



TAHERIDS

TAHERIDS (Pers. Āl-e Ṭāher), name of a prominent family of the early Abbasid period and more particularly a line of governors of Khorasan (205-59/821-73) from that family.

The first of these governors (sing. *amir*) and the eponym of the family was Ṭāher b. Ḥosayn, known as Ḍu'l-Yaminayn (“the ambidextrous”) or less flatteringly as al-A‘war (“the one-eyed”; for an explanation of these and his other honorifics, see Kaabi, 1983, I, pp. 194-96), a general who rose to prominence in the course of the civil war between the caliph al-Amin (r. 193-198/209-813) and his brother al-Ma‘mun (r. 198-218/813-33). Ṭāher’s ancestors and extended family were also significant for their broader political importance, their immense wealth, and their cultural contributions and patronage (for a detailed genealogical chart of known family members, see Nafisi, endpaper foldout).

Origins. The early Arabic sources are somewhat quiet about Ṭāher’s background, giving the false impression that Ṭāher “surgit sur la scène politique ‘abbāside grâce à un coup de chance” at the time of the civil war between al-Amin (Kaabi, 1972, pp. 145-46). That may be due to the familiarity rather than the obscurity of the information to the contemporary audience; later Arabic and Persian writers are more informative. Modern research can trace back the prehistory of the Taherids for three generations with some confidence; beyond that, information is suspect and primarily of interest only as artifacts of Taherid attempts to legitimize their rule in the eyes of various constituencies or of *šo‘ubi* controversies [see [IRANIAN IDENTITY iii. Medieval](#)



Islamic Period] (e.g., the claim they were descended from Rostam-e Dāstān or Persian aristocracy; see Bosworth, 1969a, p. 49). For example, one very detailed, though garbled and orthographically uncertain, account of Ṭāher's ancestry is given by Juzjāni (*Ṭabaqāt* I, p. 190); he traces the family back to a certain Māy b. Ḳosrow, who was converted to Islam and given the name As'ad by 'Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb, and from him back to the legendary Iranian king Manučeher; elsewhere (p. 191) he says Ṭāher was descended from As'ad, formerly named Farroḵ and presumably the son of Māy b. Ḳosrow, who was converted to Islam by the general Ṭalḥat al-Ṭalḥāt, also known as Ṭalḥa b. 'Abdallāh b. Ḳalaf al-Ḳozā'i. Ebn Ḳallekān (tr. de Slane, I, p. 649; II, pp. 52-53), who claims to be using information from Sallāmi's lost history of Khorasan, gives the genealogy as Ṭāher b. Ḥosayn b. Moṣ'ab b. Rozayq b. Māhān (or Rozayq b. As'ad b. Rāduyah, etc.) and says that it was Rozayq who was converted by Ṭalḥat al-Ṭalḥāt. The basic line of descent from Ḥosayn, Moṣ'ab, and Rozayq is confirmed by numerous other sources, including a panegyric poem written by Boṭayn of Ḥems (quoted in Ṭabari, III, p. 1090).

It is clear enough that the early members of the family were clients (sing. *mawlā*, pl. *mawālī*) of the tribe of Ḳozā'a. They were thus presumably non-Arabs and probably Persian, but their exact geographic origin is uncertain, and hence modern scholars remain divided on the issue of their ethnic identity. For example, Hugh Kennedy (1986, p. 150) says that the family was "of Arab origin," but C. E. Bosworth (*Camb. Hist. Iran* IV, p. 91) observes that "the sources agree that the Ṭāhirids were ethnically Persian." If As'ad was "probablement d'origine persane" and indeed the first Muslim member of the family, as suggested by Mongi Kaabi (1983, I, pp. 62-63), he may have been one of the *asāwera* who became a client of 'Abdallāh b. Ḳalaf al-Ḳozā'i and who could have been formally converted to Islam by 'Ali in Basra around the time of the Battle of the Camel (36/656). Rozayq, a more clearly historical personality (though his name appears in a wide array of variants such as Zurayq, Zāyeq, Zartu, etc.), could have converted about the same time and become a client of 'Abdallāh b. Ḳalaf's son Ṭalḥa. Ṭalḥa is known to have accompanied the army of Salm b. Ziād to Khorasan and Sistān in 61/680-81. Ṭalḥa himself served as a governor of Sistān during the period 62-64/681-84 and died and was buried there (*Tāriḳ-e Sistān*, pp. 103-4). One or more of the Taherid ancestors, wherever their original home may have been, probably accompanied these Basran forces to settle in Khorasan, and in Ebn Abi Ṭāher Ṭayfur (p. 63) there is at least one anecdotal indication that Ṭāher himself believed that Rozayq was among them.

Given the generally anti-Umayyad sentiments found among the strata of society to which Rozayq belonged, as well as his affiliation with the tribe of *Ḳozā'a*, it is not surprising to find that his family was deeply involved in the events surrounding the Abbasid Revolution (see [ABBASID CALIPHATE](#)). On the evidence of a passage from *Ṭabari* (II, p. 1988), Rozayq b. As'ad was still living at the time of the Abbasid *da'wa*. His son, Abu Maṣṣur Ṭalḥa, presumably named in honor of the general, had witnessed the wars of 'Abd-al-Raḥmān b. Moḥammad b. al-Aš'at, who was appointed governor of Sistān in 80/699 and then rebelled and was killed by the Zonbil (on whom, see ['ARAB ii. Arab Conquest of Iran](#)) about 85/704, and had participated in the campaigns of Mohallab b. Abi Ṣofra (d. 82/702). This Abu Maṣṣur Ṭalḥa, from the village of Ālin in the Marv oasis, was among the very first recruits to the Abbasid cause in Khorasan and served as one of the twelve chiefs (*naqibs*) of the *da'wa*. He was among Abu Moslem's closest advisors, acted as official secretary of the mission, and played a critical role in a number of key events in the history of the movement (Kaabi, 1972, pp. 152-59). Some sources also mention as another of the core *rejāl al-da'wa* and one of the *noḡarā' al-noḡabā'* a Moṣ'ab b. Rozayq. Although it is odd that the most important of these sources (*Aḡbār*, pp. 217, 220) does not indicate any connection between Ṭalḥa and Moṣ'ab, other sources explicitly confirm that they were brothers and that Moṣ'ab was the grandfather of Ṭāher Ḍu'l-Yaminayn (Sam'āni, ed. Yamāni, I, p. 81; Jahšīāri, p. 84). Ebn *Ḳallekān* (tr. de Slane, I, p. 654) adds that Moṣ'ab served as the secretary for Solaymān b. Kaṭir *Ḳozā'i*, the chief of the Abbasid mission in Khorasan prior to the arrival of Abu Moslem.

From the Abbasid Revolution to the Civil War. Profiting from its support of the revolution, the family earned an administrative role for itself in Bušanj ([Fušanj](#)) and the area around [Herat](#), which would remain its power base. Sam'āni (ed. Yamāni, I, p. 81) says Abu Moslem put Abu Maṣṣur Ṭalḥa b. Rozayq in charge of the taxes of Herat, but he was promptly killed by a group of Kharijites; Abu Moslem himself visited Ālin to console Moṣ'ab b. Rozayq on his death. Moṣ'ab must have inherited the position, since, according to Ebn al-Aṭir (VI, p. 43) and Gardizi (ed. Ḥabibi, p. 126), he was acting as governor of Bušanj ca. 160/776-77, at the time of the revolts of Yusof al-Barm and [Moḡanna'](#), but he had to flee when the town was overrun by Kharijites (*ḥaruris*). It was also there that Ṭāher was born in 159/775-76 (Ebn *Ḳallekān*, tr. de Slane, I, p. 652), and several anecdotes indicate that he had a special appreciation of it as an ancestral home. For example, his speaking of the pleasure he would take from the spectacle of “the aged females of Bušanj



climbing up to the roofs of their houses that they might get a sight of me as I pass by” (Ebn Kallekân, tr. de Slane, I, p. 650), or his request to [Fazl b. Sahl](#) for the right to deliver the Friday sermon (*ḳotba*; Jahšiâri, p. 291). The close and lengthy association of the Taherids and Bušanj is a typical example of the way in which numerous members of the new Abbasid military and administrative elite were able to take control of various districts of Khorasan and Transoxiana and transform them into hereditary fiefdoms. It raises the question of whether the family of Rozayq had some prior connection with the area around Herat or whether they insinuated themselves there at the expense of the previous local rulers. The former might explain why Abu Moslem chose Ṭalḥa as his agent there, while the latter might have been one reason why the Herat region was in almost constant turmoil during the first decades of the Abbasid period. Juzjâni (*Ṭabaqât*, p. 191) appears to be alone in implying that Moṣʻab lived in Bušanj prior to the Abbasid Revolution.

The sources give only bits of information about Ṭāher’s father, Ḥosayn b. Moṣʻab, but they do make it clear that he had become one of the major magnates of Khorasan and was probably still in effective control of Bušanj (Jahšiâri, p. 291). Azdi (*Taʻrik al-Mawṣel*, p. 318) describes him as one of the *wojuh Ḳorāsân* from whom Hārūn al-Rašid, on his deathbed, made sure to solicit an oath of allegiance to al-Maʻmun. There is, moreover, one particularly interesting account which sheds light on how Ḥosayn b. Moṣʻab was involved in events affecting Khorasan during the reign of Hārūn al-Rašid (Ṭabari, III, pp. 714-15): Ḥosayn had an audience with ʻAli b. ʻIsā b. Māhān, the notorious governor of Khorasan (180-91/796-806). After greeting ʻAli, he was met with a vehement verbal assault, as ʻAli denounced Ḥosayn as a “heretic and son of a heretic” and “enemy of Islam,” accused him of having drunkenly made trouble for ʻAli by predicting his dismissal from office, and threatened to kill Ḥosayn as soon as he could get the caliph’s permission. He then had his chamberlain (*ḥājeb*) literally drag Ḥosayn from the room. Ḥosayn was so alarmed that he immediately set off for Mecca to seek Hārūn’s protection.

