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HĀRUN AL-RAŠID

HĀRUN AL-RAŠID, HĀRUN B. MOḤAMMAD B. ʿABD-ALLĀH (d. Ṭus, 3 Jomādā II 193/24 March 809), the fifth caliph of the ʿAbbasid dynasty (r. 170-93/786-809), the third son of the caliph al-Mahdi and second son borne him by the slave concubine Ḵayzorān. He was born in Ray, either on 26 Ḏu'l-ḥejja 145/17 March 763 or 1 Moḥarram 149/16 February 766. Since he is also said to have been 21 or 22 years old at his accession (Ṭabari, III, p. 599), the later date seems more likely.

On the death of his elder brother, Musā al-Hādi, on 15 Rabiʿ I 170/14 September 786, Hārun ascended to the throne. His reign can be divided roughly into two parts: a longer initial period, during which he was content to let himself be guided by his forceful mother, Ḵayzorān, and even more so by her ally Yaḥyā b. Ḵāled Barmaki and his two sons Fażl and Jaʿfar. Their ties were strengthened by the fact that Hārun, Ḵayzorān, Fażl and his mother were all linked together through co-lactation relationships (Ṭabari, loc. cit.). The influence of the Barmakid family continued for some seventeen years, until their downfall in Moḥarram 187/January 803 (see BARMAKIDS); hence the second, shorter period of Hārun's assumption of personal power, aided by two officials, Fażl b. Rabiʿ (q.v.) and Esmāʿil b. Ṣobayḥ, neither of whom enjoyed the status and influence of the Barmakids.

As a youth during his father's reign, Hārun had been in nominal charge of two military expeditions against Byzantium (163/780 and 164/781), the latter one penetrating as far as Scutari on the Bosphorus coast. When he became caliph, the duty of *ḡazw* (raiding) against the Greeks was one which he was to take

seriously; according to Ṭabari (III, p. 709), during such raids he wore a special cap (*qalansuwa*) with the title *Ḡāzi Ḥājj,* "Warrior for the Faith, Pilgrim," inscribed on it. His expeditions benefited from internal dissension in Byzantium, certainly until the accession of the energetic Nicephorus I in A.D. 802, and from external pressures on the empire, enabling him to secure a series of military and naval victories (Bosworth, 1991, pp. 58-62).

In between these expeditions, however, Hārun's empire was very unsettled, far from the image fixed in popular imagination under the influence of the *Thousand and One Nights* (see *ALF LAYLĀ WA LAYLĀ*) of a glorious and harmonious empire. The military and administrative capabilities of the Barmakids laid a foundation which held the caliphate together substantially for another half-century or so, until the process of disintegration began. Even so, it was necessary after 184/800 to leave distant Efriqiyā in the Maghreb (i.e., eastern North Africa, modern Tunisia) to the governor Ebrāhim b. Aḡlab, in return for an annual tribute. Already, in 172/788 and 178/794, there had been revolts in Egypt against financial oppression and misgovernment, though they were eventually subdued by the general Harṯama b. Aʿyān (q.v.). Syrian tribes, which had always resented the loss of their dominant position under the Omayyad caliphs, were also racked by internal strife. Hārun's transfer of his capital in 180/796, from Baghdad to the twin cities of Raqqa and Rāfeqa on the middle Euphrates, where he remained until the last year of his life, was motivated partly by the need to watch over Syria (see Bosworth, forthcoming).

In spite of the fact that the eastern lands of the caliphate, from Iraq to the fringes of what is now Afghanistan and Transoxania, were extremely unsettled during Hārun's reign, he never had the knowledge, nor the will, to solve the problems there. In 178-79/794-95, in the northern half of Mesopotamia, Jazira, there was a recrudescence of the persistent local strain of Kharijism under Walid b. Ṭarif Taḡlebi, who was eventually killed near Hit by Hārun's general Yazid b. Mazyad Šaybāni (Ya-ʿqubi, II, pp. 495-96; Ṭabari, III, pp. 631, 638; tr. pp. 143, 153-54; Kennedy, p. 121). However, much more geographically extensive and enduring (for thirty years) was the Kharijite revolt in eastern Persia, which begin in around 179/795-96 under a leader of local noble (*deh-qān*) stock from the Bost region of southern Afghanistan, Ḥamza b. Āḏarak (or ʿAbd-Allāh). He breathed new fervor into the Kharijism of Sistan, the roots of which went back to early Omayyad times. Ḥamza was bitterly anti-ʿAbbasid, and took advantage of local resentment of the financial exploitation by the ʿAbbasid officials in Zarang and in Khorasan, especially the

tyranny of ʿAli b. ʿIsā b. Māhān (see below). Ḥamza's partisans invaded Khorasan, ravaged the countryside, and cut off the flow of revenue from Khorasan to Iraq. The major threat posed by Ḥamza's activities was a contributory factor in Hārun's decision in 193/808 to travel personally to Khorasan, but Ḥamza's movement continued for another twenty years, until his death towards the end of Maʾmun's reign (Sadighi, pp. 54-56; Amoretti, pp. 510-12).

