the whole.¹¹ That is, most groups identified as *khawārij* tended to draw from Northern (Muḍarī) Arab groups, whilst the Ibādiyya successfully recruited from the Southern (Yamanī) groups of Azd and Kinda, and later from various Berber groups. In the absence of genealogical/tribal connections to the first Khārijites, the Ibādiyya imagined their community in a way similar to how other late antique actors had established their communities by appropriating and manipulating a body of material (mostly poetry and stories) focused on earlier figures (e.g. the first Khārijites at the Battle of Šiffīn, the *muḥakkima*; those who fought and died at Nahrawān; those who fought Mu‘āwiya at a place called al-Nukhayla in Iraq; and other early martyrs).¹² The nascent Ibādiyya constructed an emerging sectarian identity around these figures, simultaneously rejecting the militant Khārijites (e.g. the Azāriqa, Najdiyya, etc.) as illegitimate.¹³ Thus, whatever connections the Ibādiyya might have to the so-called Khārijites had to be imagined, and they vehemently rejected the militant expressions of Khārijism in the process.

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that most modern Ibādīs take great offence at being linked to the Khārijites. Hoffman, in an excellent chapter investigating this phenomenon in the modern era, chronicles the ways that modern Ibādīs have navigated this association. She shows how the Ibādiyya reject the label Khārijite and its connotations, yet simultaneously embrace the early secessionists at Nahrawān, along with the early martyrs (e.g. the early hero and martyr Abū Bilāl Mirdās b. Udayya, d. 61/680–1) and others who the mainstream Muslim community would consider early Khārijites.¹⁴ Part of the modern Ibādī rejection of the label Khārijite involves arguing that the Ibādiyya embraced a different set of doctrines from Khārijite sub-groups like the Azāriqa, Najdiyya, and so on.¹⁵ To most of the modern Ibādiyya, then, the casual association of their group with the wider mass of groups known as

¹¹ Wilkinson, *Ibādism*, 156–60; Gaiser, *Shurāt*, 116–17.

¹² Gaiser, *Shurāt*, 133–45.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 6–7.

¹⁴ Hagemann and Verkinderen, ‘Kharijism’, 495. For Abū Bilāl’s legacy, see also Hagemann in this volume.

¹⁵ Hoffman, ‘Historical’, 193–6.

the *khawārij* remains misplaced, and it must be admitted that a convincing argument can be made to back up this contention.

Much of the issue, of course, revolves around how any given group conceptualises the *khawārij*. If they are conceptualised broadly, as they are in the mainstream (meaning proto-Sunnī, Sunnī and later Shīʿī) literature, then the Ibāḍiyya could be argued to fall within the purview of what can be called Khārijite. Modern Ibāḍīs, however, put forth a narrower conceptualisation of the Khārijites and come to a different conclusion. Both perspectives offer distinct interpretations of specific early Islamic historical events, such as the Battles of Ṣiffīn or Nahrawān, and personalities, such as ‘Alī, ‘Uthmān, the founder of the Azāriqa (Nāfiʿ b. al-Azraq (d. 65/685)), and so on. And while it is not the aim of this chapter to argue which construal is more correct, it is the intent of this chapter to explore more fully early Ibāḍī historiography on the subject.

Specifically, this chapter adds to the insights on the relationship between the so-called Khārijites and the Ibāḍiyya by investigating how the Ibāḍiyya initially conceptualised the Khārijites who operated in the period that stretched from ‘Uthmān’s murder to the first Ibāḍī rebellions in the middle of the second/eighth century. It examines how the terms *khārijī/khawārij*, as well as various related terms such as *muhakkima*, *ḥarūriyya* (another early name for the Khārijites), *ahl al-Nahrawān* (the people of Nahrawān), *ahl al-Nukhayla* (the people of al-Nukhayla), *al-māriqūn* (a pejorative moniker for the Khārijites that is traced to several *ḥadīths*; see below),¹⁶ and the early martyr figures appear in early Ibāḍī writings, especially the Ibāḍī *siyar* (epistles), and it draws three conclusions.

First, we show that the Ibāḍī scholars (*‘ulamāʾ*) of the second/eighth century appear willing to use the term *khawārij* in relation to their own group, albeit with some qualifications on the militant Khārijites. Second, from the late second/eighth and third/ninth century onwards they began to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable *khawārij*, or to reject associations with that term altogether. And, third, both of these approaches – that is, cautiously adopting the term *khawārij* for themselves, or bifurcating/rejecting it – offer precedents for how the modern Ibāḍiyya approach the topic. If, as we have

¹⁶ There are many versions and variant wordings of this *ḥadīth*. For two examples, see al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 6163 (Book 78, no. 189) and Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, 170.

posited above, the memory of rebels and rebellions remains important, then an investigation of how early Ibādī sources treated the memory of the Khārijites can shed light on the complex relationship between Ibādism and Khārijism. Additionally, as Ibādī historiography remains, for the most part, understudied, it is the hope that this research might offer a platform from which further explorations into Ibādī historiography might be launched.

Second-/Eighth-Century Appropriations

Second-/eighth-century Ibādī *siyar* (epistles, sing. *sīra*)¹⁷ offer careful appropriations of the term *khawārij* (which is almost always found in the plural form). There are several examples of its use in these sources, but exact dating and attribution of these early *siyar* can be problematic, as is the case of the first letter of ‘Abdallāh b. Ibād (d. second/eighth century). In non-Ibādī sources Ibn Ibād is often considered the eponymous founding father of the movement. Ibādī sources, however, more often consider him a kind of lieutenant to the person that Ibādīs hold to be their actual founder, Jābir b. Zayd (d. before 104/722).¹⁸ None of these positions can be definitively proven given the state of the evidence, nor can the two letters attributed to Ibn Ibād be reliably credited to him, nor dated effectively. It is a good guess that the first letter dates to the first half of the second/eighth century.¹⁹ In this letter, Ibn Ibād replies to a person named ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān who had previously accused the *khawārij* of being extremists. Ibādīs consider him to be the Umayyad caliph, ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 65–86/685–705), though this, too, is suspect. In his reply, Ibn Ibād offers one of the first (proto-)Ibādī definitions of the Khārijites:

You wrote to me addressing [the issue of the] *khawārij*, and you asserted that they go to extremes in their religion (*yughallūn fī dīnihim*), and that they break (*yufāriqūn*) from the people of Islam. And you asserted that they do not follow the path of the believers. I am going to make their path clear to you: they were ‘Uthmān’s companions, but they disowned his innovations when he introduced changes within the *sunna*. They were ‘Alī’s companions

¹⁷ On the *siyar*, see al-Salimi, ‘Identifying’, 115–21; Crone and Zimmerman, *Epistle*, 23–6; Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, 6–8.

¹⁸ Ennāmī, *Studies*, 24–9.

¹⁹ On Ibn Ibād and the first letter, see Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, 57–62; Madelung, ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Ibād and the Origins’, 52; Crone and Zimmermann, *Epistle*, 276.

until he nominated ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ as mediator and left God’s rule ... In their religion and their *sunna*, they were following God’s Messenger, Abū Bakr and ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb.²⁰

Ibn Ibād thus considers the *khawārij* to be the rightly guided group who fought under ‘Uthmān and ‘Alī’s banners before breaking with them because of their wrongdoings. His phrasing implicitly rejects the charge of extremism (*ghalā/ghuluww*) by tying them to the authoritative precedent (*sunna*) of the Prophet Muḥammad and the first two caliphs Abū Bakr (r. 11–13/632–4) and ‘Umar (r. 13–23/634–44).²¹ Later in his *sīra*, Ibn Ibād declares his allegiance with the Khārijites, stating: ‘We bear witness by God and the Angels that whoso is [the Khārijites’] enemy, we are their enemy, and who affiliates with [the Khārijites], we affiliate with them by our hands, our tongues and our hearts’.²²

However, Ibn Ibād is careful to qualify his connection to the Khārijites by explicitly dissociating from Nāfi‘ b. al-Azraq (d. 65/685), the eponymous founder of the Azāriqa. He states: ‘We dissociate (*nabra*) before God from Ibn al-Azraq and his followers from the people. When they rebelled (*kharaḥū*), they rebelled according to Islam, as it seemed to us, but [then] they forsook it (*artaddū*) and disbelieved after being faithful (*kafarū ba’d imānihim*).²³ Such a qualification makes clear that Ibn Ibād was aware of a general affiliation among Muslims of his era (whenever that might have been) of the Azāriqa with the Khārijites, and he deemed it important enough to make clear their errors and his rejection of them. Although he does not state it outright, Ibn Ibād considers the Azāriqa as having been initially among those he considers legitimate Khārijites, but through their actions they disqualified their link to this group.

This selective Ibādī embrace of certain persons and groups from those who would at a later date altogether be considered *khawārij* in the mainstream tradition is borne out in the so-called second letter of Ibn Ibād. As with the

²⁰ Al-Salimi and Madelung, *Ibādī Texts*, 24.

²¹ The accusation of extremism (*ghalā/ghuluww*) remains interesting, though perhaps not surprising. If it is accepted that the text was composed in the second/eighth century, then its usage fits in with how polemicists of the Umayyad period used accusations of extremism against those (mainly Shī‘a) who seemed to defend dangerous and competitive religious ideas. See al-Qāḍī, ‘Development’, 295–7; *EF*, ‘Ghulāt’ (S. Anthony).

²² Al-Salimi and Madelung, *Ibādī Texts*, 23.

²³ *Ibid.*

first letter, the second letter cannot be reliably attributed to Ibn Ibādī, nor can it be dependably dated.²⁴ It purports to be addressed to a supporter of ‘Alī, and might date from roughly the same time period as the first letter (i.e. first half of the second/eighth century). The second letter nowhere employs the term *khawārij*, but rather offers an Ibādī narrative of some of the battles and personalities who are, in the wider Islamic tradition, usually associated with the first Khārijites (i.e. the *muhakkima*). For example, in discussing the *ahl al-Nahrawān* (the Khārijites who fought ‘Alī at the Battle of Nahrawān), the second letter advances fairly standard Ibādī/Khārijī arguments against ‘Alī’s embrace of the arbitration.²⁵ These include an allusion to an early companion, ‘Ammār b. Yāsir (d. 37/657), and his death at the Battle of Šifīn, and thereby to the *ḥadīth* that Ibn Yāsir would be killed by the ‘rebellious party’ (*al-fi’a al-bāghiyya*). Without explicitly mentioning the *ḥadīth*, the second letter nevertheless implies that in killing Ibn Yāsir, Mu‘āwiya’s group betrayed itself to be the ‘rebellious party’ mentioned in Qur’ān 49:9. To Ibādīs, then, a clear Qur’ānic precedent existed for continuing to fight Mu‘āwiya and reject arbitration, and ‘Ammār b. Yāsir’s death was one proof among others for the rightness of the *ahl al-Nahrawān*’s break with ‘Alī.²⁶ The letter provides further Qur’ānic proofs against ‘Alī’s acceptance of the arbitration in a version of the debate (*munāzara*) between ‘Alī’s representative, ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Abbās (d. 67/687), and a group that was said to have decamped to al-Nukhayla, outside of Kūfa.²⁷ Moreover, the second letter claims in several places that the *ahl al-Nahrawān* consisted of *anṣār* (‘Helpers’, those from Medina who hosted the early Muslims after the *hijra*) and *muhājirūn* (those who emigrated with the Prophet to Medina during the *hijra*), including seventy veterans from the Battle of Badr (2/624), and condemns ‘Alī for killing them.²⁸ Among those mentioned explicitly is the early Ibādī/Khārijī hero Ḥurqūṣ b. Zuhayr (d. 38/658).²⁹ Thus, although the second letter provides an early Ibādī (one might argue the earliest) version of these events and personalities, it is clear that

²⁴ Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, 51–6; Madelung, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ibādī’s Second Letter’, 1–2.

²⁵ Al-Salimi and Madelung, *Ibādī Texts*, 52–8.

²⁶ On ‘Ammār b. Yāsir in the Ibādī tradition, see Gaiser, *Shurāt*, 126–8; for a North African Ibādī version, see Ibn Sallām, *Kitāb*, 83–4.

²⁷ On Ibādī versions of the *munāzara*, see Gaiser, ‘North African’.

²⁸ Al-Salimi and Madelung, *Ibādī Texts*, 46, 52, 54.

²⁹ On Ḥurqūṣ b. Zuhayr in the Ibādī tradition, see Gaiser, *Shurāt*, 129–32.

they are the same as those which, in the mainstream tradition, are associated with the first Khārijites.

The second letter also addresses the ‘*māriqūn*’ *ḥadīth*, a widely known *ḥadīth* with several versions. In this *ḥadīth*, the Prophet was said to have predicted that there would be a group that exited from right religion ‘as an arrow leaves the bow (*yamraqūna min al-dīn kamā yamraqu al-sahm min al-ramiyya*)’, adding in some versions ‘and they will not return to it, just as the arrow does not return to its nock-point’.³⁰ In the mainstream Muslim tradition, this *ḥadīth* is almost always associated with the Khārijites, and Ibn Ibād’s second letter seems to respond to this association by portraying the *ḥadīth* to be a falsehood repeated as a deception in the context of warfare. When the son of the person uttering it protests to his father that the *ḥadīth* is a lie, the father scolds him by saying ‘be silent my boy, warfare is deception (*inna al-ḥarb khuda*)’.³¹ In the second letter, then, Ibn Ibād frames the ‘*māriqūn*’ *ḥadīth* as a lie told in the context of war, inappropriately applied to the *ahl al-Nahrawān*.

The second-/eighth-century Omani Ibādī author Shabīb b. ‘Aṭīyya’s *sīra* offers a parallel refutation of the ‘*māriqūn*’ *ḥadīth*, but one that labels militant Khārijites alone as those who have exited proper religion. Ibn ‘Aṭīyya states:

And if they intend by ‘heading out of the religion and leaving the community’ particularly to mean the *khawārij*, then the blinded enemies of God have to know that the people of Nahrawān and those who followed them were the best of the people of religion and of Muḥammad’s *umma*. Among them, some headed out of religion and left the *umma*, like Nāfi’ b. al-Azraq, Dāwūd and ‘Aṭīyya [b. al-Aswad] did.³²

Like Ibn Ibād’s first letter and, implicitly, his second, Ibn ‘Aṭīyya’s *sīra* appropriates the term *khawārij* for the *ahl al-Nahrawān* (and by extension, for the Ibādīyya who traced themselves to the *ahl al-Nahrawān*), but judiciously excludes militants such as Ibn al-Azraq along with figures that Crone and

³⁰ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1715 (no. 6932).

³¹ Al-Salimi and Madelung, *Ibādī Texts*, 50–1.

³² *Ibid.*, 166–7.

Zimmerman call ‘quasi-Azraqites’ such as Dāwūd and ‘Aṭīyya b. al-Aswad.³³ In another section of the same *sīra*, Ibn ‘Aṭīyya defends the *ḥarūriyya* (another moniker for the Khārijites) from the ‘*māriqūn*’ *ḥadīth*, claiming that those who apply it to them have changed the *ḥadīth* according to their whim (*taḥrīfīkum al-aḥādīth ilā abwā’ikum*).³⁴

A fourth example of a second-/eighth-century Ibādī usage of the term *khawārij* comes from the epistle of Sālim b. Dhakwān (d. second half of the second/eighth century). This *sīra* likely dates from the second half of the second/eighth century, and very little is known about the author. Considering the Azāriqa, Ibn Dhakwān states: ‘Then Ibn al-Azraq and his followers went out. They continued for as long as God wished to follow the conduct of the Khārijites before them, but then detestation of their *qawm* moved them to classify the latter as idolaters.’³⁵ As with Ibn Ibād’s letters, and the *sīra* of Ibn ‘Aṭīyya, Ibn Dhakwān employs the term *khawārij* positively, but qualifies the transgressions of Ibn al-Azraq and the Azāriqa as having excluded them from that group.

Second-/eighth-century Ibādī authors, then, seem willing to embrace the term *khawārij*, viewing the early Khārijites as their predecessors and defending them from charges of extremism and separatism. Simultaneously, they qualify this acceptance by consistently casting the Azraqites (and even some ‘quasi-Azraqites’) as outside the fold of acceptable belief and behaviour. From their writings, it seems clear that early Ibādī authors were aware of the ways that arguments about extremism, associations with the Azāriqa, and the ‘*māriqūn*’ *ḥadīth* were (or could potentially be) used against them, and they responded accordingly, casting the extremism of the Azraqites as an innovation that excluded the Azraqites from the community, and pushing back against the ‘*māriqūn*’ *ḥadīth* in various ways.

³³ Crone and Zimmermann, *Epistle*, 211. Dāwūd was reported to be the eponym of the Dāwūdiyya (ibid., 18, 111ff); ‘Aṭīyya b. al-Aswad was another early Khārijite, said to be from the Najdiyya, but also the ‘founder’ of the ‘Aṭāwiyya (ibid., 18).

³⁴ Al-Salimi and Madelung, *Ibādī Texts*, 178–9.

³⁵ Crone and Zimmermann, *Epistle*, 100–1. Ibn Dhakwān uses the term *qawm* to indicate non-Ibādī Muslims.

Acceptable and Unacceptable Khārijites

One late second-/eighth-century author, ‘Abdallāh b. Yazīd al-Fazārī (d. after 179/795), anticipates in his writings some of the changes that third-/ninth-century Ibādī authors would introduce into Ibādī historiography on the Khārijites. In both the *Kitāb al-Qadar* (Book of Predestination) and the *Kitāb Fī'l-radd ‘alā Ibn ‘Umayr* (Book of Refutation of Ibn ‘Umayr), al-Fazārī draws a distinction between the Ibādīyya and those who he calls the *khawārij al-musharrīka*, or the *khawārij al-mushṭarīkat al-muslimīn* (‘Khārijites who apply the label *shirk* to Muslims’).³⁶ These Khārijites, al-Fazārī makes clear, are those who wrongly apply the term *shirk* (polytheism) to sinners (*ahl al-aḥdāth*) from among the people of the *qibla* (the direction of prayer, meaning, in this case, non-Ibādī Muslims). In the *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* (Book of Monotheism) al-Fazārī simply employs the term *khawārij* to refer to the militants (for example, he names the Najdiyya).³⁷ However, in the same *sīra* he introduces the term *al-khawārij min ahl al-salāt* (‘Khārijites from among the people of prayer’) to distinguish between the militants and those Khārijites who correctly classify sinning Muslims and treat them accordingly, and he identifies himself with this group.³⁸ In other words, throughout his writings, and in different ways, al-Fazārī draws distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable *khawārij* based upon whether or not they correctly apply (in his opinion) what in later Islamic jurisprudence became known as the *asmā’ wa’l-aḥkām* (classifications and judgments of sinners).

This bifurcation of the *khawārij* into ‘good’ Khārijites and ‘bad’ Khārijites continues in Omani Ibādī *siyar* from the third/ninth century. It appears, for example, in Abū Muṭṭhir al-Ṣalt b. Khamīs’s (d. second half of the third/ninth century to early fourth/tenth century) *sīra*, where Abū Muṭṭhir distinguishes between the *khawārij man tashrīk al-mustahillīn* (‘Khārijites who anathematise those who are immune [from this accusation]’) and the *khawārij al-muslimīn ‘alā al-‘adl wa-l-ḥaqq* (‘Khārijite Muslims on [the

³⁶ Al-Salimi and Madelung, *Early Ibādī*, 16, 72, 75.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 150–1, 168–9 (al-Fazārī also mentions the Najdiyya in the *Kitāb Fī'l-radd* (*ibid.*, 94–5), and both the Najdiyya and Azāriqa in the *Kitāb al-Qadar* (*ibid.*, 15)).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 196–7.

path of] justice and truth').³⁹ Abū Mu'thir names Nāfi' b. al-Azraq, Najda b. 'Āmir (the eponymous 'founder' of the Najdiyya; d. 73/692), and 'Abdallāh b. Ṣaffār, the eponymous 'founder' of the Ṣufriyya (d. second half of the first/seventh century, if he existed at all) as examples of those who 'broke from the conduct of the Muslims' (*khālīf sīrat al-muslimīn*). In turn, he gives the *ahl al-Nabrawān*, the people of al-Nukhayla, and three early Khārijite heroes (Qarīb b. Murra al-Azdī (d. 50/670), Zuḥḥāf al-Ṭā'ī (d. 50/670), and Abū Bilāl Mirdās b. Udayya) as examples of acceptable Khārijites.⁴⁰ Similarly, in the *Kitāb al-Aḥdāth wa-l-ṣifāt* (Book of Events and Features) Abū Mu'thir makes reference to the *khawārij al-muslimīn min aslāfinā* ('Khārijite Muslims from among our predecessors').⁴¹

Similarly, Abū Qaḥṭān Khālīd b. Qaḥṭān's (d. late third/ninth to early fourth/tenth century) work, named the *Sīra tansubu ilā Abī Qaḥṭān* (Epistle attributed to Abū Qaḥṭān), employs the phrase *al-khawārij al-muslimīn* to describe acceptable Khārijites. The author appends the Ibādī rebels 'Abdallāh b. Yahyā (known as Ṭālib al-Ḥaqq, d. 130/748) and al-Julandā b. Mas'ūd (d. 133/751) to the *ahl al-Nabrawān* and *al-Nukhayla*; Qarīb, Zuḥḥāf and Abū Bilāl as examples of good *khawārij*, and censors Nāfi' b. al-Azraq and Najda b. 'Āmir for breaking with their precedent.⁴² So too, the Omani Ibādī *imām* al-Muhannā b. Jayfar's (d. latter half of the third/ninth century) *sīra* uses the term *al-khawārij al-muḥakkima*, by whom he means the *muḥakkima* specifically, along with the people of Nahrawān and Abū Bilāl, to describe acceptable Khārijites, who he contrasts with Nāfi' b. al-Azraq.⁴³ Finally, Hāshim b. Ghaylān, an Ibādī *'ālim* who lived during the imāmate of al-Muhannā b. Jayfar (r. 226–37/840–51), isolates the unacceptable Khārijites by speaking of 'those among the ranks of the *khawārij*, the doubters and the others who were not in the religion of the Muslims'.⁴⁴ Bifurcation of Khārijites into acceptable and

³⁹ Ibid., 262, 271. Later in the *sīra* he gives an exhaustive list of those he considers 'imāms of the Muslims', which includes the figures he has mentioned previously, but adds figures like Farwa b. Nawfal and 'Abdallāh b. Ibād (ibid., 275–6).

⁴⁰ On 'Abdallāh b. Ṣaffār and the Ṣufriyya, see Lewinstein, 'Making', 75–96. For the people of al-Nukhayla in Ibādī sources, see Gaiser, *Shurāt*, 133–4; on Qarīb and Zuḥḥāf, see ibid., 136–9; on Abū Bilāl, see ibid., 140–5.

⁴¹ Kāshif, *al-Siyar*, I:52.

⁴² Ibid., I:110–14.

⁴³ Al-Salimi, *Ibadi Texts in Oman*, 153–4.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 126.

unacceptable types, then, solidified as an Ibādī historiographical trend in the third/ninth century, though the lack of regularity in the terminology shows that this was a developing trend among the Omani Ibādī *‘ulamā’* of the time.

Beyond Oman, one important third-/ninth-century Ibādī scholar rejected the term *khawārij* altogether. The last Baṣran Ibādī *imām*, Abū Sufyān Maḥbūb b. al-Raḥīl (d. around 210/825), whose family relocated from Baṣra to Ṣuḥār (Sohar) in Oman, consistently employed the term *khawārij* in contrast to ‘Muslims’. In his discussion of them, it is clear that by *‘khawārij’* he means the extremists such as Nāfi‘ b. al-Azraq, yet he refuses to use the term at all in relation to the Ibādīyya or their predecessors.⁴⁵ In one place, he clearly states ‘the Muslims differ from all of the *khawārij* (*jamī‘ al-khawārij*) in their labeling the people of the *qibla* with polytheism (*shirk*)’.⁴⁶ It might be possible to dismiss Abū Sufyān’s blanket rejection of the term *khawārij* in relation to the Ibādīyya as an isolated example, except for the fact that Abū Sufyān served as the *imām* of the Ibādīyya in Baṣra after Wā’il b. Ayyūb (d. first half of the third/ninth century). In other words, his influence over what constituted proper Ibādism in the heartland of Ibādism was immense, and cannot easily be dismissed.

It is noteworthy that, as a Baṣran Ibādī, his outright rejection of the label *khawārij* contrasts with the bifurcation of the Khārijites into acceptable and unacceptable that prevails among Omani scholars of his same era. In other words, it might have been a third-/ninth-century Omani Ibādī convention to speak of acceptable and unacceptable Khārijites, whereas the Baṣran Ibādīs might have rejected using the term for themselves altogether. This supposition finds limited support in the portions of the *Kitāb Abī Sufyān* (which as its name suggests was said to be written/dictated by Abū Sufyān himself) that survive in North African Ibādī *siyar* works.⁴⁷ For example, the sections of the tenth-/sixteenth-century North African Ibādī scholar al-Shammākhī’s *Kitāb al-Siyar* that discuss the Battles of Ṣiffīn and Nahrawān, as well as the portions of it that detail the early Khārijite rebellions of Kūfa and Baṣra in

⁴⁵ Ibid., 79–81.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 95.

⁴⁷ On the *Kitāb Abī Sufyān*, see Gaiser, *Shurāt*, 122–3; Gaiser, ‘North African’, 69–71; Wilkinson, *Ibādism*, 164, who suggests that the work remained unknown in Oman up to the sixth/twelfth century, when it slowly began to be reincorporated into Omani Ibādī writings.

the early Umayyad period, nowhere employ the term *khawārij*.⁴⁸ It is unclear if these sections specifically come from the *Kitāb Abī Sufyān*, though other, and very extensive, sections of al-Shammākhī's *siyar* explicitly name Abū Sufyān as their source. What is clear from the parallels between these portions of al-Shammākhī's *siyar* and what can be found in earlier sources, such as al-Balādhurī (d. after 279/892) and other eastern sources, is that all of these works rely on shared Kūfan/Başran materials for the narratives of these figures. Refusal to associate the Ibādiyya with the Khārijites, then, might have been something coming via Abū Sufyān, or it might have been a convention passed to al-Shammākhī via other Kūfan/Başran sources. In either case, the contrast with how Omani Ibāḍī authors chose to portray the Khārijites and how Abū Sufyān and the North African Ibāḍīs portray them is striking.

Rejecting the *Khawārij*

Abū Sufyān's style of refusing to associate the *khawārij* with the Ibādiyya eventually gained traction in Oman itself, and an example from al-Qalhātī's sixth-/twelfth-century *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān* offers a stark illustration of this transformation. In his discussion of true believers, al-Qalhātī quotes extensively from the above-mentioned *sīra* of Shabīb b. 'Aṭīyya. In one section of the text, he uses the same portion of Ibn 'Aṭīyya's refutation of the 'māriqūn' *ḥadīth* that was quoted above. However, whereas Ibn 'Aṭīyya employs the term *khawārij* in his paragraph, al-Qalhātī substitutes the term *ahl al-nahr* ('People of the River', referring to those first Khārijites who fought at Nahrawān, a canal) for the term *khawārij*, rendering it thus:

And if they intend by 'heading out of the religion and leaving the community' particularly to mean the *ahl al-nahr*, then the blinded enemies of God have to know that the people of Nahrawān and those who followed them were the best of the people of religion and of Muḥammad's *umma*. Among them, some headed out of religion and left the *umma*, like Nāfi' b. al-Azraq, Dāwūd and 'Aṭīyya [b. al-Aswad] did.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Al-Shammākhī, *Kitāb*, I:156–65, 168–81; see also Ibn Sallām, who offers a version of some of these events and likewise does not employ the term *khawārij* (*Kitāb*, 129–33).

⁴⁹ Al-Qalhātī, *al-Kashf*, II:415.

Not only does al-Qalhātī sanitise Ibn ‘Aṭīyya’s quote of the term *khawārij*, but this substitution renders the source of right guidance as those who followed the first Khārijite *imām*, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Rāsibī (d. 38/658), at Nahrawān rather than the wild nexus of early Khārijite groups in Baṣra and Kūfa from whom the Ibāḍiyya recognised some leaders and rejected others.⁵⁰ Indeed, from the fifth/eleventh century onwards the Ibāḍiyya increasingly used the term ‘al-Wahbiyya’, after *imām* ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Rāsibī, to refer to themselves, and al-Qalhātī’s manipulation of Ibn ‘Aṭīyya’s *sīra* reflects this shift.

This chapter has charted a transformation in how early Ibāḍī authors employed the term *khawārij* in their writings, along with how they used related words (such as *muḥakkima*, *ḥarūriyya*, *ahl al-Nahrawān*, *ahl al-Nukhayla* and *māriqūn*) to establish their relationship to these figures. It has been shown that while earlier second-/eighth-century authors were willing to associate the Ibāḍiyya with the Khārijites, albeit with qualifications that excluded the militant Khārijites, by the third/ninth century Omani Ibāḍīs were more vigorously qualifying the term *khawārij* in ways that charted out acceptable and unacceptable Khārijites, and the Baṣran Ibāḍī Abū Sufyān was rejecting it altogether. Both of the third-/ninth-century methods – bifurcating the *khawārij* into acceptable and unacceptable Khārijites, or refusing to link the Ibāḍiyya to them – find their counterparts in how modern Ibāḍīs navigate their association with the memory of the Khārijites.

Why this shift from the second/eighth century to the third/ninth? Why did Ibāḍīs increasingly feel uncomfortable with the label *khawārij*? We identify two reasons, one external and one internal. First, the third/ninth century witnessed the growing influence and availability (via the growth of the Muslim paper industry⁵¹) of proto-Sunnī and Shī‘ī heresiographical works. These works advanced a strongly negative image of the *khawārij* by accentuating the importance and role of militant Khārijite groups such as the Azāriqa and Najdiyya. More and more, the wider Muslim community came to ‘know’ the Khārijites mainly through their most violent and shocking examples.

⁵⁰ Adam Gaiser heard from contacts in Oman that portions of al-Qalhātī’s *Kashf* were altered or censored. He cannot confirm or deny this allegation, but it would be prudent to examine the relevant manuscripts to see if this particular passage was altered by someone other than al-Qalhātī (personal communication).

⁵¹ Déroche, *Islamic Codicology*, 50–1.

This would naturally have placed great pressure on Ibādī authors to qualify their stance in relation to these militants, and might explain the historiographical move to more forcefully delineate acceptable and unacceptable Khārijites, or to abandon the association with the Khārijites altogether.

Another reason might have to do with the establishment of Ibādī polities in North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula in the second/eighth and third/ninth century. In their re-framing of political theory, the custodians of these imāmates might have wanted to more closely control the memory of the early Khārijite rebels and martyrs, lest this memory encourage rebellions against their own rule. This type of control can be witnessed, for example, in the ways that the Omani Ibādī ‘*ulamā*’ and *imāms* institutionalised (or at least attempted to institutionalise) the organisation of groups known as the *shurāt* (another name for the early Khārijites, from the Qur’ānic term ‘seller’ that refers to those who sold themselves to achieve God’s plan).⁵² They formulated rules governing the prosecution of *shirā*’ and guidelines for how the *shurāt* should act, set up supervisory roles for the ‘*ulamā*’, and created a type of *imām* (*al-imām al-shārī*) who would lead them.⁵³ It is possible that a similar attempt at control can be witnessed in the changing historiographical stances toward the *khawārij*.

Conclusion

It is hoped that this chapter might encourage more historiographical investigations into early Ibādī literature. In particular, this chapter confined itself, for the most part, to second/eighth- and third/ninth-century examples, and mainly those from Omani *siyar*. Examples from the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries remain to be investigated, as does other literature from the North African Ibādīyya. And because both modern Ibādī refusals to associate their group with the Khārijites as well as some pre-modern Ibādī acceptance of the term *khawārij* can be seen as extensions of earlier trends in medieval Ibādī writings, it is equally important to discover the ways that early traditions informed modern sensibilities. Indeed, modern Ibādī thinking on the relationship (or lack thereof) between the Ibādīyya and the Khārijites has deep roots

⁵² Gaiser, *Shurāt*, 47ff.

⁵³ Gaiser, *Muslims*, 105–9.

within the Ibādī tradition. As with the study of the Khārijites, a richer understanding of the Ibādī historical record begins with an appreciation for how various Ibādīs framed that tradition.

From a wider perspective, this chapter has hoped to shed light on how one religious minority, the Ibādiyya, chose to appropriate, in a complex fashion, the memory of the early rebel groups that preceded them, the *khawārij*. As we have shown, this process developed over a long period of time and speaks to the reception and management of religious ‘tradition’. On the one hand, Ibādīs inherited the wider Muslim traditions about the *khawārij*, traditions that fashioned the image of the *khawārij* in negative and polemical terms. On the other hand, different Ibādīs in different geographies and time periods surely possessed their own internal reasons for how and why they positioned themselves in relation to the *khawārij* as they did. These topics merit more investigation, as they speak to ways that the memory and representation of rebels and their rebellions remains expedient to those who preserve it.

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PART II

**POLITICAL CULTURE
OF REBELLION**

3

The Revolt of Yaḥyā b. Zayd b. ‘Alī (d. 125/743): *Bay‘a*, Disobedience and Rebellion in the Early Islamic Period*

Natalie Kontny-Wendt

Introduction

The contentious activities of Yaḥyā b. Zayd b. ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn (d. 125/743) in late-Umayyad Khurāsān feature prominently in the Islamic historical tradition. Modern scholarly discourse generally considers Yaḥyā a rebel,¹ primarily due to two aspects: first, Yaḥyā was important for Hāshimī propaganda in Khurāsān and the subsequent legitimation of ‘Abbāsīd authority after the Hāshimī movement had successfully toppled the Umayyads;² and second, his recognition as *imām* in later Zaydī tradition, which traces its origins back to Yaḥyā’s father Zayd b. ‘Alī (d. 122/740), was contingent on his willingness to rebel.³

A recent article has, however, described Yaḥyā as a rebel against his will.⁴ Indeed, the narrative sources do not supply a clear picture of what exactly made Yaḥyā a rebel. Which of his activities were ‘rebellious’ and what actions or events constituted the beginning of his revolt? These questions have not yet

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¹ E.g., *EP*, ‘Yaḥyā b. Zayd’ (W. Madelung); Haider, *Origins*, 200–1.

² Daniel, *Khurasan*, 38–41; Sharon, *Black Banners*, 173–8.

³ Haider, *Shī‘ī Islam*, 39–41.

⁴ Kara, ‘Yahyā’, esp. 778.

been examined in detail, something this contribution seeks to remedy. Yaḥyā's revolt is connected to that of his father, Zayd, in Kūfa in 121–2/739–40. Retrospectively, Zayd's revolt was turned into the beginning of the Zaydī movement, a forerunner of the later eponymous Shī'ī branch. The early Zaydī movement was characterised primarily by anti-Umayyad (later anti-'Abbāsīd) and pro-'Alid attitudes, which caused considerable contention throughout the eighth and ninth centuries.⁵ Yaḥyā's revolt can serve as a valuable case study for nuancing our understanding of early Zaydism as a political force and of the phenomenon of rebellion in the early Islamic period.

The revolt has so far been discussed mainly in surveys of Zaydism or works on more general topics like public punishment, martyrdom, Khurāsānī history and the Hāshimī movement.⁶ I have found only one article that deals exclusively with Yaḥyā's revolt.⁷ Its author, Cahid Kara, gives a detailed overview of Yaḥyā's revolt and the situation in Khurāsān to explain the reasons for Yaḥyā's eventual defeat and to show how his death contributed to 'Abbāsīd success. His approach is descriptive, however, and some of his main observations and conclusions differ from those arrived at here. Most pertinently, he does not discuss the meaning of 'rebellion' in Yaḥyā's context but focuses on establishing the most plausible timeline for Yaḥyā's activities.

This chapter differs from previous scholarship in two ways. First, it will critically evaluate the representation of Yaḥyā's revolt to illustrate how the meanings of rebellion were negotiated in the early Islamic tradition. Second, it will suggest a new perspective on Yaḥyā's rebel status that turns on issues of allegiance and loyalty against the backdrop of the accession of the caliph al-Walīd II (r. 125–6/743–4) just before the Third *Fitna* (c. 126–9/744–7).

The chapter has two main sections: the first will analyse the information on Yaḥyā in the narrative sources and present the basic outline of his activities in Khurāsān. Considerable attention will be given to Yaḥyā's imprisonment by the Umayyad governor of Khurāsān, Naṣr b. Sayyār (d. 131/748), and Yaḥyā's subsequent release on the order of al-Walīd II. The second section will discuss the *bay'a* (pledge of allegiance) as an influential political institution in the early

⁵ Haider, *Origins*, 193–203.

⁶ Van Arendonk, *Les débuts*; Daniel, *Khurasan*; Sharon, *Black Banners*; Agha, *Revolution*; Haider, *Origins*; Marsham, 'Attitudes'; Anthony, *Crucifixion*; Sahner, *Christian Martyrs*.

⁷ Kara, 'Yaḥyā'.

Islamic period. As Marsham has shown, loyalty and allegiance were forged by oaths and covenants,⁸ and the same mechanisms appear decisive for rebellion: rebellion is not (only) characterised by the use of violence, but (also) by changing patterns of loyalty. The role of *bay‘a* in the context of (Zaydī) rebellion has not yet been discussed in detail.⁹ This chapter argues that one crucial element of rebellion in this period was oath-making and oath-breaking,¹⁰ and it is through this lens that we might fruitfully approach Yaḥyā’s revolt. *Bay‘a* functions on two different levels here: refusing to pledge allegiance or revoking one’s loyalty to a ruler communicated opposition; in turn, the *bay‘a* also created ‘rebel communities’ and signalled a rebel leader’s own claim to power.¹¹

Yaḥyā’s Revolt

Most sources directly link Yaḥyā’s activities in Khurāsān to the revolt of his father Zayd in Kūfa in 121–2/740. After his father’s defeat, Yaḥyā escaped to Khurāsān with some followers, drawn from the ranks of Zayd’s supporters. Little is known about Yaḥyā and his life before then. He was probably the only one of Zayd’s four sons who participated in his father’s revolt.¹² Yaḥyā’s age at that time is not known, but some reports suggest that he was eighteen or older when he died in 125/743.¹³ Before summarising the narrative of Yaḥyā’s revolt, however, let us turn to the sources on which this chapter is based.

Sources

The corpus comprises Zaydī and non-Zaydī sources that stem from the ninth to eleventh centuries. The earliest extant source that includes information

⁸ Marsham, *Rituals*. See also Mottahedeh, *Loyalty*.

⁹ The only more sustained discussion of the ‘rebel *bay‘a*’ is Landau-Tasseron, *Religious Foundations*, 27–9.

¹⁰ See on this briefly Marsham, *Rituals*, 30, 54, 96, 99, and, ‘Public Execution’.

¹¹ See Esders, “Faithful Believers”; Landau-Tasseron, *Religious Foundations*; Marsham, *Rituals* and ‘Public Execution’. On the constitution of rebel communities, see also Hurvitz in this volume.

¹² Most sources do not clarify whether Yaḥyā participated in the fighting or was only present in Kūfa. The *Maṣābiḥ* (408) has Yaḥyā fight with Zayd; Ibn A‘tham (*Futūḥ*, VIII:292) indicates the same.

¹³ One report in al-Ṭabarī suggests that Yaḥyā had married while he was in Kūfa (al-Ṭabarī, *Ta‘rīkh*, II:1713–14). Other sources claim that Yaḥyā was married to an ‘Alid cousin and had at least one daughter, who died very young (Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamhara*, 50; al-Nāfiq bi-l-Ḥaqq, *Ifāda*, 46). Ibn Ḥazm (*Jamhara*, 50) states that Yaḥyā was eighteen years old when he died, the *Ifāda* (47) has twenty-eight.

about Yaḥyā is Ibn Sa‘d’s (d. 230/845) genealogical work, the *Ṭabaqāt*. The earliest historical work to preserve information about him is al-Balādhurī’s (d. c.279/892) *Ansāb al-asbrāf*. Both are included in the following analysis, alongside

- al-Ya‘qūbī’s (d. after 295/908) *Ta’rīkh* and *Kitāb al-Buldān*,¹⁴
- al-Ṭabarī’s (d. 310/923) *Ta’rīkh*,
- Ibn A‘tham’s (d. c. first half of the fourth/tenth century) *Kitāb al-Futūḥ*,¹⁵
- the anonymous *Akhhār al-dawla al-‘Abbāsiyya* (first half of the fourth/tenth century),
- al-Mas‘ūdī’s (d. 346/957) *Murūj al-dhahab*,
- al-Iṣfahānī’s (d. 356/967) *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*,
- al-Nāṭiq bi-l-Ḥaqq’s (d. c.424/1033) *Ifāda fī ta’rīkh a’immat al-sāda*,
- Ibn Ḥazm’s (d. 456/1064) *Jamharat ansāb al-‘arab*,
- *al-Maṣābiḥ*, completed by ‘Alī b. Bilāl (d. early fifth/eleventh century) and
- Gardīzī’s (fl. early fifth/eleventh century) *Zayn al-akhhār*.

While most of the non-Zaydī sources have become part of the standard canon used by Islamicists, the Zaydī sources are largely unknown and therefore seldom used. The Zaydī works consulted here – the *Ifāda* and the *Maṣābiḥ* – belong to the earliest extant Zaydī sources; both are bibliographical/prosopographical works on the (Caspian) Zaydī *imāms*. The *Ifāda*, reportedly based on an earlier list of Zaydī *imāms*, starts with the biography of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) and ends with the Zaydī *imām* Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan (d. 360/970). The *Maṣābiḥ* consists of two parts: the first by Abū l-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Ḥasanī (fl. first half of the third/ninth century), the second by his student, ‘Alī b. Bilāl. The *Maṣābiḥ* was unfinished upon Abū l-‘Abbās’ death, ending with the beginning of Yaḥyā b. Zayd’s biography; ‘Alī

¹⁴ Al-Ya‘qūbī’s two works present very different narratives. These differences will be discussed in the footnotes, where relevant.

¹⁵ Ibn A‘tham’s work has not been used comprehensively in previous studies of Yaḥyā. He preserves additional and sometimes very different material about Yaḥyā’s activities. A thorough analysis of his material is beyond the scope of this chapter; his work will thus only be referred to sporadically and has also not been included in the overview of Yaḥyā’s supporters (Appendix). I plan to deal with the *Futūḥ*’s representation of Zaydī revolts in another article.

b. Bilāl completed it and continued the *imāms*’ biographies up until al-Nāṣir li-l-Ḥaqq (d. 304/917).¹⁶

The literary sources remain our only avenue to the past in this case: we do not have any material evidence related to Yaḥyā and his revolt, such as coins.¹⁷ Given that the main elements of his story remain relatively stable across these sources,¹⁸ I assume for the purposes of this chapter that these reflect the basic outline of what happened. Of course, agreement does not guarantee historicity, and the accounts also differ with regard to many details, which hampers the analysis in places.¹⁹

The Story of Yaḥyā b. Zayd

The summary to follow is a synopsis of the above-mentioned sources and focuses on the main elements of Yaḥyā’s narrative, especially on those related to the *bay‘a*.

After the death of his father in 122/740, Yaḥyā left Kūfa with a small group that had previously supported Zayd’s revolt. The sources agree neither on the exact route of their journey to Khurāsān nor on where they stayed.²⁰ Most frame Yaḥyā’s journey as flight from Umayyad persecution and escape from the governor of Iraq, Yūsuf b. ‘Umar al-Thaqafī (d. c.127/745).²¹ There is also diverging information about who accompanied Yaḥyā during his flight and supported him along the route. Eventually, Yaḥyā arrived in Balkh and stayed there in hiding for some time. Naṣr b. Sayyār, the governor of Khurāsān, was informed of Yaḥyā’s whereabouts by Yūsuf; he sent an agent to seize Yaḥyā at the house of al-Ḥarīsh, one of Yaḥyā’s supporters in Balkh.²² Most sources

¹⁶ On Zaydī sources, see Strothmann, ‘Literatur’, esp. 358; Madelung, *Arabic Texts*, 11–12, and ‘Ḥasani, Abu’l-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. Ebrāhīm’.

¹⁷ A great example of the contribution of numismatics to the study of pro-‘Alid revolts is Bernheimer, ‘Abdallāh b. Mu‘āwiya’.

¹⁸ Ibn Sa‘d and Ibn Ḥazm only provide basic biographical and genealogical information on Yaḥyā. For example, Ibn Sa‘d (*Ṭabaqāt*, V:239) only refers to him being ‘killed in Khurāsān by Salm b. Aḥwaz who was sent to him by Naṣr b. Sayyār’.

¹⁹ On this, see also Haider, *Rebel*, 6–9.

²⁰ Most sources do not give any information on Yaḥyā’s route before he came to Balkh.

²¹ No explicit reason is given for Yaḥyā’s decision to go to Khurāsān; one report in al-Ṭabarī suggests that Yaḥyā was told the inhabitants would support him: al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, II:1713–14.

²² Ibn A‘tham (*Futūḥ*, VIII:296–7), uniquely, states that Yaḥyā was captured during a second visit to Balkh and at someone else’s house.

date Yaḥyā's imprisonment to shortly before the death of the caliph Hishām on 6 Rabī' II 125/6 February 743.

Naṣr imprisoned Yaḥyā in the provincial capital of Marw for a short period. With two notable exceptions,²³ the sources agree that Yaḥyā's subsequent release was a direct order by the new caliph, al-Walīd II b. Yazīd. After Naṣr had imprisoned Yaḥyā, he informed Yūsuf b. 'Umar about his success. Yūsuf, in turn, wrote a letter to the caliph. It is unclear whether al-Walīd II was already in power and the addressee of Yūsuf's letter, or whether the letter was addressed to Hishām, who died before it reached him. In any case, most sources state that the newly installed al-Walīd II answered Yūsuf's letter, ordered Yaḥyā's release, and granted him and his followers a safe-conduct (*amān*).²⁴ Naṣr summoned Yaḥyā to inform him about the caliph's decision and gave him riding animals and a large sum of money.²⁵ Naṣr then ordered Yaḥyā to join al-Walīd (*an yalḥaqa/yulḥiqa bi-l-Walīd*).²⁶ Some accounts refer to a subsequent argument between Naṣr and Yaḥyā.

This argument, which concerns the issues of *fiṭna* and obedience, is a key element for understanding the dynamics of Yaḥyā's revolt. When informing Yaḥyā about his release from prison, Naṣr refers to the duty of obedience, admonishes him to obey (*wa'aḏabu*) [the caliph], to fear God (*taqwā llāh*), and not to stir up sedition (*fiṭna*).²⁷ Then he orders him to join the caliph. While this is not mentioned explicitly, Naṣr's warnings and references to obedience suggest that Yaḥyā was to pledge allegiance to the caliph once in Syria. Yaḥyā's answer, included only in two (proto-)Shī'ī sources, frames this encounter even more clearly: responding to Naṣr's admonition not to cause sedition,

²³ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Buldān*, 302 states that Yaḥyā escaped prison when al-Walīd II came to power; his *Ta'rikh* (II:387–8) has Yaḥyā released on al-Walīd's order but admits there are other reports saying that Yaḥyā escaped. Gardīzī, *Zayn*, trans. 26, claims that al-Walīd ordered Naṣr to capture Yaḥyā.

²⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II:1771; al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, 148; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, II:639; *Ifāda*, 45; *Maṣābiḥ*, 417; *Akbbār*, 243; al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, II:397; Ibn A'tham, *Futūḥ*, VIII:298.

²⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II:1771; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, II:639; *Akbbār*, 243; *Maṣābiḥ*, 417; Ibn A'tham, *Futūḥ*, VIII:298. Al-Iṣfahānī (*Maqātil*, 148) mentions two sandals instead of the mules; the *Ifāda* says nothing about gifts.

²⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II:1771; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, II:639; al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, 148; *Maṣābiḥ*, 417. Al-Balādhurī also includes a report according to which Naṣr freed Yaḥyā, not al-Walīd II (see below). Ibn A'tham (*Futūḥ*, VIII:298) has the caliph command Yaḥyā to go and await his orders in Iraq.

²⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II:1771; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, II:639; al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, 148; *Maṣābiḥ*, 417; *Ifāda*, 45; *Akbbār*, 243.

Yaḥyā replies that there is no greater *fitna* in the Muslim community than the Umayyad family, whom Yaḥyā accuses of shedding blood and appropriating the properties of the Muslims unlawfully.²⁸ We will return to this below.

Yaḥyā initially followed Naṣr's order to return westwards and left Marw with his supporters in the direction of Nīshāpūr. The sources again disagree regarding his exact route and the events that took place. The course of his journey was apparently enforced by Umayyad officials, whom Naṣr had ordered to ensure that Yaḥyā travelled to al-Walīd. For instance, a commander of the governor of Ṭūs escorted Yaḥyā on the final leg of his journey to Nīshāpūr.²⁹ On this journey, Yaḥyā reportedly publicly criticised Naṣr, the caliph and Yūsuf b. ʿUmar.³⁰ We do not hear anything about immediate consequences, however; the commander eventually handed Yaḥyā over to the governor of Nīshāpūr, ʿAmr b. Zurāra (d. 125/743), who gave Yaḥyā more money and told him to continue travelling west. Yaḥyā did so and probably arrived at Bayhaq, the western-most district of Khurāsān, situated on the route between Nīshāpūr and Rayy.³¹ Here, Yaḥyā disobeyed Naṣr: instead of leaving Khurāsān, he and his considerably augmented group of followers returned in the direction of Nīshāpūr, where they fought ʿAmr b. Zurāra. Let us first look at the lead-up to this battle.

During his journey, Yaḥyā attained more followers. Most reports say that seventy men returned with Yaḥyā to ʿAmr b. Zurāra;³² others mention 120.³³ Kara has suggested that they joined Yaḥyā in Bayhaq;³⁴ however, only al-Yaʿqūbī's *Taʾriḫ* and the *Ifāda* state this explicitly.³⁵ Other sources make only indirect reference to Bayhaq:³⁶ for instance, Gardīzī states that 'when

²⁸ Al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, 148; *Ifāda*, 45.

²⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾriḫ*, II:1772; al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, 148–9; *Maṣābiḥ*, 418. The report is told on the authority of this commander.

³⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾriḫ*, II:1772; al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, 148.

³¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾriḫ*, II:1772; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾriḫ*, II:397; al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, 149; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, II:639; *Ifāda*, 45; *Akbbār*, 243.

³² Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾriḫ*, II:1772; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, II:639; *Ifāda*, 45; *Maṣābiḥ*, 418, 420. Al-Iṣfahānī (*Maqātil*, 149) and the *Akbbār* (243) report that Yaḥyā already arrived in Bayhaq with seventy men.

³³ Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾriḫ*, II:397; Gardīzī, *Zayn*, trans. 26.

³⁴ Kara, 'Yahyā', 777–8.

³⁵ Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾriḫ*, II:397; *Ifāda*, 45.

³⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾriḫ*, II:1772–3; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, II:639. The *Maṣābiḥ* (418) does not mention Bayhaq, but says that Yaḥyā came back to ʿAmr b. Zurāra with seventy people.

Yaḥyā came to a rural district of the administrative region of Nishapur, he threw off allegiance to Walīd and summoned people to his own cause'.³⁷

Yaḥyā's reasons for returning to Nīshāpūr remain unclear. Allusion is made to his fear of being killed by Yūsuf b. 'Umar upon returning to Iraq,³⁸ but we cannot know for sure. Whatever the reasons, the narrative of Yaḥyā's journey emphasises his deliberate disobedience: he openly criticised al-Walīd and Umayyad officials, then gathered further supporters, and eventually returned to Nīshāpūr instead of continuing westwards to the caliph. The battle against 'Amr in Nīshāpūr, won by Yaḥyā, is a vital element of the story. It is the Umayyad side, however, that initiated the battle: Naṣr reportedly ordered his officials to 'provoke a fight with Yaḥyā'³⁹ and told his deputies that they 'should fight Yaḥyā'.⁴⁰ So Yaḥyā was 'confronted by 'Amr',⁴¹ and it was 'Amr who 'declared war on Yaḥyā'.⁴²

What caused the outbreak of violence and the Umayyads' changed attitude towards Yaḥyā? The sources emphasise two aspects: Yaḥyā's disobedience, and the growing military threat he and his followers posed. Hillenbrand has suggested that it was Yaḥyā's acquisition of riding animals from a group of merchants following his decision to stay in Khurāsān that effected the change. She argues that this acquisition was 'clearly viewed as irregular by 'Amr and was used as the pretext to attack Yaḥyā'.⁴³ The sources indeed present Naṣr's mobilisation of 'Amr as a direct reaction to Yaḥyā's activities.

Two distinct accounts provide another perspective on this episode. The first is recorded in the *Maṣābīḥ*. Here, Yaḥyā informs 'Amr that he does not want anything from him, but only seeks to continue to Balkh. 'Amr replies that he would not let Yaḥyā and his followers pass 'unless you [Yaḥyā] give

³⁷ Gardīzī, *Zayn*, trans. 26.

³⁸ Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, II:639; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II:1771; al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, 148.

³⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II:1773.

⁴⁰ Al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, 149.

⁴¹ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, II:397.

⁴² *Maṣābīḥ*, 418.

⁴³ Al-Ṭabarī, trans. *History*, XXVI: 123 n.620; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II:1772. The report is also included by al-Iṣfahānī (*Maqātil*, 149) and the *Akbbār* (243).

me your hand and enter the *amān*' (*illā anna tu'tiya bi-yadika wa-tadkbula fī l-amān*).⁴⁴ However, Yaḥyā rejected 'Amr's offer, which then led to battle.⁴⁵

The second account is unique to al-Balādhurī and deliberately frames Yaḥyā and his supporters as bandits.⁴⁶ According to this account, a group gathered around Yaḥyā when he was in Nīshāpūr after having left Naṣr. Yaḥyā reportedly killed the city's governor ('Amr b. Zurāra) and looted the treasury (*dār al-māl*).⁴⁷ This report thus blurs the lines between rebel and bandit – monetary concerns may have played the main role, but attacking the *dār al-māl* could also always be understood as an attack on the caliphate's fundamental institutions and symbols of power.

After killing 'Amr b. Zurāra, Yaḥyā continued eastwards until he came to Jūzjān. His supporters had increased again by the time he faced Umayyad troops there who were led by Salm b. Aḥwaz, the commander of Naṣr's *shurṭa*.⁴⁸ Naṣr once again provoked the fight by sending Salm against Yaḥyā.⁴⁹ Their troops fought each other in the district of Jūzjān for three days. Eventually, Yaḥyā was hit in the forehead by an arrow and died. Most sources state that all of Yaḥyā's men died in battle. Yaḥyā's corpse was decapitated and his head sent to Naṣr b. Sayyār; his body was crucified in Jūzjān.

This basic outline has informed the understanding of Yaḥyā as rebel,⁵⁰ based mainly on his criticism of the Umayyads and his refusal to obey orders

⁴⁴ *Maṣābiḥ*, 421. The significance of the *amān* is also discussed in the chapters by Dar and Hagemann in this volume.

⁴⁵ *Maṣābiḥ*, 420–1. Gardīzī (*Zayn*, trans. 26) narrates that 'Amr ordered Yaḥyā to leave Nīshāpūr again and fought him when Yaḥyā refused. Al-Balādhurī (*Ansāb*, II:639), however, reports that Yaḥyā informed 'Amr that he was sick and only wanted to stay in Nīshāpūr until he had recovered enough to proceed to Balkh (which still would be the 'wrong' direction).

⁴⁶ Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, II:642. Al-Balādhurī appears uncertain about the report: he did not include it in his main narration of Yaḥyā's activities in Khurāsān, but at the end of the section. It thus appears as a postscript that was included for the sake of completeness. For an example of this in another context, see Kontny, 'Arabo-Islamic Geographies', 49.

⁴⁷ Al-Ṭabarī and al-Isfahānī also mention the treasury, but in a different context. Here, the commander taking Yaḥyā to 'Amr explains that an escort was regular practice in the area because the proximity of the treasury attracted bandits: al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ*, II:1771–2; al-Isfahānī, *Maqātil*, 149.

⁴⁸ The number of Yaḥyā's supporters apparently peaked before the final battle against Salm, although only al-Balādhurī (*Ansāb*, II:639) and the *Maṣābiḥ* (421–2) give the concrete number of 150.

⁴⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ*, II:1773; al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'riḫ*, II:397; al-Ya'qūbī, *Buldān*, 302; Gardīzī, *Zayn*, trans. 26–7; al-Isfahānī, *Maqātil*, 149–50; Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, V:239; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, II:639–40, 642; *Maṣābiḥ*, 419; al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, IV:49; *Akbbār*, 167, 244.

⁵⁰ E.g. *EP*, 'Yaḥyā b. Zayd' (W. Madelung).

after his release from prison. Another crucial element is the continuously increasing number of Yaḥyā's supporters in Khurāsān. These are the 'rebellious activities' that the sources ascribe to Yaḥyā and that eventually triggered the Umayyads to fight Yaḥyā in Khurāsān. Both these activities are deeply intertwined with the institution of *bay'a*, to which we shall now turn in more detail.

***Bay'a* in Early Islamic Rebellion**

Yaḥyā is readily presented as a rebel in Islamicist scholarship, but what we have of his story perhaps indicates a critic of Umayyad rule more than a leader of a deliberately planned insurgency. I will argue that markers of rebellion are present in his story, but not necessarily where they have been previously sought – Kara, for instance, suggested that the beginning of Yaḥyā's revolt is tied to violence, meaning here the first battle between him and 'Amr.⁵¹

I suggest that the argument between Naṣr and Yaḥyā upon the latter's release is key to understanding what constituted Yaḥyā's revolt because it touches on the fundamental question of loyalty and allegiance in the early Islamic period. Building on works on the *bay'a* – especially by Marsham and Landau-Tasseront⁵² – I argue that Yaḥyā's rebel status is linked to his refusal to pledge allegiance to the new caliph al-Walīd II as well as to his supporters pledging allegiance to him. The *bay'a* here served a similar purpose for rebel leaders and their official counterparts in communicating and shaping loyalty, authority and legitimacy: rebel leaders secured the backing of their supporters through oaths that bound them to their enterprise and communicated dissidence by refusing to take an oath to the ruler. The next section will discuss both aspects as they pertain to the phenomenon of rebellion in general and Yaḥyā's revolt in particular. Much of the following, however, is conjecture based on what we know about the socio-political and ideological milieu of the period and a contextual reading of the source material.

⁵¹ Kara, 'Yahyā', 777–8.

⁵² Marsham, *Rituals* and 'Public Execution'; Landau-Tasseront, *Religious Foundations*.

Disobedience: Refusing the Bayʿa to al-Walīd II

In his seminal work on accession and succession in the early Islamic Empire, Marsham argued that the main political institution of pre-Islamic Arabia was the pledged covenant under oath.⁵³ This practice was reinvented and transformed throughout the early Islamic period and was also used in the late western Roman context. Esders argues that the Visigoths, the Franks and the Muslim polity were each ‘an oath-based community’ in which the pledge acquired both a military and a legal meaning. One of the common roots of this socio-political institution can be found in the hierarchical pledge of the late Roman army.⁵⁴

In pre-Islamic Arabia, pledges were used as a means of forging political and military security in the absence of a powerful state; alliances were contracted between different tribal groupings and based on their military capacities.⁵⁵ In the ‘conquest society’, *bayʿa* developed into a ritual expressing loyalty, accession and allegiance. The agreements between Muḥammad and Arab tribal delegations functioned as *bayʿa*, in the sense of recognising a new political authority.⁵⁶ The *bayʿa*’s contractual nature, defined by mutual obligations, meant that reciprocity was a major feature.⁵⁷ During the Umayyad period, the *bayʿa* also continued to be the central expression of loyalty and leadership, both for contracting nomad military support and for expressing religio-political allegiance on the part of elites in particular. The institutional development of Islamic rulership through the establishment of dynastic succession led to a further transformation of the *bayʿa* into an instrument of monarchic power to safeguard Umayyad rule. This included persuading a wider public of the ruler’s legitimacy and binding them with pledges.⁵⁸

Despite this binding function, rebels were not stopped by a previous *bayʿa*; however, in most cases prospective rebels tried to circumvent the *bayʿa*

⁵³ Marsham, *Rituals*, 25–39.

⁵⁴ Esders, ‘Faithful Believers’, 361–9.

⁵⁵ Landau-Tasserón emphasises that the *bayʿa* was an Islamic innovation (*Religious Foundations*, 3). Pledges, however, are universal; for their use in the pre-Islamic Near East and the post-Roman West, see Cole, ‘Muhammad’, 184–8; Esders, ‘Faithful Believers’, 357–61.

⁵⁶ Marsham, *Rituals*, 61–2.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 8, 21, 33–4; Landau-Tasserón, *Religious Foundations*, 1–3.

⁵⁸ Marsham, *Rituals*, 81–3.

to the caliph. If the pledge had been given, one of the main pretexts to revoke the *bay'a* was the accusation that the ruler had violated the *bay'a* first.⁵⁹ In Yaḥyā's case, the rebels combined both strategies: Yaḥyā justified his general rejection of the Umayyads with their violation of the reciprocal *bay'a* to their subjects, and he avoided pledging allegiance to the new caliph.

The first aspect features in Yaḥyā's conversation with Naṣr. As we saw, when Naṣr released Yaḥyā from prison, he admonished him to obey and join the caliph.⁶⁰ In his reply, Yaḥyā voices his discontent towards the Umayyads: 'Is there a greater *fitna* in the *umma* of Muḥammad than you regarding the shedding of blood and the taking of what does not belong to you from the people?'⁶¹ Undoubtedly, the proto-Shī'i sources that record this interaction had a greater interest in justifying Yaḥyā's subsequent activities: to accuse the Umayyads of *fitna* was clearly a means of delegitimising their rule and making opposition acceptable. As noted, there are also attempts to delegitimise Yaḥyā's activities as banditry or condemn his use of public violence. However, there was not yet a clear theoretical distinction between 'brigandage' and 'rebellion' in the Umayyad period.⁶² The representation of Yaḥyā as rebel or bandit thus follows a later logic, and differing depictions are explained by the various author-compilers' stances on the 'Alids and/or rebellion.

Perhaps more importantly, why did al-Walīd decide to release Yaḥyā? Kara suggests that his release was informed by strategic considerations, limiting the threat he posed by sending him westwards to prevent him profiting from the large constituency of pro-'Alids in Khurāsān.⁶³ But why not leave Yaḥyā in prison? I would suggest instead that we should regard Yaḥyā's release as an attempt to (re-)gain his support and harness the region's pro-'Alid sentiment by having him pledge to al-Walīd in public. Naṣr clearly linked the order to join al-Walīd to the issue of obedience; perhaps Yaḥyā's *amān* was conditional on his oath. The *bay'a* to the caliph had by then become a ceremonial ritual

⁵⁹ Landau-Tasserou, *Religious Foundations*, 26–7.

⁶⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II:1771; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, II:639; al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, 148; *Maṣābiḥ*, 417; *Ifāda*, 45; *Akbbār*, 243.

⁶¹ Al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, 148; *Ifāda*, 45.

⁶² Marsham, 'Public Execution', 105; Cole, 'Muhammad', 190–2.

⁶³ Kara, 'Yahyā', 775–7.

bound to the burial ceremony of the previous ruler,⁶⁴ and it was expected that people, especially elites, would pledge to the ruler upon his accession.⁶⁵

Secondly, Yaḥyā's rebellious intent is signalled by his refusal to swear allegiance to al-Walīd. The letter ordering Yaḥyā's release resonates with those sent to secure the oath of allegiance to al-Walīd II and his sons as heirs-apparent.⁶⁶ These letters contained instructions and orders by al-Walīd as well as the oath itself, which the caliph reportedly copied in. Both the timing of these letters and their content support the idea that Yaḥyā's release was connected to the *bay'a*. The gifts that Yaḥyā received from Naṣr and ʿAmr may have formed part of the mutual covenant established by the oath.⁶⁷ Reading Yaḥyā's non-compliance with Naṣr's orders and criticism of Umayyad authorities as rejection of the pledge of allegiance to the caliph, he thus failed to uphold his end of the bargain and revealed his opposition to the Umayyads. This likely explains Naṣr and ʿAmr's changed attitude: Yaḥyā's disobedience invalidated the *amān* he had received from al-Walīd.

The Umayyad attack on Yaḥyā upon his return to Nīshāpūr can likely be read along these lines: it resonates with Esders' observation that the violation of oaths in the post-Roman and early Islamic context caused severe sanctions (e.g. the death penalty or confiscations), justified by accusations of treason and modelled on the Roman law of treason.⁶⁸ Similarly, there was a clear connection between the violation of the *bay'a* and the accusation of rebellion. Given caliphal claims of being God's deputies on earth, a revolt against them was by extension a rebellion against God and therefore warranted capital punishment.⁶⁹ Umayyad rhetoric of counter-rebellion also emphasised that disobedience incurred capital punishment because of its relation to public violence.⁷⁰ The next section will turn to this issue.

⁶⁴ Marsham, *Rituals*, 137–8.

⁶⁵ See also Esders, 'Faithful Believers', 361–9.

⁶⁶ For these letters, see Marsham, *Rituals*, 156–7, 169–72.

⁶⁷ Gifts were exchanged as a diplomatic component of allegiance: Marsham, *Rituals*, 64.

⁶⁸ Esders, 'Faithful Believers', 363–4.

⁶⁹ Marsham, 'Public Execution', 123–6.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 109–13.

Pledging the Bay'a to Yaḥyā b. Zayd

Oaths were widely used to impose power and build communities and polities by forging new social ties based on shared religious ideas and institutions.⁷¹ The *bay'a* was used not only to manifest caliphal rule, but was also employed by those who perceived themselves as alternative rulers, that is, rebels. The 'rebel *bay'a*' could take different forms: rebel leaders might present themselves as substitute caliphs from the beginning; the *bay'a* between the leader and his followers might function as a temporary recognition of authority for a specific purpose, such as the overthrow of the current caliph; or the leader might voice his universal claim to power at a more advanced stage of his rebellion.⁷²

In Yaḥyā's case, the sources again highlight different perspectives. Zaydī imāmate theory makes claims to leadership conditional on the willingness to take up arms, thereby connecting rebellion with legitimate rule. Narratives of the beginning of Yaḥyā's journey to Khurāsān after his father's death are particularly significant here. It is important to note that by the time the *Ifāda* and the *Maṣābiḥ* were composed, Yaḥyā's recognition as *imām* was established fact in the Zaydī tradition. It is thus no surprise that this particular perspective dominates. The Zaydī theory of the imāmate requires a candidate to rebel and lead his followers against a tyrant ruler:⁷³ 'this act of open revolt against injustice [transforms] a contender's genetic and scholarly potential ... into the charismatic authority of an Imām'.⁷⁴

The *Ifāda* and *Maṣābiḥ* both stress that when Yaḥyā's father was on his deathbed, he transferred leadership of the anti-Umayyad opposition to Yaḥyā.⁷⁵ They use the verb *awṣā* to express this transmission; this alludes to the Shī'ī concept of *waṣī* (legatee, inheritor), which is closely connected to the belief that 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib was Muḥammad's successor to the imāmate⁷⁶ and so has particular significance for the Zaydī understanding of Yaḥyā. These accounts describe Yaḥyā's task as the fight against oppressors and enemies of the

⁷¹ Esders, 'Faithful Believers', 359–60.

⁷² Landau-Tasseron, *Religious Foundations*, 27–9.

⁷³ Haider, *Shī'ī Islam*, 40.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ *Ifāda*, 45; *Maṣābiḥ*, 408.

⁷⁶ *EP*, 'Waṣī' (E. Kohlberg).

religion,⁷⁷ *jihād* against the enemies of God,⁷⁸ or battle against the Umayyads.⁷⁹ The non-Zaydī sources present this very differently, mainly framing Yaḥyā’s journey to Khurāsān as flight from Umayyad persecution and escape from Yūsuf b. ‘Umar, who was responsible for Zayd’s death.

The Zaydī perspective on Yaḥyā as *imām* does not challenge his status as rebel; on the contrary, these functions are mutually supportive by making Yaḥyā the leader of a distinct faction. The element of leadership also features in the *Akbbār al-dawla*,⁸⁰ on which basis it has been suggested that Yaḥyā might have been the unidentified figure for whom the Hāshimī movement agitated in Khurāsān, simply labelled *al-riḍā min āl Muḥammad* (‘the agreed upon from Muḥammad’s family’).⁸¹ The legal requirements for the *imāmate* as developed by Zaydī tradition over the ninth–tenth centuries⁸² certainly affected the perspective of these two Zaydī sources, but they are not alone in presenting Yaḥyā as an accepted leader against Umayyad authority in Khurāsān.

All sources agree that Yaḥyā gathered followers who pledged their allegiance to him; little is known about these followers, however – often not even their names. This section presents some preliminary insights into the prosopography of Yaḥyā’s support network. Previous prosopographical research has illustrated this approach’s potential for offering new insights into early Islamic social history,⁸³ including rebellion.⁸⁴ The observations included here are work in progress, but can provide further insight already.

Who were the people that pledged their *bay‘a* to Yaḥyā? Most often, they are referred to by generic terms such as *qawm*,⁸⁵ *jamā‘a*,⁸⁶ *rijāl*,⁸⁷ or *aṣḥāb*.⁸⁸ Similarly, the verbs used to express them joining Yaḥyā are also general, for

⁷⁷ *Ifāda*, 45.

⁷⁸ *Maṣābiḥ*, 408.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*.

⁸⁰ *Akbbār*, 233.

⁸¹ Agha, *Revolution*, 31–3.

⁸² Haider, *Sbī‘ī Islam*, 39–41.

⁸³ Impressive examples are Robinson, *Marriage* and Ahmed, *Religious Elite*.

⁸⁴ Agha, *Revolution*; Elad, *Rebellion*; Robinson, ‘Qurashi Marriage’.

⁸⁵ *Maṣābiḥ*, 421.

⁸⁶ *Ifāda*, 46; Ibn A‘tham, *Futūḥ*, VIII:295.

⁸⁷ *Akbbār*, 244.

⁸⁸ Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, II:639.

example *lahiqa bi* (join someone)⁸⁹ or *ijtima'a* (rally to someone).⁹⁰ Only the *Ifāda* uses the verb *bāya'a* to describe Yaḥyā's gathering of supporters.⁹¹ It first appears in the account of a group of men pledging their allegiance to Yaḥyā in Bayhaq before the battle against 'Amr b. Zurāra. The second instance refers to a faction of the Khurāsānī army that swore allegiance to Yaḥyā before he fought Salm b. Aḥwaz. Some of Yaḥyā's supporters are also referred to by name, and in some cases additional information about them has been preserved. His supporters can be grouped into five categories: (1) those who left Kūfa with Yaḥyā; (2) those who joined him and/or gave him shelter before his imprisonment in Marw; (3) those who joined him after his release from prison, possibly in Bayhaq; (4) those who joined him before his final battle in Jūzjān; and (5) an unspecified group of followers about whom nothing is known. The table below summarises the relevant data.

The limited data allow only tentative conclusions about the composition of Yaḥyā's supporters. First, most of them joined him in Khurāsān after his release from prison.⁹² Their number continuously increased and peaked before the battle against Salm b. Aḥwaz in Jūzjān. Most of these supporters are referred to simply as Shī'īs, Zaydīs, or people from Khurāsān; it is unclear what these terms meant at the time.⁹³ Yaḥyā already had a few followers when he reached Khurāsān, who previously had also backed his father. He had support in Khurāsān already before his imprisonment, but we rarely get explicit numbers and it is unclear whether Yaḥyā received a pledge at that time. Nevertheless, given the efforts to catch him, he seems to have posed a threat to the Umayyads.

Second, nearly all individuals who are referred to by name and/or *nisba* have a North Arabian background. Little is known about the tribal composition of supporters of Zaydī revolts in general.⁹⁴ Agha's results regarding the

⁸⁹ *Ifāda*, 46; *Maṣābiḥ*, 421.

⁹⁰ Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, II:642; al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, II:397.