Kaabi (1972, pp. 159-62; 1983, p. 66) sees the confrontation between ʻAli and Ḥosayn as evidence of an ancient enmity or rivalry between the families of Māhān and Rozayq, as well as a personal affront to the father that Ṭāher would later seek to avenge. However, it would be a mistake to see this as simply a grudge match. The episode also reflects profound differences of politics and policy that were leading to civil war. From the very beginning of the Abbasid period, there was a growing conflict of interest between a

centralizing bureaucratic elite at the capital and the provincial notables; for convenience the two factions can be referred to as the *abnā' al-dawla* (for their background, see 'ABNĀ) and the *moluk, ašrāf, or wojuh* (Amabe, pp. 94-98). Tensions between the two exploded during the governorship of 'Ali b. 'Isā, a champion of the interests of the *abnā'* faction. Virtually all the sources attribute this to the greed, personal corruption, and overall incompetence of 'Ali b. 'Isā, though it is hard to believe he was acting without the full knowledge and support of the caliph. First of all, 'Ali alienated much of the populace with his taxation policies. Abbasid taxation always seems to have been rapacious (for recently published documentary evidence of just how burdensome it was, see Khan), and 'Ali carried it to new heights of excess. This was both directly and indirectly injurious to the interests of notables like Ḥosayn b. Moṣ'ab. Not only were they being excluded from the process of collecting taxes and being subjected to onerous fiscal demands themselves, 'Ali's excessive taxation stirred up rural unrest and revolts, like that of the Kharijite Ḥamza b. Āḍarak, posed a recurrent threat to the estates of the landlords, including, as is well documented, those of the Taherids around Bušanj. Moreover, as the anecdote about Ḥosayn b. Moṣ'ab suggests, 'Ali went even further and tried to break the power of the provincial notables by systematically harassing and humiliating them. It was just such treatment that reportedly provoked the revolt of Rāfe' b. Layṭ b. Naṣr b. Sayyār, grandson of the last Umayyad governor of Khorasan, at Samarqand in 190/805-6, supported by the general populace and many members of the Central Asian elite (Ṭabari, III, pp. 707-8), though it should be noted that many things about the origins and purpose of this revolt remain unclear.

The Khorasani notables had repeatedly complained about all this to Hārūn al-Rašid and implored him to remove 'Ali from the governorship, but to no effect. He had, instead, reconfirmed 'Ali as governor but, probably in an effort to appease the Khorasani elite, had promised that eventually the caliph's son, al-Ma'mun, who was related on his maternal side to Khorasani nobility, would become governor. The broad support for Rāfe's rebellion, coupled with the continuing revolt of Ḥamza, was evidence that hostility to 'Ali b. 'Isā had the potential to become a threat to Abbasid rule in general, and this finally prompted Hārūn to act. In 191/806-7, he sent the general Hartama b. A'yan with orders to depose 'Ali and assume the governorship, seize his property, and redress the grievances of those whom he had oppressed. The following year, after Hartama had succeeded in removing 'Ali, the caliph himself set out for Khorasan to take charge of the campaign against Rāfe' b. Layṭ but died at



Ṭus in 193/809.

There is some reason to think that Ṭāher b. Ḥosayn, who had himself been abused by ‘Ali b. ‘Isā, was initially among the notables who joined the revolt of Rāfe‘ b. Layṭ (Kaabi, 1972, pp. 162-63 cites Šābošti’s *Ketāb al-diārāt* and Ebn Ḥazm’s *Naqṭ al-‘arus*). However, he was also reported to have been in the army of Hartama b. A‘yan sent to besiege Rāfe‘ in Samarqand (Ṭabari, III, p. 777). The change is understandable if one keeps in mind that in the course of these events Hārūn had extended protection to Ḥosayn b. Moṣ‘ab, deposed ‘Ali, and sought not so much to war against Rāfe‘ as to persuade him and his key supporters to give up their struggle. In any case, the siege of Samarqand was not pressed very hard. After Hārūn died and al-Ma‘mun, whom Rāfe‘, like most Khorasanis, admired and respected (Ṭabari, III, p. 777), became vicegerent of Khorasan, Rāfe‘ accepted an amnesty. Ṭāher was almost certainly involved in the negotiations that led to Rāfe‘’s surrender, which was arranged by Asad b. Sāmānḳodā whose sons were later recognized by Ṭāher as governors (Naršāki, tr. Frye, p. 76). It also seems that it was in the course of this campaign that Ṭāher suffered the accident which cost him an eye and earned him the nickname al-A‘war (Ebn Ṭayfur, p. 66). Ṭāher was apparently very sensitive about this handicap, threatening a poet who had satirized it, should he repeat the verses (Ebn Ḳallekān, tr. de Slane, I, p. 652).

The conflict stirred up by ‘Ali’s governorship was not ended with the pacification of Rāfe‘; it flared up anew in a struggle between the brothers al-Amin and al-Ma‘mun, each egged on by their respective partisans among the *abnā’* and Khorasani factions. Among other provocations, al-Amin rehabilitated ‘Ali b. ‘Isā b. Māhān, and in 195/810-11 he named him governor of territories that Hārūn’s succession agreement had assigned to al-Ma‘mun. This was tantamount to a declaration of war, and ‘Ali b. ‘Isā set out for Ray with an army reported to number 40,000 (Ṭabari, III, p. 797). In preparation for this, al-Ma‘mun’s chief adviser, Faḏl b. Sahl, had sent a force of about 4,000 troops to Ray and personally selected Ṭāher b. Ḥosayn as their leader.

The curiously small size of this force is best explained by the fact that the regular army troops under Hartama were not yet committed to the fight; they either were being held in reserve or, more likely, were at this point hesitant to become involved in a political contest whose outcome was uncertain (Ṭabari, III, p. 825). It thus would seem that the force sent to Ray was mustered for that specific purpose and mostly drawn from the ranks of the Khorasanis and Central Asians. From Ṭabari’s account (III, pp. 798-801) it can be shown that

the force included Turks, Bukharans, Khwarazmians, and Khorasani notables like ‘Ali b. Hešām [b. Farr-Ḳosrow], as well as soldiers left stranded in the fighting between the Māhānids and Rāfe’ b. Layṭ.

The choice of Ṭāher as commander is also somewhat surprising. Jahšīārī (p. 291) says Faḏl held a special meeting of the senior military officers and their sons, and as soon as Ḥosayn b. Moš‘ab arrived with Ṭāher, Faḏl immediately proclaimed that Ṭāher should be given the command. Ṭāher had certainly had experience fighting the Kharijites during his youth and had participated in the campaign against Rāfe’, but there is no indication he had led an army before and certainly not in such a critical situation. Even his own father is supposed to have expressed doubts about whether he would have the mettle to stand up to ‘Ali b. ‘Isā and implored Faḏl to reconsider (Jahšīārī, p. 291). Yet Faḏl b. Sahl expressed complete confidence about choosing him to command; perhaps he felt that Ṭāher had some special rapport with the troops sent to Ray or had played a key role in mustering them. A variant account places Ḥosayn and Ṭāher in Bušanj when the news of Ṭāher’s appointment came; there, Ṭāher, who was never short on ambition, swept aside his father’s attempts to dissuade him by asserting that it was always better to be a leader than a follower (Jahšīārī, p. 291).

There are some suitably dramatic, if suspect, accounts of the showdown at Ray between ‘Ali b. ‘Isā and Ṭāher b. Ḥosayn (notably Ṭabari, III, pp. 797-826; Mas‘udi, *Moruj* VI, pp. 421-24). They naturally contrast the arrogance, stupidity, and over-confidence of ‘Ali with the tactical brilliance and personal bravery of Ṭāher. The former is badly mistreating the few defectors from Ṭāher’s army and deriding Ṭāher as an insignificant nobody, unfit for command, against whom there was “no need for stratagems or precautions,” while the latter is carefully maneuvering his forces and striking an opponent so hard with a sword, held in both hands, that it split both helmet and head in half—one of several explanations for how he acquired the honorific (*laqab*) *Du’l-Yaminayn* (see above). Ṭāher is supposed to have extorted his shaken troops to “charge like Kharijites” (Ṭabari, III, p. 800); from the account of the battle this seems to have meant making a ferocious, all-out assault on the center of ‘Ali’s much larger army in the hope of killing him and throwing his troops into a panicked retreat. As it happened, ‘Ali was killed and his army routed; a tuft of his beard was presented to Ṭāher as proof and his head sent to al-Ma’mun. From then on, the Khorasanis considered al-Amin deposed and al-Ma’mun the caliph.



