



## FAŽL, B. SAHL B. ZĀDĀNFARRŪK

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**FAŽL**, b. SAHL b. Zādānfarrūk (d. 202/818), high official of the early 'Abbasids and vizier to the caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 198-218/813-33). His father Sahl was a Zoroastrian from the vicinity of Kūfa who became a Muslim and attached himself to the Barmakids (q.v.), seeking employment also for his two sons Fażl and Ḥasan. At Yaḥyā Barmakī's prompting, Fażl himself also became a Muslim, reportedly in 190/806 (Jahšīārī, pp. 230-31; according to Ṭabarī, III, p. 709, at the hands of al-Ma'mūn), and entered the service of Hārūn al-Rašīd's son al-Ma'mūn. It was Fażl who persuaded al-Ma'mūn to accompany his father on his last expedition to Khorasan (192/808); Fażl already foresaw that al-Ma'mūn's brother al-Amīn would be likely to set aside their father's testament for the succession, and he worked to secure for the half-Persian al-Ma'mūn a power-base in the Iranian lands. Events turned out as Fażl had expected, for Amīn, under the influence of his vizier Fażl b. Rabī', now deprived al-Ma'mūn of his succession rights in favor of his own son Mūsā (Ṭabarī, III, pp. 776-77, 795-96).

Fażl became chief counselor and right-hand man of al-Ma'mūn during the civil war (194-98/810-13) in which al-Ma'mūn eventually triumphed. Fażl is said to have promised him that, despite his apparently unfavorable position, he would in the end achieve the caliphate and to have drawn up for him an *'ahd*, a promissory contract in which the new caliph would acknowledge his debt to his Creator and his obligation to uphold the Islamic faith (text in Jahšīārī, p.



279). When al-Ma'mūn gained an initial victory over his brother, he was proclaimed caliph in the Persian lands (196/812), and Fażl became both vizier and amir for him, responsible for the civil administration of all the lands from Jebāl eastwards and for their military defense. al-Ma'mūn gave him the honorific title of *Ḍu'l-Re'āsātayn*, alluding to the two responsibilities, civil and military (*al-tadbīr wa'l-ḥarb*); an immense sum of money; and an hereditary estate (Jahšīārī, pp. 305-6; Ṭabarī, III, p. 841). This title appears on coins minted by Fażl in Persia in his capacity as al-Ma'mūn's amir or governor and, subsequently, on coins minted in Iraq and as far west as Egypt (Miles, pp. 79-106; Sourdell, 1959-60, I, p. 203 n. 2). When war with al-Amin had first seemed imminent, Fażl had advised al-Ma'mūn to conciliate and make peace with various Iranian and Turkish potentates of Transoxania and the fringes of India at a time when al-Ma'mūn was dispatching military expeditions into Sogdia, Ošrūsana, and Farḡāna and against the "king of Tibet." In 199/815 he received the conversion of the Kabul-Shah, who sent his crown and throne to Mecca as tokens of submission (Balāḍorī, *Fotūḥ*, p. 430; Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rik* II, p. 550; Ṭabarī, III, pp. 815-16; Azraqī, I, pp. 158, 168; cf. Barthold, *Turkestan*3, p. 202).

We have little information on how Fażl directed internal affairs during these years, although we know that his brother Ḥasan became director of finances in 196/812 (Ṭabarī, III, p. 841). However, after the fall of Baghdad in 198/813, Fażl became involved in the affairs of Iraq, where he aroused the opposition of the two main architects of al-Ma'mūn's military success, Ṭāher Ḍu'l-Yamīnayn and Hartāma b. A'yan. The attitude of the Sahlid brothers towards al-Ma'mūn's proclamation of the Imam 'Alī al-Rezā as his heir (cf. Ṭabarī, III, pp. 1012-13) is unclear, but a passage from the Shi'ite author Ebn Bābūya's *Oyūn aḳbār al-Rezā* to which Wilferd Madelung has drawn attention (pp. 334-39) asserts that Fażl was very doubtful of the wisdom of the caliph's action, assuming—with good reason—that he and his brother would be held responsible for the furore which might well ensue. He is said there to have refused an immense sum of money as a present from al-Ma'mūn and to have offered his master his resignation in order to retire to a life of ascetic exercises, but to have continued in office after having received the caliph's reassurances that he need not endorse any measures of which he did not approve. Fażl and Ḥasan therefore acquiesced but did in fact receive much of the opprobrium of the Iraqis, and especially of members of the 'Abbasid family and their partisans in Baghdad (cf. Ṭabarī, III, p. 977 on their earlier opposition to the Sahlids), for the nomination of 'Alī al-Rezā. They were even accused of wishing to transfer



the caliph to the 'Alids as a step towards seizing power for themselves and then reconstituting the ancient Sasanid empire (cf. Sourdél, 1959-60, I, pp. 211-12). Al-Ma'mūn's continued residence at Marw well after the reunification of the caliphate and his pro-'Alid policy were enough to brand him and his ministers as Persophiles, hostile to the Arab element in the heartland of the empire. Learning of these discontents, al-Ma'mūn hurried westwards to placate the opposition in Baghdad and to restore confidence in his rule. It was during his journey that Fa'zl was murdered in a bath at Saraḡs (2 Ša'bān 202/13 February 818) at an age variously reported as 41, 48, and 60 years (the latter age in Ṭabarī, III, pp. 1025-28; the other ages in Ebn Ḳallekān, ed. 'Abbās, IV, p. 44; tr. de Slane, II, p. 475). It was rumored that the caliph himself was behind the assassination, and since 'Alī al-Rezā died shortly afterwards also, al-Ma'mūn's pro-'Alid policy came to an end. Clearly, Fa'zl had been sacrificed for the unity of the caliphate. Energetic, authoritarian, at times violent (as in his killing of Harṭama), but nevertheless devoid of personal ambition and greed for money, he was the target of unjust accusations. Yet he was undoubtedly the most Persian of early 'Abbasid ministers in his attitude to power and his concept of the vizierial authority, a concept which was, however, to be considerably attenuated once al-Ma'mūn had resumed full control over the caliphate.

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