



## 'ABDALLĀH B. ṬĀHER

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'ABDALLĀH B. ṬĀHER ḌU'L-YAMĪNAYN, governor of Khorasan for the 'Abbasid caliphs (213-30/828-45) and most outstanding of the line of Taherid governors there. His tenure of power lasted for seventeen years, compared with the short ones of his father (less than two years) and of his brother and predecessor Ṭalḥa (six years), and so it was primarily he who established the fame and splendor of the Taherids and acquired a permanent place in later Arabic literature and culture.

'Abdallāh was born ca. 182/798 into the Taherid family. It was originally of Persian *mawlā* stock, but in the Omayyad period attached itself by clientship to the governor of Sīstān, Ṭalḥa b. 'Abdallāh al-Ḳozā'ī, and had accordingly assumed the aristocratic Arabic *nesba* Ḳozā'ī. Hence by the time of Ṭāher Ḍu'l-yamīnayn, the family had become heavily arabicized in culture and outlook, while still remaining ethnically Persian. 'Abdallāh early distinguished himself at his father's side as a commander in the service of the caliphs, coping with the discontent in the central lands of the caliphate which was an aftermath of civil war between Amīn and Ma'mūn. He followed his father Ṭāher in commanding operations in the Jazīra against Amīn's former partisan, Naṣr b. Šabaṭ; and in 209/824-25 or the following year he induced Naṣr to surrender. In 210/825-26 he was in Egypt suppressing the long-standing rebellion of the adventurer 'Abdallāh b. al-Sarī; and in 214/829 he was briefly in western Persia combating Bābak the Khurramite heretic, until Ma'mūn transferred him to Khorasan to deal with Kharejite raids there.

Hence, when his brother Ṭalḥa died in 213/828, he was eventually an obvious



choice for the governorship of Khorasan, taking up office in the provincial capital of Nīšāpūr in 215/830. The new caliph Mo‘taṣem is alleged to have disliked ‘Abdallāh, but he was nevertheless confirmed in the post (218/833), and he continued to hold it until his death. His main concerns as governor were, firstly, to strengthen and support the Taherid’s vassals in Transoxania, the Samanids; and secondly, to maintain caliphal authority and the cause of Sunnite orthodoxy in northern Iran against Iranian sectarian movements and the separatist feelings of those chafing under control from Baghdad and Nīšāpūr. Aid to the Samanids was bound up with the fact that they controlled the traffic in Turkish slaves from the Central Asian steppes into the caliphate, a traffic which had become especially important with the contemporary increased reliance on Turkish military slave armies; a large proportion of the tribute forwarded to Baghdad by ‘Abdallāh and the other members of his family consisted of these Turkish slaves. Within his own territories, ‘Abdallāh in 219/834 suppressed an ‘Alid rising in Gūzgān led by the Husainid claimant Moḥammad b. al-Qāsem. But much of his attention was claimed by the situation in the Caspian provinces, where Zoroastrianism and ancient Iranian feeling were still strong and where Zaydī Shi‘ism had found a foothold; consequently, feelings of local particularism expressed themselves in hostility to outside control and to the introduction of Sunnite orthodox teachings in Ṭabarestān and Gorgān. Hence ‘Abdallāh fought against the *espaḥbad* of Ṭabarestān, Māzyār b. Qāren, who had refused to recognize the Taherids as intermediaries and had insisted on direct dealings with the caliphs; in the end, the Taherid forces captured Māzyār and sent him to Iraq for execution. ‘Abdallāh died in Rabī‘ I, 230/November, 844, and was succeeded as governor in Khorasan by his son Ṭāher.

Constitutionally, ‘Abdallāh remained a devoted servant of the ‘Abbasids and an upholder of Sunnism within the eastern lands of the caliphate, hostile to all manifestations of sectarian and heretical activity. He faithfully forwarded tribute to Baghdad and acknowledged the ‘Abbasids in the *koṭba* and on his coinage, though he was circumspect enough never to leave his territories in order to visit the caliphal court in Baghdad or Sāmarrā. Thus ‘Abdallāh and his family can hardly be considered as an autonomous dynasty in Persia, a harbinger of the breakup of the ‘Abbasid caliphate. But the continuity over fifty years of their power in Persia probably did, in the long run, favor a certain emergence of Iranian solidarity and feeling there.

Culturally, ‘Abdallāh shared to the full in the Arab-Islamic society of his time,



and he was a munificent patron of literature; his court in Nišāpūr became a mecca for Arabic literary men and scholars. Ṭāher had procured for ‘Abdallāh as tutors some of the most eminent scholars of the age, such as the Kufan grammarian Farrā’. And there is extant an epistle containing counsels on ruling and statecraft which is said to have been written by Ṭāher for his son when the latter took up governorship of the Jazīra and Syria in 206/821 (see C. E. Bosworth, “An Early Arabic Mirror for Princes: Ṭāhir Dhū l-Yaminain’s Epistle to his Son ‘Abdallāh (206/821),” *JNES* 29, 1970, pp. 25-41). ‘Abdallāh was himself an accomplished scholar, with a particular interest in music and singing and also in composing. Among the many scholars who enjoyed his patronage, one may mention the historian and genealogist Zobayr b. Bakkār and the poet Abū Tammām. (On ‘Abdallāh’s role in the cultural history of the period, see Bosworth, “The Taherids and Arabic Culture,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 14, 1969, pp. 57-67.) In later Islamic *adab* literature, ‘Abdallāh is erected into the ideal of a wise and just Islamic ruler, and it does appear that he had a particular concern for the economic and agricultural welfare of the provinces under his control. Khorasan flourished at this time, and produced a rich revenue; Gardīzī mentions, for instance, that ‘Abdallāh commissioned an authoritative book on the law and practice of water rights, a *Ketāb al-qonī*, which was still used in Khorasan during Ghaznavid times.

See also: Taherid dynasty.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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The historical sources for caliphal history during the 3rd/9th century (Ya‘qūbī, Ṭabarī, Mas‘ūdī, Šābūstānī, Gardīzī, Ebn al-Aṭīr, etc.) are all utilized in the section on ‘Abdallāh in C. E. Bosworth, “The Ṭāhirids and Šaffārids,” *Camb. Hist. Iran* IV, pp. 97-100.

See also Barthold, *Turkestan*<sup>3</sup>, pp. 208-09; and Spuler, *Iran*, pp. 65-68.

Notable amongst the biographical literature is Ebn Ḳallekān (Beirut) III, pp. 83-89, no. 343; tr. de Slane, II, pp. 49-55.



S. Nafisī, *Tārīk-e kāndān-e Ṭāherī*, Tehran, 1335 Š./1956.

On cultural aspects, see also Browne, *Lit. Hist. Persia* I, pp. 346-47; and Bosworth, “The Ṭāhirids and Persian Literature,” *Iran* 7, 1969, pp. 103-06.