Al-Amin sent a second army, this time numbering 20,000 of the *abnā'* and commanded by 'Abd-al-Raḥmān b. Jabala al-Abnāwi, to [Hamadan](#) with orders to prepare an attack against Ṭāher. He was eventually joined there by one of 'Ali b. 'Isā's sons and some other survivors from the battle at Ray. Ṭāher immediately moved to attack them and after some fierce fighting drove them back into the city, which he placed under siege. The *abnā'* were disliked by the people of Hamadan, and 'Abd-al-Raḥmān feared they might revolt. He thus sought and received a safe-conduct from Ṭāher to withdraw his forces. Ṭāher also began expelling the remaining officials loyal to al-Amin from the [Jebāl](#) province and established a garrison at Qazvin. Later, 'Abd-al-Raḥmān attempted to mount a treacherous sneak attack on Ṭāher's men but was defeated and killed. With that, Ṭāher advanced to Ḥolwān and set up a new camp near there. In 196/811-12, al-Amin managed to raise yet another army of 40,000 men, half Bedouin and half *abnā'*, led by Aḥmad b. Mazyad. These were essentially mercenaries with no real commitment and considerable jealousy of each other. Instead of fighting them, Ṭāher quietly and covertly stoked their mutual animosity until they began fighting each other and finally left.

Not long afterwards, the regular army under Hartama arrived from Khorasan with orders to take over the areas Ṭāher had secured. Ṭāher was ordered to proceed to [Aḥvāz](#), where he easily defeated al-Amin's general, Moḥammad b. Yazid b. Ḥātem. He then advanced towards and captured Wāseṭ and [Madā'en](#), while Hartama, having defeated a small force sent by al-Amin, moved forward to Nahravān. Many areas in eastern Arabia, Kufa, and Mecca as well as members of the Abbasid family began to abandon al-Amin, defect to Ṭāher, and recognize al-Ma'mun as caliph. By the end of the year, Baghdad was surrounded and under siege by three armies: one under Ṭāher, camped at Anbār Gate to the northwest; one under Hartama to the northeast; and one under Mosayyab b. Zohayr to the southeast.

The siege of [Baghdad](#) lasted over a year, from summer 196/812 to the autumn of 198/813. The city's impoverished masses—the *'orāt* (lit. "the naked ones") as they are often called in the sources—launched a popular insurgency with many of the characteristics of what today would be called urban warfare, and this unexpected and fierce resistance protracted the siege. Throughout this period, Ṭāher was clearly the most aggressive of the three commanders, using every method at his disposal to put pressure on al-Amin: blockades, artillery barrages, infantry assaults, and subversion. The breakdown of law and order in the city, coupled with Ṭāher's destruction of captured neighborhoods and

his threats to seize the property of resisting notables, induced many to defect to his side.

When al-Amin became convinced that further resistance was impossible, he decided to surrender to Harṭama, whom he considered “our client and like a father,” instead of Ṭāher, about whom he had “an ominous feeling” (Ṭabari, III, p. 913). There was then some kind of negotiation among al-Amin’s advisors, Ṭāher, and Harṭama in which it was agreed that al-Amin would surrender to Harṭama but turn over the caliphal regalia to Ṭāher (Ṭabari, III, p. 916). Harṭama went with a barge to pick up al-Amin from the wharf at the Kold palace, but Ṭāher’s men ambushed it. The boat capsized and al-Amin fell into the Tigris, but was able to swim to shore. Ṭāher’s men quickly caught him, imprisoned, and killed him. Ṭāher sent al-Amin’s head to al-Ma’mun after having had it displayed on the Anbār Gate, along with a letter giving his justification for these actions (text in Ṭabari, III, pp. 926-30). In this letter, Ṭāher suggested that Harṭama had gone out of his way to offer al-Amin an escape from the trap he was in, that Ṭāher had tried to make the best of the unwise deal concluded between the two of them, that Harṭama and al-Amin had then attempted to subvert the agreement with Ṭāher to turn over the caliphal regalia, that al-Amin was accidentally killed in the subsequent struggle, and that he had been compelled to display al-Amin’s head to convince the populace of his death and prevent further conflict.

There is much in Ṭāher’s letter that sounds defensive and self-serving, particularly if it is true that he had been ordered to take al-Amin prisoner but not to harm him. However, it should be remembered that throughout the struggle, he was the one who had to take the initiative and the risks of battle. He had to do so with limited manpower and insufficient funding; on several occasions, he had troubles with troops threatening to mutiny because of lack of pay. He had relentlessly pressed the siege of Baghdad while Harṭama was generally passive and ineffective. At a minimum, he had good reason to suspect that after all his effort he was going to be cheated at the last moment of the glory of victory by Harṭama; at worse, he may have suspected Harṭama of duplicity and sympathy for al-Amin. Of course it is also possible that, whatever his official orders about capturing al-Amin may have been, he had a different private understanding with al-Ma’mun: when Faḏl b. Sahl, probably already seeing Ṭāher as a rival and hoping to discredit him, lamented to al-Ma’mun that “we commanded [Ṭāher] to send him [al-Amin] as a prisoner, but he sent him butchered,” the new caliph simply replied “what’s done is done;



use your cleverness to come up with an excuse for it” (Ṭabari, III, p. 950). On other occasions, Ṭāher too was less than remorseful, boasting in a poem, “I killed the caliph in his residence / and with the sword I caused his wealth to be plundered” (Ṭabari, III, p. 938, following tr., XXXI, p. 212). In this, as in many subsequent events involving Ṭāher, there is an atmosphere of political intrigue that makes it difficult to discern either motivation or truth.

After the fall of Baghdad, Faʿl b. Sahl moved to concentrate as much power as possible in his own hands. His new honorific title *Duʿl-Reʿāsatayn* (lit. “the man with two commands”) implied both civil and military authority. He sent his brother, Ḥasan b. Sahl, to take charge of the areas Ṭāher had subdued; Ṭāher was ordered to turn over all the funds at his disposal and then to proceed to Raqqā to deal with the revolt of Naṣr b. Šabaṭ in the Jazīra. This annoyed Ṭāher (Ṭabari, III, p. 1043; Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrik* p. 542), but he left for Raqqā anyway after having made sure that his troops would first be paid their salary. Although Ṭāher was nominally being made Ḥasan’s governor of the western provinces, he was never given the resources to do the job as the real goal was to isolate and marginalize him (Ṭabari, III, p. 1026).

When Ḥasan b. Sahl proved to be as unpopular in Iraq as ʿAli b. ʿIsā had been in Khorasan, revolts of all kinds broke out. Ṭāher, however, was not directly involved in the tumultuous events of this period. Nor did he make the fatal mistake, as Hartama b. Aʿyān did, of returning to Khorasan to warn al-Maʿmun about the machinations of the Sahlids; the death of his father in 199/814-15 may also have made him cautious about going back to Khorasan. Instead, he bided his time in Raqqā, ignoring the rebels he was supposed to be fighting and devoting himself, according to Michael the Syrian (III, p. 36), to religious studies and philosophy. Ebn Aʿtam (VIII, pp. 312-15) suggests, though, that Ṭāher may not have been quite as inactive as other sources imply.

By 202/817-18, the problems convulsing Iraq could no longer be concealed from al-Maʿmun; the murder of Faʿl b. Sahl and al-Maʿmun’s return to Baghdad soon followed. Whether Ṭāher’s agents were involved in this is difficult to say, but it is interesting that the informants who alerted al-Maʿmun to the misdeeds of Faʿl and Ḥasan b. Sahl made it a point to sing his praises and note the positive role he could have played in maintaining order, had he been given the chance (Ṭabari, III, p. 1026). It is clear that Ṭāher had used his time in Raqqā to amass a considerable amount of wealth and shrewdly build up a powerful retinue of followers composed, not only of his veterans and relatives, but many of the former leaders of the *abnāʾ* and members of the

Abbasid family. Ṭāher had become the indispensable man in Iraq, since potential rivals like Harṭama were either dead or discredited, and Ḥasan b. Sahl claimed to be ill and withdrew from public life. When al-Ma'mun finally arrived in Nahravān in summer 204/819, it was Ṭāher he invited to meet him and accompany him on into Baghdad; he also made Ṭāher chief of the security forces (*ṣāḥeb al-ṣorṭa*) in Baghdad and the Sawād. However, Ya'qubi (*Ta'riḳ*, p. 455) suggests that Ṭāher left Raḡqa because his troops were becoming troublesome. Ṭāher's first request of the caliph was that he abandon the practice he had adopted of using the Alid green (see [ALIDS](#)) as the official color and return to the wearing of the traditional Abbasid black (Ṭabari, III, pp. 1037-38). He even managed to help reconcile the caliph to Faḏl b. Rabī'. Such steps represented not only a rejection of Sahlid policy and a compromise with the old order, but an indication of how firmly entwined Ṭāher's interests in the years after his father's death had become with those of the Iraqi elites. The dynasty would remain firmly Abbasid, and Iraq would not be ruled as a province of Khorasan.

The Taherid governors of Khorasan. (1) Ṭāher b. Ḥosayn (205-7/821-22). In the spring of 205/821, al-Ma'mun made the surprise move of naming Ṭāher the governor of Khorasan and the eastern provinces, and Ṭāher's son 'Abdallāh took over his duties at Raḡqa. Very little is known about what Ṭāher actually did while governor, apart from the appointment of some subordinate officials, such as the report in the *Tāriḳ-e Sistān* (p. 177) that he sent a lieutenant-governor, Moḥammad b. Hoḏayn Qusi to Sistān, who governed well there and "won the hearts of the people." There is also a very interesting passage in Ebn Ṭayfur (pp. 58-60) which yields some incidental information on the structure of his administration and his reasoning for appointing various officials in it. Just about 18 months after becoming governor, in the fall of 207/822, Ṭāher died suddenly and under suspicious circumstances (Sourdel).