Hārun was highly conscious of the religious significance of his caliphal role as defender of Sunnism, and hence zealous against the Shiʿa, and against heterodoxy subsumed under the heading of *zandaqa* (see ZENDIQ) as well as the Ḏemmis (see PEOPLE OF THE BOOK). The anti-Shiʿite policy was pursued in Iraq itself, where, in 179/795-96, the politically neutral and quietist Seventh Imam, Musā Kāẓem, was arrested and imprisoned. Despite being shielded from the caliph's wrath to some extent by Yaḥyā Barmaki and his son Fażl, Musā died in captivity in 183/799 or shortly thereafter, either due to natural causes, or, according to Shiʿite sources, by poisoning (Yaʿqubi, II, pp. 499-500; Ṭabari, III, p. 649, tr. p. 172; Masʿudi, VI, pp. 329-30 (= sec. 2532); Eṣfahāni, pp. 332-36).

Within Persia itself, Shiʿite resentment against the ʿAbbasids' appropriation of the spoils of victory in 132/750 manifested itself in uprisings in such remote regions as Deylam and the Caspian coastlands, which had never been completely Islamized, and were only tenuously con-trolled by the caliphs. In 176/792, Yaḥyā b. ʿAbd-Allāh b. Ḥasan, a Ḥasanid from Median, arrived in Deylam, having eluded the caliphal authorities since the suppression, in 169/786, of the ʿAlid revolt in Median led by Ḥasan b. ʿAli Ṣāḥeb-e Fak̲k̲. Under the protection of the local Justanid king, Yaḥyā attracted supporters in Deylam and proclaimed a revolt against the ʿAbbasids. Hā-run was alarmed, and sent the governor of western and northern Persia, Fażl b. Yaḥyā Barmaki, with a powerful army to suppress them. Fażl, who preferred diplomacy to violence, offered Yaḥyā b. ʿAbd-Allāh a guarantee of security (*amān*) and an amnesty for his rebellious activity. These documents were handwritten by Hārun himself and endorsed by leading olama as well as the Hashemites. Back in Baghdad, however, Hārun grew suspicious of the veneration accorded to the ʿAlid Yaḥyā, and seems to have had him placed under house arrest. As he grew increasingly suspicious of Fażl's apparent softness towards Yaḥyā (pro-Shiʿite inclinations were to be one of the causes adduced in the sources in explaining the downfall of the Barmakids), Hārun had Yaḥyā properly imprisoned. Yaḥyā

died in jail, probably in 187/803, not long after the fall of the Barmakids; as with Musā Kāẓem, many sources aver that he was murdered there (Yaʿqubi, II, pp. 492-93; Ṭabari, III, pp. 612-24, 669-72, tr. pp. 113-31, 205; Masʿudi, *Moruj*, VI, pp. 193, 300-301 (= Sec. 2405, 2505); Eṣfahāni, pp. 308-32). Undoubtedly, Hārun's harsh and treacherous treatment of Yaḥyā had the reverse of the effect intended; Zaydi Shiʿism now began to take firm hold in Deylam, Gilān, and Ṭabarestān; and, over the next century, those regions became extremely disaffected and volatile (see Madelung, pp. 206-12; Kennedy, pp. 206-7).

Khorasan and Transoxania had been unsettled since immediately after the ʿAbbasid Revolution, when religio-social movements, such as the Mobayyeża or Espiḏ-jāmagān, "wearers of white," of Moqannaʿ and the neo-Zoroastrian Sonbāḏ, evoked messianically the name of Abu Moslem Ḵorāsāni (q.v.), probably as an expression of their disappointment at the failure of the new authorities to change the pattern of Arab dominance in politics and society in the East (see Barthold, pp. 198-200; Sadighi, pp. 494-96, 498-503; Daniel, pp. 125 ff.).