⁹¹ *Ifāda*, 45–6.

⁹² On this, see also Kara, 'Yaḥyā', 777–8.

⁹³ E.g. *Maṣābiḥ*, 408; Ibn A'tham, *Futūḥ*, VIII:295; al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, II:397–8; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, 639. A group of Khārijites apparently also wanted to join Yaḥyā's fight against the Umayyads: al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, 638; al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, 146.

⁹⁴ The most comprehensive work on this is Elad's study of the revolt of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya (d. 145/762) in Medina. In his case, supporters and opponents cannot be separated by

Table 3.1 *Yaḥyā's supporters (named individuals only)*

Cat.	Name	Tribe/Affiliation	Support	Sources ^a
1	Abū l-Ṣabbār al-ʿAbdī	ʿAbd al-Qays (Rabīʿa)	Zayd; flight	AB, I, Ṭ
1	Abū Numayla Ṣāliḥ al-Abbār (<i>mawlā</i>)	ʿAbs (Muḍar)	flight	B, Ṭ
1	al-Faḍl (<i>mawlā</i>)	ʿAbd al-Qays (Rabīʿa)	Zayd; flight; prison; fight?	AB, (B?), I, Ṭ
1	Salama b. Thābit al-Laythī	Layth (Muḍar)	Zayd; flight	AB, I, Ṭ
1	Zuhayr b. Muḥammad al-ʿĀmirī	ʿĀmir b. Luʿayy (Quraysh/ Muḍar)	Zayd?; flight	B
2	ʿAbd al-Malik b. Bishr b. Marwān	Umayya (Quraysh/ Muḍar)	host	B, Ṭ
2	al-Ḥakam b. Yazīd	–	host	I
2	al-Ḥarīsh	Bakr b. Wāʿil/Shaybān (Rabīʿa)	host	A, AB, B, I, N, Ṭ
2	Sābiq (<i>mawlā</i>)	Umayya (Quraysh/ Muḍar)	host	AB, B, Ṭ
2	Yazīd b. ʿUmar	Tamīm (Muḍar)	host?; prison; fight?	A, (AB?), B, I, Ṭ
2	Ziyād b. Zurāra al-ʿĀmirī	ʿĀmir b. Luʿayy (Quraysh/ Muḍar)	host	AB
4	Abū al-ʿAjlān	Ḥanīfa (Rabīʿa)	fight	AB, I, Ṭ
4	al-Ḥaṣḥās al-Azdī	Azd (Yaman)	fight	AB, I, Ṭ
5	Abū Yaʿqūb Dāwūd b. Ṭahmān	– // ʿZaydī ^b	warning	Ṭ
5	Salm al-Ḥadhāʾ	–	fight	AB

^a Key to the sources: A = *Akkbār*; AB = ʿAlī b. Bilāl, *Maṣābiḥ*; B = al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*; I = al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*; N = al-Nāṭiq bi-l-Ḥaqq, *Ifāda*; Ṭ = al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*. Al-Masʿūdī, al-Yaʿqūbī, Gardizī, Ibn Ḥazm and Ibn Saʿd do not mention any of Yaḥyā's followers by name.

^b According to al-Ṭabarī (*Taʾrīkh*, III:506–7), Abū Yaʿqūb and his brothers were secretaries to Naṣr b. Sayyār and a previous governor of Khurāsān. He reportedly warned Yaḥyā about Naṣr's plans. His sons supported later ʿZaydī revolts and also adopted ʿZaydism'.

tribal composition of the Hāshimī movement are pertinent in this context, as he has shown that the North Arabian Rabīʿa played an insignificant role in the movement in general and the Khurāsān chapter particularly.⁹⁵ Yaḥyā's case differs: although the Hāshimī movement and Yaḥyā's revolt were both led by, or in the name of, the same family and in opposition to the Umayyads, they

tribal or family lines. However, the Zubayrids and descendants of ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb formed the main military and administrative backbone of Muḥammad's revolt. Elad, *Rebellion*, 361–2.

⁹⁵ Agha, *Revolution*, 274–8.

mobilised different constituencies. Furthermore, no ‘Alids or ‘Abbāsids appear among Yaḥyā’s followers. Is this because such family members were included in the generic terms listed above? Did most of the ‘Zaydīs’ who had previously rebelled with Zayd b. ‘Alī follow other (pro-‘Alid) leaders after Zayd’s death?⁹⁶ Did Yaḥyā not enjoy broad Hāshimī or ‘Alid support? Indeed, only al-Balādhurī reports that Yaḥyā wrote a letter to the Banū Hāshim in Medina asking them to stand up against the Umayyads.⁹⁷ Additionally, the *Akbbār* reports that the leaders of the Hāshimī movement actively discouraged pro-Hāshimīs in Khurāsān from supporting Yaḥyā.⁹⁸ Future prosopographical research on the supporters of pro-‘Alid/Zaydī revolts, including on matrilineal connections between Umayyads and ‘Alid rebels, will shed some light on these questions.⁹⁹

The increasing number of Yaḥyā’s supporters suggests that he was perceived as an alternative leader by people in Khurāsān. By pledging their allegiance to him, they became a distinctive group: the socio-political institution of the *bay‘a* created a rebel community. As there is no information about the content of this particular ‘rebel *bay‘a*’, Yaḥyā’s motivation and the group’s aims remain unclear: did Yaḥyā advocate his own claims to caliphal power, or was he recognised as a temporary authority in a situation when several groups harboured grievances against the Umayyads?

Concluding Remarks

Whether someone is a rebel or not always depends on perspective. In Yaḥyā’s case, a close reading of his story has shown that he was perceived by some as a legitimate alternative ruler – an *imām*.

By participating in his father’s revolt, Yaḥyā was already an offender before he came to Khurāsān, at least according to the Umayyad perspective. His imprisonment in Marw and al-Walīd’s subsequent decision to release him and grant Yaḥyā an *amān* also support this. As argued here, the *amān* was granted on condition that Yaḥyā would obey Umayyad orders and pledge his allegiance to

⁹⁶ For instance, many of Zayd b. ‘Alī’s followers might later have joined the revolts of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya and his brother Ibrāhīm under the leadership of another of Zayd’s sons. Haider, *Origins*, 200–5.

⁹⁷ Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, II:638.

⁹⁸ *Akbbār*, 242.

⁹⁹ At least one of these supporters is referred to by Ibn A‘tham (*Futūḥ*, VIII:292) as a ‘Shī‘ī’.

the new caliph, corresponding to political custom at the time. Yaḥyā's decision to stay in Khurāsān and refuse the *bayʿa* to al-Walīd II, while gathering more supporters and accepting their oaths of allegiance, communicated opposition and threatened public violence, which signalled rebellion¹⁰⁰ and caused the Umayyads to react accordingly. Both of these elements indicated and defined rebellion in late Umayyad rhetoric, at least as it was later remembered.¹⁰¹

Yaḥyā's killing and post-mortem decapitation and crucifixion also show that Umayyad officials perceived him as transgressor or rebel. Crucifixion was a common punishment for rebels in the late Umayyad period.¹⁰² Yaḥyā's father, Zayd, was crucified post-mortem as well; Anthony has argued that the Umayyads justified this act with reference to his instigation of *fitna*, emphasising that the caliph would only show clemency in response to obedience.¹⁰³ Indeed, Yaḥyā's and Zayd's death narratives show further similarities: both died from an arrow that was shot by a *mawlā* and hit their foreheads,¹⁰⁴ and both were decapitated before their crucifixion.¹⁰⁵ The portrayal of their deaths resonates with a well-established martyr narrative.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, ʿAlid martyr narratives share a whole range of themes that deserve further study; the same holds true for (proto-)Shīʿī rebel narratives.

Previous research on the *bayʿa* has contributed immensely to our understanding of early Islamic kingship and rituals of accession and rule more generally. Many of these insights can be transferred to the study of rebellion, which can be understood as the opposite side of the same coin. Yaḥyā's revolt not only illustrates the different aspects of *bayʿa* in the context of rebellion, but also its importance for our understanding of disobedience and opposition. The *bayʿa*

¹⁰⁰ Marsham, 'Public Execution', 109–13; Cole, 'Muhammad', 190–2.

¹⁰¹ Marsham, 'Public Execution', 108–13, 125–6.

¹⁰² Anthony, *Crucifixion*, 40–51; Cole, 'Muhammad', 190.

¹⁰³ Anthony, *Crucifixion*, 50.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II:1773–4; *Ifāda*, 46; al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, 150; *Maṣābiḥ*, 420; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh*, II:398; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Buldān*, 302. That Zayd and Yaḥyā died from the same wound is also mentioned in al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, II:637.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II:1774; *Ifāda*, 46–7; *Maṣābiḥ*, 420, 422. Al-Yaʿqūbī's *Taʾrīkh* (II:398) and Gardīzī (*Zayn*, trans. 27) only mention Yaḥyā's beheading but not the perpetrator. Al-Balādhurī (*Ansāb*, II:637) simply states that a man from Naṣr's troops shot, killed and beheaded Yaḥyā. Al-Iṣfahānī (*Maqātil*, 150) ascribes the beheading to the *mawlā* who killed Yaḥyā and adds that he also looted Yaḥyā's corpse. According to Gardīzī (*Zayn*, trans. 27), Yaḥyā's head was mounted on a pole and exhibited in Marw.

¹⁰⁶ Anthony, *Crucifixion*, 53–5; Marsham, 'Attitudes', 120–2; Sahner, *Christian Martyrs*, 170–5.

not only functions on the ‘state’ side of power; it is also a means of forming an alternative power base against imperial power. It thus plays an important role for rebellion in the early Islamic period and should be considered more systematically in its study.

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4

Poet, Scholar, Rebel? ‘Imrān b. Ḥiṭṭān (d. 703), Khārijite Revolt and the ‘Playbook of Rebellion’ in the Umayyad Period*

Hannah-Lena Hagemann

Introduction

Khārijism is often understood as an expression of eternal rebellion, grounded in an uncompromising religiosity so excessive that it crosses into the absurd. The image of the Khārijite as a violent fanatic has proved persistent and indeed useful in the political arena until today, and because scholarship continues to neglect Khārijism, that image is slow to change.¹ But change it should: as recent research indicates, the phenomenon was more complicated than traditional approaches would suggest and goes beyond an exceedingly narrow interpretation of religion.² Perhaps the best way to arrive at a more nuanced picture of Khārijism is to start with biography and prosopography: we still know little about Khārijite actors, especially below the leadership level, despite the rich biographical and genealogical material preserved in the Islamic

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¹ For the medieval and modern legacy of Khārijism, see Hagemann, *Khārijites*. For contemporary Arab/Muslim approaches, see Timani, *Modern* (which also reviews western academic literature).

² E.g. Robinson, ‘al-‘Aṭṭāf’; Wilkinson, *Ibadism*, 157–160; Hagemann and Verkinderen, ‘Kharijism’, 495–7 and Appendix.

tradition. Addressing this lacuna, this chapter will focus on the life and legacy of ‘Imrān b. Ḥiṭṭān al-Sadūsī (d. 703).

‘Imrān occupies a liminal space in the Islamic tradition. He was a Baṣran poet and transmitted *ḥadīth* from important figures like Abū Dharr (d. 652), Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī (d. c.668), ‘Ā’isha (d. 678), Ibn ‘Abbās (d. c.687–8), and Ibn ‘Umar (d. 693).³ He is also remembered as a leader of the Ṣufriyya, a quietist (but not pacifist) branch of Khārijism, and major scholar of Khārijite doctrine and law.⁴ ‘Imrān’s denominational affiliation is contested, however, like that of other significant Khārijites: examples include Abū Bilāl Mirdās b. Udayya (d. 680–1) and Jābir b. Zayd (d. 711–23), variously claimed by (proto-)Sunnīs, Mu‘tazilīs, Ibādīs, and Ṣufrīs.⁵

‘Imrān’s reputation and legacy primarily drew on his fame as a poet and master of language. The sources tie his Khārijite career to al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf (d. 714), governor of Iraq and the east for the Umayyad caliphs ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 685/692–705) and al-Walīd I (r. 705–15). Al-Ḥajjāj’s persecution of ‘Imrān and the latter’s escape are a daring tale of adventure, with ‘Imrān as the undisputed hero. Modern scholarship has neglected him: the extant fragments of his poetry were first published in an anthology of Khārijite verse in 1963,⁶ but the most extensive discussion of his life and work remains a chapter in an unpublished 1981 PhD dissertation.⁷ The *EP* article is brief and there is no *EF* article (yet).

Here I will approach ‘Imrān’s story from two perspectives. I will problematise notions of Khārijite exceptionalism and contend that ‘Imrān’s story is told in a framework of tribal relations that challenges broad-brush interpretations of Khārijism as an ideology of religious separatism. Second, I suggest a

³ Ibn Sa‘d (d. 845), *Ṭabaqāt*, I:294, 360, VII:113; Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855), *Musnad Aḥmad*, I:407; al-Bukhārī (d. 870), *Ta’rīkh*, IV:282, VI:413; Ibn Abī al-Dunyā (d. 894), *Uzla*, 66; Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 965), *Thiqāt*, V:222.

⁴ Al-Jāhīz (d. 868–9), *Bayān*, I:61–2 and 280, III:176; al-Balādhurī (d. after 892), *Ansāb*, V:184; al-Mubarrad (d. 898), *Kāmil*, III:124, 191–2; al-Baghdādī (d. 1037), *Farq*, 55; al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 1078), *Tabṣīr*, 53; al-Shahrastānī (d. 1153), *Milal*, trans. *Muslim Sects*, 103; al-Burrī (d. 1291), *Jawhara*, 450.

⁵ Jābir: *EP*, ‘Djābir b. Zayd’ (R. Rubinacci); *EF*, ‘Jābir b. Zayd’ (E. Francesca). Abū Bilāl: Gaiser, ‘Tracing’, 67; *EP*, ‘Mirdās b. Udayya’ (A. Gaiser).

⁶ ‘Abbās, *Shi‘r*.

⁷ Abu-Rahmeh, ‘Poetry’, 386–430. Malḥas (*Ḥizb*, 95–112) gathers material on ‘Imrān but does not analyse it.

re-reading of ‘Imrān’s flight that turns on early Islamic mechanisms of conflict resolution and presents intercession as a productive lens through which to understand ‘Imrān’s tale.

I will first narrate ‘Imrān’s story according to Ibn A‘tham’s (d. early tenth century) *Kitāb al-Futūḥ*,⁸ the fullest extant version; its almost total neglect in the sparse scholarship on ‘Imrān is unfortunate. This is followed by a biographical sketch. I will then analyse Khārijism and the ‘playbook of rebellion’ in the early Islamic period through three frames: rebellion/contention; varieties of Khārijism, especially regarding the issue of violence; and mechanisms and institutions of conflict resolution (intercession; safe-conduct (*amān*)).

‘Imrān’s Story

‘Imrān’s escape from al-Ḥajjāj was famous⁹ and circulated in several versions.¹⁰ The earliest is preserved in al-Mubarrad’s (d. 898) *Kāmil*, only just predating Ibn A‘tham’s account.¹¹ The main story elements are stable, but the details vary, sometimes considerably. The timeline is problematic and some passages seemingly result from the merging of different (contradictory) versions. A comparative analysis of all available versions is beyond the scope of this chapter: the following synopsis was kept concise and only gives some examples of the noted difficulties for illustration.

Ibn A‘tham places ‘Imrān’s story directly after the revolt of the Khārijite Shabīb b. Yazīd al-Shaybānī (d. 697) against al-Ḥajjāj in mid-690s Iraq, implying a connection that is not, however, stated explicitly. Al-Ḥajjāj’s reasons for persecuting ‘Imrān remain unclear. Of note, ‘Imrān’s wife Ḥamra¹² occupies a remarkable position in Ibn A‘tham’s narrative: their relationship generally left an impression in the Islamic tradition,¹³ but Ibn A‘tham gives Ḥamra unmatched agency over her own affairs.

⁸ Ibn A‘tham, *Futūḥ*, VII:98–107.

⁹ Ibn Ḥajar (d. 1449), *Iṣāba*, V:233.

¹⁰ Other extensive accounts are al-Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, III:124–33; al-Isfahānī (d. 967), *Aghānī*, XVIII:79–88; ‘Abd al-Ghanī (d. 1019), *Mutawārīn*, 62–74; al-‘Awtabī al-Ibādī (fl. early twelfth century), *Ansāb*, II:468–74.

¹¹ Al-Balādhurī mentions ‘Imrān’s flight but gives no details: *Ansāb*, VIII:33–4.

¹² Other names are given, but Jamra/Ḥamra is most common. I follow Ibn A‘tham in calling her Ḥamra throughout.

¹³ Perhaps the best-known story turns on the contrast between ‘Imrān’s ugliness and Ḥamra’s beauty, concluding that the grateful and the patient are both rewarded with Heaven, which developed into

The episode begins with al-Ḥajjāj sending letters to his agents and the caliph, ‘Abd al-Malik, in pursuit of ‘Imrān.¹⁴ This drove ‘Imrān out of Iraq and towards the Umayyad stronghold of Syria, which appears counter-intuitive: rebels withdrawing from Umayyad authority tended to go east.¹⁵ In Syria, he stayed with various tribal groups, all of whom eventually disapproved of him, forcing him to move on. However, his final stop proved successful: in Damascus, ‘Imrān stayed with Rawḥ b. Zinbā‘ al-Judhāmī (d. 703), the caliph’s confidant. When Rawḥ inquired about his name and genealogy (*nasab*), ‘Imrān resorted to trickery: he lied and claimed descent from the Azd, a southern Arab tribe like Rawḥ’s Judhām. Elements of subterfuge make a good adventure tale, but there is also a point here about *‘aṣabiyya* (‘kinship solidarity’; ‘strong tribal factionalism’) that we will return to below.

Rawḥ offered ‘Imrān generous hospitality throughout his year-long stay. However, eventually things went downhill, ironically because of ‘Imrān’s intellectual brilliance. As an important courtier, Rawḥ attended many an evening salon (*samar*) where poetry, *ḥadīth* and ‘strange’ pieces of knowledge (*gharīb*) were traded. Rawḥ would detail these sessions to ‘Imrān, who would unfailingly identify poets, poems, or particularly obscure *ḥadīth*, surpassing anyone Rawḥ had ever met.¹⁶ Eventually, he told ‘Abd al-Malik about his guest’s extraordinary knowledge¹⁷ and, when prompted, listed ‘Imrān’s physical characteristics, propensity for prayer and piety, eloquence and knowledge of poetry.

The caliph now grew suspicious, and here the story becomes muddled. To summarise, ‘Abd al-Malik suspected ‘Imrān’s identity and ordered Rawḥ to test him by asking about the composer of verses taken from a praise poem for ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib’s (d. 661) Khārijite assassin, Ibn Muljam. As ‘Imrān himself had authored the poem, he provided the correct answer. There are different, largely irreconcilable versions of these events. The sources agree, however, that

a well-known dictum. See e.g. al-Kharā’iṭī (d. 938), *Itīlāl*, I:153; Ibn ‘Abd Rabbīhi (d. 940), *Iqd*, VII:118; Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1200), *Muntaẓam*, VI:291.

¹⁴ Ibn A‘tham initially does not mention al-Ḥajjāj’s missives, but his letter to ‘Abd al-Malik features later in the story.

¹⁵ Contemporaneous examples in Hagemann, ‘Muṭarrīf’, esp. 450 n.21.

¹⁶ See also al-Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, III:125; al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, XVIII:80–1; ‘Abd al-Ghanī, *Mutawārīn*, 65–7; al-‘Awtabī, *Ansāb*, 469–70.

¹⁷ Ibn A‘tham, *Futūḥ*, VII:98–9; al-Burrī, *Jawhara*, 450.

‘Abd al-Malik was now convinced of ‘Imrān’s identity.¹⁸ Ibn A‘tham’s account then has the caliph produce a letter from al-Ḥajjāj accusing ‘Imrān of revolting and ‘spreading corruption’ (*qad afsada qīyāman min al-nās*), asking that he be sent to al-Ḥajjāj if apprehended.¹⁹ The letter’s description of ‘Imrān fits Rawḥ’s perfectly.

Instead of arresting ‘Imrān, however, ‘Abd al-Malik only asked Rawḥ to fetch him under assurances of safety. Rawḥ thus informed ‘Imrān, who was fearful and demanded a safe-conduct (*amān*).²⁰ The caliph agreed but accurately predicted that ‘Imrān would have disappeared when Rawḥ returned home. A note was eventually found hidden underneath ‘Imrān’s bed with a praise poem for Rawḥ’s hospitality (the ‘farewell poem’ being another marker of ‘Imrān’s story).²¹

The remaining parts of the story are less convoluted. ‘Imrān next went to Zufar b. al-Ḥārith al-Kilābī, another tribal chief. He claimed to belong to the al-Awzā’ tribe among whom Zufar had relatives, so he offered ‘Imrān hospitality on those grounds. ‘Imrān’s particular conduct – other sources say his excessive fasting and prayer invited the tribal youth’s mockery²² – drew his host’s attention: he offered ‘Imrān protection and material riches, but ‘Imrān refused and emphasised his reliance on God.²³ He stayed with Zufar until a messenger from Rawḥ arrived who recognised and identified him as ‘Azdi’. This upset Zufar, but ‘Imrān refused to disclose his affairs and disappeared. Zufar also received a poem praising his hospitality and finally realised whom he had sheltered. He went to offer ‘Imrān an *amān* but could not find him.

¹⁸ Ibn A‘tham, *Futūḥ*, VII:99–100; al-Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, III:125–6; al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, XVIII:80–1; al-‘Awtabī, *Ansāb*, 470; al-Shammākhī (d. 1522), *Siyar*, I:190.

¹⁹ Ibn A‘tham, *Futūḥ*, VII:100.

²⁰ Ibid.; ‘Abd al-Ghanī, *Mutawārīn*, 67. Variants abound; one has ‘Imrān react to the invitation with ostensible delight, claiming he had been too shy to ask Rawḥ for a caliphal audience. ‘Imrān’s request for an *amān* is missing from this version, but here, too, he tricks his host and absconds. See e.g. al-Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, III:126; al-‘Awtabī, *Ansāb*, 471.

²¹ Ibn A‘tham, *Futūḥ*, VII:102. There are different versions of this poem (and all others connected to ‘Imrān’s travels). Compare, e.g., Ibn A‘tham, *Futūḥ*, VII:101–2 with al-Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, III:126.

²² Al-Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, III:126; al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, XVIII:82; ‘Abd al-Ghanī, *Mutawārīn*, 70; al-‘Awtabī, *Ansāb*, 471.

²³ See also ‘Abd al-Ghanī, *Mutawārīn*, 70; al-Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, III:126. ‘Imrān’s reply fits reports of him rebuking his fellow poet al-Farazdaq and the latter’s audience for asking anyone other than God for benefits. Al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, XVIII:86–7; al-Darjīnī (fl. 1252), *Ṭabaqāt*, II:231. Al-Farazdaq and ‘Imrān had a difficult relationship: Wakī’ (d. 918), *Qudāt*, III:50–1.

‘Imrān now travelled to Oman, settling with some Azdīs who shared his beliefs, recited his poetry, and venerated the fallen Khārijite hero Abū Bilāl, who had inspired several of ‘Imrān’s elegies.²⁴ He stayed with them in ‘security and fearlessness’ (*āminan muṭma’innan*);²⁵ relief and gratitude mark his praise poem for them.²⁶ Most sources have ‘Imrān return to Iraq after his presence in Oman was eventually discovered, living in hiding or continuing his travels until his death years before al-Ḥajjāj.²⁷ Ibn A‘tham, uniquely, states that ‘Imrān remained in Oman until al-Ḥajjāj had died and then returned to Baṣra, where Ḥamra enters the picture.

‘Imrān’s relative Suwayd b. Manjūf lived in Baṣra. His wife Ḥamra was a Khārijite and deeply impressed with ‘Imrān’s strict piety. Hearing about his visit, she asked for his help in divorcing her husband as she preferred ‘Imrān himself. ‘Imrān visited Suwayd with his (previously unmentioned) Khārijite comrades to ask for her release as a Khārijite woman. Suwayd confronted Ḥamra, who confirmed she was not well-disposed towards him. Suwayd divorced her and she eventually married ‘Imrān. Suwayd’s motivation for granting the divorce appears controversial: Ibn A‘tham preserves in the same passage statements confirming and denying that Suwayd’s decision was based on his fear of the Khawārij.²⁸

Biographical Sketch

We know little about ‘Imrān’s life and almost nothing from before his confrontation with al-Ḥajjāj. His *nasab* is most often given as ‘Imrān b. Ḥiṭṭān b. Zabyān al-Sadūsī.²⁹ He hailed from Baṣra and belonged to Banū Sadūs, most

²⁴ For Abū Bilāl, see also Baptiste and Gaiser’s chapter in this volume.

²⁵ Ibn A‘tham, *Futūḥ*, VII:104.

²⁶ Ibid., 104–5. See also al-Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, III:127; al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, XVIII:83; al-‘Awtabī, *Ansāb*, 471; al-Burrī, *Jawhara*, 451–2.

²⁷ The sources disagree where in Iraq ‘Imrān went; all options appear uncomfortably close to al-Ḥajjāj. Compare al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, XVIII:83 with Yāqūt (d. 1229), *Mu‘jam*, IV:259. Others simply state that he remained with the Azd (in Iraq or elsewhere) until his death: e.g. al-Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, III:127.

²⁸ Ibn A‘tham, *Futūḥ*, VII:106.

²⁹ Variants abound: e.g. Ibn al-Kalbī (d. 822), *Nasab Ma‘add*, I:56; Ibn Khayyāt (d. 854), *Ṭabaqāt*, 358; al-Jāhiz, *Bayān*, I:61–62; al-‘Āmidī (d. 980), *Mu‘talif*, 114.

likely Banū l-Ḥārith b. Sadūs, a sub-branch of Shaybān b. Dhuhl of Bakr b. Wā'il,³⁰ many early Khārijites were Shaybānīs.³¹ 'Imrān died in Iraq in 703.³²

The tradition remembers 'Imrān primarily as an authority on grammar and philology and an accomplished poet.³³ A collection of his poetry, written on pages described as old and yellowing, was still read in Baṣra in the mid-ninth century during the Zanj revolt.³⁴ In the same period, the Baṣran *qāḍī* al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥubāb (d. 917–18) gathered 'Imrān's (no longer extant) *dīwān*, which earned him accusations of Khārijite sympathies.³⁵ The last independent mention of a collection of 'Imrān's poetry occurs in the early twelfth century.³⁶ He was allegedly a stirring orator,³⁷ but his sermons have not survived, either.

'Imrān had a reputation for piety and asceticism.³⁸ He was a *mubaddith* and his transmission from 'Ā'isha and Ibn 'Umar implies that he travelled to the Ḥijāz at some point as neither is known to have left the region much.³⁹ His son also appears as a transmitter.⁴⁰ 'Imrān's poetry testifies to a deep familiarity with pre-Islamic verse and the Qur'an alike. He may have had an Azraqī-Khārijite maternal uncle;⁴¹ al-Mas'ūdī (d. 957) apparently discussed both 'Imrān and his father Ḥiṭṭān in the Khārijite chapter of his lost *Akbbār al-zamān*,⁴² but

³⁰ Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, VII:113; al-Bukhārī, *Ta'rikh*, VI:413; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Thiqāt*, V:222; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntazam*, VI:291; al-Burrī, *Jawbara*, 450.

³¹ Robinson, *Empire*, 106–29.

³² Ibn Taghrībirdī's claim that 'Imrān died in 89/707–8 is a minority position. Abu-Rahmeh, 'Poetry', 410.

³³ E.g. al-Farāhīdī (d. 791), *Ayn*, I:323; Sībawayhī (d. 796), *Kitāb*, II:375, III:488; al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d. 838), *Amtbāl*, 109.

³⁴ Al-Tanūkhī (d. 994), *Nishwār*, III:289–90.

³⁵ *EF*, 'al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥubāb' (Ch. Pellat); accusations firmly rejected in *EF*, 'al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥubāb' (S. Mourad).

³⁶ Al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī (d. after 1108) sent a letter to a friend 'yearning' for 'Imrān's poetry. See, briefly, Abu-Rahmeh, 'Poetry', 387.

³⁷ Al-Isfahānī, *Aghbānī*, XVIII:79; al-Ḥuṣrī, *Zabr*, IV:925.

³⁸ Al-Āmidī, *Mu'talif*, 114; Ibn A'tham, *Futūḥ*, VII:99; Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, IV:461; al-Baghdādī, *Farq*, 55. Examples of his *zuhd* poetry in Abu-Rahmeh, 'Poetry', 416–19; Gaiser, *Shurāt Legends*, 67–8, 78, 84.

³⁹ Noted also by Abu-Rahmeh, 'Poetry', 391–2.

⁴⁰ Al-Bukhārī, *Ta'rikh*, VIII:64; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Thiqāt*, VII:525.

⁴¹ Al-Jāhīz, *Bayān*, I:57.

⁴² Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, III:168.

Ḥiṭṭān's Khārijism is not mentioned elsewhere.⁴³ Al-Madā'inī's and al-Āmidī's works on 'Imrān and his tribe, respectively, are also not extant.⁴⁴

Almost everything we know about 'Imrān's life is thus conjecture. As is common for gifted bards, other poets often attributed their works to 'Imrān.⁴⁵ Conversely, even his most famous poems were sometimes attributed to others.⁴⁶ This is problematic: because we have so little information, 'Imrān's biography and Khārijite profile have mainly been reconstructed on the basis of this poetry. Our understanding of 'Imrān thus depends on our assessment of its reliability and historical setting – and at least some of the flight episodes appear as retrospective attempts to contextualise his poetry in *asbāb al-nuzūl*-style.

His age during his conflict with al-Ḥajjāj is difficult to determine as the available details seem irreconcilable. According to his own (alleged) testimony, he was a young man (*fatā*) when he gave his first sermon (*kbuṭba*) in Baṣra during the governorship of Ziyād b. Abīhī (r. 665–73) or 'Ubaydallāh b. Ziyād (r. c.675–84).⁴⁷ He was allegedly acknowledged as Abū Bilāl's successor after this Khārijite rebel was killed in battle in 680–1,⁴⁸ implying that he was an adult then. If 'Imrān indeed transmitted from Abū Dharr (d. 652), he was born in the first half of the 640s at the latest. However, only a few sources mention this, almost all of them (post-)tenth century.⁴⁹

It has been suggested that 'Imrān fought for 'Alī at Ṣiffīn as 'Alī enjoyed much support from the Bakrīs and because of a vague poetic reference,⁵⁰ but there is no actual evidence. Sadūsī relatives of 'Imrān led the Bakr and/or Rab'ā tribes on 'Alī's side,⁵¹ but they probably belong to the generation of

⁴³ Abu-Rahmeh's view ('Poetry', 386) that Ḥiṭṭān's companionship with Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī supports his Khārijism because Abū Mūsā was a Qur'an reciter (*qārī*), many of whom became Khārijites, is problematic.

⁴⁴ Ibn al-Nadīm (d. c.995), *Fihrist*, 116 (not all manuscripts label 'Imrān 'al-Khārijī': Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, trans. Dodge, I:226 n.160); al-Āmidī, *Mu'talif*, 114.

⁴⁵ Al-Ṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, XVIII:85–6.

⁴⁶ E.g. al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, V:388. See also below.

⁴⁷ Al-Jāhīz, *Bayān*, I:116, II:6.

⁴⁸ Al-Isfarāyīnī, *Tabsīr*, 53, 54; al-Baghdādī, *Farq*, 55.

⁴⁹ Earliest references in Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Uzla*, 66; Ibn Abī 'Āṣim (d. 900), *Zuhd*, 31, 41. For his son as secondary transmitter from Abū Dharr instead, see al-Dūlābī (d. 923), *Kunā*, III:989.

⁵⁰ Abu-Rahmeh, 'Poetry', 393–4. The poem occurs in Ibn Muzāḥim's *Waq'at Ṣiffīn*, which does not mention 'Imrān otherwise. *Pace* Abu-Rahmeh, I do not think we can deduce 'Imrān's presence at Ṣiffīn from either point.

⁵¹ Abu-Rahmeh, 'Poetry', 393.

‘Imrān’s father.⁵² This does not preclude ‘Imrān’s participation, but if he was a youth during Ziyād’s or Ibn Ziyād’s tenure in Baṣra, he was probably too young. It has been speculated on the evidence of another poem that as a young man he participated in the conquest of Tustar (638–9),⁵³ which would push back his birth date far enough to have fought at Ṣiffīn. Al-İṣfahānī’s (d. 967) statement that ‘Imrān went quietist before the confrontation with al-Ḥajjāj because of his old age would fit here.⁵⁴ No earlier source makes this connection, however; the Tustar claim was disputed,⁵⁵ and he is not mentioned as a Companion⁵⁶ but consistently counted among the Successors (*tābi‘ūn*) of the second or third *ṭabaqa*.⁵⁷ All this may tentatively suggest that he was born in the 640s–early 650s.

Khārijism and Rebellion

Our information on ‘Imrān is sparse and contradictory, and the best-known episode of his life is a highly literary composition preserved primarily in works of *adab*.⁵⁸ Can ‘Imrān’s story still tell us something about Khārijism and rebellion? I suggest that (some admittedly creative) reading between the lines contextualises ‘Imrān’s actions in an early Islamicate framework of conflict resolution that was built on intercession and safe-conducts. His case presents a good opportunity to step away from militant Khārijism and recognise its variety. His legacy became controversial over time, indicating changing scholarly conventions and the formation of an image of Khārijism that came to signal ‘rebellion’. ‘Imrān’s tale is thus a rich source for early Islamic intellectual and socio-political history.

⁵² See Ibn Ḥibbān, *Thiqāt*, IV:354; Ibn al-Kalbī, *Nasab*, I:56; Ibn Durayd (d. 933), *Isbtiqāq*, 353; Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihī, *Iqd*, II:314.

⁵³ Following al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, I:2553–4 for the date of the Tustar campaign.

⁵⁴ Al-İṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, XVIII:79.

⁵⁵ Abu-Rahmeh, ‘Poetry’, 391. Was he potentially confused with an older relative, a Bakrī leader who died during the conquest of Tustar? Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, II:299; Morony, ‘Effects’, 57.

⁵⁶ The one such claim I have found is rejected by the author. Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, V:233.

⁵⁷ Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, VII:113; Ibn Khayyāt, *Ṭabaqāt*, 358.

⁵⁸ Historical works before Ibn Kathīr’s (d. 1373) *Bidāya* usually do not discuss him.

‘Imrān the Rebel

How does ‘Imrān fit within a framework of rebellion? He is not known for armed resistance: al-İṣfahānī states he had taken up arms in his youth,⁵⁹ but provides no details; other sources do not know about this.⁶⁰ Some of ‘Imrān’s poetry emphasises that he could not in good conscience swear allegiance to tyrants (i.e. the Umayyads),⁶¹ and a few later works claim that his poems moved fellow Khārijites to bloodshed;⁶² one explains his persecution by al-Ḥajjāj thus.⁶³ However, the poetry attributed to ‘Imrān has little martial content: there is some elegiac yearning for a martyr’s death in battle following Abū Bilāl’s killing,⁶⁴ but most of it laments the ephemerality of the material world in classic *zūhd* fashion. Overall, violence is instigated by the state representative, not the ‘rebel’.

The Shaybānī-Khārijite revolts of the mid-690s are often considered the relevant historical context for ‘Imrān’s conflict with al-Ḥajjāj. Unhelpfully, it has been presented both as a result of and as a trigger for these revolts;⁶⁵ neither case has been substantiated. Al-Mubarrad and Ibn A‘tham offer little help: the former does not discuss al-Ḥajjāj’s reasons, while the latter remains vague. The single mention of ‘Imrān in Ibn Khayyāt’s (d. 854) *Ta’rikh* might provide some insight, however. It occurs in his report on Shabīb’s revolt against al-Ḥajjāj and the rebel’s successful entry into Kūfa with his wife Ghazāla. Al-Ḥajjāj hid from them, allowing Ghazāla to enter and preach in the congregational mosque. ‘Imrān commemorated this occasion with a poem mocking al-Ḥajjāj’s cowardice:

A lion against me, but in combat an ostrich,
Weak-winged, who jumps with fright at the chirp of a sparrow.

Why did you not go out against Ghazala in the battle?
No, your heart was in the rib cage of a bird.

⁵⁹ Al-İṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, XVIII:79. Ibn Hajar, *Iṣāba*, V:232 mentions but does not discuss this claim.

⁶⁰ ‘Abd al-Ghanī, *Mutawārīn*, 72 explicitly says that he did not ‘witness the fighting’.

⁶¹ Whether this is a historical reference or a literary expression of opposition remains unclear. For the oath of allegiance (*bay‘a*) in rebellion, see Kontny-Wendt in this volume.

⁶² Al-Ḥuṣrī, *Zabr*, IV:925; al-Burrī, *Jawbara*, 450.

⁶³ Al-Burrī, *Jawbara*, 450.

⁶⁴ Hagemann, *Khārijites*, 116, 172.

⁶⁵ Compare *EP*, “Imrān b. Ḥiṭṭān” (J. W. Fück) with *EP*, ‘Şufriyya’ (W. Madelung/K. Lewinstein).

Ghazala tore apart his heart with knights
Who left his appearance like yesterday which has passed.⁶⁶

Ibn Khayyāt says nothing further, but al-Balādhurī indicates that the poem enraged al-Ḥajjāj: ‘he [ʿImrān] shall find no safety [safe-conduct?] with me (*lā amān labu ʿindī*)!’⁶⁷ Others state explicitly that the poem instigated al-Ḥajjāj’s persecution.⁶⁸ Indeed, al-Ḥajjāj was not known for his sense of humour and ʿImrān seems to have struck a nerve – even years later, an Umayyad princess threw the poem in al-Ḥajjāj’s face.⁶⁹

When it was composed is unclear, however: other accounts suggest that ʿImrān was already in hiding.⁷⁰ The first line (‘A lion *against me*’) also implies that his conflict with al-Ḥajjāj predated it. ʿImrān had allegedly even been taken prisoner by al-Ḥajjāj once and only escaped execution due to his quick thinking.⁷¹ He subsequently refused to oppose al-Ḥajjāj against the exhortations of his companions: ‘Shall I fight al-Ḥajjāj over his authority (*ʿan sultānibi*) / with a hand that admits to being his *mawlā*?’⁷² This episode only appears in a few relatively late sources and again the timeline is unclear. The flight narrative does not indicate that al-Ḥajjāj ever got hold of him; overall, we get no real context.⁷³

We thus have two possible triggers: (1) personal conflict, a common explanation in (early) Islamic historiography;⁷⁴ and/or (2) a connection to larger-scale, perhaps systemic contention. Concerning the former, fear of

⁶⁶ Ibn Khayyāt, *Taʾrīkh*, 274–5; Wurtzel’s translation in Ibn Khayyāt, *Khalīfa*, 136. Other versions abound (e.g. al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, VIII:33–4, XIII:377), but this is the earliest. Ibn Khayyāt, *Khalīfa*, 136 n.754 for further references.

⁶⁷ Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, VIII:34.

⁶⁸ Al-Ḥafḥānī, *Aghānī*, XVIII:84–5; al-ʿAwtabī, *Ansāb*, 468.

⁶⁹ Al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj*, III:367–8. If correctly identified, her brother was the caliph ʿUmar II (d. 720), who clashed with al-Ḥajjāj at least once. *EP*, “Umar II b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz” (P. M. Cobb).

⁷⁰ Al-Maqdisī (d. after 966), *Badʿ*, VI:34; ʿAbd al-Ghanī, *Mutawārīn*, 72–3.

⁷¹ Al-Burri, *Jawhara*, 450; Ibn al-Abbār (d. 1260), *Itāb*, 61; al-Darjīnī, *Ṭabaqāt*, II:231–2. Al-ʿAwtabī, *Ansāb*, 468 claims that ʿImrān was captured by ʿAbd al-Malik once but gives no further details; the incident appears otherwise unknown.

⁷² Al-Burri, *Jawhara*, 450–1; Ibn al-Abbār, *Itāb*, 61; al-Darjīnī, *Ṭabaqāt*, II:231–2.

⁷³ The same poem is elsewhere ascribed to a companion of the Azraqī-Kharrījite Qaṭarī b. al-Fujāʿa (d. 698) who was allegedly released from captivity by al-Ḥajjāj because of their prior acquaintance. ʿImrān is not named in this version and also not usually counted among Qaṭarī’s followers. His flight does not immediately align with Qaṭarī’s career, either: Qaṭarī was in Iran already when al-Ḥajjāj first appears in Iraq. Poem: al-Māwardī, *Aḥkām*, 60; Qaṭarī: *EP*, ‘Azāriqa’ (K. Lewinstein).

⁷⁴ Noted in e.g. *EP*, ‘Ibn al-Ashʿath’ (L. Vecchia Vaglieri).

al-Ḥajjāj is a common trope that must have a certain historical core, but the frequency with which it is adduced obscures in what cases it is actually accurate.⁷⁵ The latter is difficult to gauge. Opposition to Umayyad rule was widespread, especially in the Jazīra and Iraq, and a tribal factor is noticeable: Bakr b. Wā'il produced many rebels against al-Ḥajjāj, and on at least two occasions, Bakrī-Shaybānī leaders who later turned Khārijite confronted 'Abd al-Malik about granting them material benefits and honours, indicating tribal discontent.⁷⁶ Did 'Imrān get caught up in this? Can we reconcile the contradictory information on his significance for the Shaybānī revolts? More research is required here, especially concerning the predominance of Jazīran-Shaybānī Khārijism in this period.⁷⁷

'Imrān the Khārijite

Khārijism had a broader range of meanings than is often acknowledged. Neither rejection of 'Alī and 'Uthmān nor (militant) piety were uniquely Khārijite, for instance.⁷⁸ 'Imrān's reputation for asceticism fits the Khārijite mould, but most ascetics or renunciants were not Khārijites. As noted, he is often called a Ṣufī and hailed as their 'primary legal scholar (*ṣāhib futyābīm*)',⁷⁹ but his legal and theological thought was not preserved. This seems surprising, but figures associated with the early Ṣufriyya are often ill-defined in terms of biography and doctrine.⁸⁰ Perhaps the strongest indication of 'Imrān's Khārijism is the poetry on Ibn Muljam and Abū Bilāl, the earliest extant versions of which appear in works of the later ninth century.⁸¹

⁷⁵ E.g. Klasova, 'Empire', chs 1–3; Hagemann, 'Muṭarrif'; Sijpesteijn, 'Closing Ranks'. The Egyptian *ḥadīth* scholar 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Azdī (d. 1019) dedicated an entire book (*Kitāb al-Mutawārīn*) to people who fled from al-Ḥajjāj.

⁷⁶ Ibn A'tham, *Futūḥ*, VII:84–5 (Shabīb b. Yazīd); Abu-Rahmeh, 'Poetry', 427 ('Itbān b. Waṣīla). The Marwānids had apparently denied military stipends (and corollary privileges) to the Bakr and Tamīm of (or in) Syria; Shabīb revolted after (unsuccessfully) demanding this stipend (*farīda*). Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, VIII:19; Ibn A'tham, *Futūḥ*, VII:84–5; Robinson, *Empire*, 121–4.

⁷⁷ For a preliminary overview of Jazīran Khārijism, see Robinson, *Empire*, 109–26.

⁷⁸ Hagemann, *Khārijites*, 114–21; Gaiser, 'Tradition'. My thanks to Adam for sending me the draft paper.

⁷⁹ Al-Jāhīz, *Bayān*, I:62.

⁸⁰ Lewinstein, 'Making'. 'Ṣufriyya' is a nebulous term that probably served as shorthand for 'classification unclear'; a coherent faction with specific doctrines did not exist at this time. *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Ibn Qutayba, *Ma'ārif*, 410; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, V:184, 388; al-Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, III:124–5, 187. 'Imrān apparently also composed poetry for other Khārijites: al-Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, III:174.

However, ‘Alī was unpopular with many contemporaries,⁸² and Abū Bilāl’s death was widely regretted.⁸³

‘Imrān’s admiration for Abū Bilāl, Baṣran origins, and ties to the Azd and Oman ostensibly connect him to the Ibādīs. Their scholarly circles were based in Baṣra, they had broad Azdī support (especially in Oman), and the movement’s likely founder, Jābir b. Zayd al-Azdī, transmitted from ‘Ā’isha and Ibn ‘Abbās like ‘Imrān. However, early Ibādī sources do not claim ‘Imrān explicitly and say little about him. Later Ibādī sources primarily remember ‘Imrān’s praise for Ibn Muḥjam,⁸⁴ but rarely mention his elegies on Abū Bilāl or escape from al-Ḥajjāj.⁸⁵ Al-‘Awtabī has a lengthy account of his flight, but does not call him an Ibādī. Al-Darjīnī (fl. 1252) and al-Shammākhī (d. 1522), both relying heavily on al-Mubarrad, consider ‘Imrān an Ibādī,⁸⁶ but overall, he left few traces in the Ibādī tradition and plays no role in early Ibādī legal and theological texts.⁸⁷

Early (proto-)Sunnī biographical and *ḥadīth* works know ‘Imrān as a trustworthy transmitter who appears in some of the now-canonical *ḥadīth* collections and the *Musnad Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*.⁸⁸ Most remain silent regarding his Khārijism,⁸⁹ as do the earliest philological works. Proto-Sunnī authorities like Ibn Sīrīn (d. 728), Muḥārīb b. Dithār (d. 734), Qatāda b. Dī‘āma (d. 735), and Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 778) associated with and transmitted from him, and Sufyān would recite ‘Imrān’s ascetic poetry.⁹⁰ A tribal factor is apparent (Muḥārīb and Qatāda were Sadūsīs), but early scholars of all persuasions had few reservations about intermingling.

⁸² Husayn, *Opposing, passim*.

⁸³ Gaiser, *Shurāt Legends*, 62–8; Hagemann, *Khārijites*, 168, 170–3.

⁸⁴ Al-Qalhātī (d. early thirteenth century), *Kashf*, II:253; al-Barrādī (d. early fifteenth century), *Jawābir*, 163–4, 194; al-Shammākhī, *Siyar*, I:190; al-Izkawī (d. 1737), *Kashf*, II:201.

⁸⁵ Al-Darjīnī, *Ṭabaqāt*, II:226–32 is an exception: his account is the longest after al-‘Awtabī and mentions both extensively. Al-Shammākhī, *Siyar*, I:189–90 is the next longest but omits the elegies for Abū Bilāl.

⁸⁶ Al-Darjīnī, *Ṭabaqāt*, II:226; al-Shammākhī, *Siyar*, I:189.

⁸⁷ This includes the following texts and collections: Crone and Zimmermann, *Epistle*; al-Sālimī, *Early Islamic Law*; al-Kharūṣī, *Jawābāt*; al-Sālimī and Madelung, *Early Ibādī Theology*; al-Sālimī, *Early Ibadī Theology*.

⁸⁸ *EP*², “‘Imrān b. Ḥiṭṭān’ (J. W. Fück); Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, I:407.

⁸⁹ The earliest reference is Ibn al-Kalbī (d. 822), *Nasab*, I:56, but his fellow student Ibn Sa’d does not mention it. Neither do, e.g., Ibn Khayyāt, the *Musnad Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, al-Bukhārī, al-‘Ijlī or Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

⁹⁰ Al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, XVIII:87; Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 1176), *Ta’rikh*, V:146; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, IX:53.

However, we can observe a gradual change in how ʿImrān was perceived, the tenth century being a watershed. Later *ḥadīth* scholars criticised al-Bukhārī and his colleagues for their inclusion of ʿImrān and other ‘heretics’, although opinion remained divided.⁹¹ ʿImrān’s praise of Ibn Muljam earned him many curses in the (post-)tenth-century tradition, which also produced counter-verses modelled on the poem.⁹² That ʿImrān’s legacy became disputed can also be seen in accounts of his conversion to Khārijism: later sources overwhelmingly portray him as a staunch Sunnī and fierce opponent of the Khawārij initially, blaming his conversion on Khārijite Bedouin, a youth from Oman, or his wife.⁹³ Some reports claim that he abandoned his Khārijite beliefs before his death, although the earliest such assertion occurs in Ibn Ḥajar’s (d. 1449) work.⁹⁴ The conversion narrative warrants similar caution. Al-Isfahānī claims that ʿImrān had married Ḥamra ‘in order to return her to the *sunna*’, but the attempt backfired.⁹⁵ It was this version which caught on: variants appear in Ibn Kathīr’s (d. 1373) *Bidāya* and Ibn Ḥajar’s *Iṣāba*, for instance.⁹⁶ But earlier sources do not know about this: we saw that Ibn Aʿtham presents them both as Khārijites before their marriage, while al-Mubarrad does not mention Ḥamra.

Progressively stricter criteria for acceptable *ḥadīth* transmitters and increasingly negative connotations of Khārijism likely influenced how ʿImrān was viewed: by the twelfth century, some definitions called any rebel against an established leader a Khārijite.⁹⁷ We should understand attempts to distinguish between ʿImrān’s pre- and post-Khārijite material in this light as well.⁹⁸ The *EI*² entry, which simply presents his conversion by Ḥamra and (proto-)Sunnī origins as fact, is unfortunately misleading here.

⁹¹ Brown, ‘Criticism’, 22, 35–6 and *Canonization*, 116, 118, 250.

⁹² E.g. al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj*, III:168; al-Maqdisī, *Badʿ*, V:234; al-Isfarāyīnī, *Tabṣīr*, 54; al-Baghdādī, *Farq*, 55; Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, V:232; Brown, ‘Criticism’, 22; Abu-Rahmeh, ‘Poetry’, 412–13.

⁹³ Bedouin and women are classic villains. Another Khārijite example here is ‘Alī’s assassin Ibn Muljam, who in some versions was incited to his deed by his fiancée/wife. Bedouin/youth: e.g. al-Yazīdī (d. 922), *Amālī*, 101; al-Isfahānī, *Aghbānī*, XVIII:83, 85. ʿImrān’s wife: e.g. al-Isfahānī, *Aghbānī*, XVIII:79, 83, 87; Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, V:233; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, IV:52.

⁹⁴ Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, V:233 and *Tabḍīb*, VIII:128. Ibn Ḥajar cites al-Azdī’s (d. c.945) *Taʾrīkh al-Mawṣil*; unfortunately, this information must have been contained in the work’s lost earlier sections.

⁹⁵ Al-Isfahānī, *Aghbānī*, XVIII:79, 83, 87.

⁹⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, IX:53; Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, V:233.

⁹⁷ Al-Shahrastānī, *Milal*, I:114.

⁹⁸ Abu-Rahmeh, ‘Poetry’, 392 for references.

The rare references to ‘Imrān’s militant activities are also tenth-century and (much) later, probably owing to the development of Khārijism into a shorthand for ‘violent rebellion’. His flight certainly paints a different picture, of someone fearful of al-Ḥajjāj and keen to stay alive. Likewise, neither ‘Imrān’s refusal to fight al-Ḥajjāj after being released nor the flight narrative’s tribal framework fit common perceptions of Khārijism.

Khārijites are often portrayed as egalitarian, strictly rejecting precedence on tribal or ethnic grounds. This notion is quite persistent, although it has been challenged.⁹⁹ ‘Imrān’s story suggests further complications. Much of his poetry is distinctly tribal and genealogical,¹⁰⁰ and we could read his poem mocking al-Ḥajjāj’s cowardice similarly: Sadūs belong to Shaybān, other members of whom also versified their pride in Ghazāla’s audacity.¹⁰¹ Moreover, many Sadūsīs were among the transmitters of stories about and *ḥadīth* from ‘Imrān.¹⁰² He was an expert on the *ayyām al-‘Arab*, and ‘Abd al-Malik explicitly recognised his language as *nizārī* (var.: ‘*adnānī*; ‘northern Arab’).¹⁰³ He also sought assistance from Umayyad agents without compunction and knew how to navigate the tribal sensitivities of his hosts.

It has been suggested that ‘Imrān’s poetry indicates contempt for ‘*aṣabiyya*.¹⁰⁴ The tribal framing of the story may be meant to convey the pitfalls of a society too blindly focused on kinship and tribal factionalism, which are easily exploitable. But both Rawḥ and Zufar also tried to offer ‘Imrān refuge *after* they learned his identity. If we disregard ‘Imrān’s Khārijite label for a moment, we see a clever man entirely at home in the world of the *ashraf*, with comprehensive knowledge of tribal relations that he used to his advantage and a sense of pride in his own descent.

⁹⁹ E.g. Crone, ‘Ethiopian Slave’; Hagemann and Verkinderen, ‘Kharijism’, 495.

¹⁰⁰ Abu-Rahmeh, ‘Poetry’, 425–7.

¹⁰¹ Ibn Khayyāt, *Khalifa*, 136. Ibn Khayyāt ascribed the poem to ‘Itbān b. Waṣīla (see n.76); further ascriptions and versions exist (ibid., ns. 751–2). Al-Mubarrad’s *Kāmil* attributes (one line of) the poem to one ‘al-Shaybānī’, whom the editor identifies as ‘Imrān. Al-Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, III:29 and n.6.

¹⁰² See above and al-Ḥafāhānī, *Aghānī*, XVIII:79, 85; ‘Abd al-Ghanī, *Mutawārīn*, 72.

¹⁰³ Al-Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, III:125.

¹⁰⁴ Abu-Rahmeh, ‘Poetry’, 407–8.

‘Imrān the Petitioner

‘Imrān’s choice of hosts appears odd. Rawḥ was close to ‘Abd al-Malik; he was the caliphal governor of Filasṭīn, a prominent tribal notable, and neighbour of al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik (d. 715). Rawḥ had been loyal to the Umayyads through the Second *Fitna* (680–92) and the governorship was a reward.¹⁰⁵ Al-Ḥajjāj had even begun his career under Rawḥ’s command.¹⁰⁶ Rawḥ is described as a hospitable man,¹⁰⁷ but ‘Imrān’s choice still appears risky. Perhaps he tried to hide in plain sight, but if so, he failed: not hiding his ‘Khārijite’ mannerisms or philological expertise led to his discovery. Zufar likewise does not seem a natural choice: unlike Rawḥ, whose Azdī background at least made him an ally of ‘Imrān’s tribe, Zufar was head of a rival alliance.¹⁰⁸

Zufar also complicates the timeline. As noted, ‘Imrān’s flight is often connected to the Shaybānī-Khārijite revolts of the mid-690s. Al-Ḥajjāj was appointed as governor of Iraq in 694; the revolts began a year later. Zufar belonged to the Iraqi *ashraf* and had a rebellious history himself: during the Second *Fitna*, he opposed the Umayyads, holding out at his stronghold in Qarqīsiyā (Jazīra) until he was besieged by ‘Abd al-Malik’s troops in 690. A peace agreement was eventually wrought; Zufar and his family relocated to Qinnasrīn (Syria) and forged strong ties with their neighbour Maslama b. ‘Abd al-Malik (d. 738) through marriage and military service. The family stayed loyal to the Umayyads until the latter’s fall in 750.¹⁰⁹

‘Imrān is explicitly said to have stayed with Zufar in the Jazīra,¹¹⁰ but when the Khārijite revolts broke out in the mid-690s, Zufar was already in Syria. If he was still in the Jazīra, ‘Imrān’s flight must have begun before al-Ḥajjāj was appointed and the Khārijites revolted. The traditional framing of his story would then collapse. If all this occurred in the mid-690s, the Jazīra was probably not the setting of ‘Imrān’s and Zufar’s meeting. The second option fits the narrative more easily if we allow for confusion due to the link between

¹⁰⁵ Hasson, ‘Chef judhāmīte’; Lecker, ‘Estates’, 32 and ns.80–81 thereto; *EP*, ‘Rawḥ b. Zinbā’ (G. Hawting).

¹⁰⁶ *EP*, ‘al-Ḥadjdjād b. Yūsuf’ (A. Dietrich).

¹⁰⁷ Al-Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, III:125; Ibn A‘tham, *Futūb*, VII:99; al-‘Awtabī, *Ansāb*, 469.

¹⁰⁸ Abu-Rahmeh, ‘Poetry’, 425–6.

¹⁰⁹ Crone, *Slaves*, 108–9.

¹¹⁰ E.g. al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, XVIII:82; al-‘Awtabī, *Ansāb*, 471.

Zufar and Qarqīsiyā; the earliest extant versions of ‘Imrān’s flight in fact do not mention Zufar’s location.

‘Imrān visited many tribes during his journey, but only Rawḥ and Zufar are mentioned by name. Did ‘Imrān seek shelter with Zufar because of his rebellious history? If ‘Imrān’s flight occurred in the mid-690s, Zufar already lived in Syria as Maslama’s neighbour and confidant. Appealing to his former opposition would probably have been futile at best. Rawḥ and Zufar might thus compare better than initially appeared: both were closely connected to the caliphal family when ‘Imrān visited.

‘Imrān might have chosen them not despite, but because of this connection. There is no explicit evidence and other explanations are possible: that the story operates within a tribal framework, for instance, which required the involvement of prominent *ashrāf*. But the repeated references to an *amān* in ‘Imrān’s tale invite a different reading. To recap: al-Ḥajjāj’s anger at ‘Imrān’s poem led him to rule out any possibility of an *amān*; both Rawḥ and Zufar regretted that ‘Imrān felt compelled to leave once they realised whom they had harboured – Zufar even went after him to offer an *amān*. When ‘Imrān reached Oman, we are told he lived there in complete security (*āminan muṭma’innan*), not an exact reference to the safe-conduct but reflective of the lexicon of the *amān*.¹¹¹

Most pertinent is the *amān* mentioned when ‘Abd al-Malik discovers ‘Imrān’s identity. There are two versions of ‘Imrān’s reaction to the caliph’s summons: one has him express delight, the second presents him as fearful.¹¹² ‘Imrān absconds in both versions, but the safe-conduct only appears in the second: here, ‘Imrān demands a hand-written caliphal *amān* stamped with ‘Abd al-Malik’s own seal. The caliph agrees and no surprise is expressed at this demand. Safe-conducts were a regular feature within the system of early Islamic governance;¹¹³ if the dissident was particularly strong, they could sometimes even fill in the conditions of their own *amān*.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ On the impact of the *amān* lexicon on negotiations with rebels, see Hagemann, ‘Caliph’.

¹¹² See note 20.

¹¹³ Marsham and Robinson, ‘Safe-Conduct’; Dar and Kontny-Wendt’s chapters in this volume.

¹¹⁴ ‘Alid example in Ibn Sahl al-Rāzī (fl. late ninth century), *Fakḥkh*, 75.

Did ‘Imrān hope for Rawḥ or Zufar’s intercession? This was another common mechanism of reconciliation during or following contention.¹¹⁵ We have a contemporaneous example in a failed Iraqi tribal revolt in 695: one rebel went straight to Syria because he had the caliph’s favour and so could ask for protection from al-Ḥajjāj.¹¹⁶ Now, ‘Imrān was good friends with his fellow *muḥaddith* Muḥārib b. Dithār and would go on *ḥajj* with him.¹¹⁷ They also travelled to Damascus together, where Muḥārib taught Sufyān al-Thawrī,¹¹⁸ although these must have been at least two separate trips – Sufyān was born after ‘Imrān’s death. ‘Imrān might thus have already had contacts in Syria. In any case, Rawḥ was perfectly placed to secure an audience and *amān*. Ibn A‘tham’s account of Shabīb’s revolt is structured similarly: here, too, Rawḥ has an intercessory function.¹¹⁹ Did al-Ḥajjāj’s (purported) letter chase off ‘Imrān prematurely? Zufar’s connection to Maslama b. ‘Abd al-Malik, who admired ‘Imrān’s ascetic poetry,¹²⁰ might have made him an attractive second choice.

While conjecture, I would propose that ‘Imrān’s rationale was to seek intercession from well-placed individuals who had access to the only power that superseded al-Ḥajjāj’s authority. The Umayyads and al-Ḥajjāj should not be seen as necessarily acting in unison: the future ‘Umar II (d. 720), for instance, was dismissed as governor of the Ḥijāz for sheltering fugitives from al-Ḥajjāj at the latter’s instigation.¹²¹

Conclusions

This chapter sought to explore the early Islamic ‘playbook of rebellion’ and highlight the complexities of Khārijism. Scholars still largely focus on the spectacular revolts and violent depredations of militant Khawārij, which makes it difficult to interrupt the circular reasoning that often characterises approaches to Khārijism. ‘Imrān is an excellent case study because he does not fit neatly into preconceived notions.

¹¹⁵ Contemporaneous examples in Hagemann, ‘Muṭarrif; Sijpesteijn, ‘Closing Ranks’.

¹¹⁶ Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, VII:289; Sijpesteijn, ‘Closing Ranks’.

¹¹⁷ Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064), *Rasā’il*, II:113–14.

¹¹⁸ Judd, *Religious Scholars*, 172.

¹¹⁹ See also n.76.

¹²⁰ Al-Isfahānī, *Aghbānī*, XVIII:87; Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 1176), *Ta’rikh*, V:146.

¹²¹ *EP*, ‘Umar II b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’ (P. M. Cobb).

Much can be gained from exploring personalities like ‘Imrān. What exactly did the accusation that he had ‘spread corruption’ entail? The sources hardly portray him as a rebel: the established vocabulary¹²² is largely absent and no direct militant action is indicated. Was affiliation with the Khawārij enough to be considered an enemy of the state? Occasional high points of persecution aside, intellectual Khārijism (as in the Baṣran scholarly circles) seems to have been tolerated. So was al-Ḥajjāj’s persecution of ‘Imrān a personal conflict and/or a case of informal *lèse majesté*?

The question of how ‘Imrān fits into the Shaybānī/Ṣufri framework of the revolts in the 690s is connected to this, and it is worth investigating how and why the Jazīran-Shaybānī revolts of the mid-690s came to be labelled Ṣufri so frequently. ‘Imrān is presented as a Ṣufri leader like Shabīb, and the Ghazāla poem ties him to this cluster of revolts. But is ‘Imrān lumped in with them because of his Shaybānī roots or because of his Ṣufri label? Is the Ṣufri label perhaps a consequence of his being Shaybānī?

‘Imrān certainly operated in tribal terms. This was not unusual within early Islamic society, of course, but contradicts what Khārijism supposedly was. His recourse to well-established mechanisms of conflict resolution speaks against Khārijite exceptionalism. One could argue that ‘Imrān was simply not a good Khārijite, but we may be better served with an alternative: that Khārijism was a complex phenomenon which allowed for a broad range of attitudes and behaviours, and that Khārijites were more integrated into the fabric of state and society than is often thought. There are many comparative examples: during the tribal discord in Mosul caused by the *fitna* between al-Amīn (d. 813) and al-Ma’mūn (d. 833), for instance, the self-appointed governor of Mosul invited a group of nearby Khārijites into the city to rid himself of his rivals; the plan worked.¹²³ Such cases show that Khārijites acted within tribal frameworks, had links to the communities around them, moved within the same political structures, and occupied the same geographical contexts. Khārijism did not necessarily make one an outsider.

¹²² See the Introduction to this volume.

¹²³ Al-Azdi, *Ta’rikh*, 343–6, 350–4.

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PART III

**CONTENTIOUS
COMMUNITIES**

5

Sectarianism and Counterinsurgency in Sixth-Century Roman Mesopotamia: A Case Study in ‘Ruralisation’

Walter Beers

Introduction

The mid-sixth century was a watershed for the history of Christianity in the Middle East.¹ It was in this period that the fissures between the mainstream, Chalcedonian, Roman imperial church and its anti-Chalcedonian Miaphysite alternative developed into a decisive, and as it would prove, permanent split marked by rival and irreconcilable clerical hierarchies: on the one side, the future Greek Orthodox and Melkite churches, and on the other, the Syriac Orthodox and Coptic churches.² The sectarian conflict in question had its origins in disagreement over the Christological definition promulgated at the Council of Chalcedon (451), and in the rival clerical factions that had developed quickly in the aftermath of the council: on the one side,

¹ This chapter draws on material from my doctoral dissertation ‘The Tottering House of the World’; readers can find a fuller presentation of my argument there. For an awareness of the connections between my work on pre-Islamic Syriac sources and the problems of early Islamic history, I am much indebted to Christian Sahner’s presentation to the Princeton Davis Seminar (‘The Medieval Islamic World: A View from the Mountains’, 28 January 2022), and to his generous conversation on several subsequent occasions. I would also like to express my thanks to Hannah-Lena Hagemann and Alasdair Grant, and to an anonymous external reviewer, for their generous and stimulating comments. Funding from the Haifa Center for Mediterranean History, the University of Haifa and Princeton University made the research presented here and the writing of this chapter possible.

² Frend, *Rise*, remains the standard survey; for a useful overview of Christological controversy in the fifth and sixth centuries, see also Allen, ‘Definition’.

Chalcedonians supported the council's *Dyophysite* ('two-nature') definition; while on the other, anti-Chalcedonians rejected the council and defended a *Miaphysite* ('one-nature') definition.³

It would be a mistake, however, to imagine that conflict over such ideological niceties was not deeply imbricated in the evolving power dynamics of the late antique church apparatus and its participation in the late Roman Empire's political economy, its tributary fiscal regime and its dominant landed service-aristocratic social group. This chapter offers a case study intended to explore some of the consequences of this imbrication. It offers an example of the ways in which sectarian conflict in the late ancient Middle East could intersect with the socioeconomic in complex and dynamic ways, with the potential to shape new and unexpected social and religious forms. This example also illustrates the importance of raising questions about the role of subaltern social groups in such sectarian contexts. Much as the subaltern, agrarian-and-pastoralist majority of the population of the late ancient world will always remain largely invisible to us, their role as 'historical dark matter', mutually determining the actions and behaviour of the elites who dominate our source material, should always be made part of our efforts to model the past.⁴ It is my hope that this contribution to the present volume will inspire readers working in the history of the Islamicate world to raise similar questions, and explore the potential of similar models, in the history of sectarianism and its role in rebellion and insurgency in their own periods and contexts.

It will be useful to clarify at the outset that I use the word 'subaltern' in the basic, binary Gramscian sense employed in the early work of the Subaltern Studies group: subaltern are all those members of the population who are not elite. Even prominent Miaphysite clergy with close connections to the imperial court in Constantinople such as John of Ephesus (on whom more below) were subaltern insofar as they claimed membership in a legally disenfranchised and socioeconomically precarious sectarian group, and might act in a subaltern capacity insofar as they pursued or expressed the interests of the dominated rather than the dominant.⁵ Similarly, in what follows, I employ notions of

³ For 'Miaphysite' instead of the older and imprecise 'Monophysite', see Brock, 'Miaphysite'.

⁴ Matheou, 'Methodological'.

⁵ Guha, 'Aspects', 8.

‘insurgency’ and ‘counterinsurgency’, taken from the work of Ranajit Guha, to characterise the dynamics of acute subaltern resistance to the conditions of existence dictated by dominant elites.⁶ To put it in other language, I understand subaltern Miaphysitism as an instantiation of resistance to pastoral power – as an expression of ‘wanting to be conducted differently, by other leaders and other shepherds, towards other objectives and forms of salvation’.⁷

Volker Menze has drawn attention to the period immediately after the accession of Justin I (r. 518–27) as a key moment in Miaphysitism’s estrangement from the imperial church.⁸ The last years of the reign of Anastasius (r. 491–518) had seen an unravelling of the fragile truce between the rival clerico-Christological factions that had prevailed since the early 480s, as the emperor showed himself increasingly friendly to Miaphysitism. Indeed, the years between 512 and 518 represented a brief Miaphysite ascendancy under the intellectual and practical leadership of Philoxenus of Mabbug (d. 523) and Severus of Antioch (d. 538). Together, these two bishops mobilised regional monastic sentiment in a vigorous campaign against the supporters of Chalcedon, and built a staunchly Miaphysite episcopal network across much of the Roman east. The balance of clerical power changed abruptly, however, with the accession of Justin. In the hopes of shoring up his delicate political position, Justin turned to the pope in Rome. The popes, however, had always been strong supporters of Chalcedon, and the price of papal endorsement was thus an aggressive campaign of de-Miaphysitisation among the eastern clergy. Severus, Philoxenus and other intransigent bishops fled, or were condemned to exile, and their episcopal network collapsed almost overnight. Most bishops and clergy, of course, simply accepted the new status quo, but contemporary sources attest to the exile of more than fifty bishops and their replacement with reliably Chalcedonian candidates.⁹

Although negotiations between the rival factions were to continue sporadically throughout the century, after these events the Miaphysite clergy never again came close to dominating the imperial church. After 518, the two factions began to take on increasingly distinct characteristics: on the one hand,

⁶ Guha, ‘Prose’ and *Elementary Aspects*, esp. ch. 1.

⁷ Foucault, *Security*, 194–5.

⁸ Menze, *Justinian*, chs 1–2; see also the classic study by Honigmann, *Évêques*.

⁹ Honigmann, *Évêques*, 142–54.

an urban, Chalcedonian episcopacy; and on the other, a rural, monastery-based Miaphysite episcopacy.¹⁰ By mid-century, Jacob Burd'oyo (d. 578) and other itinerant bishops had taken the decisive step of conducting the first ordinations of extra-imperial Miaphysite clergy. Jacob's new bishops made no attempt to occupy the urban cathedrals to which they were notionally entitled, preferring instead to set themselves up in monasteries in the countryside.

This bifurcation of hierarchies, however, was only the most visible aspect of a larger and more complex process. Fortunately, we have a literary source that offers us a great deal of detailed information about the initial stages of this process: John of Ephesus (c.507–88), whose eyewitness account of the Miaphysite experience in northern Mesopotamia in the 520s and 530s was preserved by the compiler(s) of the eighth-century Syriac *Zuqnin Chronicle*.¹¹ The anti-Miaphysite purges carried out in northern Mesopotamia in these years under the auspices of Justin I and his successor Justinian (r. 527–65) served to catalyse a set of dynamic processes that essentially transformed the character of Miaphysite Christianity in this far-eastern corner of the Roman Empire. Here, a sectarian tendency originating in elite clerical circles became constitutive of something totally different: a distinctly rural, subaltern communal identity, existing both ideologically and geographically at the margins of late Roman society.¹² I term this process of transformation 'ruralisation'. Under assault from a Roman state engaged in a project of 'de-Miaphysitisation', as well as provincial aristocrats' opportunistic expropriation of land from the disenfranchised sect, Miaphysites fled urban hinterlands and found refuge in upland and other marginal zones. Necessity precipitated the formation of practical alliances and ideological realignment among dispossessed peasant smallholders, threatened local elites, and Miaphysite clergy and monks – who began to offer, for the first time, a version of Christianity that distanced itself from the marriage of church and empire.¹³

¹⁰ Menze, *Justinian*, ch. 4; Ford, 'Ordination'; and for parallel developments in Egypt somewhat later (after 575), Booth, 'Towards'.

¹¹ Once mistakenly identified as the lost history of Syriac Orthodox patriarch Dionysius of Tel Maḥre (d. 845), the *Zuqnin Chronicle* is still sometimes ascribed to 'pseudo-Dionysius': *Incerti auctoris chronicon anonymum*.

¹² The Miaphysite shift towards rural monasteries and villages in this period was already observed by Frend, *Rise*, 294–5, 320.

¹³ For Miaphysite political ideology in the period, see Wood, *We Have No King*, chs 6–7; Taylor, 'Psalm'.

