Al-Mansūr (754-775 AD) 
the Real Founder of the ‘Abbāsid Dynasty

A study on the political problems during the early years of the ‘Abbāsid dynasty
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CHAPTER ONE

THE RISE OF THE 'ABBĀSIDS AND AL-MANṢŪR'S SUCCESION TO THE CALIPHATE

1. The reign of Abū al-'Abbās al-Saffah

The first of the 'Abbāsid caliphs, Abū al-'Abbās 'Abdullāh b. ʿAlī b. ʿAbdullāh b. ʿAbbās was proclaimed in the Great Mosque in Kūfa on Friday, Rabīʿ Awwal 132/ October 750. Abū al-'Abbās was sick when he received the oath of allegiance, therefore, he made a short speech in which he spoke of the family of the Prophet, claimed their rights over the caliphate, pointed out the tyranny of the Umayyads and appreciated the people of Kūfa.

Following the proclamation of the 'Abbāsid caliphate, the 'Abbāsids had to fight two powerful forces of the Umayyads: one led by Marwān b. Muḥammad in al-Jazaʿir and the other commanded by Ibn ʿUmar b. Ḥubayra at Wāṣiṭ. Naturally, the first attempt was directed towards the Umayyad caliph because the 'Abbāsid caliphate would not gain its full power until this caliph was subdued.

Abū al-'Abbās sent his armies under the leadership of ʿAbdullāh b. ʿAlī. According to some historical accounts, Marwān's army numbered 120.000 men, while ʿAbdullāh was supported by about 20.000 men. The number of Marwān's army seems to be exaggerated, the fact is that his soldiers were larger than those of ʿAbdullāh, but the exact figure is difficult to ascertain. The two troops met near the upper river of the Zīb and they were involved in a fierce battle. The last Umayyad Caliph in Jumāda II suffered a decisive defeat, and he himself fled to Mosul then to Syria, taking refuge to Palestine and finally he was killed in a village of Buṣār in Egypt.

As already mentioned, the second obstacle to the 'Abbāsids was Ibn Ḥubayra's army at Wāṣiṭ. After Marwān's defeat, therefore the 'Abbāsid army was dispatched to fight Ibn Ḥubayra for he represented the last stronghold of the Umayyads. He was still holding Wāṣiṭ, where Ḥasan b. Qabīlah laid siege on him, which lasted for eleven months. The
CHAPTER TWO
THE POLITICAL PROBLEMS DURING THE EARLY YEARS OF AL-MANŞÜR’S REIGN

1. The revolt of ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Alī

As already mentioned at the end of the first chapter, al-Mansūr, following his proclamation as Caliph, had to face a number of economic and political problems. The most important and immediate step which confronted him was to crush both his great enemies; his uncle, ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Alī and Abū Muslim. The former claimed himself successor to the caliphate and rebelled against him, and the latter, due to his increasing power, threatened the dynasty.

‘Abdallāh b. ‘Alī is said to have visited Abū al-‘Abbās at al-Anbār in 136/753 and was instructed to lead the campaign against the Byzantines with the army from Syria and Khurāsān. He was at the place called Dalūk and getting ready to move against Byzantines when he received the news of the Caliph’s death and the oath of allegiance to Abū Ja’far. ‘Abdallāh summoned people to pray in congregation, he then announced the death of Abū al-‘Abbās and asked them his own claim. He informed the people that al-Saffāh had promised him the succession when the latter sent him to march against Marwān II. Some of ‘Abdallāh’s officers such as Abū Ghanā‘īm, Khaddir al-Mawzī, Abū al-Asbagh and all of the officers of the men of Khurāsān attested his claim. They took the oath of allegiance to him and so did the majority of people of Syria and al-Jazīrah. ‘Abdallāh then set out for Harrān and captured it from al-Mansūr’s deputy after the siege for forty days. The allegation that the siege lasted for forty days is debatable because al-Mansūr, as will be seen later, sent Abū Muslim to fight ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Alī as soon as he heard of ‘Abdallāh’s rebellion.

Regarding ‘Abdallāh’s claim, Omar argues that it is difficult to ascertain its validity. The fact is that the ‘Abbāsid feared his ambition as it was indicated clearly from Abū Ja’far’s expression and anticipation. According to Ballādhuri’s allegation, quoted by Omar that Abū al-‘Abbās seems to have promised ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Alī the succession. But one of the Caliph’s friend Sa’īd b. ‘Umar al-Makhzūmī advised him not to transfer the caliphate from...
CHAPTER THREE
AL-MANSUR'S ATTEMPT AT TRANSFERRING THE CALIPHATE TO HIS LINE

1. Al-Mansur's relation with the Husaynid-'Alids

The crushing of the Ḥasanid-'Alid revolt seems to be the climax of the 'Alid attempt to regain the caliphate, which, according to them, was usurped by the 'Abbāsids. Although we find another revolts of the 'Alids during the reign of al-Hādi and the later 'Abbāsid caliphate they were less dangerous than those of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya and his brother Ibrāhīm. Nevertheless, al-Mansur who always felt insecure of the 'Alids kept investigating the 'Alid movement.