Both the appointment of Ṭāher and his untimely death at the age of about 48 are the subjects of much speculation in the sources and uncertainty for modern scholars. There were perhaps some practical reasons for making a change of governor in Khorasan. There had been an incursion of Toḡuz-Oḡuz Turks (see [ḠOZZ](#)) into Ošrusana, and a militia group had appeared in [Nishapur](#) trying to take the war against the Kharijites into its own hands. The caliph thought, or was persuaded, that the current governor, Ḡassān b. 'Abbād, would be ineffective in dealing with such problems (Ṭabari, III, p. 1042). Ḡassān actually seems to have been a fairly capable governor, but he was also a



cousin and protégé of Faḏl b. Sahl, and so the caliph may have been looking for a pretext for removing him. It is more difficult to say why Ṭāher sought the governorship and why al-Ma'mun gave it to him.

According to Ṭabari (III, pp. 1040-41), Ṭāher's brother-in-law, Moḥammad b. Abi'l-'Abbās Ṭusi, was engaged in a debate over the imamate at al-Ma'mun's court with a Zaydi Shi'ite theologian, in the course of which al-Ma'mun became very angry with him. Ṭāher later went to see al-Ma'mun at a drinking party (*nabid*), apparently to smooth things over. He noticed after a few drinks that the caliph was weeping, but al-Ma'mun refused to tell him why. His curiosity aroused, Ṭāher had one of his soldiers bribe a court eunuch to find out the reason. Supposedly the caliph admitted that he had wept because Ṭāher's presence had reminded him of al-Amin's murder, and vowed that one day he would have revenge for his brother's death. Mas'udi (*Moruj* VI, pp. 485-87) claims that al-Amin's mother, Zobayda, had sent a bitter poem to al-Ma'mun, who had become hostile to Ṭāher thereafter. Ṭāher then intrigued with the caliph's chief secretary, Aḥmad b. Abi Kāled, to arrange his appointment as governor in order to escape from al-Ma'mun. As soon as Aḥmad suggested having Ṭāher replace Ġassān, al-Ma'mun immediately objected that Ṭāher was overly ambitious and would take the opportunity to rebel, but Aḥmad persuaded him by saying that he would personally vouch for Ṭāher's conduct (Ṭabari, III, pp. 1042-43; Ebn Kallekān, tr. de Slane, p. 653). Ya'qubi (*Ta'rik*, p. 554), on the other hand, describes Aḥmad b. Abi Kāled as Ṭāher's close personal friend, who received three million [dirhams](#) to forge a letter from Ġassān asking to be removed from office and then suggest Ṭāher as his replacement. Unfortunately, there is a lacuna in the text discussing what happened when Ġassān returned from Khorasan. and the caliph discovered he had been deceived. Ya'qubi (*Boldān*, p. 307) says that Ṭāher "maneuvered" al-Ma'mun into appointing him and realized only after his arrival in Khorasan that the caliph had an unfavorable opinion of him.

It is hard not to be skeptical about these stories, as Ṭāher would be giving up a lot and taking on some risks to go to Khorasan. Many members of his family had joined him in Iraq, where he had acquired immense wealth, including a palace and audience hall in Baghdad. Ṭāher had built up what was essentially a private army, including his own bodyguard (sing. *ḡolām*), and a vast network of friends, spies, and agents. He was governor of the Jazira, chief of the security forces (*šorat*), governor of both eastern and western Baghdad, and head of the police in the Sawād (Ṭabari, III, p. 1039). An anecdote in Ebn

Ṭayfur (pp. 62-63) suggests he had some anxiety about returning to Khorasan, and he delayed for at least two months before finally setting out (Ṭabari, III, p. 1044). Instead of Ṭāher intriguing for the position, the caliph may have been more than happy to send him far away to deal with other problems out of fear that he was becoming much too powerful in Iraq. At least it suggests why the caliph would have been so willing to agree with Aḥmad b. Abi Kāled on the appointment, and why Ṭāher was so careful to make sure he left behind agents from his own family to watch over his Iraqi interests.

As for Ṭāher's death, a report on the authority of his son, Moṭahhar, claims that Ṭāher suffered from the onset of a sudden fever and was found dead in his bed at the governor's palace in Marv by his uncles 'Ali and Aḥmad b. Moṣ'ab (Ṭabari, III, p. 1063). However, according to the testimony of the head of the *barid*, that is, the caliph's chief spy, in Khorasan, Ṭāher on one occasion did not mention the name of the caliph or pray for him in the *koṭba*, an act normally taken as a sign of revolt (Ṭabari, III, p. 1064; Ebn Kālekān, tr. de Slane, I, pp. 653-54; Gardizi, ed. Ḥabibi, p. 135). Juzjāni (*Ṭabaqāt*, I, p. 192) suggests, however, that he "forgot" to mention the caliph, and no one ever knew the cause of his death. The postmaster immediately reported this news to al-Ma'mun and expected to be executed for it, but Ṭāher dropped dead of an apparent heart attack that night. The news of Ṭāher's act of rebellion arrived in Baghdad one day and that of his death the next; this gave rise to the rumor that Ṭāher was poisoned by a eunuch whom he had been given by al-Ma'mun or Aḥmad b. Abi Kāled with orders to kill Ṭāher in the event he did anything untoward (Ebn Kālekān, tr. de Slane, I, p. 164; cf. the variant account in Ya'qubi, *Ta'rik*, pp. 556-57).

How much, if any, of this is true is open to question. Kaabi (1983, pp. 173-90) argues that the relations between al-Ma'mun and Ṭāher were fine and that stories to the contrary were circulated "pour semer la discord entre al-Ma'mun et les Āl Ṭāhir." Yet there is still reason to think that some kind of estrangement, if not a complete break, had developed. For example, another well-informed source (Ya'qubi, *Boldān*, p. 307) claims that Ṭāher felt that al-Ma'mun was turning against him and so "encouraged signs of rebellion but did nothing openly himself." Al-Ma'mun was also said to have been immensely relieved to hear of Ṭāher's death (Ṭabari, III, p. 1065). Above all, there is the crucial and objective evidence that Ṭāher did indeed begin to omit the caliph's name from some of his coinage (Bosworth, *Camb. Hist. Iran IV*, p. 95). The extent and nature of the breach, however, as well as Ṭāher's ultimate



intentions remain unclear.

(2) Ṭalḥa b. Ṭāher (207-13/822-28). Whatever happened between al-Ma'mun and Ṭāher did not seem to affect relations between the caliph and the rest of the family very much. For one thing, as Bosworth has noted (*Camb. Hist. Iran* IV, p. 96), the caliph had to address numerous other problems, such as the continuing revolt of Naṣr b. Šabaṭ in the Jazīra and the outbreak of **Bābak Kōrrami's** revolt in **Azarbaijan**; he could hardly risk a confrontation with a family as the Taherids, who were firmly entrenched in both Iraq and Khorasan. Moreover, Ṭalḥa was already on the scene in Khorasan and, after some initial trouble, had taken command of the army (Ṭabari, III, p. 1064; a variant tradition placing Ṭalḥa in Iraq and being appointed by his brother 'Abdallāh seems most unlikely). Thus, immediately after hearing of Ṭāher's death, both al-Ma'mun and Aḥmad b. Abi Kāled agreed to send Ṭalḥa a document investing him as governor (Ṭabari, III, p. 1065).

Ṭalḥa inherited two problems from his father's administration: the war with the Turks in Transoxiana and the war with the Kharijites in Sistān. Several sources claim that al-Ma'mun sent Aḥmad b. Abi Kāled to Khorasan, presumably not long after Ṭalḥa's appointment and ostensibly to lead an expedition into Transoxiana where he is said to have defeated Kāvus b. Kārākoroh of Ošrusana (Ṭabari, III, pp. 1065-66). It is not clear whether it was the caliph's intent to try to replace Ṭalḥa or just to keep an eye on him. It could also be that he felt Ṭalḥa was too young and inexperienced to lead the army in this critical frontier region and needed help to establish himself (Ebn al-Aṭir, VI, p. 382). If the hidden agenda was to replace or weaken Ṭalḥa, it was thwarted by his dispensing of lavish bribes, or rewards for their help, to Aḥmad b. Abi Kāled and his secretary. Kaabi (1983, p. 189) suggests these were not bribes but accession presents (sing. *heba*), though this does not seem consistent with either the size of the amounts or the fact that they were also given to his secretary. In any case, this would certainly not have been the first time that Aḥmad had been rather duplicitous in his dealings between the caliph and the Taherids. Shortly thereafter, in 208/823-24, Ṭalḥa's uncle, Ḥasan b. Ḥosayn b. Moṣ'ab, rebelled at Kermān (Ṭabari, III, p. 1066). It is not clear whether this was aimed at challenging Ṭalḥa's appointment or whether it might have been a continuation of Ṭāher's supposed break with al-Ma'mun. In any case, Ḥasan was quickly captured by Aḥmad b. Abi Kāled and then pardoned by the caliph.

According to the *Tārik-e Sistān* (pp. 177-81), Ṭalḥa sent a number of lieutenants

to try to govern that turbulent province. Their primary task was to fight Ḥamza and the Kharijites, but sometimes one would wind up in a fight with his replacement. Several also found dealing with *‘ayyār* bands, essentially urban anti-Kharijite militias, to be a bigger problem than the Kharijites themselves. In 213/828, Moḥammad b. Esmā‘il Dohli, assisted by Ṭalḥa’s brother, Aḥmad b. Ṭāher, fought a major battle against the Kharijites. Although Moḥammad and Aḥmad were apparently defeated, the Kharijites suffered a major setback when their leader Ḥamza died at about the same time as the battle. Gardizi (ed. Ḥabibi, p. 135) also notes that there were battles between Ṭalḥa and Ḥamza, and implies that Ḥamza may have been killed by Ṭalḥa’s forces. Ṭalḥa himself died that same year.