James C. Scott's work on premodern highland southeast Asia offers a valuable set of comparative insights here.¹⁴ He has emphasised the very real and significant limits placed on the effective exercise of centralised state control over populations by the friction of difficult terrain. Regions characterised by rugged terrain and difficulties in navigation and travel (mountains, swamps, deserts, etc.), which make the efficient movement of military force difficult, or which expose armed groups to isolation and ambush, imposed hard limits on the ability of premodern states to employ the techniques of violent control on which the projection of their power depended. Such regions have thus often become what Scott calls 'shatter zones ... where the human shards of state formation and rivalry accumulated willy nilly, creating regions of bewildering ethnic and linguistic complexity'.¹⁵ And just as Scott's 'shatter zones' can constitute a living stratigraphy of the history of flight from taxation, slavery, war and other forms of violence, they are also frequently marked by an exceptional religious diversity. In southeast Asia, mountainous zones and other regions characterised by high levels of terrain friction served as a refuge for disenfranchised religious sects fleeing the Buddhist orthodoxy imposed at the state core.¹⁶

Scott's perspective will perhaps come as less of a surprise to scholars of the Islamicate world than to late Roman historians, who often remain too inclined to think of the post-Diocletianic state as monolithic, pervasive and largely unchallenged within the borders of the empire. Mountains (such as the Lebanon and anti-Lebanon ranges) and swamps (such as the *batā'ih* of southern Iraq) are familiar as places of insurgent refuge from centralised state control in the history of the Umayyad and 'Abbāsid periods.¹⁷ But Scott's observations serve to remind us of the ways in which the history of religion is inextricably bound up with the history of state power and the apparatuses, techniques and discourses that constitute and maintain the hegemony of elite social groups. It is in this context that we find the productive value of identifying 'ruralisation' as a discrete historical process with potential parallels beyond the restricted sphere of late Roman Christian sectarianism.

¹⁴ Scott, *Art*, ch. 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 7–8.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 153–8.

¹⁷ For a useful general discussion of such dynamics, see Eger, *Islamic-Byzantine Frontier*, 293–309.

Christological Sectarianism and the Late Roman Service Aristocracy

Before we turn to a detailed examination of our source, it will be helpful to spend a little time on some preliminaries.

First, a brief overview of the life and works of John of Ephesus himself.¹⁸ John was born and raised in Ingilēnē, one of a set of tiny Syro-Armenian client states in the upper Tigris and Arsaniyas valleys (modern southeastern Turkey), the ‘satrapies’ of Sophēnē.¹⁹ By 522, when he was about fifteen years old, the countryside of northern Mesopotamia was full of Miaphysite monks who had been expelled from their monasteries in Amida (Diyarbakır) and Edessa (Urfa) as a result of state-sponsored de-Miaphysitisation. John joined one of these itinerant monasteries and spent the next two decades as monk, moving repeatedly around the region to avoid harassment from Chalcedonian bishops. In about 540, alongside many other Miaphysite monks and clergy, he left the area to join an expatriate community in Constantinople. Since space does not permit a discussion of the details of his subsequent career here, it is enough to note that by the 560s he had been ordained the titular Miaphysite bishop of Ephesus and had climbed to a prominent position in the leadership of the nascent Miaphysite church. It was in this context that he began to work as a self-appointed historian of Miaphysitism – writing only in Syriac, despite his residence in Constantinople. In 565–8 he wrote the *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, a semi-autobiographical hagiographic collection, and then compiled an *Ecclesiastical History* in the Eusebian tradition, covering from Julius Caesar up until about 570.²⁰ He worked on a continuation of this latter text for the rest of his life; it was left unfinished at the time of his death after 588.²¹

Thus, when John recounted what he characterised as the ‘persecution’ of Miaphysites by Chalcedonians in his *Ecclesiastical History*, he drew on eyewitness experience from the 520s and 530s, of life in an embattled Miaphysite

¹⁸ The standard studies are van Ginkel, ‘John’; Harvey, *Asceticism*. See also the carefully sourced overview of John’s career in Destephen, *Prosopographie*, 494–519 (‘Iōannēs 43’).

¹⁹ For background, see Marciak, *Sophene*, chs 1–3.

²⁰ *Lives of the Eastern Saints*; the *Ecclesiastical History* to 570 is lost, but significant material from the text is preserved in both the *Zuqnin Chronicle* and in Michael the Great’s twelfth-century *Chronicle* (see van Ginkel, ‘John’, 46–68 for discussion).

²¹ *Iohannis Ephesini historiae ecclesiasticae pars tertia*.

monastic community in the Mesopotamian countryside.²² In order to understand what John experienced at this time, however, it is essential to place this religious history in its larger socioeconomic context. Here I follow Jairus Banaji and Peter Sarris in seeing a major feature of the history of the east Roman world in late antiquity being a developing tension between the interests of the imperial fiscal apparatus and the post-Constantinian service aristocracy.²³ In the sixth century, these aristocrats – exemplified by the Apion family made famous by its papyrus archive – continued to depend on the imperial apparatus for titles and salaries. But at the same time, they had become increasingly entrenched in provincial regimes of property, thanks to investments in estate-building and commercial production. The practical result of this entrenchment was a growing conflict of interest between aristocratic landowners and the imperial fisc over the allocation of agricultural surplus.

It was for this reason that, in the early years of his reign, Justinian issued a barrage of legislation aimed at reforming provincial administration. This legislation attempted to curb tax farming, to detach governors from regional aristocratic influence networks, and to make them work reliably for the priorities of the central imperial apparatus. These goals are laid out programmatically in ‘Novel 17’, issued in April 535, a set of general instructions intended to be issued to each new governor as a sort of handbook of gubernatorial good practice.²⁴ It sternly adjures the new governor to combat a whole set of aristocratic misbehaviours, including illegal property seizure, theft of agricultural labourers, abuse of patronage, and the use of private armed retainers.

We will return to ‘Novel 17’ below. For now, it is sufficient to emphasise that the process of Miaphysite ruralisation has to be understood as a consequence of two basic facts. The first is that, by the sixth century, competition between aristocratic estate owners and between aristocrats and the imperial fisc was increasingly intense. The second is that, according to long-standing late Roman legal precedent, the personal property of heretics and property used for ‘heretical assemblies’ was potentially subject to confiscation by

²² On John’s participation in the Christian discourse of persecution, see Shepardson, ‘Martyrs’.

²³ Banaji, *Exploring the Economy and Agrarian Change*; Sarris, *Economy*; see also the useful review by Tedesco, ‘Late Antiquity’.

²⁴ Justinian, *Novels*, 17.

the state.²⁵ What this meant was that a dramatic reversal of sectarian fortune, such as happened immediately after the accession of Justin in 518, represented an exceptional opportunity for the working out of aggressive aristocratic competition.²⁶ In this scenario, the losers were not only disenfranchised from a religious perspective, but would also lose control over the land and properties that supported monasteries and churches, and fed monks and clergy. This dynamic created an incentive for Miaphysitism to become more insurgent and more implacably hostile to centralised, urban authority. It also created an incentive for Miaphysite monks and clergy to flee into rural areas where aristocratic and state presence was minimal, and where they could begin to build mutually beneficial relationships with rural villagers.

John of Ephesus: Persecution and Plunder

John's eyewitness account of his experience as a Miaphysite monk in northern Mesopotamia began its life as a short work entitled *On the Persecution*, probably written in the late 530s to give voice to the monks' protest at their treatment by their Chalcedonian bishops and the provincial authorities. This work is lost in its original form, but in the late 560s John incorporated it into his *Ecclesiastical History*, from which it was later excerpted *in extenso* by the anonymous compiler(s) of the eighth-century *Zuqnin Chronicle*.²⁷ Previous commentators have suggested that John's account of the 'persecution' should be approached with scepticism, given its character as a work of sectarian polemic.²⁸ I take a somewhat different position here, for three reasons. (1) There is, *a priori*, no reason to dismiss an account of church-state cooperation in violent domination solely because our source was himself a victim of that violence. (2) Nothing of what is described in John's account is in any way out of the ordinary in the context of a premodern insurgency/counterinsurgency dynamic, as we will see below. And (3), key details of John's account are

²⁵ The specific legal precedent in this case was a 455 law of Marcian (r. 450–7), laying down penalties for those who rejected Chalcedon, preserved as Justinian, *Codex*, I:5.8.

²⁶ For the phenomenon of opportunistic accusations by private individuals generally, see Humfress, *Orthodoxy*, 255–9.

²⁷ Van Ginkel, 'John', 87–8.

²⁸ Menze, *Justinian*, 109–10; cf. also (with reference to John's *Lives of the Eastern Saints*) van Ginkel, 'John', 42–3. Although I disagree with him substantially, I am much indebted to Menze's analysis of the material discussed here (*Justinian*, esp. ch. 3).

corroborated by other well-placed contemporary sources: the *Amida Chronicle* ascribed to pseudo-Zachariah of Mytilēnē, completed c.569, and – even more importantly – the *Chronicle of Edessa*, a pro-Chalcedonian source written after 540.²⁹

In Edessa, the event that precipitated this insurgency was the arrival in the city in November of 519 of a military force that attempted to arrest the bishop, Paul, who had refused to subscribe to the official endorsement of Chalcedon recently disseminated by the emperor Justin. John reports that this touched off what can be characterised as a typical late Roman urban riot. While the bishop himself took refuge in the cathedral baptistry, a riotous crowd, apparently led by monks, began to throw stones at the general and his troops. To this provocation the soldiers responded swiftly and violently: after dispersing the crowd by firing arrows into it, they spread out through the city putting rioters to the sword, specifically targeting anyone wearing a monk's habit.³⁰

In response to this massacre, John informs us, the city's monks withdrew from communion with Paul's Chalcedonian replacement, Asclepius bar Maloḥe.³¹ This rejection of Asclepius' authority was announced with the maximum of publicity, by the posting of placards anathematising Chalcedon on the gates of the monasteries.³² A similar dynamic seems to have played out in Amida. John tells a highly stereotyped story about the martyrdom of a priest, Cyrus 'the Spitter', so called because he spat out the Chalcedonian eucharist after it had been forced into his mouth. As a result of Cyrus's death – he was reportedly burned alive at the tetrapylon in the centre of Amida – a riot was only narrowly avoided. Again, there was a mass withdrawal from communion with the new Chalcedonian bishop, Abraham bar Kayli.³³

The bishops' response to this revolt was to expel the recalcitrant monks from their cities' monasteries. It is clear from the details that John provides

²⁹ *Amida Chronicle*, 8.5 and 10.1–3 (II:77–83, 173–8); *Chronicle of Edessa*, s.a. 831, 836 (I:10–11, II:9–10).

³⁰ *Incerti auctoris chronicon anonymum*, II:24–6/Witakowski, *Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mabre*, 25–6 [hereafter, *Zuqnin Chronicle*].

³¹ For the career of Paul of Edessa, see Menze, 'Jacob', 421–38; for Asclepius bar Maloḥe, a member of a prominent aristocratic family, see Jones *et al.*, *Prosopography* [hereafter, *PLRE*], II:163 ('Asclepius 6').

³² *Zuqnin Chronicle*, II:27/27.

³³ *Ibid.*, II:32–8/32–7.

that the bishops employed a number of strategies to maximise the effect of these expulsions on community morale. Expulsions during major liturgical feasts prevented monks from celebrating the feast and enjoying the temporary relaxation of ascetic rigour. John also complains about expulsions timed to coincide with the evening meal – depriving the monks of what may well have been their only opportunity to eat during the day. Nor were cenobitic monks the only victims of expulsion. Hermits and stylites were also driven out of their places of retreat, and it is easy to imagine how spiritually and psychologically disruptive this will have been. Expulsions in winter were also calculated to put the monks at risk of death from exposure or starvation. At Edessa, monks had to carry the sick and elderly members of their communities on litters when they left the city. At Amida, they were forced to leave to the tender mercies of the bishop a hospital filled with forty brothers who were too infirm to travel.³⁴

The monks' response to these assaults, however, was strategic and apparently highly effective. Multiple monasteries' worth of monks moved through the countryside together, taking up residence in abandoned rural monasteries and developing relationships with local villages:

When these things became known in the neighbouring villages, all the people who kept God in their heart conferred secretly with each other, because of fear of the persecutors, and in the middle of the night they took bread, wine, dry pulses and other things necessary for sustenance, and secretly brought them to <the monks> having seen in what distress they were and in what miserable dwellings they lived, like the beasts among the crags.³⁵

The monks used jurisdictional boundaries to their advantage, moving just outside their bishop's territory, or encamping in strategic proximity to provincial borders.³⁶ In the early stages of the process, if we are to judge by the movements of John's own group, the monks moved into the foothills of the Taurus and into other marginal areas such as the Tektek hills, east of Edessa.³⁷

³⁴ Ibid., II:21–4, 27–9, 38–43/22–4, 27–9, 37–41.

³⁵ Ibid., II:43/40–1.

³⁶ Ibid., II:40/38; cf. also *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 417.

³⁷ Between c.521 and 526/7, John and his fellow Amidene monks lived at the Monastery of Mor Mama at a place called HIZYN in ṬYŠP: *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 214, 260, 406. This is probably the 'monastery of Rishmat in Ṭishpa' referenced at *Incerti auctoris chronicon anonymum*, II:200/trans. Harrak, *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, 184. It is included there in a list of monasteries subject

In about 531, for reasons that are not entirely clear, but were probably a matter of court politics, Justinian issued a mass amnesty for all expelled monks.³⁸ Monks returned to Amida and Edessa and, John reports, began to rebuild their demolished monasteries.³⁹ But this reprieve was short-lived. In another political reversal, the brief visit of Pope Agapetus to Constantinople resulted in the first official condemnation of Miaphysitism as heresy.⁴⁰ Justinian's 'Novel 42', dated August 536, condemned Severus of Antioch's writings to be burned, and forbade his supporters to hold assemblies or to administer the sacraments. Property associated with such activity was to be confiscated for the benefit of the orthodox, Chalcedonian church:

We also forbid everyone to receive these men; on the contrary, we decree that they are to eject them from the cities they are disrupting, in awareness of the penalties now contained in our divine constitutions, which attach the very buildings in which any such activity takes place, and the estate properties from which they are supplied with sustenance, to the most holy churches; they take them away from the owners, on the ground of their causing harm to the simpler folk, and put them, with justice, under the most holy orthodox churches.⁴¹

Taking advantage of this new legal situation, Ephrem, the aggressively Chalcedonian patriarch of Antioch, went on the offensive.⁴² He made a tour of the eastern provinces of his patriarchy in military force, an event that was remembered vividly in the Miaphysite tradition as Ephrem's 'descent to the east'. A fresh wave of monastic expulsions followed his pastoral visits. John and his fellow Amidene monks fled back into the Taurus foothills, this time

to raiding near Edessa, Harran and Tella – which nicely triangulates the Tektek Dağ, the most likely location for an abandoned monastery in the area: Keser Kayaalp, *Church*, 146–52. In 526/7 the group moved to the Monastery of the Poplars near Abarne (mod. Çermik, Diyarbakır province): *Zuqnin Chronicle*, II:40/38; *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 416–17, 569–70; for Abarne, see Dillemann, *Haute*, 93–4, 110.

³⁸ *Amida Chronicle*, 8.5 (II:77–83).

³⁹ *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 418.

⁴⁰ On these events, see Millar, 'Rome', 62–82.

⁴¹ Justinian, *Novels*, 42.3.2.

⁴² For Ephrem, see *PLRE*, II:394–6 ('Ephraemius'). Ephrem's family came from Amida, but prior to his elevation to the patriarchy, he had been a high-ranking civil administrator, serving in Antioch as *comes Orientis* in 523–4 and 526.

moving rapidly from place to place.⁴³ In the winter of 536/7, they were finally forced to split into small groups, each led by a priest or deacon, and to go into hiding in the high Taurus. John's own little group crossed the Euphrates and took refuge in the mountains near Melitēnē.⁴⁴

It can scarcely be a coincidence that in March 536, Justinian had reorganised the provincial administration of Roman Armenia and had abolished the 'satrapies', the tiny Syro-Armenian client states in which John had spent his childhood, in favour of a new province of Fourth Armenia.⁴⁵ Instrumental in the implementation of these changes was Ephrem of Antioch's brother, also called John, who was probably appointed governor of the new province.⁴⁶ In 535 and 536, Justinian also issued laws directed towards undermining the traditional landholding practices of the region's hereditary Armenian nobility, the *naxarark*.⁴⁷ Our John's *Lives of the Eastern Saints* includes what appears to be an account of an abortive uprising against the new regime, spearheaded by rural clergy and led by Thomas 'the Armenian', the last satrap of Balabitēnē.⁴⁸ Beneath the hagiographic topoi, we can glimpse a telling conjunction between the interests of local Armenian elites and the Miaphysite clergy, both suddenly and dramatically disenfranchised by a hostile Roman state.⁴⁹

It seems probable that it was a series of more aggressive counterinsurgent strategies, oriented towards separating the monks from the villagers that had been supporting them, that had triggered both the uprising in Balabitēnē and

⁴³ Following the 'descent of Ephrem', John and a group of fellow monks returned to the neighbourhood of Abarne (mod. Çermik, Diyarbakır province), to the Monastery of the Hill of the Sycamores in Gúmtā: *Zuqnin Chronicle*, II:39/37; *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 418. For Gúmtā, cf. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae*, 18.9.2. They later moved back to the Monastery of the Poplars (see n.37, above).

⁴⁴ First at the Monastery of the Nut/Gawzā at 'BDYHR, near Claudias on the Euphrates (near modern Gölyurt, Adiyaman province): *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 232, 570–1; for Claudias, see Mitford, *East of Asia*, I:136–7, II:578. John's group then moved to the Monastery of the Huts in the same neighbourhood (John's last home before he moved to Constantinople): *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 296, 570–1.

⁴⁵ Justinian, *Novels*, 31.

⁴⁶ *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 294; cf. *Zuqnin Chronicle*, II:40/38–9, where John Ephrem's brother makes an appearance harassing the Amidene monks. In both these passages John is described as a 'satrap' (hence *PLRE*, III:639 – 'Ioannes 23'), but this will, strictly speaking, have been an anachronism after the institution of the new province.

⁴⁷ Justinian, 'Novel 21' and 'Edict 3' (both in Justinian, *Novels*). For discussion, see Adontz and Garsoïan, *Armenia*, chs 7 and 8.

⁴⁸ *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 293–6.

⁴⁹ For a more detailed discussion of this episode, see Beers, 'Miaphysite Subalternity', 23–44.

the Amidene monks' flight across the Euphrates. One of these strategies was the punitive billeting of troops, who made it clear to the villagers upon whom they inflicted themselves that their tour of duty would last until the local Miaphysite monks were forced to leave the neighbourhood.

They went to stay in the villages nearby and started to oppress their <inhabitants> by plundering, killing their animals and eating <them>. They said: 'We shall stay in your houses until you, men and women, go and by lamentation cause that congregation of monks to leave. <Until then> we shall stay in your houses and eat up and plunder everything you have.'⁵⁰

Remarkably, in Amida, the bishop Abraham bar Kayli implemented a fully-fledged sacramental registry to attempt to force Chalcedonianism on his flock. John claims that any parents who failed to bring their child to receive a Chalcedonian baptism could expect to be harassed by Abraham's clergy:

He made a list of the quarters, mansions and houses of the city, of men and women, each one by his name. He demanded that they be entered onto the church register and that they receive communion, even babies, and not only those which had been born but also those which had not yet been born. He demanded that the women should be registered so that when they had given birth, they should bring the <babies> to be baptised. If it happened that a newborn child died or <that a baby> was miscarried, unless clergy came to see it, the family of the dead baby which had not been brought to be baptised was in danger.⁵¹

More significant than either of these strategies, however, was the threat of property confiscation, which was brought to bear not only on monks and clergy, but on their lay supporters as well:

It had been written in advance to all authorities that whoever in any village received one of [the monks] or invited him to his house, the house should be confiscated [lit., would be for the *ταμείον*] and he himself would risk being put to death.⁵²

⁵⁰ *Zuqnin Chronicle*, II:39/38.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, II:34/33 (Witakowski's translation slightly modified).

⁵² *Ibid.*, II:43/40.

This passage, which employs a Greek word referring here to the imperial fisc, is in fact only the most explicit of many references that John makes to this phenomenon. Throughout his descriptions of the Chalcedonian persecution, not only in the *Zuqnin Chronicle*, but also in his *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, he repeatedly uses the words *baz* ('take spoil'/'plunder') and *beztā* ('robbery'/'plundering'), complaining about the 'plundering' of Miaphysite churches, monasteries and lay supporters. Two examples will suffice to illustrate the general trend:

1) [The monks] were persecuted and fled, were robbed [*'etbzezi*], captured, put in irons, locked up in prisons, <brought> before courts and <subjected> to various tortures ... And then <the oppressors> pillaged [*bāzín*], scourged and tortured also the rest of the believers who took in the persecuted and let them enter their villages or houses.⁵³

2) After five years ... [Aday's] monastery was brought to indigence; and, when he knew that it had been plundered [*'etbazzat*] more than ten times, and no longer contained provision for the needy as before ... the blessed man was grieved and distressed on account of the starving and distressed persons for whom there was no method of providing, and further the inmates of his monastery were also pressed by want.⁵⁴

I would like to suggest that what John characterises here as 'plundering' was in fact a much broader phenomenon than legal confiscation by the state, on behalf of the (now officially) Chalcedonian church. Instead, much of John's 'plundering', I would argue, was in fact the work – quasi-legal at best, if not entirely illegal – of private individuals, who opportunistically tagged, or even simply threatened, property owners with the heretical label wherever and whenever they could. It is easy to see how such opportunism could have extended beyond the expropriation of monastic property when monks were driven out of their monasteries. The alert and unscrupulous could have employed such tactics not only on ecclesiastical and monastic landowners, but also on any

⁵³ Ibid., II:21/22–3 (Witakowski's translation slightly modified).

⁵⁴ *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 129, 'Life of Aday the Chorepiscopus'.

layperson who found themselves vulnerable to accusations of giving material support to heresy.⁵⁵

Nor, indeed, I would argue, would widespread expropriation of the property of disenfranchised Miaphysites have had to wait on their official condemnation in Justinian's 'Novel 42' of August 536. The departure of so many bishops and the expulsion of so many monks after Justin's accession in 518 would have created a chaotic environment in which an alert landowner or estate manager could surreptitiously augment his or his employer's property without the need for any recourse to legal action. Anywhere that threats, gossip or rumour could serve to cow the legitimate owner into submission, expropriation could easily take place beyond the oversight of the law-courts. In such a context, elite social status and connections could be brought to bear by enterprising aristocrats who were looking to expand their estate holdings by whatever means possible, legal or otherwise. Similarly, the collusion in such activities of provincial governors and other state officials – who were themselves often members of regional aristocratic families – would have been an easy source of mutual enrichment for all concerned. This consideration brings us back at last to Justinian's 'Novel 17', of April 535 – his general instructions for provincial governors.

It should be emphasised that this law was promulgated more than a year prior to the condemnation of Miaphysitism in 'Novel 42'. Nevertheless, in 'Novel 17', we find an explicit condemnation of precisely the practice I have just described – extra-legal property seizure in the name of religion:

Not even in the cause of religion, and of hunting down heresy, shall you allow anyone to plunder your province, or to be given a commission for any such action in the province of which you are governor. You yourself will see to the investigation of such matters, with due consideration also for the interests of the public treasury, and will not allow anything to be done in the name of religion that is not in accordance with our instructions. If the case is one of canon law, whether the parties to the controversy be bishops or any others, you are to judge it in conjunction with the metropolitan of the province, and to reach on it an appropriate decision, pleasing to God, which

⁵⁵ Illustrative of elite opportunism in this sphere is the practice addressed in Justinian, *Novels*, 55.

will observe due respect to the orthodox faith, ensure that the revenues are unimpaired, and keep our taxpayers unharmed.⁵⁶

To this Justinian adds a pronouncement, which, in the context of the Roman legal tradition, is nothing short of extraordinary:

Something else over which you must take every care, whenever someone proves to deserve punishment, is to chastise him without touching his property; you are to permit that to be left to his family, and to the law and its terms. After all, it is not the property that commits offenses, but the property-owners. Those who reverse that position are letting those who deserve punishment to go free, and punishing others in their stead – those whom the law was perhaps calling to their succession – by depriving them of their property.⁵⁷

Punishment by confiscation of property, *publicatio bonorum*, is a feature of Roman criminal law with roots deep in the republican period.⁵⁸ Justinian's pronouncement therefore demands some explanation – which can, I would argue, be found in the concern expressed in the previous paragraph for taxpayers and fiscal revenue. Appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, Justinian does not here reject the idea of confiscation as punishment *per se*; instead, he attempts to reserve it, at least rhetorically, as an imperial prerogative. Such an intervention in this context implies that governors had been colluding with private citizens in opportunistic anti-heresy activities at a volume that Justinian's administration perceived as a substantive threat to the fisc. The ideal governor conjured up by 'Novel 17' should represent those fiscal interests as the state's primary civil representative in the provinces, rather than colluding with the provincial aristocracy to privatise the tax base.

If such activities were already a feature of the socioeconomic landscape in northern Mesopotamia in the 520s, as John's account seems to suggest, the official condemnation of Miaphysitism in the summer of 536 must have served to initiate a fresh round of yet more opportunistic expropriation. It was perhaps for this reason that the 'descent of Ephrem' was remembered as a disaster

⁵⁶ Justinian, *Novels*, 17.11.

⁵⁷ Justinian, *Novels*, 17.12.

⁵⁸ Fuhrmann, 'Publicatio'.

for the Miaphysite community in the region. The final flight of John and his fellow Amidene monks to the refuge offered by the high Taurus implies a near total loss of substantive ties to productive property and material support in the lowland agricultural territory of Amida. Although, as we have seen, John claims that ‘plundering’ also affected the monks’ lay supporters, he does not offer any information about whether such laypeople also participated in their flight into the mountains, or whether the monks subsequently sought new relationships with mountain villages and the pastoralist communities which occupied them. In the absence of evidence, we should perhaps imagine that both phenomena overlapped to a certain degree.

We should probably read ‘Novel 42’s ruling about property confiscation, quoted above, as an abrogation – again, at least rhetorically – of what Justinian had proclaimed a year before in ‘Novel 17’. We may imagine that this shift in attitude on the part of the imperial administration represented the adoption of what could be characterised as an ‘if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em’ approach to the problem. In other words, having failed to prevent property confiscations, the administration attempted instead to exercise some legal control over the activities of provincial opportunists, no doubt in the hope of allocating the spoils of the new wave of de-Miaphysitisation to loyal supporters of the regime. The losers in such a struggle for spoils would thus have found themselves caught between the fisc and the regional aristocracy. Many of them, as losers in such contests often do, perhaps chose flight to the hills instead of the landlord or the tax collector. As David Taylor has pointed out, the Chalcedonian counterinsurgency was no more effective than counterinsurgencies usually are. The removal of bishops had only served to skim off the most cosmopolitan and compromise-prone element of the Miaphysite leadership, and their places were taken by monks – monks who were far more suited, both ideologically and practically, to function as the leaders of an insurgent movement.⁵⁹ As the victims of the wholesale expropriation of their sources of income and livelihood, they had very little reason to be invested in urban society, and even less reason to submit to episcopal or civil authority.

John indicates that, as the situation continued to deteriorate, the Miaphysite monastic communities of northern Mesopotamia moved further

⁵⁹ Taylor, ‘Psalm’, 79–81.

afield, not only into the Taurus, but also onto the Ṭur ‘Abdin plateau and south into the Khabur valley and the Syrian steppe.⁶⁰ Here, following James C. Scott, we can imagine that they finally found areas where they were, relatively speaking, beyond the reach of the authority of the state and the imperial church. It was this impasse that set the stage for – on the one hand – the entrenchment of a Chalcedonianism that was, as the century progressed, increasingly limited to the cities and their immediate lowland agricultural territories. On the other hand, Miaphysite monasticism made a decisive shift towards rural and upland zones, where the reach of urban-based clergy was limited, and where – crucially – aristocratic investment was also limited. It is precisely in such a context that Miaphysitism began to take on, for the first time, a new character as something specifically different from mainstream Roman Christianity, and something specifically subaltern.

Towards Ruralisation as a Category of Analysis

It is important to be clear about the limitations of ‘ruralisation’ as a discrete historical process, and as an object of historical analysis and interpretation. Miaphysitism was not solely made in the mountains, nor did it remain confined to them. The close reading I have offered above of John of Ephesus’s account of the Miaphysite experience in northern Mesopotamia in the 520s and 530s does not represent a total history of anti-Chalcedonian Christianity in the period. The Miaphysites were not merely a persecuted remnant hidden away in highland refuges. They continued to play a significant, if increasingly segregated role in the social and intellectual life of the late Roman Empire up to and during the upheavals of the first half of the seventh century, and their greatest period of efflorescence coincided with the early centuries of Arab rule in the Middle East. Under more fortunate political circumstances, the Syriac Orthodox would go on to play a prominent role in the urban milieu of cities such as Takrīt and Malatya.⁶¹ Nor were the adherents of Miaphysitism all highland pastoralists and rough country monks; from the late sixth to the

⁶⁰ *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 419–20, 573; cf. a reference to the effects of anti-Miaphysite activity touching even ‘the inhabitants of the ‘Arab in Mesopotamia, and Izla and Bet Gaugal’ in *Amida Chronicle*, 8.5 (II:77–83). For the latter two toponyms, which here indicate the Ṭur ‘Abdin generally, see Palmer, *Monk*, xix; for the ‘Arab, Dillemann, *Haute*, 75–8.

⁶¹ Wood, *Imam*, ch. 5; Gyllenhaal, ‘Byzantine Melitene’.

ninth century, the monastery of Qenneshe (probably near modern Jarābulus) functioned as an influential Syriac Orthodox intellectual centre, training scholars of high calibre and fostering a sophisticated school of Greek-Syriac translation.⁶²

Nevertheless, the ruralisation of Miaphysitism in the first half of the sixth century was an essential factor in its preservation as a distinct intellectual tendency – and increasingly, a distinct sociopolitical community – in a late Roman milieu in which many other disenfranchised versions of Christianity were effectively marginalised and subsequently faded into historical obscurity. The ethnicisation of the Syriac Orthodox *per se*, as Bas ter Haar Romeny and his colleagues have shown, belongs to the early Islamic period.⁶³ The ruralisation of Miaphysitism, however – the shift to predominantly rural-monastic community leadership and the creation of resilient Miaphysite communities in rural and upland zones – was an essential moment in the staging of the pre-conditions for the creation of Syriac Orthodox identity. The aggressive estate-building projects of the late Roman service aristocracy created an environment in which the socioeconomic interests of dispossessed monks such as those of Amida and Edessa, local elites like Thomas the Armenian, and the nameless villagers of northern Mesopotamia began to coincide. State-sponsored attempts at de-Miaphysitisation produced a contrary effect – the creation of a resistant, and resilient, communal identity. In this context, hegemonic religious discourse offered a field for both local elites and rural communities to stake a claim to difference, and to begin to defend their socioeconomic interests in the face of aristocratic domination and exploitation.

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⁶² Tannous, *Making*, ch. 6.

⁶³ Haar Romeny *et al.*, 'Formation'.

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6

Religion and Rebellion: Mobilisation through Religious Image-Building – The Cases of the Zanj and Qarāmiṭa

Nimrod Hurvitz

Introduction

In al-Ṭabarī's account from the year 278/891, there appears a list of the aberrations of the Qarāmiṭa movement and a reference to a meeting between an unnamed Qarmaṭī and the leader of the Zanj, 'Alī b. Muḥammad (d. 270/883), in which the Qarmaṭī suggested that the two movements join forces.¹ The Qarāmiṭa were a branch of the Ismā'īlī Shī'ī movement, who operated clandestinely during the ninth century from their headquarters in Salamiyya, Syria. In the 860s, the Ismā'īlīs converted Ḥamdān Qarmat, the eponym of the Qarmaṭī movement, and through his activities acquired a foothold in south Iraq. It is possible that one of their leaders approached the Zanj, who were at that time (the 870s) a powerful rebel movement that operated in south Iraq.

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, III:2130; trans. *History*, XXXVII:175. This episode is mentioned in Daftary, *Ismā'īlīs*, 116–17; Popovic, *Revolt*, 81–2. The Zanj are further discussed in this volume by P. Grant, and the Qarāmiṭa by Chenganakkattil. For a survey of the Qarāmiṭa, see Kennedy, *Prophet*, 287–92. On the Qarāmiṭa of Bahrayn, see Daftary, *Ismā'īlīs*, 119–20, 160–5, 220–2. For a different interpretation of the Qarāmiṭa's formation that emphasises material factors, see Webb, 'Bedouin'. On Western historiography of the Ismā'īliyya, see Daftary, *Ismā'īlīs*, 1–31. For a succinct remark on the topic, see Daftary, *Short History*, 36–7, where he writes that modern narratives of the Ismā'īlī movement rely on three types of sources: Ismā'īlī writings, Imāmī heresiographical writings, and anti-Ismā'īlī tracts. For a monograph about the Zanj, see Sāmīr, *Thawrat*; Popovic, *Revolt*. For historical surveys that address the Zanj, see Kennedy, *Prophet*, 179–82 and also Shaban, *Islamic History*, II:100–12.

The Zanj comprised slaves and freed slaves who revolted against their ‘Abbāsīd masters and oppressors. Their rebellion began in 256/869, during which they terrorised the inhabitants of south Iraq and overcame several ‘Abbāsīd armies that were sent to subdue them. Only in 270/883 were the ‘Abbāsīds able to defeat them and bring the rebellion to an end.

The information about the encounter between ‘Alī b. Muḥammad and the unnamed Qarmaṭī is murky and omits critical details: the date of the meeting is not specified; the name of the transmitter is not mentioned; and the name of the Qarmaṭī who participated in this meeting is not stated. What is mentioned is that the nameless Qarmaṭī was the brother-in-law of the well-known Qarmaṭī propagandist (*dā’irī*) Zikrawayh b. Mihrawayh (d. 294/907), and when he met ‘Alī b. Muḥammad, he said: ‘I subscribe to a certain religious practice, and have one hundred thousand swords at my command. Let us discuss this matter. If we agree about the practice, I will join you with all my men; if not, I will withdraw.’² According to this report, ‘Alī b. Muḥammad was not interested in collaborating with the Qarāmiṭa, and Zikrawayh’s brother-in-law slipped out of the room when he got the chance.

Significantly, al-Ṭabarī places this anecdote at the end of a series of reports about the religious deviations of the Qarāmiṭa. He writes that Qarmaṭ was described by some Kūfī inhabitants as having ‘invented a new religion’ and ‘thought of putting Muḥammad’s people to the sword’.³ In other anecdotes the Qarāmiṭa are presented as distorting Islam by introducing Christian figures and ideas, as well as altering rituals. Furthermore, they are said to have moved the day of the congregational prayer to Monday, inventing days of fasting and falsifying chapters from the Qur’ān.⁴ It is hardly a coincidence that al-Ṭabarī completes this list of allegations with a report about the effort of the Qarāmiṭa to join the Zanj, who were in his eyes another heretical movement, which had a reputation of distorting the faith and murdering Muslim believers. From his perspective the two movements were a perfect match: blasphemous, cruel and dangerous.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’riḫ*, III:2130; trans. *History*, XXXVII:175.

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’riḫ*, III:2127; trans. *History*, XXXVII:173.

⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’riḫ*, III: 2128; trans. *History*, XXXVII:173–4.

The Qarāmiṭa and Zanj had more in common than being perceived by al-Ṭabarī as evil incarnate. First and foremost, they revolted against the same enemy, the ‘Abbāsids. They also appeared in the same regions, southern Iraq and northeast Arabia, during the second half of the third/ninth centuries. Lastly, they seem to have drawn supporters from similar milieus.⁵ Yet arguably the most significant characteristic that they shared is that they came into being in the course of their respective rebellions. Whereas many other rebel movements were based on pre-existing communities such as tribes, army units or religious communities, and constituted cohesive social groups with shared histories, group identities and hierarchies of authority, the Zanj and Qarāmiṭa were newly formed communities that did not exist before they rebelled. They were composed of disparate social groups who were not familiar with each other, had no common past, and whose members were not acquainted with their own leaders. Such movements elicit the questions: how did a stranger, who had no previous connections with his potential followers, gather them around him and transform them into a rebel movement? What drove individuals and small groups that had not collaborated in the past to join him and create a new movement that fought so aggressively against the regime and predominant religious views?

Part of the answer is that movements such as the Qarāmiṭa and Zanj espoused a radical belief system that ascribed superhuman abilities and secret knowledge about the world to their leaders. The attribution of exceptional spiritual capabilities to the individuals who initiated the rebellions drew to them groups of followers, created a rebellious community and reshaped society in the regions that they operated. The social repercussions of rebellions that are couched in such beliefs are significantly different from another type of rebellion that has been aptly labelled in this volume ‘stakeholder revolts’, and whose goal was to negotiate political influence and material improvements, rather than to alter social structures or religious beliefs.⁶ Whereas religiously embedded rebellions aimed to remove regimes, ‘stakeholder revolts’ did not

⁵ On the social composition of these two movements, see Daftary, *Ismā‘īlīs*, 123–4.

⁶ See Hagemann and Grant’s introduction to this volume, 1.

necessarily revolt against the political system.⁷ Furthermore, whereas religiously embedded rebellions brought to the forefront of political action unfamiliar figures that established new movements, the ‘stakeholder revolts’ were usually led by well-known figures that stood at the head of long-standing social entities. The limited goals of ‘stakeholder revolts’, whose actions were ‘part of a political negotiation process’, can be described by paraphrasing Clausewitz’s renowned characterisation of war: rebellion is merely the continuation of negotiation with other means.

The spiritual powers that the leaders of the Zanj and Qarāmiṭa movements claimed for themselves compensated for their lack of social capital and enabled them to attain the prestige they needed to lead movements of adherents. Their social ascendance is similar to that of Babak, about whom Patricia Crone observed that individuals of low social standing could attain a respected social position through claiming ‘special gifts, imparted to him by God ...’.⁸ The present study will examine how the leaders of the Zanj and Qarāmiṭa, who were of relatively humble backgrounds, attained leadership status and gathered a community around them by alleging that they possessed unique spiritual powers or knowledge, or by representing another individual who possessed such powers. Furthermore, it will argue that there are several ways to make such claims, and it will examine two approaches that were used by the founders of the Zanj and Qarāmiṭa to construct leadership roles and mobilise a following. The first was that of Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ (eponymous founder of the Qarāmiṭa), who claimed to represent an *imām* with supernatural powers and to possess secret religious knowledge. The second was that of ‘Alī b. Muḥammad (founder of the Zanj) as well as Zikrawayh b. Mihrawayh and his sons (leaders of the Qarāmiṭa in south Iraq), who claimed to possess superhuman abilities and to be the scions of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, or representatives of one of his descendants. Each of these case studies will bring to light the mechanisms by which social tensions merge with spiritual beliefs and shape religiously embedded rebel movements.

⁷ Ibid., 1. For examples of such rebellions, see the chapters in this volume by Dar and Bosanquet.

⁸ Crone, *Nativist Prophets*, 74. On the use that was made of ‘religious prophecy’ for generating a ‘revolutionary movement’ in early modern Germany, see Engels, *Peasant War*, 41.

‘Alī b. Muḥammad and the Zanj

‘Alī b. Muḥammad was an elusive figure that aroused the wrath and disrespect of many chroniclers.⁹ The hostility and negative bias of these sources complicates any effort to sketch a profile of the leader of the Zanj movement. What is more, ‘Alī b. Muḥammad was a habitual impostor. A contemporary historian, al-Ya‘qūbī (d. after 295/908) labelled him ‘the man who pretended to be of the family of Abū Ṭālib’.¹⁰ Al-Mas‘ūdī (d. 956), who wrote a few decades after ‘Alī was executed, agrees with al-Ya‘qūbī’s observation that ‘Alī b. Muḥammad pretended to be a descendant of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and added that most people knew this and spoke of him as an impostor (*da‘īy*) of the family of Abū Ṭālib.¹¹ Furthermore, al-Mas‘ūdī asserts that despite his posturing as an offspring of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, he actually held the views of the Khawārij.¹² There were, according to the chronicles, other names and views that he assumed. The different personas that he adopted, along with his propensity to manipulate religious views, create the impression that he reinvented himself as he moved between the communities and social groups that he sought to lead.¹³

Despite these difficulties, there are several facets in his life that seem relatively certain and are significant for our analysis. The first is that he was well educated and possessed impressive rhetorical abilities. His mother supposedly said he ‘endlessly pursued everyone who knew the *adab* ... and the *riwāya*’.¹⁴ This description accords with al-Ṭabarī’s remark that ‘Alī made his living as a poet in al-Muntaṣir’s circles when he lived in Sāmarrā’.¹⁵ His verbal abilities also seem to have served him well when he convinced the governor of Wāsiṭ to free him and his followers, an event to which we will return shortly.¹⁶

⁹ Note the numerous times that al-Ṭabarī refers to him as the ‘abominable one’ (*al-khabīth*). For example, al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III:1856; trans. *History*, XXXVI:132–3. See also al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, XXI:268. For a survey of medieval Muslim historians’ disrespect and scepticism regarding ‘Alī’s numerous personas, see Sāmīr, *Thawrat*, 38–9.

¹⁰ Al-Ya‘qūbī, *Ta’rikh*, III:1292.

¹¹ Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj*, IV:180–1.

¹² *Ibid.*, IV:181. On a Zanjī coin that carries a Khārijī slogan, see Walker, ‘Rare Coin’.

¹³ On his biography and personality, see Sāmīr, *Thawrat*, 38–49. See also Popovic, *Revolt*, 150–3.

¹⁴ Al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, XXI:26–9. See also Popovic, *Revolt*, 34.

¹⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III:1743; trans. *History*, XXXVI:31; al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, XXI:269.

¹⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III:1746; trans. *History*, XXXVI:33.

A second biographic detail were his travels between communities and efforts to attain positions of leadership in each of them. This obviously implies that in these communities he was an outsider: therefore, he did not possess local social networks, family connections or personal friendships to help him establish rebellious communities. This, as will be discussed later, is a critical aspect of the newly formed rebel communities that are studied in this essay.

A third probable characteristic was his propensity to agitate. Starting in 249/863, when he moved from Sāmarrāʾ to Baḥrayn, he was constantly on the look out for communities or groups that bore grievances against the ‘Abbāsīd rulers and would join him in his struggle against their regime. When he arrived in Ḥajar, a city in Baḥrayn, he took the name ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan b. ‘Ubaydallāh b. al-‘Abbās b. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and mobilised a following by claiming to have supernatural powers.¹⁷ During that period, he says of himself, ‘I received signs of my leadership as *imām*, which were manifest to people.’¹⁸ Among these signs was his ability to recite by heart three *sūras* from the Qur’ān, which he initially did not know. Apparently, because of his supernatural pretences, some of his followers believed that he was a prophet and paid him taxes, as well as allotting him the position of judge.¹⁹ However, not all the inhabitants of Ḥajar were convinced by his claims and a group of them clashed with his followers. The violence forced him to leave the area and he moved to Aḥsāʾ, where he was joined by several Bedouin tribes.²⁰

Although the dates and details were not very clear, when he travelled through the desert in that period, he pretended to be Abū al-Ḥusayn Yaḥyā b. ‘Umar (d. 250/865), who was an ‘Alid rebel that mobilised a group of ‘Alids and some Bedouins and died in Kūfa a short while before ‘Alī b. Muḥammad appeared there.²¹ Some of his followers did not believe he died and argued that he went into occultation and that he was the *mabdī* that would appear in the future. Using this persona, ‘Alī mobilised many Bedouin supporters and

¹⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾriḫ*, III:1743; trans. *History*, XXXVI:31. On his claim to understand the language of the birds, see al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, XXI:269.

¹⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾriḫ*, III:1744; trans. *History*, XXXVI:32.

¹⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾriḫ*, III:1744; trans. *History*, XXXVI:31.

²⁰ Al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, XXI:269.

²¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾriḫ*, III:1745; trans. *History*, XXXVI:32. On Abū al-Ḥusayn Yaḥyā b. ‘Umar, see al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾriḫ*, III:1516; tr. *History*, XXXV:15–16. Mentioned also by Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, XIV:512.

led them to Baḥrayn, where he fought local forces and lost. As a result of the defeat, many of the Bedouins abandoned him.²² It is worth noting that during the first stage of his activism, when ‘Alī b. Muḥammad operated in Baḥrayn and the surrounding deserts, he failed to build a large following and a powerful army. However, and this will be significant in the coming years, he did succeed in attracting a small circle of loyal adherents.

‘Alī b. Muḥammad was disappointed with the Bedouins and decided to move to a city. As he roamed the desert with the followers who remained with him, he told them that he had heard voices instructing him to go to Baṣra.²³ Baṣran society, at that point, was split into two warring factions, and ‘Alī tried to establish a presence in the city by winning over one of them. However, his propaganda failed again, since the men he sent to speak on his behalf were chased out of town, and he also escaped. Although he and some of his supporters succeeded in getting away, another group of his followers, including his wife and eldest son, were caught and jailed.²⁴ A short while later, when he travelled through the marshlands, he too was captured by a vigilant official who pursued him. Interestingly, although the authorities hunted for him and his supporters and even put some of them in jail, the governor of Wāsiṭ, to whom ‘Alī was brought after he was caught, released him. According to al-Ṭabarī, it was because of ‘Alī’s ‘cunning and persuasion’.²⁵ It is not clear why one official searched for ‘Alī, another released him, while a third held his family in jail. However, the overall impression that these anecdotes convey is that at that point in time, he and his followers were already perceived as a threat to the regime.

Upon his release, ‘Alī travelled to Baghdad, where he claimed to be a relative of Aḥmad b. ‘Īsā b. Zayd (247/861), a well-known Zaydī leader who fled the ‘Abbāsids most of his life.²⁶ He also alleged that he received supernatural signs such as the ability to read the minds of his followers. Furthermore, he asked the Lord for a sign and ‘saw on a wall a message being written to him by an

²² Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III:1745; trans. *History*, XXXVI:32.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III:1746; trans. *History*, XXXVI:33. Also see al-Ṣafādī, *Wāfi*, XXI:269.

²⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III:1746; trans. *History*, XXXVI:33.

²⁶ *Ibid.* See also al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III:1857; trans. *History*, XXXVI:133 and n.379. He is mentioned as a Zaydī *imām* in Daftary, *Ismā‘īlīs*, 76. For the rebellious history of Aḥmad’s uncle Yaḥyā, see Kontny-Wendt in this volume.

invisible hand'.²⁷ It is reported that his propaganda in Baghdad was effective enough to attract more followers, who joined him and his circle of adherents.²⁸

A short while later, the governor of Baṣra left, chaos in the city intensified, the gates of the jails were opened and 'Alī's family was freed.²⁹ When news of these events reached him, he decided to move to the region with some of his followers and settled in a castle called al-Qurashī. At that point he decided to change his persona once again and presented himself as an agent who was acting on behalf of one of the caliph al-Wāthiq's sons and was responsible for purchasing land. He instructed his followers to address him in that manner.

'Alī b. Muḥammad's travels to different locations and communities, and his efforts to incite rebellion, reveal several characteristics about the 'Master of the Zanj' and his subversive activities. The first, which is self-evident, yet easily overlooked, is that he was an outsider in all these communities. Being a stranger meant that he was suspect, or at best an unknown quantity, and therefore, potential supporters were not aware of his qualifications or abilities, his family background, existing allies or enemies, or other details that may interest individuals joining a rebel movement. Furthermore, he could not rely on any form of social prestige and had to create an impression that he was worthy of leading them in a rebellion, which obviously would endanger their lives and livelihood.

'Alī b. Muḥammad's second notable characteristic was his checkered balance of success and failure. On the one hand he failed to establish powerful movements that conquered the regions he desired. In all the locations that he established a movement, he and his followers were driven out either by local populations or the regime's armies. Yet, for short spells of time, he did attract large followings that were willing to fight under his leadership. Furthermore, despite losing the battles, he succeeded in gathering around him a growing number of committed followers. This kernel of loyal adherents would remain with him throughout the Zanj rebellion.

The third was the social composition of his rebel movements. Between 249–255/863–869, his followers were *mawālī*, small merchants, and Bedouin

²⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, III:1746; trans. *History*, XXXVI:34.

²⁸ Al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, XXI:269. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, XIV:512.

²⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, III:1747; trans. *History*, XXXVI:34. Also al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, XXI:269.

tribes. In their references to the movement during those years, neither al-Ṭabarī nor al-Ṣafadī mention the Zanj or slaves.³⁰ Furthermore, the ideology that he promulgated at that point did not play up social injustice and freeing slaves. Its main themes were a variety of religious, primarily supernatural characteristics that asserted that he and his followers received divine guidance, in parallel to being a descendant of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.

While pretending to be al-Wāthiq’s son’s agent, ‘Alī b. Muḥammad identified an opportunity that would transform his movement and enable him to build a powerful rebel army. In Ramaḍān 255/869, ‘Alī b. Muḥammad realised that he could build a significant fighting force by winning over the workers in the desalination project of the marshlands (*shūrajīyyīn*).³¹ Al-Ṭabarī depicts a sudden realisation on the part of ‘Alī b. Muḥammad, who transformed his recruitment policy and stated ideology within days.

The shift began when ‘Rayḥān b. Ṣāliḥ, one of the slaves (*ghilmān*) of the Shūrajīyyīn’ passed close to ‘Alī’s camp and was taken by force to meet him.³² He was interrogated by ‘Alī about military matters in Baṣra, and was asked whether anyone in the city knew about him or his men. He was also asked what he knew about a military figure by the name of Zaynabī and the warring factions in Baṣra, the Bilāliyya and Sa‘diyya. After realising that Rayḥān knew little about the military and political situation in Baṣra, ‘Alī asked him about the *shūrajīyyīn*, ‘both the freedmen (*al-aḥrār*) and slaves (*al-‘abid*) and their living conditions’.³³ In al-Ṭabarī’s chronicle, this was the first time in his six years of political agitations that ‘Alī is mentioned as paying attention to the *shūrajīyyīn* or to social matters. The conversation ends with ‘Alī proposing that Rayḥān join him, and Rayḥān agrees. ‘Alī then asks Rayḥān to bring with him as many slaves as he can.

³⁰ For al-Ṣafadī’s description of the movement, see al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, XXI:268–73. In his depiction of the rebellion, al-Ṣafadī does not mention the Zanj until he discusses the events of 254/868, after ‘Alī b. Muḥammad returned to Baṣra the second time. See al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, XXI:269. Al-Ṭabarī’s first reference to the Zanj is in the year 255/869. See al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III:1751; trans. *History*, XXXVI:38.

³¹ On *shūrajīyyīn*, see Sāmīr, *Thawrat*, 28–9. See also Talhami, ‘Zanj Rebellion’, 459. For the significance of this landscape, see P. Grant’s chapter in this volume.

³² Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III:1747–8; trans. *History*, XXXVI:35.

³³ *Ibid.*

A day or two after this meeting, ‘Alī took an unprecedented step and went out with his followers to gather *shūrajīyyīn*. He travelled through the countryside from one group to another seizing slaves. Al-Ṭabarī describes ‘Alī’s new policy: “Alī continued to operate in this fashion all day until he had amassed a large number of the Shūrajīyyīn slaves’.³⁴ After their numbers increased, he appointed commanders to the newly formed military units.³⁵ From that point on, perhaps a few weeks after Rayḥān was brought to him, ‘Alī had a large army that could challenge the ‘Abbāsīd regime.

The speedy recruitment of the *shūrajīyyīn* changed the social composition of ‘Alī’s followers, which seems to have included slaves, free men and Black people who probably belonged to both categories. The matter is complicated because al-Ṭabarī uses several terms to describe ‘Alī’s followers. For example, his usage of *shūrajīyyīn* indicates that these workers in the marshlands where both slaves and free men.³⁶ In other descriptions, al-Ṭabarī uses terms such as *khawal* or *‘abīd*, indicating that many of them were slaves.³⁷ In other parts of the text he writes of *al-sūdān*.³⁸ It is also significant to note that al-Ṭabarī begins to use the term Zanj in order to describe the movement or its members only after ‘Alī has gathered a significant number of Black rebels.

The term Zanj and the social composition of the movement have been understood in different ways by modern historians. One view, elaborated by Fayṣal al-Sāmīr, who wrote one of the most detailed monographs of the movement, examines the rebellion through the lens of class struggle and writes,

[S]ome think that the Zanj rebellion was a war between races – between Black and White. I disagree with that view. I think it was a war between the social strata of slaves, semi-slaves, peasants and Bedouins who were discontented with the regime on the one hand, and the landlords and slave owners and the Caliphate on the other hand.³⁹

³⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III:1749; trans. *History*, XXXVI:36.

³⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III:1751; trans. *History*, XXXVI:38.

³⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III:1748; trans. *History*, XXXVI:35.

³⁷ For *‘abīd*, see al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III:1748, 1756, 1837; trans. *History*, XXXVI:35, 42, 111. For *khawal*, see al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III:1751, 1771; trans. *History*, XXXVI:38, 55, 56.

³⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III:1764, 1765, 1766; trans. *History*, XXXVI:49, 50, 51.

³⁹ Sāmīr, *Thawrat*, 59. Kennedy, *Prophet*, 179–80 also characterises the rebels as slaves.

The opposite view was that the revolt involved solely Black people. This was the opinion of Shaban.⁴⁰ Most contemporary historians agree, or base themselves on al-Sāmīr's assessment, which depicts the Zanj as a movement that is made up of several social groups, all of which felt oppressed by the economic and political elites of south Iraq. For example, citing al-Sāmīr's monograph, Ghada Hashem Talhami writes that '[T]he slaves were merely one among several oppressed classes who participated in the rebellion, which was not an attack on the institution of slavery but on social inequality ...'⁴¹

The new social composition of his followers drove 'Alī to elaborate a new rhetoric. A short while after he gathered the *shūrajīyyīn*, 'Alī spoke with them in order to raise their morale and promised that he would give them possessions and treat them kindly.⁴² Although this is hardly an elaborate social vision, it does address the fears of his new recruits who suffered in the past from dire circumstances and abuse. In a subsequent sermon, his social and religious vision was a little more detailed, as 'he recalled the wretched state from which, through him, God had rescued them. 'Alī said that he wanted to improve their condition, giving them slaves (*al-'abīd*), money, and homes to possess for themselves, and that by them they could achieve the greatest things.'⁴³ As several historians have already noted, this is not a revolutionary social outlook that eradicates slavery, but rather, a redistribution of slaves.⁴⁴

Another aspect that 'Alī introduced in his sermons were references to social injustice. He spoke about the divine intervention that changed their 'wretched state' as well as achieved 'the greatest things' with them. In another sermon he asserted that 'he had not revolted to achieve earthly goods and glory, but only for the wrath of God and against the corruption and decay of the faith that he saw among the people'.⁴⁵ Within a short while after 'Alī altered the social composition of his movement, he reinvented himself as a

⁴⁰ Shaban, *Islamic History*, II:100–1. Other historians who followed suit were Talhami, 'Zanj Rebellion', 455; Furlonge, 'Revisiting the Zanj'. By contrast, Kennedy, *Prophet*, 179 is closer to Nöldeke's assessment and describes the Zanj as 'the slave population of southern Iraq, most of them of East African origin'.

⁴¹ Talhami, 'Zanj Rebellion', 455.

⁴² Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, III:1749–50; trans. *History*, XXXVI:36.

⁴³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, III:1751; trans. *History*, XXXVI:38.

⁴⁴ Furlonge, 'Revisiting the Zanj', 8–9; Talhami, 'Zanj Rebellion', 455.

⁴⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, III:1757; trans. *History*, XXXVI:43.

socio-religious activist that struggled ‘against the corruption and decay of the faith’. A new ideological theme, mainly social injustice, was added to his supernatural religious persona and the Zanj movement came to speak for the oppressed: slaves, Black people and other social groups that had been abused by the ‘Abbāsīd regime and its elites. It is at that point that he also inserted slogans that are identified with the Khawārij, known for their egalitarian outlook, which enabled al-Mas‘ūdī to label him a Khārījite.⁴⁶

The new image of the socio-religious activist who makes down-to-earth promises did not negate ‘Alī’s image as possessor of supernatural abilities. In al-Ṭabarī’s description of ‘Alī’s growing power and prestige, the historian recounts how ‘Alī was greeted in several towns by the local populations. In one such encounter, he conversed with a Jew who ‘asked ‘Alī a number of questions, which he answered. The Jew claimed that he had found a description of him in the Torah and that he had foreseen fighting alongside him. He also queried ‘Alī about certain marks on his body, which he stated he knew about.’⁴⁷ This story echoes the encounter between Baḥīrā the monk and Muḥammad, in which Baḥīrā checked the Prophet’s body for signs that were mentioned in the Christian books and ‘saw the seal of prophethood between his shoulders’.⁴⁸ This story, which draws upon the well-known topos according to which the sacred books of the earlier monotheistic faiths mention signs of prophets to come, is used by ‘Alī b. Muḥammad to continue to build up his image of a divinely chosen and guided leader.

Along with this story, al-Ṭabarī lists several other hagiographic motifs that are ascribed to ‘Alī b. Muḥammad and his men. On one occasion ‘Alī refers to a successful battle as ‘one of the signs of perfection of their mission’.⁴⁹ In others he claims to have heard voices or the voices of angels, to have had visions and to have known what would happen in the future.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj*, IV:181; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, III:1748–9; trans. *History*, XXXVI:36. Also Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, XIV:512, 513. On the Zanj use of Khārījī ideology, see Sāmīr, *Thawrat*, 60, 65–70; Talhami, ‘Zanj Rebellion’, 455. On a coin that bears a Khārījī slogan, see Walker, ‘Rare Coin’.

⁴⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, III:1760; trans. *History*, XXXVI:46.

⁴⁸ Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, I:180; trans. *Life*, 80.

⁴⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, III:1767; trans. *History*, XXXVI:52.

⁵⁰ On voices, see the comments in al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, III:1848, 1870; trans. *History*, XXXVI:126, 146. On a conversation between the angels, al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, III:1969; trans. *History*, XXXVII:31. On a vision, see al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, III:1856; trans. *History*, XXXVI:133.

The key to ‘Alī’s political manoeuvring was his ability to identify social grievances and seize upon opportunities. This characteristic began with the construction of a religious aura. One aspect of his religious persona was the continuous adoption of Shī‘ī names, whether by claiming descent from ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib’s family or by asserting his identity as a Shī‘ī leader that was killed. It reflects his understanding that in the third/ninth-century popular imagination, Shī‘ism was identified with opposition to the hated ‘Abbāsīd regime and the effort to confront corruption, and was useful in getting the attention and support of marginalised and abused groups and individuals.⁵¹ Another element in the religious persona that he built was the assertion that he possessed supernatural abilities. In a society in which possessing spiritual powers was not an uncommon claim, ‘Alī’s supernatural assertions were not totally outlandish. At the same time, we need to remember that although a handful of individuals believed ‘Alī, most of the people who were exposed to his claims rejected them. Perhaps the most impressive example of ‘Alī’s ability to make the most of changing circumstances was the recruitment of the *shūrajīyyīn*. The speed with which he recognised the potential that lay in this group of discontented workers, his ability to win them over and his willingness to add the relevant ideological elements to his religious outlook, reveal his astuteness and socio-political adaptability. Thus, in contrast to the protracted process by which clandestine propagandists speak and convince potential followers, ‘Alī’s new approach enabled him to create a community of rebels instantaneously.

The new social segment that ‘Alī added to his movement, the *shūrajīyyīn*, needed a novel ideology. Therefore, whereas during the first six years of his rebellious efforts, the image he forged for himself was based on claims of affiliation with the ‘Alids and a supernatural connection to divine providence, after he began to gather the *shūrajīyyīn*, he added a new motif to his persona: socio-religious criticism. This combination of a divine aura coupled with concern about social injustice proved to be a potent ideological basis that attracted large swathes of south Iraqī society.

After ‘Alī b. Muḥammad altered his method of recruitment and established a strong fighting force, his followers badgered the population of south Iraq, plundered Baṣra and were deemed a threat to Baghdad as they overcame

⁵¹ This observation has been made by Sāmīr, *Thawrat*, 40.

several ‘Abbāsīd armies that were sent against them. Yet, fifteen years later, ‘Alī and his followers succumbed to al-Muwaffaq. Using sophisticated psychological warfare, the ‘Abbāsīd leader succeeded in dismantling the Zanj movement by granting pardons and presents to anyone who deserted the enemy and joined him.⁵² But, whereas the ‘Abbāsīds could still rely on military might and manipulations to overcome the Zanj, the social problems and grudges in wide segments of the population remained. Consequently, religio-political propagandists would continue to operate in south Iraq.

Qarāmiṭa

While the Zanj fought and lost to the ‘Abbāsīds, another subversive movement made inroads into the region. This was the Ismā‘īliyya, a clandestine movement whose impact on medieval Islamic history, particularly between the second/eight to fifth/eleventh centuries, was second only to that of the ‘Abbāsīds.⁵³ The movement came into being around the middle of the eighth century, when a group of Shī‘ī followers asserted that Ismā‘īl b. Ja‘far and his son Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl were the *imāms*. Muḥammad feared the ‘Abbāsīds, went into hiding and we know very little about him or subsequent leaders of the movement. It seems that, in the course of the next century, they established a clandestine network of missionaries who spread their religious views. During the middle of the ninth century, their missionaries established communities in several parts of the Islamic world such as south Iraq, Baḥrayn, Yemen, Iran and North Africa.⁵⁴ In the late ninth and early tenth centuries, two of these movements went on to establish dynasties – the Qarāmiṭa in Baḥrayn and the Fāṭimids in North Africa.

The Ismā‘īliyya’s religious thought was highly sophisticated as it operated on two levels – the exoteric and esoteric – and elaborated complex interpretative tools that were understood solely by its intellectual elite.⁵⁵ The two major themes of their religious thought were the cyclical nature of sacred history and cosmology. Yet, despite the intricacy of their religious thought, their missionaries proved themselves extremely adroit in the psychology of religio-political

⁵² Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, III:1981–2, 2063, 2069; trans. *History*, XXXVII:42, 110, 115.

⁵³ On the Ismā‘īliyya, see Daftary, *Ismā‘īlīs*; Halm, *Empire*.

⁵⁴ On the spread of the Ismā‘īlī movement, see Daftary, *Short History*, 42–3.

⁵⁵ On Ismā‘īlī doctrine, see Daftary, *Ismā‘īlīs*, 136–40 and *Short History*, 50–8.

persuasion and were able to disseminate their religious vision among all strata of Muslim society.⁵⁶

The main figure who spread Ismāʿīlī beliefs in south Iraq was Ḥamdān b. al-Ashʿath, known as Qarmaṭ.⁵⁷ Qarmaṭ's proselytising was much slower, more subtle and sophisticated than that of the Zanj. He began building his persona by conveying an appearance of religious devotion and integrity. Al-Ṭabarī writes about him that 'he led an ascetic life and displayed his piety to all'.⁵⁸ He made his living by weaving baskets, prayed much of the time, and whenever approached by someone, spoke to them about religious issues and his contempt for worldly matters. After living in this manner for some time, he revealed that his true intention was to urge 'allegiance to an Imam from the house of the Messenger'.⁵⁹ He won the admiration of many people in the region and took a dinar from anyone who joined him, which they thought was a contribution to the *imām*.⁶⁰ As the number of his followers increased, he established a hierarchy of missionaries and sent them to proselytise in different parts of south Iraq. For nearly two decades this network of missionaries operated in south Iraq, their following grew, and they waited for an order from the chief propagandist, Saʿīd b. al-Ḥusayn, who resided in Salamiyya, to rebel.

In 286/899, Saʿīd b. al-Ḥusayn, the chief propagandist of the Ismāʿīlī movement, claimed to be the *imām* himself, and not merely his representative.⁶¹ As Heinz Halm notes, this radical change in the group's stated ideology led to a schism and break-up of the movement.⁶² The schism itself began when Ḥamdān sent his brother-in-law, ʿAbdān, to Salamiyya to find out who was standing at the head of the movement and the latter reported that Saʿīd b. al-Ḥusayn had declared himself to be the *mahdī*. Ḥamdān and ʿAbdān

⁵⁶ Halm, *Empire*, 27–30, 45–7; Halm, 'Methods'.

⁵⁷ For descriptions of Qarmaṭ's entry into the Ismāʿīlī movement and the establishment of an Ismāʿīlī propaganda network, see al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, XXV:189ff; Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz*, VI:44ff.

⁵⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III:2124, trans. *History*, XXXVII:169.

⁵⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III:2124, trans. *History*, XXXVII:170.

⁶⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III:2126, trans. *History*, XXXVII:171.

⁶¹ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, XXV:230; Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz*, VI:65; Halm, *Empire*, 62–3. See also Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs*, 125–6.

⁶² Halm, *Empire*, 62–6. On the schism and its importance, see Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs*, 125–6 and *Ismāʿīlīs in Medieval*, 45–61; Madelung, 'Fatimids'.

denounced him and refused to recognise him as their leader.⁶³ However, one of their propagandists, Zikrawayh b. Mihrawayh, accepted Saʿīd b. al-Ḥusayn's claim. At that time Ḥamdān disappeared, and Zikrawayh had 'Abdān murdered.

Fearing revenge, Zikrawayh went into hiding, while his propagandists continued to disseminate their beliefs. However, he quickly realised that they found it difficult to convert people living in the Sawād to their cause. As a result, when 'Zikrawayh saw that the Qarmaṭians would not be able to defend themselves or find help from the inhabitants of the Sawad', he moved his followers to the Syrian desert, where he tried to win over supporters.⁶⁴ As in the case of 'Alī b. Muḥammad, Zikrawayh's agents found it difficult to raise a critical mass of followers that would constitute a rebel fighting force that could challenge the 'Abbāsīd military. In Syria, the situation was only a little better. They had limited success since most of the tribes refused to collaborate with them, except for one sub-tribe, the Banū 'Ullayṣ b. Ḍamḍam b. 'Adī b. Janāb.⁶⁵

Apparently, due to Zikrawayh's and his sons' inability to raise a robust rebel movement, they altered their method of proselytising and turned to the style of propaganda that the Zanj utilised: claiming family relations with 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and asserting that they had signs indicating that they enjoyed divine guidance. For example, in a passage describing the manipulation of names by Zikrawayh and his sons, al-Ṭabarī writes:

He asserted to them that he was Abū 'Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl b. Ja'far b. Muḥammad. According to another report, he asserted that he was Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh b. Yaḥyā and again, that he was Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl b. Ja'far b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib – although Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl reportedly had no son called 'Abdallāh.⁶⁶

Most of these names link Zikrawayh and his sons to Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl b. Ja'far, that is, to the line of Shīrī *imāms* known as the Seveners, and

⁶³ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, XXV:230; Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz*, VI:65–6; Halm, *Empire*, 63; Daftary, *Ismā'īlīs*, 126.

⁶⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, III:2218; trans. *History*, XXXVIII:113.

⁶⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, III:2218; trans. *History*, XXXVIII:114.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

through them to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. Along with falsifying his family genealogy, Zikrawayh’s son, Yaḥyā, asserted that he was riding a divinely guided she-camel and that his adherents must follow her. Furthermore, he claimed that his short hand was another divine sign.⁶⁷

Yaḥyā b. Zikrawayh was killed in battle on the outskirts of Damascus in 289/902.⁶⁸ His followers from the tribe of ‘Ullayṣ appointed his brother al-Ḥusayn b. Zikrawayh as their leader. Al-Ḥusayn, like his brother, tampered with his genealogy, and in his case asserted that he was ‘Aḥmad b. ‘Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl b. Ja‘far b. Muḥammad’.⁶⁹ He, too, pointed to a physical feature, a mole, and claimed it was a divine sign. Furthermore, he was designated from the pulpits as Commander of the Faithful.⁷⁰ In other instances he was called *mahdī*.⁷¹ He travelled through Syria and into Lebanon, killing and plundering. Consequently, al-Muktafi sent a strong force to fight him, and after a series of losses, he was caught. In 291/904 he was executed.

After the deaths of his two sons, Zikrawayh b. Mihrawayh continued to correspond with the disheartened segments of the Banū ‘Ullayṣ. He went so far as to use the death of his sons to promote his own image by claiming to have known about their coming fate: ‘He informed them that it had been revealed to him that the man known as al-Shaykh and his brother would be killed, and that his imam, who would be revealed to him, would appear after their death and be victorious.’⁷² As in the case of the Master of the Zanj, Zikrawayh and his sons claimed to be the offspring of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and to possess supernatural capabilities. However, their propaganda was not very effective, neither among the peasants of the Sawād nor among most of the tribes in the area. The one exception was the Banū ‘Ullayṣ, and among them it was mainly *mawālī*, vagabonds and low-class members of the tribe who joined them.⁷³

The Zanj and Qarmaṭi techniques of proselytising that were examined in this article highlight two approaches. One of them, in which the proselytiser

⁶⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’riḫ*, III:2218–9; trans. *History*, XXXVIII:115.

⁶⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’riḫ*, III:2219; trans. *History*, XXXVIII:115.

⁶⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’riḫ*, III:2219; trans. *History*, XXXVIII:116.

⁷⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’riḫ*, III:2220; trans. *History*, XXXVIII:116.

⁷¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’riḫ*, III:2225, 2232; trans. *History*, XXXVIII:122, 129.

⁷² Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’riḫ*, III:2247; trans. *History*, XXXVIII:145.

⁷³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’riḫ*, III:2218, 2256–7; trans. *History*, XXXVIII:114, 158. The symbolic significance of these events forms a case study in the chapter by Chenganakkattil in this volume.

conveys an image of piety through ascetic practices and secret knowledge, was scrutinised by Heinz Halm, who noted that al-Ḥusayn al-Aḥwāzī, Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ and ‘Alī b. al-Faḍl won the trust and respect of the local populations that they met by adopting ascetic practices and intimating that they possess secret knowledge.⁷⁴ Once these proselytisers trusted their listeners, they revealed to them that they represented the *mabdi* to come. This approach was complemented by a second method, by which the proselytiser asserted that he was in possession of supernatural qualities and scion to the Prophet’s family. This approach was applied by ‘Alī b. Muḥammad and Zikrawayh and his sons. Judging by the case studies in this chapter, the first approach was gradual and could take decades, whereas the second approach was much faster and could establish a rebel movement within weeks or months.

Comparison and Observations

In contrast to ‘stakeholder revolts’ that relied upon existing social entities and known leaders, many of the religiously embedded revolts were newly created movements that were instigated and led by unknown figures who did not possess previous social capital and were driven by revolutionary religious ideals and values. This study examined how individuals from the lower strata of society, who were not wealthy or widely known and did not possess social or religious capital, military qualifications or exceptional intellectual capabilities, attained positions of leadership.

In writing about rural rebellions, Patricia Crone made several interesting observations about the role of religious ideas in such revolts. In a comparison between the different types of leaders of rebellions she observed that ‘aristocrats do not claim to be the spirit of the prophets when they rebel, nor do they raise their troops by means of a religious organisation: they are entitled to obedience by virtue of their status ...’⁷⁵ To the aristocrat, or in our case, chief of a tribe or military leader who stands at the head of an existing social hierarchy and enjoys an innate position of influence, Crone juxtaposes ordinary individuals who belong to the lower strata of society and therefore have no

⁷⁴ Halm, ‘Methods’, 2, 5.

⁷⁵ Crone, *Nativist Prophets*, 73.

authority in the eyes of their peers. She comments, ‘why should anyone listen to an illiterate soldier or a former cowherd *unless* he has special gifts, imparted to him by God through dreams, communication with spirits ...’⁷⁶ Leaders of army units or tribes do not need religious ideologies to mobilise warriors. They are in positions of leadership, and their political and military adroitness determines whether they can instigate a rebellion. However, a ‘cowherd’ cannot expect individuals who are his social superiors to consider him their leader. The only way to turn the social hierarchy upside down is by claiming superhuman intervention – a gift ‘imparted to him by God’. Crone summarises this point: ‘It is the special access to the divine that singles out people of common origins as authoritative.’⁷⁷ In other words, when an ordinary individual summoned other ordinary individuals to confront their social superiors, it had to be in the name of a higher cause, that is, divine will. Since divine intervention is deemed a legitimate force that can transform man-made social structures, religion played a critical role in the newly formed rebel movements.

Yet, despite the profound impression that some religiously embedded rebel movements left on society, in many instances they faced daunting challenges. One challenge was to convert enough people to their cause and to gather a critical mass of adherents that would constitute a rebel movement that could perform military tasks. We saw that ‘Alī b. Muḥammad failed four times before he met the Zanj and succeeded in creating a powerful rebel movement. Similarly, Zikrawayh and his sons also failed several times to gather a big enough movement to face the ‘Abbāsīd forces. Another challenge was to maintain the rebel movements intact, especially when they faced military hardships and lost battles. For example, many of ‘Alī’s followers left him, both Bedouins and Zanj, when they came across hard-fighting foes. Similar desertions occurred among the followers of Zikrawayh and his sons.

