



## ‘ALĪ B. ‘ĪSĀ B. DĀ’ŪD

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‘ALĪ B. ‘ĪSĀ B. DĀ’ŪD B. AL-JARRĀḤ (245-334/859-946), vizier during the reign of the caliph Moqtader (295-320/908-32). His family was of Persian origin resident in Iraq, and many of its members held posts in ‘Abbasid administration; ‘Alī himself entered the bureaucracy as a secretary when about twenty years old. In 286/899 he and his uncle Dā’ūd were appointed respectively head of the western and of the eastern departments of the finance ministry (*dīwān al-dār*). Conflict with the family of Ebn al-Forāt culminated in ‘Alī’s involvement in a plot to depose the young caliph Moqtader in favor of ‘Abdallāh b. al-Mo‘tazz (295/908). Its failure resulted in ‘Alī’s banishment to Mecca, where he remained until the fall of Ebn al-Forāt in 299/912. The following year he was invited to succeed the vizier Kāqānī.

In his first vizierate (300-04/913-17) ‘Alī attempted to put the caliphal finances in order by increasing revenues and reducing court expenses, but he soon ran into strong opposition. His conclusion of a truce with the Qarmatians of Bahrain secured the release of ‘Abbasid soldiers taken prisoner, but laid him open to the accusation of treason. Later the costly military expeditions to Egypt (301/914) to fend off Fatimid incursions and to parts of Iraq against various rebels made it impossible to pay the Baghdad garrison, which mutinied. ‘Alī was dismissed and replaced by his rival Ebn al-Forāt, who imprisoned him.

When it again became necessary to choose a vizier, the caliph consulted ‘Alī b. ‘Īsā and appointed Ḥāmed b. ‘Abbās in 306/918; when the new vizier proved incompetent, the caliph attached ‘Alī to him as an adviser. For almost five



years he again exerted power, but he was no more successful than before in reconciling the caliph’s entourage to the money-saving measures which he judged necessary to meet the cost of operations against Fatimid attacks and the revolt of the governor of Azarbaijan, Yūsuf b. Abī Sāj. During this time the mystic Ḥallāḡ was tried and executed (309/922). It would appear that ‘Alī, who refused to join in Ḥallāḡ’s interrogation, felt a secret sympathy for him and was anxious to defend him, but could achieve nothing against the hostility of Ḥāmed, the titular vizier, and the others interested in the prosecution. In 311/923 Ḥāmed was replaced by Ebn al-Forāt, who again put ‘Alī on trial. He was tortured and made to pay a huge fine before being allowed to retire to Mecca, whence he was exiled to Yemen. A year later, however, he was recalled and appointed inspector of the finances of Egypt and Syria. In 314/927 he was appointed vizier for the second time.

‘Alī’s second vizierate lasted only a year and was a failure. Finding himself unable to obtain from the caliph, or from the latter’s influential mother, adequate funds for action against the Qarmatians, who were threatening Baghdad, he was obliged to resign. Thereafter he did not again occupy any top-level office, but he continued to play an important role in governmental and administrative affairs. After the restoration of Moqtader (following his temporary deposition by the troops in 317/929), ‘Alī was put in charge of the investigation of complaints (*maḏālem*), and next became an adviser to the vizier Solaymān b. Ḥasan, who was his cousin. After a brief banishment to Dayr Qonnā on the lower Tigris, he was reemployed during the reign of Qāher (320-22/932-34), exiled again, and then recalled by the vizier Ebn Moqla, who needed his help in negotiations with the Hamdanid prince Ḥasan b. Abī’l-Hayjā’. From 325/936 onward ‘Alī acted as an adviser to another vizier, his brother ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān, and later was reengaged by the caliph to investigate complaints. He died at the age of eighty-nine in Baghdad.

‘Alī strove courageously to save the ‘Abbasid caliphate from the many dangers threatening it. Though unsuccessful, he earned a reputation for honesty which is approvingly echoed by the chroniclers and has led a modern orientalist to describe him as “the good vizier.” His technical expertise as a well trained, professional secretary was supplemented with a solid knowledge of Islamic culture, which he owed to two Shafe‘ite teachers sympathetic to Mu‘tazilism. This explains not only the nature of his piety, but also his hostility to the Hanbalites and his attitude to the caliphate. Unlike those Shi‘ite secretaries who did not genuinely acknowledge the ‘Abbasid caliphate’s legitimacy and



were only interested in enriching themselves at the state's expense, he upheld the principle of a responsible caliphate employing honest and devoted officials. This was why he sided with Ebn al-Mo'tazz and attempted to have the caliph Qāher, whom he considered unsuitable, deposed by the *qāzīs*. At the same time he had contacts with prominent spokesmen of Sufism, which explain why he tried in vain to prevent the trial of Ḥallāj. He also protected literary writers and men of religion, though he later had to give up such patronage. As an administrator, he was concerned to maintain the empire's prosperity and to make the fiscal system as honest as possible. To this end he abolished several abusive taxes and eliminated, or tried to eliminate, certain practices harmful to the public interest; in particular he tried to restrict the practice of tax-farming. To balance the budget, however, he was obliged to restrict expenditure on the court and to resort to borrowing from Jewish moneylenders. Such a policy had little chance of success with a situation so unstable and a caliph so fickle and inexperienced as the young Moqtader. Moreover the caliph could hardly give unreserved support to a man who had earlier taken sides against him. The contemporary circumstances, the laxity of the system, the spinelessness of the caliph, and also to some extent 'Alī b. 'Īsā's own touchiness prevented any lasting accomplishments.

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