(3) ‘Abdallāh b. Ṭāher (213-30/828-44). The spotlight in most of the historical sources for the time of Ṭalḥa’s governorship is on the activities of his brother ‘Abdallāh b. Ṭāher in the west. He is quite clearly the most important of all the Taherid governors, and so there is a great deal of material in the sources about him in that respect as well (for a detailed account, see [‘ABDALLĀH B. ṬĀHER](#)).

‘Abdallāh b. Ṭāher had been raised at the caliphal court by al-Ma’mun, almost as if he were an adopted son, and they apparently thought of each other in just that way (Šābošti, p. 86). He was given his first military command at 17, and by 27 he was famous for his “ethics, virtue, manliness, and bravery” (Juzjāni, *Ṭabaqāt* I, p. 192). Ṭāher groomed ‘Abdallāh as his deputy in Raqqā, tasked with fighting the Kharijite rebel Naṣr b. Šabaṭ. But in 205/821, al-Ma’mun had recalled ‘Abdallāh and made a more experienced veteran commander the governor of the Jazira. Ya‘qubi (*Ta’riḳ*, p. 455) suggests, however, that this appointment was actually made by Ṭāher. Ṭāher apparently spent the months before he left to assume the governorship of Khorasan in praising ‘Abdallāh to the caliph and eventually cajoling him into reappointing ‘Abdallāh as governor of Raqqā when the current holder of the office died (Ṭabari, III, pp. 1045-46). It was this appointment that occasioned Ṭāher to write his famous epistle on governance to his son (discussed below). ‘Abdallāh also took over his father’s position as commander of the security forces and collector of taxes in Baghdad, while putting his cousin in charge of the city’s two main bridges. In 209/824-25, ‘Abdallāh succeeded in finally ending Naṣr b. Šabaṭ’s revolt and arranging Naṣr’s amnesty (Ṭabari, III, pp. 1067-72). His next assignment was to restore order in Egypt in 210/825-26, where he was needed to suppress the revolt of ‘Obaydallāh b. al-Sari (Ṭabari, III, pp. 1087-91; Ebn Kallekān, tr. de Slane, II, p. 52), as well as to address other problems. In 214/829, after his



triumphant return from Egypt, al-Ma'mun offered him a choice of the governorship of the Jebāl, Azarbaijan, and Armenia, with the responsibility of fighting Bābak, or of taking over Khorasan, as Ṭalḥa had just died. 'Abdallāh elected to assume the governorship of Khorasan, leaving his uncles Eshāq and Ṭāher b. Ebrāhīm as his deputies in Baghdad (Ya'qubi, *Ta'rik*, p. 574).

Upon arriving in Khorasan, 'Abdallāh made the extraordinary decision, apparently entirely on his own authority, of moving the capital from Marv, where it had been since the time of the Arab conquest, to Nishapur. Rather than quarter his troops in the old city, he founded a new suburb, Šādiāk, for his palace and the soldiers' homes (Ya'qubi, *Boldān*, p. 278; Yāqut, *Mojam* V, p. 208). These changes, however, were not without precedent. Abu Moslem had ruled for a while from Nishapur where he had built a congregational mosque and a governor's palace (*dār al-emāra*). The model of a separate city for the ruler and his troops had been employed at Baghdad, as it later would be at Samarra.

The immediate need for the change may have been because of social unrest in the area, first caused by sectarians supposedly in league with Bābak (*ḥamrā*) and then by a major pro-Alid uprising in Ṭāleqān in 219/834-35, as well as by the perennial Kharijite raids (Šābošti, p. 90; Ya'qubi, *Ta'rik*, p. 576; Ṭabari, III, pp. 1165-66). But it is important to note that the move to Nishapur also reflected a more fundamental change in the nature of the Taherid polity. From this point on, 'Abdallāh concentrated on dealing with the persistent problems in Sistān and expanding his influence into Ṭabarestān, while the duty of guarding the frontier areas of [Central Asia](#) was largely delegated to local rulers and notables—the best known being the Samanids. The pretext of fighting “heretics” provided convenient cover for Taherid ambitions, which in both cases also proved difficult to achieve and generated new difficulties.

Ṭabarestān was nominally one of the areas that fell under the administrative authority of the Taherids, but in reality the situation there was very complex, as it was ruled in practice by various indigenous dynasties. Around 201/816-17, a prince of the Qarenid house, Māzyār, having been ousted from his ancestral lands by rivals, converted to Islam and became a client of al-Ma'mun. With al-Ma'mun's support, he returned to Ṭabarestān in 207/822-23, and by 210/825-26 he had taken control of all the mountainous interior areas. A coalition of his enemies in the lowland cities included the *abnā*' governor, Muslim religious officials, merchants, and landlords. They complained about him to al-Ma'mun, but the caliph confirmed his authority over the whole of the province (Ebn

Esfandiār, tr. Browne, pp. 150-52). More and more, these groups would look to the Taherids for support against Māzyār b. Qāren, who was accused of everything from apostasy to stirring up class warfare. The sources, however, are so blatantly hostile to Māzyār and so conspicuously biased in favor of the Taherids that it is difficult to know how to interpret the conflict or the plots to which it supposedly gave rise.

This situation persisted into the reign of al-Mo'taşem (r. 218-27/833-42), when a dispute arose over whether Māzyār should submit the tax revenues directly to the caliph or via 'Abdallāh b. Ṭāher (Ṭabari, III, pp. 1268-72). Māzyār is said to have had an intense dislike of the Taherids and was not about to agree with a practice that would have implied that he was their subordinate. He was reportedly encouraged to resist by the general Ḥaydar the Afšin who also resented the Taherids. Their dislike was mutual; not only was Afšin a rival for caliphal favor, his house and the Taherids had been rivals for control of Ošrusana at least since the time of Ṭālḥa b. Ṭāher. Afšin appealed to Māzyār on the grounds that the two of them, presumably unlike the Taherids, were Persian aristocrats (Ṭabari, III, p. 1269). For his part, 'Abdallāh b. Ṭāher kept sending letters to al-Mo'taşem (r. 218-27/833-42) to incite him against Māzyār. Finally, in 224/838-39, al-Mo'taşem authorized 'Abdallāh to declare war on Māzyār. Māzyār's brother betrayed him and turned him over to the Taherid commander, Ḥasan b. Ḥosayn, who sent him on to al-Mo'taşem in Samarra. 'Abdallāh supposedly obtained incriminatory correspondence about Afšin from Māzyār by promising to seek a caliphal pardon for him, but Māzyār was executed anyway after having been compelled to testify against Afšin at the latter's trial. 'Abdallāh b. Ṭāher thus managed not only to take direct control of Ṭabarestān but to eliminate two powerful competitors for caliphal favor in the process. There are numerous reports that al-Mo'taşem resented 'Abdallāh and would have liked to have him removed from Khorasan. Since the caliph consented to the war and the executions of Māzyār and Afšin, it seems that 'Abdallāh was able to bend al-Mo'taşem to his will.

In Sistān, 'Abdallāh b. Ṭāher made renewed, vigorous, and repeated efforts to defeat the remaining Kharijites, with the corresponding agenda of propping up the urban and Shafi'ite elites and bringing the tax revenues under his control. The various governors he dispatched and the battles they fought are recorded at some length in the *Tāriḳ-e Sistān* (pp. 181-92; cf. Bosworth, 1968, pp. 104-6). After the crushing defeat of his first army, he turned to what the *Tāriḳ-e Sistān* (p. 181) calls an "army of foreigners" (*lašgar-e anbuḥ az ḡorabā*),



pretty clearly made up of his Central Asian allies with some of the Samanids among them. However, the province was never really pacified, and the local treasury was usually empty. Sistān also suffered from several droughts, famines, severe winters, and epidemics during these years. On one occasion in 221/835-36, ‘Abdallāh ordered 300,000 dirhams to be distributed among those who had been impoverished by such disasters. This gesture does not sound all that charitable when one considers that the Taherids often gave 10,000 or even a 100,000 dirhams to poets for a few lines of verse, or that the revenue from the Taherid domains amounted to 48 million dirhams.

Most authorities indicate that ‘Abdallāh b. Ṭāher died in Nishapur in Rabi‘ I 230/December 844 (Ṭabari, III, p. 1339; Ebn Kallekān, tr. de Slane, II, p. 53).

(4) Ṭāher b. ‘Abdallāh (230-248/844-862). According to [Balāḍori](#) (*Fotuḥ*, p. 431), Ṭāher b. ‘Abdallāh led a brief but successful raid on behalf of his father into the lands of the Toḡuz-Oḡuz Turks, perhaps with the objective of securing Turkish slaves (Gordon, p. 35). His father also appointed him governor of Ṭabarestān upon the death of Ḥasan b. Ḥosayn, where he probably was at the time ‘Abdallāh died ([Ebn Esfandiār](#), tr. Browne, pp. 156-57). The caliph al-Wāteq (r. 227-32/842-47) then confirmed him as governor of Khorasan (Ṭabari, III, pp. 1338-39). There is, however, little to say about his governorship beyond the observation of Ya‘qubi (*Boldān*, p. 307) that “he governed [the province] firmly for 18 years.” One critical event, though, was the collapse of Taherid authority in Sistān as the revolt of a complicated series of events beginning in 238/852 when Ṣāleḥ b. Naẓr and a band of ‘*ayyār* took over the city of [Bost](#). The next year Ṣāleḥ captured Zaranj and expelled the Taherid governor Ebrāhim b. Ḥoẓayn Qusi (Bosworth, 1968, pp. 113-16).