The social impact of rebel movements that were formed around individuals who claimed exceptional religious qualities ranged from the Ismā‘īliyya, who left an indelible mark on the history of Muslim societies, to circles of followers such as those who gathered around ‘Alī b. Muḥammad and dissipated within weeks or months after they came together. It will require more comparative

⁷⁶ Ibid., 74.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

studies to identify patterns of resilience or frailty among religiously embedded rebel movements and explain them.

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PART IV
**CONTENDING THE
PROVINCE**

7

Taxation, Rebellion and Withdrawal in Early ‘Abbāsīd Armenia (136–58/754–75)*

Alasdair C. Grant

Introduction

This chapter comprises a study of a series of revolts undertaken by members of the noble Arçruni and Mamikonean families in Armenia during the reign of the ‘Abbāsīd caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 754–75). At the time of these revolts, Armenia was a province of the Islamic Empire; the Byzantine Empire, however, which at various points in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages controlled parts of the region, continued to loom large on Armenia’s north-western flank. Territorially, politically, socially, economically and culturally, the region was, in Laurent’s formulation, *entre Byzance et l’Islam*, while the legacy of Sasanian Iranian administration remained keenly felt.¹ This division was reflected in the fragmentation of the *naxarark*‘, the Christian Armenian hereditary nobility, who rarely presented a unified front but competed between and within families for power.² The story of these revolts is the story of the *naxarark*‘ and their aspirations for influence as a provincial elite within an intra- and inter-imperial setting.

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¹ Laurent, *L’Arménie*; Vacca, *Non-Muslim Provinces*.

² Banaji, ‘Aristocracies’.

This chapter approaches the revolts in Armenia under al-Manṣūr in three ways. It begins by introducing the surviving narratives of these revolts, in which it is much indebted to recent work by Vacca and La Porta on the Armenian *History* of Łewond, the most important source for the period. It then proceeds to analyse two major features of those narratives. The first is the rebels' resentment towards caliphal taxation, which is here broken down and contextualised in socioeconomic terms to evaluate afresh its role in precipitating revolt. The second is the rebels' withdrawal to rural strongholds, so far neglected by scholarship, discussed in relation to paradigms of unruly highland landscapes. The chapter is intended as a case study in structural analysis of social contexts of rebellion. Its approach is historical materialist, in that it understands the creation and extraction of wealth to be the driving forces of social relations and changes.

Revolt Narratives

Before turning to analysis of the revolts' two major themes, it is helpful to provide a summary account of the extant narratives. These narratives describe events that can be grouped into two uneven parts: first, a revolt in around 760 by an Arcruni lord in the family's traditional region of Vaspurakan, southeast Armenia; second, a cluster of overlapping revolts in 774–5, which seem to have comprised at the least two Mamikonean-led contingents and one Arcruni-led contingent. These latter initiatives appear to have been connected and maybe co-ordinated, but it remains an open question whether one should talk of a single, general revolt or of multiple parallel revolts.

The most extensive and important source for these events is the *History* of Łewond. Łewond was a priest, who wrote his text for a nobleman, Šapuh Bagratuni, in the late eighth or (less likely) late ninth century.³ Other Armenian accounts by Step'anos Tarōnec'i (completed 1004/5) and Vardan Arewelc'i (writing thirteenth century) are derivative of Łewond, while that by Kirakos Gandzakec'i (writing c.1240–67) may preserve a mixture of both Łewond-derived and independent material. Briefer but valuable accounts are found

³ I am most grateful to Alison Vacca for sharing her and Sergio La Porta's study of Łewond's *History* before its publication, as this chapter could not have been written without it. The earlier dating of Łewond's *History* is generally preferred but has been challenged: Greenwood, 'Reassessment'.

in Arabic historiography, notably the *Kitāb al-Futūḥ* of Ibn Aʿtham, written most likely in the tenth century.⁴ In the summary offered here, the backbone of this narrative is always derived from Ēwond; discrepancies preserved in other texts are labelled as such. As the Armenian and Arabic accounts sometimes drew on common sources, however, it is not always possible to verify one text with reference to another.

First in chronological order comes the revolt of Gagik Arcruni in Vaspurakan. This is attested only in the accounts of Ēwond and, following him, Stepʿanos Tarōnecʿi, and does not appear in Arabic sources. It is difficult to date Gagik's revolt precisely. Ēwond's preceding notice concerns the 'Abbāsīd reconstruction and resettlement of the garrison city of Karin (Greek Theodosiopolis, Arabic Qālīqalā, modern Turkish Erzurum) following its destruction by a Byzantine army, which Arabic sources place in 756–7. Sometime in the following years (assuming Ēwond's sequence is correct), an 'Abbāsīd general called Sulaymān raided Vaspurakan, killing Gagik's brothers, Sahak and Hamazasp; Gagik then killed Sulaymān in retaliation. In about 760, Gagik ensconced himself in his fortress of Nkan and seems to have exercised a regional autonomy over Vaspurakan, supported by plunder and taxation extracted there and in neighbouring Atrpatakan. Gagik was besieged and eventually captured through false promises of peace talks, after which he was sent to the caliph and died in prison, eventually to be succeeded by his sons, also called Sahak and Hamazasp.⁵

The rest of this summary is concerned with the cluster of revolts in 774–5. Ēwond prepares the reader for these events by relating details of 'Abbāsīd tax hikes and violence across Armenia.⁶ In 774, the nobleman Artawazd Mamikonean took a group of followers to the capital, Duin, and armed himself there on the pretence of preparing to fight on behalf of the 'Abbāsīds. Instead, he killed and robbed a tax collector in Kumayr, Širak canton, and took his followers north to distant Georgia. The governor of the time, al-Ḥasan

⁴ Ibn Aʿtham, *Futūḥ*, ed. Bukhārī; McLaren, 'Dating'.

⁵ Ēwond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 302–4, trans. 285–9; Stepʿanos Tarōnecʿi, *Patmutiʿiwn Tiezerakan*, ed. 726–7, trans. 194. Chronology: Laurent, *L'Arménie*, 128–9. Ēwond ties this event to the arrival of the 'Abbāsīd governor Šālīḥ b. Šubayḥ al-Kindī, who in fact ruled exactly ten years earlier (750–1): *ibid.*, 425.

⁶ Ēwond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 304–5, trans. 289–90; Kirakos Gandzakecʿi, *Patmutʿiwn Hayocʿ*, ed. 71–2, trans. 64–5.

b. Qaḥṭaba (r. 753–4 or 758 and 770–5) pursued him with the Armenian prince Smbat Bagratuni in train.⁷ The close association of these Armenian nobles with the ‘Abbāsīd army is reflected in the version of this story recorded by al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), who describes it as a riot among the army; because the *naxarark*‘ were bound to provide military service to the caliphate, this may be interpreted as a mutiny.⁸

Following Artawazd’s revolt, silver mining reportedly ceased in Armenia but al-Ḥasan continued to levy taxes. To this backdrop, another member of the same dynasty, Muṣeḥ Mamikonean, rebelled. His revolt began with a confrontation with some Muslims who had come to his family with the intention of avenging earlier deaths of other Muslims. Muṣeḥ then took a small force to Bagrewand and killed a tax collector there. This symbolic act, plus a victory against an ‘Abbāsīd force at the village of Xars, attracted an increasingly wide following of both nobles and commoners to Muṣeḥ’s rebel forces, while the region’s caliphal troops retreated to Duin. The nobles were confident that Muslim rule was over, a belief strengthened by a monk who prophesied the return of the ancient kingship to Armenia. In what is arguably the high point of Łewond’s narrative, he relates that ‘all’ the Armenian *naxarark*‘ assembled and swore to live or die as a group. Including the commoners, the forces are said to have stood at 5,000. The campaigns of 774 came to a head with a rebel siege of Karin.⁹ Al-Balādhurī (d. after 892) notes that the Armenians broke off their allegiance under Muṣeḥ, while Ibn A‘tham claims that he rebelled as a result of a quarrel with al-Ḥasan’s son, Muḥammad, over possession of his ancestral signet ring.¹⁰ Muṣeḥ’s prominence in Łewond’s *History*, plus his appearance in

⁷ Łewond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 305–6, trans. 290–1 (and marginal notes). This event has sometimes been dated to earlier in the decade, but 774 is to be preferred: Łewond, *Discours*, trans. Martin Hisard, 161 n.789 (with references). Duin and Širak were both in the central Armenian province of Ayrarat: Hübschmann, *Ortsnamen*, 278–83, 361, 364, 365–6, 422. Al-Ḥasan’s term: Łewond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, 290 (marginal note; later terminus); Vasmer, *Chronologie*, 27 (earlier terminus); Laurent, *L’Arménie*, 248–9, 426 (earlier terminus).

⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’riḫ*, ed. III:436, trans. XXIX:142. Military service: n.35, below.

⁹ Łewond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 306–7, trans. 292–3; paraphrased with some confusion by Vardan Arewelc’i, *Hawak’umn Patmut’can*, ed. 75, trans. 181. Bagrewand was a canton of Ayrarat: Hübschmann, *Ortsnamen*, 361–2.

¹⁰ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, ed. 210, trans. 329; Ibn A‘tham, *Futūḥ*, VIII:234–5.

two Arabic sources, may suggest that his was the most substantial component of the revolts of 774–5.

Early in 775, however, the pace of revolt began to change. First, another nobleman, Ašot Bagratuni, advised against rebellion, predicting failure; his words were considered treasonous by his peers. It is arguable that Ašot is used as a mouthpiece for Lewond's own agenda, who had to be careful not to offend his Bagratuni patron and thus toe a careful line between the family's involvement in revolts on the one hand and their mostly pro-caliphal (as opposed to pro-Byzantine) sympathies on the other.¹¹ Lewond states that the various *naxarar* families stayed put in their local domains, while the 'Abbāsids successfully raided around Duin; Gagik's sons, of whom Hamzasap appears to have been the senior figure, remained in Vaspurakan. The implication is that the nobles were not pulling together. Ibn A'tham states that Mušel wrote to his neighbouring noblemen and tried to rouse them to rebellion, and that Hamzasap Arcruni responded by attacking Ibrāhīm b. al-Ḥasan, the governor's son and Muḥammad's brother, who had been in Bardha'a/Partaw, far to the east. This suggests that Mušel was more successful than Lewond would imply, but it confirms Lewond's picture of regional fragmentation.¹² As La Porta and Vacca remark, the degree of co-ordination between these various revolts is difficult to ascertain. They see Artawazd and Mušel Mamikonean as leading discrete revolts and the Arcrunik' as either coordinating with Mušel or else simply rebelling at the same time. There can, however, be little question that the Mamikonean' and Arcrunik' rebels knew about each other.¹³

At this point, the tide of the conflict turned and the 'Abbāsids began taking the initiative once more. As Vacca has demonstrated, Lewond's report of this retaliation is confused, conflating details from two different revolts. Lewond claims that al-Manšūr appointed a general, 'Amr', and sent him from Syria to Xlat'/Akhlat, to be reinforced by 30,000 cavalry from Khurāsān. This is in fact 'Āmir b. Ismā'īl al-Ḥārithī, whose army was sent slightly earlier against some

¹¹ Lewond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 307–8, trans. 294–5, 293 (marginal note), also xix and xxxi (introduction), 322 (commentary); Greenwood, 'Reassessment', 113–15.

¹² Lewond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 308, trans. 295–6; Ibn A'tham, *Futūḥ*, VIII:235. Bardha'a, the Armenian Partaw, was the caliphal capital of Caucasian Albania, Uti province (today Azerbaijan): Hübschmann, *Ortsnamen*, 273.

¹³ Lewond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, 319–21 (commentary).

other Caucasian Christian rebels, the Canark'/Şanariyya to the north, and who died in 774. This is a confusion that Łewond shares with al-Balādhurī, thus suggesting their reliance on a common source.¹⁴ The revolt of the Canark' likely stretched the 'Abbāsids' military capacity and thus opened up a window of opportunity for widespread revolt, helping to explain why so much unrest erupted in 774–5.

Ašot Bagratuni, who was then in Xlat', warned the rebel nobility that an army would soon attack them. As a precedent of distrust had already been set through his earlier opposition to the revolt, the nobility assumed that he was trying to trick them into lifting the ongoing and, so far, promising siege of Karin and thus damage their cause. This distrust continued into the next episode of the narrative, the siege of Arčēš (modern Erciş) by members of the Arcruni, Amatuni and Bagratuni families, during which Hamazasp Arcruni refused to acknowledge that 'Abbāsid counter-insurgents were on their way, killing the messenger who brought the news.¹⁵

By this point in Łewond's narrative, the stage has been set for the catastrophic defeat of the revolt. This occurred in two separate major battles, reflecting the multiple prongs of attack – perhaps a result of the general revolt's regional fragmentation. First, the besiegers of Arčēš were ambushed, routed and slaughtered by al-Ḥasan b. Qaḥṭaba and Ibrāhīm b. al-Ḥasan on 15 April. This prompted the rebels at Karin to abandon their siege of the town, deemed to be near success, either from fear of attack or to join the other rebels in confronting the 'Abbāsid army. The confrontation came just nine days later, at Bagrewand on 24 April. The Armenians under Mušel Mamikonean, reportedly outnumbered thirty-to-one, apparently won the first bout of the battle but were defeated after the caliphal army under Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan rallied.¹⁶ The deaths amounted to 3,000 by the reckoning of both Łewond (citing a Muslim source) and Ibn A'tham, including members of the Mamikonean,

¹⁴ Łewond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, 323–7 (commentary); Vacca, 'Ostikans', 236–40; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, ed. 210, trans. II:329. Arabic sources for separate revolts: Ibn A'tham, *Futūḥ*, VIII:233–4; al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'riḫ*, ed. II:447, trans. III:1106. Al-Balādhurī's sources: Vacca, 'Armenian Sources'.

¹⁵ Łewond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 308–9, trans. 296–7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, ed. 309–11, trans. 297–300, comm. 319–21 and table 4; Ibn A'tham, *Futūḥ*, VIII:235. Derivative Armenian sources: Vardan, ed. 75, trans. 181; Kirakos, ed. 72, trans. 65.

Bagratuni and Gnuni families.¹⁷ The defeated Mamikoneank⁴ would never regain their former prominence.¹⁸

Taxation

Having outlined the revolt narratives, this chapter now turns to their most obvious theme: taxation. Previous scholarship, almost exclusively upon the authority of Ēwond, has placed great emphasis on these narratives of harsh taxation as a symbol of foreign oppression and a cause of inevitable conflict.¹⁹ While these stories of hardship do find support in other, less well exploited sources, this scholarship falls short in the imprecision of its approach; to nuance the causal link between taxation and the revolts, it is necessary to ascertain how circumstances changed in this period, and for whom.

First, it is important to note that the evidence Ēwond provides for this causal link is equivocal. Gagik Arcruni's revolt from c.760 is attributed to the hardships induced by a governor called 'Caleh', probably a reference to the early 'Abbāsīd governor Šāliḥ b. Šubayḥ al-Kindī, mistakenly transposed one decade later.²⁰ Ēwond then attributes Artawazd Mamikonean's insurgency to the stringencies of al-Ḥasan b. Qaḥṭaba's governance, which brought disruption for the nobles and physical abuse for commoners in the service of extracting more tax. Having gone out from Duin, one of the rebels' first targets was a tax collector.²¹

By contrast, Gagik Arcruni's initial violent confrontation with the general Sulaymān is presented as an act of revenge for Sulaymān's killing of Gagik's brothers, Sahak and Hamazasp.²² Mušel Mamikonean sought out and killed a tax collector named as 'Abumčur' (unidentified) at Bagrewand early on in his

¹⁷ Ēwond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 309–11, trans. 297–300; Ibn A'tham, *Futūḥ*, VIII:235.

¹⁸ Ēwond, *History*, trans. Arzoumanian, 41 (introduction); Ter-Ghevondyan, *Emirates*, 21–2.

¹⁹ Manandian, 'Žořovrdakan Apstambut'yunnerə', esp. 214–22; Jinbashian, *Church-State Relations*, 213–15; Dadoyan, *Armenians*, I:85–6; Greenwood, 'Armenian Neighbours', 348; Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, I:98; Pederian, *Armenia*, 32; Macler, 'Armenia', 156. Discussion in Laurent, *L'Arménie*, is more dispersed; see esp. 237–8.

²⁰ Ēwond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 303–4, trans. 288 (and marginal note), comm. 312; Laurent, *L'Arménie*, 424. Both al-Tabarī (cited by the above authors) and coinage (Vasmer, *Chronologie*, 27) place his officeholding period in 133/750–1.

²¹ Ēwond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 305, trans. 290–1.

²² *Ibid.*, ed. 302–3, trans. 286–7.

revolt, thus mirroring the actions of Artawazd, but the trigger for his revolt was the arrival of some Muslims who are said to have infiltrated his ‘house’ (*tun*), probably meaning the family domains around Aruč in Aragacotn, in order to avenge the killing of other Muslims. Mušel then pre-emptively responded to this threat by killing the infiltrators and seeking safety in a fortress, and it was only after this that he sought out the tax collector.²³

On the strength of Łewond’s account alone, it would therefore be difficult to argue for the importance of taxation as a cause, as opposed to a symbol, of the revolts. This is reflected in Vacca and La Porta’s observation, that tax collectors were among the most visible symbols of the state’s authority and thus an immediate target for those wishing to reject that state’s claims to authority, regardless of whether their grievances concerned primarily taxation.²⁴ To demonstrate the causal link, it will therefore be necessary to look beyond Łewond.

The evidence of the underexploited canons of the Council of Partaw (768) confirms Łewond’s picture of hardship. Smbat Bagratuni, who travelled with al-Ḥasan to fight Artawazd and who later died on the Armenian side at Bagrewand, was present at the council.²⁵ The fact that a council was held in Partaw in Albania rather than Duin in Armenia perhaps indicates anxiety to avoid ‘Abbāsid influence in the Armenian capital.’²⁶ While it is possible that there is a prescriptive or formulaic component to the canons, those relevant to socioeconomic hardship were evidently composed to address current problems. Importantly, it does not seem that Łewond drew on the earlier canons for his *History*, and therefore the one source may be used to cross-check the other.

The canons evince three indices of hardship. Firstly, villagers were no longer supplying the material support they had traditionally given to their local monasteries. Secondly, some people were becoming so poor from the oppression of taxation (*i netut’enē barkac’*) that they were selling themselves into slavery. Thirdly, hospices for the sick had become derelict, forcing the

²³ Ibid., ed. 306, trans. 292; ‘house’ as Aruč/Aragacotn: Łewond, *Discours*, trans. Martin-Hisard, 165 n.810.

²⁴ Łewond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, xxx (introduction), 291 (marginal note), 314 (commentary).

²⁵ Ačařean, *Hayoc’ anjnanunneri bařaran*, IV:542–3.

²⁶ Jinbashian, *Church-State Relations*, 210.

infirm to become vagabonds.²⁷ These three canons thus confirm Ēwond's claims that levels of taxation were unbearable and illustrate the decay of social welfare infrastructure.

This socioeconomic pressure was due above all to the hitherto unprecedented level of intervention that characterised taxation after the 'Abbāsīd takeover of Armenia. It is tempting to measure intervention merely in terms of tax collectors, who receive ample attention from the sources and hence also in scholarship. Collection was, however, only one aspect of taxation. To understand the institution as a whole, it is also necessary to consider how tax was assessed and on what it was spent.²⁸

'Abbāsīd rule in Armenia logically began with a new round of assessment. The reign of al-Saffāḥ (750–4) followed the Third *Fitna*, during which time members of the Mamikonean family rebelled in Armenia (747/8–50). The collection of taxes was likely interrupted at that time: Ēwond claims that Abū Ja'far 'Abdallāh b. Muḥammad (later the caliph al-Manṣūr), during his time as governor of Armenia and the Jazīra, required families to reveal the names of their dead, so that they could be taxed; receipt of payment was then apparently conferred in the form of a lead neck seal. While the taxing of the dead may be a literary trope, and while the tiny size of the corpus of surviving lead neck seals makes such a mass enterprise improbable, it is completely plausible that al-Manṣūr was tasked with conducting a tax census and that such an undertaking was vital for the finances of the 'Abbāsīd imperial machinery.²⁹ This evidence points to the existence of a head tax.

In terms of tax collection, 750 may be seen as a turning point from *ad hoc* to regularised extraction. References to tax collectors vanish from the Armenian sources after the era of Prince T'ēodoros Ṛštuni (d. between 656–9) and do not reappear until the narratives of the revolts under al-Manṣūr. In the intervening period, tax collection appears to have occurred sporadically and to have involved the use of force against the *naxarark*'; this implies that tax collection was in the hands of the nobility, and that the latter were only irregularly

²⁷ 'Kanonk', ed. II:8, 11, 12–13, trans. 123–5.

²⁸ This tripartite division draws on Wickham, *Framing*, 56–149.

²⁹ Ēwond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, 376 (marginal note); Robinson, 'Neck Sealing'; Legendre, 'Aspects', 144; private communication with Dr Noémie Lucas.

called upon to forward that revenue.³⁰ By contrast, Armenian sources speak of two tax collectors being murdered by the rebels of 774–5, perhaps reflected in al-Ṭabarī's report of the looting of the provincial treasury.³¹

The idea that the *naxarark*‘ jealously guarded their fiscal prerogatives is corroborated by two Arabic sources. The first of these is al-Balādhurī. In his *Futūḥ*, the author lists a series of governors for the period starting with al-Ḥasan b. Qaḥṭaba; this notice comes immediately after his account of the revolt of Mūshā'il/Muṣel Mamikonean. He records two points: first, that Khuzayma b. Khāzim (r. 785–6 and 802/3–806/7) was the harshest of these governors, introducing a land tax based on area for the regions of Duin and Naxčawan (thus requiring that fallow lands be brought back into cultivation); second, that the Armenian patricians (i.e. *naxarark*‘) retained power over their regional landholdings and would cooperate with strong tax collectors, paying the *kharāj*, but would pay no attention to those they deemed to be weak.³² This anecdote suggests that tax collectors were sent to Armenia in the last quarter of the century, like those killed in the revolts of the 770s, but that defiance of these officials by the *naxarark*‘ was nothing exceptional.

The second source is the judge al-Muḥassin b. ‘Alī al-Tanūkhī (d. 994). He records an anecdote dated to the reign of al-Mutawakkil (847–61) in which it is stated that Armenia was taxed according to the *muqāta'a* system and that the Armenians had obtained a contract under which they profited greatly; after considerable wrangling, this contract was renewed. The interpretation of the term *muqāta'a* is vexed, but it probably reflects a lump-sum-based land tax system as opposed to one based on the assessment of land.³³ This might contradict al-Balādhurī's statement about Duin and Naxčawan, but it appears that not all areas of Armenia were assessed in the same way, nor were levels of intervention maintained. A plausible interpretation of the two sources is that

³⁰ E.g. a military presence during the conquest period (al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 199) or confinement in Duin c.700 ('Xač'azgeac' nahatakn', ed. Awgerean, VI:225).

³¹ Lewond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 305–7, trans. 290–3; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫh*, ed. III:436, trans. XXIX:142.

³² Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 210/329. Khuzayma: Laurent, *L'Arménie*, 430–1, 434–5. Area-based taxation: Campopiano, 'Land Tenure', 488.

³³ Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, ed. 31–2, trans. 509–10 and note; discussed in Laurent, *L'Arménie*, 204. For the interpretation of *muqāta'a*, I thank Prof. Jürgen Paul and Dr Noémie Lucas (private communications).

the *naxarark*‘ organised the local collection of taxes and periodically rendered these to regional-level caliphal officials when the latter toured the province; when the latter were weak, the former did not yield. Either way, this evidence implies that a land-based tax, sometimes assessed by area, was being levied in Armenia as well as a head tax before 785–6.

Attributing the revolts to ‘Abbāsīd encroachments upon the traditional prerogatives of the *naxarark*‘ finds further support in the most important Arabic account of the revolts of 774–5, that of Ibn A‘tham. He writes that Muṣeḡ rebelled after a personal quarrel with Muḡammad b. al-Ḥasan, one of the governor’s sons and his deputy over Karin and Xlat‘, since Muṣeḡ refused to give Muḡammad his father’s signet ring.³⁴ The surrendering of an ancestral ring would be tantamount to a symbolic handover of authority from Muṣeḡ to Muḡammad; it would presumably imply both personal submission and corporate submission, in Muṣeḡ’s capacities as an individual and as a scion of the Mamikonean house.

The last facet of taxation to consider is expenditure, for which the military surely comprised by far the largest component. Scholarship has long recognised that the Armenian nobility were required to provide cavalry service to the caliphate, as they had done for the Sasanians, in return for fiscal exemptions and/or rewards.³⁵ Lewond states that the *naxarark*‘ lost their long-enjoyed military stipends under al-Saffāḡ and were forced to pay for their own upkeep through a tax on their houses (*i tanc’ iureanc’*).³⁶ The chronicler Samuēl of Ani talks of taxes that included wheat, hemp rope and a gauntlet, from which the nobility and clergy were exempt.³⁷ It is thus probable that Armenian subalterns had previously supplied the revenue that paid for the *naxarar* cavalry; this change would thus free up that money for other expenses. These stipends were later restored under al-Mahdī (r. 775–85), a reversal that echoes a similar loss and restoration of stipends under Hishām.³⁸ The later restoration may

³⁴ Ibn A‘tham, *Futūḡ*, VIII:234–5; Lewond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, 291 (marginal note), 326 (commentary).

³⁵ E.g. Vacca, *Non-Muslim Provinces*, 18, 125, 137, 155 n.11, 187, 190, 196–7.

³⁶ Lewond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 280–1, trans. 279–80.

³⁷ Samuēl Anec’i, *Hawak’munk’*, ed. 100; Manandian, *Trade*, 130–1 and ‘Žoḡovrdakan Apstambut’yunnera’, 212–13.

³⁸ Lewond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 334, trans. 329, comm. 281; silver famine under al-Manṡūr: *ibid.*, ed. 304, 306, trans. 289, 291.

have been connected to the commencement of minting at a silver mine-head in Apahunik'/Bājunays, identified in a series of silver coins from the years 169–71/785–8.³⁹ One can thus speak of two major developments in taxation during the first quarter-century of 'Abbāsīd rule: the first is a temporary surge in extortion that hurt all social classes, the second an additional tax burden on the nobility. Fiscal practice therefore did not develop in a linear manner, which could periodically create pressure points.

This pressure on multiple social classes is reflected in Lewond's claims regarding the mixture of nobles and subalterns involved in the revolts. Armenian commoners (*ramik*) are said to have been subjected to various physical torments under al-Ḥasan to make them pay as much in taxation as possible: the lash, fetters, gallows, casting into freezing rivers, torture by guards. Lewond states that the nobility's anguish was caused by the maltreatment of the commoners.⁴⁰ This probably reflects two complementary factors: first, the nobles' social obligation to protect the commoners on their land; second, that if anyone could maltreat the Armenian commoners, it was the *naxarark'* and not 'Abbāsīd administrators.⁴¹

The next time commoners appear in Lewond's narrative is when 'many' joined the *naxarark'* immediately before their army besieged Karin, that is, late 774.⁴² Lewond does not say that they were pressed into service, and it is plausible that they chose to join the nobility having identified shared hardships. Among the Armenian army defeated at Arčēš, there are said to have been many commoners unexperienced in war who had recently joined the revolt; 1500 are said to have died and more to have fled.⁴³ Finally, unnamed commoners are mentioned among those who were killed at and fled from the field at Bagrewand nine days later.⁴⁴ In addition to this evidence, it is important to make allowance for Lewond's overwhelming focus on the nobility, something to be expected of pre-modern historiography; the role of subalterns may therefore have been greater still.

³⁹ Bates, 'Second Muḥammadiyya'. Apahunik' was a canton in Turuberan/Tarōn, home to the city Manazkert/Manzikert: Hübschmann, *Ortsnamen*, 329–30.

⁴⁰ Lewond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 305, trans. 290.

⁴¹ This analysis is indebted to Prof. Jürgen Paul (private communication).

⁴² Lewond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 307, trans. 293.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, ed. 309, trans. 297.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, ed. 310–11, trans. 299–300.

The ‘Abbāsids should therefore be understood as trying to impose their authority and personal power over Armenia through the political and economic subordination of its local ruling class. This would explain the mixture of reciprocal violence and economic grievances that Ēwond presents as the triggers for the revolts: the longer-term cause was the assertion of ‘Abbāsīd rule over the province, which gave a primary role to resource extraction and in which clashes were part and parcel. This resource extraction also hurt the subaltern classes and led to an aligning of the interests of the *naxarark*‘ and *řamik* in opposition to the caliphal elites.⁴⁵ Typologically, though not ethno-linguistically, this model brings the revolts in Armenia into line with the caliphal ‘stakeholder’ mode of rebellion discussed in this volume’s Introduction and exemplified in the chapters by Bosanquet and Dar. This model emphasises rebellion as a tool for negotiating privilege within the ruling structures of the Islamic Empire, something practised by Christian and Muslim stakeholders alike.

Withdrawal

One notably persistent feature of Ēwond’s narratives of these revolts is their protagonists’ withdrawal to defensible strongholds. By contrast to the theme of taxation, this element of the revolts does not seem to have attracted scholarly comment before. These acts of withdrawal would take the rebels into familiar rural and mountainous terrain beyond the easy reach of imperial armies and officials. The Armenian Plateau presents invaders and occupiers with challenging terrain, rising to between 1000 and 2000 metres; it thus towers over both the Iranian Plateau, of between 600 and 1500 metres, and Anatolian Plateau, averaging 1000 metres.⁴⁶

The correlation between mountainous rural landscapes and resistance towards outside power structures has been well theorised. Today, this paradigm is associated above all with Scott’s *The Art of Not Being Governed*, which takes as its geographical canvas the mountainous massif (‘Zomia’) of South and Southeast Asia. To those whose focus lies further west, the paradigm is associated with Braudel and his evocation of the early modern Mediterranean

⁴⁵ Arzoumanian (Ēwond, *History*, trans. Arzoumanian, 40), reaches a parallel conclusion: that the revolts were precipitated by the erosion of the territorial ownership rights of the *naxarark*‘.

⁴⁶ Hewsen and Salvatico, *Atlas*, 15.

as a world in which hierarchical and civilised coastal plains are girded by unruly and egalitarian alpine anti-civilisations. For the Islamicist, the paradigm has been applied with specific reference to religious reformist movements. For Armenia, Crone's *Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran* offers a geographically proximate example that considers how religious heterodoxy and Sasanian revivalism played out in resistance to Umayyad and 'Abbāsīd rule.⁴⁷ Within this volume, Walter Beers has applied a version of this model, which he calls 'ruralisation', to Miaphysite Christians who sought to escape persecution from the Byzantine Empire by moving to remote locations in Mesopotamia. Early 'Abbāsīd Armenia seems another obvious candidate for membership of this group, so this section examines its credentials.

There is certainly ample evidence for acts of withdrawal by rebels in early 'Abbāsīd Armenia. In c.760, Gagik Arcruni withdrew to the fortress of Nkan in Vaspurakan, seemingly because he was unable to flee to a safe place in the Roman Empire.⁴⁸ In the revolts of 774–5, Artawazd Mamikonean moved to Georgia, taking his *naxarar* retainers and members of his house with him.⁴⁹ Mušel Mamikonean did much the same, in his case taking his house to the fortress of Artagers in Aršarunik canton, Ayrarat province; next, he went to Bagrewand with sixty men and there, like Artawazd, seized and killed the tax collector and his companions, thereby stopping tax collection. This act largely parallels Gagik's withdrawal to Nkan and subsequent raiding in neighbouring areas, except that Gagik is not recorded as having killed a tax collector.⁵⁰ Just as instructively, when the victorious 'Abbāsīd troops conducted their mop-up exercise in Armenia after the Battle of Bagrewand, they are said to have conquered the various fortresses, giving those inside 'a letter of oath' (*gir erdman*), which is surely the Muslim-Arabic *amān* or 'safe conduct'.⁵¹ These acts of

⁴⁷ Scott, *Art*; Braudel, *Mediterranean*, 1:25–53; van Staëvel, 'Sociétés de montagne'; Sahner, 'View from the Mountains' (I am grateful to the author for the chance to read this unpublished paper); Crone, *Nativist Prophets*.

⁴⁸ Lewond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 303–4, trans. 288–9. Nkan lay somewhere east of Lake Van: Adontz, *Armenia*, ed. Garsoïan, 461–2, with references. Laurent, *Arménie*, 109, places it at T'oinawan, east of Kotor, near Albak.

⁴⁹ Lewond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 305–6, trans. 290–1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, ed. 306, trans. 292. Artagers has been placed in the mountains south of Kars in today's Turkey (notes and references in P'awstos Buzand, *Histories*, trans. Garsoïan, 447) or in the region of the Kōtek Çay valley and the northern Kağızman plain (Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, I:438).

⁵¹ Lewond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 311, trans. 300–1.

withdrawal by nobles and their retainers emphasise both the dynastic and the rural character of early medieval Armenia: ‘To control the fortresses was to control Armenia.’⁵²

In direct opposition to the rural fortresses in the possession of the Armenian hereditary nobility, Ēwond’s text consistently portrays Armenia’s cities as being under the control of the caliphate. After the initial successes of Muṣeł Mamikonean in c.774, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan sent out a task force of 4,000 cavalry from Duin under the general Abū Najīb to punish him; those who survived the subsequent defeat at the hands of Muṣeł fled in turn to Duin, where it is said that the people came out in lamentation.⁵³ Then, in spring 775, the general ‘Āmir b. Ismā’īl al-Ḥārithī is claimed to have travelled from Syria and to have taken up residence in Xlat’, where the local inhabitants gave him intelligence regarding the state and morale of the rebel troops. (‘Āmir is named in error, as discussed above.) The cautious Ašot Bagratuni was also in Xlat’ at the time, presumably tied to the ‘Abbāsīd army due to the obligation upon the *naxarark*’ to provide cavalry service.⁵⁴

This trend is reflected in Nina Garsoian’s characterisation of cities as something ‘foreign’ to early-medieval Armenian society. Cities, she argues, were few, politically unprivileged and populated largely by non-Armenian traders; Armenian secular and clerical elites, by contrast, preferred to dwell in rural settings such as dynastic fortresses or remote monasteries. Moreover, Garsoian notes that literary formulations of hardship and of good living are overwhelmingly rural in tone; one notable example comes from Ēwond’s narrative of the revolts of 774–5, in which he has Ašot Bagratuni warn of the rebels’ impending loss of their ‘forests and fields’.⁵⁵

The Scott or Braudel model seems, so far, to stand up. It must be remembered, however, that this vein of scholarship understands these restive mountainous societies as subaltern. The Armenian rebels answer to this label only in part. Commoners participated, but the revolts were instigated and shaped by the interests of the *naxarark*’. On the other hand, these nobles rebelled

⁵² Quoting Banaji, ‘Aristocracies’, 199.

⁵³ Ēwond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 306, trans. 291–2.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, ed. 308, trans. 296.

⁵⁵ Garsoian, ‘Early-Mediaeval Armenian City’, 76; quotation: Ēwond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 307–8, trans. 294–5.

precisely because their prerogatives were being challenged by ‘Abbāsīd imperial elites, and hence their status was being diminished. They were thus locally dominant but regionally subaltern.⁵⁶ Cases of rebels withdrawing to more inaccessible territory are by no means unusual in the context of the early Islamic Empire, and both elites and non-elites are found among their ranks. Where the Armenian example stands out is in its character as a rural, aristocratic society with traditions of cultural patronage (not least the commissioning of Lewond’s *History*) as opposed to a refuge where rebels from elsewhere went to escape the urban-based society of the Islamic Empire; in this sense, its closest parallels probably lie in the other former Sasanian territories in Iran, such as those discussed by Crone.⁵⁷ Remaining for now with the specifics of the Armenian case, the status of the *naxarark*’ relative to the ‘Abbāsīd elites can be clarified by asking what they hoped to achieve by rebelling and withdrawing.

One possible explanation is that these rebels hoped for local regime change in the short term. Following his withdrawal to Nkan, Gagik Arcruni managed to survive a year-long siege, and even at that point was not forced into submission. Immediately after narrating Gagik’s death, Lewond writes that Armenia cycled through three governors in a period of around a year: Yazīd b. Usayd (r. ?–765 or 769), Bakkār b. Muslim (769–70 or 771) and al-Ḥasan b. Qaḥṭaba (r. 770 or 771–5), the second recalled allegedly because he was too soft on the province.⁵⁸ Given the possibility of such swift administrative change, it is plausible that Gagik felt he simply needed to sit tight; gathering taxation and loot around his fortress would maintain him and his retainers in the meantime.

But the rebels may have hoped for a more dramatic regime change than simply a softer ‘Abbāsīd governor. The way that Lewond expresses the outbreak of Artawazd and Mušel’s revolts is worthy of note: the *naxarark*’ ‘undertook acts of rebellion and renounced Ishmaelite subjugation’ (*ev dzernamux elen yirs apstambut’ean ev i bac’kac’in i bnazandut’enēn Ismaeli*),

⁵⁶ Banaji, ‘Aristocracies’, 197.

⁵⁷ Remote regions: e.g. Hagemann, ‘Muṭarrif’, Haug on Tirmidh in this volume. Iran: Crone, *Nativist Prophets*.

⁵⁸ Lewond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 304–5, trans. 289–90. Officeholding terms: *ibid.*, 290 (marginal note: Bakkār to 771); Vasmer, *Chronologie*, 27 (Bakkār to 770); Laurent, *L’Arménie*, 427–9 (ditto). Both Yazīd and al-Ḥasan held other terms in office. The end date of Yazīd’s tenure is unclear due to evidence for an obscure figure called Sulaymān, who may have governed between Yazīd and Bakkār.

beginning with Artawazd, while Mušel joined with some other *naxarark*⁵⁹ and then ‘left Ishmaelite subjugation’ or ‘obedience to Ishmael’ (*i bac’ekay i bnazandut’enē Ismayeli*).⁵⁹ This raises the larger question of whether Mušel (or Artawazd or Gagik) and their respective followings were attempting to leave ‘Abbāsīd control altogether. If they were, they may have appealed to the one power that could have intervened in their interests: Byzantium. Lewond tends to write positively about Byzantium, but overall says very little, focusing instead on the Islamic conquest society and tying his chronology to its rulers.⁶⁰ Hypotheses regarding the possible role of Byzantium in these revolts are therefore circumstantial.

First, Lewond’s narrative implies that Gagik would have fled to the Roman Emperor Constantine V, had he been able, rather than ensconcing himself in Nkan.⁶¹ La Porta and Vacca suggest that Constantine V pursued the deportation of people from the border region further into his empire as a particular point of policy.⁶² Later in his narrative of the revolts of 774–5, when Lewond attributes cautionary words to Ašot Bagratuni, he has him advise against exile among the Greeks and warn that the rebels would be unlikely to defeat the caliphate, given even the mighty Byzantine Empire could not manage this.⁶³

Lurking throughout these narratives is the fate of the city of Karin. Together with Duin in Armenia and Bardha’a in Albania, Karin comprised one of the most important strategic centres for military control over Armenia.⁶⁴ Karin changed hands various times, including at the beginning of al-Manšūr’s reign: at that time, the Roman Emperor Constantine V succeeded in taking the city and expelling its Muslim garrison and inhabitants. Following this, Lewond reports, many locals sought refuge in Byzantine land. Byzantine occupation was short-lived, however, and early the following year (probably 755)

⁵⁹ Lewond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 305–6, trans. 290, 292. Lewond, *Discours*, trans. Martin-Hisard, 164 n.809, notes that *i bac’ekac* is a calque on the Greek *aphistemi* and literally means ‘to step aside’. Cf. the Arabic *kharaja ‘alā*, ‘go out against’, i.e. ‘rebel against’.

⁶⁰ Martin-Hisard, ‘L’Empire Byzantin’.

⁶¹ Lewond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 303–4, trans. 288.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 315 (commentary).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, ed. 307–8, trans. 294–5.

⁶⁴ E.g. Garsoïan, ‘Early-Mediaeval Armenian City’.

Yazīd b. Usayd came, levied the poll tax, rebuilt the walls and resettled the city, supplying it from within the province of Armenia.⁶⁵

Karin also features prominently in Ēwond's revolt narratives. It is presented as the origin point of the small cavalry force sent to attack Mušel and defeated by him at Xars,⁶⁶ and it became the object of a largely effective siege by a rebel army over the winter of 774–5.⁶⁷ The rebels were determined not to break off this siege when Ašot Bagratuni advised them to prepare a united force to face the troops newly arrived in Xlat'/Akhlāt,⁶⁸ and according to Ēwond it was broken only in response to the disastrous defeat at Arčēš. Ēwond praises the fact that the besiegers did not flee to Byzantium but bravely confronted death.⁶⁹ This siege may have been an attempt to lure Byzantine aid to the rebellion and thus swap one imperial master for another. Should this hypothesis be accepted, it would distinguish the Armenian case from other instances of 'stakeholder' revolts, which were focused on renegotiating privilege within the Islamic Empire, rather than aiming at seceding from it.⁷⁰

Looking to the earlier years of the century yields more evidence to support this thesis. First, the Byzantine Empire and the northerly border region of Tayk' appear repeatedly as destinations for political asylum seekers. Ēwond presents the Armenian victory against an Umayyad army at Vardanakert in 703 as a consequence of the Umayyads' refusal to allow a group of *naxarark'* to flee across the border to the Byzantines. When news of their victory reached the emperor, the Armenian leader, (another) Smbat Bagratuni, was rewarded with the court title of *kouropalates* – a high dignity awarded to imperial scions and foreign princes – and subsequently settled in Tayk'.⁷¹ The Marwānid-era martyr, Vahan of Golt'n, is described in his *vita* as having sought to move to Byzantine territory (like Gagik Arcruni) but got no further than Tayk'.⁷² Moving forward a few years to the time of the Third *Fitna*, Ēwond reports

⁶⁵ Ēwond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 302, trans. 285–6.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, ed. 306, trans. 292.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, ed. 307, trans. 293.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, ed. 308, trans. 296.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, ed. 309–10, trans. 297–8.

⁷⁰ In addition to Dar's chapter in this volume, see Cobb, *White Banners*, especially 126.

⁷¹ Ēwond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 55–6, trans. 46–8. Tayk': Hübschmann, *Ortsnamen*, 276–8; Vacca, *Non-Muslim Provinces*, 59; Kazhdan, 'Kouropalates'.

⁷² Artawazd, 'Patmut'iwn', ed. 878.

that members of the Mamikonean family rebelled against weakened caliphal rule; the presence of a Byzantine army in the Black Sea region seems to have confirmed the sense of opportunity.⁷³ As Greenwood has already remarked, the revolts under al-Manṣūr are unusual by contrast for the lack of an explicit Byzantine context.⁷⁴ Such a context should probably be assumed, but was perhaps more than Ēwond was prepared to admit, his hands tied by his association with the pro-caliphal Bagratunik'. Since the Armenian nobility were long used to working within the framework of imperial elites, it is plausible that they sought in this case to help their own socioeconomic interests by playing one empire off against another.

Conclusion

The establishment of 'Abbāsīd rule in Armenia during the third quarter of the eighth century created substantial tensions with the *naxarark'*, the provincial Christian elites. These tensions precipitated revolts in *c.*760 and, on a larger scale, in 774–5. The tensions arose above all from changes to the fiscal system, which saw the *naxarark'* lose control over the assessment and collection of local taxes as well as their own traditional tax exemptions. In the revolts of 774–5, the rebel nobles were joined by commoners, who were especially vulnerable to newly increased economic hardship, and whose maltreatment by 'Abbāsīd administrators the *naxarark'* resented.

A major strategy pursued by the rebels was withdrawal to defensive dynastic strongholds. Some moved to regions close to the Byzantine frontier, while others harboured frustrated aspirations to cross into Byzantine lands. It is circumstantially plausible that the rebels courted Byzantine aid or that they sought to bargain greater fiscal prerogatives in return for submission to Byzantine rule. In the end, all of these revolts were defeated, but Arabic sources reveal that the *naxarark'* nevertheless obtained considerable leverage over the fiscal system in the ensuing decades.

This characterisation of the revolts of early 'Abbāsīd Armenia stands at the intersection of three paradigms of contention. First, they were tax revolts in terms of their short- to medium-term causes. Second, they were 'mountainous'

⁷³ Ēwond, *History*, ed. and trans. La Porta and Vacca, ed. 261–4, trans. 254–8.

⁷⁴ Greenwood, 'Armenian Neighbours', 347–8.

revolts in terms of their strategies. But third, and above all, they were ‘stakeholder revolts’, since they were shaped by the interests of provincial elites vis-à-vis the imperial centre. In this sense, these revolts bear important structural similarities to those undertaken by Muslim provincial elites elsewhere in the Islamic Empire.

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8

Local Resistance and Arab Rebellion: The Conquest of Khurāsān and Transoxiana in the Context of the First and Second *Fitnas*

Robert Haug

Introduction¹

The Arab conquest of Khurāsān and its neighbouring regions, Ṭukhāristān and Transoxiana (*Mā warā' al-nahr*),² was a long and drawn-out process that lasted the better part of a century. Beginning around the year 30/650–1, the Arabs sent several armies from Iraq to conquer, reconquer, and again reconquer territories in eastern Iran and Central Asia. This process has also been described as one of ‘capture-rebellion-recapture’,³ but the categorisation of local resistance to imperial expansion as rebellion is problematic. Firstly, we may question when recently conquered populations may shift their political violence from resistance to rebellion. When seen from the perspective of Muslim jurists, a strong distinction was found between fighting external enemies – typically conceptualised as warfare against unbelievers – and fighting

¹ Besides the editors of this volume and the participants in the conference from which this volume grew, I would also like to thank members of the University of Cincinnati’s Taft Global Premodern Reading Group who read and offered insightful comments on a draft of this chapter.

² Following the modern map, Khurāsān roughly constitutes northeastern Iran and Turkmenistan, while Ṭukhāristān is northern Afghanistan (ancient Bactria). Transoxiana comprises Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, parts of western Kyrgyzstan, and southern Kazakhstan.

³ On the notion of ‘capture-rebellion-recapture’, see Hill, *Termination*, 135.

internal enemies – apostates, rebels and brigands.⁴ Where do conquered peoples who are non-Muslim but (nominally) under the authority of a Muslim state fit into this dichotomy? For how long is resistance among conquered peoples treated as a continuation of an external war against an external enemy? When does it become rebellion – an internal conflict?

Secondly, we may argue that the early conquests of Khurāsān were largely ephemeral, focused on the extraction of wealth rather than installing sustainable imperial rule.⁵ While the caliphate continued to send governors from Iraq – from where the conquest of Iran was managed, Baṣra having been the ‘command centre’ for the conquest of Khurāsān – along with contingents of warriors under their command to oversee the administration of Khurāsān, these governors were largely limited to the collection of tribute/taxes and the expansion of territory beyond the frontiers of the province. They did not establish permanent garrisons until 51/671.⁶ Before this point, Arab soldiers probably rotated between Khurāsān and Iraq on a regular basis, leaving little to no year-round permanent presence. Even after this, the presence of caliphal representatives remained scattered and uneven for decades. The idea that the early conquests were not fully focused on bringing Khurāsān under a singular imperial authority comes into further focus when we examine political violence among the conquerors. This includes violent instances of contention,⁷ such as rebellions and civil wars or *fitnas* fought between Arab factions both at the imperial centre – which pulled representatives of imperial power away from Khurāsān for extended periods of time – and similar political violence between largely Arab factions fought in Khurāsān itself. In this context, many of the so-called acts of rebellion by local populations resisting the Arab conquest might better be understood as moments in which local authorities or notables sought to fill a void created when caliphal armies retreated or lessened their

⁴ On the rules of fighting such internal enemies and the distinctions between internal and external rivals, see Kraemer, ‘Apostates’; Abou El Fadl, *Rebellion*.

⁵ For a response to the ‘capture-rebellion-recapture’ paradigm, see Haug, *Eastern Frontier*, 73–4.

⁶ This is noted in the chronicles through the decision to send a new detachment of soldiers to Khurāsān with their families, implying a more permanent settlement at Marw. Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 410; al-Balādhurī, *History*, 404; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:156; trans. *History*, XVIII:163.

⁷ Here I follow the vocabulary set out by the editors of this volume, Hagemann and Grant, in their Introduction, who follow the terminology of Charles Tilly and Paul Cobb. On the application of Tilly’s terminology to Islamic contexts, see Cobb, *White Banners*, 6–7.

grip on regions they had successfully, though briefly subjugated. For much of this period of conquest, it was, in fact, Arab rebellion and civil war that limited the caliphate's ability to maintain firm and consistent control over Khurāsān, Ṭukhāristān and Transoxiana.

In this context, Iranian resistance may be seen as responding to the breakdown of Arab unity and, subsequently, imperial authority more than the conquests themselves. We can add these local uprisings to a larger discussion of medieval revolt that sees the act of revolt not merely as resistance to the encroachment of the state but as part of a dialogue between rulers and ruled.⁸ As such, rebellion may be seen as an integral part of the state-building process.⁹ The state may represent a level of security and stability that disappeared in moments of conflict and which local actors sought to reassert, sometimes through forms of violent contention. As stated in this volume's Introduction, 'rebellion operated as a normative means of negotiating power ... rather than representing a disruption or breakdown of the socio-political order'.¹⁰ In the cases highlighted in this chapter, rebellion appears as a response to disruption or breakdown rather than the cause of it.

This chapter focuses on three moments of Arab rebellion and/or civil war that impacted Arab rule in Khurāsān and on the ways local populations responded to these disruptions. By rebellion, I mean moments in which agents of the caliphate in Khurāsān ignored or refused the orders of the imperial centre. By civil war, I mean internal warfare between agents of the caliphate over the nature and future of the caliphate. These moments are paired with acts of violent contention initiated by the local population of Khurāsān and neighbouring regions that could themselves be construed as rebellion. First, we will examine Khurāsān immediately before and during the First *Fitna* (35–40/656–61), a time when Arab authority declined and then disappeared in the east as conflict embroiled the caliphate over the succession to the assassinated caliph ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān (r. 23–35/644–56). During this period, the noble Parthian house of Qārin led an uprising and alleged members of the

⁸ Firnhaber-Baker, 'Introduction', 3–5.

⁹ See Hagemann and Grant, Introduction to this volume; Challet, 'Dialogue'.

¹⁰ See Introduction to this volume, 2.

Sasanian royal family along with Sasanian imperial officials re-emerged in Khurāsān, looking to replace Arab authorities.¹¹

Second, we will explore the inter-Arab violence that occurred in Khurāsān during the Second *Fitna* (60–73/680–92) – a conflict during which the office of the caliphate became dynastically attached to the Marwānid line of the Umayyad family. This violence opened the way for a Hephthalite invasion that may have briefly held the provincial capital of Marw and reached as far west as Nīshāpūr.

Third, we will look at the independent kingdom established by Mūsā b. ‘Abdallāh b. Khāzim (d. 85/704) in Tirmidh following the end of the Second *Fitna*. This became a haven for both Arabs and non-Arabs fleeing Marwānid rule, including survivors of Ibn al-Ash‘ath’s (d. 85/704) failed rebellion in Iraq. Most important here were the Sogdian brothers Ḥurayth and Thābit b. Quṭba (d. c.85/704). Thereby, Tirmidh became a target of both Umayyad and Sogdian/Turkic authorities during the twelve years Mūsā held the city.

Following the editors’ introduction to this volume, in all three cases, ‘the main constituencies of rebellion emerge as local elites’¹² – nobles and officials of the former Sasanian regime, a Hephthalite ruler whose territory was being encroached upon, the son of a former governor, and wealthy representatives of the urban Sogdian, presumably merchant, population. These ‘rebellious’ elites show a progression of caliphal authority and presence in the east as we move from agents of the former Sasanian regime to rulers of frontier territories targeted for expansion and, finally, disgruntled agents of the caliphate itself.

Before moving forward, a brief note on sources. In the study of the early Islamic East, we rely on sources that are both chronologically and spatially distant. Few documentary sources have survived – primarily coins, bearing a constellation of the names of acknowledged local rulers, locations at which coins were minted, and dates when the coins were minted, alongside any iconography or text. We are therefore reliant on literary sources including chronicles, local histories and biographical dictionaries composed in the third/ninth century or later and typically in the imperial centre of Iraq.

¹¹ The Sasanian Empire ruled the majority of the Iranian world from 224 CE until the Arab-Muslim conquests began around 633 CE, with the final Sasanian Emperor, Yazdgerd III, being killed in Marw in 651 CE.

¹² Hagemann and Grant, Introduction to this volume, 2.

We can, however, trace through *isnāds* or chains of authority the transmission of knowledge from lost earlier sources such as al-Madā'inī's (d. c.228/843) *Futūḥ Khurāsān* (*The Conquest of Khurāsān*) – here, al-Ṭabarī's (224–310/839–923) *Tārikh* (*History*) and al-Balādhurī's (d. c.279/892) *Kitāb al-Futūḥ* (*Book of the Conquests*) are most important – as well as eyewitness reports that had been transmitted orally. I make use of both the available literary sources (marking divergent traditions when necessary) and numismatic evidence with a somewhat positivist belief that we can achieve a close proximation of events as they occurred based on the available material.

Case 1: The Reemergence of the Sasanian Elite during the First *Fitna*

The conquest of Khurāsān began around the year 30/650–1 under the direction of the governor of Baṣra 'Abdallāh b. 'Āmir (4–57 or 59/626–78 or 80). Ibn 'Āmir stayed in the east for approximately two years and, around 32–3/652–4, returned west. Shortly afterwards (these events are typically dated to the year 33/653–4), a man named Qārīn, likely the head of the Qārīnid Parthian family,¹³ reportedly gathered a force of 40,000 men at Bādghīs and Herāt, which had been conquered by Ibn 'Āmir's forces just a year or two earlier, to resist the Arab presence in Khurāsān.¹⁴ An Arab force numbering 4,000 under the command of 'Abdallāh b. Khāzim al-Sulamī (d. 73/692–3) met Qārīn and defeated him. One report preserved by al-Ṭabarī, on the authority of al-Madā'inī, dramatises the battle. Ibn Khāzim's troops wrapped their spearheads in rags soaked in grease, oil and pitch. They then surrounded Qārīn's camp at night before lighting the rags on fire. This gave the enemy the impression they had been engulfed in a sea of flames causing panic among their

¹³ The Qārīnids were one of the five Parthian noble families who played a prominent role in the politics of the Sasanian Empire: see Pourshariati, *Decline*.

¹⁴ The summary is based on the following reports: Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārikh*, 167, 179 (shortened versions recorded on the authority of Ibn Khayyāt appear in Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārikh*, XXVIII:13–14; al-Dhahabī, *Tadhbīb*, V:129; Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī, *Iṣāba*, IV:62). Al-Ṭabarī included several versions of this story including two based on al-Madā'inī: al-Ṭabarī, *Tārikh*, I:2905–6; trans. *History*, XV:108–10 (Ibn al-Athīr included a truncated version of these reports under the year 33/653–4: Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, III:68). Ibn 'Asākir included another report based on the lost *Kitāb al-Futūḥ* of the Balkhī Abū Hudhayfa Iṣḥāq b. Bishr al-Bukhārī (d. 206/821) that does not name Qārīn directly: Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārikh*, XXVIII:11–12. Al-Balādhurī's report replaced Qārīn with a generic group of Turks: al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, XIII:311; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 408; al-Balādhurī, *History*, 403.

ranks.¹⁵ Generally, reports of Qārin's uprising are not focused on Qārin or the local resistance movement he led. Instead, they are focused on the duplicitous manner by which Ibn Khāzim achieved his leadership position. From a broader perspective, it also becomes a story about the declining presence of Arab forces in Khurāsān and the dangers to continued caliphal rule in the east.

When Ibn 'Āmir left Khurāsān shortly before Qārin's uprising, he appointed Qays b. al-Haytham al-Sulamī his lieutenant.¹⁶ Accompanying Qays in his campaigns in Khurāsān and in governing the province was his cousin, 'Abdallāh b. Khāzim. But Ibn Khāzim was also Ibn 'Āmir's cousin and they appear to have had a bond that encouraged Ibn 'Āmir to grant Ibn Khāzim a diploma offering him the governorship of Khurāsān should Qays ever leave his post.¹⁷ (Qays and Ibn 'Āmir were not related.) Qārin's uprising created conditions to drive Qays out of Khurāsān. In most accounts, when word reached Qays that Qārin had gathered a force at Bādghīs and Herāt, the governor asked his cousin for advice. Ibn Khāzim told Qays to go to Baṣra and seek reinforcements from Ibn 'Āmir, but the moment Qays left Khurāsān, Ibn Khāzim revealed his diploma, took charge of the army, and defeated Qārin. Upon hearing news of this victory, Ibn 'Āmir appointed Ibn Khāzim governor, a position he would hold until the outbreak of the First *Fitna*.

We might read this narrative as a prelude to the First *Fitna* itself, a period when the Arab presence in Khurāsān disappeared and was replaced by people claiming to be members of the Sasanian royal family or former Sasanian administration. We will return to this shortly. In this case, Qārin's uprising occurred following the departure of Ibn 'Āmir from Khurāsān – perhaps with the larger portion of the Arab army that had conquered the province – and the appointment of a governor, who appears unprepared to defend Khurāsān. Qays fled at the first sign of trouble and his own cousin had been plotting to

¹⁵ 'Ibn Khāzim approached (the enemy), who saw fires right and left, moving forward and backward, sinking and rising, but without being able to perceive anyone. They were terrified by this.' Al-Ṭabarī, trans. *History*, XV:109.

¹⁶ Sayf b. 'Umar, *Ridda*, 89–90; Ibn Khayyāṭ, *Tārīkh*, 179; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 408; al-Balādhurī, *History*, 403; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, XIII:314; al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, II:167–8; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, I:2831, 2904–5; trans. *History*, XV:36, 108; Gardīzī, *Zayn*, 228.

¹⁷ In some reports, Ibn Khāzim forged this diploma. In one version of Ibn Khāzim's betrayal of Qays, which leaves out Qārin and his uprising, Sayf b. 'Umar reports that Ibn 'Āmir held his cousin in great esteem: Sayf b. 'Umar, *Ridda*, 90–1; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, I:2832–3; trans. *History*, XV:37.

usurp his position. Ibn ‘Āmir had not left Khurāsān in a strong position and representatives of the former Sasanian nobility were prepared to strike. These dynamics would be intensified with the outbreak of the First *Fitna*.

Following the assassination of Caliph ‘Uthmān, the majority – if not all – of the Arabs in Khurāsān returned to Baṣra to participate in the ensuing civil war, and Arab rule in Khurāsān ceased. Reflecting this, Arab-Sasanian dirhams were struck consistently in Khurāsān from the conquest in 31/651–2 until 37/657–8, but this was followed by a fifteen-year break in which we have no evidence of minting.¹⁸ During this time, our sources describe a resurgent Sasanian authority in the region. It is likely that Caliph ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (r. 35–40/656–61) did not even attempt to send a governor to Khurāsān until after the Battle of Ṣiffīn (37/657). The first governor he did send, Ja‘da b. Hubayra al-Makhzūmī, only made it as far as Nīshāpūr before being turned back by local resistance.¹⁹ At this point, al-Balādhurī, rather pessimistically, declared that Khurāsān remained in a state of confusion (*multāṭha*) until ‘Alī’s death.²⁰

Ja‘da was followed by Khulayd b. Qurra al-Yarbū‘ī. Ibn Muzāḥim al-Minqarī (d. 212/827) reported that when Khulayd conquered Nīshāpūr, the city was under a Sasanian governor (*‘amāl Kīsrā*) who had come from Kābul. Among the list of spoils taken at Nīshāpūr were two Sasanian princesses who were enslaved and sent to Kūfa.²¹ In al-Dīnawarī’s (d. c.280s/890s) version of these events, the Sasanian governor was replaced with a Sasanian princess who likewise came from Kābul.²² Al-Ṭabarī, following al-Madā’inī, was the most generous with Khulayd’s campaigns, saying he successfully conquered Nīshāpūr and Marw, where he captured two Sasanian princesses.²³ The Sasanian royal family had kept a rump court in Zābulistān or Kābulistān with the support of the T’ang Empire of China, and the re-emergence of Sasanian officials and nobles from Kābul show these remnants of the imperial family

¹⁸ For the early issues of Arab-Sasanian coins from Marw, see Malek, *Arab-Sasanian Numismatics*, I:183–7, II:566. Following this break, the earliest dated coins may be from the camp mint of Ibn ‘Āmir, whom the caliph Mu‘āwiya reappointed as governor of Baṣra: *ibid.*, II:450.

¹⁹ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 408–9; al-Balādhurī, *History*, 403; al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, II:183–4; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, I:3349–50, 3389–90; trans. *History*, XVII:99, 140.

²⁰ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 409; al-Balādhurī, *History*, 403. Only Gardīzī credits Ja‘da with any victories in Khurāsān: Gardīzī, *Zayn*, 232–3.

²¹ Ibn Muzāḥim, *Waq‘at Ṣiffīn*, 11.

²² Al-Dīnawarī, *Akbbār*, 163–4.

²³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, I:3350, 3390; trans. *History*, XVII:99–100, 140.

seizing the opportunity presented by the First *Fitna* to reassert their presence in Khurāsān.²⁴

It was not just Parthian and Sasanian nobles who sought to reclaim Khurāsān from the Arabs during the First *Fitna*. Pre-conquest local elites also attempted to assert themselves under caliphal hegemony. The *marzbān* of Marw, Māhawayh – infamous for his role in the death of the last Sasanian Shāhānshāh Yazdgird III (r. 11–31/632–51) – sought a letter from ‘Alī saying the *dabāqīn* (petty landed gentry), *asāwira* (aristocratic, Iranian cavalry, many of whom had joined the Muslims during the conquest of Iran), *dihśālārīn* (village headmen), and *jundsālārīn* (military officers) should pay their taxes to him.²⁵ These refused, but the specificities of this request imply that a local, pre-Islamic, Sasanian administrative and military hierarchy was still active on the ground in Khurāsān. Māhawayh assumed that he could deploy these networks on behalf of the caliph and that a letter from the caliph would be sufficient to gain these local elites’ compliance. While the refusal to pay Māhawayh – and, indirectly, the caliph – is itself an act of rebellion against caliphal authority, this scene also illustrates local and pre-Islamic authorities seeking to fill the vacuum created by the First *Fitna* to their own advantage, either by attempting to wield the authority of the caliphate for themselves or by ignoring orders from Iraq.

Conflict among the Arabs in Khurāsān – between Qays and Ibn Khāzim – and in Iraq – the First *Fitna* – following the departure of the bulk of the Arab forces from Khurāsān weakened the caliphate’s hand in the east and opened opportunities for pre-Islamic elites of the region to fill the void and proclaim their authority, including the Parthian Qārinids, members of the Sasanian royal family, and local officials who had previously made terms with the Arabs. Not all sought overtly to overthrow or bring an end to Arab rule in Khurāsān – Māhawayh, for example, sought to work in support of ‘Alī – but they did move to provide stability in an uncertain time. The Arabs were forced to reassert (and expand) their positions in the region during the caliphate of Mu‘āwiya (r. 41–60/661–80) but, following his death, the Second *Fitna* again created disunity and destruction among the Arabs in Khurāsān; this was met

²⁴ On this court in exile, see Agostini and Stark, ‘Zāwulistān’; Haug, *Eastern Frontier*, 92–4.

²⁵ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 408; al-Balādhurī, *History*, 403; al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, II:184; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, I:3249; trans. *History*, XVI:190–1; Gardīzī, *Zayn*, 233.

with another round of local uprisings, this time focused on the Hephthalites of Ṭukhāristān.

Case 2: The Hephthalite Response to the Second *Fitna*

Under the year 64/683–4, al-Ṭabarī provides a report of a Turkic raid on Qaṣr Asfād, likely a fort east of Nīshāpūr. This report contains few details and focuses instead on the brave response of Zuhayr b. Ḥayyān and a band of warriors from the Banū Tamīm. In the account, the Turks raid Qaṣr Asfād, where a group from the Banū Azd were stationed. The Azd were defeated by the Turks, as were a group of Azdī reinforcements who came from the surrounding areas. Then the nominal governor of Khurāsān, ‘Abdallāh b. Khāzīm, sent Zuhayr b. Ḥayyān leading a contingent of the Banū Tamīm to drive back the Turks. They were successful, routed the Turks, and chased them well into the night, until Zuhayr’s hand froze to his spear and he called off the pursuit.²⁶ This Turkic raid also appears in reports preserved by al-Balādhurī, who says they reached as far west as Nīshāpūr, and al-Ya‘qūbī (d. after 295/908), who simply reports that Ibn Khāzīm fought some Turks.²⁷

Not only do these reports lack detail; al-Ṭabarī’s also condenses events into a more simplified timeline. While he places this narrative under the year 64/683–4, numismatic evidence indicates that these events took place closer to 67/686–7. This is part of a larger passage which, while entirely situated under a single year within his text, covers a period of approximately four years. These reports do not seem to have much to say about rebellion, until we place them in context.

When Ibn Khāzīm sent Zuhayr and the Banū Tamīm to Nīshāpūr, they were besieging Herāt, then occupied by Aws b. Tha‘laba and the Banū Rabī‘a, who had challenged Ibn Khāzīm’s claim to the governorship. Following the death of Caliph Yazīd I (r. 60–4/680–3) and the outbreak of the Second *Fitna*, the then-governor, Salm b. Ziyād (d. 73/692), abandoned Khurāsān. Multiple Arab factions who had settled in Khurāsān, often defined by tribe or tribal confederation, began to struggle over control of the province, occasionally

²⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:493; trans. *History*, XX:76.

²⁷ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 414; al-Balādhurī, *History*, 408; al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, II:252.

reaching out to the Meccan caliph and rival of the Umayyads, ‘Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr (r. 64–73/683–92), for confirmation.

This violence had two major phases. First, Ibn Khāzim fought against the Banū Bakr b. Wā’il, having taken control of the provincial capital of Marw, easily defeating them at Marw al-Rūd. The Bakr were part of the larger Rabī’a confederation. This phase of the fighting then turned towards Herāt, where Ibn Khāzim besieged Aws b. Tha’laba and his Rabī’a supporters. On the basis of a single coin naming Ibn Khāzim’s son and lieutenant in Herāt, we can date the end of this siege to 67/686–7 or earlier.²⁸ After defeating Aws at Herāt, Ibn Khāzim’s erstwhile allies from the Banū Tamīm turned against him, killing his son Muḥammad. Based on the aforementioned coin, this occurred in 67/686–7 or later. A violent conflict ensued that lasted at least two years but had not fully resolved before the end of the Second *Fitna* and the victory of the Marwānid caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 65–86/685–705). ‘Abd al-Malik offered Ibn Khāzim the governorship of Khurāsān, but he refused and attempted to flee across the Amu Darya (Oxus) with the treasury of Marw to join his son Mūsā, who had established himself at Tirmidh.²⁹ Ibn Khāzim was caught by one of his Tamīmī rivals and killed outside of Marw.³⁰ The Turkic raid occurred in the context of this inter-Arab violence.

Al-Ṭabarī, alongside our other sources for the Second *Fitna* in Khurāsān, collapses several events into a few years, but numismatic evidence supplies a clearer timeline of events. At the outset of the civil war in 64/683–4, coins struck at the four major urban centres of Khurāsān – Marw, Abrashahr (Nishāpūr), Marw al-Rūd and Herāt – were fairly uniform, naming Salm b. Ziyād.³¹ Slowly, Salm’s name was replaced with that of Ibn Khāzim,

²⁸ Walker, *Catalogue*, 95. A discussion of this coin can be found in Malek, *Arab-Sasanian Numismatics*, I:303–4.

²⁹ The reasons for Ibn Khāzim refusing ‘Abd al-Malik’s offer are unclear in the sources. Ibn Khāzim states that he refused to kill the messenger who brought ‘Abd al-Malik’s letter out of fear that it would spark another wave of tribal conflict. That he only explains why he did not respond more harshly implies that his refusal should have been expected.

³⁰ Sources for the Second *Fitna* in Khurāsān and the *fitna* of Ibn Khāzim include Ibn A’tḥam, *Futūḥ*, V:169; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, XIII:312; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 414–16; al-Balādhurī, *History*, 407–9; al-Ya’qūbī, *Tārikh*, II:252, 271; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārikh*, II:488–96, 593–8, 695–700, 831–4; trans. *History*, XX:70–9, 177–81; XXI:62–6, 209–12; al-Azdī, *Tārikh*, 106; Gardīzī, *Zayn*, 241–3; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārikh*, XXVIII:12–13.

³¹ Malek, *Arab-Sasanian Numismatics*, Marw: II:566–8; Abrashahr: II:430; Marw al-Rūd: II:574; Herāt: II:528.

beginning with Marw as early as 63/682–3 and then Abrashahr in 65/684–5.³² At Marw al-Rūd, the centre of the Bakr's resistance to Ibn Khāzīm, and Herāt, the centre of Rabī'a resistance, coins bearing Salm's name continued to be struck up to 67/686–7, four years after he had departed the province. We may assume that these coins were issued by Ibn Khāzīm's rivals and can therefore use them to track the progress of the fighting in Khurāsān.

There is one other noteworthy name found on coins struck in Khurāsān at this time: Zhulād Gōzgān, the Hephthalite lord of Gōzgān (Jūzjān), a region in the foothills of the Hindu Kush northeast of Herāt. The Hephthalites were a semi-nomadic group of Iranian Huns (sometimes referred to as the White Huns) who had come to rule Ṭukhāristān in the mid-fifth century CE, extending their authority into Transoxiana and even parts of Khurāsān. Following the rise of the First Turkic Khaganate in the mid-sixth century and their expansion into these same regions, various Hephthalite rulers had taken hold of the highlands of Ṭukhāristān and then maintained these territories into the second/eighth century. The coins including Zhulād's name are part of the short-lived Arab-Hephthalite series of silver drachms. They appear close to contemporary Arab-Sasanian issues in both style and quality but are distinguished by the inclusion of inscriptions in Bactrian alongside the typical Pahlavi and Arabic inscriptions.³³ On these tri-lingual coins, we can see the changing nature of imperial power in East Iran: silver Sasanian drachms, which acted as a valuable currency for trade as far east as China, were modified to highlight the growing power of the Arab-Muslims through the inclusion of Arabic and, increasingly, Islamic inscriptions. By adding his own Bactrian inscriptions, Zhulād was inserting himself as a participant in the imperial networks of the day.³⁴ Of course, few people – if anyone – could read all three languages, but the presence of the different scripts would mark the intersection of these three imperial traditions: Sasanian, Arab and Hephthalite.

Interpreting this evidence, we begin to see a story of Hephthalite autonomy and resistance during the Second *Fitna* that matches the reports of a raid on Khurāsān. In 63/682–3, coins were struck in the name of Salm b. Ziyād at

³² For a short overview of coins featuring Ibn Khāzīm's name, see Malek, *Arab-Sasanian Numismatics*, I:256–7.

³³ For a current overview of this series, see Vondrovec, *Coinage*, 531–5.

³⁴ The importance of such an expression is discussed by Haug, 'Trilingual Coins'.

Anbīr in Gōzḡān (modern Sar-i Pul in northern Afghanistan) with the mint appearing in both Pahlavi and Bactrian.³⁵ These issues imply that, even when adding a Bactrian inscription, Anbīr recognised the authority of the governor of Khurāsān before the outbreak of the Second *Fitna* and struck coins following an imperial design. But the following year, coins were struck at Anbīr with the mint name in both Pahlavi and Bactrian, but only the name of Zhulād Gōzḡān in Bactrian and no reference to any Arab governor. Similar issues were struck continuously through 69/688–9.³⁶

Assuming that the lack of Arab names on these coins indicates that Zhulād recognised no authority in Khurāsān, Zhulād used the outbreak of the Second *Fitna* and the violence in Khurāsān to assert his autonomy in Gōzḡān in the language of his time: Arab-Sasanian-style coins. More complicated are a series of Arab-Hephthalite coins that list Marw as the mint in Pahlavi but Anbīr as the mint in Bactrian. These coins, which may appear as early as 63/682–3, name Salm in Pahlavi and Zhulād in Bactrian and were struck through 65/684–5.³⁷ They are of a high quality, indistinguishable from Arab-Sasanian coins struck at Marw at the same time, and we are left to speculate about the origins of the dies used for these coins.