In 179/795, a recrudescence of an earlier revolt of the Moḥammera, "wearers of red" (perhaps neo-Mazdakites), took place in Gorgān (q.v.; Ṭabari, III, pp. 645-46; Amoretti, p. 505), but this was only a minor manifestation of a deeper malaise in Khorasan and Transoxania, which was fueled by the same long-standing resentment mentioned above as well as the attempts to extend caliphal power in the East through governors whose only apparent concern was to extract money from the local population. The sources describe the tyrannical exactions of Hārun's governors, including Ḡeṭrif b. ʿAṭāʾ Ḡassāni (175-77/791-93), who introduced a monetary reform which, according to Naršaḵi, placed a heavy tax burden on the Bukharan community (Barthold, p. 169). In the face of rising discontent, Hārun despatched Faẓl b. Yaḥyā Barmaki, who during his tenure as governor (178-79/794-95) managed to defend the frontiers of Transoxania from marauding Turks, to build extensive public and charitable works, and to recruit a corps of Khorasanian troops for caliphal service (the so-called *ʿAbbāsiya*), while generally showing a solicitude for the interests of the local population as well as for those of his master (Barthold, p. 203; Sourdel, I, pp. 145-47; Daniel, loc. cit.). Unfortunately, Faẓl aroused the resentment of the caliph, who replaced him with ʿAli b. ʿIsā b. Māhān (q.v.). This proved to be a disastrous decision, because ʿAli b. ʿIsā implemented a policy of naked exploitation of Khorasan; the sources, almost uniformly hostile to ʿAli b. ʿIsā, contrast him in the worst possible light with Faẓl's benevolent

rule. Daniel has written that “he is as classic an example of the tyrannical, corrupt, and incompetent administrator as al-Faḍl was the exemplar of the model governor” (p. 170). Although he had been denounced before Hārun, in 189/805 ʿAli b. ʿIsā managed to mollify the caliph with an unprecedented array of precious gifts, which he had obtained through his massive extortions (Ṭabari, III, pp. 702-04, tr., pp. 250-54; Bayhaqi, pp. 536-39; Daniel, p. 171).

Now that he could no longer depend on the restraining influence of the Barmakids, Hārun’s appointment of ʿAli to Khorasan led almost inevitably to a major conflagration in the eastern caliphate, where the southern fringes of Khorasan were already being harried by Ḥamza b. Āḏarak’s partisans (see above). It began in 190/806 in Samarqand under Rāfeʿ b. Layṯ, a descendant of the last Umayyad governor of Khorasan, Naṣr b. Sayyār. However, it spread rapidly into Khorasan, where it was an expression of the popular resentment of the tyranny of ʿAli b. ʿIsā, whose son ʿIsā was killed in Nasaf by the rebels. The provincial postmaster (*ṣāḥeb-e barid*) of Khorasan, Ḥamuya Ḵādem, informed Hārun that the situation was grave, especially since ʿAli, who boasted powerful forces and immense wealth, would not be dislodged easily from his governorship. The caliph nevertheless sent to Khorasan his trusted general Harṯama b. Aʿyān, who managed to arrest ʿAli in 191/807; he was eventually made to disgorge his personal fortune of 80 million dirhams and was jailed in Baghdad, before emerging to play a leading role during the reign of the next caliph, Moḥammad Amin. However, Rāfeʿ’s revolt continued, and so Hārun resolved to march eastwards via Gorgān to Khorasan, in order to take charge of operations personally; this intention was frustrated by his death in the vicinity of Ṭus on 3 Jomādā II 193/24 March 809 (Ṭabari, III, pp. 738-39, tr. pp. 303-4). Having lost its *raison d’être* with ʿAli’s removal, Rāfeʿ’s movement gradually lost impetus during the succeeding governorship of Maʾmun in Khorasan (Barthold, pp. 200-201; Daniel, pp. 172-75).

Thus, Hārun’s period of personal rule after the fall of the Barmakids can not be considered particularly successful; the preceding years, when he lacked interest in administration, had perhaps made too deep an imprint on his character and judgment. The sources signal a decline in bureaucratic efficiency during Faẓl b. Rabiʿ’s headship of the secretarial and diplomatic side of the caliphal administration. Hārun may be criticized for a lack of forethought in his decision to apportion the empire between his sons Moḥammad Amin, ʿAbd-Allāh Maʾmun and Qāsem Muʾtaman, by means of the “Meccan Letters” of 186/802; whatever may have been the caliph’s motives

here (and it may be that modern critics are being wise after the event), the result was a fratricidal civil war on his death.

The dominance of the Barmakids within the state for much of Hārun's reign has been taken as implying a certain bias towards Persian elements, but the accusation in some strongly pro-Arab, anti-Šoʿubi circles (exemplified in a famous satire by the contemporary philologist Aṣmaʿi, accusing the Barmakids of polytheism, or *šerk*, as well as Mazdakite inclinations) of a definite support for Persian heterodoxy can not be seriously sustained (see Sourdel,I, pp. 175-76). The Barmakids may have simply represented Khorasanian interests at the court, and may have tried to redress Hārun's neglect of the eastern caliphate (see Mottahedeh, pp. 70-71). Except for the move eastwards at the end of his reign, Hārun showed much more interest in events in the central lands of the caliphate, seemingly content to leave Persia to his provincial governors. Although the political skills and states-manship of Maʾmun, who had a long-term base in Merv, may have held off the process, the subsequent falling-away of Khorasan and the east from caliphal control during the course of the 3rd/9th century had its roots in the latter part of Hārun's reign.

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