The 'Alids split into the Ḥasanids and the Husaynids. The former followed the line of Ḥasan b. 'Ali b. Abī Taḥlib and the latter descended from Husayn b. 'Ali b. Abī Taḥlib. Since the tragedy of Karbala in 61/680, the Husaynids maintained the quiescent policy which gave the Ḥasanids the opportunity to bid for power. And after the death of Zayd b. 'Ali in 122/740, the leadership of the 'Alids was contested by the two contenders, the Husaynid Ja'far al-Ṣādiq and the Ḥasanid 'Abdullāh al-Mahj and his son, Muḥammad.1

It is likely due to the political activities and their intensive da'wā (propaganda) in the early 'Abbāsids, the Ḥasanids are recorded in many historical works, while very few sources relate the movement of the Husaynids. Omar observes the scarcity of historical account of the Husaynids since the appearance of the Shi'a Ḥusayniyya (the partisans of Husayn) in two centuries from the history of Shi'a Ḥusayniyya, the branch which later called Shi'ite Imām the Twelver Shi'ite or Ja'farī, derived from Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq.2

Ja'far al-Ṣādiq lived in a generation which was marked with the most drastic political change, but he tried his utmost to abandon politics and advised his followers not to rise in revolt.3 It is reported that Ja'far al-Ṣādiq was the only 'Alids who did not support the nomination of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya during the meeting at al-Abwā, he even predicted his failure and hinted that the caliphate would be held by Abū Ja'far. Though this story seems to imply the pro-'Abbāsid tendency, the fact is that Ja'far al-Ṣādiq during his life abandoned political activity. It is also reported that when Abū Salāma intended to
CONCLUSION

The ‘Abbasid dynasty emerged when the first Caliph Abū al-‘Abbās was proclaimed in 132/749. However, he enjoyed his reign for a very short time (4 years and nine months), during which he succeeded in uprooting the Umayyads and their supporters and suppressing those who were dissatisfied with the ‘Abbasid policy. He began strengthening his power by appointing most of his relatives in the important offices, including al-Manṣūr who played a very important role during his reign. He was appointed governor of the great provinces such as al-Jazīra, Mosul, Armenia and Azerbayjān and led the campaign against Ibn Hubayra at Wāṣīt and Ishāq b. Muslim al-‘Uqaylī at the frontier of Sumaysāt. This provided him with valuable experience for his future task as the successor of Abū al-‘Abbās. Seen from this, it is understandable if Abū al-‘Abbās appointed him his successor. In addition, al-Manṣūr possessed some characters suitable for the head of the empire. He had, as some historians credit to him, bravery, firm determination, cunning as well as he was regarded as treacherous, cruel and mean.

Al-Manṣūr succeeded his brother al-Saffāh in 136/754. No sooner did he ascend to the throne than he was faced by some problems, politically and economically. Al-Saffāh died, leaving behind the empty treasury due to his lavish gift to his soldiers and clients on the one hand, and his negligence to raise the revenue on the other. It was also credited to him that ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Ali claimed to the succession. Al-Saffāh promised him the caliphate if he could defeat Marwān II. ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Ali’s claim to the succession and his revolt formed the first political problem which al-Manṣūr had to overcome. Thanks to Abū Muslim’s brilliant skill in warfare and his loyalty to the ‘Abbasids, al-Manṣūr’s throne was saved. However, the man who had served the ‘Abbasids since they launched the secret propaganda, during the ‘Abbasid revolution until the ‘Abbasid empire was strongly established, ended his life in brutal assassination by his own master. Whatever charges were accused against Abū Muslim, the most significant motives of al-Manṣūr to eliminate him was that he feared that his influence would overpower him which he thought very dangerous to his empire.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


The book studies the succession and political problems during the early years of the 'Abbāsid rule. The short reign of the first Caliph al-Saffāh left to the nascent dynasty some serious political problems. Since the dynasty had been supported by many different groups and factions, once it had been established, they looked for various ways to express their interests and rivalries in the form of succession disputes and uprisings. It was I-Mansūr's great task to overcome these political problems. The first challenge came from his own family, 'Abdallāh b.'Alī who claimed the succession which was allegedly promised by the late caliph. The second threat came from al-Mansūr's general, Abū Muslim who had rendered a great service to the 'Abbāsids. Due to the jealousy of the Caliph and the increasing power of Abū Muslim, the Caliph brutally murdered him. The third political problem were the uprisings of the Hasanid 'Alids, Muhammad and his brother Ibrāhīm b.'Abdullāh who claimed their rights to the caliphate. All these political problems could successfully be handled by al-Mansūr by resorting to various tactics and stratagems.

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