In short, during Ibn Khāzim’s siege of Herāt, when the Arabs who had been stationed along the frontier between Khurāsān and Ṭukhāristān had been defeated and the survivors besieged in Herāt, a Hephthalite lord was asserting his independence by striking coins in his own name. This makes Zhulād the likely culprit behind the raids described by al-Balādhurī, al-Ya‘qūbī and al-Ṭabarī as well. These sources refer to the attackers as Turks, but chroniclers very rarely distinguish between the semi-nomadic peoples of the east, with Turk acting as a generic catchall for these peoples. This would lead us to speculate whether the Marw/Anbīr dies were initially spoils of these raids, captured in Khurāsān and taken to Anbīr where the Bactrian inscriptions could be added.

³⁵ Malek, *Arab-Sasanian Numismatics*, II:428. A coin appears at Anbīr in 63/682–3 with Ibn Khāzim’s name as well: Walker, *Catalogue*, 90. There is some debate about the calendar used on the Arab-Hephthalite coins. The argument for Hijri dates is made in Haug, ‘Trilateral Coins’.

³⁶ Malek, *Arab-Sasanian Numismatics*, II:428–30.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, II:566–70, 574.

The coins struck in Zhulād's name in Anbīr continued beyond 67/686–7, the latest possible date for the raids in Khurāsān and, following a brief pause, so did the coins naming both Marw and Anbīr. In 67/686–7 and 68/687–8, coins were struck naming Marw and Salm b. Ziyād in Pahlavi and Anbīr and Zhulād in Bactrian.³⁸ The only coins known from Marw for 68/687–8 name Salm, or Salm and Zhulād. This is the only year between 63/682–3 and 72/691–2 in which there were no coins struck at Marw in Ibn Khāzīm's name.³⁹ Reports of the fighting between Ibn Khāzīm and the Banū Tamīm have the Tamīm consolidating in Marw following the murder of Ibn Khāzīm's son and attempting to depose Ibn Khāzīm.⁴⁰ Even though al-Ṭabarī dated these events to 65/684–5, the numismatic evidence from both Herāt and Marw make the 68/687–8 date much more likely.

Importantly, not only do coins naming Zhulād continue to appear in this year, but the first example of a coin naming Ibn Khāzīm in Pahlavi and Zhulād in Bactrian comes from 69/688–9.⁴¹ This coin indicates the mint of Marw in Pahlavi but makes no reference to Anbīr, perhaps an indication that Ibn Khāzīm and Zhulād had conspired to regain control of Marw from the Banū Tamīm. From this same year comes a coin naming the mints of Marw in Pahlavi and Anbīr in Bactrian, but only Zhulād in Bactrian.⁴² This is the first and only coin of Zhulād's that mentions Marw without naming an Arab governor. While the literary sources make no references to any Hephthalite raids during Ibn Khāzīm's fighting with the Banū Tamīm, the numismatic evidence indicates the possibility that Zhulād had either participated in the violence or taken advantage of it.

If the literary sources make only slight, passing references to the activities of the Hephthalites of Ṭukhāristān during the Second *Fitna*, the numismatic evidence paints a fuller picture. The Hephthalite king of Gōzgān, Zhulād, asserted his authority in increasingly brazen manners, striking coins in his name – first alongside the name of the former Arab governor of Khurāsān

³⁸ Malek, *Arab-Sasanian Numismatics*, II:570–2.

³⁹ Walker listed a coin naming Ibn Khāzīm for this year, but did not include an illustration, and Malek finds it doubtful. Walker, *Catalogue*, 92; Malek, *Arab-Sasanian Numismatics*, I:186.

⁴⁰ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 415; al-Balādhurī, *History*, 408; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:595; trans. *History*, XX:178.

⁴¹ Malek, *Arab-Sasanian Numismatics*, II:572.

⁴² *Ibid.*

but eventually with his name alone – and raiding far into Khurāsān on at least one occasion, possibly twice. By the time of the Second *Fitna*, the remnants of the Sasanian ruling class that had taken advantage of the First *Fitna* were gone, only to be replaced by other local lords from the less accessible highland fringes of the region, who could equally use the occasion of inter-Arab conflict to reassert their authority in Khurāsān. While both are cases of local forces filling the vacuum left by Arab disunity and conflict, the Hephthalites were themselves invaders as well rather than holdovers of a previous regime, engaging in their own practice of empire-building by appropriating some of the symbols of imperial authority through the striking of coins.

Case 3: Mūsā b. ‘Abdallāh in Tirmidh

We may consider Mūsā b. ‘Abdallāh b. Khāzim’s conquest of Tirmidh a continuation of his father’s struggles during the Second *Fitna*. Most accounts of Mūsā’s flight across the Amu Darya are tied directly to the violence between Ibn Khāzim and the Banū Tamīm. As the Tamīm took Ṭūs and Nishāpūr from Ibn Khāzim and threatened Marw, Ibn Khāzim asked Mūsā to take his baggage to Transoxiana and find a safe place for them.⁴³ While our sources are quiet on this point, we must assume that this happened sometime between the death of Muḥammad (c.67/686–7) and the death of Ibn Khāzim in 73/692–3. The people who accompanied Mūsā were largely supporters of his father; more would follow after Ibn Khāzim’s death.⁴⁴ In a sense, Tirmidh became a refuge for those who had lost out during the Second *Fitna* in Khurāsān. The reports of Mūsā’s conquest of Tirmidh are few and tend to focus on how he tricked the king of Tirmidh into letting him into the city and even its fortress before Mūsā treacherously expelled the leaders of the city and took control of it for himself.⁴⁵ For the purposes of this chapter, rather than analyse the accounts of Mūsā’s time in Tirmidh, let us focus on how Tirmidh became

⁴³ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 415; al-Balādhurī, *History*, 408; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1145; trans. *History*, XXIII:90.

⁴⁴ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 418; al-Balādhurī, *History*, 410. Al-Ṭabarī numbers those who followed Mūsā across the Amu Darya at 220 but they were joined by another 400 after Ibn Khāzim’s death: Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1145, 1148; trans. *History*, XXIII:90, 93.

⁴⁵ There are only two sources that provide a discussion of Mūsā’s conquest of Tirmidh. Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 417–19; al-Balādhurī, *History*, 410–11; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1145–64; trans. *History*, XXIII:90–108. For much of his account, al-Ṭabarī relies upon al-Madā’ini.

a refuge for those who had run afoul of the Marwānid authorities and how continued revolt and violence within the caliphate prevented the governors of Khurāsān from capturing Tirmidh for over twelve years.

Mūsā and his followers are often portrayed as refugees, rebels and ruffians struggling to find a secure place in Transoxiana before taking Tirmidh. While Mūsā initially set out with a group of his father's supporters, al-Ṭabarī reports that his entourage was quickly joined by 'some down-and-out robbers' (*qawm min al-ṣa'ālīk*).⁴⁶ An unsavoury reputation preceded Mūsā and the king of Bukhārā refused him entry because he was 'a murderer, and his companions are like him, people given to war and evil'.⁴⁷ The lord of Nūqān – a place within the jurisdiction of Bukhārā – likewise turned Mūsā away, saying that 'the people are afraid of you and do not feel secure from you'.⁴⁸ Ṭarkhūn, the king of Samarqand, initially welcomed Mūsā and his followers and granted them great hospitality, until one of Mūsā's men challenged a Sogdian cavalier to a duel, killing him in the process, and Ṭarkhūn expelled Mūsā and his followers.⁴⁹ Ṭarkhūn pursued Mūsā to Kish where they almost came to battle, until Mūsā convinced the Sogdians that his men were ready to fight to the death and take as many of Ṭarkhūn's warriors with them as possible.⁵⁰ Whether this view of Mūsā and his followers as violent hooligans was a reputation born of specific conduct on Mūsā's part or from the violence that had engulfed Khurāsān during the Second *Fitna*, Mūsā crossed the Amu Darya with a certain level of notoriety.

Once Mūsā had established himself in Tirmidh, attempts to remove him were stymied by continued infighting in Khurāsān. 'Abd al-Malik's first governor in Khurāsān, his cousin Umayya b. 'Abdallāh, quickly found himself in conflict with Bukayr b. Wishāḥ of the Banū Tamīm – Ibn Khāzim's killer who had attempted to claim the governorship for himself. In 77/696–7, Umayya

⁴⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1145; trans. *History*, XXIII:90. Cf. Yaḥyā b. Zayd, another rebellious son of a rebel, in Kontny-Wendt's chapter. Yaḥyā was likewise accused of attracting bandits as he made his way east. In both cases, an accusation of banditry/robbery was perhaps meant to diminish the political power of a movement by painting its followers as interested in illicit financial gain.

⁴⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1145–6; trans. *History*, XXIII:90.

⁴⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1146; trans. *History*, XXIII:91.

⁴⁹ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 417; al-Balādhurī, *History*, 410; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1146; trans. *History*, XXIII:91.

⁵⁰ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 417; al-Balādhurī, *History*, 410; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1147; trans. *History*, XXIII:91–2.

attempted to organise a campaign against Bukhārā and then Tirmidh with Bukayr's support – who he had named his lieutenant in Ṭukhāristān – but once Umayya crossed the Amu Darya with the majority of the army, Bukayr burned the boat bridge across the river, attacked Marw, took Umayya's son hostage, and deposed the governor. This forced Umayya to make peace with the people of Bukhārā, abandon any campaign against Tirmidh, and return to Marw.⁵¹ Rivalry over the governorship of Khurāsān saved Mūsā, with one of Bukayr's supporters waxing poetically on Umayya's refusal to pursue Mūsā. 'When you saw how forbidding were the mountains of Sogdia, you turned tail on Mūsā and [his brother] Nūḥ.'⁵² Later, Umayya attempted to send another force against Mūsā, but their leader was assassinated by his own troops and the army scattered with some choosing to join Mūsā in Tirmidh.⁵³ Six years later, Mūsā further attracted the support of some refugees from Ibn al-Ash'ath's failed revolt in Iraq.⁵⁴

During this time, the governors of Khurāsān had their own reasons for avoiding confrontation with Mūsā. For example, the famous general al-Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufra (c.10–82/c.630–702) did not confront Mūsā during his governorship and advised his sons to ignore him as well: 'If he [Mūsā] is killed, the first person to come against you as amīr of Khurāsān will be a man from Qays.'⁵⁵ Here, al-Muhallab is implying that the death of Mūsā would spark a renewed round of intertribal competition and, perhaps, violence among the Arabs which would remove the Azdī Muhallabids from their positions of power.

Mūsā was also protected by infighting among the lords of Sogdiana. In al-Ṭabarī's account of the conquest of Tirmidh, Mūsā was aided by a *dihqān*

⁵¹ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 416–17; al-Balādhurī, *History*, 409; al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, II:271; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1022–8; trans. *History*, XXII:165–72. A later reference to this incident states that Bukayr refrained from attacking Mūsā until Umayya became governor. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1149; trans. *History*, XXIII:94.

⁵² Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1025; trans. *History*, XXII:168.

⁵³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1031; trans. *History*, XXII:175.

⁵⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1109, 1152; trans. *History*, XXIII:56, 97. The revolt of Ibn al-Ash'ath began in 81/700 in Sīstān, where Ibn al-Ash'ath had been sent at the head of a large force to fight the *zunbil*, the king of Kābul. Facing adverse conditions, Ibn al-Ash'ath had attempted to make peace with the *zunbil*, but the governor of Iraq, al-Ḥajjāj, ordered him to continue fighting. In response, Ibn al-Ash'ath marched back to Iraq and led a revolt against Umayyad authority that lasted until 83/702–3. On further cases of survivors of Ibn al-Ash'ath's revolt participating in later acts of rebellion, see Hagemann, 'Muṭarrīf', 457–9.

⁵⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1151–2; trans. *History*, XXIII:96.

who was at odds with the Tirmidh shāh and instructed Mūsā in ways to curry the king's favour and gain access to the city and even its fortress.⁵⁶ Having been chased from the city, the Tirmidh shāh fled to the Turks, asking for support, but they responded in a disparaging way: 'God curse you! Have you no pride? A man comes with 100 followers and drives you out of your own city.'⁵⁷ The Turks then delayed in attacking Tirmidh, giving Mūsā time to establish himself behind the walls of the city. Mūsā's position as both a rebel who attracted and offered protection to other rebels and as an Arab-Muslim fighting against Turks, Sogdians and Hephthalites put him in an interesting, intermediary position with the caliphate. For example, when the infamous governor of Iraq, al-Ḥajjāj (c.41–95/661–714), learned of Mūsā's victory over an army of Hephthalites and Turks, he reportedly said, 'Praise be to God who has given the hypocrites victory over the polytheists'.⁵⁸

Mūsā also attracted the support of non-Arabs in Tirmidh, most importantly the brothers Thābit and Ḥurayth b. Quṭba, who attempted to use Tirmidh as a staging ground to remove Umayyad authority from Khurāsān. The Ibn Quṭba brothers were Sogdian clients of the Banū Khuzā'a who appear to have been leaders of a community of Sogdians in Marw (themselves either merchants or nobles) who had allied with the Muslims, presumably to secure beneficial trade concessions.⁵⁹ They were prominent political and military figures with roles in the attempted conquest of Transoxiana. When Bukayr b. Wishāh revolted in Khurāsān, an underlying issue was the amount of debt he and his followers had accrued with Sogdian creditors preparing for an aborted campaign into Transoxiana.⁶⁰ Thābit led the vanguard when Umayya crossed the Amu Darya before Bukayr's revolt, and both Thābit and Ḥurayth fought battles against Bukayr to differing results.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1147–8; trans. *History*, XXIII:92–3.

⁵⁷ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 418; al-Balādhurī, *History*, 410; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1148; trans. *History*, XXIII:93.

⁵⁸ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 418; al-Balādhurī, *History*, 410; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1155; trans. *History*, XXIII:99.

⁵⁹ For debates over the Ibn Quṭba brothers' identity, see de la Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders*, 275; Ulrich, *Arabs*, 134–5.

⁶⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1022–3; trans. *History*, XXII:165–6.

⁶¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1026–7; trans. *History*, XXII:169–70.

In 82/701–2, Ḥurayth ran afoul of al-Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufra, disobeying his orders during a campaign against Kish, for which he was stripped and received thirty lashes. Ḥurayth took great offense at being stripped and threatened to kill the governor, which led his brother Thābit to encourage him to flee Khurāsān for the safety of Tirmidh, where he would be beyond the governor’s reach. The Ibn Quṭba brothers reportedly arrived in Tirmidh with 300 *chākar* (personal bodyguard similar to *ghulām*) as well as some Arab followers.⁶² At Tirmidh, they quickly rose to prominence by providing necessary support from the lords of Sogdiana. For example, they encouraged Ṭarkhūn, the king of Samarqand, to provide Mūsā with a large force, a feat they could accomplish because ‘Thābit was much loved among the non-Arabs, enjoying wide renown’.⁶³ Ṭarkhūn was then able to gather further local rulers and troops from both Transoxiana and Ṭukhāristān to support Mūsā.

The influence Thābit and Ḥurayth gained created animosity with the Arabs among Mūsā’s supporters. Some of Mūsā’s supporters complained to him that, ‘You only have the name and these two are the lords of the army’.⁶⁴ When Thābit encouraged Mūsā to turn his army against the then-governor of Khurāsān, Yazīd b. al-Muhallab (52–102/672–720), Mūsā’s Arab supporters warned him that the brothers were not to be trusted: ‘If you expel Yazīd from Khurāsān and they [Thābit and Ḥurayth] become safe, they will take charge and overcome you.’⁶⁵ They feared that the Ibn Quṭba brothers sought to overthrow Arab rule; this animosity led them to plot and celebrate the deaths of Thābit and Ḥurayth. When Ḥurayth was killed on the battlefield, some of Mūsā’s followers allegedly told him, ‘God has relieved us from Ḥurayth, so deliver us from Thābit because life with him is unbearable.’⁶⁶ When word of this reached Thābit through a spy he

⁶² Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1080–2, 1152; trans. *History*, XXIII:29–31, 96.

⁶³ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 418; al-Balādhurī, *History*, 410; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1152; trans. *History*, XXIII:96–7.

⁶⁴ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 418; al-Balādhurī, *History*, 410; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1153; trans. *History*, XXIII:97.

⁶⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1153; trans. *History*, XXIII:97.

⁶⁶ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 418; al-Balādhurī, *History*, 410; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1155; trans. *History*, XXIII:99.

had infiltrate Mūsā's inner circle, he fled to Ṭarkhūn.⁶⁷ Thābit and Ṭarkhūn then besieged Tirmidh, during which Thābit was killed by one of Mūsā's Arab followers.⁶⁸

The deaths of Ḥurayth and Thābit drove away Mūsā's non-Arab supporters, weakening his position. It was in this context that the new governor of Khurāsān, al-Mufaḍḍal b. al-Muhallab (d. 102/720), sought to remove Mūsā from Tirmidh. Stuck between Ṭarkhūn and al-Mufaḍḍal, Tirmidh fell to the Arabs and Mūsā was killed in 85/704. Interestingly, al-Balādhurī has one of Mūsā's killers shout a battle cry that may be read as indicating his desire to avenge Thābit: 'By the Ark (*thabat*) of Moses and the Lord of the Ka'ba!'⁶⁹ Al-Ṭabarī makes this motivation more explicit, reporting that Thābit was the aggrieved killer's paternal cousin.⁷⁰

Mūsā's establishment of a rebel kingdom in Tirmidh was buoyed by the disunity among the Arabs of Khurāsān following the Second *Fitna*. Not only were attempts to capture the city stymied by open revolt in Khurāsān, but fears of renewed intertribal violence left a series of Umayyad governors hesitant to attack Mūsā. At the same time, Mūsā's intermediary position created opportunities for locals who held ties in both Khurāsān and Transoxiana, such as the Ibn Quṭba brothers, to position themselves in a way that garnered support and antagonism from both directions. It was only when Mūsā's Arab supporters were faced with a choice between the preservation of Mūsā's rebel kingdom in Tirmidh or Arab-Muslim rule in Khurāsān that his revolt came to an end. Here we see an example of rebels engaging in a negotiation over caliphal authority rather than seeking to disrupt, destroy, or overturn it. Arab supporters of Mūsā did not seek the destruction of the caliphate and the end of caliphal authority. Rather, they sought to adapt their position within those structures. A direct threat to caliphal rule in Khurāsān was at odds with these goals.

⁶⁷ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 418; al-Balādhurī, *History*, 410; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1155–60; trans. *History*, XXIII:99–104.

⁶⁸ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 418–19; al-Balādhurī, *History*, 410; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1157–8; trans. *History*, XXIII:101–2.

⁶⁹ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 419; al-Balādhurī, *History*, 411.

⁷⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1161; trans. *History*, XXIII:105.

Conclusions

When we examine moments of violent contention among conquered populations in Khurāsān and beyond, they often appear during moments of revolt, rebellion or civil war among the Arabs either in the provinces or in the caliphal heartlands. We should therefore ask whether or not such acts of violent contention were so specifically in response to conquest and incorporation into the caliphate or whether they were more a reaction to the instability found within the caliphate. Considering the frequent occurrence of revolt and civil war across the early caliphate – here we touched upon the First and Second *Fitnas* and the revolt of Ibn al-Ash‘ath, but these were just the most prominent examples – would it not be reasonable for recently conquered populations to wonder whether the caliphate was long to exist? If not, would it be wrong for them to consider what alternatives were possible?

During the First *Fitna*, we saw the remnants of the Sasanian elite attempting to reassert their positions in Khurāsān. During the Second *Fitna*, it was the Hephthalite kingdoms of the mountains of Ṭukhāristān that hoped to gain more autonomy and expand their authority. In the aftermath of the Second *Fitna*, coalitions of Arabs and Sogdians, sometimes working in partnership with the lords of Transoxiana, created independent intermediary spaces with competing plans to make a space for themselves in either Transoxiana or Khurāsān. These were just the beginning and we can map this dynamic throughout the Umayyad period, up to and beyond the outbreak of the ‘Abbāsīd Revolution in Khurāsān, driven by a similar combination of Arab and non-Arab rebels against the caliphate. It is therefore important when studying rebellion and revolt – especially in spaces at the edge of empire such as Khurāsān, Ṭukhāristān and Transoxiana – not only to understand them and the actors involved in their local context, but also to imagine how they fit as pieces of a larger political puzzle, with rebels reacting to and taking advantage of larger dynamics at the imperial centre.

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PART V
CONTENDING THE CITY

9

Negotiating Rebellion: The Revolt of the *Jund* of Tunis (793–4)*

Alon Dar

Introduction

This contribution focuses on the overthrowing and killing of the last Muhallabī governor of Ifrīqiya, al-Faḍl b. Rawḥ b. Ḥātīm al-Muhallabī, by the *jund* of Tunis in 793–4. Modern scholarship considers this revolt the main factor in ending thirty years of Muhallabī rule in the province, which was regarded as a time of relative stability.¹ It was followed by a series of sub-revolts and the immediate dispatching of caliphal agents and troops to the province. The revolt of 794 subsequently led to a power vacuum in Ifrīqiya that only ended with the establishment of Aghlabid rule in the province at the beginning of the ninth century.² The event is told in various Islamic chronicles, in largely similar narratives, as outlined below.³ It is a rich case study that highlights the role of negotiation in rebellion and furthers our understanding of

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¹ Kennedy, ‘Origins’, 40–1; Savage, ‘Survival’, 13; Talbi, *L’Émirat*, 77–82.

² On this power vacuum and the rise of the Aghlabids, see Bosanquet’s chapter in this volume; Kennedy, ‘Origins’, 42–3.

³ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, XXIV:90–3; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, V:279–300; al-Maqrīzī, *Muqaffā*, IV:257–8; Ibn ‘Idhārī, *Bayān*, I:86–8; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, XXX:142; al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, II:496.

early Islamic political culture. Before analysing this episode, however, a short description of the main events is needed.

The revolt of 793–4 began shortly after al-Faḍl's appointment as governor of the province. This appointment came after al-Faḍl had successfully asked the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809) to appoint him instead of the reigning governor of Ifrīqiya, his cousin Naṣr b. Ḥabīb al-Muhallabī (r. 791–3) (discussed below).⁴ Al-Faḍl then appointed over Tunis his cousin al-Mughīra, who enraged the city's *jund* (army contingent) by treating them disrespectfully (*istakbafā*). The *jund* now gathered for the first time and sent a letter to al-Faḍl asking for al-Mughīra's replacement; when their request was denied, they gathered again in Tunis and appointed a certain 'Abdallāh b. al-Jārūd as their leader (this, as argued below, marks the beginning of the revolt),⁵ following which they besieged al-Mughīra's house. Ibn al-Jārūd then sent a second letter to al-Faḍl: this time the governor accepted the *jund*'s demand and sent another cousin of his to replace al-Mughīra. However, some members of the *jund* decided to kill the approaching new governor. This action caused the revolt to spread out of Tunis and following some battles, the rebels succeeded in driving al-Faḍl away from the provincial capital Kairouan, chasing him down and killing him. Ibn al-Jārūd then took control of the province. However, he faced several challenges: the caliph sent an army against him, led by the general Harthama b. A'yān (d. 816); some of his own comrades were persuaded by a caliphal emissary to stop supporting him; and another *jund* unit, loyal to the killed governor, came from the Zāb (discussed below) to fight him as well. Seeing this, Ibn al-Jārūd negotiated a safe-conduct (*amān*) for himself and was sent to Baghdad, ending the chain of revolts.

Despite displaying its own specific characteristics – that is, the revolt happened in a specific time and place, and was enacted by specific historical actors – this case study bears certain similarities with other contentious events involving governors and provincial elites during Umayyad and early 'Abbāsīd rule. These similarities pertain to structures and mechanisms of the 'playbook of revolt' and conflict resolution, such as letter exchanges, negotiation processes and oath-taking, which are remembered and told in the sources

⁴ Naṣr was later briefly appointed as governor of Armenia in the late 790s: al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, II:518.

⁵ Not to be confused with the rebel Ibn al-Jārūd (d. 695) who led a revolt against the famous governor of Iraq, al-Ḥajjāj (d. 714), in 695. This revolt was recently discussed in Sijpesteijn, 'Closing'.

in a similar fashion. This case study serves us well as unlike many others, it has survived in a rich narrative that details the story from the first contentious moment, through a fully-armed uprising against the governor, to the arrival of caliphal armies from Iraq. It thus allows us to follow closely the ‘birth’ of a rebellious group, the unfolding of the revolt, and the varied attempts to reconcile the rebels. In what follows, I provide a close reading of these events.

The following discussion highlights two (somewhat overlapping) points: (1) that alongside violence, there existed mechanisms of negotiation and other forms of ‘soft power’ to mediate between the parties of the conflict; and (2) that the way the revolt unfolded and developed from a local dispute between the *jund* of Tunis and the city’s ruler to a full-scale provincial revolt was not a sudden or arbitrary eruption of violence, but rather an escalation of that dispute and the failure of other means of communication between the *jund* and its superiors. As our case study suggests, armed conflict could be the end result of a (failed) process of negotiation, and therefore invites us to ask when revolts start and when exactly one becomes a rebel. I will return to these points throughout this chapter. That rebelling was a conscious choice of historical actors in pre-modern societies is one of the themes of this volume.⁶

Ruling an Empire from Afar: Dealing with Provincial Revolts

Governing an empire demands a constant effort on the part of rulers to establish and maintain control and obedience. Resistance in the provinces could disrupt the routine of rule and prevent or withhold the extraction of revenues or the implementation of imperial policies. Losing control in the provinces, especially for pre-modern empires in which communication and logistics took time and sending troops to faraway places was costly, was always a risk. Revolts in pre-modern empires could take various forms, from tax-revolts to attempts to overthrow the imperial ruler.⁷ This was also the case for the Islamic Empire’s predecessors, the Roman Empire and (to a lesser extent) the Sasanian Empire, where members of the elite and the army took part in and led revolts.⁸ In a recent book, Roman historian Gambash defined provincial revolts as revolts

⁶ On rebellion as a method of communication, see Firnhaber-Baker, ‘Introduction’, 7–11; Challet, ‘Violence’, 283–8. For the early Islamic imperial case, see Dar and Sijpesteijn, ‘Introduction’, 438.

⁷ Bearing in mind that sometimes revolts escalate, and that these forms are not mutually exclusive.

⁸ Canepa describes two cases of this nature: ‘Parthian’, 297, 305–6; see also Bagot, ‘State’, 212–24.

by the indigenous inhabitants of the province, to be distinguished from the Roman soldiers and officeholders who were stationed in those provinces; this differs from our case, where provincial revolts were led by state-appointed officials.⁹ Despite this difference, Gambash describes similar mechanisms and practices of rulers attempting to prevent these large-scale revolts in various ways: for example, trying to mitigate tensions in the province before they broke out by giving attention to grievances via petitions and withdrawing military presence to avoid confrontations; and carefully tailoring the military and diplomatic response after the outbreak of violence.¹⁰ The rulers of the Islamic Empire faced similar problems and responded to these challenges in similar ways, which might point to a shared late antique culture of rebellion and conflict resolution.

Caliphs had several ways and means to try to establish control over the provinces, although the degree of this control has been the subject of recent debates.¹¹ The abundance of revolts in the first centuries of the Islamic Empire made the question of obedience and loyalty on the part of stakeholders within the empire a crucial one. Much like in the Roman Empire, it seems that one of the tasks of the caliphs and their courts was to be informed about the situation in the provinces, to address grievances and dispense justice. This was done by making use of information flowing from the provinces to the caliphal court via institutions such as the *barīd* (the postal and intelligence network), the judicial courts, and meetings between caliphs and individuals and groups from the provinces, as will be discussed later.

One of the most frequently recurring sources of contention was conflict between provincial governors and provincial elites. Cobb has demonstrated how the conditions in early ‘Abbāsīd Syria made it a fertile ground for such conflict and were a result of the political and administrative apparatus of the empire, which entrusted much power to the hands of those provincial elites

⁹ Gambash, *Rome*, 1–3. See also the discussion in Whittaker, *Rome*, 32.

¹⁰ Gambash, *Rome*, especially chapters 2 and 3.

¹¹ Nef and Tillier recently argued for a polycentric model of the Islamic Empire rather than a centralised empire that was controlled from the caliphal court. This model thus attributes much more authority and independence to provincial governors and provincial elites: Tillier and Nef, ‘Voies’. Legendre, ‘Neither Byzantine’, 4–6 summarises the debate on the centralisation of power in the early Islamic Empire.

who had emigrated to the provinces and stayed there.¹² This is different from the problems that Gambash describes for Roman history, in which the Roman administration came from outside the province and did not stay in the provinces for long periods of time. Cobb focused on ‘Abbāsīd Syria, but this type of contention was also present under the Umayyads and in different provinces.¹³ We thus need to ask about the types of actions and reactions that rulers and stakeholders in the empire could resort to in order to prevent a breakdown in relationships, especially in times of crisis when these connections were at risk.¹⁴

Governors could dispatch provincial armies or ask for caliphal reinforcements in case of need.¹⁵ The Islamic Empire had also put in place several socio-political institutions and mechanisms that allowed for a certain degree of control over and communication with the provinces in order to gain knowledge of local affairs, which in turn facilitated provincial rule. The use of the postal system, the *barīd*, for instance, meant that caliphs had the infrastructure to communicate orders and policies to the provinces through letters and to utilise a network that supplied necessary intelligence, most probably also serving to oversee the governor and his work.¹⁶ The *barīd* was also an institution that caliphs used to dispatch orders secretly.¹⁷ Moreover, caliphs met with provincial delegations. Although the practice of institutionalised provincial delegations to the caliphal court had decreased by the end of the eighth century,¹⁸ people could still appeal to the caliph in person. As noted,

¹² Although governors were frequently sent from the caliphal court to the province and could change often, the administrative layer below the governor was mainly held by settled Arab-Muslim elites. Kennedy, ‘Central’, 26–32, 38.

¹³ Cobb, *White Banners*, 15. Dar, ‘Governors’ and Sijpesteijn, ‘Closing’ are the most recent discussions of such contention.

¹⁴ Two important contributions to understanding loyalty and how to maintain it in pre-modern Islamic political culture are Mottahedeh’s *Loyalty*, which examines types of loyalties in the Būyid Empire, and Marsham’s *Rituals*, in which he describes and analyses the mechanisms of the oath of allegiance in the Umayyad and early ‘Abbāsīd Empires.

¹⁵ See, for example, how al-Ḥajjāj (d. 714) asks for Syrian army reinforcements during a revolt by the Arabo-Muslim elite in Iraq: al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, IX:266–30.

¹⁶ Silverstein, *Postal Systems*, 78–80; al-Kindī, *Wulāt*, 50.

¹⁷ In two cases, the *barīd* is mentioned as a way of appointing a new governor over Egypt while the reigning governor was still in office. In the first case, Qurra b. Sharīk arrived with two of his companions in Egypt in 709 on the back of *barīd* horses led by a guide. In the second case, the Umayyad caliph ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz appointed a new governor to the province by sending him a letter with orders to the messenger to conceal the matter from everyone else: al-Kindī, *Wulāt*, 56.

¹⁸ Tillier, *Représenter*, 186.

this also happened in our case: al-Faḍl had personally appeared before Caliph Hārūn and convinced him to appoint him as the new governor of Ifrīqiya. We might speculate that the caliph agreed to this in order to avoid potential confrontation with al-Faḍl and his supporters, or that al-Faḍl convinced him that he was the best candidate to ensure that the caliph received support and, most importantly, revenues from the province.

Caliphs could also appoint loyal followers over a province in order to secure it. In the case of Ifrīqiya, it was the Muhallabid family who ruled the province for almost thirty years and thus assured relative quiet on that front. However, this does not mean that caliphs had no control over the appointment of governors, of course: they usually did not allow the governorship of the province to be passed on from father to son, for instance, presumably to prevent one branch of the Muhallabid family from achieving too much power in the province.¹⁹ The practice of not passing the rulership over Ifrīqiya from father to son had been broken with the death of al-Faḍl's father Rawḥ in 791, when his son (and al-Faḍl's brother) Qabīṣa was announced as the new governor before the eventual arrival of a caliphal letter appointing Naṣr as governor instead.²⁰ Thus, when al-Faḍl asked to be appointed over the province in 793, he effectively asked the caliph to overrule his own appointment and pass the governorship back to his own branch of the family. This contributed to the uprising in Tunis (see below).

I will now turn to a close reading of the events of the 794 revolt, zooming in on moments of negotiation in order to demonstrate the mechanisms of soft power that came into play during the event and to describe how it developed gradually from a local dispute into a provincial revolt. In the case of the Ifrīqiyan *jund*, the rebels went through various stages of negotiation during which the conflict could have been resolved in a more peaceful way: letters and messengers were exchanged between the factions, and the reigning governor appears to have taken some action to appease his disgruntled constituency. I would therefore suggest examining the present revolt within the framework of conflict resolution and/or problem-solving by rulers and rebels. While the chapter pays attention to the specific characteristics of these events, it hopes to shed light on the broader phenomenon of rebellion in the early Islamic Empire as well.

¹⁹ See the discussion in Kennedy, 'Origins', 42.

²⁰ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, XXIV:89–90.

The Revolt

We can observe several occurrences of negotiation throughout this revolt. As rebellion is regarded in this chapter as a form of negotiation and communication involving both rebels and government officials, this section will highlight the moments in which negotiation processes are visible and spelled out. I will focus on those moments in order to examine the specific demands each side had and the ways in which those demands were pronounced and voiced. The reconstructed version presented here is mainly based on the description of events in Ibn al-Athīr (d. 1233), Ibn ʿIdhārī (d. after 1312), al-Nuwayrī (d. 1333) and al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442), as they supply a considerably more detailed narrative than the earlier al-Yaʿqūbī (d. after 908) and al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), the other two sources that discuss the event. While the sources are late, and were likely subject to embellishment and editorial reshaping, they all agree on the core events that occurred, with some differences in phrasing. A full historiographical study of the sources and their authors is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Tension Building: Appointment and Resentment

The first moment of negotiation appears even before the confrontation in Tunis, with al-Faḍl's journey to the caliphal court. Al-Faḍl travelled there to ask for his appointment as provincial governor – a request that Caliph Hārūn approved.²¹ The importance of this short episode is twofold. First, it shows that rulers could sometimes avoid confrontation with strong political actors from the provinces. In our case, Hārūn chose to accept al-Faḍl's request, who at the time held a military position as commander of the ʿAbbāsīd troops stationed in Zāb, an important garrison town. This section of the *jund* was loyal to al-Faḍl, but we should also bear in mind that Zāb was the power base for the soon-to-be-ruling Aghlabīd dynasty and thus might already have had further political aspirations as well.²² Of course, one cannot determine with certainty that Hārūn chose al-Faḍl as governor due to fear of potential insurrection rather than other possible skills and benefits that al-Faḍl may have possessed, as

²¹ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, XXIV:89; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, V:297–300.

²² Chapoutot-Remadi, 'Comment', 52–7.

we are told only that he appointed him over the province (*wallābū*) without explanation, yet it is important to understand that alongside violence there existed other forms of negotiation that were available to both caliphs and provincial elites. One can only imagine the time and money that had to be spent on travel from the province to the caliphal court and back, but in any case, certain provincial elites enjoyed access to the caliphal court, be it in presence or via other ways of communication (like letters).

The practice of caliphs deciding on provincial governors after personal appeals is known from other cases. One example is Maslama b. Mukhallad (d. 682), who was reportedly appointed over Egypt by Caliph Mu'āwiya (r. 661–80) in 667 after having visited him in Damascus.²³ On the other hand, when a caliph denied delegations from the provinces, he risked potential revolt, as in the case of the so-called Berber Revolt of 740 that also began in Ifrīqiya: the future rebels had sent a delegation to Caliph Hishām (r. 724–43) to complain about their mistreatment by caliphal officials, but their efforts to meet with the caliph failed, which later helped spark the revolt.²⁴ In al-Faḍl's case, caliphal decision-making also contributed to the outbreak of the revolt: the sources explicitly connect the tension between new governor al-Faḍl and the *jund* in Tunis to the latter's continued loyalty to the deposed governor.

Building a Rebellious Group

A second stage of negotiation occurs right after al-Faḍl has appointed his relative al-Mughīra over Tunis. The *jund* feels that al-Mughīra treats them unjustly and with disrespect/belittles them (*istakhaḥḥa*) and therefore sends a letter to al-Faḍl with a request for al-Mughīra's dismissal. This is the first time in the narrative in which the future rebels present their demands to al-Faḍl, who according to some versions also treated them badly (*awḥashabum*).²⁵ Here, they merely ask for the replacement of one particular agent and have not yet used violence. At this point, the sources do not yet mention any factions within the *jund* and the *jund* seems to speak in one voice. It is important to note here that the *jund* of Ifrīqiya was far from a homogeneous group: it came

²³ Al-Kindī, *Wulāt*, 38.

²⁴ Blankinship, *End*, 225; Manzano Moreno, 'The Iberian', 590–3; Rouighi, *Inventing*, 18–33.

²⁵ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, XXIV:89; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, V:299.

to the province in two major waves and was composed of various groups from different tribes and cities.²⁶ We will return to this later. At this stage, they had not yet chosen a leader among themselves and did not formally act as a serious opposition group: this occurs during the next stage, after al-Faḍl refuses to replace al-Mughīra.

Following the governor's refusal, the *jund* turns into a more organised movement. In fact, I would argue that this is the moment in which the *jund* becomes a rebellious movement, making their demands clear and appointing a leader. This is made explicit by Ibn al-Athīr, who states that it is at this moment that the *jund* decided to abandon the governor's obedience.²⁷ We should keep in mind that the *jund* had a crucial role in running the province and in its social, economic and political life. Some of the *jund* of Tunis remained loyal to al-Faḍl's predecessor and thus had a reason to go against al-Faḍl, perhaps in the hope that they had more to gain in privileges and resources.²⁸ On the other hand, the *jund* in the province relied financially on the regular stipends they received, and thus the relations between them and the caliphal administration was reciprocal, which explains their initial reluctance to break away completely.²⁹

The second gathering of the *jund* in Tunis is narrated by the sources in more detail than the first one. We hear about the faction of the Khurāsāniyya within the *jund*, when a man from this group urges the *jund* to take control of the situation and appoint a leader over them to avoid the movement's failure.³⁰ The *jund* chooses Ibn al-Jārūd to deal with their affairs and, according to Ibn al-Athīr, gives him the oath of allegiance (*bay'a*).³¹ This act seems to be very important for rebelling groups: the appointment of a leader and exchange of oaths positions the group as one that aspires to act in an organised way against governmental agents.³²

²⁶ Kennedy, 'Origins', 38; Bosanquet in this volume.

²⁷ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, V:299: *fa-ijtima'ū 'alā tark ṭā'atibi*. For more examples of group formation allowing for the articulation of shared claims and demands, see Hurvitz's chapter in this volume.

²⁸ Djaīt, 'Wilāya', 111, 115; see also Bosanquet in this volume.

²⁹ Kennedy, 'Origins', 38.

³⁰ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, V:298; al-Maqrīzī, *Muqaffā*, IV:257 (with the oath).

³¹ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, V:290; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, V:90.

³² For another example in this volume, see Kontny-Wendt's chapter.

The oath here seems to fit an ad hoc model in order to achieve a specific purpose or goal.³³ It differs from other modes of the rebel *bay'a* in which the oath is meant to publicly denounce the caliph as illegitimate, as in the case of the 'Alid revolt discussed by Kontny-Wendt in this volume: here, the *bay'a* was an act with which people transferred loyalty from the caliph to the rebel leader. As we shall see below, the *jund* of Tunis made it clear on numerous occasions that they did not denounce the legitimacy of the caliph himself. One reason might be that while the 'Alid rebel leader enjoyed legitimacy based on his lineage and was regarded by his followers and the Umayyads alike as a claimant to the caliphate, Ibn al-Jārūd was equal in status to his companions. In his case, then, the *bay'a* was more of an agreement on who the leader of the movement should be rather than a grand statement on the legitimate ruler of the province or empire.

The appointment of a leader means that the *jund* has now moved on to a stage in which clearer hierarchies appear. In addition to the more practical implications, we can also envision this moment as a signal by the rebels to the government about their intentions. While giving and receiving an oath of allegiance was not exclusive to rebellious groups, the institution did play a significant role in revolts throughout the early Islamic period and appears in many rebellion narratives.³⁴ In other words, exchanging an oath of allegiance with a non-caliphal appointee might very well have been perceived as an act of rebellion in itself. As such, appointing Ibn al-Jārūd as leader meant the *jund* was perceived by the government officials as a rebellious group, while simultaneously it was a way for them to express their seriousness to the governor, and so we can also see it as an attempt to negotiate from a stronger position. The latter point is strengthened by the next stage of the events, in which violence starts but the rebels are still negotiating with the governor and asking for al-Mughīra's replacement.

³³ See the discussion on this type of oath in Marsham, *Rituals*, 26–8; Landau-Tasseron, *Religious Foundations*, 27, 29.

³⁴ See, for example, Sijpesteijn, 'Closing', 474 n.17; Landau-Tasseron, *Religious Foundations*, 26–7.

First Act of Violence: Besieging al-Mughīra and Negotiating from a Stronger Position

The third stage of the revolt signifies the first use of violence against government representatives. Having decided on a leader and thus moved to a new operative stage, the *jund* takes more decisive action and besieges the local governor al-Mughīra. Here, our sources have two slightly different descriptions of the events. According to al-Nuwayrī, the rebel leader Ibn al-Jārūd continues to negotiate with the provincial governor al-Faḍl by sending him a letter, which consists of two main parts. In the first part, Ibn al-Jārūd tells al-Faḍl that while the *jund* acted against al-Mughīra, those actions were not meant to be a revolt of contestation (*ikbrāj kbilāf*), but were due to al-Mughīra's actions against the state (*dawla*) itself, meaning that their alleged concern was the way his actions were hurting the community as a whole. In the second part, he again asks al-Faḍl to appoint someone else over Tunis, but this time Ibn al-Jārūd adds another threat: if al-Faḍl refuses to do so, then the *jund* will appoint someone of their own choosing. The governor replies with a letter in which he finally agrees to the demands of the *jund* and promises to appoint over them a new ruler, with the stipulation that if the *jund* goes against this new ruler, it will be a breach of the agreement on their part and they will be considered rebels (*wa-qad wallaytu 'alaykum 'āmilan fa-in da'fatumūbu fa-huwa āyat al-nakḥ minkum*).³⁵

Ibn al-Athīr's version supports al-Nuwayrī's in that it agrees that at this stage the *jund* went out against al-Mughīra and sent a letter to the governor al-Faḍl, but Ibn al-Athīr cites a different letter. Here, too, the *jund* writes to al-Faḍl and states that their actions are targeted against al-Mughīra specifically, demanding to appoint a leader of their own. The letter, however, uses a different phrase to convey their continuing loyalty to the governor/caliph, stating that 'we did not pull our hands from obedience' (*lam nukhrij yadan 'an al-ṭā'a*). Al-Faḍl then appoints his cousin 'Abdallāh b. Yazīd b. Ḥātim al-Muhallabī over them.³⁶

³⁵ Al-Maqrīzī, *Muqaffā*, IV:257; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, XXIV:91.

³⁶ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, V:300. The phrase 'not pulling hands from obedience' also appears in other cases. See for example the use of a similar term in a letter by the people of Ifrīqiya to the caliph after the murder of the governor Yazīd b. Abī Muslim in 721: al-Jahshiyārī, *Wuzarā'*, 57. See also the Introduction to this volume.

Letters are the device by which the two sides' demands and perspectives are presented. While we should be cautious in taking the text of these letters at face value, as letters in chronicles may well be literary devices or reconstructions rather than actual preserved documents,³⁷ they nonetheless carry interesting information. The purpose of this chapter is not to determine what was historically true, and it is well beyond its scope to reflect sufficiently on the appearance of letters in historical chronicles.³⁸ However, it is very likely that messages were in fact conveyed between the two sides in one form or another, and very possibly in the form of letters. The fact that sources cite different versions of the messages might suggest that while by the time the events were written down the verbatim content of the letters had been lost, there was still a memory of their role and the general message they conveyed.

What do the messages tell us? First, they allude again to the *jund*'s intentions, centred on replacing one specific governmental agent rather than the provincial administrative apparatus as a whole. Both al-Nuwayrī and Ibn al-Athīr convey this same message, but use different phrasing. This demand can be observed in other cases of contention as well, when elites in the provinces wanted to have a say in who would rule them.³⁹ In our case, the *jund* now considered itself to be in a stronger position and so added a threat. Their actions against al-Mughīra gave them more leverage in their negotiations with al-Faḍl and indeed yielded results, as the governor accepted the *jund*'s original demand and replaced al-Mughīra.

Another possible reading of the two narratives cited above is that they are a later insertion into the text by its authors/transmitters. If this is the case, we can at least get a glimpse of the story-telling of revolts, as here it appears that the narrators justify the *jund*'s actions by explaining that they rebelled due to bad governance by the governor and his viceroy in Tunis. Bad governance and unjust treatment by rulers and state agents are said to have been the trigger for many revolts and confrontations in the early Islamic Empire and in late antiquity.⁴⁰ What is interesting in this case is that even if the language of unjust

³⁷ On the appearance of letters in chronicles, see Noth, *Early Arabic*, 76–87.

³⁸ See the discussion of letters to rebels in Hagemann, 'Caliph'.

³⁹ Sijpesteijn, *Shaping*, 62; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, XVIII:72–3.

⁴⁰ See recent examples in Dar, 'Governors'; Sijpesteijn, 'Closing'; Huseini, 'Rebellion', 530; Hagemann, 'Muṭarrif', 450. Harsh treatment that causes the murder of a governor of Ifrīqiya

behaviour by rulers was a later insertion, the narrators of the events accept the notion of revolt against a specific office-holder that does not necessarily challenge caliphal authority.

With al-Mughīra out of the picture, this could have been the end of the episode and the *jund* could have returned to serve willingly under al-Faḍl. However, their success in deposing al-Mughīra, along with different views within the factions of the *jund*, contributed to an escalation in violence that ultimately ended in a provincial revolt involving many of the province's inhabitants, as we shall see in the next stage.

From Local Dispute to Provincial Revolt

While the dispute over the governor of Tunis could have ended here, a dramatic decision taken by some of the rebels changed the course of events and caused the revolt to escalate to the provincial level, involving also the indigenous population. As we saw, the governor sent another relative of his to replace al-Mughīra as city governor. However, when he reached the outskirts of Tunis, the rebels sent a delegation to see who he was and examine his intentions. Some of them warned the others that he would continue al-Mughīra's ways, so the rebel *jund* sent an army against him and killed him. With no direct information about the reason why some of the rebels feared this, we can only suspect that they believed that he was sent from the governor's court in order to continue his predecessor's policies and the harsh treatment of the *jund*, or that they perhaps thought he was coming to fight them.

An armed confrontation with the governor's forces was now inevitable. One report even cites a conversation between Ibn al-Jārūd and another rebel leader, al-Farsī, in which al-Farsī laughs about the possibility of further negotiation with the governor, saying that al-Faḍl would never forgive them for killing his kin.⁴¹ Realising that armed conflict is unavoidable, the rebels write to all the military commanders and city rulers in Ifrīqiya, urging them to join the *jund* of Tunis in their revolt and promising each one of them that they

in 721 is mentioned in al-Jahshiyārī, *Wuzarā'*, 57; for the Roman context, see Lavan, 'Writing', 19–39.

⁴¹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Muqaffā'*, IV:258.

would rule the province if they allied themselves to the rebels; many heeded his call. Ibn al-Athīr cites this letter as follows:

We looked at what al-Faḍl had done in the country of the Commander of the Faithful, and his bad conduct (*sū' sīratibi*), so we could not help but revolt (*kburūj*) against him in order to expel him. No, then we looked, and we did not find anyone more deserving of the advice of the Commander of the Faithful, because of his voice and his kindness to his army, than you [i.e. each commander receiving this letter]. We consider our souls inferior to you, and if we are victorious, we will make you our leader and will write to the Commander of the Faithful asking him for your appointment [as governor], and if it is the other, then no one knows that we wanted you, and peace.⁴²

The rebels here employ the same rhetoric as before: their actions are aimed against a specific government representative because of his unjust behaviour and they are not opposed to the superior office-holder, in this case, the caliph. In fact, they recognise the caliph as the legitimate ruler and the one who would need to confirm the new governor. The rebels also testify to the caliph's legitimacy by referring to the 'land of the Commander of the Faithful', which serves here to emphasise that the rebels do not contest caliphal rule over the empire.

Al-Faḍl probably felt that the negotiations with the rebels had failed at this stage. The murder of his cousin and prospective new governor was unacceptable, much like the rebels suspected. In response, al-Faḍl sent a military force against Tunis, but the rebels won and chased the governor's army back to Kairouan. They besieged the capital city for several days until eventually the population of the city opened the gates and allowed them in. Al-Faḍl and some of his men escaped, but Muhallabid rule of the province came to an end with the family's expulsion from the province and Ibn al-Jārūd taking control of Ifrīqiya. The newly proclaimed 'rebel governor' faced many challenges at this point, needing to establish himself as the new ruler facing intra-provincial competition and having to convince the caliph of his legitimacy, waiting to see how the caliph would react to the uprising in the far-away province. In order to deal with potential competition from al-Faḍl, Ibn al-Jārūd initially chose to expel him and his family, whose extended period of rule over Ifrīqiya might

⁴² Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, V:300.

have supported claims to legitimate rulership, from the province. However, taking the advice of some of his companions, Ibn al-Jārūd eventually decided that expelling al-Faḍl was not enough, fearing that al-Faḍl would gather support and return to fight him. He therefore ordered his men to chase al-Faḍl down and kill him; his troops caught up with al-Faḍl before the latter could reach Tripoli and slew him and his companions.⁴³

Aftermath: The Chain of Revolts

The unrest in the province was anything but over, however. In the same year, 794, the province was shaken by subsequent revolts, this time against Ibn al-Jārūd himself. Ibn al-Jārūd's killing of the Muhallabī governor was perhaps one step too far, as it enraged al-Faḍl's loyal constituency in Zāb, the *jund* of which he had previously led before being appointed as provincial governor. They rose against Ibn al-Jārūd, led by a certain al-A'ālā. At the same time, the caliphal court reacted to the events in three different ways. First, the caliph sent an army to the province to regain control of Kairouan; the troops were led by Harthama b. A'yān, who had just finished putting down revolts in the Egyptian Delta and so was in the vicinity.

Alongside employing coercive power, the caliphal court enacted two mechanisms of soft power to try to persuade Ibn al-Jārūd to cease his rebellious actions. First, the caliph's secretary, Yaḥyā b. Khālīd al-Barmakī (d. 806), sent letters to Ibn al-Jārūd, promising him benefits if he turned back from what was perceived as disobedience by the caliphal court in Baghdad.⁴⁴ The second method of negotiating with Ibn al-Jārūd was through an emissary. A certain Yaqtīn b. Mūsā (d. 802/3) was sent to the province to negotiate with Ibn al-Jārūd in person.⁴⁵ Yaqtīn arrived just before the imperial army. According to Ibn al-Athīr, he was chosen because of his good qualities and his good standing

⁴³ Ibn 'Idhārī, *Bayān*, I:88.

⁴⁴ See similar promises by caliphs to rebels in Hagemann, 'Caliph', 24–5.

⁴⁵ Here, there seems to be a confusion in the sources regarding the emissary. Most sources credit a certain Yaḥyā b. Mūsā, presumably either referring to Yaḥyā al-Barmakī or mentioning Yaqtīn by an incorrect personal name. The sources are not clear on who exactly sent Yaqtīn: al-Ṭabarī says that it was the vizier Yaḥyā (*Tārīkh*, XXX:142); al-Nuwayrī suggests that Yaqtīn was sent by Hārūn himself or that Yaḥyā sent Yaqtīn ahead to the province to negotiate in person (*Nihāya*, XXIV:93). Ibn al-Athīr argues that it was decided by Harthama in Egypt (*Kāmil*, V:300).

with the faction of the Khurāsāniyya within the *jund*.⁴⁶ The Khurāsāniyya is an interesting case: descendants of people who participated in the ‘Abbāsīd takeover, they were originally sent to the provinces to serve as loyal supporters of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphs and to counter the influence of other provincial Arab elites.⁴⁷ Their power and importance stemmed from their indispensability to governors, who relied on them as the military force of the province.

Familiarity with rebellious groups also played a role in the appointments of emissaries in other cases.⁴⁸ And indeed, this proved to be beneficial in this case, as Yaqtīn was able to persuade al-Farsī, the leader of the *jund*’s Khurāsāniyya faction, to renounce his obedience to Ibn al-Jārūd. Yaqtīn had been a long-time opponent of the Umayyads; after the ‘Abbāsīd takeover, he became a respected and influential man during the caliphate of al-Ṣaffāḥ (r. 749–54). He fought alongside the Khurāsāniyya at the Battle of Fakhkh in Iraq in 786, helping to put down an ‘Alid revolt against the ‘Abbāsīds. This might explain why he was highly regarded by the Khurāsāniyya⁴⁹ and indicates a high level of awareness of ties and relations between local, regional, socio-political and economic actors at the caliphal court, which used sophisticated methods to negotiate with rebellious elements and played different factions against each other to the caliph’s advantage.

Having learned about al-Farsī’s agreement with Yaqtīn, Ibn al-Jārūd planned and succeeded in arranging al-Farsī’s assassination. Now, however, faced with both the caliphal army approaching from Egypt and al-Faḍl’s vengeful former *jund* coming from Zāb, the people of Ifrīqiya reportedly transferred their loyalty again and joined the caliphal forces. Ibn al-Jārūd clearly realised that he was in a tough position: he negotiated an *amān* for himself from the caliphal agent and then went to Baghdad. Ibn al-Athīr claims that he was imprisoned in Baghdad, while al-Ṭabarī states that he returned to Baghdad and there received gifts from the caliph, who also appointed him to a high office.⁵⁰ Al-Maqrīzī states that Ibn al-Jārūd died in Egypt some time after receiving

⁴⁶ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, V:301.

⁴⁷ Cobb, *White Banners*, 31–4.

⁴⁸ Herrero-Soto, ‘Perdón’, IX.

⁴⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, XXX:142; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, XXIV:92.

⁵⁰ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, V:301; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, XXX:142.

the *amān*.⁵¹ We may not know exactly what happened to Ibn al-Jārūd, but it is worth pointing out that the practice of negotiating an *amān* for rebels and then allowing them to go back to the capital was a practice that we are familiar with from other cases.⁵²

This marks the end of the revolt of the *jund* of Tunis. The caliphal army led by Harthama b. Aʿyān took over Kairouan and Harthama was appointed as the new governor of Ifrīqiya. The *jund* that came from the Zāb, joined by many of the province's inhabitants, including the North African tribes, took revenge by killing some of Ibn al-Jārūd's companions before returning home upon the order of the caliphal emissary.⁵³

Conclusions

This chapter discussed the unfolding of a revolt within the frame of problem-solving. It followed the events through different stages, describing the birth and subsequent development of a rebellious movement: from al-Faḍl's appointment as governor of Ifrīqiya and his behaviour toward the *jund*, through the different stages of escalation in the relationships between al-Faḍl and the *jund*, the expulsion and killing of the governor, and finally the arrival of a caliphal agent and army in the province that ended this episode. The different stages serve here as a reminder of how local contentious events could develop into full-scale revolt, and that these events had tipping points at which revolt could have been prevented.

There are several moments in which the different factions could have perhaps resolved their dispute peacefully: al-Faḍl's first rejection of the rebels' request to replace al-Mughīra motivated the rebels to gather and choose a leader, an action that moved them to a more operative stage of contention and perhaps could be seen as the moment in which they became a rebellious party with an internal hierarchy and office-holders, indicating that non-violent contentious action can also be categorised as rebellion within the problem-solving framework. The *jund*'s killing of the replacement governor sent from Kairouan transformed this event from local contention in Tunis to full-on

⁵¹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Muqaffā*, IV:258.

⁵² Herrero-Soto, 'Perdón', IX–XIII. The rebel Naṣr b. Shabath also received a safe-conduct from Caliph al-Ma'mūn under the stipulation that he would go to Baghdad: *EF*, 'Naṣr b. Shabath al-'Uqaylī' (H.-L. Hagemann).

⁵³ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, V:300–2; al-Maqrīzī, *Muqaffā*, IV:258–9.

provincial revolt. The subsequent murder of al-Faḍl was perceived by the *jund* of the Zāb as an excessive move, or at the very least gave them a legitimate reason to oppose Ibn al-Jārūd. Their march on Kairouan complicated an already complex political and military situation and contributed to Ibn al-Jārūd's decision to accept an *amān*. All of these examples are moments in which the situation escalated.

I argued here that the revolt of 793–4 sheds light on the various mechanisms and actions that were at everyone's disposal: letters and messages were sent to negotiate between rebels and rulers, private meetings were held in order to negotiate in person, safe-conducts were given, and armed violence was threatened and, in some cases, carried out. This chapter thus locates violent conflict at one point on a broader spectrum of possible oppositional action, arguing that this revolt served as a means of negotiation and communication between the *jund* and the government. It also demonstrates that rulers also opted to use soft power rather than exercising coercive power immediately, for instance by accepting the demands of (potential) rebels to avoid potential confrontation. This is evident in our case in Hārūn's appointment of al-Faḍl over Ifrīqiya and al-Faḍl's replacing the ruler of Tunis. If we consider the possible costs of sending an army, the distance that this army needed to travel,⁵⁴ and potential dangers along the way, it made sense for rulers to try to diffuse contentious events in more peaceful ways. The rebels, on the other hand, held enough power and leverage as members of the military upon which 'Abbāsīd/Muhallabid rule relied to be able to communicate their messages to the governor and the caliph. They also acted in ways that helped them to strengthen their position and change the situation to their own benefit: by besieging al-Mughīra, they were able to make their demands more firmly and convince the governor to accept them.

This case study also touched upon the question of loyalty and obedience, which is discussed by all three sides (governor, caliph and rebels). The emphasis of the rebels' messages on their obedience indicates that they sought a way to legitimise their actions through the language of obedience. This was not always accepted, as the caliph and his court regarded them as disobedient, sent an army against them, and removed Ibn al-Jārūd from his position. The question of loyalty and obedience also features in numerous other instances throughout

⁵⁴ Kennedy, 'Rise', 100.

the revolt: the people of the province changed their loyalty to and from Ibn al-Jārūd, and the letters that the rebels sent to the provincial military leaders and city rulers specifically legitimised their actions by accusing agents of the government of acting against the state (*dawla*). This helps us to understand ‘loyalty’ and ‘obedience’ not as a one-way process in which rulers received public support unconditionally, but rather as an exchange of ideas and perceptions of just rule as well as reciprocal obligation, a process in which different historical actors saw themselves as guardians of (what they perceived) was just and right.⁵⁵ This shared political language and consensus about the system of governance were the foundation from which all these actors drew legitimacy.

The fact that the rebellious party was part of the *jund* was also significant in that they were composed of different groups. It seems that there was disagreement between those factions at certain moments of the events, when some groups engaged in actions that were not agreed upon by the rest, as in the killing of al-Mughīra’s replacement sent from Kairouan. Such disagreement shows how some groups facilitated fully armed revolt, while others were perhaps more content to keep the dispute on a smaller scale. The factions within the *jund* of Tunis also proved crucial after they were able to take over the province, as the negotiator Yaqīn b. Mūsā convinced the Khurāsāniyya faction to leave Ibn al-Jārūd. The volatility of the *jund* as comprising different factions continued to be a factor, as described in detail by Bosanquet in her contribution to this volume.

This case study also offers insight into the phenomenon of rebellion in the early Islamic Empire more broadly. First, it suggests that violent revolts did not break out *ex nihilo*, but rather that they were part of various processes, mechanisms and institutions of negotiation in the political arena such as personal meetings, petitioning and safe-conducts. Second, it features mechanisms that fit a certain type of rebellion, that is, revolt by Arab-Muslim provincial elites. These men had certain expectations of how they should be treated and what constituted unjust behaviour towards them. By revolting against one caliphal agent, they apparently did not seek to overthrow the caliph or the system, something our sources make a point to stress. This is different from other, rare confrontations in the empire aimed at overthrowing the caliph or caliphal

⁵⁵ On the reciprocity of the *bayʿa*, see Landau-Tasseron, *Religious Foundations*, 9–15.

system. The large-scale revolts discussed here existed alongside more local types of opposition, such as withholding taxes or disobeying orders. Our case here shows that even in the midst of violent confrontation, rulers and rebels could opt to continue negotiating terms. Rebellion might therefore be understood not as a total breakdown of the imperial system, but as an established element in the repertoire of pre-modern Islamicate power politics.

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10

Changing Patterns of Rebellion in Aghlabid Ifrīqiya*

Antonia Bosanquet

Introduction

The Arab province of Ifrīqiya was beset by conflicts of both an internal and external nature during its early years. This was due not only to the non-Arabs that inhabited the conquered territories, but also to the *jund* itself, the Arab troops that were supposed to defend the province. Secessions, revolts and structural breakdown due to intra-*jund* rivalry meant that imperial rule over Ifrīqiya was more contentious than it was over other provinces of the Empire,¹ although the challenges facing the conquerors here might usefully be compared with those faced by the *jund* in the eastern frontier province of Khurāsān in the first decades after its conquest.² Although the Muhallabid rulers that governed the province from 154/771 brought a period of respite from the almost continuous conflict and frequent alternation of governors,³ the dynasty's control over the province ended in 178/795,⁴ again at the hands of the *jund*, and near-chaos returned. This lasted until 184/800, when Ibrāhīm

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¹ Bosanquet, 'Ifrīqiya's Status', 217–36, 220.

² See Haug in this volume.

³ Kennedy, 'Origins', 31–48, 34. On Muhallabid rule over Ifrīqiya, see Talbi, *L'Émirat*, 74–82.

⁴ Ibn 'Idhārī, *Bayān*, I:122.

b. al-Aghlab, a general in Ifrīqiya who had restored ‘Abbāsīd power after another *jund* revolt, was named governor of the province by the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd. When Ibrāhīm b. al-Aghlab died in 196/812, he was succeeded by his son, Abū l-‘Abbās Muḥammad (r. 196/812–201/817). This father-son transition of rule heralded the beginning of the Aghlabid dynasty, which ruled over Ifrīqiya until the Fatimid conquest of the province in 296/909.⁵

Ibrāhīm b. al-Aghlab’s reign and the foundation of the Aghlabid dynasty is portrayed by Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) as the beginning of a new, more stable phase in the history of Arab Ifrīqiya.⁶ However, writing in the ninth/fifteenth century, and with a specific approach to the reconstruction and interpretation of history,⁷ Ibn Khaldūn’s presentation of this transition conveys a sense of inevitability that was by no means apparent in the third/ninth century. This study will show that the development of political and social stability in third/ninth-century Ifrīqiya was not a foregone conclusion, and should rather be seen as the result of skilful management of the rebellious elements of Ifrīqiyan society,⁸ a redistribution of military dependency to private troops as well as the *jund*, and careful handling of the relationship with the caliphate in the east. Another important element was the improving economy in Ifrīqiya, particularly regarding trade across the Mediterranean.

I will discuss political change in the province by analysing one of the most serious rebellions in the history of Aghlabid Ifrīqiya, led by Maṣṣūr al-Ṭunbudhī against the Aghlabid ruler Ziyādat Allāh in 208/823. The analysis of al-Ṭunbudhī’s rebellion will relate it to a lack of cohesion within the Arab settled population of Ifrīqiya, showing how the fragility of social alliances initially contributed to the success of the rebellion, but ultimately undermined the movement by preventing a unified front from resisting the recovery of the state by Aghlabid forces. It will also highlight the role of Tunis as the city from which many of the rebellions against Arab rule of Ifrīqiya originated. The closing section will consider the significance of this rebellion, arguing

⁵ Ibn ‘Idhārī, *Bayān*, I:92; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, XXIV:51–4. The period of Aghlabid rule over Ifrīqiya is studied in depth by Talbi, *L’Émirat*. Further literature is available in Anderson *et al.*, eds, *Aghlabids*.

⁶ Ibn Khaldūn, *Dīwān*, IV:250.

⁷ On the ‘khaldunization’ of history, see Rouighi, *Inventing*, 140–57.

⁸ Al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, IV:215.

that al-Ṭunbudhī's uprising was a key moment in the Aghlabids' transition to dynastic rulers of a quasi-independent province of the 'Abbāsid Empire.

The Rebellion of al-Ṭunbudhī

In 208/823 the former governor of Tripoli, Maṣṣūr b. Naṣr al-Ṭunbudhī, revolted against the third Aghlabid *amīr*, Ziyādat Allāh b. Ibrāhīm al-Aghlab (r. 201/817–223/838).⁹ According to al-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333), al-Ṭunbudhī's revolt began after he criticised the *amīr*'s treatment of a former rebel, 'Amr b. Mu'āwiya al-Qaysī.¹⁰ Ibn Mu'āwiya had been appointed as governor of Kasserine¹¹ but, as he became more powerful, he began to seek autonomous rule. His attempt was put down by the Aghlabid army and 'Amr was imprisoned together with his two sons. Shortly afterwards, Ziyādat Allāh killed the three men and staged a drinking party at which their heads were prominently displayed.¹² Ibn 'Idhārī notes that Ziyādat Allāh's action was in response to the suggestion that he was afraid of the Qaysī tribe and a desire to prove the contrary.¹³ Ziyādat Allāh belonged to the Banī Tamīm, which was a different tribe to the Qaysīs. Upon hearing about the treatment meted out to the rebels, al-Ṭunbudhī, also a Qaysī,¹⁴ is described as enraged and calling out angrily against the Banī Tamīm, saying he wished for the manpower to confront them. As he was still the governor of Tripoli, his sentiments were reported to Ziyādat Allāh, who promptly dismissed him and was only with difficulty persuaded not to kill him.¹⁵ Al-Ṭunbudhī returned to his home, a fort (*qasr*) known as Ṭunbudh in the region of al-Muḥammadiyya. Muḥammadiyya was not far from Tunis and after his return, al-Ṭunbudhī agitated among the city's *jund*, encouraging them to rebel against the *amīr*. Al-Ṭunbudhī was then joined by other *jund* leaders.¹⁶

When Ziyādat Allāh discovered that a rebellion was underway, he sent troops to arrest al-Ṭunbudhī, led by Muḥammad b. Ḥamza. But Ibn Ḥamza's

⁹ Šāliḥ Wahb, 'Ḥarakat', 433–42.

¹⁰ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, XXIV:58.

¹¹ Ar. al-Qasrayn. The Islamic settlement was built on the site of the Roman city of Cilium, and the two fortresses after which it was named were two mausoleums remaining from this period. About 300 km from Tunis, it lies to the south-west of Kairouan, closer to the frontier Zāb region.

¹² Ibn al-Abbār, *Hulla*, I:110.

¹³ Ibn 'Idhārī, *Bayān*, I:138.

¹⁴ See below, p. 245.

¹⁵ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, XXIV:58.

¹⁶ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Buldān*, 138.

troops were outwitted and then killed by al-Ṭunbudhī's men,¹⁷ who then went on to murder the Aghlabid governor of Tunis. Ziyādat Allāh sent a second set of troops to suppress the rebellion, this time led by his cousin and vizier, al-Aghlab b. 'Abdallāh b. al-Aghlab, and the two sides met in battle close to the Sebkhā al-Sejourni, near Tunis. But this battle, known as the Battle of Sebkhā, in 209/824, also ended in defeat for the Aghlabids. According to al-Nuwayrī, the Aghlabid troops had agreed to surrender to al-Ṭunbudhī's troops beforehand, angered by Ziyādat Allāh's high-handed threats about their fate, should they lose.¹⁸

After this defeat, several other *jund* factions renounced their loyalty to the Aghlabids and al-Ṭunbudhī came to control much of northern Ifrīqiya.¹⁹ Even when Ziyādat Allāh offered *amānāt* (safe passage guarantees) to the rebel troops, they refused to renounce their loyalty to al-Ṭunbudhī.²⁰ A further campaign against the rebels, also led by al-Aghlab b. 'Abdallāh, was defeated as well. This time al-Aghlab and other elite members of Ziyādat Allāh's troops were killed, further increasing the ruler's isolation.

In Jumāda 209/September 824,²¹ al-Ṭunbudhī's troops were able to take Kairouan after some of its *jund* sided with the rebels. But the city's loyalties were divided and Ziyādat Allāh's troops re-entered shortly afterwards. Even after retaking the city, it was clearly not safe for the ruler to stay there and Ziyādat Allāh barricaded himself in the palace city of 'Abbāsiyya, while conflict continued around the region.

It appears that al-Ṭunbudhī's ambition was to become ruler of all or most of the province of Ifrīqiya, after the fashion of the Aghlabid or Muhallabid rulers. He minted dirhams in his name from 210/825 which, like the Aghlabid dirhams, do not refer to the caliph in Baghdad.²² However, another dirham also struck in 209/824 contains the same legend as the coin struck under al-Ṭunbudhī, but without al-Ṭunbudhī's name. In contrast to the coin minted

¹⁷ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, XI:59; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, V:433.

¹⁸ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, XI:59. Collusion between Arab rebels and the *jund* is also given as the reason for the success of a rebellion in rural Egypt in 168/784. Mikhail, 'Notes', 282; al-Kindī, *Wulāt*, 125.

¹⁹ Ibn Khaldūn, *Dīwān*, IV:252.

²⁰ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, XI:59.

²¹ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, V:434.

²² Bahri, *Hommes*, I:254.

by al-Ṭunbudhī, it refers to the mercy of the caliph (*rahmat al-khalīfa*). Another dirham, struck in 210/825, contains the same legend, and refers to the mercy of the caliph, but contains the name of ‘Alī as well.²³ Al-‘Ush argues that the reference to the caliph on some of the coins indicates that they were minted by rebels against Aghlabid authority, and that the submission to Baghdad expressed on the coin was an attempt to acquire the caliph’s support for their rebellion.²⁴

Without speculating further about the identity of those who minted the other coins,²⁵ it seems likely that the reference to the caliph on one dirham and its absence on coins struck in al-Ṭunbudhī’s name is an indication that there were others, alongside al-Ṭunbudhī, who had acquired substantial authority in the region and had similar ambitions. This suggestion corresponds to the depiction of the literary sources of the *jund* factions as asserting control over separate regions,²⁶ particularly after al-Ṭunbudhī’s troops were expelled from Kairouan. For example, the *jund* commander ‘Āmir b. Nāfi’ initially acted as al-Ṭunbudhī’s deputy but then abandoned him after he was defeated in Kairouan and attempted to establish autonomous rule over a separate part of the province. Another key commander was ‘Abd al-Salām b. al-Mufarraj, who joined the rebels’ battles against the Aghlabid troops but maintained de facto independent rule over the western city of Beja.²⁷

Ziyādat Allāh attempted to win back power at a battle in Sbiba, in Muḥarram 209/824, but his troops, now severely weakened, lost again. By now the Aghlabid ruler had lost control over all regions of the province except the one south of Kairouan, comprising Gabes, the Sahel, Nafzawa and Tripoli.²⁸ Symbolising how tenuous his hold on power had become, it was now the *jund*’s turn to offer him an *amān* to leave Ifrīqiya, if he abdicated as ruler.²⁹

²³ Fenina, ‘Mağğāna’, 207.

²⁴ Al-‘Ush, *Monnaies*, 20.

²⁵ Bahri suggests that the other coins were minted by ‘Imrān b. Mujālid: Bahri, *Hommes*, I:254. On the identity of ‘Alī, named on one dirham, see Fenina, ‘Mağğāna’.