(5) Moḥammad b. Ṭāher b. ‘Abdallāh (248-59/862-73). Ṭāher b. ‘Abdallāh died in the summer of 248/862 and, after some initial hesitation (see below), the caliph al-Mosta‘in (r. 248-52/862-66) confirmed his son Moḥammad as the new governor of Khorasan. He soon had to deal with the outbreak of a rebellion in Ṭabarestān and an existential threat to the dynasty from the rising power of the [Saffarids](#) in Sistān.

Resentment of Taherid rule in Ṭabarestān had been brewing for some time. It erupted into open revolt in 250/864-65 as a result of the ineffective governorship of Moḥammad b. Ṭāher’s representative, his uncle Solaymān b. ‘Abdallāh, although Ebn Esfandiār (tr. Browne, p. 157) ascribes the problems to the “tyranny and harshness” of his subordinates. Solaymān installed his

corrupt sons as governors of various cities, where they brutalized the population; authorized an unprovoked attack on peaceful inhabitants of Deylam (see [DEYLAMITES ii. IN THE ISLAMIC PERIOD](#)); and allowed his brother Moḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh to take uncultivated state land (*mawāt*), which had been used communally by the people, as his private estates. The abuses of these nepotistic Taherids, as Ṭabari (III, p. 1525) notes in an unusually candid and informative comment, “would fill a book.” In the ensuing revolt, the people of western Ṭabarestān and Deylam formed a coalition and invited the Zaydi Shi‘ite imam Ḥasan b. Zayd to give it moral leadership, since his kinsman Yaḥyā b. ‘Omar had just been butchered by the forces of Moḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh b. Ṭāher in Iraq. Joined by malcontents from other parts of Ṭabarestān, Ḥasan b. Zayd and the rebels marched on the provincial capital [Āmol](#) and captured the city. Ḥasan b. Zayd also sent some of his supporters to seize Ray from its Taherid governor; they took control of the city and fended off a counterattack by the army of Moḥammad b. Ṭāher (Ṭabari, III, pp. 1531-32). Solaymān b. ‘Abdallāh regrouped in [Gorgān](#), and, apparently joined by Moḥammad b. Ṭāher himself, recaptured Āmol and Sāri in 251/865-66 and drove Ḥasan b. Zayd back to Deylam. Ṭabari (III, pp. 1583-86) mentions the *fath-nāma* the governor sent announcing these events. In a few months, however, Ḥasan b. Zayd was back in control of Ṭabarestān and Gorgān, essentially ending Taherid rule of those areas.

Meanwhile [Ya‘qub b. Layṭ](#) Ṣaffār had gained dominion in Sistān and fame for his victories on the province’s eastern frontiers. Now he began to expand to the west and north at Taherid expense, while asking the Taherids to fight the Kharijites on their behalf (Ya‘qubi, *Ta‘riḳ*, p. 605). Perhaps as early as 252/866-67, and certainly by 255/869-69, Ya‘qub had made incursions into Kerman (see [KERMAN iv](#)), and both the caliph and Moḥammad b. Ṭāher had to recognize him as governor. Ya‘qub subsequently gained authority over [Balk](#), Herat, [Bādġis](#), and even Bušanġ, which, as their home town, must have been very galling to the Taherids (Ṭabari, III, p. 1875). The *Tāriḳe Sistān* (pp. 208-9) says that Moḥammad b. Ṭāher judged it best to accept what Ya‘qub had had done and sent him gifts and letters of patent recognizing his governorship of several provinces. In 255-56/869-70, Ḥosayn b. ‘Abdallāh b. Ṭāher accompanied Ya‘qub to fight the Zonbil and the Turks and was rewarded by being reappointed as governor of Herat (*Tāriḳ-e Sistān*, p. 215).

Then, in 256/869, the caliph al-Mo‘tamed (r. 256-79/869-92), perhaps deliberately trying to stir up trouble, sent a letter naming Moḥammad b.



‘Abdallāh as the governor of Sistān and Khorasan (*Tāriḳ-e Sistān*, p. 216). In 259/872-73, after Moḥammad b. Ṭāher had recognized a defector from Ya‘qub’s army as governor of Nishapur (Ṭabari, III, 1875), Ya‘qub marched on the city himself. He summoned Moḥammad b. Ṭāher to an audience at his camp, berated him for neglect of his duties, and had him and other members of the Taherid family imprisoned. He sent a delegation to the court of al-Mo‘tamed to explain his action, claiming that he had been invited by the people of Nishapur to assume rule because of the ineffectiveness of the Taherids (Ṭabari, III, p. 1881). The caliph, no doubt under the influence of the Iraqi Taherids and fearful of how powerful the Saffarids were becoming, condemned the imprisonment of Moḥammad b. Ṭāher and ordered Ya‘qub to return to his own territories. That prompted Ya‘qub to march on Baghdad in 262/875-56; the caliph, in a panic, then hastened to recognize Ya‘qub as governor of Khorasan, ending any pretense of Taherid authority there, only to have the situation dramatically changed by the unexpected defeat of Ya‘qub in a battle about 50 miles south of the capital.

According to the *Tāriḳ-e Sistān* (pp. 220-21), Ya‘qub had provided Moḥammad b. Ṭāher with funds and sent him, his family, and his friends to be confined near a mosque in Zaranj, where he died and was buried a few years later. Yet Ṭabari and other sources claim that Ya‘qub had brought him in chains to Iraq, where he was found after Ya‘qub’s defeat, freed, and sent to the caliph. He took up residence at his grandfather’s palace in Baghdad (Ṭabari, III, pp. 1894-95), was arrested for a while in 267/880-81 (Ṭabari, III, p. 1947), and then resumed holding a position as chief of security in Baghdad and Samarra until at least 272/886 (Ṭabari, III, p. 2111). His brother, Ḥosayn b. Ṭāher made an attempt to reclaim Nishapur and bring about a Taherid restoration but was driven out by Aḥmad b. ‘Abdallāh Ḳojestāni, a former Taherid military officer, and went to live in Marv (Ṭabari, III, pp. 1891, 1907, 1931).

The Taherids of Iraq. As the events of the late Taherid period demonstrate, the Taherids in Iraq were just about as powerful and important, even if less well known, than their Khorasani relatives. They regularly held positions as military commanders, heads of the security forces (*ṣāheb al-ṣorṭa*) for eastern and western Baghdad, and chief tax collectors or administrators (e.g., *‘āmel* and *mo‘āwen*) for the Sawād of Kufa. They held considerable property in Iraq, above all the great residential and administrative compound in Baghdad known as the *ḥarim Ṭāher* (Le Strange, pp. 119-21). They were also in effect the cashiers for the army (see the very informative description in Ṭabari, III, p.

1726), assuring their influence over the military. This role enabled them not only to oversee the steady flow of funds from Iraq to Khorasan but also to provide intelligence to the Taherid governors in Khorasan and to exert influence over policies at the caliphal court in their favor. From an administrative point of view, they acted as deputies of the governor of Khorasan and were appointed by him rather than directly by the caliph. Later on, however, as the position of the Taherid governors weakened and the caliphate itself was in almost constant turmoil, that of the Taherid officials in Iraq strengthened.

Eshāq b. Ebrāhim [b. Ḥosayn] b. Moṣ'ab, for example, held the post of *ṣāheb al-ṣorṭa* of Baghdad during the caliphates of al-Mo'taṣem, al-Wāteq, and al-Motawakkel (r. 232-47/847-61), and was leader of the pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) in 230/845. He served as head of the police and prison in Samarra, and played a role in the judicial persecutions of Aḥmad b. Hanbal and the anti-Mu'tazilites. He was said to have slaughtered as many as 100,000 of Bābak Ḳorrami's supporters in the Jebāl (Ṭabari, III, pp. 1165, 1167). He supervised the execution of Bābak's brother in 223/837-38 (Ṭabari, III, pp. 1231), and in 225/839-40 he was involved in the humiliation of Māzyār at Samarra and the trial of Afšin (Ṭabari, III, pp. 1303, 1308-11). A key factor in enhancing the importance of the Iraqi Tahirids during this period was their usefulness to the caliphs as a counterweight to the rapidly rising power of the Turkish generals. Al-Motawakkel had already had to turn to Eshāq b. Ebrāhim to arrange the arrest of Itāk and his sons in 235/949-50 (Ṭabari, III, pp. 1384-86).

Eshāq's brother, Moḥammad b. Ebrāhim, sometimes assumed the duties of *ṣāheb al-ṣorṭa* when his brother was away, as in 231/845-46, when he had to deal with the anti-Mu'tazilite agitation stirred up by Aḥmad b. Naṣr (Ṭabari, III, p. 1345). Moḥammad b. Ebrāhim was also the commander of one of the armies that had invaded Ṭabarestān in 224/838-39 (Ṭabari, III, p. 1276). In 232/846-47 he was named governor of Fārs (Ṭabari, III, p. 1363). When in Ḍu'l-Ḥejja 235/July 850, Eshāq b. Ebrāhim was visited on his deathbed by the general Boḡā and the Abbasid prince al-Mo'tazz, he named as his successor not his brother, but his son Moḥammad (Ṭabari, III, p. 1403). The latter had been most distinguished in his youth for his prodigious gluttony, and only his father's influence had secured him choice government posts. In 236/850-51, Moḥammad b. Eshāq managed to secure through the lavish distribution of gifts the governorships of Fārs, Yamāma, Baḥrayn, and Egypt as well as control of the pilgrimage road to Mecca. When that offended his uncle Moḥammad b.



Ebrāhim, Moḥammad b. Eshāq intrigued with the caliph al-Motawakkel and a cousin to have him murdered (Ṭabari, III, pp. 1404-5).