²⁶ Ibn Khaldūn, *Dīwān*, IV:250.

²⁷ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, V:435.

²⁸ Ibn ‘Idhārī, *Bayān*, I:141. Ibn Khaldūn has Tunis instead of Gabes, surely a copyist’s error: Ibn Khaldūn, *Dīwān*, IV:253.

²⁹ Ibn Khaldūn, *Dīwān*, IV:253; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, V:435; Ibn ‘Idhārī, *Bayān*, I:141.

Most sources depict the turning point as the move by Ziyādat Allāh's advisor, Sufyān b. Sawāda, to obtain the support of the *jund* of Nafzawa and the surrounding non-Arab tribes. Troops described as Berbers, of whom the Zanata comprised the majority, joined the battle against the troops of 'Āmir b. Nāfi' and defeated them.³⁰ Following this, the Aghlabid troops were able to push back against the rebels, retaking one city after another.

Most sources depict the rebellion as dissolving due to the rivalry between al-Ṭunbudhī and 'Āmir b. Nāfi', and 'Āmir's envy for al-Ṭunbudhī more specifically. In 211/826 'Āmir, supported by most of the *jund*, besieged al-Ṭunbudhī's fort in Muḥammadiyya until al-Ṭunbudhī surrendered. Although al-Ṭunbudhī was promised an *amān* to depart for the east, he was forced into a prison en route,³¹ where he was murdered by 'Āmir's men.³² This murder provoked further conflict between the *jund* factions.³³ The men who had supported al-Ṭunbudhī and saw the revocation of the *amān* as a personal insult³⁴ were now opposed to 'Āmir b. Nāfi'.³⁵ 'Āmir took control of Tunis but could not unite the city's *jund*. In 214/829 he fell ill and died, the rebellion having run out of steam long before this point.

After their victory at Nafzawa, Aghlabid troops had gradually recovered control of the cities held by rebellious *jund* commanders, most of which offered little resistance. In 212/827, Ziyādat Allāh began a series of raids on the island of Sicily.³⁶ As Talbi observes, the fact that Ziyādat Allāh was able to find sufficient troops to undertake a military campaign shows how much ground

³⁰ Ibn Khaldūn, *Dīwān*, IV:253.

³¹ Most of the sources have Djerba, but its distance from the site of the conflict makes this unlikely. Talbi's interpretation, that the Arabic 'Djerba' is a corruption of 'Coreva', is convincing; Talbi, *L'Émirat*, 198.

³² Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, V:484.

³³ For further discussion of factional rivalry within a *jund* during rebellion, see Dar's chapter in this volume.

³⁴ The betrayal of an *amān*, or allowing a person's death after guaranteeing them safety, was regarded as deeply insulting to the concluding parties. For example, the departure of the renowned theologian Yaḥyā b. Sallām (d. 200/815) from Ifrīqiya is attributed to his indignation that the *amān* he had helped to formulate for a different rebel, 'Imrān b. Mujālid, was betrayed by the Aghlabid *amīr* 'Abdallāh b. Ibrāhīm, who killed 'Imrān in 197/813: Ibn al-Abbār, *Hulla*, I:35. On 'Imrān's role in rebellions in Ifrīqiya, see below, p. 251.

³⁵ Talbi, *L'Émirat*, 199.

³⁶ On raids in Sicily from Ifrīqiya before the Aghlabid period, see Djaīt, 'Wilāya', 117; Talbi, *L'Émirat*, 386–9.

he had managed to regain by this point,³⁷ but the campaign also contributed to the unification of the *jund* behind him. It further ensured new resources for settling the financial grievances that had underlain some of the rebellions.³⁸

Causes for the Rebellion

Were tribal loyalties the reason for the rebellion's momentum? This is at least hinted at by al-Nuwayrī, who depicts al-Ṭunbudhī's murder as motivated by tribal rivalry.³⁹ Although al-Nuwayrī's account was produced much later than the events that it describes and doubtless incorporates an eighth/fourteenth-century perspective, his account of the rebellion is likely to have been based on that of the fifth/eleventh-century Ifrīqiyān historian al-Raḡīq, or a dependent source,⁴⁰ suggesting that tribal affiliation was also invoked as an explanation in earlier periods. Ibn 'Idhārī, also writing in the eighth/fourteenth century and whose sources are known to have included al-Raḡīq,⁴¹ also takes it for granted that tribal affiliation was a factor for conflict. His reference to Ziyādat Allāh's fear of angering the province's Qaysī element reminds the reader that, despite the strength of the Tamīmī Aghlabids, they were vulnerable to the influential Qaysī confederation. This is reflected in the depiction of al-Ṭunbudhī, a Qaysī, openly voicing his anger at the Aghlabids' harsh treatment of 'Amr b. Mu'āwiya, another Qaysī, suggesting that he felt a certain amount of impunity vis-à-vis the rulers. The Qaysīs were an important confederation within the *jund* and it is likely that al-Ṭunbudhī's Qaysī lineage enabled him to amass greater support than would otherwise have been the case. When 'Āmir b. Nāfi', who was not a Qaysī, claimed leadership of the rebellion, any cohesive force that it possessed seems to have been lost.

However, even if concepts of tribal loyalty did play a role, the rebellion cannot be explained solely in these terms. The Qaysīs and Tamīmīs both belonged to the northern Arabian or Muḍarī tribal confederation and had

³⁷ Talbi, *L'Émirat*, 205.

³⁸ Nef, 'Aghlabides', 191–211 and 'Reinterpreting'; Talbi, *L'Émirat*, 206.

³⁹ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, XXIV:62.

⁴⁰ Al-Raḡīq's account of al-Ṭunbudhī's rebellion has not survived. See Bosanquet, 'How the Umayyads', 409–11; al-Raḡīq, *Quṭb al-surūr*, 3–8. On whether al-Raḡīq or Ibn al-Raḡīq is the correct name, and on the writer's formative role in the Ifrīqiyān historical tradition, see Amara, 'al-Raḡīq'.

⁴¹ Amara, 'al-Raḡīq', 129–38.

both arrived in Ifrīqiya in 144/761, to recover the province from non-Arab Ibādīs who had seized control there.⁴² Ibrāhīm b. al-Aghlab's father had been a leader of one of the troop contingents, and the loyalty that he had commanded among the *jund* was part of the reason why Ibrāhīm b. al-Aghlab was able to avoid assassination during the first years of his rule. Thus, there were ties binding the Tamīm with the Qays in Ifrīqiya, which related to their joint reconquest of the province. The rebellion should be understood as partly caused by the Aghlabids' effort to weaken these ties, to centralise power within their own dynasty.

References to this initiative are found in both early and later historical sources. Writing in the eighth/fourteenth century, al-Nuwayrī describes the Aghlabid period as the time of the emergence of the *dawla* of Ifrīqiya. Although the earlier historian al-Raqīq also refers to the Aghlabid period in these terms (*ibtidā' dawlat Ifrīqiya*),⁴³ al-Nuwayrī explains the phrase in more detail:⁴⁴

This *dawla* was the first political entity established in Ifrīqiya that was referred to as such. Before them [the Aghlabids] there were governors; if one of them died or did something that necessitated his removal, he would be removed by whoever was caliph at the time, in the Umayyad or 'Abbāsīd Empire. But when the *dawla* [of Ifrīqiya] was established it was almost independent.⁴⁵

Here, and in the longer discussion that follows, it is evident that for al-Nuwayrī, Ifrīqiya's status as a *dawla* is defined by its rulers' autonomy in determining the province's affairs and leadership.⁴⁶ However, the Aghlabids' detachment

⁴² On the Ibādī appropriation of Tripoli and Kairouan and their recovery by 'Abbāsīd forces, see Schwartz, *Anfänge*, 164–89. See the valuable non-Arab view of events in al-Shammākhī, *Sīyar*, I:121–4.

⁴³ Al-Raqīq, *Tārīkh*, 176.

⁴⁴ *Dawla* is defined in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* as a dynasty, or the period of an individual's rule, but al-Nuwayrī evokes other connotations that would be more appropriate for the political entity itself. For example, he parallels the term *dawla* with the province name of Ifrīqiya, suggesting that *dawla*, like Ifrīqiya, carries territorial or political significance beyond that of personal rule. *EP*, 'Dawla' (F. Rosenthal).

⁴⁵ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, XXIV:45.

⁴⁶ Most modern historians of Tunisia also see the Aghlabid period as inaugurating political independence for Ifrīqiya. See, for example, Talbi, 'L'Ifrīqiya', 103.

from the dictates of the 'Abbāsīd caliphs was only part of their path towards 'dawla-ship'. Equally important was the rulers' distancing of themselves from the *jund*, which was perhaps an even more significant impediment to independence than the caliphs in Baghdad.

The *jund* had been the most important political actor in Ifrīqiya before the arrival of Ibrāhīm b. al-Aghlab. Both when it was ruled by governors (*wulāt*) sent by the Umayyad caliphs and when members of the Muhallabid family held control, members of the *jund* had exercised considerable control over appointments and the distribution of resources.⁴⁷ But their role diminished in the early decades of Aghlabid rule, as the ruling family began to centralise power and increase control over key offices. This transition began under Ibrāhīm b. al-Aghlab, whose army of slaves imported from the sub-Sahara gave the dynasty an independence from the *jund* that the Umayyad *wulāt* and the Muhallabids had not had.⁴⁸ This strategical move is praised by al-Ṣafādī,⁴⁹ but clearly rankled with the *jund* itself.

After Ibrāhīm, Ziyādat Allāh continued the practice of diversifying military dependence away from the *jund* by buying slaves and manumitting them to become his soldiers. This is suggested by the rhetoric attributed to the Aghlabid general who addressed the troops before the Battle of Sebkhā, in which he refers to Ziyādat Allāh as the one who had removed their shackles (*fakka riqābakum*).⁵⁰ At the same time, the Aghlabid rulers were either reducing the pay of the *jund* or avoiding paying them altogether. Rather than being due to financial constraints, this may have been part of a long-term plan to demobilise the *jund* and end their stranglehold over the political affairs of the province.⁵¹ Many of the *jund* would have had alternative sources of income, such as farm estates,⁵² piracy or trade, and so were not dependent on their salary. The financial consequences were significant nonetheless.

However, perhaps more important than the economic aspect was the decline in political and social status that this move heralded. Ziyādat Allāh's

⁴⁷ Djaīt, 'Wilāya', 111, 115.

⁴⁸ Al-Raḡīq, *Tārīkh*, 186–8.

⁴⁹ Al-Ṣafādī, *Wāfi*, V:215.

⁵⁰ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, XXIV:58.

⁵¹ Bahri, *Hommes*, I:249.

⁵² Talbi, 'Law', 220–41.

harsh treatment of the *jund* and his refusal to overlook slights to his authority, as his father had done, reflect this.⁵³ Ziyādat Allāh's reaction to al-Ṭunbudhī's outburst in Tripoli can be seen as an example of this policy, as can his ostentatious murder of 'Amr b. Mu'āwiya and his sons.

Ziyādat Allāh's exclusion of *jund* members from political power, and the concentration of these functions within his family,⁵⁴ is also indicated by the names of commanders sent to suppress the rebellion. The governor of Tunis, whom al-Ṭunbudhī murdered, was a cousin of Ziyādat Allāh, and the *amīr*'s vizier and military commander for his campaigns against al-Ṭunbudhī, Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh b. al-Aghlab, was his nephew. Sufyān b. Sawāda, who persuaded the Berbers around Nafzawa to support the Aghlabids against 'Āmir b. Nāfi', was the son of Ziyādat Allāh's cousin. Of all the key persons mentioned in the campaign against the rebels, only Muḥammad b. Ḥamza al-Rāzī was not an Aghlabid family member. All these policies aimed at strengthening the Aghlabid dynasty at the cost of the *jund* would have been particularly provocative for the factions that had helped to bring Ibrāhīm b. al-Aghlab to power and expected to be rewarded for their loyalty. A further factor in the rebellion was thus certain groups' expectation of loyalty from the Aghlabids, and the resentment that this was now being withdrawn.

At the same time, the success of the rebellion also reflects how slowly Aghlabid centralisation had advanced. Following their failure to hold Kairouan, Ibn 'Idhārī depicts the various *jund* leaders retreating to set up near-independent rule in their own regions,⁵⁵ suggesting that the *jund* still acted as local powers, without any loyalty towards Kairouan that might have exerted a cohesive influence.

Causes for the Rebellion's Failure

Many of the explanations offered for the success of the rebellion can also be given for its ultimate failure. The rebels were united in their objection to what they regarded as illegitimate practices, but no clear objectives, in terms of

⁵³ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, XXIV:58.

⁵⁴ A similar practice can be noted for the Aghlabid governors posted on Sicily, most of whom were part of the Aghlabid ruling elite. Granara, *Narrating*, 12. On the conquest and administration of Aghlabid Sicily, see Talbi, *L'Émirat*, 456–540.

⁵⁵ Ibn 'Idhārī, *Bayān*, I:141.

setting a different ruler over Ifrīqiya, or carving out a separate realm of rule, are mentioned in the sources. Coins minted in his name show that al-Ṭunbudhī positioned himself as *amīr* in the fashion of Ziyādat Allāh, after his uprising became more successful. But none of the literary accounts depicts him specifying his ambitions at the start of the rebellion. The existence of coins minted neither by the Aghlabids nor al-Ṭunbudhī also suggests that more than one actor attempted to establish themselves as a regional power after Ziyādat Allāh's control diminished. Although al-Ṭunbudhī's appeal to existing dissatisfaction among the *jund*, and possibly his identity as a Muḍarī Arab, was sufficient to unite the various factions against the Aghlabid leader, the lack of strategy or clear claim to leadership weakened his ability to overcome the centrifugal tendencies that had drawn the factions to rebellion in the first place.

This is exemplified by the role that Kairouan played in the conflict. Al-Ṭunbudhī's troops captured the city in Jumāda 209/September 824 and tried to hold it by hastily constructing walls against an attempted reconquest.⁵⁶ However, among the *jund* of the city, reactions to the rebellion were divided. The two chief judges, Asad b. al-Furāt and Abū Muḥriz, refused to join the rebels, indicating continued support for the Aghlabids among the population.⁵⁷ But when Ziyādat Allāh reconquered the city and the scholar 'Abdallāh b. Abī Ḥassan al-Yaḥṣūbī advocated harsh punishment for *jund* members who had supported the rebels, he found his notebooks returned to him in pieces on his doorstep, showing that many of the city's scholars sympathised with the *jund* and, indirectly, the rebels. Neither the scholars nor the *jund*, however, offered enough support to enable al-Ṭunbudhī's troops to hold the city. Ziyādat Allāh's troops retook it after a short period and the rebellion broke into regional components, under the separate command of 'Āmir b. Nāfi', 'Abd al-Salām b. al-Mufarraj and al-Ṭunbudhī. Without overarching support or strategy, the various *jund* factions were not able to withstand the increasing strength of the Aghlabid troops, as they conquered one city after another.

In addition to the centrifugal nature of the *jund*, it is worth mentioning the role that non-Arab elements played in deciding the conflict. The victory of Sufyān b. Sawāda at Nafzawa is attributed to his success in engaging the

⁵⁶ Ibn 'Idhārī, *Bayān*, I:140.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

non-Arabs of this region to support the Aghlabid side. According to Ibn Khaldūn, the Berbers had invited ‘Āmir b. Nāfi‘ to take the city,⁵⁸ indicating that they had taken the initiative to participate in Aghlabid politics before Sufyān b. Sawāda appealed for their support. This presentation may reflect Ibn Khaldūn’s particular interest in the agency of what he sees as Berber tribes in Islamic North Africa, but it also corresponds to other evidence of non-Arab participation in intra-Arab conflicts. Non-Arab participation in intra-Arab conflicts is rarely mentioned by Arab historians, but they clearly played a decisive role in some battles.⁵⁹ For example, in 196/811, after the *jund* of Tripoli had expelled the governor, he regained control of the city with the help of neighbouring Berbers.⁶⁰

On the other side, Ibn ‘Idhārī depicts ‘Āmir b. Nāfi‘’s troops as dominated by 1000 black men (*alf aswad*) armed with shovels and picks.⁶¹ This may be a rhetorical technique by which to devalue ‘Āmir’s campaign, now resorting to such crude weapons and slave soldiers.⁶² However, it also supports Talbi’s argument that slaves, including those from the sub-Sahara, were used for agricultural labour,⁶³ and suggests that their involvement in military conflicts appeared plausible in the early eighth/fourteenth century, when Ibn ‘Idhārī was writing. Therefore, although Ibn al-Athīr describes the campaign against Sicily as the ultimate means by which Ziyādat Allāh brought the rebellion to an end,⁶⁴ it seems that the internal dynamics were what prevented it from succeeding. Once the end of Aghlabid rule became a realistic possibility, conflict over leadership and lack of experience or interest in cooperation made the movement vulnerable to the more centralised and unified Aghlabid forces.

⁵⁸ Ibn Khaldūn, *Dīwān*, IV:253.

⁵⁹ On the role of non-Arabs in rebellions, see also Haug’s contribution to this volume. For further discussion of cooperation between rebels and external actors, see the chapters by A. Grant and P. Grant.

⁶⁰ Al-Shammākhī, *Siyar*, I:140–4.

⁶¹ Ibn ‘Idhārī, *Bayān*, I:141–2.

⁶² I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer of this article for this suggestion.

⁶³ Talbi, ‘Law’.

⁶⁴ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, V:201.

Tunis: A Rebellious City?

The fact that al-Ṭunbudhī began his rebellion in Tunis is not surprising, given that he had been forced to return to his home estate after Ziyādat Allāh dismissed him as governor of Tripoli. The closest city to Ṭunbudh that had a large *jund* faction was Tunis,⁶⁵ which would have made it the obvious address for a *jund* member seeking to rebel. However, the fact that the rebellion began in Tunis also corresponds to a broader pattern in which the city's *jund* frequently resisted rule from Kairouan.⁶⁶

In 186/802, shortly after Ibrāhīm b. al-Aghlab took power, Tunis was the site of a major rebellion involving 10,000 men from the city and surrounding region. The rebels are described as both Arabs and Berbers, suggesting that it had a broader support base than the Arab *jund*.⁶⁷ The rebels took control of the fertile region to the south of Tunis, and it took a major intervention, led by the Aghlabid general ʿImrān b. Mujālid, to put this movement down.⁶⁸

ʿImrān appears to have settled in the city after his victory, because he is described as launching his own rebellion against Aghlabid rule from Tunis in 194/810.⁶⁹ He led the *jund* in protest against lack of pay and managed to gain control over Kairouan, whereupon ʿImrān began to call himself *amīr Ifrīqiya*⁷⁰ and mint coins in his name.⁷¹ Not until a year later, in 195/811, was Ibrāhīm b. al-Aghlab able to appease the rebels using funds sent from the caliph via Egypt.⁷² Al-Nuwayrī notes that it was only by taking cover in his palace city and digging a ditch around it that Ibrāhīm was able to survive the revolt.⁷³

These two large-scale rebellions, which both severely threatened Aghlabid rule and during which the rebels minted coins in their own name, can be seen as forerunners for al-Ṭunbudhī's revolt, which, although it was on a larger scale and lasted longer, appears to have taken a similar course. Although

⁶⁵ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, V:201.

⁶⁶ Talbi, *L'Émirat*, 211; al-Ka'bī, *Tafsīr*, I:62.

⁶⁷ Ibn Khaldūn, *Dīwān*, IV:250; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, XXIV:55.

⁶⁸ Ibn al-Abbār, *Hulla*, I:105–11; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, V:369.

⁶⁹ Ibn Khaldūn, *Dīwān*, IV:251; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, V:408; Bahri, *Hommes*, I:248.

⁷⁰ Al-Tamīmī, *Ṭabaqāt*, I:258.

⁷¹ Farrugia de Candia, *Monnaies*, 95–118.

⁷² Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 231; al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, V:216.

⁷³ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, XI:60.

rebellions in other cities with a *jund* contingent were not unknown,⁷⁴ sources mention Tunis as a site of serious rebellion in the early Aghlabid period far more frequently than any other city.

Tunis was also a site for frequent rebellions before the beginning of Aghlabid rule.⁷⁵ It was from Tunis that the only outright rebellion against an Umayyad governor began, in 127/745.⁷⁶ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥabīb al-Fihri, a great-grandson of the early conqueror of North Africa, ‘Uqba b. Nāfi’, and a member of one of the ruling families in the west, sailed to Tunis from al-Andalus and led a rebellion from there against the Umayyad governor, which ended with the governor leaving the province and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān taking up his post.⁷⁷ Although rebellions by the non-Arabs subjected to Arab rule were frequent before the stabilisation of relations in the Muhallabid period, this was the first time that the military Arabs of the province had openly rejected the caliphally appointed governor. Even when the Berbers in Kairouan murdered the governor Yazīd b. Abī Muslim in 101/720,⁷⁸ they are depicted as justifying their actions as being directed against the tyranny of this particular governor, not Umayyad rule or the caliph’s choice more generally.⁷⁹

The city’s opposition to rule from Kairouan continued throughout the Muhallabid period. The rebellion that terminated Muhallabid presence in Ifriqiya, analysed in Dar’s contribution to this volume, began in Tunis in 177/793, when the city’s Muhallabid governor so angered the *jund* that they revolted against him and demanded his replacement. They marched on Kairouan and, in their confrontation with the Aghlabid troops there, the Ifriqiyān governor was killed. Although the leader of the rebels, Ibn al-Jārūd,⁸⁰ attempted to establish himself as leader over the entire province, his claims do

⁷⁴ Compare the uprising and subsequent massacre of 700 *jund* members in Bilizma during the rule of Ibrāhīm b. al-Aghlab towards the end of the Aghlabid period: Ibn Rusta, *Aḥḥādīth*, 351.

⁷⁵ Valérian, *Ports*, 64; Djaīt, ‘Wilāya’, 117.

⁷⁶ Ibn al-Abbār attributes the beginning of his rule to the death of al-Walīd II in 126/744: Ibn al-Abbār, *Hulla*, I:341.

⁷⁷ Ibn ‘Idhārī, *Bayān*, I:60.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, I:48.

⁷⁹ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, 318.

⁸⁰ Pace Kennedy (‘Origins’, 31–48, esp. 42), who refers to Abū l-Jārūd. Ibn Jārūd is the name given by Ibn ‘Idhārī, *Bayān*, I:124.

not seem to have been accepted beyond the *jund* of Tunis and he was expelled after seven months.⁸¹

Shortly after this, another governor of Tunis, Tammām b. Tamīm al-Tamīmī, also seems to have aimed to become governor of Ifrīqiya. In 183/799 he led the *jund* of Tunis in a revolt against the caliphal governor Ibn Muqātil al-‘Akkī, who was forced to leave the province while Tammām proclaimed himself ruler over the province. Ibrāhīm b. al-Aghlab, who was the commander of the Zāb in south Tunisia at this point, then arrived and took control of Kairouan, initially in the name of the ousted al-‘Akkī but then in his own right. Tammām, having retreated to Tunis, sent an army to Kairouan, which was defeated, but it was only after Ibrāhīm’s troops attacked Tammām’s forces in Tunis and defeated them a second time that Tammām abandoned his claims.

Why had Tunis become the base for so many rebellious movements? It was a comparatively new city in early Islamic Ifrīqiya: although it lay close to the Roman city and bishopric of Thunes,⁸² the building of Tunis was closely linked to the construction of an arsenal under Ḥassān b. al-Nu‘mān (d. 80/699–700), which was intended to protect the eastern coast from Byzantine attacks from the sea. The workforce for constructing the arsenal allegedly consisted of Copts brought from Egypt,⁸³ but Copts are not mentioned in later accounts of the city. It is likely that this group, like the Berbers who lived in the city, were not relevant for the authors of the historical texts, who mention only the Arab *jund* among its occupants. The *jund* were more heavily represented here than in any other city in Ifrīqiya except Kairouan. Having been settled in large numbers to defend the city against Byzantine reconquest, they remained in Tunis, and many of them would have found additional forms of income relating to maritime or other activities.

It is likely that the heavy concentration of *jund* in Tunis was part of the reason for the frequent outbreaks of rebellion here. Although the political centre was the (almost) newly founded city of Kairouan, the arsenal in Tunis, ongoing trade connections with other Mediterranean ports, and the industrial

⁸¹ Ibn ‘Idhārī, *Bayān*, I:125; Kennedy, ‘Origins’, 31–48, esp. 42.

⁸² Fenwick, *North Africa*, 60.

⁸³ Ibn Abī Dīnār, *al-Mu‘nis*, 15.

and artisanal activity that continued in the region after the Byzantine conquest meant that Tunis took on some of the functions that the Byzantine regional capital of Carthage had fulfilled previously. Its infrastructure developed further under Caliph Hishām b. ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 105–25/724–43), making it the second major Ifrīqīyan city after Kairouan,⁸⁴ but it was also an important port for this city, which afforded it significant political leverage. After the campaign in Sicily began, the importance of Tunis increased still further, so that it became a regional centre with much more than only maritime functions.⁸⁵ But even during the earliest years of Aghlabid rule, before maritime raids became a major part of their foreign policy, Tunis played a key military and commercial role, allowing its large *jund* population to challenge the pre-eminence of the elites in Kairouan.

Also important was Tunis’s proximity to anti-Aghlabid powers such as al-Andalus. Other ports⁸⁶ are noted by the geographers as crossing points to the Iberian Peninsula, but these were smaller urban settlements, further removed from Aghlabid rule and without the same level of infrastructure as Tunis. They also had a much smaller *jund* presence than Tunis, which had served as one of the gathering points for earlier campaigns in Sicily.⁸⁷ Al-Andalus was an important refuge for opponents of the caliphal governors of Ifrīqiya, thanks to its leaders’ opposition to the Umayyad and later ‘Abbāsīd caliphate.⁸⁸ Furthermore, its relative proximity to Tunis, and the family connections that had bound the regions since the conquest,⁸⁹ facilitated political agitation from the Iberian Peninsula. This is exemplified by the rebellion of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Fihri in 127/745. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān had settled in al-Andalus after Umayyad troops had taken refuge there, following their defeat in a battle against Berber rebels close to Tangier in 124/742.⁹⁰ His father, Ḥabīb b. Abī ‘Abda,⁹¹ had been killed in this battle. Ḥabīb had been a high-ranking Umayyad general,

⁸⁴ Ibn Abī Dīnār, *al-Mu’nis*, 60.

⁸⁵ Valérian, *Ports*, 66.

⁸⁶ Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ṣūra*, 50.

⁸⁷ Talbi, *L’Émirat*, 386–9.

⁸⁸ On the relationship between Umayyad al-Andalus and the Umayyad Empire in the east, see Moreno, ‘Tombs’. On the relations between al-Andalus and the ‘Abbāsīd Empire, see al-Filālī, *‘Alāqāt*, 69–73.

⁸⁹ Gendró, *Invasión*, 24–7.

⁹⁰ Bosanquet, ‘How the Umayyads’.

⁹¹ Ibn ‘Idhārī, *Bayān*, 1:51.

and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān was well-connected with the Arab settler elite of Ifrīqiya. From the Andalusian city where he was based, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān was able to communicate regularly with and acquire the support of the military Arabs based in Tunis,⁹² with whom he had already been well-acquainted before leaving the province. Having prepared a support base, he arrived to begin his uprising against the Umayyad governor.

Although none of the sources refer explicitly to any Andalusian influence on the rebellion of al-Ṭunbudhī, in his account of the uprising, al-Ya‘qūbī notes that Tunis was the main port for traffic with al-Andalus.⁹³ He then refers to Tāhart, the main city of the Ibādī Rustamid dynasty that was opposed to the Aghlabid rulers of Ifrīqiya. The juxtaposition of al-Andalus and Tāhart in al-Ya‘qūbī’s prose reminds the reader of the hostility of both places to pro-caliphal rule in Ifrīqiya and hints that the proximity of al-Andalus to Tunis encouraged anti-Aghlabid currents in the city.

The Significance of al-Ṭunbudhī’s Rebellion

The rebellion started by al-Ṭunbudhī in 208/823 did not end fully until 213/828, when ‘Āmir b. Nāfi‘ died. It was the longest period of serious unrest since ‘Abbāsīd rule over Ifrīqiya had been restored in 144/762, and an uprising of this severity would not occur again under Aghlabid rule. It seems likely that the relative tranquillity that developed after al-Ṭunbudhī’s revolt was due to Ziyādat Allāh’s recognition of the threat that the rebels’ actions posed to his authority, and his concern to avoid another uprising of this nature.

Can the start of the Aghlabid campaign into Sicily be attributed to al-Ṭunbudhī’s rebellion? Amari argued that the invasion was planned by Ziyādat Allāh as a means of distracting the *jund*’s attention from internal conflict and to unite their energies on an external enemy.⁹⁴ His interpretation is rejected by Talbi, who sees the conscious creation of an ideological enemy as a modern strategy, inappropriate for understanding a historical culture.⁹⁵ Regardless of possible political motivations, it seems likely that Ziyādat Allāh was attracted by the economic benefits that such a campaign would bring,

⁹² Ibn ‘Idhārī, *Bayān*, I:60.

⁹³ Al-Ya‘qūbī, *Buldān*, 138.

⁹⁴ Amari, *Storia*. For a discussion of his thesis, see Nef, ‘Michele Amari’, 30–3.

⁹⁵ Talbi, *L’Émirat*, 208.

probably viewing it as a means to acquire funds with which to buy the *jund*'s support, or to pay those who had helped him to rebuild his power base.⁹⁶

These socio-economic factors are not mentioned in the historical texts, which do not depict Ziyādat Allāh as initiating the attack on Sicily. Instead, this role is attributed to the Sicilian general Euphemios, who revealed to the Aghlabids that the Byzantines had broken the terms of their peace treaty with them by taking Muslim prisoners,⁹⁷ whereupon Ziyādat Allāh consulted scholars about whether the Arabs should maintain their peace treaty or invade the island.⁹⁸ The depiction of this consultation is important for the legitimation that it awards Ziyādat Allāh and his campaign, transforming him from a beleaguered ruler fortifying his palace to the leader of a military campaign supported by religious law. Thus, although the Sicily campaign cannot be seen as a strategy specifically designed to distract the subjects from al-Ṭunbudhī's rebellion, the invitation of Euphemios came at a key moment, when both new funds for the *jund* and additional legitimation for the leader were needed.

By invading Sicily, Ziyādat Allāh oriented Ifrīqiya's political outlook still further from what it had been under Umayyad and Muhallabid rule. The policy of earlier Arab rulers had focused on the western Maghrib, meaning that the Zāb was the chief strategic *thaghr* or frontier region, and the garrison city of Ṭubna⁹⁹ a key *jund* base.¹⁰⁰ Already before the invasion of Sicily, the Aghlabid rulers had begun to shift focus towards the Christian Mediterranean, as shown by the five Aghlabid invasions of Sicily between 191/807 and 206/821.¹⁰¹ This shift was partially related to the stabilisation of relations with the Berbers to the south and west of Ifrīqiya during the Muhallabid period and the renunciation of control over the trade routes in these regions.¹⁰² It was also related to the increasing commercialisation of the western Mediterranean, as economic infrastructures around its shores grew more complex in the late second/eighth

⁹⁶ For a discussion of these factors, see Nef, 'Reinterpreting', 82–6.

⁹⁷ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, V:436–7. On Euphemios, see Prigent, 'Carrière' and 'Pour en finir'. The importance of conceptualising good rulership apart, it is noteworthy that a similar account is given by Latin sources, e.g. *Chronicon Salernitanum*, 59.

⁹⁸ Nef, 'Comment'; Talbi, *L'Émirat*, 408–11.

⁹⁹ This was the former Roman city of Thubunae, close to contemporary Barika (Algeria), also part of the Byzantine regional frontier network.

¹⁰⁰ Talbi, *L'Émirat*, 104.

¹⁰¹ Ibn 'Idhārī, *Bayān*, I:137; Talbi, *L'Émirat*, 390. Sardinian campaigns: Besta, *Sardegna*, 35.

¹⁰² Bahri, *Hommes*, I:235. Changing trade routes: Vanacker, 'Géographie'.

century.¹⁰³ As Mediterranean trade began to influence the Ifrīqiyan economy, control over the waters around it, and particularly over the strait between Ifrīqiya and Sicily, became a priority.¹⁰⁴

Another important consequence of the rebellion was the decision to end Tunis's rebellious potential for good. In 218/833, after it had offered refuge to the last of the rebel leaders, the city was attacked by Aghlabid troops and many of its population killed or enslaved. The cruelty of the Aghlabid troops against their own subjects was exceptional, and even renowned poets and scholars were killed. Many of the survivors left the city, not to return until Ziyādat Allāh offered them an *amān* a year later. Significantly, the attack on Tunis was conducted from the newly established Aghlabid base in Sicily, not from Kairouan. The Sicilian governor, Abū Fihr Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh b. al-Aghlab, who led the attack, was Ziyādat Allāh's nephew and his army may have consisted of Sicilians who were not involved in the complicated power networks of the Ifrīqiyan *jund*.¹⁰⁵ The ruthlessness of the campaign seems to have intimidated (or eliminated) potential rebels, and the city was quieter during the next decades.¹⁰⁶

The invasion of Sicily and the punishment of Tunis were key events for the future development of Aghlabid rule in Ifrīqiya. Not only was the political focus now oriented predominantly towards the north rather than the southwest but, by reducing the potential for rebellion in Tunis and founding a long-term campaign in Sicily, Ziyādat Allāh succeeded in subduing the rebellious element within the *jund* and further centralising and concentrating political power in the Aghlabid dynasty. The stability of the next decades owed much to this development, while the economic prosperity that underpinned it derived largely from Mediterranean trade.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Bosanquet, 'Maritime Trade'; Picard, *La Mer*, 289–93. Valérian notes that much of the impetus for this change came from the sailors and merchants themselves rather than arising from a state initiative. Valérian, *Ports*, 62. For an example of state-led trade between Ifrīqiya and Frankish agents, see Ilisch, 'Kupfermünzen'.

¹⁰⁴ Nef, 'Comment'.

¹⁰⁵ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, V:438; Ibn 'Idhārī, *Bayān*, I:104.

¹⁰⁶ Talbi, *L'Émirat*, 212.

¹⁰⁷ Nef, 'Reinterpreting'.

Conclusion

The *jund*'s commitment to the political authority in Kairouan was relatively weak both before and after the beginning of the Aghlabid period. Their priorities, as shown by the uprising of 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Fihri in 127/745, were the domination of their own faction or wider family and not the strengthening of caliphal authority or his representative in Kairouan. In one sense, the uprising instigated by al-Ṭunbudhī was different from previous revolts, in that it united different tribes or *jund* factions against Aghlabid attempts to disenfranchise them. However, it also followed a pattern established before the beginning of Aghlabid rule, in that the local or atomised orientation of the *jund* prevented the larger cooperation that would have been necessary to overcome the return of Aghlabid sovereignty.

Just as the initial success of the rebellion shows the unfinished process of centralisation that the first Aghlabid ruler had begun, so too does its ultimate failure show how far the transition from province to *dawla* had already taken place. The suppression of the rebellion, and the measures taken to prevent further outbreaks, were important for the continuation of the transition process, which proceeded more quickly after 218/833. Thus, al-Ṭunbudhī's rebellion can be seen as a key moment in Aghlabid history, and in the history of Tunis more specifically.

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PART VI
DISPUTING PRIVILEGE

11

Wealth and the Image of the Umayyads in the Sermons Attributed to Abū Ḥamza (d. 748)

Andrew Marsham

Introduction

In 745–6, the Baṣran Ibādī al-Mukhtār b. ‘Awf al-Azdī, better known as Abū Ḥamza (d. 748), pledged allegiance to the South Arabian Ibādī leader ‘Abdallāh b. Yahyā b. ‘Amr al-Kindī, better known as Ṭālib al-Ḥaqq (d. 748). Abū Ḥamza led a small band of youthful rebels and briefly took control of Mecca and Medina in 747–8, defeating the Medinans at the battle of Qudayd and slaying their commander, a great-grandson of the caliph ‘Uthmān. The last Umayyad caliph, Marwān II (r. 744–50), sent an army that recaptured the towns of the Ḥijāz and killed Abū Ḥamza early in 748 before marching on South Arabia and killing Ṭālib al-Ḥaqq. However, Marwān II’s army was recalled north, and so Ṭālib al-Ḥaqq’s rebellion led to the foundation of an Ibādī imāmate in Ḥaḍramawt.¹ This successful revolt (for the Ḥaḍramawtis) was founded upon tribal solidarities and hostilities,

¹ *EP*, ‘al-Mukhtār b. ‘Awf al-Azdī, Kharidjite agitator, also well-known by his *kunya* *Abū Ḥamza*’ (Ch. Pellat) and ‘Ṭālib al-Ḥakk’ (Ersilia Francesca); Wilkinson, *Ibādism*, 124, 177–83; Gaiser, *Shurāt*, 84, 145–7; Frantsouzoff, ‘Les ibāḍites’, 63–71; Baptiste, ‘La *khutba*’. I would like to thank Enki Baptiste for sharing the draft text of this study with me. I would also like to thank the organisers and participants in the 2022 workshop in Hamburg and the participants in 2013 panels at Leeds IMC and BRAIS in Edinburgh. I am particularly grateful to Enki Baptiste, Adam Gaiser, Alasdair Grant, Hannah-Lena Hagemann, Harry Munt and Christian Sahner for advice and assistance. All remaining errors are of course my own.

regional resentment at the wealth of the imperial elite, and, seemingly, pietist moral censure of misappropriation of revenues that were seen as rightly belonging to all Muslims. Later Baṣran and Ḥijāzī circles narrated the revolt in detail, as did figures at the ‘Abbāsīd Iraqī and Andalusi Umayyad courts, and later Ibādī scholars.

Abū Ḥamza is particularly famous in the medieval Arabic tradition and in modern scholarship for a sermon or sermons that he delivered when he seized the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina from Umayyad control in 747. The sermons are reproduced in chronicles, histories and literary collections from the mid-ninth century and after.² The texts have features indicative of oral delivery, including repetitive refrains, rhythmic prose, and redundancies that have an emphatic effect when received aurally. These features do not prove that the sermons were in fact delivered in their extant versions, merely that the transmitters retained (or deployed) the linguistic forms associated with orality.³

Although Abū Ḥamza’s sermons were delivered when writing had a comparatively limited place in the political culture of Islam, early sermons recorded in later sources may sometimes reflect the themes or even the words of original speeches. However, as Qutbuddin and others have noted, it is unlikely that verbatim versions of speeches survive from the first century or so of Islam; instead, it is their themes and perhaps some verbatim phrases that may have been transmitted. Moreover, these materials were transmitted and recorded for later purposes, and repeated processes of selection, editing, and some embellishment or invention, determined both the survival and shape of the extant texts.⁴ The Abū Ḥamza materials took their extant written forms in

² Ibn Khayyāt (d. 854), *Ta’rikh*, 251–2, s.a. 129 AH; al-Jāḥiẓ (d. c.868), *Bayān*, II:122–4; Ibn Sallām (d. 887), *Kitāb*, 112–13; al-Balādhurī (d. c.892), *Ansāb*, VII:620, 622–9; al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), *Ta’rikh*, II:2009–11; Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihī (d. c.940), *Iqd*, IV:144–7; al-Azdī (d. 945–6), *Ta’rikh*, 103–6; al-Iṣfahānī (d. c.970), *Aghānī*, XX:103–8; al-Darjīnī (d. 1271–2), *Ṭabaqāt*, 266–9; Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373), *Bidāya*, X:35–6; al-Izkawī (fl. 1700s), *Kashf*, 181–5; Baptiste, ‘La *khuṭba*’. Translations include: Williams, *Islam*, 215–9; Crone and Hinds, *God’s Caliph*, 129–32; al-Ṭabarī, *History*, XXVII:113–18; Qutbuddin, ‘*Khuṭba*’, 259–64; Ibn Khayyāt, *Khalifa*, 282–4; Baptiste, ‘La *khuṭba*’.

³ On ‘oral’ transmission, see Schoeler, *Oral*. On orality in *khuṭbas*, see Qutbuddin, ‘*Khuṭba*’ and *Arabic Oration*. See also Klasova, ‘Empire’; Al-Khoe, ‘Functions’.

⁴ Qutbuddin, ‘*Khuṭba*’, 187–9 and *Arabic Oration*, 21–63. See also Klasova, ‘Empire’, 272–341; Al-Khoe, ‘Functions’.

Iraq in the middle two quarters of the ninth century, about one hundred years after the original speech. These versions derive in turn from written materials circulating in the early to mid-ninth century, some of which were based on earlier Baṣran and Ḥijāzī sources.

In the first part of what follows, the analysis of the transmission of the various versions of the sermons is set out in detail. (A reader who does not want these details might wish to skip to the second part, on page 276.) The second part of the chapter analyses some of the sermons' key themes: Abū Ḥamza's concerns are said to have been particularly with political economy and the just use of tax revenues, and with questions of 'consultation' (*shūrā*) and 'approbation' (*riḍā*), as well as with disappointment at the religious and political failings of the Medinans. The third section addresses connections between the theme of the immoral misuse of wealth by individual Umayyad leaders and the interests of the Iraqi scholars who transmitted the sermons and the Ibādī group among whom the sermons reportedly originated.

While the state of the evidence does not permit certainty, elements in the sermons appear to derive from a mid-eighth-century Ibādī context, for all that the speeches were reworked during writing and transmission. The speeches of Abū Ḥamza therefore probably provide some insight into criticisms of the Umayyads present among elements of Arabian Muslim populations of Baṣra and South Arabia in the years leading up to the 'Abbāsīd Revolution. Their themes chime with other 'rebel' materials from the same period, suggesting increasing competition over the spoils of empire at that time. Moreover, the sermons' Baṣran Azdī context means that they may indicate the grievances of a group that resented the decline in Marwānid times of their conquest-era fortunes. The sermons' themes also connect with other materials attributed to early Ibādī groups; thus, the sermons add to our picture of the beliefs and practices of this distinctive branch of Islam at its formative moment. However, the preservation of the sermons seems to owe much to the rather different interests of early 'Abbāsīd-era scholars and their audiences, as well as those who came after them in the medieval and early modern periods.

The Transmission of the Sermon Materials

The majority (but not unanimous) opinion in the sources is that at least one *khutba* was delivered by Abū Ḥamza on his arrival in Mecca and that he also

spoke on at least one occasion at Medina after the Battle of Qudayd. Usually, it is at Mecca that Abū Ḥamza is said to have delivered his famous sermon comprising a chronological narration of the merits of the first two caliphs, the failings of the third and fourth caliphs ‘Uthmān and ‘Alī, and the grievous sins of the Umayyads, as well as criticism of the Shī‘īs and, in most versions, also an evocative concluding eulogy for his zealous youthful following as battlefield martyrs. At Medina, he is said, among other things, to have excoriated the Medinans for their hypocrisy and moral weakness in supporting an Umayyad regime that they knew to be unjust and ungodly. (See also Table 11.1 at the end of this chapter.)

There are two main overlapping sets of these sermon materials: the first set were transmitted by the Iraqī scholar al-Madā’inī (d. c.843), the second mostly by the Medinan scholar Abū Mūsā Hārūn b. Mūsā b. Abī ‘Alqama al-Farawī (d. c.861–2 or c.866–7), but also by some other Ḥijāzī scholars. Parallels in content show that, despite some unique features in many of the transmissions, none is completely independent; material circulating before these extant versions were composed has contributed directly or indirectly to all of them.⁵

Al-Madā’inī circulated a written version of the ‘Meccan’ sermon. This begins with the chronological narration about the caliphs, followed by denunciations of the Umayyads as a whole and then of the Shī‘a. It concludes with the eulogy for Abū Ḥamza’s followers. One version of these materials is found in the work of the ‘Abbāsīd polymath al-Jāḥiẓ (d. c.868). A longer, but closely related, version is found with slight variations in the works of the ‘Abbāsīd courtier and scholar al-Balādhurī (d. c.892) and the Mosuli *qāḍī* Yazīd b. Muḥammad al-Azdī (d. 945–6). A near-identical version of the eulogy section only is also found in the Baṣran *ḥadīth* scholar Khalīfa b. Khayyāt’s (d. 854) *Ta’rīkh*, alongside a version of the excoriation, which is usually associated with Medina but which Khalīfa says was addressed to the Meccans. The chronological narration about the caliphs, which is bitterly critical of the Umayyads, is missing from the extant text of Khalīfa’s *Ta’rīkh*. It appears to have been excised as unacceptable in Umayyad al-Andalus by Khalīfa’s

⁵ These conclusions expand on Frantsouzzoff, ‘Les ibāḍītes’, 63–71, who analysed one element of the sermon as it appears in Ibn Khayyāt, al-Ṭabarī, al-Darjīnī and al-Iṣfahānī. Frantsouzzoff finds a common source behind all four.

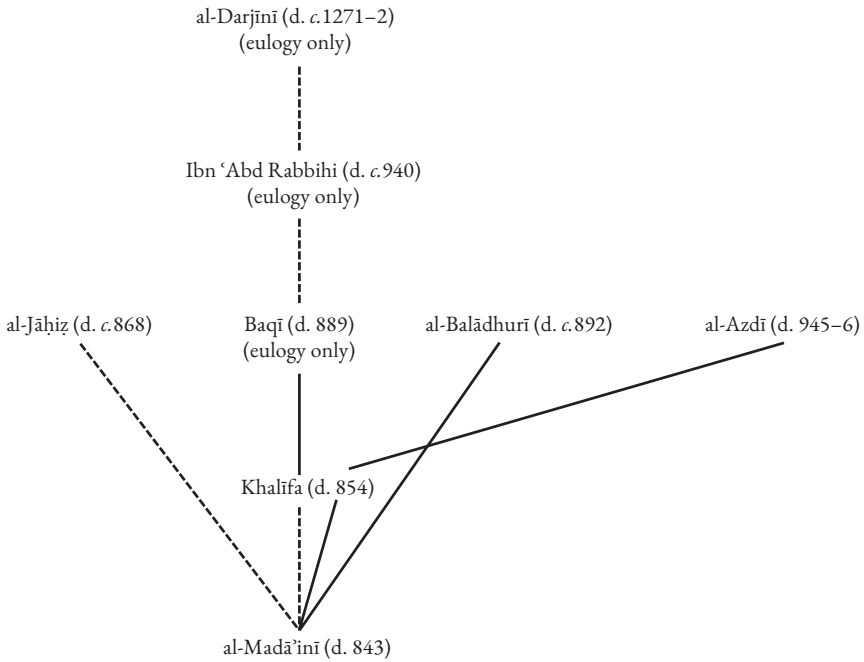


Figure 11.1 The *isnāds* of the ‘al-Madā’inī’ version of Abū Ḥamza’s sermon (dashed lines indicate putative transmission based on content and context in the absence of an *isnād*)

transmitter, the Andalusī scholar Baqī b. Makhlad (d. 889).⁶ The two elements Baqī retained continued to be transmitted in the Islamic West, appearing in the work of his student, the Andalusī courtier Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi (d. c.940) and then almost verbatim from Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi in a thirteenth-century Maghrebi Ibāḍī text by al-Darjīnī (d. 1271–2); neither provides an *isnād*.⁷ (See Fig. 11.1 above.)

Given the close textual parallels between these texts and the attribution to al-Madā’inī by al-Balādhurī and al-Azdī, al-Madā’inī was probably the source for this version of the chronological narration about the caliphs, denunciations of the Umayyads as a whole and of the Shī‘a, and the eulogy of Abū Ḥamza’s followers.⁸

⁶ Ṣaddām, *Ta’rikh Khalīfa*, 21; cf. Andersson, *Early Sunnī*, 37–40. See further below.

⁷ Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi as Baqī’s student: Toral-Niehoff, ‘Book’, 135.

⁸ The excoriation that appears in Khalifa’s work but not in that of al-Balādhurī, al-Azdī and al-Jāhīz is attributed by Khalifa to an Ismā’il b. Ishāq. See further p. 271, below.

Al-Jāhiz probably abbreviated materials found unabridged in al-Balādhurī and al-Azdī. Whereas al-Jāhiz omits Marwān I and ‘Umar II and ends the narration with Yazīd II, both al-Balādhurī and al-Azdī’s versions include Marwān I and ‘Umar II (who is partially exculpated). Uniquely among these versions, al-Balādhurī also includes ‘Abd al-Malik, al-Walīd I and Sulaymān. Both al-Azdī and al-Balādhurī also then include the sarcastic remark, ‘Thus is the description of God’s deputies!’ (*fa-bākadhā šifat kbulafā’ Allāh*), before narrating the same anecdote about Hishām relieving the wealthy of the Ḥijāz of their obligation to pay the alms tax in a drought (also absent from al-Jāhiz’s version).⁹ All three then include near-identical material lambasting the Umayyads collectively for their tyrannical rule and for their misuse of the alms-tax (*sadaqa*), slightly truncated in al-Balādhurī’s text. A near-identical critique of the Shī’a for causing *fitna* and believing in the transmigration of souls and new revelation, among other things, follows in all three. Abū Ḥamza’s eulogy of his own followers appears almost exactly word-for-word as the conclusion to al-Balādhurī and al-Azdī’s version of the sermon. A near-identical version of this eulogy is transmitted by al-Jāhiz as a separate sermon to ‘the people of the Ḥijāz’ (*abl al-Ḥijāz*).

A second set of sermons and some shorter fragments are found in the *Ta’rikh* of the Iraqi Sunnī religious scholar and lawyer, al-Ṭabarī (d. 923). These reached al-Ṭabarī from one al-‘Abbās b. ‘Īsā al-‘Uqaylī, who appears in al-Ṭabarī’s work only as a transmitter for texts about Abū Ḥamza. He in turn transmits from the Medinan scholar Abū Mūsā Hārūn b. Mūsā b. Abī ‘Alqama al-Farawī (d. c.861–2 or c.866–7), who is also the source for much of al-Ṭabarī’s other material on Abū Ḥamza’s revolt.¹⁰ This al-Farawī was a client of the clan of ‘Uthmān, which might explain his interest in the battle of Qudayd.¹¹ Al-Farawī names three individuals as the respective sources for three of the five reports. He attributes the other two to ‘some of our teachers’ (*ba’d ash-yākhbinā*). The named sources are Medinan and appear in al-Ṭabarī’s *Ta’rikh* only in his *isnāds* for material about Abū Ḥamza. This Medinan provenance explains the focus in al-Farawī’s materials on speeches at Medina.

⁹ Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, VII:627–8; al-Azdī, *Ta’rikh*, 104–5.

¹⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, II:1942, 1981, 1983, 2006, 2007–14 (all on Abū Ḥamza) and III:595 (on an audience with al-Hādī (r. 785–6)).

¹¹ Ibn Ḥajar, *Tabdhib*, XI:13.

Al-Farawī had probably collected these materials in a form then copied by al-Ṭabarī's immediate source, al-'Abbās b. 'Īsā al-'Uqaylī. (See Fig. 11.2.)

The first of al-Ṭabarī's reports is a (somewhat divergent) version of the excoriation found in Khalīfa and his later Andalusī and North African transmitters. However, it is said to have been delivered not in Mecca, but in Medina after the Battle of Qudayd, which makes more sense of its content.¹² Al-Ṭabarī says that this was transmitted to al-Farawī from 'the *mawlā* of the Sā'idīs', Mūsā b. Kathīr.¹³ Al-Ṭabarī's version is thematically and sometimes verbally similar to Khalīfa's. However, Khalīfa's version cites an Ismā'īl b. Iṣḥāq, who was probably an Azdī from Baṣra, a generation senior to Khalīfa himself.¹⁴ In turn, Ismā'īl b. Iṣḥāq is said to have transmitted from one al-Zanjī b. Khālīd, who is probably Muslim b. Khālīd al-Zanjī, a Meccan scholar (d. c.795–7).¹⁵ Thus, Khalīfa and al-Ṭabarī appear to preserve variant versions of the excoriation sermon, both from Ḥijāzī sources.

Second, al-Ṭabarī reports a short saying about the Umayyad caliph Hishām. This shares some verbatim text with the versions that appear mid-*khuṭba* to the Meccans according to al-Balādhurī and al-Azdī. However, it begins slightly differently from them in al-Ṭabarī and is placed in Medina by him. His *isnād* is 'some of the teachers' (*ba'd ashyākhinā*) of al-Farawī.

Third, al-Ṭabarī presents a sermon he says Abū Ḥamza also performed to the Medinans. This sermon justifies Abū Ḥamza's uprising and criticises the Medinans for supporting Marwān II against him at Qudayd, before ending with a eulogy for his supporters. This is largely different from the material in the Madā'inī narrations, although there are echoes of the reference to the Qur'ānic rules about the alms tax found in the material transmitted by al-Jāhīz, al-Balādhurī, and al-Azdī, and a sentence that parallels one appended to al-Azdī's and Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi's versions of the eulogy occurs before it in al-Ṭabarī's account. The concluding eulogy is somewhat like the one that

¹² Cf. Ibn Khayyāt, *Khalīfa*, 284 n.1799.

¹³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II:1981. Mūsā appears in al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh* only as a source for some of the reports about Abū Ḥamza in the same *isnād*.

¹⁴ Ibn Khayyāt, *Ta'rikh*, 252 n.2; Andersson, *Early Sunnī*, 112, 119.

¹⁵ Ibn Ḥajar, *Tabḥīb*, X:128–30, XII:324. Cf. Ibn Khayyāt, *Khalīfa*, 283 n.1796.

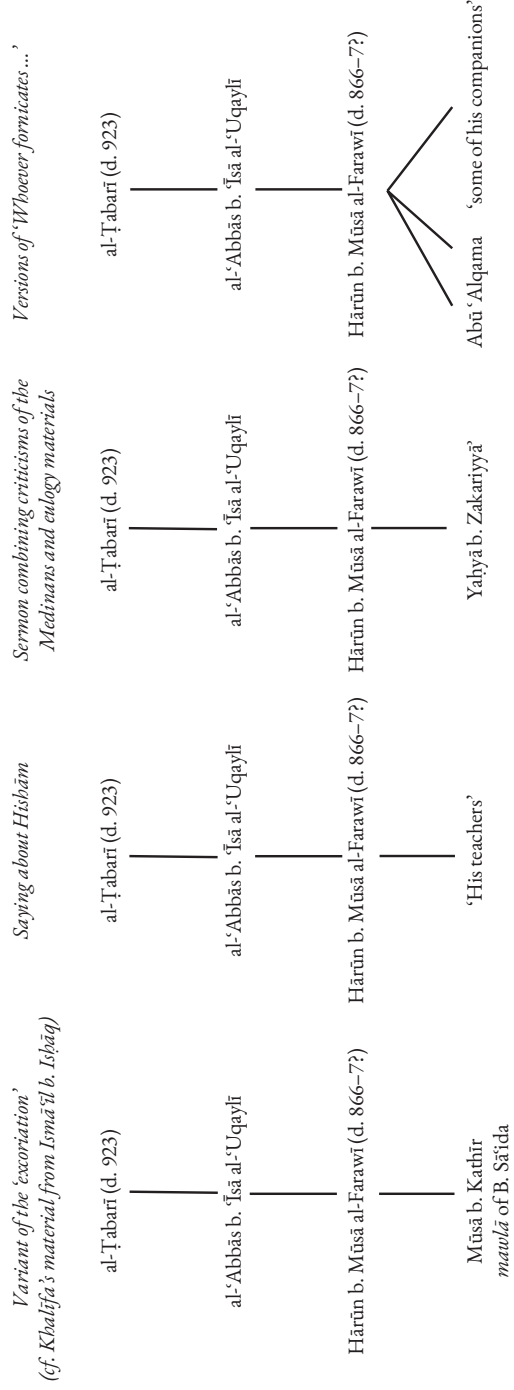


Figure 11.2. Al-Ṭabarī's *isnāds*

concludes the Madā'inī version of the Meccan sermon. It is said to have reached al-Farawī from one (unidentified) Yaḥyā b. Zakariyyā'.¹⁶

Finally, al-Ṭabarī also gives three slightly different versions of 'whoever fornicates is an unbeliever, whoever steals is an unbeliever' (*man zanā fa-buwa kāfir wa-man saraq fa-buwa kāfir*), again from authorities transmitted via 'Abbās b. 'Īsā and Hārūn b. 'Īsā.¹⁷

Three other early compilers transmit materials from Abū Ḥamza's sermons. These are the late ninth-century North African Ibādī Ibn Sallām (d. 887), the Andalusī scholar Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi and the Shī'ī-inclined Iraqi *adab* scholar al-Iṣfahānī (d. c.970). Ibn Sallām presents some lines on the authority of one Muḥammad b. Khālīd that share their theme and some vocabulary with Khalīfa's and al-Ṭabarī's material excoriating the Medinans.¹⁸ Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi presents the excoriation of the Meccans (as he also has it) as part of a longer version of a different sermon, which he attributes to Mālīk b. Anas (d. 796). The excoriation portion of this much longer text is identical to Khalīfa's version. Thus, it is either a copy of Khalīfa's text or comes from a common written source.

Al-Iṣfahānī supplies four versions of the sermon. The first two are reported on al-Ṭabarī's authority, with his *isnāds*. They parallel his texts closely, although the excoriation of the Medinans is combined with the report about Hishām's relieving the alms tax.¹⁹ Then, a third sermon is placed in Medina and is reported on the authority of 'the grandfather' (*jadd*) of the same Abū Mūsā Hārūn b. Mūsā b. Abī 'Alqama al-Farawī who is the authority for al-Ṭabarī's text.²⁰ This sermon, which criticises the Medinans for their lack of religion, is not reported by al-Ṭabarī and does not include material found in the other ninth- and tenth-century sources discussed above.

The fourth, and longest, sermon transmitted by al-Iṣfahānī is reported on the authority of the same Hārūn b. Mūsā, but is said by al-Iṣfahānī to have come from Dā'ūd b. 'Abdallāh b. Abī al-Karām (fl. ninth century), who

¹⁶ This Yaḥyā could be the same who reports about Khurāsān and the 'Abbāsīd Revolution: al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II:1276. Frantsouzzoff suggests he is one Yaḥyā b. al-Zakariyyā' al-Kindī (d. c.800?): Frantsouzzoff, 'Les ibādītes', 65.

¹⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II:2011.

¹⁸ Ibn Sallām, *Kitāb*, 112–13. I am grateful to Christian Sahner for drawing my attention to this text.

¹⁹ Al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, XX:103–5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, XX:105.

was a great-great-great-great-grandson of the Prophet's uncle, Abū Ṭālib.²¹ Dā'ūd is said to have had a written text (*khaṭṭ*) from the eighth-century Ḥijāzī scholar Muḥammad b. Faḍāla al-Naḥawī.²² Probably, al-Iṣfahānī included this particular version of the sermon because of the Ṭālibids' purported role in its transmission.²³ It begins with a sentence that echoes the 'eulogy' text but then moves to a version of the chronological narration about the caliphs. This chronological narration and what follows share much of their language with the al-Madā'inī version of the same, but diverge in many details. Moreover, the criticism of the Shī'a is longer in al-Iṣfahānī's version than in any of the others. Al-Iṣfahānī places this sermon in Medina.

Scholars from later times also transmitted the sermons. The thirteenth-century Maghrebi Ibādī text by al-Darjīnī (d. 1271–2) repeats materials from Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi near verbatim, but without an *isnād*. Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373) copied written material from al-Ṭabarī but names al-Madā'inī, as opposed to the sources named by al-Ṭabarī, in some of his *isnāds*.²⁴ Finally, a long and elaborate version of the sermon is found in the work of the early modern Omani scholar Sirḥān b. Sa'īd b. Sirḥān al-Izkawī (fl. eighteenth century). This version is the subject of a detailed study by Enki Baptiste.²⁵ Al-Izkawī transmitted his version on the authority of the Iraqī traditionist and 'Abbāsīd courtier al-Haytham b. 'Adī (d. 822–3), from one 'Īsā b. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd. While it is longer and more elaborate, and includes what looks like a much later legal excursus, al-Izkawī's text shares numerous verbatim parallels with earlier versions of the chronological narration about the caliphs, particularly with al-Balādhurī's and al-Iṣfahānī's. Most likely, it is an early modern Omani elaboration of materials already in circulation in medieval times.

To sum up, there are two main groups of *khuṭba* materials, in two, somewhat distinct, strands, one 'Baṣran/Iraqī' and one 'Medinan/Ḥijāzī'. The 'Baṣran/Iraqī' material is shared by Baqī's version of Khalīfa, al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Balādhurī and al-Azdī. Al-Madā'inī and Khalīfa are the authorities for these

²¹ On Hārūn, see al-Dhababī, *Ta'rikh*, XIX:360–1, §553. On Dā'ūd, see *ibid.*, XV:147.

²² This Ibn Faḍāla appears, for example, in Ibn 'Asākir's *isnāds*: Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh*, XVI:310.

²³ On al-Iṣfahānī's religio-political inclinations, see Su, *Shī'ī Past*.

²⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, X:35–6.

²⁵ Baptiste, 'La *khuṭba*'. See also Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 129–32.

texts. In them, versions of the sermon generally held to have been performed at Mecca predominate. This transmission includes the chronological denunciation of the caliphs and a version of Abū Ḥamza's eulogy of his followers. The 'Medinan/Ḥijāzī' materials include the excoriation of the Medinans for supporting the Umayyads, as well as some sayings of Abū Ḥamza. However, the two groups of material are interrelated. For example, Khalīfa and al-Ṭabarī include a version of the eulogy that shares material with the Baṣran/Iraqī transmission. Al-Ṭabarī includes a version of the accusation against Hishām that he increased wealth inequality and misused the alms tax, some of which appears in the chronological denunciation in the Baṣran/Iraqī transmission. The phrase, 'the people are of us and we are of them', also appears in a distinctive address to the people of Medina reported by al-Ṭabarī and Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi, as it does at the end of al-Azdī's version of the eulogy.

Defective *isnāds* mean we can get back no further than c.800 with much certainty. Moreover, the material from which the extant versions derive was probably transmitted in a mixed oral and written form; thus, there is therefore no single written form to recover from the extant materials. However, the textual elements shared between the al-Madā'inī and the Ḥijāzī transmissions almost certainly antedate the ninth century. This is not to say that passages appearing only in one or the other transmission cannot be early, but it is impossible to be certain.

Written versions composed in the mid-ninth century were then copied by compilers in the orbit of the Andalusī Umayyad or Iraqī 'Abbāsīd courts. This helps to explain the selection of material, with the Andalusī compilers passing over the criticism of the Umayyads and the Iraqī scholars showing much greater interest in their denunciation. Other major themes are rhetoric in defence of Abū Ḥamza's cause and his fierce criticism of the Medinans for backing the Marwānids against him. These circles' growing interest in prose writing and recording eloquent speeches also explains interest in a rebel who was remembered as an effective orator.²⁶ The sermons' appearance in several Ibādī sources reflects their continued interest to co-religionists.

²⁶ See on this latter point, Baptiste, 'Le *khutba*'.

The Themes of the Sermons

A fair working hypothesis is that one or more *khuṭbas* were performed by Abū Ḥamza in the Ḥijāz c.747, and that the extant texts perhaps reflect outlines of what he said, albeit re-shaped and embellished over time. Further support for a mid- to late eighth-century *Sitz im Leben* comes from thematic parallels between the Abū Ḥamza sermons and materials in Ibādī texts dated to the eighth and ninth centuries, such as the *Epistle of Sālim b. Dhakwān* (c.800) and the versions of the letters attributed to ‘Abdallāh b. Ibād. The latter are said to have been written to ‘Abd al-Malik but probably belong in the mid- to late eighth century and, in one case, to mid-eighth-century Baṣra.²⁷ Like these other Ibādī materials, the rhetoric of the Abū Ḥamza sermons is notable for the theme of the use and misuse of wealth, alongside the question of the role of the consent of the Muslims in legitimising leadership. Parallels with the wider ‘Abbāsīd-era tradition include the literary-historical representation of the Umayyads’ vices and virtues.

The underlying concern of the speech is the question of the rightful collection and distribution of wealth – the problem of the *fay*.²⁸ This is one of the key grievances reportedly articulated by many other Arabian and Arabian-heritage rebels against Umayyad rule in the mid- to late eighth century: resentment of the appropriation of taxes by the Umayyad rulers and their allies and supporters at the expense of the rebels, who saw these resources as their right. For example, the theme of the *fay*’ is found associated with the slightly earlier rebellion of Zayd b. ‘Alī at Kūfa and in the speeches and letters of Yazīd b. al-Walīd at Damascus. It is likely that these perceptions of economic injustice were a key motivation for violent resistance to Umayyad rule – after all, the distribution of wealth is an underlying factor in most conflict. The later Umayyads were both reliant upon a relatively narrow base of

²⁷ Crone and Zimmermann, *Epistle*; Cook, *Early*, 51–67. I would like to thank Adam Gaiser for drawing my attention to the latter.

²⁸ For *al-fay*’ in the sermons, see e.g. Ibn Khayyāṭ, *Ta’rīkh*, 252; al-Jāhīz, *Bayān*, II:123, 1.2; Ibn Sallām, *Kitāb*, 112, 1.13; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, VII:626; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, II:2008; al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, XX:237, 241; al-Izkawī in Baptiste, ‘La *khuṭba*’, §12, §17, §31. For *al-māl al-ḥarām*, see e.g. al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, VII:627; al-Azdī, *Ta’rīkh*, 104; al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, XX:237. For *māl Allāh*, see al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, VII:627; al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, XX:241. For *al-māl/al-amwāl* where other sources have *fay*’, see al-Azdī, *Ta’rīkh*, 104; al-Izkawī in Baptiste, ‘La *khuṭba*’, §6.

supporters and their Syrian armies and were under continuous pressure to extract more revenue from their territories. Moreover, there were enormous disparities in wealth between the leading beneficiaries of the late Umayyad imperial system and the wider Muslim population.²⁹ Rights to the revenues from conquered lands, expressed in religious terms, were a founding principle shared by many of the Arabian conquerors. Moreover, the Ibādīs were actively engaged in attempting to establish alternative state structures and so had a particular interest in the laws of war and tax.³⁰

Abū Ḥamza and Ṭālib al-Ḥaqq (whose title, after all, could also be translated, ‘Seeker after Legal Rights’) represented specific constituencies who probably resented the status and power of the Umayyad elite and their allies. The resources of Iraq had been used to pay the Syrians that had been stationed at Wāsiṭ since c.703, as well as their Umayyad-loyalist commanders. The Azdīs of Baṣra, of whom Abū Ḥamza was one, had rebelled under Yazīd b. al-Muhallab in 720, and probably saw the collapse of Umayyad control in Iraq after 744 as an opportunity to reassert their rights. Likewise, while Ṭālib al-Ḥaqq had served as a *qāḍī* for the Thaqafī governors of South Arabia and their Syrian troops, he was from the local Kindī tribe and drew local Ḥaḍramawtis to his cause; that is, he had status among a provincial elite that may have resented the domination of the alien, predominantly Thaqafī, ruling group. Again, Ṭālib al-Ḥaqq took civil war in Syria as his opportunity to rebel in favour of the rights of true Muslims.³¹

The theme of economic justice runs through the various versions of the chronological narration about the caliphs. Abū Bakr is remembered as having fought to maintain the unity of the *umma*. In al-Izkawī’s version, this is explained as his having fought those unwilling to pay the *zakāt* – the charitable payment obligatory for all members of the new community. That is, it is emphasised that the political unity of the earliest community was predicated upon shared financial obligations, and not simply upon shared religious practices. In all versions of the sermon, ‘Umar is the one that ‘collected the

²⁹ See e.g. Blankinship, *End*, 190–1, 225–9; Marsham, *Umayyad Empire*, 190–1, 198. See also *EF*, ‘Fay’ (A. Marsham). On the huge wealth of the upper echelons of the late Umayyad imperial elite, see Banaji, ‘Late Antique’, esp. 169–73; Marsham, *Umayyad Empire*, 198, 246–7, 255.

³⁰ Wilkinson, *Ibādism*, 174 and n.31.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 178; Gaiser, *Shurāt*, 145. See also Baptiste, ‘La *khuṭba*’.

*fay*³², or, in some versions, the *māl* or *amwāl*. From this, he ‘assigned *‘aṭā*’ (or ‘stipends’, the pay assigned to Muslim migrants) and ‘established *amṣār* and *diwāns*’ (i.e. ‘garrisons’ and ‘registers of tax-payments and recipients of the *‘aṭā*’).³²

In contrast to the two rightly guided caliphs, Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, who managed the Muslims’ wealth well, the Umayyads are bitterly criticised for mismanagement. Mu‘āwiya ‘made ... God’s property something to be taken by turns’ (*ittakhadha ... māl Allāh duwalan*);³³ Hishām’s actions, in relieving the wealthy Medinans of the alms tax, ‘made the rich richer and the poor poorer’ (*fa-zādat al-ghanīya minkum ghanīyan wa’l-faqīr faqran*) – a textual element that appears in both Baṣran/Iraqi and Medinan/Ḥijāzī materials.³⁴

These are both allusions to a Qur’ānic verse (Q. 59:7) which became a key text in Islamic tax law:³⁵

What God has bestowed (*afā’a*) on His Messenger (and taken from) the people of the villages (*min abl al-qurā*), belongs to God, to His Messenger, to kindred and orphans, the needy and the wayfarer – so that it does not (merely) make a circuit between the wealthy among you (*kay lā yakūna dūlatan bayna ’l-aghniyā’i minkum*). So, take what the Messenger assigns to you, and deny yourselves what he withholds from you, and fear God. For God is harsh in punishment.

That is, the Umayyads are impious, and a key element of their impiety, to which Abū Ḥamza returns repeatedly, is their misuse of the *fay* – their ‘appropriation for themselves’ (*ista’tbara*) of the *fay*, according to Ibn Sallām and al-Izkawī’s versions, and misuse of ‘forbidden monies’ (*al-māl al-ḥarām*), as al-Balādhurī’s version has it, and the negative consequences for social justice: the rich get richer.³⁶

This criticism of the Umayyads’ wealth is paired with criticism of their tyranny – their imposition of authority by brute force as opposed to rule by

³² See above, n.28.

³³ Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, VII:627. Cf. al-Jāhiz, *Bayān*, 123, ll.8–9; al-Azdī, *Ta’rikh*, 104; al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, XX:106. Cf. Pecorini Goodall’s chapter in this volume.

³⁴ Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, VII:627–8; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, II:2009; al-Azdī, *Ta’rikh*, 105; al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, XX:103–4.

³⁵ See *EP*, ‘Fay’ (A. Marsham), with further references.

³⁶ See above, n.28.

reciprocity and consent. Mu‘āwīya is said to have ‘taken God’s slaves as his own, God’s property as something to be taken by turns (cf. Q. 59.7) and God’s religion as a sham’ (*ittakbadha ‘ibād Allāh khawalan wa-māl Allāh duwalan wa-dīnahu daghalan*).³⁷ These accusations form part of a wider discourse found across much of the Islamic tradition directed against the Umayyads: Crone and Hinds point out that the criticism of Mu‘āwīya is attributed elsewhere to al-Ḥasan al-Basrī (d. 728), the famous pious critic of the Umayyads;³⁸ a similar accusation is also levelled against Mu‘āwīya’s son Yazīd I in traditions attributed by al-Ṭabarī to Abū Mikhnaf and by Ibn Khayyāt to Wahb b. Munabbih. In these traditions, Yazīd himself enslaved the Ḥijāzīs: when his commander conquered Medina in 683, he demanded a pledge of allegiance where the Medinans agreed to be Yazīd’s property – again, the term used is *khawal* as opposed to *‘abīd*.³⁹

This material also echoes Sālim’s *Epistle*, where it is held that only idolaters can be enslaved upon defeat.⁴⁰ In other words, the accusation that the Umayyads demanded a pledge of allegiance that enslaved the Muslims relates to the calls for *shūrā*, or consultation, that are said to have met Mu‘āwīya’s designation of his son Yazīd as his successor, and which seems to have remained a prominent strand of much opposition to the Umayyads. It also relates to the notion of *riḍā* (consent or approval) – the idea that any pledge of allegiance in Islam was in some sense reciprocal, and dependent upon the approval of the Muslims. This latter idea was salient in the rhetoric of the ‘Abbāsids, whose coming to power coincided with Abū Ḥamza’s rebellion. Likewise, *shūrā* and *riḍā* are prominent positive aspects of ‘Umar I’s caliphate in al-Balādhurī’s, al-Azdī’s, al-Iṣfahānī’s and al-Izkawī’s versions of the sermon material, as they are in Sālim’s *Risāla*.⁴¹

The same accusations about the Umayyads are the most prominent theme in the materials addressed to the Medinans. The Medinans are made to concede about the Umayyads that:

³⁷ See above, n.33.

³⁸ Crone and Hinds, *God’s Caliph*, 130 n.2; see also Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. *daghalun*.

³⁹ Ibn Khayyāt, *Ta’rikh*, 149, s.a. 63 AH; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, II:423.

⁴⁰ Crone and Zimmermann, *Epistle*, 72–3, 213–14.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 74–7. For the ‘Abbāsid Revolution, see Crone, ‘On the Meaning’; Marsham, *Rituals*, 187–8, 195–6.

They have taken wealth to which they were not entitled and have put it where it does not belong. They have ruled despotically and have taken exclusive possession of what rightfully belongs to us, including our *fay*'. They have passed it around among the rich and their possessors of worldly rank. They have used our portions, and that which rightfully belongs to us, as dowries for women and for slave girls for sexual intercourse.⁴²

In contrast, Abū Ḥamza promises that 'we shall be fair in our judgements towards you, and rely with you on the *sunna* of your Prophet, and divide your *fay*' among you'⁴³ ... 'if we are victorious, we shall surely give to every man what rightfully belongs to him'.⁴⁴ When he seeks the Medinans' support, he says:

We summon you to God's Book and His Prophet's *sunna*, sharing fairly, and to justice for the flock, and establishing the fifths (*al-akḥmās*) [of battlefield loot] on the occasions which God commanded them.⁴⁵

In many of the texts, the Qur'ānic prescriptions on the eight rightful recipients of the *ṣadaqa* (Q. 9:60) are invoked, with the Umayyads accused of having come up with a ninth category: themselves.⁴⁶

In these core criticisms of the Umayyads attributed to Abū Ḥamza – misappropriation of the *fay*' and lack of regard for *riḍā* – we probably glimpse elements of criticism of the Umayyads that circulated in the mid- to late eighth century. At the heart of the matter appear the two ideas of *amr Allāh* – 'God's command' – which appears in many versions of Abū Ḥamza's speech and in Sālim's *Epistle* – and *māl Allāh* and *fay' Allāh* – 'God's wealth' and 'God's revenue', which are likewise present in both texts; a pietist monotheist community is represented in these texts as being ruled by God and enacting God's command on earth.

The problem, of course, was precisely how and where God's command was made manifest. For the Umayyads, it was in their rule (note that they are

⁴² Ibn Khayyāt, *Ta'rikh*, 252; Ibn Khayyāt, *Khalīfa*, 283. Cf. Ibn Sallām, *Kitāb*, 112–13; al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, XX:103.

⁴³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II:2008; trans. *History*, XXVII:114.

⁴⁴ Ibn Khayyāt, *Ta'rikh*, 252; Ibn Khayyāt, *Khalīfa*, 284.

⁴⁵ Ibn 'Abd Rabbīh, *Iqd*, IV:145, ll.5–6; al-Darjīnī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 267.

⁴⁶ E.g. al-Jāhīz, *Bayān*, II:124, ll.8–9; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, VII:628. Cf. al-Azdī, *Ta'rikh*, 105; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II:2010; al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, XX:104, 107.

an *abl al-bayt* in some versions of the speech, albeit a vicious one).⁴⁷ Likewise, the Medinans sided with the Umayyads, and one of the narrative functions of these speeches for the later compilers appears to be to illustrate the dynamics of Ḥijāzī loyalty to Umayyad rule, underpinned by shared interests, against hostility to it from groups excluded from the benefits of empire.⁴⁸ For these rebels, God's command resided in consultation with the 'faithful'. Likewise, God's wealth was used by the Umayyads for their own purposes, something seen by those excluded from wealth and power as corruption. As Sālim has it in his *Epistle*: "Uthmān made God's property into something to be taken in turns among his relatives ... he also borrowed an enormous amount of money from God.' When a man reproached that he should pay back this money because it was 'God's *fay*', Uthmān sacked him."⁴⁹

Moral Criticisms of Specific Umayyad Caliphs

These structural abuses of wealth and power are the fundamental criticisms of the Umayyads in Abū Ḥamza's speech. However, there are also more specific criticisms directed at individual Umayyad caliphs, which resonate with the more structural critique. Although in places the Abū Ḥamza texts appear to confuse specific personalities, there is in general a close correlation with the almost caricature-like representations of the Umayyads found in the tradition as it was set down under 'Abbāsīd rule in the ninth and tenth centuries.

Mu'āwiya, Marwān I and Hishām are represented as the architects of the Umayyads' misrule and as embezzling God's wealth; the others merely follow their lead. Each of the lesser figures, though, has his own weaknesses: Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya is accused of sexual incontinence and is named in one version as Yazīd of the wines, monkeys and cheetahs; 'Abd al-Malik appointed the notorious al-Ḥajjāj to Iraq; al-Walīd I was stupid and negligent; Sulaymān was greedy and lascivious.

These characterisations resemble the images found in the wider late eighth- and ninth-century tradition. There, entertaining anecdotes – many

⁴⁷ On *abl al-bayt*, see Sharon, 'The Umayyads'.

⁴⁸ On the shared interests of the Ḥijāzīs and the Umayyads, see Munt, 'Caliphal Imperialism', 6–21, with remarks about Abū Ḥamza at 12–13. On the Umayyads' Medinan lands and their political authority, see Munt, 'Caliphal Estates', 432–63.

⁴⁹ Crone and Zimmermann, *Epistle*, 78–9.

of them scurrilous – are juxtaposed with drier political narrative. Even in the comparatively sober work by al-Ṭabarī, the same characterisation of the Umayyad caliphs sometimes comes through, along with many of the same stories. Similar material reappears in al-Iṣfahānī's *Aghānī*. Both texts are in turn heavily dependent on late eighth- and early ninth-century traditionists associated with the courts of the 'Abbāsids Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809), al-Amīn (r. 809–11) and al-Ma'mūn (r. 811–33), such as al-Haytham b. 'Adī, al-Wāqidī, and al-Madā'inī.

For example, Abū Ḥamza states that the caliph Sulaymān's 'concern was with his belly and his private parts' (*hammuhu baṭnahu wa-farjahu*). As Su has shown, Sulaymān's greed is proverbial and is expounded upon at length in collections such as al-Balādhurī's *Ansāb*. Some combine victual and sexual appetites: al-Balādhurī relates that Sulaymān once ate the fat of forty kids' kidneys, among various other unspecified foodstuffs. Then he had sex with one of his female slaves. On getting up, he was unwell (*maw'ūkan*), and died very shortly after. In contrast, al-Ṭabarī relates more sober accounts of Sulaymān's death, some also attributed to al-Madā'inī. Nonetheless, worldliness is linked to mortality in al-Ṭabarī's accounts, too. Al-Ṭabarī states that, one day before prayer, Sulaymān put on green robes made of silk, probably representing lavish expense and dubious religious status, since Muslim men are not supposed to wear silk. Sulaymān then looks in the mirror and vainly exclaims, 'My God! I am a king in the prime of his youth!' Having led the prayer, he immediately fell ill (*wa'aka*, again) and died.⁵⁰

These stories are amusing and were probably viewed that way at the courts of the 'Abbāsīd caliphs, where they circulated and were almost certainly publicly performed. However, they also probably had an admonitory function: it was dangerous to make direct statements about how a reigning monarch ought to comport himself, but the now long-defeated Umayyads had become a safe repository of amusing and advisory anecdotes. Al-Balādhurī, who served at the courts of the 'Abbāsīd caliphs throughout almost the whole ninth century, probably composed his *Ansāb* for this hybrid function.⁵¹ Al-Ṭabarī's rather more severe focus in his *History* on God's covenant and, following

⁵⁰ Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, VII:51–3; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II:1337–8; Su, 'Writing History', 1–24.

⁵¹ Cf. on al-Balādhurī's *Futūḥ*: Kennedy, *History*, 5–8.

Mårtensson, perhaps on tax policy, may explain his relative restraint.⁵² So, too, might his status as an independent religious scholar rather than a courtier: he was not part of the elite circle where advice for kings and anecdotes about the lavish wealth of monarchs were in demand; rather, as a lawyer and Qur'anic exegete, he had other historical agendas.

Conclusions

Investigations into the Abū Ḥamza material point in two directions: forward, into late eighth- and ninth-century 'Abbāsīd Baghdad, and back, into late Umayyad and early 'Abbāsīd mid-eighth-century Baṣra and the Ḥijāz. Much of what is presented as Abū Ḥamza's sermon appears to parallel the stereotypes that the Umayyad caliphs had become in the literary circles of Iraq, at least by the late eighth or early ninth centuries. The extravagance of the Umayyads had become material for both entertainment and edification in the hands of al-Haytham, al-Wāqīdī and al-Madā'inī – and this image owed a great deal to life in 'Abbāsīd Baghdad. Meanwhile, al-Ṭabarī, while relying on many of the same authorities, is quieter about the Umayyads' greed and promiscuity, seemingly reflecting his more religiously oriented agenda, outside the patronage of the 'Abbāsīds. Likewise, Baqī, writing in Umayyad circles in al-Andalus, omitted many of the most scandalous accusations.

All this raises the question of when these stereotypical images of the Umayyads began to take shape. Difficult though it is to prove, I would contend that at least some of them were already circulating in the early to mid-eighth century in Iraq and the Ḥijāz, and that the roots of some of the elaborations that were composed at the 'Abbāsīd court in fact lie in this now-all-but-lost mid-eighth-century context. Part of the case for this is source-critical: as explained in the first part of the chapter, much of the material in the sermons dates to the first decades of the ninth century. Moreover, this material has the characteristics associated with early Islamic *khutbas* and so could, at least partially, reflect the themes and forms of material performed in c.747. Another point in support of this is that the criticisms of the Umayyads appear somewhat foreshadowed in much earlier texts. For example, Yazīd b. Mu'āwīya is accused of 'childish games and empty delights' in a Syriac chronicle composed in Mesopotamia in

⁵² Mårtensson, 'Discourse', 287–331.

Table 11.1 Outline of some textual elements in the pre-1000 CE versions of *Abū Hamza's sermon* [*x* = close parallel; (*x*) some parallel]

	Jāḥiẓ/ Balādhurī/ Khalīfa [Mecca]	Azdī [Mecca]	Khalīfa < Ismāʿīl b. Ishāq [Mecca]	Ibn Sallām	Ṭabarī [Medina] (copied in al-Isfahānī)	Ṭabarī [Medina] (copied in al-Isfahānī and Ibn Kathīr)	Ṭabarī [Medina] (copied in al-Isfahānī and in Ibn Kathīr)
Chronological narration of caliphs (including chronological denunciation of the Umayyads)	x	x					
Hishām	x (except Jāḥiẓ)					x	
'Ninth category'	x	(x)					x
Denunciation of the Shia	x	x					
Eulogy: 'You say ... youths ...'	x (separate in Jāḥiẓ)	x					x
Excoriation: 'You have asked us about our leaders ...'			x	(x)	x		
<i>Fitna</i>							
'People are from us'		(x)					(x)
'We did not leave lightly ...'							x
Infidels (3 short reports)							
'I have not seen a trace of religion'							
'Your house is the house of the <i>bijra</i> '							

Ṭabarī [Medina] (copied in al-Iṣfahānī and Ibn Kathīr)	Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi < Mālik [Medina] (copied in al-Darjīnī)	Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi [Mecca] (copied in al-Darjīnī)	Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi (<i>no isnād</i>)	Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi (<i>no isnād</i>)	al-Iṣfahānī < Hārūn < Abū ‘Alqama	al-Iṣfahānī < Dā’ūd < Nahawī
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x

(x)

(x)

x

(x)

x

x

x

x

x

x

c.687–8.⁵³ It is also notable that ‘Umar II retains a somewhat positive image in the Abū Ḥamza material, just as he tends to have across the early tradition.⁵⁴

In a mid-eighth-century context, such accusations of sensuality and promiscuity would have had a rather different purpose and meaning to the ones they acquired at the caliphal court in ninth-century Baghdad. They were probably related to similar currents elsewhere in late antique monotheist discourse: criticism of a harmful concern with the world and its pleasures rather than with God and the hereafter. Thomas Sizgorich made use of the ideas of the anthropologist Fredrik Bauer in arguing for the central importance of self-denial in accordance with God’s will in defining and maintaining communal boundaries in late antiquity and suggested continuities between the ascetic traditions of Christianity and those of Islam.⁵⁵ Adam Gasier has also made similar arguments with specific reference to the so-called Khārijites.⁵⁶ For many opponents of the Umayyads, this misuse of ‘God’s property’ reflected not only the Umayyads’ worldly impiety – and so, their place outside the community of the faithful – but also their lack of concern for the consent of the Muslims upon which their authority depended. Such criticisms form part of a wider discourse from later Umayyad times that reflects widespread competition for elite status. The same criticisms then became pertinent to the interests of the new ‘Abbāsīd elite, while the eloquent form of their delivery made them of literary interest as Arabic consolidated its place as the *lingua franca* of the empire.

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⁵³ Brock, ‘North Mesopotamia’, 63; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 194–200.

⁵⁴ Borrut, *Between Memory*, 117–18. On ‘Umar II, see *ibid.*, 249–83. See also Greenwood *et al.*, ‘Armenian Source’, where ‘Umar II is again presented positively.

⁵⁵ Sizgorich, *Violence*.

⁵⁶ Gaiser, *Shurāt*.

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12

A Generational Explanation of the Third *Fitna* (126–36/744–54)

Leone Pecorini Goodall

Introduction

The Third *Fitna* is a complicated topic of study: various parties were involved and Arabic sources of the third/late ninth–tenth centuries produced divergent interpretations of the defeat of the Marwānid dynasty (r. 65–132/684–750), which also ended the Umayyad caliphate. The dynasty's fall and the subsequent rise of the 'Abbāsids started with the Third *Fitna*, here dated to 126–36/744–54, beginning with the revolt against and subsequent decapitation of al-Walīd b. Yazīd (d. 126/744), and ending only with the defeat of the 'Abbāsīd 'rebel' 'Abdallāh b. 'Alī (d. 136/754).¹ This chapter will take a new approach to the study of the *fitna* and investigate it within the context of the ruling Marwānid family.

First, it will contextualise the rebellion and bring to bear an apocalyptic *ḥadīth* that highlights the social and demographic features that inform the argument. Subsequently, it will investigate the careers of those family members who revolted, namely the *banū al-Walīd* (sons of al-Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik) and the *banū Hishām* (sons of Hishām b. 'Abd al-Malik). These had previously benefitted from the extended rules of their fathers and appear as the most aggrieved factions. Lastly, it will outline the marital connections

¹ It was not until the defeat of 'Abdallāh b. 'Alī and the successful accession of al-Manṣūr (d. 158/775) that the 'Abbāsīd dynasty was established, concluding a long period of instability: Borrut, *Entre Memoire*, 354–81. The research for the present paper was made possible by the generous support of the SGSAH AHRC Doctoral Training Partnership.

between these groups to demonstrate how endogamous unions brought the families closer, with the *banū Hishām* taking a subordinate role: they were younger, and there were more daughters of marriageable age available than among the *banū al-Walīd*.

Concerning the historiographical problems posed by this transitional period, Steven Judd argued in a study of the literary accounts of the *fitna* that, ‘in the absence of reliable contemporary Umayyad sources, it is increasingly clear that the history of the fall of the Umayyads remains more literary than factual’.² Judd pointed out that the main sources available to historians of early Islam, al-Ṭabarī (d. 312/923) and al-Balādhurī (d. c.279/892), provide significantly different justifications for the event despite both using al-Madā’īnī (d. 225/843) as their primary transmitter, one focusing on religious disputes (al-Balādhurī), the other on tribal disputes (al-Ṭabarī).³ Al-Balādhurī frames his argument in terms of Qaḍarite (a group supporting the doctrine of free will) opposition to al-Walīd b. Yazīd’s immoral behaviour, spearheaded by his cousin Yazīd b. al-Walīd (d. 126/744).⁴ Judd views these discrepancies as attempts to generate a coherent narrative – always difficult when dealing with the end of any dynasty – and use the Umayyads’ demise as a foil for contemporary ‘Abbāsīd concerns.⁵ That the narrative’s contents and details had not been streamlined is also visible when comparing Arabic with Greek and Syriac sources;⁶ however, its chronological structure has largely been determined and seems fairly stable.

Given Judd’s warnings, I have opted to use prosopographical methods to argue that an ulterior, albeit not incompatible, explanation for the *fitna* can be found when tracing the implications of vertical succession in the Marwānīd family.⁷ I will argue that the fall of the Marwānīds was a direct consequence of the factionalism of the Marwānīd polity and the long-term unsustainability of ‘agnatic rotation’, meaning that the position of caliph

² Judd, ‘Medieval Explanations’, 103.

³ *Ibid.*, 90–4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 91–2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁶ Pecorini Goodall, ‘The ‘Abbās’, *passim*.

⁷ Interestingly, al-Ya’qūbī, who does not use al-Madā’īnī, explains the fall of al-Walīd as a consequence of his drinking, womanising and neglect of caliphal duties: al-Ya’qūbī, *Tārīkh*, II:400; trans. *Works*, III:1054–6.

rotated between male relatives (agnates) of the same generation rather than moving from father to son. The accession of al-Walīd b. Yazīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān as caliph in 125/743 represented the first instance of ‘vertical’ succession in nearly forty years; it was therefore arguably no coincidence that a rebellion ensued.

Given the complexity of events, it is first necessary to provide a chronological outline of the events leading up to the Third *Fitna*. In the year 102/720–1, the caliph Yazīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 101–5/720–4) nominated his brother Hishām b. ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 105–25/724–43) as heir-apparent and his son al-Walīd b. Yazīd (r. 125–6/743–4) as second heir.⁸ Hishām would enjoy a nineteen-year reign, in which he unsuccessfully attempted to remove al-Walīd from the succession in favour of his own son Maslama.⁹ Al-Walīd had thus served over twenty years as *walī al-‘abd* (heir-apparent) when he became caliph in 125/743. Upon his accession, he imprisoned Hishām’s sons and put three of Hishām’s governors to death, two of whom were the previous caliph’s maternal uncles.¹⁰ In the same year, al-Walīd b. Yazīd nominated his own sons, ‘Uthmān and al-Ḥakam, as heirs.¹¹ In 126/744, his cousin Yazīd b. al-Walīd rallied the support of the *banū Hishām* and *al-Walīd*, eventually leading to al-Walīd’s murder.¹² In nominating his own sons as heirs, al-Walīd had alienated other Marwānid lines. These nominations meant his cousins risked losing the considerable privileges and authority they had enjoyed under other caliphs, and they rebelled against al-Walīd to secure the patrimony for themselves.¹³ From a social and demographic perspective, the wider problem was that there were simply too many Marwānids in that generation to maintain parity among agnates. As many had enjoyed long governorships or military appointments, they were able to mobilise enough support to launch a rebellion.¹⁴

⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1740–1.

⁹ Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, VIII:388.

¹⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1751; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, IX:143; Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, II:546.

¹¹ On the evidence for this nomination process, see Marsham, *Rituals*, 156–7.

¹² For a summary of the events leading up to the caliph’s death, see Pecorini Goodall, ‘The ‘Abbās’, 402–9.

¹³ Marsham, *Rituals*, 119–22; Décobert, ‘Notule’, 229.

¹⁴ This was not unique to the Marwānid polity but was a limitation of dynasties that employed polygamy and had numerous cadet branches that could make a claim to rule: Duindam, *Dynasty*, 17–23; Marsham, ‘Kinship’, 20.

While narrative histories occlude potential societal and demographic factors behind the rebellion, those factors can be identified in *ḥadīth* and via prosopographical overviews, as the following sections demonstrate.

The Size of the *Banū al-Ḥakam*

The following *ḥadīth*, found in al-Ṭabarānī's (d. 360/971) *Muḥjam al-Kabīr*, details the rise and fall of the *banū al-Ḥakam* (the Marwānid dynasty, descendants of al-Ḥakam) and highlights many of this chapter's major themes. It focuses on the major criticisms of Marwānid rule: the dynasty's size, appropriation of caliphal finances, mistreatment of the Muslim community, and lack of adherence to Islam. This same *ḥadīth* can be found in the eschatological *Kitāb al-Fitan* of Nu'aym b. Ḥammad (d. 228/844), where it is split into two, indicating an early third/ninth-century composition.¹⁵ Other versions of the *ḥadīth* are recorded in al-Balādhurī's *Ansāb al-Ashraf*, al-Zubayrī's (d. 256/870) *Nasab Quraysh*, and Ibn 'Asākir's (d. 571/1176) *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq*. I have opted to provide the translation of al-Ṭabarānī's version of the *ḥadīth* because the two notices have been merged.

Aḥmad b. Rishdīn al-Miṣrī < Muḥammad b. Sufyān al-Ḥaḍramī < Ibn Lahī'a < Abū Qabīl < 'Abdallāh b. Mawhab al-Ḥamdanī (d. 101–10/719–28):

When Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān was with us, Marwān b. al-Ḥakam entered and spoke to him concerning his needs, and he [Marwān] said: 'O *amīr al-mu'minīn*, fulfil my needs, by God my wants are great: I have become the father of ten [children], the brother of ten and the [paternal] uncle of ten.' And when Marwān turned away [and left], Ibn 'Abbās was sitting with Mu'āwiya by his throne, and Mu'āwiya said [to him]: 'I ask you, by God, did the Prophet not teach us: "When the *Banū al-Ḥakam* reach thirty men they will take the wealth¹⁶ of God between them in turn, and the servants [of God] as property, and corrupt the book [of God], and when they

¹⁵ Nu'aym b. Ḥammad, *Fitan*, I:130; trans. *Book of Tribulations*, 55, 97.

¹⁶ Although the translated *ḥadīth* has *ayāt Allāh*, the other versions of this *ḥadīth* nearly unanimously state *māl Allāh*. See, for example, even the same compiler's *Muḥjam al-awsat*, VIII:6. Nu'aym b. Ḥammad (*Fitan*, I:130, 190; trans. *Book of Tribulations*, 55, 97) gives the same *isnād* but has *māl Allāh*, as do al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, IX:291; Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh*, LXIX:156; al-Zubayrī, *Nasab*, 110.

reach four hundred and ninety-nine, their destruction is quicker than fruit [ripening]?”¹⁷

This *ḥadīth* is always narrated in connection with Marwān’s appearance at the Umayyad caliph Mu’āwiya b. Abī Sufyān’s court, foreshadowing Marwānid rule.¹⁸ It may have been generated in the lead-up to the ‘Abbāsīd takeover to delegitimise the Marwānid dynasty, as the main transmitter, ‘Abdallāh b. Mawhab, died at least forty years after the events. The dating and accuracy of this *ḥadīth* are not the focus of this chapter, but rather the identification of the *banū al-Ḥakam*’s size and the appropriation of caliphal finances as a defining feature of Umayyad rule. Prosopography supports this: the *Nasab Quraysh* records Marwān as having eleven brothers, ten sons and seven nephews.¹⁹ Counting Marwān, the *banū al-Ḥakam* numbers twenty-nine; the agreement between the genealogical information and the number in the *ḥadīth* underlines a preoccupation with population size.²⁰ As for the 499 members of the *banū al-Ḥakam*, this is more difficult to calculate and should be seen as stressing the Marwānids’ considerable growth within three generations. That by the time of the Third *Fitna* the dynasty’s demise is linked to their size foreshadows the generational component to succession that forms the focus of the chapter’s argument.

Taking the wealth of God in turn references both the dynastic elements of the caliphate and the perception of the Marwānids as benefitting financially from their association with rule. Furthermore, it references Q. 59:7: ‘So that wealth may not circulate amongst your rich’ (*kay lā yakūna dūlatan bayna l-aghniyā’i minkum*). The *banū al-Ḥakam*’s wealth is a recurring historiographical theme, as most narratives of caliphal succession and deposition focus on removing or granting wealth.²¹ For instance, the narratives of

¹⁷ Al-Ṭabarānī, *Muḥjam al-Kabīr*, XIX:382.

¹⁸ In the version narrated by al-Zubayrī, al-Balādhurī and Ibn ‘Asākir, it is followed by a letter from Marwān to Mu’āwiya stating that he was now the father of ten, the brother of ten and the uncle to ten. Al-Zubayrī, *Nasab*, 110; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, IX:291; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh*, LXIX:156.

¹⁹ M. Robinson, ‘Population Size’. This is discounting all sons who are said to have died (*daraja*) or predeceased their fathers (*lā ‘aqiba labu*); furthermore, the entry for ‘Abd al-Raḥman b. Ḥakam has a lacuna, starting merely with *ikhwat labu*, meaning a few nephews could be missing: al-Zubayrī, *Nasab*, 159–60, 170–2.

²⁰ On the reliability of numbers in early Islamic sources, see Nawas, ‘Quest’.

²¹ See, for example, the removal notices of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Marwān or Hishām b. ‘Abd al-Malik in al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, II:335, 376–7. Hishām also attempted to depose al-Walīd by reducing his and his companions’ salaries: al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, VIII:388.

al-Walīd b. Yazīd's accession as preserved in Arabic, Greek and Syriac all focus on al-Walīd b. Yazīd seizing Hishām's storerooms (*khazā'in*) in Ruṣafa.²² As discussed below, Marwānid agnatic relatives were granted important governorships and leadership of summer expeditions and the *ḥajj*, all of which contributed to wealth accumulation.²³ However, let us first expand upon the generational and social context for the *fitna*, which was a product of Marwānid succession policy.

Generational Stratification

Marsham stressed that, 'in the Marwānid patrimony [...] succession tended to become the focus of competition within the dynasty and within the dynasty's supporters'.²⁴ This competition was exacerbated by the adoption of agnatic rotation by the dynasty: of the nine Marwānid caliphs who succeeded 'Abd al-Malik, four were brothers (his sons al-Walīd, Sulaymān, Hishām and Yazīd), while 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz was their first cousin. When Yazīd b. al-Walīd came to power, he nominated his brother Ibrāhīm and a cousin, reintroducing agnatic rotation. There were thus only three instances of 'vertical' succession. Literary sources place an emphasis on maintaining the caliphate among the *banū 'Abd al-Malik*, while any attempt to remove an heir in favour of one's own son was unsuccessful.²⁵ For instance, the nomination narrative following Sulaymān b. 'Abd al-Malik's death sees Hishām b. 'Abd al-Malik press the Marwānid courtier Rajā' b. Ḥaywa al-Kindī (d. 112/730) to reveal the succession order; when he refused, the future caliph allegedly exclaimed: 'Is it someone outside the sons of 'Abd al-Malik?'²⁶

The sources thus reflect anxieties over the caliphate passing out of the hands of the *banū 'Abd al-Malik*. An increase in concubine-born sons (*ḥajīns*) meant that individuals like Maslama b. 'Abd al-Malik only had patrilineals to rely on, making support of their brothers over cousins or nephews

²² Pecorini Goodall, 'The 'Abbās', 405.

²³ For wealth accumulation through association with the Marwānid state, see most recently Zychowicz-Coghill, *Annals*, 53–6.

²⁴ Marsham, *Rituals*, 120.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 121.

²⁶ Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, V:248; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1343; Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh*, XLV:164. See Bosworth's discussion of 'Umar's nomination in his 'Rajā' Ibn Ḥaywa'. For a similar example, see al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, VIII:369–70.

an obvious decision.²⁷ This system worked for nearly forty years; the death of Hishām, however, brought about two major problems: firstly, Hishām was amongst the youngest free-born sons of ‘Abd al-Malik and given his nineteen-year-long reign, the candidate pool of the *banū ‘Abd al-Malik* had dried up; secondly, al-Walīd b. Yazīd had been established as heir for over twenty years.²⁸

Hishām’s attempts to remove al-Walīd with the support of his governors (mainly maternal relatives or in-laws) and elevate his own son proved unsuccessful. The restriction of the Marwānid patrimony thus loomed over an earlier generation, who felt their privileges were at risk. This is why the *banū al-Walīd* and *Hishām* rebelled against their cousin al-Walīd, whose succession meant it was unlikely that they would be chosen for the caliphate or nominated for important positions. This is particularly significant given the breakdown of the tribal support networks that had defined the Marwānid polity: by the 120s/740s, localised military support superseded the previous importance of tribal connections and unity.²⁹

Since no grandson of ‘Abd al-Malik had yet come to power, all caliphs prior to al-Walīd b. Yazīd were products of unions made during the Second *Fitna* (60–72/680–92), meaning that maternal family members, who had benefitted greatly from their association with the dynasty, found themselves further estranged from the ruler. This is reflected in al-Walīd b. Yazīd’s imprisonment of Hishām’s sons and their maternal relatives, who had supported the attempted deposition upon his accession.³⁰ This heavy-handed approach, paired with the nomination of his own sons, must have confirmed the rebellious factions’ suspicion that they would be removed from the patrimony. Notably, al-Walīd b. Yazīd may have tried to co-opt a section of the future rebels; this failed, however, as he tasked the most senior member of the *banū al-Walīd*, al-‘Abbās, with imprisoning Hishām’s sons and securing the storerooms. This faith was misplaced, as al-‘Abbās appears in Arabic sources as being captured by his brother Yazīd, prompting significant defections of

²⁷ M. Robinson, *Marriage*, 180; Urban, *Conquered Populations*, 111–18.

²⁸ For Hishām’s birth in 72/691, see Pecorini Goodall, ‘Ibn ‘Ā’isha’, 503–10; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, VIII:367; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1466; Anon., *Uyūn*, 81–2; Ibn ‘Abd Rabbīhī, *Iqd*, 192.

²⁹ Urban, *Conquered Populations*, 125–8; Marsham, *Rituals*, 120.

³⁰ Al-Ya’qūbī, *Tārīkh*, II:397.

al-Walīd's supporters, or, in the case of Christian sources, orchestrating the *fitna*.³¹

From a generational perspective, by employing agnatic rotation, Umayyad succession policy resulted in generating a series of familial branches that, if the caliphate were to pass from father to son, had a claim to rule via hereditary right.³² This would manifest itself in the rebellion against al-Walīd b. Yazīd by the sidelined *banū al-Walīd* and *Hishām*. Given the rebellion's eventual success, why were they previously not successful in removing him as heir? The answer lies in the contractual nature of the *bay'a* (pledge of allegiance). With one exception, every Marwānid caliph with previously designated heirs attempted to remove them; none succeeded. As stressed by Marsham and the introduction to this volume, the *bay'a* was a contractual agreement and could not be broken unilaterally without repercussion, and rebellions were often articulated in relation to the pledge.³³

As I will show in the next section, the *banū al-Walīd* and *Hishām* were the best established to rebel against the newly appointed caliph, having benefitted from official appointments during their fathers' extended rule.

The Constituencies of the Rebellion

The *banū al-Walīd* and *Hishām* had enjoyed considerable gubernatorial and institutional positions during the lengthy reigns of their fathers, allowing for the consolidation and accumulation of wealth. Al-Walīd b. Yazīd and his brothers, on the other hand, did not enjoy the same privileges of rule as they were all still quite young at the time of their father's death; moreover, under *Hishām* these positions were dominated by his sons and maternal family, the *banū Makhzūm*. By investigating the family's leadership of the *ṣā'ifa* (summer raid against the Romans), *ḥajj* (pilgrimage) and governorships, it is clear the *banū al-Walīd* and *Hishām* were uniquely positioned to call upon wider imperial support in their rebellion.

³¹ Pecorini Goodall, 'The 'Abbās', 402–18.

³² Marsham, *Rituals*, 129. As Marsham has rightly pointed out, many of the Marwānids also died young, which undoubtedly sped up caliphal succession and resulted in multiple agnatic branches coming to power, exacerbating competition. Marsham, 'Introduction', 15.

³³ Marsham, *Rituals*, 21–80; Hagemann and Grant, Introduction to this volume, 1; Judd, 'Third Fitna', 72–84. See also Kontny-Wendt in this volume.

McMillan has convincingly demonstrated that leading the *ḥajj* meant garnering legitimacy.³⁴ The *ṣāʿifa* took on similar legitimising significance as the *ḥajj*, as can be seen in early Marwānid poetics such as the *madīḥ* (eulogy) for ʿAbd al-Malik by al-Akḥṭal (d. 92/710), in which the poet praises the caliph for his active participation in yearly warfare,³⁵ despite ʿAbd al-Malik having never personally led the *ṣāʿifa*. However, of the fifty-two raids recorded in our source material, only three were not led by a family member; keeping leadership positions within the *banū al-Ḥakam* allowed them to monopolise the legitimacy and authority these afforded.³⁶ The financial perks of raiding are also clear: al-Ṭabarī claims that if a Marwānid went raiding, they would receive an *ʿatā* (stipend) of 200 *dinārs*, and they presumably also received a large portion of the spoils. Marwān b. al-Ḥakam is said to have received one fifth of the spoils of the conquest of North Africa despite not being ruler at the time. This may in fact be a trope, as that is the traditional allotment for a caliph.³⁷ It is not clear if military participation was required for the *ʿatā* to be paid, meaning that the Marwānids may have regularly received salaries of this size.³⁸ Raiding then generated legitimacy and financial advantages for the ruling family; fortunately, details of the leadership of raids are preserved in histories across the late antique tradition, as I will briefly discuss before turning to the data itself.

Information on leadership of the *ḥajj* and *ṣāʿifa* is found throughout early Islamic historiography. According to Kennedy, it constitutes the ‘skeleton annal’ underpinning the chronological framework of the sources, as they were the main yearly events (from the polity’s perspective) and aided in generating an imperial historiography.³⁹ Crone and Robinson have highlighted the centrality of lists in early Islamic historical writing, and Zychowicz-Coghill’s re-composition of al-Layth b. Saʿd’s *Tārīkh* (d. 175/791), itself primarily composed of these notices, demonstrates their early circulation.⁴⁰ These lists were

³⁴ McMillan, *Meaning*, 166.

³⁵ Al-Akḥṭal, *Sbiʿ*, I:39–53. For a full discussion and translation of the poem, see Pinckney Stetkevych, ‘Al-Akḥṭal’, 145–53.

³⁶ These three occurred under ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz and Yazīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik in 99/718, 101/720 and 104/723. Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, I:426, 461, 477.

³⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1731–2; Ibn Qutayba, *Maʿārif*, 195.

³⁸ Kennedy, *Armies*, 63.

³⁹ Kennedy, ‘Sources’, 167.

⁴⁰ Crone, *Slaves*, 17; C. Robinson, *Historiography*, 78; Zychowicz-Coghill, *Annals*, *passim*.

probably compiled independently and then incorporated into larger narrative-style histories, as evidenced by the survival of a list in Ibn ‘Asākir’s hand of Hārūn b. Hātim’s (d. 249/863–4) *Tārīkh*, which enumerates *ḥajj* leaders from the reign of ‘Alī to the fall of the Umayyads.⁴¹

The sources used for the present overview are the annalistic histories of Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ (d. 240/855), al-Ṭabarī, al-Maṣ‘ūdī (d. 346/956) and the regnal history of al-Ya‘qūbī (d. after 295/908). For raiding leadership, the Greek *Chronographia* of Theophanes (d. 818) has been consulted. Since Marwānid children were primarily granted governorships of Syria, the tables generated by Gundelfinger and Verkinderen were consulted, as was Crone’s *Slaves on Horses*.⁴² For the *ḥajj*, references have been made to McMillan’s tables of pilgrimage leaders.⁴³ Italicised dates indicate that another leader is provided for that same year, meaning there were multiple raids in the same year or simply that there was disagreement.⁴⁴ The date ranges for governorships are tentative since often we only know either appointment or dismissal date. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, however, the figures in the tables appear as opponents to al-Walīd b. Yazīd. What stands out in Table 12.1 is the active role played in caliphal institutions by the sons of al-Walīd and Hishām b. ‘Abd al-Malik, especially when compared to the sons of the other caliphs.

Investigating the early careers of Marwānid sons in Table 12.1 reveals a much higher rate of governors, particularly among the *banū al-Walīd*, who apparently maintained their governorships in Syria into the *fitna*; this was the case for both Bishr and ‘Umar b. al-Walīd, who were major opponents of al-Walīd b. Yazīd.⁴⁵ Except al-‘Abbās, these sons were no longer charged with leading raids or the *ḥajj* following their father’s death and were not granted new governorships, but maintained influence in these regions. Yazīd b. al-Walīd was not granted any leadership positions under his father, presumably because he was only fourteen when his father died, meaning he was not old enough to perform any public duty. A limitation of the prosopographical

⁴¹ Al-Shihābī, ‘*Tārīkh*’, 116–45. I am grateful to May Shaddel for sharing a copy of both the article and images of the manuscripts with me.

⁴² Crone, *Slaves*; Gundelfinger and Verkinderen, ‘Governors’.

⁴³ McMillan, *Meaning*.

⁴⁴ Blankinship, *End*, 119.

⁴⁵ On al-‘Abbās’ continued influence in Ḥimṣ and Bishr and ‘Umar’s role in the Third *Fitna*, see Pecorini Goodall, ‘The ‘Abbās’.

Table 12.1 Performance of empire in the Marwānid family

Marwānid	Šāʿifa (date)	Hajj (date)	Governorship
Marwān b. Muḥammad b. Marwān (d. 132/750)	105/724, ¹ 121/739, ² 123/741 ³	N/A	Al-Jazīra and the North (Hishām) ⁴
Sons of Hishām b. ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 105–125/724–43)			
Sulaymān b. Hishām (d. after 130/747)	114/733, ⁵ 117/736, ⁶ 118/737, ⁷ 119/738, ⁸ 120/738, ⁹ 122/740, ¹⁰ 124/742 ¹¹	112/731 or 113/732 and 120/738 ¹²	N/A
Maslama b. Hishām (d. 132/750)	118/737, ¹³ 121/739 ¹⁴	118/737 ¹⁵	N/A
Muʿāwiya b. Hishām (d. 118/737)	106/725, ¹⁶ 107/726, ¹⁷ 109/728, ¹⁸ 110/729, ¹⁹ 111/730, ²⁰ 112/731, ²¹ 114/733, ²² 115/734, ²³ 116/735, ²⁴ 117/736, ²⁵ 118/737, ²⁶ 119/738, ²⁷ 122/740 ²⁸	N/A	N/A

¹ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārikh*, II:480.² *Ibid.*, II:523.³ Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārikh*, II:395.⁴ For his governorship, see Vacca, 'Umayyad North', 229.⁵ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārikh*, II:507–8; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārikh*, II:1561.⁶ Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārikh*, II:395.⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārikh*, II:1588; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 411.⁸ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārikh*, II:518; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 411.⁹ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārikh*, II:520; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārikh*, II:1635; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 411.¹⁰ Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārikh*, II:395; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 411.¹¹ Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārikh*, II:395; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārikh*, II:1727.¹² McMillan, *Meaning*, 128–30.¹³ Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārikh*, II:395.¹⁴ *Ibid.*¹⁵ McMillan, *Meaning*, 129.¹⁶ Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārikh*, II:394.¹⁷ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārikh*, II:492; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārikh*, II:394.¹⁸ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārikh*, II:496; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārikh*, II:395; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārikh*, II:1495.¹⁹ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārikh*, II:496; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārikh*, II:1506–7.²⁰ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārikh*, II:500–1; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārikh*, II:395; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārikh*, II:1526.²¹ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārikh*, II:504; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārikh*, II:395; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārikh*, II:1530; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 410.²² Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārikh*, II:507–8; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārikh*, II:395; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārikh*, II:1561.²³ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārikh*, II:510; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārikh*, II:395; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārikh*, II:1562–3.²⁴ Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārikh*, II:395; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārikh*, II:1564.²⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārikh*, II:1564.²⁶ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārikh*, II:515; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārikh*, II:395; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārikh*, II:1588.²⁷ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārikh*, II:518.²⁸ *Ibid.*, II:526.

Table 12.1 (continued)

Marwānid	<i>Ṣā'ifa</i> (date)	<i>Ḥajj</i> (date)	Governorship
Muḥammad b. Hishām (d. after 122/740)	122/740 ²⁹	N/A	N/A
Yazīd b. Hishām (d. after 120/738)	N/A	120/738 ³⁰	N/A
Ibrāhīm b. Hishām (d. after 108/727)	108/727 ³¹	N/A	N/A
Sa'īd b. Hishām (d. after 111/730)	111/730 ³²	N/A	Ḥimṣ (Hishām b. 'Abd al- Malik) ³³
Sons of al-Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik (r. 86–96/705–15)			
Yazīd b. al-Walīd (d. 126/744)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Al-'Abbās b. al-Walīd (d. 132/750)	88/707, ³⁴ 90/709, ³⁵ 93/712, ³⁶ 94/713, ³⁷ 96/715, ³⁸ 102/721, ³⁹ 103/722 ⁴⁰	86/705 or 94/713 ⁴¹	Ḥimṣ (al-Walīd) ⁴² 86–96
'Abd al-'Azīz b. al-Walīd (d. 111/728–9)	90/709 ⁴³ or 91/710, ⁴⁴ 94/713 ⁴⁵	93/712 or 94/713 ⁴⁶	Damascus, Qinnasrīn (al-Walīd and Yazīd b. 'Abd al- Malik) ⁴⁷ 86–96

²⁹ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, II:526.

³⁰ McMillan, *Meaning*, 130.

³¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1492.

³² Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, II:500–1; al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, II:395; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1526.

³³ Gundelfinger and Verkinderen, 'Governors', 300.

³⁴ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, I:399; al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, II:350; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1194; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 377.

³⁵ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, I:402; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1200–1.

³⁶ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, I:405; al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, II:1350; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1236.

³⁷ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, I:408; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1255–6; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 383.

³⁸ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, I:421; al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, II:1350.

³⁹ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, II:471.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, II:475; al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, II:378; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1437.

⁴¹ McMillan, *Meaning*, 95–6.

⁴² Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, I:417.

⁴³ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, II:1350.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1217.

⁴⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1255–6.

⁴⁶ McMillan, *Meaning*, 96–7.

⁴⁷ Gundelfinger and Verkinderen, 'Governors', 299.

Table 12.1 (continued)

Marwānid	Ṣā'ifa (date)	Hajj (date)	Governorship
Bishr b. al-Walīd (d. after 126/744)	96/715 ⁴⁸	95/714 ⁴⁹	Qinnasrīn (al-Walīd and Yazīd b. 'Abd al-Malik) ⁵⁰ 86–96, 101–5
'Umar b. al-Walīd (d. after 126/744)	94/713 ⁵¹	88/707 ⁵²	Jordan (al-Walīd and Yazīd b. al-Walīd) ⁵³ 86–96, 126
Ibrāhīm b. al-Walīd (d. after 132/750)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Sons of al-Ḥajjāj b. 'Abd al-Malik (d. after 106/724–5)			
'Abd al-'Azīz b. al-Ḥajjāj b. 'Abd al-Malik (d. 126/744)	N/A	124/742 ⁵⁴	Ḥimṣ (al-Walīd b. Yazīd) ⁵⁵ 126
Sons of Yazīd b. 'Abd al-Malik (d. 105/724)			
al-Walīd b. Yazīd b. 'Abd al-Malik (d. 126/744)	N/A	116/735 ⁵⁶	N/A
Ghamr b. Yazīd b. 'Abd al-Malik (d. 132/750)	125/743 ⁵⁷ (al-Walīd b. Yazīd)	N/A	N/A

⁴⁸ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, I:421; al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, II:1350; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1269.

⁴⁹ McMillan, *Meaning*, 97.

⁵⁰ Crone, *Slaves*, 128; Gundelfinger and Verkinderen, 'Governors', 299.

⁵¹ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, II:1350.

⁵² McMillan, *Meaning*, 96.

⁵³ Crone, *Slaves*, 126; Gundelfinger and Verkinderen, 'Governors', 301.

⁵⁴ McMillan, *Meaning*, 130.

⁵⁵ Gundelfinger and Verkinderen, 'Governors', 300.

⁵⁶ McMillan, *Meaning*, 129.

⁵⁷ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, II:395; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 416.

data is that it is unclear why he served as figurehead of the rebellion; as I have demonstrated elsewhere, however, he was heavily reliant on his brothers, who had been tasked with pilgrimage and raiding leadership.⁴⁶

Hishām, unlike al-Walīd, did not give many governorships to his children, preferring his maternal family; but his children, particularly the concubine-born ones, feature actively on the frontier and to a lesser extent, in pilgrimage

⁴⁶ Pecorini Goodall, 'The 'Abbās', 405–11.

ceremonial.⁴⁷ The reason for this is two-fold: one, by granting his maternal family governorships, he maintained loyal support in strategic regions, namely Iraq and the Ḥijāz; two, in Syria and the Jazīra, regions typically granted to close members of the caliphal family, Hishām had to contend with the entrenchment of various influential family members such as Maslama b. ‘Abd al-Malik, Marwān b. Muḥammad or the *banū al-Walīd*, who continued to be associated with these regions for extended periods.

Unlike the sons of Hishām and al-Walīd, Yazīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik’s sons did not hold important or lucrative positions; al-Walīd b. Yazīd’s only *ḥajj* occurred under his uncle Hishām b. ‘Abd al-Malik.⁴⁸ This lack of gubernatorial or political experience is owed partially to the brevity of Yazīd’s reign; Sulaymān’s sons do not appear either, as they were quite young.⁴⁹ More significantly, though, Yazīd did not appoint his own family over the *ḥajj*, which was led exclusively by his Qaysī governors of Mecca and Medina.⁵⁰ His raiding policy looks the same, as it was largely in the hands of his governors of Syria.⁵¹ Additionally, Yazīd died quite young, and his children were probably not of an age to enjoy such positions – a further indication of the generational perils of agnatic succession. Yazīd’s mother was ‘Ātika, the daughter of the second Umayyad caliph Yazīd b. Mu‘āwiya; his maternal Sufyānid relatives were not assigned important positions, perhaps because they had a similar claim to rule as the *banū Marwān*.⁵²

The extended reigns of al-Walīd and Hishām b. ‘Abd al-Malik and their sons’ centrality in political-religious and gubernatorial positions must have contributed to a feeling that they deserved the caliphate. These positions also permitted them to command loyalty and engender military support.⁵³ It seems that al-Walīd b. Yazīd did recognise the importance of granting these positions to family members: he tasked his brother Ghamr b. Yazīd with the only *ṣā’ifa*

⁴⁷ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, I:534–42.

⁴⁸ Ibid., I:377; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, VII:476; Ibn A‘tham, *Futūḥ*, VIII:137; al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, II:259. This pilgrimage season went down infamously, as al-Walīd allegedly placed a drinking tent over the Ka‘ba; on this event – and al-Walīd’s reputation – see Judd, ‘Reinterpreting’.

⁴⁹ Mayer, ‘New Considerations’, 81–8.

⁵⁰ McMillan, *Meaning*, 119–22.

⁵¹ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, II:471, 475, 477, 480.

⁵² Al-Zubayrī, *Nāsab*, 163.

⁵³ Ibn Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, II:549; al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, II:400.

of his reign and made his own sons and heirs governors of Damascus and Ḥims, respectively.⁵⁴ Interestingly, like Hishām, al-Walīd b. Yazīd nominated his maternal uncles over Iraq and the Ḥijāz.⁵⁵

Al-Walīd's accession, which brought with it the imprisonment of the *banū Hishām* and the torture and execution of Hishām's governors, led the two most well-established Marwānid branches to rebel. The *banū al-Walīd* reportedly had personal grievances, too: apparently al-Walīd b. Yazīd had taken a concubine from the *banū al-Walīd*, who threatened him because of this.⁵⁶ Similarly, the *banū al-Walīd* accused him of having had sex with his father's *ummahāt awlād* (concubine mothers).⁵⁷ The focus on *ummahāt awlād* in the narrative is significant: as nearly all of al-Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik's surviving sons were concubine-born, the concubine in question may have been one of their mothers or a wet-nurse. As noted, concubine-born sons would often tie themselves to their brothers to maintain their role in the patrimony. The *banū al-Walīd* and *Hishām* had taken their turn with the wealth and positions of the caliphate, but with the accession of al-Walīd b. Yazīd risked losing out; they thus reasserted themselves through rebellion. United in their opposition to al-Walīd b. Yazīd, the genealogical record shows that they brought the two branches closer via marriage, probably to assure the mutual interests of both going forward.

Marriages between the *Banū al-Walīd* and *Hishām*

Ahmed and Robinson have demonstrated that the Quraysh frequently married their own cousins and genealogical literature reflects this transition towards endogamous unions. In the case of Marwānid women, endogamy appears to have largely been the norm.⁵⁸ This was an attempt to keep access to the caliphate away from powerful families who might otherwise have made a claim based on marriage, emphasising the importance of matrilineality in early Islam. The following section will analyse endogamous marriages to understand the factions of the Third *Fitna*, arguing that these marriages elucidate

⁵⁴ Gundelfinger and Verkinderen, 'Governors', 301.

⁵⁵ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, II:397–8.

⁵⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1776.

⁵⁷ Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, IX:178.

⁵⁸ For Ḥaṣanid endogamy, see Ahmed, *Religious Elite*, 148–66; M. Robinson, *Marriage*, 9.

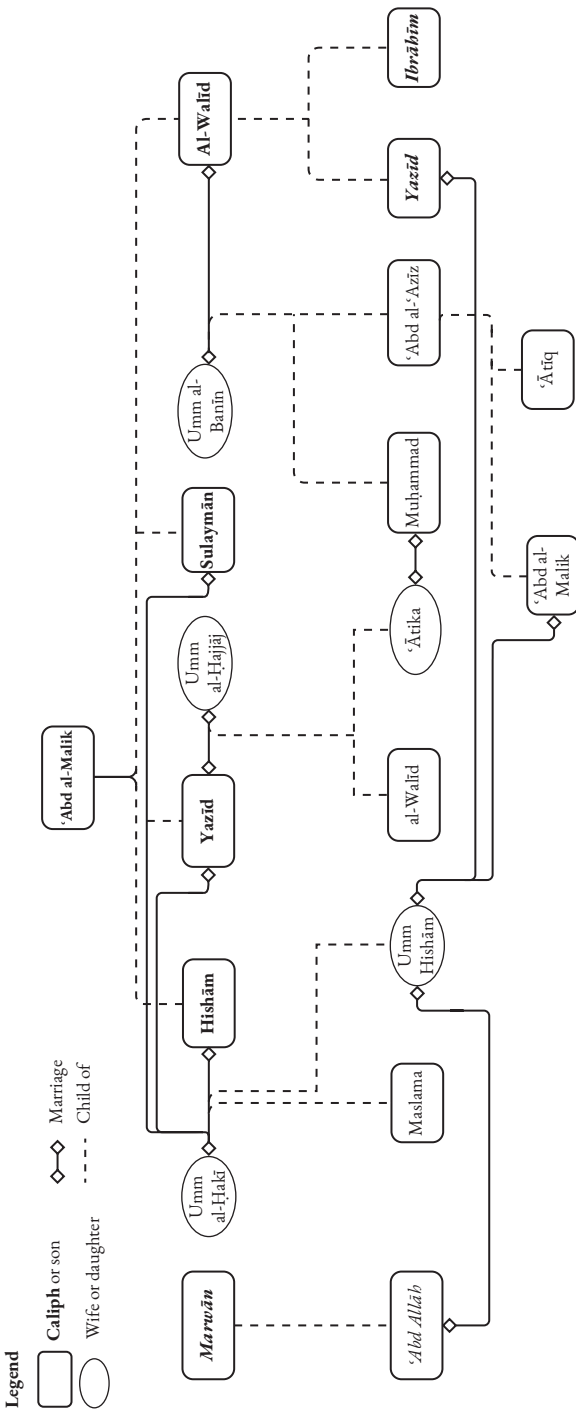


Figure 12.1 Endogamous marriage amongst the grandsons of 'Abd al-Malik

how and why the *banū al-Walīd* became the pre-eminent branch of the *banū Marwān*. A genealogical tree has been provided for reference (see Fig. 12.1). Furthermore, I will foreground the conclusions of the analysis, which consists of three points: firstly, Yazīd b. al-Walīd's marriage to Umm Hishām bt. Hishām b. 'Abd al-Malik is representative of the alliance between the two branches. Second, the *banū Hishām* were ill-positioned to put forth a caliphal candidate. Thirdly, the marriages of concubine-born sons within these generations illustrate how individuals without maternal family tied themselves to other branches.

Figure 12.1 shows it was common for caliphal daughters to marry multiple members of the same family. For instance, one of Hishām's daughters, Umm Hishām, married Yazīd b. al-Walīd in the lead-up to the rebellion against al-Walīd b. Yazīd; subsequently, she married his nephew and then 'Abdallāh b. Marwān b. Muḥammad b. Marwān.⁵⁹

Umm Hishām's first marriage to Yazīd b. al-Walīd is perhaps the most important for the present study. In al-Ṭabarī's account, this notice is provided in the build-up to the rebellion and Sulaymān b. Hishām's return from imprisonment in Jordan.⁶⁰ That this marriage occurred in this context is all the more significant because the 'exchange of brides between sections could both forge and symbolise alliance relationships of different kinds, as well as other mutual commitments'.⁶¹ In this case, however, Yazīd did not exchange a bride of the *banū al-Walīd*, but allegedly returned the *amwāl* (goods/riches) that al-Walīd had taken upon his accession, reiterating the centrality of wealth to the *fitna* narrative. It is possible that this marriage was an attempt to protect the daughters of the *banū Hishām*, whose brothers had been imprisoned. Once freed, Sulaymān b. Hishām, now a brother-in-law, would lead the caliph's forces against Marwān b. Muḥammad b. Marwān after Yazīd's death; he ultimately defected to the Khārijite al-Daḥḥāk b. Qays al-Shaybānī (d. 128/746), further cementing his rebel credentials.⁶²

⁵⁹ Al-Zubayrī, *Nasab*, 167.

⁶⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1827; Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh*, LVII:308.

⁶¹ Landau-Tasserón, 'Status of Allies', 8.

⁶² Hawting, *First Dynasty*, 99–101.

The other military commander of the anti-al-Walīd b. Yazīd faction was ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. al-Ḥajjāj b. ‘Abd al-Malik, Yazīd’s second heir.⁶³ ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was in all probability a *hajīn*.⁶⁴ His nomination as heir is curious, given his general absence from the sources before the *fitna*; this could, however, be partly explained by his marriage to Umm Salama bt. Hishām.⁶⁵ ‘Abd al-‘Azīz had married Umm Salama by 124/741–2, as they allegedly went on *hajj* together in that year, meaning that he had linked himself to the *banū Hishām* before Hishām’s death.⁶⁶ This was a marriage between two concubine-born children and it was rare for *hajīn* sons to marry their concubine-born cousins, emphasising that this was likely a political marriage.⁶⁷ Furthermore, as brother-in-law to Hishām’s imprisoned sons, he may have stepped in on their behalf. Another of Hishām’s daughters married her cousin Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Malik, who appears in the sources as one of the main supporters of Maslama b. Hishām during Hishām’s attempts to remove al-Walīd from succession.⁶⁸ Like ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, Muḥammad was a *hajīn* and his marriage into the *banū Hishām* is an outlier given the lower rate of *hajīn* marriage practices; it may have been an attempt by Hishām to secure support for his son by assuring his brothers a continued role in the caliphate.⁶⁹

These marriages are given further context considering that Hishām was one of ‘Abd al-Malik’s youngest sons and his children, even if they were born when Hishām was in his mid-teens, would not have been of marrying age until around the 110s/730s. Additionally, Umm Hishām’s mother, Umm Ḥakīm, gave birth to five children, including Maslama b. Hishām, making it even more probable that Hishām’s daughters reached marrying age only in the 110s/730s.⁷⁰ None of these children could have been born prior to Hishām’s assumption of the caliphate, given that Umm Ḥakīm was married first to his brothers Sulaymān and Yazīd, though it is not clear if she bore them children.

⁶³ Al-Dīnawarī, *Akbbār*, 350; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, IX:189; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1870.

⁶⁴ Al-Zubayrī, *Nasab*, 165. The notice provided by later historians, that ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s mother was Rayṭā bt. ‘Ubaydallāh b. ‘Abdallāh al-Ḥārithiyya, is probably a later construct aimed at delegitimising the ‘Abbāsids: Judd, ‘Medieval Explanations’, 99–100.

⁶⁵ Al-Zubayrī, *Nasab*, 168.

⁶⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1727.

⁶⁷ Al-Zubayrī, *Nasab*, 167.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 168; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, VIII:388.

⁶⁹ M. Robinson, *Marriage*, 195–9.

⁷⁰ There is some uncertainty as to Umm Ḥakīm’s *nasab* and in turn her generation: al-Zubayrī, *Nasab*, 167, 171; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh*, LXX:229.

In fact, this casts doubts on Hishām's attempts to nominate Maslama: even if he was Umm Ḥakīm's eldest son, he would have been thirteen at most when Hishām began to position him for the caliphate.

The young age of Hishām's sons is also evident in the prosopographical table above, as no free-born sons assumed any public role until the mid-730s; Ibrāhīm, Sulaymān and Mu'āwiya b. Hishām were concubine-born.⁷¹ That Hishām's daughters, aside from the *hajīn* union between 'Abd al-'Azīz and Umm Salama, contracted no marriages before the *fitna* may indicate that Hishām was waiting to marry off his other daughters until he had secured his son's succession. His death and their young age may also explain why Umm Hishām married only during the *fitna*. Hishām was al-Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik's younger brother, meaning the latter's sons had seniority in the system of relative agnatic parity, and the marriages reflect this. Furthermore, al-Walīd is recorded as having had only two daughters, while Hishām had five.⁷² Al-Walīd b. Yazīd's imprisonment of the *banū Hishām* may have meant that these daughters were in a vulnerable position. Marriage therefore served to tie these two groups of cousins together. Additionally, the *banū al-Walīd* appear to have retained the strongest and most recognised hereditary claim to the caliphate in the late Marwānid period and crucially were well-positioned to press it due to the imprisonment of Hishām's sons.⁷³ This is reflected in the suggested nomination of 'Ātiq b. 'Abd al-'Azīz b. al-Walīd as successor to al-Walīd b. Yazīd – a re-adoption of agnatic rotation, but this time between cousins.⁷⁴

The *banū Hishām* and *al-Walīd* were not the only ones marrying amongst themselves: one of al-Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik's sons, Muḥammad, married al-Walīd b. Yazīd's full sister, 'Ātika.⁷⁵ This marriage is noteworthy for combining many of the competing branches of the Marwānids: Muḥammad was the son of Umm al-Banīn bt. 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Marwān, while 'Ātika was named after her maternal grandmother, the daughter of the second Sufyānid caliph, and her mother was Umm al-Ḥajjāj al-Thaqafi. Muḥammad b. al-Walīd does not appear in any narratives of the Third *Fitna*, and according to al-Balādhurī

⁷¹ Al-Zubayrī, *Nasab*, 167–8.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 165, 167–8.

⁷³ Marsham, *Rituals*, 118.

⁷⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II:1776.

⁷⁵ Al-Zubayrī, *Nasab*, 166–7.

gave his daughter in marriage to another son of Yazīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik, but these two were divorced by Hishām as the marriage was never consummated.⁷⁶ This forced divorce could be read as an attempt to reduce connections between the *banū al-Walīd* and *Yazīd*. The marriage between Muḥammad b. al-Walīd and ‘Ātika probably occurred at the latest under Hishām but perhaps even earlier; since both husband and wife were from the main child-bearing unions of their parents, they were probably among the eldest children.

Data for endogamous marriages aid in contextualising and interpreting the role of individual family members within the wider narrative framework. To a lesser extent, data for *hajīn* marriages aid in understanding why and how individuals devoid of uterine brothers tied themselves to other familial branches.

Conclusion

Studying Marwānid family dynamics reveals that the Third *Fitna* was a direct consequence of dynastic factionalism and the limitations of the succession model. The aggrieved factions had accumulated significant political and religious capital within and outside the family in the years leading up to the *fitna*. This is well reflected in the discussed *ḥadīth*, which indicates that the Marwānid dynasty had simply grown too large to maintain the agnatic parity of the first decades of rule. Prosopography indicates that the *banū al-Walīd* and *Hishām*, the two larger factions of the Marwānid caliphate, had benefitted the most from the long reigns of their fathers and thus had the most to lose.⁷⁷ Al-Walīd b. Yazīd’s accession posed a threat and led significant branches of the family to rebel in response. Alliances were facilitated by marriage, as in Umm Hishām and Umm Salama’s cases. Yazīd b. al-Walīd’s alleged succession policy, nominating his brother followed by a first cousin instead of his own sons, further underlines that the issue of agnatic parity was paramount for the rebels, despite not being clearly stated as such in the sources.

Yazīd’s accession marked a watershed moment in early Islamic history since the barriers to *hajīn* caliphal rule had been broken. This is significant,

⁷⁶ Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, IX:164.

⁷⁷ Al-Walīd had eighteen children, Hishām fathered fifteen, Yazīd twelve and Sulaymān thirteen: al-Zubayrī, *Nasab*, 165–8.

Marwānid family tree

[#] – indicates order in Marwānid succession

Al-‘Abbās b. al-Walīd – italicised name indicates they were born to an *umm walad*

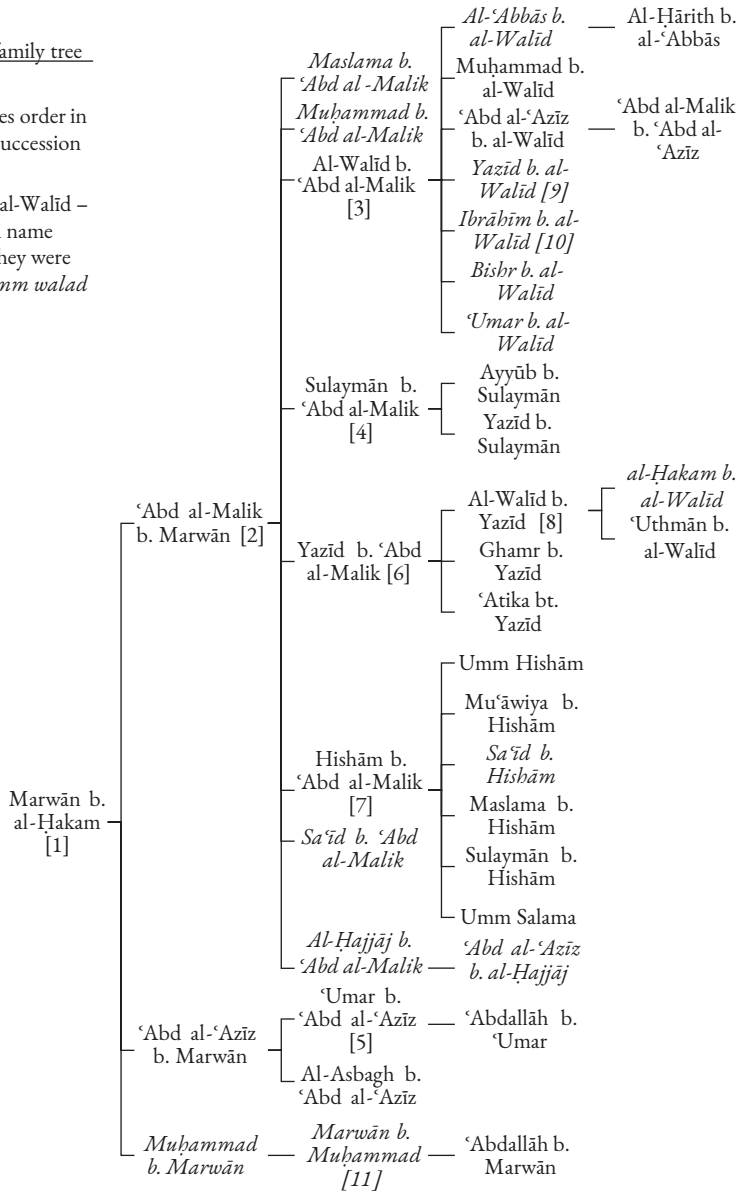


Figure 12.2 Marwānid family tree

as *hajīns* are the main subjects of accounts of the Third *Fitna*, reflecting the breakdown of the tribal support networks that had defined the Marwānid polity. The social context of the rebellion of the Third *Fitna* should therefore be seen as the over-expansion of the Marwānid family, which had proved incapable of restricting caliphal succession without alienating two major branches.

The generational explanation laid out here is not incompatible with other justifications for the *fitna* put forward by historians and Arabic narrative sources. Undoubtedly, there was a tribal and perhaps religious dimension, although the elite-focused nature of the present analysis occludes them. Certainly, a degree of tribal conflict played out along a Qays-Yemen binary, but Qaysī support was owed to Marwān b. Muḥammad's long-standing presence in the Jazīra and the North. Similarly, al-Balādhurī's account cannot be discounted entirely. Depictions of al-Walīd's unsuitability for the caliphate are found across late antique historiography and draw attention to his drinking, gambling and pleasure-seeking, indicating that even if religious opposition was overstated to suit the agenda of a compiler, this perception of him was widespread.⁷⁸ The confusing and often convoluted causes for the *fitna* presented by the sources eludes a single explanation; however, by identifying the careers of family members and the patterns of succession and nomination it is possible to read between the lines of the source material and provide a social and generational justification for the rebellion which brought about the end of the first Islamic dynasty.

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⁷⁸ Pecorini Goodall, 'The 'Abbās', 416.

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PART VII
SPACES OF REBELLION

13

Three Ka'bas, Three Rebellions: Rebels and Sacred Architectures in the Early Islamic World

Muhamed Riyaz Chenganakkattil

Introduction

By God, may I urge you not to make this sacred house a 'plaything for kings'. None of them wants to do anything else than tear it down and rebuild it. If the kings persist on the act of reconstruction, the respect for the house will fade away from the hearts of people.¹

These remarks were made by the eighth-century Islamic legal jurist, Mālik b. Anas, as a response to the 'Abbāsīd caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809), when the latter consulted him to receive a legal opinion on the restructuring of the Ka'ba, the religious building located in Mecca. This brief reference represents a window onto the role of sacred space and its varied political possibilities in the imperial culture of the caliphs in the early Islamic period. Though short, this significant legal exchange, between a religious and a political authority, reflects discourses in early Islamic sources on political engagements with sacred sites. The chastising remarks of the jurist, including the powerful rhetoric of the Ka'ba as a 'plaything for kings',² illustrate the intricacies of the existing

¹ Al-'Aynī, *Umdat al-qārī*, II:307; Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Istidbkār*, IV:188.

² For this phrase, see Hawting, 'Plaything'.

relationship between sacred space and power. They reveal how rulers in early Islamic contexts used the Ka'ba to serve their political motives.³

Mecca holds a unique place in Islam, structured around distinct characteristics of the sacred. Each object there is considered a part of an irremovable or inviolable space, generating numerous discourses concerning Muslims' intellectual, political and socio-cultural history since its establishment. Often referred to as a spiritually magnetic space, Mecca attracts millions of people from various parts of the world. Its emotionally generative capacity draws the hearts of pilgrims, engaging them in an affective world of Islam. Mecca has served as a reference point for various actors seeking to utilise the potential of (sacred) space to reorient or redirect political authority, imbued with new spatial meanings. In Islamic history, Mecca is treated as a 'locational anchor', setting the direction and spiritual destination of Muslims.⁴ In pre-Islamic Arabia, Mecca and its precincts were fertile ground for competition between political interests, contesting authority and reclaiming power. Throughout Islamic history, manifold efforts have been made to reclaim places like Mecca, by controlling pilgrims or diverting them from existing centres to newly established structures, depositing an object or undertaking remodelling with the aim of creating new pilgrimage possibilities. Conscious attempts have been made to construct new Muslim spatial imaginations to suit rulers' political projects. It is widely known that in early Islamic history, multiple spaces, along with sacred architecture, were employed as political tools to legitimise the authority of rulers.

Throughout history, the Ka'ba has been rebuilt and restructured for various purposes. These include rebuilding after natural disasters, such as floods and fires, as well as after political upheavals, such as warfare between rulers and rebels within Islam and conflicts with external forces. One notable instance of reconstruction was allegedly undertaken by the Quraysh, a prominent Arab clan, after a massive fire that was caused by a spark from an incense stick held by a pilgrim. In response to this specific destruction, long before the rise of Islam, the Quraysh reportedly decided to rebuild the structure based on the Abrahamic model, which subsequently became the standard for the Ka'ba.

³ See van Steenberg, *Caliphate*.

⁴ O'Meara, *Ka'ba*.

Centuries later, another disaster struck the Ka'ba, when it was burnt amid the Second *Fitna* (c.680–92), attributed to Ibn al-Zubayr's (d. 692) uprising against Umayyad caliphal imperialism. In response, Ibn Zubayr reconstructed the Ka'ba and added a gate or door. However, after Ibn al-Zubayr's defeat and murder under the Umayyad agent al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf (d. 714), the structure was reverted to the (allegedly) original Qurashī architectural model with the support of the Umayyads. This serial restructuring of the Ka'ba's architecture highlights strong relationships between the organisation of sacred space and the material and cultural organisation of power. Friedland and Hecht have discussed this in their analysis of the constructivist approach towards sacred space.⁵

While there are studies that examine the relationship between sacred space and political authority, investigations into how rebels in the early Islamic period used sacred architecture in resistance against existing power structures are relatively scarce. These uprisings were frequently fuelled by political and economic concerns and by resistance to authoritarian regimes. This chapter studies several such rebellious movements to offer new perspectives on how rebels strategically employed a 'spatial palimpsest' to change the region's physical and cultural landscape and utilise the changed landscape for their own political ends.

In the early Islamic period, various rebellions led to the repurposing of old structures and the construction of new ones that reflected the transformed socio-political contexts of the time. Harry Munt, in his study on sacred space in Islam, states that 'older sacred spaces have not always been appropriated by conquerors or other newcomers, and plenty of examples exist where a given holy site has fallen out of use over time'.⁶ For Munt, the sanctification project of rulers took the form of attributing a hierarchy to these spaces. He further states that,

these sacred hierarchies and interrelationships could change over time – some places could become more sacred, others less so – and such alterations can only be understood fully within their appropriate historical context.⁷

⁵ Friedland and Hecht, *To Rule Jerusalem*.

⁶ Munt, *Holy City*, 7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

The concept of sacred space had a tremendous impact on Islam's religious and political landscape. Munt investigates the role of rulers and caliphs and their motivations in exercising their power, therefore displaying their strong commitment to protecting or reclaiming these spaces.

In this chapter, I argue that repurposing and restructuring at its various levels, in the context of rebellion, facilitated inscribing new political meanings that could be considered legitimising tools for authority over space. This contestation of sacred spaces was enabled by relocating, transferring and moving specific structures and objects with modifications at the same place, as well as carrying sacred objects to another space to establish or restructure a new physical religious place and metaphorical alternatives – in this case, in relation to Mecca and the Ka'ba. Furthermore, by conceiving of space as political, and specifically by positing a politics of sanctification through spatial overwriting with exclusive reorganising and re-centring, I explore how the Ka'ba and sacred precincts became sites of contestation for reaffirming religious-political authority. Questions posed here include: how did the sacred precincts of the Ka'ba act as an appropriate space for the declaration of a new caliphal state or as a site for challenging traditional modes of power relations in Islamic political history, such as transferring power to the descendants of the present caliph? How did pilgrims and residents in Mecca respond to these new calls for authority, especially the perceived problems of the reconstruction of the Ka'ba and its partial destruction, through ripping off sacred objects and through its reconstitution in another spatial context?