It was probably to deal with this family feud and other problems that the Khorasani Taherids intervened by sending the governor's brother Moḥammad b. 'Abdallāh b. Ṭāher, accompanied by his own troops (*šākeriya*), to Samarra in 237/850-55. He took over a number of the security and fiscal posts that would have been held by his predecessors Eshāq b. Ebrāhim and Moḥammad b. Eshāq (Ṭabari, III, p. 1410). He, too, had to suppress several of the popular religious protests, and a letter quoted by Ṭabari (Ṭabari, III, p. 1425) contains the instructions he was given by al-Motawakkel for handling the execution of the Shi'ite 'Isā b. Ja'far in 241/855-56. Like Eshāq b. Ebrāhim, he also served as leader of the pilgrimage in 246/860-61 (Ṭabari, III, p. 1452). He left Mecca in Safar 247/April-May 861 (Ṭabari, III, p. 1470) and was in Iraq just prior to the assassination of al-Motawakkel in Šawwāl 247/December 861, as the result of a plot hatched by the caliph's son al-Montaṣer (r. 247-48/861-62).

In his efforts to reassert caliphal authority, al-Motawakkel had done nothing to challenge the position of the Taherids, and so it is likely that Moḥammad b. 'Abdallāh supported him in most or all of his policies. In the events after the caliph's murder, Moḥammad b. 'Abdallāh played a significant, but rather murky, role. Ṭabari gives the texts of two lengthy letters to him from al-Montaṣer, one ordering him to publicize news of the caliph's zeal for holy war (*jehād*) and the dispatch of the general Waṣif to fight the Byzantines (Ṭabari, III, pp. 1481-85) and the other informing him that al-Mo'tazz and al-Mo'ayyed had been stripped of the right of succession, all their retainers were to be dismissed, and their property was to be confiscated (III, pp. 1489-95). Although phrased as orders to Moḥammad b. 'Abdallāh and as a release from his commitments to al-Mo'tazz, they were more likely intended to win his support by assuring him that he would retain his own offices and prerogatives: "The Commander of the Faithful will not place between you and himself anyone who will govern over you" (III, p. 1495, following tr. XXXIV, p. 218). After the sudden death of al-Montaṣer in 248/862, the Turkish cabal decided to make al-Mosta'in the caliph (r. 248-52/862-66); the installation ceremony was disrupted by a riot on behalf of the claims of al-Mo'tazz, in which it is alleged the troops of Moḥammad b. 'Abdallāh were involved, though he himself seems to have reached some kind of accommodation with the new regime (Ṭabari, III, pp. 1503-5). There are some hints as to what that might have been. It was just at that moment that news arrived of the death of the governor Ṭāher b.

‘Abdallāh. Moḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh apparently had ambitions to be named as his successor and, when that proved impossible, arranged to have the post given, not to one of his other brothers in Khorasan, but to his nephew Moḥammad b. Ṭāher as Ṭāher had wished (Ṭabari, III, p. 1506 and note to parallel passage in Ṣuli; Ya‘qubi, *Ta’rik*, p. 604). He himself took over the usual administrative and police posts in Iraq and the Hejaz but emphasized that he held these in his own right and not as a subordinate to his nephew. That this represented a rather significant shift in the relations of the Iraqi and Khorasani branches of the family is suggested by notices of the special ceremony at the Jawsaq Palace in Samarra to confirm the arrangements on 12 Ša‘bān 248/11 October 862 (Ṭabari, III, p. 1506).

As chief of the security forces, Moḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh had the unenviable task of putting down the revolt in Kufa of the Alid Abu’l-Ḥosayn Yaḥyā b. ‘Omar in 250/864-65 (Ṭabari, III, pp. 1515-23). As noted earlier, his involvement in this episode and his acquisition of property in Ṭabarestān led to the Zaydi revolt there; and as in other places, his heavy reliance on Christians for his secretarial staff seems to have contributed to his unpopularity in Ṭabarestān. He also played the role of something of a kingmaker in the dispute with the Turkish troops over the deposition of al-Mosta‘in, at first defending al-Mosta‘in and raising a militia to fight the Turks (Ṭabari, III, pp. 1552-77) but then throwing his support to al-Mo‘tazz (r. 252-55/866-69) and persuading al-Mosta‘in to abdicate (Ṭabari, III, pp. 1628-45). Moḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh died of a horrible disease the night of an eclipse of the moon on 14 Du‘l-Qa‘da 253/15 November 867 (Ṭabari, III, p. 1691). In accordance with his testament (*waṣīya*), he was succeeded by his brother ‘Obaydallāh (223-300/837-913), the last truly distinguished member of the family known to us (biographical sketch in Ebn Kallekān, tr. de Slane, II, pp. 79-81). In Rabi‘ I 255/February 869, Solaymān b. ‘Abdallāh b. Ṭāher came from Khorasan with his own troops and replaced ‘Obaydallāh as *šāḥeb al-šorṭa*, but he proved to be just about as ineffective and unpopular in Baghdad as he had been in Ṭabarestān (Ṭabari III, pp. 1706, 1714-15, 1725-27). He died in Moḥarram 266/August-September 879 (Ṭabari III, p. 1937). ‘Obaydallāh presumably then returned to office only to be supplanted again in 270/883-84 by the fugitive Moḥammad b. Ṭāher b. ‘Abdallāh. Later, ‘Obaydallāh was in and out of office, but mostly out, and died in poverty; his son Moḥammad may have briefly acted as *šāḥeb al-šorṭa*, but the post was given to a non-Taḥerid in 301/913-14. Apparently no members of the Taḥerid family held any significant office after that (details on this obscure last phase of Taḥerid influence can be found in Bosworth, 1969a, pp. 74-77 and Kaabi,



1983, I, pp. 357-65).

Political significance. It can hardly be questioned that the Taherid family attained a position of remarkable and pervasive importance in early Abbasid history. Historians, however, are divided on the significance of their holding the governorship of Khorasan and most of the Islamic east on a clearly hereditary basis for over 50 years. A particular issue is whether this was a critical element in the fragmentation of the Abbasid caliphate, so that “in practice, the first independent Muslim dynasty had been established on Iranian soil; the political rebirth of the Persian nation began” (Spuler, *Iran*, p. 60).

A conservative interpretation, aimed at correcting what is seen as an anachronistic “nationalist” view of the Taherids shared by many early orientalist and modern Iranian historians, emphasizes that the rise of the family did not mark any fundamental break in the history of the caliphate. Kaabi, for example, claims that “l’Etat ṭāhiride n’était, en fait, que la continuité de la *wilāya* du Ḥurāsān, instaurée depuis la conquête de l’Islam, et que le califat, sous le règne d’al-Ma’mūn, jugea opportune de la confier à Ṭāhir et d’en faire un Etat dynastique. Cette dynastie, ne fut donc pas le fruit d’une intrigue ou d’une lutte qui l’opposa au gouvernement central” (1983, I, p. 403). Bosworth also stresses that “the Ṭāhirid governors faithfully acknowledged and fulfilled the constitutional rights of their overlords the caliphs” and that they were “retained in Khurāsān by the ‘Abbāsids because they were able to provide firm government for an important sector of the empire” (*EI*² IX, p. 105). Similarly Kennedy maintains that it is “misleading” to consider the Taherids “as the first independent Iranian dynasty” and describes the relationship between the Abbasid caliphs and the Taherids as “a partnership” and “the most successful solution the ‘Abbāsids ever devised for integrating the province into the caliphate” (1986, p. 161), even though he recognizes the importance of provincial elites in the Abbasid system of governance. From this point of view, the Taherids were loyal and obedient, if especially gifted, servants who could provide the caliphs with the most efficient and effective administration of an unusually troublesome province. Their vast economic and social interests in Iraq put them in the same political boat as the caliphs, and it was not in the interest of either party to rock it.

A recent revisionist interpretation, well argued by Fukuzo Amabe and largely shared by the author of this entry, takes the position that, from the moment Ṭāher b. Ḥosayn took up arms on behalf of al-Ma’mun and put al-Amin to

death, “the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate was transformed into an empire dominated by the Khurāsānī lords” and “a completely autonomous government of Khurāsān under one of the lords, instead of an ‘Abbāsīd prince, was established contrary to Rashīd’s original grand design” (pp. 103-4). This should by no means be understood as an attempt to return to earlier theories that the Taherids were motivated by ethnic concerns or bringing about “the rebirth of the Persian nation.” It is an argument based on political dynamics emphasizing that the Taherids sought and obtained a genuine autonomy, by which they were able to protect their economic and class interests, as they thought best and without caliphal interference.

When it comes to ascertaining the degree of autonomy enjoyed by the Taherids or the extent of their devotion to the Abbasids, one should certainly not put too much emphasis on the “constitutional” formalities of being invested with the governorship or other offices. This pious fiction disguises a very different reality. The salient fact, as noted long ago by V. V. Barthold, is that Taherid “ authority was so firmly established in Khorāsān that the province could not be given to any other” (*EI*¹ IV, p. 614). Indeed, the caliphs could not even replace one member of the family with another more to their liking, as is illustrated by al-Wāteq’s failed attempt to make Eshāq b. Ebrāhim governor instead of Ṭāher b. ‘Abdallāh, or al-Mosta‘in’s twice frustrated efforts to name a governor of his choosing. Where we can detect some divergence between the wishes of the caliphs and the Taherids, as in the policies regarding Ṭabarestān or the treatment of Afšin or dealing with the Saffarids, the caliphs, not the Taherids, gave way; apparently in this “partnership” the Taherid tail often wagged the Abbasid dog. We know too that the Taherids collected taxes as the legal agents of the caliphate, but it is far from clear how much they actually remitted and how much they kept for themselves and in Khorasan. Ya‘qubi, who was in a good position to know, explicitly says they collected 40 million dirhams in land tax and “spent all of it as they saw fit” (*Boldān*, p. 309; cf. Barthold, *Turkestan*, p. 220). That might well explain why the caliph al-Mo‘taṣem was so annoyed when asked by his minister for two million dirhams for an irrigation project in Šāš and Farḡāna (Ṭabari, III, p. 1326), areas that he would have seen as a Taherid responsibility rather than his own. In any case, the Taherids collected enough from their Iraqī estates to be, in effect, fiscally independent.

There is also abundant evidence of friction between the caliphs and their “loyal” servants, of which the story that Ṭāher b. Ḥosayn was planning to



revolt is simply the most extreme and best known example. Ṭāher felt no great embarrassment about having murdered al-Amin and boasted of it in his poetry; he also did not hesitate to write an insolent and threatening letter to al-Mo'taşem, or possibly Ebrāhim b. al-Mahdi (Ṭabari, III, p. 933). Even though al-Ma'mun had practically raised 'Abdallāh b. Ṭāher, he apparently distrusted him enough during his governorship of Egypt to have spies try to find out if he had Shi'ite sympathies (Ṭabari, III, p. 1094). Al-Mo'taşem detested 'Abdallāh, hinted to Afşin that he would like to see him removed from Khorasan (Ṭabari, III, p. 1305), and perhaps even attempted to have him murdered. For his part, 'Abdallāh did not trust the caliph enough even to return to Iraq to perform the pilgrimage (Gardizi, ed. Ḥabibi, p. 136). Moreover, the Taherid officials in Iraq were not always so obedient and deferential either, as a poem casting scorn on Moḥammad b. Ṭāher's treatment of al-Mosta'in demonstrates (Ṭabari, III, p. 1650).

Governance and culture. Sources as early as Ya'qubi speak glowingly of the Taherid administration of Khorasan (*Ta'riḳ*, p. 586; *Boldān*, p. 307), and well into the Saljuq period throngs of people visited the grave of 'Abdallāh b. Ṭāher praying, as if at a religious shrine, for their needs to be met. Neẓām-al-Molk (d. 485/1092) was one of those visitors and recalled 'Abdallāh as "a man who habitually appointed devout and pious men to be his officers, and persons who had no need of worldly goods and did not busy themselves with their private interests, with the result that the taxes were duly collected, the peasants were not troubled and he himself was not embarrassed" (*Siāsatnāma*, tr. Darke, p. 49). Likewise, Juzjāni remembered 'Abdallāh as having ruled "with great justice and equity" and having "established good practices" (*Ṭabaqāt*, I, p. 193). This enthusiasm is largely shared by modern historians. Typical of them is Barthold, who characterizes the Taherid period as one of "enlightened absolutism" where the ruler protected "the lower against the oppression of the higher classes," felt a moral responsibility "to protect the interests of the peasants" in particular, and "promoted education" while guarding against more radical "restless elements among the masses" (*Turkestan*, pp. 212-13).

The celebrated epistle that Ṭāher b. Ḥosayn addressed to his son 'Abdallāh on the occasion of his appointment to the governorship of the Jazira (text in Ebn Ṭayfur, pp. 19-28; commentary and tr. in Bosworth, 1970) clearly states in its opening sentences the view, repeatedly emphasized thereafter, that the first duty of a ruler is to protect the interests of his subjects. Secular power has

been delegated by God to the ruler, who must therefore be pious and uphold justice according to custom (*sunna*) and law (*šari'a*). Taxes should not be hoarded in treasuries but “expended on the welfare of subjects, on the provision of their just dues, and on removing burdens from them” (tr. Bosworth, 1970, p. 34). The land tax in particular should be both collected and expended fairly; the army should be paid well and regularly; and judges (sing. *qāzi*) should apply the *šari'a* justly.

The epistle could be read almost as a denunciation of the exact policies that had been followed by 'Ali b. 'Isa, and its theoretical maxims are reflected to some extent in the practices of the Taherids in Khorasan but are rather more difficult to detect in the case of their administration of Sistān and Ṭabarestān. The careful attention of the Taherids to matters of taxation and the payment of troops has already been noted. There are also two well-known examples of how the Taherids supported religious scholars (sing. *‘ālim*) and tried to base administrative practices on the *šari'a*. 'Abdallāh b. Ṭāher rewarded Abu 'Obayd Qāsem b. Sallām richly for his commentary on *Ġarīb al-ḥadiṯ* (Juzjāni, *Ṭabaqāt*, I, p. 193; cf. Kaabi, 1983, I, pp. 262-63), and he commissioned a group of jurists to compile an authoritative treatise on irrigation law, the *Ketāb al-quni*, still in use at the time of Gardizi (ed. Habibi, p. 137).

It is also clear that the Taherids valued education and high culture greatly—and took them so seriously that Ṭāher once fired an administrator in Kufa for having a secretary who had used the genitive case when he should have used the nominative (Ebn Ṭayfur, p. 70)! We know, for example, that the famous philologist and poet Abu'l-'Amaytal was the tutor of sons of 'Abdallāh b. Ṭāher (Ebn Kallekān, tr. de Slane, II, pp. 55-57; Ebn al-Nadim, tr. Dodge, pp. 106-7), as he himself had been taught by Yaḥyā b. Zīād Farrā' and 'Oyayna Mohallabi (Bosworth, 1969, p. 59). The scientist Sahl b. Bešr (Hāyā Yahudi) was also employed by Ṭāher b. Ḥosayn and compiled an anthology of his major writings while in Khorasan (Ebn al-Nadim, tr. Dodge, p. 652). The Taherids were also presumably the founders of the great library in Khorasan known as the Ṭāheriya (Ebn al-Nadim, tr. Dodge, p. 94), and the famous literary scholar al-'Attābi, a fixture at the court of Moḥammad b. Ṭāher in Raqqā, visited a library at Marv that had been founded by Yazdgerd and maintained by the Taherids (Ebn Ṭayfur, p. 86). Ebn Ḥawqal (p. 435) noted that the Taherid court at Nishapur attracted many secretaries and writers, who were then followed by theologians and jurists as well, and thought this explained why the city had produced such a large number of scholars.



Many of the Taherids, governors, and lesser officials, in Khorasan and in Iraq, were celebrated patrons of the arts, and *adab* literature is filled with anecdotes about their largesse and their appreciation of wit, wisdom, and *bon mots*. Not only that, a surprising number of the Taherids were accomplished poets and writers themselves: among them, Ṭāher b. Ḥosayn was recognized as a skillful poet and musician, and both Ṭāher and his son ‘Abdallāh b. Ṭāher were regarded as masters of the epistolary art (Ebn al-Nadim, tr. Dodge, p. 256). ‘Obaydallāh b. ‘Abdallāh, unfortunate as he was in his political and personal life, was much respected as an essayist and poet (Ebn Kallekān, tr. de Slane, II, pp. 80-81. Ebn al-Nadim (tr. Dodge, p. 256; see FEHREST) mentions an otherwise unknown Maṣṣūr b. Ṭalḥa b. Ṭāher b. Ḥosayn, a governor of Marv and Khwarazm (see CHORASMIA ii), as an exemplary Taherid scholar who wrote on philosophy and music so well that his works impressed the great philosopher al-Kendi.

Arabic poetry was the prime literary passion of the Taherids. As was typical of the times, they recognized the great propaganda value of panegyric and feared the embarrassment of being satirized (and there are plenty of examples of both in the case of the Taherids). Kaabi (1983) has meticulously and comprehensively identified the multitude of poets patronized by the Taherids and compiled such of their verses as can be identified. Most are of course obscure, but they included such luminaries as Abu Tammām, Boḥtori, Ebn Ṭayfur, and Ebn al-Rumi. According to Ebn al-Nadim (tr. Dodge, p. 355), Ṭāher b. Ḥosayn, ‘Abdallāh b. Ṭāher, Moḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh, Solaymān b. ‘Abdallāh, Moḥammad b. Ṭāher, b. ‘Abdallāh, and ‘Obaydallāh b. ‘Abdallāh b. Ṭāher, all wrote poetry themselves, usually leaving divans of 30 to 100 pages.

The question of Taherid sentiments about Persian language and culture is more complicated and unfortunately caught up in the controversies over whether they were laying the foundations for the subsequent “Persian Renaissance” (see in particular the studies by Bosworth, 1969a and 1969b). Whether the Khorasani Taherids, and even less the Iraqi ones, regarded Persian as their “native” tongue is a matter of conjecture, but some of them did speak it. Ṭāher’s dying words were reportedly in Persian (Ebn Ṭayfur, p. 71; Ṭabari, III, p. 1063), and Persian was at least occasionally spoken at the court of Moḥammad b. Ṭāher b. Ḥosayn in Raqqā (Ebn Ṭayfur, p. 86). Yet according to a well-known passage in ‘Awfi’s *Lobāb al-albāb* (ed. Nafisi, p. 241), the Taherid dynasty, so famous for its generosity and largesse, at least to poets writing in Arabic, attached no value to Persian as a language of culture.

Authors of Persian poetry were beginning to appear in this period, notably Ḥanzāla Bādġisi, but there is no evidence that the Taherids either encouraged or rewarded them.

Figure 1. Dirham of Ṭāher b. Ḥosayn (as Dhu'l-Yaminayn Mawla al-Ma'mun), Moḥammadiya, 195/811. Private collection, Russia.

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