To elaborate these principles, I present three case studies: (1) 'Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr's claim and announcement of himself as the heir to the caliphate, his opposition to the caliphate becoming an inheritable institution of the Umayyads, and his criticism of Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya's (d. 683) succession as heir-apparent in the Umayyad caliphal system;⁸ (2) the Qarmaṭians' rebellious call

⁸ See, for example, Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ch. 69, '*Kitāb al-Ḥajj*', on demolishing the Ka'ba: 'The House was burnt during the time of Yazid b. Muawiya when the people of Syria had fought (in Mecca). And it happened with it (the Ka'ba) what was (in store for it). Ibn Zubair (Allah be pleased with him) felt it (in the same state) until the people came in the season (of Hajj). (The idea behind was) that he wanted to exhort them or incite them (to war) against the people of Syria. When the people had arrived, he said to them: O people, advise me about the Ka'ba. Should I demolish it and then build it from its very foundation, or should I repair whatever has been damaged of it? Ibn 'Abbas said: An idea has occurred to me according to which I think that you should only repair (the portion which has been) damaged and leave the House (in that very state in which) people embraced

against the ‘Abbāsids and the subsequent sacking of the Black Stone from the Ka‘ba (early tenth century); and (3) al-Ḥusayn b. Maṣū‘ al-Ḥallāj’s (d. 922) call for pilgrimage to replicas of the Ka‘ba in one’s own home, representing a form of spiritual rebellion. These instances inform our understanding of the political and rebellious sovereignty that alleged rebels possessed or claimed to have. Investigating the distinct characteristics of each case, I suggest that it was not merely rulers that employed sacred spaces as political tools for legitimising authority, but also those that rebelled against those in power.

These three events support my argument that sacred space served as a potential site for the socio-political reconfiguration of the Muslim community. Each historical event will be elucidated to highlight the patterns of these movements and to demonstrate how they utilised the place, remnants and replicas of sacred objects and architecture in Mecca to reclaim authority and shift the religio-political centre. Although these movements ultimately faced resistance from the political authorities of their respective periods, they left a lasting impact on many communities and influenced successive generations to resist ruling regimes or rebel against widely accepted religious norms. Examining the trajectories of events associated with each period, I outline a topography of rebellion to identify similarities and continuities in claiming and reclaiming political, religious and spiritual authority. I contextualise each event to explore its socio-political capabilities, how ordinary people embraced such movements, how they influenced public sentiment as ideological calls to action, and how they potentially fostered widespread sectarianism and rebellious tendencies during the early Islamic period.

This chapter delineates various actors in rebellion against a centre, idea and power structure. Each political rebellion in the periods discussed in this chapter stemmed from ideological backing, typically from a sectarian ruler or claimant to the caliphate or imāmate. Their actors engaged in diplomatic negotiations, and studying their political challenges is crucial for understanding rebellion from various perspectives. My examination of rebellion aims to

Islam (and leave those very stones in the same state) when people embraced Islam, and over which Allah’s messenger had raised it. Thereupon Ibn Zubair said: If the house of any one of you is burnt, he would not be contented until he had reconstructed it, then what about the House of your Lord (which is far more important than your house)? I would seek good advice from my Lord thrice and then I would make up (my mind) about this affair. After seeking good advice thrice, he made up his mind to demolish it’. See <https://sunnah.com/muslim:1333f> (last accessed 9 May 2023).

explore the role of space and pilgrimage centres, and the experiences of *ḥajj* pilgrims in facilitating rebellion and staking claims for political legitimacy, whether successful or not. Space, architecture, buildings, objects, relics and symbols serve as locational anchors to mobilise people for collective action against oppressive regimes, corrupt rulers, or political and moral corruption. While my focus centres on three interconnected moments in early Islamic history, I trace the utilisation of space and place, particularly associated with the Muslim centre in the Ḥijāz, to highlight the rebellious characteristics of these movements.

Ibn al-Zubayr's Revolt against the Umayyads

An early instance of intervention at the Ka'ba by a rebel leader is that of 'Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr. When Mu'āwiya (d. 680), the first Umayyad caliph, ascended to the caliphate in 661, Ibn al-Zubayr did not oppose him. What instigated his resistance was Mu'āwiya's move to appoint his son, Yazīd, as his heir-apparent to the caliphate. Highlighting the problems of Yazīd's nomination for this powerful position within Islam, Ibn al-Zubayr questioned the new political order that might come from Yazīd's accession to the throne. Thus, his legitimacy to rule and govern was sternly challenged by Ibn al-Zubayr.⁹ In 680, when Yazīd eventually took the role of the caliph, Ibn al-Zubayr's political mood changed altogether, and he acted as an accelerator of rebellion.

While Yazīd ordered his governor at Medina to secure allegiance to himself as the newly appointed caliph, and sought the Zubayrids' submission to him as the new Umayyad ruler, Ibn al-Zubayr escaped from Medina to Mecca. He sought a new political haven from where he could launch a challenge against caliphal imperialism, which followed a process of appointing the caliph based on familial lineage. Ibn al-Zubayr's protest gained in acceptance as he countered Umayyad claims to inheritance of the caliphate with his own claim of territorial authority in Mecca, particularly within the holy precincts.¹⁰ By focusing his political actions around the *ḥaram*, he aimed to attract the attention of pilgrims, Meccan families and others. Through a secretive project,

⁹ Campbell, 'Telling Memories'.

¹⁰ Madelung, 'Abd Allāh B. Al-Zubayr'; Shaddel, 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr'.

he gathered several followers prepared to oppose what they understood as a corrupt process of accession to the caliphate. Before Mu'āwiya's death, as an alternative to the traditional inheritance-based caliphal selection, Ibn al-Zubayr proposed three options: leaving the succession question to the people, nominating a non-blood relative as caliph, and forming a *shūrā* (consultative body) without any Umayyad representation.¹¹

In short, Ibn al-Zubayr's anti-Umayyad position became the root cause of an insurrection. The primary locus of his rebellious activity was Mecca, as the holy premises or protected sacred spaces became a symbolic marker of the caliphal position.¹² Although many other marginal rebellions were staged against Umayyad rule, Ibn al-Zubayr's challenge was more powerful in terms of how it gathered momentum among various groups, such as the 'Alids and Khārijites. This prominence can be attributed to the Zubayrids' use of Mecca as a sacred space and 'leadership of the pilgrimage to legitimize their claim to the caliphate'.¹³ By highlighting the problem of social authority and economic security, and by exposing Umayyad negligence towards the region of Mecca and their weak position vis-à-vis the status of the Ka'ba, Ibn al-Zubayr could build a 'counter-caliphate in Mecca'.¹⁴ As will become clear from the following sections, though he had expanded his caliphal power to other regions, his primary motive for the uprising was to protect the sacred space and to make it a hub of political authority. At the outset of the rebellion, he cooperated with Khārijites, 'Alids and Ḥasanids to fight against a common enemy. Later, each of them split into independent rebellious movements, which created many challenges to Umayyad governance.¹⁵ I will describe how those rebellions also used the spatial symbol of the Ka'ba and the Prophet's Mosque and Pulpit to legitimise spatial tools for their claims to the caliphate.

The *Ḥaram* as Centre in Zubayrid Rebellion

Ibn al-Zubayr's prioritisation of the Ḥijāz as the centre of the action is visible in his final advice to the 'Alid *imām* and martyr al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī (d. 680)

¹¹ Nadvi, 'Ibn al-Zubayr', 60.

¹² Lynch, 'Sons'.

¹³ Browne, *Literary History*, I:228.

¹⁴ Arjomand, *Messianism*, 133.

¹⁵ Hagemann, *Khārijites*, 47.

when he decided to move to Kūfa. The advice is as follows: ‘If you had stayed in the Ḥijāz and then wanted this matter here, we would not have disagreed with you, but helped you, pledged allegiance to you and advised you.’¹⁶ In stating this, Ibn al-Zubayr emphasised the centrality of the Ḥijāz in the course of his rebellious actions; his resistance to leaving the Ḥijāz to help his fellow rebels ultimately contributed to the failure of the Zubayrid rebellion.¹⁷ Ibn al-Zubayr had assumed two qualities of the holy sanctuary as valid causes to make a claim for caliphal authority and to protect the sanctuary from the impending onslaughts of the Umayyads. Ibn al-Zubayr’s justificatory gesture towards the centrality of *ḥaram* precincts in this grand caliphal project can be summarised like this: the holy sanctuary could not be the target of the Umayyads because it was sacred; no blood should be shed and no evil intentions could be tolerated; and the Umayyads would not dare attack a structure like the Ka‘ba.

To put it differently, Ibn al-Zubayr’s selection of the sacred space of the *ḥaram* as the location of his rebellion might have been for two reasons: its intrinsic divine characterisation of inviolability, and for the sacred protection it offered against attacks initiated by the Umayyads.¹⁸ This use of the Ka‘ba and its premises for such rebellious actions apparently created a dilemma for the Umayyads in terms of whether it might be blasphemous or heretical to attack the Zubayrids in a sacred space, as well as engendering anxiety regarding how such a political move might be received by the Muslim community, and especially by pilgrims. Ibn al-Zubayr’s ‘strong association with the Muslim sanctuary at Mecca’ further shows his strategic programme for his universal caliphal ambition by his use of a place where both the space and people therein were (theoretically) protected from war, even if they had rebelled against the *imām* or caliph.¹⁹ This could have been another source of crisis for the Umayyads with regard to the quelling of the Zubayrid rebellion. Linking Mecca with questions of political authority, by assuming the title of ‘*al-‘a’idh bi-l-bayt*’ (the refugee of the House), Ibn

¹⁶ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, ed. al-Qāḍī, III:400.

¹⁷ Bouali, ‘Fitna’ and ‘De la révolte’.

¹⁸ A *ḥaram* is an ‘inviolable zone’, and it has legally and scripturally acclaimed status of protected territory in Islam.

¹⁹ Hawting, *First Dynasty*, 49.

al-Zubayr followed the legal dictum and scriptural order of protecting the sacred space and preserving its sanctity.²⁰

In 683, the Umayyads violated the legal prescription of immunity and inviolability ascribed to *ḥaram* premises by besieging Mecca.²¹ The siege took place on all levels leading to social boycotts, economic repression, denial of food and violence. During this siege, the curtain of the Ka'ba was burnt, its structure was destroyed, and many inhabitants were killed.²² Al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf was the military commander of a second siege (691) against Ibn al-Zubayr, during the reign of 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (d. 705). In every siege, there was a massive loss of life and damage to buildings, which made the *ḥaram* space inaccessible for pilgrims. Many of them consequently separated from Ibn al-Zubayr and joined al-Ḥajjāj until it was rumoured that Ibn al-Zubayr's sons had deserted him and joined al-Ḥajjāj's army. Al-Ḥajjāj presented Ibn al-Zubayr with three options: he could travel to the place he desired; he could be sent to the Levant in chains; or he could fight until he was slain. After a series of attacks, Ibn Zubayr and his followers were brutally killed, and Ibn al-Zubayr's head was sent to 'Abd al-Malik. The rest of his body was displayed near the Ka'ba, to demonstrate publicly the harsh punishment that awaited rebels against the caliph. The roles played by the *ḥajj* and the Ka'ba in reconfiguring the political conditions for caliphal authority are among the narrative elements that historians report with reference to the Zubayrid rebellion and the Umayyads' response.²³

A conversation reported to have taken place between Ibn al-Zubayr and his mother provides further narrative evidence for the importance of the holy sanctuary to his rebellion. It is interesting to look at his emphasis on protecting the sacred space of Mecca as the primary cause of his resort to violence against the Umayyads. The narrative is as follows:

'Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr kissed her head and said: 'This is my opinion, which I have been waiting for this day, I did not rest in the world, and I did not like life in it, and what invited me to rebel was anger that emerged from

²⁰ Hawting, 'The Ḥajj', 29.

²¹ Peters, *Mecca*, 400.

²² Al-Ṭabarī, *History*, XX:114.

²³ Hawting, 'Ibn Al-Zubayr', 375 and *First Dynasty*, 55.

desacralising God's sanctuary, but I like to know your opinion, and you give me insight. Look, Mother, I might be killed from this day, so that your sorrow does not intensify, and I surrender the matter to God; your son did not deliberately stage a rebellion, an act of obscenity, nor was he dragged into the judgment of God. Nothing was more favourable to me than the satisfaction of my God.²⁴

For Ibn al-Zubayr, *istiḥlāl al-ḥaram* (the desacralisation of the holy precincts, or sacrilegious moves) was a significant reason for his act of rebellion, for which he uses the word *khurūj* in his final conversations with his mother.

After the destruction of the Ka'ba, Ibn al-Zubayr embarked on its rebuilding to resonate emotionally with his followers. When Ibn al-Zubayr was killed during the siege, the structure he rebuilt was restored by the Umayyads to its original form, possibly to prevent the emergence of a new Zubayrid movement in Mecca, the visibility of which structure could have incited memories of Ibn al-Zubayr's uprising. The restoration of the Ka'ba into its original form unfolded as follows: after al-Ḥajjāj seized control of Mecca, he wrote to the caliph, asserting that Ibn al-Zubayr had altered the structure by adding elements not part of its original form, including an additional door. 'Abd al-Malik instructed him to seal the western door and dismantle any added stone. Al-Ḥajjāj demolished six cubits of it and rebuilt it on Qurashī foundations, sealing the western door and filling what was beneath the eastern door's threshold up to four cubits, installing two shutters to close the door. This restoration project by al-Ḥajjāj symbolised a return to the original structure, potentially garnering support from pilgrims and Mecca residents. The erasure of physical, symbolic markers complemented the murder of Ibn al-Zubayr in the Umayyad strategy for the quelling of his rebellion.

It can be conjectured here that merely occupying and claiming authority over space was not an adequate method of rebellion. The changing, restructuring and modifying of the existing structure was also part of the rebellious configuration. I understand this process as a 'palimpsestic mode of rebellion'. This involved adding new structures to the Ka'ba and then subsequently the destruction of the newly constructed parts. Both these palimpsestic acts were

²⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, ed. Muḥammad and Aḥmad, IV:337–8.

motivated by the need to claim authority over the space. Scholars like Hawting and Necipoğlu have noted that while Ibn al-Zubayr used Mecca as his revolutionary abode, ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān engaged in building and restoring the Dome of the Rock. This was done so that pilgrims could be redirected to the structure instead of visiting the Ka‘ba, which Ibn al-Zubayr occupied as a locus of rebellion.²⁵ Allegedly, ‘Abd al-Malik attempted to redirect pilgrims to a parallel structure like the Ka‘ba; this parallel structure was extolled and given importance by framing new narratives of sanctity.²⁶ ‘Abd al-Malik might have imagined that building a parallel structure would facilitate the gradual weakening of the rebellious movement.

These acts can be illuminated by applying the interpretive framework of the spatial palimpsest, which functioned here by creating a new political imagination and convincing a community of pilgrims to buy into the idea of a new structure.²⁷ At the same time, Ibn al-Zubayr laid his claim on the holy sanctuary to legitimise his caliphal authority, while the Umayyads, under ‘Abd al-Malik, used the Dome of the Rock as a symbol of his dynastic caliphal authority.²⁸ The purpose behind venerating the Dome of the Rock at the time of the Zubayrid rebellion at Mecca might have been to highlight the potential to rethink a new centre of attraction for Muslims.

Other Rebellions at Sacred Structures

While the ruling Umayyad Caliphate had itself used an alternative pilgrimage centre, rebellious movements in the ‘Abbāsīd period used a similar strategy to strengthen their authority by establishing a new sacred space. In this section, I highlight another three rebellions that based their claims upon the status of the Ka‘ba and of the new centre of political action in the Mosque of the Prophet. For instance, in the post-Zubayrid period, the ‘Alid Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh b. al-Ḥasan (d. 762), assuming the messianic title of *al-Nafs al-Zakiyya*, rose against the ‘Abbāsīds with the support of the residents of the Ḥijāz.²⁹ His crucial concern was allegedly the ‘Abbāsīds’ negligence of and their opposition

²⁵ Hawting, ‘Ibn Al-Zubayr’, 376.

²⁶ Elad, ‘‘Abd al-Malik’.

²⁷ For more on politics of palimpsest, see Flood, ‘Pillars’; Aksamija *et al.*, *Palimpsests*.

²⁸ Necipoğlu, ‘Dome of the Rock’.

²⁹ Elad, *Rebellion*.

to the status of the Ka'ba. In this rebellious movement in 762, Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya criticised the stringent policies of the caliphate and used the religious structure of the Ka'ba as an accelerator of rebellion.

Another 'Alid, al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥasan (d. 786), a local insurgent based in the Ḥijāz, led another rebellion in 786 for which he used the Prophet's *minbar* (pulpit) to claim caliphal authority.³⁰ His intention behind emphasising the significance of the Prophet's Mosque and other sacred sites was to garner followers, especially pilgrims. Haider points out that al-Ḥusayn employed the idea of prophetic space to get the support of the 'Alids in the Ḥijāz using 'an implicit Shī'ite cause'.³¹ This focus on geographical location is evident in his claim of accession to the caliphal office, which incorporates a clarion call to a new imagination of the caliphate: 'I am the son of the Messenger of God, in the *ḥaram* of the Messenger of God, in the mosque of the Messenger of God, atop the minbar of the Prophet of God.'³² His rebellion halted pilgrims' visits to the Prophet's Mosque, and worship was stopped for a couple of weeks. I contend that by emphasising the mosque and *minbar* associated with the Prophet, the rebellion demonstrated its purpose to establish a centre there.

Yet another 'Alid, the Ḥasanid Ismā'īl b. Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm (d. 866), rebelled in 865 by looting the Ka'ba, killing and hijacking the pilgrims and setting up a replica of pilgrimage in a region other than Mecca. Moreover, 'Alids like the Ḥusaynid Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn b. Ja'far and his brother 'Alī rebelled by occupying the Prophet's Mosque in 884.³³ Each employed a distinct spatial strategy to substantiate their claims to the caliphate. All these rebellions culminated in the projection of a notion of parallel sovereignties by spatially legitimising their power. I will explain the characteristics and patterns of such kinds of rebel movements in greater detail when I analyse the concept of 'hagio-scaping' and the replication of sacred space while discussing the Qarmaṭian rebellion in the 'Abbāsīd period and al-Ḥallāj's spiritual rebellion against the corruption of the caliphate, respectively.

³⁰ Munt, 'Caliphal Imperialism', 14; Kennedy, *Abbasid Caliphate*, 109.

³¹ Haider, *Origins*, 209.

³² Munt, 'Caliphal Imperialism', 14.

³³ *Ibid.*, 15.

The Qarmaṭians and their Claim for a New Political Centre

While the Zubayrid rebellion was based on claiming authority over the original sacred space, other rebellions constructed a 'second Mecca' or 'second Ka'ba'. With reference to these actions, I use the term hagio-scaping: in the political context of rebellion, hagio-scaping refers to the imagination and production of holiness or sacredness using a sacred object or trans-placing it to a new religious geography.³⁴ It includes making movable devotional landscapes and moving a sacred relic or object to a new site that thereby becomes a place of veneration.³⁵ This interpretive framework can be applied to help us understand the Qarmaṭian rebellion of 930.³⁶

Here is not the place to provide a long history and origins of the Qarmaṭian movement and its activities in different parts of the world, but rather to analyse how sacred objects and sacred space played important roles in facilitating their movement. The Qarmaṭians are often 'remembered for the sacrilege they committed in Mecca, which shocked and reverberated across the Islamic world for generations'.³⁷ The Qarmaṭians emerged as a sub-group of the early Shī'ī groups of the Fāṭimids and Ismā'īlīs in ninth-century Iraq and later spread as networks of rebels to regions such as Yemen and Bahrayn.³⁸ They conquered many places that previously belonged to the 'Abbāsid Caliphate. The Qarmaṭians, 'once established as a state', are known as 'the ambassadors of justice', who acted against the 'Abbāsid Caliphate's perceived negligent and exploitative approach towards Iraqi pilgrims in terms of heavy taxation.³⁹ Polemical writings labelled the Qarmaṭians as infidels, immoral, or as a group that used ideological religious justifications to mask social concerns.

Once they gathered momentum in their rebellious activities and expanded to various regions, they started harassing *hajj* caravans crossing the steppe between Baghdad and Mecca. In the year 930, their rebellion intensified.

³⁴ Scott and Simpson-Housley, *Sacred Places*.

³⁵ Bursi, 'Fluid Boundaries', 492–4.

³⁶ The significance of this revolt for group identity-building comprises the second of two case studies treated in Hurvitz's contribution to this volume.

³⁷ 'Qarmatians', in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*; see further Demichelis, 'Kharijites and Qarmatians'.

³⁸ De Somogyi, 'Treatise'; Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh*, index, on the beginnings of the Qarmatian sect.

³⁹ Webb, 'Bedouin', 279.

They were able to reach the Ka'ba; the Qarmaṭians, headed by Abū Ṭāhir al-Jannābī (d. 943–4), looted and killed all the pilgrims they found in the sanctuaries of Mecca and its surroundings in the Great Mosque and the space of the Ka'ba. Then, al-Jannābī ordered them to throw the dead in the Zamzam well and to remove the door of the Ka'ba. They removed its cloth and then took the Black Stone away, retaining the latter for twenty-two years and keeping it at a replica Ka'ba at Hajar in Baḥrayn. It was taken to the oasis in eastern Arabia known as al-Aḥsā', where it remained until the 'Abbāsids ransomed it in 952.⁴⁰ According to historian Quṭb al-Dīn al-Ḥanafī, the stone was returned after twenty-two years under mysterious circumstances with a letter that said: 'By the intention of God we took it, and by His intention, we have returned it.'⁴¹

I focus here on the looting of the *ḥajar al-aswad*, the Black Stone set into the Ka'ba, and the setting up of a new pilgrimage centre. Moving an object from a sacred space and hiding it from pilgrims indicates a new mode of rebellion. The Qarmaṭians shifted the sacred objects of Muslims to another place and removed them from ritual worship to demonstrate rebellious motives. The trafficking of the Black Stone helps us understand that the mobility of a sacred object might create a new sacred space to which pilgrims could be drawn. In the case of Ibn al-Zubayr's rebellion, the idea was to protect sacred space from external forces, while the Qarmaṭians resorted to a violent approach of destroying sacred sites through looting, murder and desacralisation. By forming a new spatial imaginary for Muslim pilgrims, the Qarmaṭians aimed to make the Stone a centre for their rebellious action. Hagio-scaping or place-making using sacred symbols refers to establishing an alternative centre to claim rebellious sovereignty and especially authority over pilgrims, as evident in their treatment of the Black Stone, the structure and the sacred curtain of the Ka'aba. The Qarmaṭians encountered opposition from those who did not accept their hagio-scaping project. Two tendencies are thus in evidence: firstly, deconsecrating sacred space using violent methods, which can be understood as creating disorder and instilling horror in pilgrims; secondly, initiating a new sacred space by installing appropriated sacred objects there. This process of replacement created a new locational anchor for Muslims.

⁴⁰ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Qarāmiṭa*, 15–19.

⁴¹ Al-Nahrawālī, *Tārikh*, 150.

The Qarmaṭian group might have assumed that possessing the sacred object could draw the hearts of Muslim pilgrims. This is clear from their attempts to divert the pilgrims to Baḥrayn. The medieval Muslim scholar Ibn al-Jawzī, in his book on the Qarmaṭians, argues that many people from different regions had joined the Qarmaṭian group because of their ideological stance but were unaware of their acts of desacralisation at Mecca.⁴² In removing sacred objects from their original places, the Qarmaṭians may be seen as iconoclasts of sorts. One example of such behaviour is that, after invading Mecca and killing pilgrims, the Qarmaṭians took the sacred cloth of the Ka'ba, tore it into several pieces and distributed it to their followers.⁴³ Thus, they removed a symbolic marker of Islamic tradition that acted as the tool for legitimising the caliphal authority of the 'Abbāsids. Once these symbols had been taken away, control over them automatically dwindled. This rebellion thus contested and relocated sacred space; to this end, after destroying a space, they used an alternative space to propagate their political agenda. This might have been intended to belittle the uniqueness or exclusivity of Meccan space in Islam, and therefore re-orient the people to a new, parallel power structure.

Although the rebellion was unsuccessful to some extent, to quell it, the 'Abbāsids had to implement extreme measures, such as punitive execution and disfiguration through dismembering.⁴⁴ Many of its followers were subjected to these sorts of harsh methods of punishment, even just for being a sympathiser of the movement. Al-Ḥallāj b. Maṣṣūr, the spiritual and political martyr of the 'Abbāsīd era, was criticised for his Qarmaṭian ideology and insistence on the idea of the divine incarnation in humans. While the present section has examined how the Qarmaṭians diverted pilgrimage with recourse to the physical structure of the Black Stone, the following section will explain how al-Ḥallāj subscribed to a rebellious notion of pilgrimage, for which he was prosecuted, punished, hanged and crucified.

⁴² Examples in al-Ṭabarī, *al-Mukhtār*.

⁴³ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, ed. Tornberg, VII:153; Abū l-Fidā', *Mukhtaṣar*, 74. See more generally al-Qurṭubī, *Sīlat*, 81.

⁴⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, ed. Muḥammad and Aḥmad, XI:81.

Al-Ḥallāj and an Alternative Ka‘ba

Al-Ḥusayn b. Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj was executed in 922 after his spiritual rebellion in Baghdad. Al-Ḥallāj had performed pilgrimage thrice. Perhaps after returning from Mecca for the third time, he brought home the idea of pilgrimage to replicas of the Ka‘ba at one’s own home as an alternative to the obligatory pilgrimage. ‘Upon returning to Baghdad, al-Ḥallāj constructed a replica of the Kaaba for private worship at his residence and proclaimed sentiments similar to those he expressed during his prayer at Arafat, thereby inciting wrath and outrage among his fellow citizens.’⁴⁵ According to the traditional biography of al-Ḥallāj, the three times that he performed the *ḥajj* in Mecca were significant turning points in his life, and he was subsequently executed for advocating the local performance of the pilgrimage to make it accessible to all. When al-Ḥallāj expressed his vision of demolishing the Ka‘ba, this was a purely symbolic invitation to transform the *ḥajj* ritual, evidenced by his words: ‘And build it with wisdom.’⁴⁶ The demolition of the Ka‘ba is a euphemism for transforming the rituals of the *ḥajj*, not material demolition as in the case of the Qarmaṭians.

Al-Ḥallāj suggested to his followers that there was no physical requirement to travel to Mecca. He argued that it was possible for ‘every house to have its own Ka‘ba or to make a replica of the Ka‘ba and perform circumambulation around that replicated structure, spending and feeding the orphans and the poor on the days of pilgrimage’.⁴⁷ The ‘Abbāsīd decision to execute al-Ḥallāj was based on this propagation of replicating the Ka‘ba. Since many followers had subscribed to his Ṣūfī ideology, the Qarmaṭians were also influenced by this grand project of metaphorical pilgrimage to Mecca. To put it differently, al-Ḥallāj was accused of having preached the kind of spatial palimpsest that was associated with the Qarmaṭians.⁴⁸ Furthermore, al-Ḥallāj’s affiliations with rebels, Shī‘īs and non-Muslims aroused the suspicions of conservative Sunnī

⁴⁵ Mojaddedi, ‘Ḥallāj’, 589–92.

⁴⁶ Ibn Diḥya, *Nibrās*, 97.

⁴⁷ Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, ed. Shīrī, IX:141; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, VI:1; al-Ḥallāj, *Akbbar*.

⁴⁸ Fiegenbaum, ‘al-Ḥallāj’. Similar ideas were followed by the Zanj.

rulers and political authorities.⁴⁹ It is reported that the phrase ‘Qarmaṭian agent’ was written on his forehead for three days before his execution.⁵⁰

The concept of an imaginary, unreal Ka‘ba was central to al-Ḥallāj’s philosophy. Proposing an antinomian philosophy, al-Ḥallāj’s ‘replica of the Ka‘ba’ model spread to different parts of the caliphate. It caused concerns among rulers and legal scholars as al-Ḥallāj gained popularity, while the caliphate feared the emergence of a parallel power structure based on his ideas.

Conclusion

This chapter has proposed a novel approach to rebellion that focuses on the delegitimisation of political authority through the claiming, reclaiming and shifting of sacred space and objects. It has engaged with three major case studies and more briefly treated several further examples of rebellions related to Mecca. Its focus has been questions of sacred space and the emergence of a new religio-political imagination in the early Islamic world. It has dealt with the re-imagining of the Ka‘ba and sacred objects as loci for rebels’ claims to authority over pilgrims from different parts of the world and to political authority through spatial control.

This chapter has juxtaposed three Ka‘bas with three types of rebellion: first, Ibn al-Zubayr’s creation of a new imagination of the caliphate by resorting to the sanctified premises of the Ka‘ba; second, shaping an alternative political space through the Qarmaṭians’ appropriation of the Black Stone of Mecca; third, proposing a new spiritual rebellion against unjust rulers on the part of al-Ḥallāj, the rebel Ṣūfī martyr, by asking his followers to consider their own home as a Ka‘ba and thus a space for substitute pilgrimage.

Two different modes of palimpsest, literal and metaphorical, can be found when analysing rebellion that instrumentalised the built sacred environment. The former ‘refers to physical inscriptions, modifications, erasures, and physical recontextualizations of the object itself’.⁵¹ The latter refers to the ‘overlaid and intertextual meanings of the object, which may or may not have any

⁴⁹ *Encyclopedia of Islam*, ‘al-Hallaj’, 285.

⁵⁰ Mason, *Passion*, I:3, 30. It has been argued that al-Ḥallāj was in fact ‘a victim of mistaken identity as a political agitator, an agent of the Qarmathians’: Mason, *Al-Hallaj*, 10.

⁵¹ Colwell, ‘Palimpsest’.

connection to any material changes to the object'.⁵² In terms of the Ka'ba and sacred objects associated with it, a spatial palimpsest can be seen as 'a sequence of depositional episodes in which successive layers of activity are superimposed on preceding ones in such a way as to remove all or most of the evidence of the preceding activity'.⁵³

Throughout history, the idea of multiple centres or Ka'bas has been a point of polemical contestation among political rulers and a point of discussion among rebels, which relates to new political configurations of space in early Islamic history. Sacred space is connected to rebellion on three levels: the first comprises the reclaiming of authority by re-centring movement in a significant place, like Mecca, or a protected site of sacred space. The second comprises moving an important sacred object from a sacred space and shifting the centre of pilgrimage. The third comprises proposing an alternative sacred space without further requirement of physical travel to Mecca for pilgrimage.

Making a claim to, or declaring a rebellion from holy, sacred or protected places suggests an attempt to establish territorial authority over them, thereby arousing the emotional sensitivities of followers. This exclusive assertion of authority in a space likely aimed to shape Muslims' spatial awareness, which was imbued with religious sentiments. Shifting the focus from mere space to affective geography might unveil new political dimensions, enabling rebel factions to harness a spectrum of emotions for their political ends.

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⁵² Palmer in Colwell, 'Palimpsest', 151.

⁵³ Bailey, 'Time Perspectives', 204.

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14

Infrastructures of Contention: The Zanj Rebellion (255–69/869–83)

Philip Grant

Introduction

Modern historiographical accounts of rebellion have much to tell us about sequences of events, their causes and the issues at stake, as well as who participated. They generally have less to say about how they happened, at least when it comes to the uprisings of the early Islamic period. By the ‘how’, I mean questions of logistics and provisioning, but also how fighting actually took place and what features of the environment helped and hindered the various human participants.

By emphasising ‘humans’ here, I link the ‘how’ to the ‘who’, because one of this chapter’s principal arguments is that humans are *not* the sole actors of the uprising discussed in this chapter, nor indeed of any other. What I call here the revolt’s ‘infrastructure’ was decisive in enabling both the Zanj rebels’ activities and their eventual defeat by ‘Abbāsīd forces, even as study of this infrastructure demonstrates that the revolt’s longevity was *not* the consequence of being fought in difficult terrain where the rebels held an advantage. That the rebels were not somehow better attuned to fighting in (supposedly) marshy conditions is closely bound up with my second major argument: the water- and landscapes of southern Iraq and south-western al-Ahwāz, the theatres of the rebellion, were not inaccessible backwaters, but major thoroughfares that the ‘Abbāsīds and other Muslim elites invested in to increase agrarian production and therefore the amount of surplus they could extract from those labouring on the land, including many future Zanj rebels. Furthermore, the

contemporary political, economic and moral order was embedded in the infrastructure they built and which shaped both their and the rebels' actions.

The revolt (*kburūj*)¹ of the Zanj was initiated in Ramadan 255/August–September 869 by a wandering visionary claiming to be an 'Alid,² an Arab named 'Alī b. Muḥammad (d. 270/883) from a village near al-Rayy (Iran), posing as an agent of a son of the former caliph al-Wāthiq (d. 232/847) handling the sale of *sibākḥ* (nitrous topsoil probably used as fertiliser). Together with his companions, including some who had supported his earlier attempt at rebellion in Baḥrayn in 249/863–4, he began recruiting followers by freeing Zanj workers. At least some of these must have originated in East Africa,³ most are described as slaves (*riqq*, *'abīd*, *ghilmān*), some as free (*aḥrār*), working to clear the topsoil for the owners of this 'salty land' (*shūraj*) just east of Baṣra.⁴ The rebel host swelled to include more freed slaves, some villagers and Bedouin, becoming large enough to defeat local detachments of government troops, provoke the despatch and defeat of forces from Baghdad and Sāmarrā', capture, pillage, and sometimes sack major settlements, most notably Baṣra. Whilst they never permanently occupied Baṣra, Zanj forces did govern

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḥ*, III:1742. English translations from al-Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. XXXVI (trans. Waines). The significance of this revolt for group identity-building comprises the first of two case studies treated by Hurvitz in this volume.

² His 'Alid genealogy changed during the rebellion, a sure sign for al-Ṭabarī (*Ta'riḥ*, III:1743–4, 1856–7) of the falseness of his claims and the opportunism that lay at the root of his leadership. Nevertheless, this also indicates his familiarity with one of the central elements of the repertoire of a certain kind of revolt, by that point two centuries old.

³ Their origins are unclear. *Bilād al-Zanj* at this time referred to coastal East Africa from present-day southern Somalia to northern Mozambique, but because of the lack of evidence for a regular early 'Abbāsīd slave trade between the coast and the Persian Gulf, some historians have argued that the 'Zanj' of the rebellion cannot have originated there. The arguments are summarised in Franz, *Kompilation*, 65–79, who concludes that the sceptics' argument *ex silentio* is unconvincing. See also Vernet, 'Slave Trade', for the contrary argument that a slave trade of the intensity that later appeared was highly unlikely at this date. Franz, 'Slavery' argues that, notwithstanding the enslavement of many Zanj in the region, it was not a 'slave revolt'. As plantation slaves the Zanj were *sui generis* in the Islamic world and did not conform to Islamic legal concepts of slavery: slavery is a species of dependent labour, not the genus, and the revolt would therefore be better thought in continuum with peasant revolts. In forthcoming work, I argue that the contradiction between acknowledging the Zanj enslavement and then denying that their condition can be assimilated to slavery arises from a problem of classification, and that if we adopt a prototypical approach to defining slavery rather than an Aristotelian one, the Zanj Rebellion can reasonably be described as a 'slave revolt' and compared with other such events.

⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḥ*, III:1742–51.

significant amounts of territory in lower al-‘Irāq and al-Ahwāz, possessing their own administrative apparatus.

Their capital was al-Mukhtāra on the Abū l-Khaṣīb canal near Baṣra; two cities further north, al-Manī‘a and al-Manṣūra, were substantial enough to accommodate thousands of inhabitants and be defended by multiple walls and moats. At their greatest extent, the rebels took Wāsiṭ and reached Jarjarāya, but from 265/878 a well-organised and equipped ‘Abbāsīd campaign took first al-Manī‘a and al-Manṣūra, then, after a two-year siege, al-Mukhtāra. The rebels were either killed in battle, like their leader; incorporated into ‘Abbāsīd forces after defecting, induced by promises of *amān* (safe-conduct) and robes of honour (probably the greatest number);⁵ enslaved by Bedouin after fleeing al-Mukhtāra;⁶ or, for a handful of leaders who did not surrender, imprisoned and eventually executed.⁷

Contention and Infrastructure

In his study of rebellions in early Islamic Syria, Cobb defines contention as ‘the episodic making of claims that bear on other people’s interests ... in the context of early Islamic Syria, [this] almost always involved violence’.⁸ Drawing on political sociologist Charles Tilly and his students’ analysis of contentious action in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, Cobb states that any given ‘culture’ expresses claims in a limited number of ways: its ‘repertoire’. His is a study of ‘politics in the sense of the differential deployment of power in society ... most often [in early Islamic society meaning] the right to armed coercion’.⁹ Despite this transhistorical sociological framework, Cobb insists on acknowledging contemporary social terminology, eschewing a vocabulary of strata or classes in favour of *umarā’*, *asbrāf*, urban masses (under various names), and *fallāḥūn*, emphasising that this society was marked by ties of lineage, loyalty and patronage crosscutting and overruling horizontal ties of corporate identity or class. Medieval Arabic sources use these terms to designate the different groups of claim-making actors around whom his study

⁵ Discussed in Grant, ‘Entangled’, 573–602.

⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III:2094.

⁷ *Ibid.*, III:2111.

⁸ Cobb, *White Banners*, 6.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

is structured, reflecting Cobb's 'primary focus on *people* — on the actors of Syrian contention'.¹⁰

I emphasise the word 'people' not merely to indicate my agreement with this attempt to understand contention and political violence in terms of the actors involved, but also to highlight what is lacking, namely many of the revolt's actors. I do not mean the various commanders named on both sides of the revolt, nor different groups of the rank and file, nor those caught up in the revolt without participating on either side – villagers, merchants, pilgrims. I mean, among others: horses; mules, donkeys, pack animals; a barking watchdog; sheep, water buffaloes, generic cattle; biting insects and disease-causing microbes; palm trees; reeds; thickets; mud; wind; water – rain, canals, rivers, moats, open water, the sea, the tide; despite the water, fire; roads, including alongside canals; dams and breakwaters; boats of many kinds; boats formed into a *jisr*, 'pontoon bridge'; permanent brick or stone bridges (*qanṭara*); weapons and armour (swords, spears, bows and arrows, siege equipment, stones, bricks).

This extensive, though not exhaustive, list highlights what is missing from Cobb's summary of the 'actors' of Syrian contention: anything other than people. It is impossible to understand the symbolic repertoire (colours, slogans, banners) of rebellions without simultaneously comprehending the necessary co-presence of materials (dyes, cloth) and their chains of production.¹¹ This observation sits within a broader ontological claim. Humans are not sole agents of the construction of the social world, but build it together with a wide range of non-human actors; taking account of these agencies and their complex interactions leads to a more 'symmetrical' understanding of phenomena like rebellions.¹² They can no longer be narrated as solely human affairs, with everything pertaining to the non-human relegated to a 'nature' understood as opposed to human 'culture' or 'society'.¹³

This chapter analyses the infrastructure of rebellion, referring not simply to inert, physical things serving human purposes, but the entanglement of canals, rivers, roads, plants, animals, and weapons with the moral and political

¹⁰ Cobb, *White Banners*, 8.

¹¹ Grant, 'Entangled', 573–602.

¹² Latour, *We Have*.

¹³ Descola, *Par delà*.

order configuring and justifying them, the regimes of property and surplus extraction out of which the Zanj rebellion emerged and which it disrupted. Here I draw on contemporary scholarship of infrastructure, which points out that ecologies and infrastructures are not separate, but create one another.¹⁴ Infrastructure emerges through ‘human-animal-environmental collaborative work’;¹⁵ moral and political values are embedded in infrastructures, and infrastructures themselves are agents whose effects exceed whatever they were planned to do.¹⁶

Meditating on the modern colonial manner of ‘dwelling’ on the earth (*l’habiter colonial*), Martinican philosopher Ferdinand rejects the nature/culture divide as foundational to the colonisers’ will to subjugate and exploit everything they defined as nature, even, as with Black slaves, to exclude from inhabiting the earth altogether. Consequently, he sees the latter’s resistance to colonial dwelling not as a simple exercise of human agency, but as an alliance. Drawing our attention to the seventeenth–nineteenth-century maroon communities of the Caribbean, he emphasises that these autonomous mini-polities of self-liberated slaves managed to hold the colonisers at arm’s length and negotiate with them as equals because they formed a natural-cultural alliance with the terrain: the *mornes*, steep and hard-to-access hills of the islands’ interiors, thickly forested, populated by hostile insects and microbes, or highly venomous snakes, which he wilyly characterises as maroon ‘diplomats’.¹⁷

Massignon first observed the similarities between the Zanj Rebellion and New World slave uprisings, yet a detailed comparison still awaits.¹⁸ Like Ferdinand, I offer a symmetrical account where the course of the rebellion is understood as an effect of infrastructures combining the human and the non-human, the natural and the cultural, moral and political. Yet the Caribbean comparison throws up a surprise: while the Zanj Rebellion was certainly long-lasting, its longevity and scale cannot be attributed to the difficulty of the

¹⁴ Scaramelli, ‘Delta’.

¹⁵ Tawil-Souri, ‘Speculations’, 1067.

¹⁶ Jensen, ‘*Umwelten*’.

¹⁷ Ferdinand, *Écologie*.

¹⁸ *EP*, ‘Zandj’ (L. Massignon).

terrain on which it was fought;¹⁹ here it differs from the maroon polities or slave uprisings of the hills and swamps of the New World.²⁰ The canals and rivers of the Baṣra region were not difficult to access, still less natural barriers to central authorities attempting to assert control: they were an infrastructure of control and exploitation, enabling transport, communication and surplus extraction, even as they also enabled revolt. They did not obviously favour the rebels over the ‘Abbāsids; indeed, their importance made it vital for the continuation of ‘Abbāsīd authority that the rebellion be suppressed.²¹

The Effects of the Waterscape

Symmetry and a focus on infrastructure offer themselves as solutions to problems raised by the historiography of the uprising. One persistent theme is the difficulty of the terrain – or, more accurately, the waterscape – and the advantages it supposedly bestowed upon the rebels, especially initially.

Early in the first year of the revolt, in late Shawwāl and early Dhū’l-Qa‘da 255/September–October 869, a sequence of engagements on the outskirts of Baṣra led to a Zanj victory, known as *yawm al-shadhā* (‘day of the barges’). Following this defeat, in early 256/870, the authorities despatched a commander, Ju‘lān al-Turkī, and his troops from Sāmarrā’. Popovic views the rebels’ victory on the ‘day of the barges’ as a turning-point: with the defeat of local military forces, the uprising became ‘an affair of state’.²² While the rebels did not take Baṣra (they would in 257/885), the inability of the city’s caliphal representatives to defeat them meant they had become more than a local nuisance. Ju‘lān’s response on arrival was to set up camp, dig a trench (*kbandaq*) around it, and stay there for six months before attempting battle together with various Baṣran allies.²³ The result was hardly encouraging:

¹⁹ The other reasons adduced for the rebellion’s longevity (‘overlap’ with the revolt of Ya‘qūb b. Layth [d. 265/979] in Iran; loss of tax revenues from Egypt following Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn’s [d. 270/884] takeover as autonomous governor) continue to be relevant and probably sufficient.

²⁰ Perhaps the Zuṭṭ rebellion (820–34) or that of ‘Imrān b. Shāhīn (d. 369/979) conform more to the marronage model or *longue-durée* defiance of central authority enabled by difficult terrain discussed by Christian Sahner for the early Islamic world in his forthcoming work.

²¹ I thank the anonymous reviewer for this point. However, plantation agriculture involving enslaved labourers was never re-established.

²² Popovic, *Revolt*, 55. Ju‘lān’s despatch: al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III:1786.

²³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III:1785.

When the two sides met, they only threw stones and shot arrows at each other, and Ju'lān found he could not proceed owing to the dense stand of palm trees and undergrowth, which allowed no room for the horses upon which most of his troops were mounted.

[A]fter Ju'lān had spent some time thus entrenched, the Zanj leader said he had decided to conceal some of his troops along the approach roads to the trench and then launch a night attack upon him. The result ... was that a number of Ju'lān's men were killed and the rest were gripped with such terror that Ju'lān left the camp to return to Basrah ... which made his weakness apparent to the central authorities ... [and] he was removed from responsibility for fighting the abominable one [*al-khabīth*, i.e. the Zanj leader].²⁴

Compare Kennedy's explanation for the revolt's longevity: 'the rebels were aided by the difficult marshy terrain, ideal for guerilla warfare conducted by men who knew the area well but almost impenetrable to a strange, largely cavalry army like the Turks'; when the 'Abbāsīd response finally came it was a slow advance 'concentrating on destroying the ships which gave the Zanj such mobility in the marshes. The army was large, perhaps 50,000, but the terrain meant that progress was slow.'²⁵

Compressing a fourteen-year rebellion into a few pages requires simplification, but this conclusion is nonetheless curious. During multiple confrontations with the rebels, 'Abbāsīd forces were hindered by the terrain from using cavalry only three times: during the episode with Ju'lān, and twice on successive days in Rabī' II 267/December 880, when they successfully besieged the Zanj camp-city of al-Manṣūra. On the first occasion, horsemen caught in a Zanj ambush dismounted and successfully fought their way out of trouble,²⁶ whilst on the second cavalry dismounted before a moat in order to cross it and successfully drove off the Zanj defenders.²⁷

Cavalry was used throughout the uprising; the rebels, too, had horses.²⁸ In his more specialised work, Kennedy notes that among the boats used in this

²⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, III:1834–5; trans. *History*, XXXVI:108–9.

²⁵ Kennedy, *Prophet*, 178–9.

²⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, III:1969.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, III:1970–1.

²⁸ E.g. *ibid.*, III:1848–50, 1852, 1866, 1909, 1911–13, 1924.

‘entirely amphibious warfare’ were specialist craft for carrying horses;²⁹ he generally emphasises the requirement for all fighting in this terrain to be suitably equipped (boats, archers, siege equipment) and tactically astute (opening and blocking waterways, building and destroying bridges), rather than contrasting lumbering Turkish cavalry and nimble Zanj guerillas.

Even if historians are more precise writing at length, the idea that the rebellion’s longevity was due to the rebels operating more skilfully in the marshy terrain is widespread. In modern historiography, this observation was first made by Nöldeke:

Within a few weeks the Zanj had gained several victories ... we find the Zanj’s peculiar mode of fighting, namely, out of concealed side-channels, heavily overgrown with reeds, to fall suddenly upon the rear of the enemy’s troops as they rowed along. In this war it is the regular thing that a number of the vanquished are drowned.³⁰

Nöldeke notes that the Zanj benefitted from the particular conditions of lower Iraq, the marshlands (*baṭīḥa*, pl. *baṭā’ih*) formed by the rivers Tigris, Euphrates and Kārūn (Dujayl) just north of Baṣra before they join on their approach to the Persian Gulf to form the ‘One-Eyed Tigris’, today’s Shaṭṭ al-‘Arab. The shoreline today is considerably farther south thanks to centuries of silt deposits extending the land; at the time of the rebellion, Baṣra and its harbour town al-Ubulla sat just inland.³¹ Subsequent historians likewise considered this difficult marshy terrain as advantageous for the Zanj, at least until the ‘Abbāsīd forces had adapted, but also acknowledged its fertility.³²

Nöldeke wrote his pioneering ‘sketch’ at the end of the nineteenth century, but since then, generations of scholars have asked how to classify the rebellion (Shī‘ī or Khārijite); discussed the personality and motivations of ‘Alī b. Muḥammad (opposed to oppression or just an opportunist?); examined the rebellion’s effect on the caliphal finances; weighed up the exact proportions of slaves, Zanj, Bedouin, and others, and thus the characterisation of the revolt

²⁹ Kennedy, *Armies*, 153.

³⁰ Nöldeke, ‘Servile War’, 146–75, 154–5.

³¹ See esp. Verkinderen’s excellent work reconstructing the region’s early medieval waterways (*Waterways*).

³² Popovic, *Revolt*, 10–11, 55–7; Sāmīr, *Thawrat*, 94–7.

as a social/class-based or a racial/ethnic one; noted changes in river courses and the Persian Gulf; and suggested comparisons with slave uprisings in Mediterranean antiquity and in Haiti. These are all themes he first broached.³³ That the Zanj had ‘a peculiar mode of fighting’ dictated by the topography is part of this narrative tradition.³⁴

Nöldeke’s sketch lacks references; my own close re-reading of al-Ṭabarī’s *Ta’rikh* suggests not only that the Zanj did not have a ‘peculiar mode of fighting’, but that their knowledge of the terrain or long adaptation to its ‘nature’ bestowed no obvious advantage. For both sides engagement demanded adaptation to amphibious warfare (boats, fording, swimming). Both sides used horses and suffered from the conditions (drowning, unspecified marsh-induced sickness, likely malaria and dysentery).³⁵ While the marshes were important, the most relevant waterscape was actually the canals and rivers of Baṣra and its environs upstream of the city and the junction of the Tigris and Euphrates.

I now turn to analysing the engagements of the ‘day of the barges’. Recounted at considerable length, the account bursts with the circumstantial details that make al-Ṭabarī’s narrative so rich and fascinating, albeit frustrating when these are not explained or contextualised for someone reading centuries later. The *Ta’rikh* itself draws extensively on a lost *Akbbār Ṣāhib al-Zanj* by the sometime *kātib*, but also repentant rebel, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Sahl.³⁶ While especially hostile to the Zanj leader, the eyewitness quality of much of the account means the circumstantial details should be taken seriously. The text ‘is one of the best reported events of the period’.³⁷ Among battle narratives, only the accounts of the Prophet’s campaigns and the early conquests are longer.³⁸ Moreover, whilst Shoshan observes that ‘there is more about late antique warfare in two pages of Theophylact Simocatta than in 200 pages of

³³ Amabe, *Emergence*; Popovic, *Revolt*; Sāmīr, *Thawrat*; Talhami, ‘Zanj’; ‘Ulābī, *Thawra*; Waines, ‘Third Century’.

³⁴ I first encountered this assertion before reading Nöldeke, in two MA theses written almost forty years apart: Muhammad, ‘Zanj’; McLeod, ‘Race’.

³⁵ E.g. al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III:1776, 1862, 1962.

³⁶ Franz, *Kompilation*, 83–122 discusses the sources of the revolt and how much of the lost *Akbbār al-Ṭabarī* used.

³⁷ Shaban, *Islamic History*, 100–1.

³⁸ Kennedy, *Armies*, 153.

Tabari [on the conquests],³⁹ the latter's account of the Zanj Rebellion is a treasure trove of information on the conditions of engagement.⁴⁰

Two further comments on the *Ta'rikh* as a source are in order. My reliance on al-Ṭabarī does not mean there are no other sources for the rebellion,⁴¹ but the number of accounts not demonstrably dependent on al-Ṭabarī is small⁴² and none add anything vital for the study of the uprising's infrastructure. However, knowing that much of the land around the 'One-Eyed Tigris' was then owned by 'Abbāsids, often described as 'Hāshimites' in al-Ṭabarī's text,⁴³ nevertheless bestows particular resonance on a notorious episode recounted by al-Mas'ūdī: the Zanj sell captured women, including Hāshimīs, as *jāriyya* (female slaves) and *waṣā'if* (servants) to the Zanj women,⁴⁴ brutally reversing the political order embedded in the infrastructure they had themselves been forced to build. Meanwhile, the coins issued in the Zanj leader's name have generally been studied for what they tell us about his supposed 'Alid or Khārijite leanings,⁴⁵ but in addition to being a mobile embodiment of his claim to legitimate rule, they also tell us that the rebels had access to supplies of metal, minting equipment and expertise, and were part of a monetary economy.

Second, al-Ṭabarī's choices as compiler and editor were undoubtedly consistent with his own political and literary-aesthetic concerns; he apparently omitted many reports about the rebellion's middle years and added derogatory epithets for its leader (e.g. *al-khabīth*: 'the vile'; *al-la'īn*: 'the accursed'), consistent with his concern for Muslim 'communal cohesion'.⁴⁶ That the later stages of the narration are increasingly hostile to the rebels and supportive of the 'Abbāsīd caliphs' war efforts has been seen as indicating Muḥammad

³⁹ Shoshan, *Arabic*, 2.

⁴⁰ It is possible to read al-Ṭabarī here as again providing a 'mirror for commanders', as he had done in his materials on Umayyad battles with Khārijites in Iraq (Hagemann, *Khārijites*, 244–6), holding up certain government commanders as examples of what (not) to do. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan as an actual participant in some of these engagements would therefore be an even better source for such information than al-Ṭabarī's source Abū Mikhnaf, whose great-uncle was a (in his case successful) government commander.

⁴¹ See Popovic, *Revolt*, 6–9; Franz, *Kompilation*, 83–122.

⁴² Again, Franz's discussion of the rebellion's 'compilation history' is fundamental here: *Kompilation*, 88–91. See also Anon., *Uyun*, 16, §20; Popovic, *Revolt*, 31–2.

⁴³ Verkinderen, 'Land', 519–20.

⁴⁴ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murāj*, VIII:60.

⁴⁵ Summary in Popovic, *Revolt*, 130, 134, 152, 156 n.6.

⁴⁶ Hagemann, *Khārijites*, 258.

b. al-Ḥasan's own desire to reintegrate himself into the 'Abbāsīd system.⁴⁷ Again, however, none of this affects the mass of details concerning what I term the infrastructure here. These are incidental to the narrative's political function, but exactly the sort of thing that the participants-turned-narrators would have had intimate experience of. Verkinderen notes that this text is the most extensive narrative of a rural environment anywhere in the early Islamic period.⁴⁸

Scholars have bemoaned the occasional tediousness of the details,⁴⁹ but read as information that is not incidental to the main narrative but pertains to the infrastructure of rebellion and is therefore essential to it, these details take on a new charge. They illustrate how the 'affordances' of the infrastructure, that is, the way in which its physical properties made certain actions (im)possible, both constrained and enabled all participants.⁵⁰ I summarise the engagements here before analysing key moments.

The Day of the Barges

A barking dog on a breakwater belonging to a *kātib* alarms the Zanj leader, who sends someone to investigate and finds a supporter bearing letters and information about approaching government forces. The Zanj intercept them among the palm trees, defeat them, take prisoners and boats, and also some pilgrims to whom they explain their rebellion before releasing them. More government forces march along both banks of the Nahr Bayān. There is a series of attacks and counterattacks. The government forces flee, except for those stuck in the mud, as the tide has not yet come in. Two rebel detachments marching along the Nahr Sharīkān are ambushed by government troops, but after fierce spear-fighting the Zanj are again victorious.

The following day a Zanj scout finds two barges blocking the Nahr al-Qandal, which are seized, together with clothing and ten Zanj; when the tide comes in, 'Alī b. Muḥammad crosses the Bayān to the mouth of the al-Qandal, but one boat carrying flour is blown off course by a strong wind and only returns the following day, its captain having had to fight off villagers trying to

⁴⁷ These comments are based on Franz, *Kompilation*, 110–11.

⁴⁸ Verkinderen, 'Land', 501, 518.

⁴⁹ 'Ulābī, *Thawra*, 15; Kennedy, 'Revolt', n.p.

⁵⁰ On 'affordances', see Hodder, *Entangled*, 40–51.

seize his cargo. The rebels set up camp in Dubbā, a subdistrict of Baṣra with many canals, plunder a village belonging to one al-Mu‘allā b. Ayyūb after his agent (*wakīl*) has promised to give them money but fails to return; finally they recruit more Zanj.

The rebels overwhelm the government garrison on the Nahr al-Qandal, then set off along both sides of the canal, plunder another village and via various canals reach the salt flats outside Dubbā. A Baṣran date-seller informs them of conditional support from one of the city’s factions, but after five days without further communication from him the rebels disband their boats and are moving overland when they see 600 horsemen on the western bank of the Nahr al-Dāwardānī, who turn out to be Arab tribesmen. The Zanj parley with them but are informed that this was a trap, and when the Zanj attack preemptively, the tribesmen raise a black flag and withdraw. In Dubbā the rebels find sheep and cattle among the palm groves.

The following day they engage a government detachment, defeat it, and find 600 new recruits, camping on the salt flats of Barāmikha. In the morning, they arrive at the flats by the Dīnārī canal, plunder, and ‘Alī b. Muḥammad prohibits advancing to Baṣra. A day later they set out for Baṣra, and after various conflicting pieces of intelligence about the direction from which Baṣran forces are arriving, battle is joined and a Zanj victory results. Among those fleeing are one Faṭḥ, who jumps into Nahr Ḥarb,⁵¹ and two Baṣran leaders, whose barge capsizes and who are captured and beheaded. In the morning ‘Alī b. Muḥammad again orders his troops not to set out for Baṣra, but a contingent ignores him, is met by a larger Baṣran force at the Nahr Shādhānī and, despite reinforcements, overwhelmed and driven back. Many Zanj are drowned in the Nahr Kathīr, but ‘Alī b. Muḥammad, challenged on the Kathīr *qanṭara*, fights off his assailants. The Baṣrans seize pack animals, goods, letters and astrolabes from the Zanj boats; many Zanj only return to camp the following morning. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad orders three of his lieutenants to the *qanṭara*. One of them is killed, the others escape because they are waiting on the bank.

The next day the Baṣrans set off under the direction of a skilled and experienced barge fighter, with three barges of archers and numerous people on foot, some unarmed. Multiple Zanj ambushes await, including on both banks of

⁵¹ He was drowned in a later battle: al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III:1911.

the Nahr Shayṭān; Zanj women supply the male fighters with bricks. The terrified Zanj leader implores divine aid, and white birds come down and overturn a Baṣran galley, all on board being drowned, then the Zanj ambushers attack and kill almost everyone on the barges. Against his followers' urging, 'Alī b. Muḥammad orders a withdrawal to the Abū Qurra salt flats at the farthest edge of the Baṣran canal network, where they build reed huts and devote themselves to plunder.⁵²

The Infrastructure of Contention

Attention to the affordances of this infrastructure highlights what we might paradoxically term the 'necessary contingency' of any rebellion. The watchdog alerts the Zanj to the presence of a messenger, who then informs the rebels about the Baṣrans' advance: the whole sequence of events, including the Zanj victory, depends on a factor beyond human control that emerges from the affordances of the agricultural infrastructure. The breakwater or dyke's (*musannā*) purpose is both to prevent too much water entering a field and damaging crops, and to enable people to cross the canal,⁵³ but its form also provides a perfect spot for the dog to station itself and bark.⁵⁴

Throughout this sequence, the affordances of this infrastructure both enable and hinder military action for rebel and government forces, producing unexpected results. Canal banks permit infantry and cavalry to march alongside the water, just as the canals allow troops, their animals, supplies and equipment to move, but also be captured. Date palm plantations enable ambushes; a permanent bridge, part of a 'developed road system' parallel to the river, provides a crossing-place and a location for fighting, propaganda

⁵² Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, III:1766–87.

⁵³ Rost and Hamdani, 'Dam Construction', especially George's illustration of a man and sheep walking on a 'head-dam', 210 fig.4.

⁵⁴ Probably no detail in a historical text of this kind is without symbolism or literary narrative function, yet the incidental quality of the dog suggests that the most immediately relevant hermeneutical frame for reading it is the long-attested presence of watchdogs on irrigation infrastructure in southern Iraq. Other incidental figures should be investigated against the symbolic associations they would have evoked in an educated, broadly elite Muslim readership (e.g. the white birds), but this is outside the chapter's scope. That animals can possess an agency that is both historically situated and manifested through later politico-religious polemic emerges from Marashi's study of the Prophet's mule Duldul ('More Than Beast').

and assassination.⁵⁵ Moreover, this infrastructure and its affordances are clearly ‘naturalcultural’:⁵⁶ the natural properties of water, in canals built by humans, make possible the movement of boats, but also cause them to get stuck in the mud when the tide is out or bear them off course when the wind whips up,⁵⁷ alternately hindering both sides. The water allows some fighters to flee; others to be captured; still others, including Zanj, to be drowned, despite their assumed swimming abilities (drowning was a common cause of death for mid-twentieth-century Marsh Arabs, despite their deep familiarity with the waterscape).⁵⁸

Nor are the local government forces blundering incompetents forever outwitted by supremely adapted rebels. They too execute a successful ambush, engage in subterfuge, deploy intelligence, and call on the skills of specialists in canal warfare, though here in vain when confronted by well-planned ambushes supported by a gendered division of labour and simple but effective ammunition (bricks) as well as divine intervention, reminding us that for contemporaries, God was also a ‘social actor’: al-Ṭabarī’s enthusiastically pro-‘Abbāsīd narrators on more than one occasion invoke Him as giving victory in battle to the government forces.⁵⁹ If modern historians stand to benefit little from entering theological debates about divine action in earthly affairs, we can at least acknowledge that for many of those we study, such action was a given, if sometimes mysterious.⁶⁰

Infrastructural Political Economy

Details about the infrastructure of contention also invite historians to consider the moral and political orders embedded in it. As Campopiano has observed, the Islamic central authorities continued the Sasanian government’s role in building water infrastructure in Mesopotamia. Early ‘Abbāsīd caliphs

⁵⁵ Verkinderen, ‘Land’, 518.

⁵⁶ ‘Natureculture’ is a concept first proposed by Haraway, *Modest*.

⁵⁷ The events described take place in early October, still part of the extended summer season in southern Mesopotamia, since the brief autumnal transition occurs in November–December. Summers often see the blowing of the *shamāl*, a strong wind from the south-east that brings intense heat from the Arabian landmass: Ochsenschlager, *Iraq’s Marsh*, 9.

⁵⁸ Maxwell, *Reed*, 51.

⁵⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III:1955, 1960, 1995.

⁶⁰ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* first argued that historians should take divine agency in rebellions seriously rather than dismissing it as the explanation of superstitious and ill-educated rebels.

attempted to extend their control over former Sasanian crown lands, but increasingly entrusted land reclamation, canal building and maintenance to wealthy property owners.⁶¹ The owner of the land on which the barking dog was found, and about whom we only know that he was a *kātib*,⁶² was one such individual, as was al-Mu'allā b. Ayyūb,⁶³ whose *wakīl* appears in the narrative as manager of the enslaved Zanj working there.

These Zanj laboured to prepare the land for cultivation, most likely for date plantations, plentiful in the area. Other possibilities are sugar cane, cultivated since Sasanian times in neighbouring Khūzistān, which might have contributed to excessive soil salinity and a resultant fall in agricultural revenues (and therefore taxation) in the mid-ninth century, necessitating the clearing of the topsoil from the Baṣra area;⁶⁴ and rice, for the cultivation of which, by the ninth century, the erosion of good soil had made the flooded areas on the edge of the marshland suitable.⁶⁵ Among other near-contemporaries with land near Baṣra we may note the Turkish commander Bughā the Elder and the grammarian al-Mubarrad.⁶⁶

The owners of these lands accrued both fiscal advantages and spiritual merit from bringing these dead lands into cultivation.⁶⁷ This arrangement was mutually beneficial to private landowners and the state: the former obtained both higher returns through tax incentives and a title to ownership allowing them to dispose of the lands at will; the latter earned tax revenues on land that hitherto yielded nothing to the treasury and the landowners' loyalty.⁶⁸ Moreover, these Muslim landowners thereby gained an independent

⁶¹ Campopiano, 'Cooperation', 403–5.

⁶² Waines in his translation of the passage (al-Ṭabarī, *History*, XXXVI:51) attributes this identification to the editors of the Arabic text.

⁶³ While al-Ṭabarī gives no information about him, he is the protagonist of an anecdote related by the judge al-Tanūkhī (d. 384/994). His son, the story's transmitter, was also called al-Mu'allā; he might be the landowner named here. Al-Tanūkhī, *Faraj*, I:56.

⁶⁴ Campopiano, 'Cooperation', 394, drawing on Ouerfelli, *Le sucre*, 22–4. Franz, *Kompilation*, 38 suggests sugar and cotton were the two main crops, although he draws on older secondary literature for his claims about sugar. He maintains that the necessary scale and intensity for sugar production was possible because large estates established by Arab fighters after the conquest engendered a 'new plantation-like economy'.

⁶⁵ Franz, *Kompilation*, 40.

⁶⁶ Gordon, *Breaking*, 120–1; Franz, *Kompilation*, 40.

⁶⁷ Campopiano, 'Cooperation', 400–6; Popovic, *Revolt*, 13; Sāmīr, *Thawrat*, 26–7; Verkinderen, *Waterways*, 55.

⁶⁸ Verkinderen, 'Land', 507.

source of income,⁶⁹ though as noted many were connected to the authorities (*al-sultān*). The distinction between these elites and the state is not absolute from the economic standpoint, since both were involved in appropriating the surplus production of peasant labour.⁷⁰ Moreover, in the case of dead lands, the absence of inhabitants on them prior to reclamation was surely a major motivation in employing enslaved labourers like the Zanj.⁷¹

The early ‘Abbāsids were especially active around Baṣra and upstream at Wāsiṭ.⁷² Several canals were named for early members of the caliphal house.⁷³ Al-Balādhurī relates how Baṣra itself was built at the behest of its first governor, in correspondence with the caliph ‘Umar I (d. 23/644), because of its access to water, pasture and fertile land. Early Umayyad governors ordered the building of new canals to provide a better fresh water supply to the growing population, so many canals were named after Umayyad-era notables.⁷⁴

The Nahr al-Qandal that the Zanj find blocked was the ninth of Baṣra’s ‘rivers’ on the west side of the Tigris, all of which fed into al-Fayyāḍ, the main river of the city itself;⁷⁵ Dubbā, where the Zanj seize livestock they find in the palm groves, lay between al-Qandal and Nahr al-Amīr, which were connected by at least one transverse canal,⁷⁶ described by al-Balādhurī as a large tidal canal (*khawr*). Al-Balādhurī also relates that the city’s second ‘Abbāsīd governor had al-Qandal dammed to make Baṣra’s water sweet.⁷⁷ He was successful enough to earn the townsfolk’s loyalty: when Caliph al-Manṣūr (d. 158/775) proposed draining part of the marshes, they feared interference with the water supply and considered rebelling to appoint their governor as caliph, before being convinced to send ambassadors to al-Manṣūr instead.⁷⁸

⁶⁹ Campopiano, ‘Land Tenure’, 486.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 466, 479, 482, 486, 489.

⁷¹ Ibid., 490–1; Verkinderen, ‘Land’, 516–7.

⁷² Meanwhile, the general al-Muwaffaq actually invested state funds in irrigation works and providing seeds and cattle to peasants near Wāsiṭ to generate revenue for the war against the Zanj. Verkinderen, ‘Land’, 506 n.20.

⁷³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III:626; Verkinderen, *Waterways*, 195.

⁷⁴ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 358–70.

⁷⁵ Verkinderen, *Waterways*, 109.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 93, 168; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, III:2016.

⁷⁷ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 370. How the dam would have accomplished this remains unclear: Verkinderen, *Waterways*, 93.

⁷⁸ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 371–3.

Whilst we know nothing else about the Nahr Sharīkān, it is clear from this account that it was a tributary of the large canal known as the Nahr Bayān. Al-Ṭabarī's history is an important source for the latter's location: it was named after the town of Bayān, big enough to have a *minbar* (pulpit) in its mosque, meaning that it was equipped for Friday prayer and had some official importance.⁷⁹ The town lay on the border of Khūzistān and Iraq and on the main roads from Baṣra to al-Ahwāz and Fārs; the government army was resupplied from al-Ahwāz via Nahr Bayān. As seen in this episode, the pilgrims captured there by the Zanj indicate it was the route from al-Ahwāz to Mecca, too.⁸⁰ There is a clear inference to be made: far from the fighting occurring deep in inaccessible marshes home for millennia to dissidents, it takes place on a main road, or rather main waterway, connecting major settlements and enabling the movements of troops, officials and supplies.

The role of successive central authorities in commanding, coordinating, or encouraging water infrastructure in Mesopotamia can be traced back at least to Sumerian times. Rather than supporting Wittfogel's 'hydraulic state' thesis, water infrastructure leading to the emergence of centralised authority, recent scholarship suggests a 'reverse Wittfogel' is more plausible: expanding states found themselves liable to construct water infrastructure in the areas into which they had expanded.⁸¹ Archaeologists and historians have also emphasised the space left for local initiative: although state authorities certainly undertook major canal-building projects, smaller ones might be carried out by local landowners and even involve important elements of labour co-operation.⁸² Indeed, the Zanj themselves are recorded as having built a canal and dams; one rebel is nicknamed al-Ḥaffār, 'the [canal] digger'.⁸³

Date palm plantations also had an extremely long history by the time of the Zanj rebellion; the oldest dateable date phytolith found in southern Mesopotamia is around 12,000 years old.⁸⁴ During the Zuṭṭ Rebellion, in many ways a precursor to the Zanj Rebellion, an anonymous Zuṭṭi poet declares

⁷⁹ Verkinderen, *Waterways*, 99–100.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁸¹ Wilkinson and Rayne, 'Hydraulic Landscapes'.

⁸² Campopiano, 'Cooperation', 401–3; Verkinderen, 'Land', 504.

⁸³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, III:1928, 1973, 2092.

⁸⁴ Altaweel *et al.*, 'New Insights', 34.

with great glee that his people have cut off the silk-clad elites of Baghdad from their fine Baṣra dates.⁸⁵

Moreover, the ‘One-Eyed Tigris’ was tidal (like the Tigris and Euphrates upstream of Baṣra), meaning that the various canals connected to it were also tidal.⁸⁶ Date palm plantations were irrigated by this tidal flow, an excellent illustration of the inseparability of nature and culture. Literal date palm ‘cultures’, planted by human labour, flourished and provided sustenance to the people, returns to landowners, and tax revenues to Sāmarrā’, subject to ‘natural’ fluctuations beyond their control, but which they could nonetheless anticipate and channel, thanks to the canals. Indeed, the naturalcultural quality of Baṣra’s waters is well-captured in the word *nahr*, used to describe canals excavated by human efforts that remained tidal and at risk of silting up, but also to refer to ‘natural’ rivers whose courses and flows had in fact been altered by centuries of canals draining off their waters for irrigation and transport.⁸⁷

Conclusion

Canals thus enabled transportation and irrigation, and date plantations fed people and generated revenues that in turn enabled certain types of political and social relations. Drawing on Carse’s work on the Panama Canal’s infrastructure, we should see ‘Abbāsīd power itself, and the Zanj rebellion in response, as the effect of this infrastructure: both local elites and those in Baghdad and Sāmarrā’ drew power from it, and at least some of the rebels had previously been forced to work the land to generate the benefits that those elites enjoyed.⁸⁸ Without this infrastructure, there would have been no Baṣra, no movement between there and Khūzistān, no prosperity and tax revenues, no landowners, no labourers, no canals, dams, or dogs.

One of the contentions of this chapter has been that the sheer amount of detail preserved in al-Ṭabarī’s *History* enables us to rewrite the history of the Zanj Rebellion symmetrically, including all manner of non-human actors. I have attempted to demonstrate the value of this approach here regarding

⁸⁵ Richardson, *Roma*, 24–5.

⁸⁶ See Verkinderen, *Waterways*, 68–103.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, xv, also observes this double meaning of *nahr*, without making a point about the redundancy of nature/culture splits. On silting and gradients, see Jotheri, ‘Recognition’.

⁸⁸ Carse, ‘Nature’.

what I have termed the infrastructure of contention. Yet even without such abundant information for other rebellions, we are not bereft of details either. The series of revolts that broke out in Umayyad and early 'Abbāsīd times in the Egyptian Nile Delta known as the Bashmūr rebellions, involving variously both local Coptic peasants and Arab tribesmen and often provoked by excessive taxation, are often considered to have persisted so long in part because of the inaccessible, marshy terrain.⁸⁹ The scholarship seems to take this for granted, sometimes referring to a regional history of recalcitrance dating back to Pharaonic times, but the area had clearly been reshaped by long human occupation and was economically connected to the rest of Egypt and to the eastern Mediterranean. Would it be possible to re-analyse these revolts with the same infrastructural approach and similarly revise the standard assumption? The Zanj Rebellion is, in and of itself, worthy of study; but the value of the approach set out here will be more fully proved if it can provide a solid basis for further comparative work.

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⁸⁹ E.g. Feder, 'Bashmurite', 33–4; Wissa, 'Last Revolt', 250–2.

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