

The History of al-Ṭabarī

VOLUME XXXII

The Reunification
of the
ʿAbbāsīd Caliphate



TRANSLATED BY C. E. BOSWORTH

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THE HISTORY OF AL-ṬABARĪ

AN ANNOTATED TRANSLATION

VOLUME XXXII

The Reunification of the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate

THE CALIPHATE OF AL-MA'MŪN

A.D. 812-833/A.H. 198-213



The History of al-Ṭabarī

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The History of al-Ṭabarī
(Ta'rīkh al-rusul wa 'l-mulūk)

VOLUME XXXII

**The Reunification of
The 'Abbāsīd
Caliphate**

translated and annotated
by

C.E. Bosworth

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

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Acknowledgements

In 1971 the General Editor proposed to the UNESCO to include a translation of al-Ṭabarī's *History* in its Collection of Representative Works. UNESCO agreed, but the Commission in charge of Arabic works favored other priorities. Deeming the project worthy, the Iranian Institute of Translation and Publication, which collaborated with UNESCO, agreed to undertake the task. After the upheavals of 1979, assistance was sought from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The invaluable encouragement and support of the Endowment is here gratefully acknowledged.

The General Editor wishes to thank sincerely also the participating scholars, who have made the realization of this project possible; the Board of Editors for their selfless assistance; Professor Franz Rosenthal for his many helpful suggestions in the formulation and application of the editorial policy; and Dr. Susan Mango of the National Endowment for the Humanities for her genuine interest in the project and her advocacy of it.

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Preface

THE HISTORY OF PROPHETS AND KINGS (*Ta'riḫ al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*) by AbūJa^ʿfar Muhammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (839-923), here rendered as the *History of al-Ṭabarī*, is by common consent the most important universal history produced in the world of Islam. It has been translated here in its entirety for the first time for the benefit of non-Arabists, with historical and philological notes for those interested in the particulars of the text.

Ṭabarī's monumental work explores the history of the ancient nations, with special emphasis on biblical peoples and prophets, the legendary and factual history of ancient Iran, and, in great detail, the rise of Islam, the life of the Prophet Muḥammad, and the history of the Islamic world down to the year 915. The first volume of this translation will contain a biography of al-Ṭabarī and a discussion of the method, scope, and value of his work. It will also provide information on some of the technical considerations that have guided the work of the translators.

The *History* has been divided here into 38 volumes, each of which covers about two hundred pages of the original Arabic text in the Leiden edition. An attempt has been made to draw the dividing lines between the individual volumes in such a way that each is to some degree independent and can be read as such. The page numbers of the original in the Leiden edition appear on the margins of the translated volumes.

Al-Ṭabarī very often quotes his sources verbatim and traces the chain of transmission (*isnād*) to an original source. The chains of transmitters are, for the sake of brevity, rendered by only a dash (—) between the individual links in the chain. Thus, according to Ibn Ḥumayd—Salamah—Ibn Ishāq means that al-Ṭabarī received the report from Ibn Ḥumayd who

said that he was by Salamah, who said that he was told by Ibn Ishāq, and so on. The numerous subtle and important differences in the original Arabic wording have been disregarded.

The table of contents at the beginning of each volume gives a brief survey of the topics dealt with in that particular volume. It also includes the headings and subheadings as they appear in al-Ṭabarī's text, as well as those occasionally introduced by the translator.

Well-known place-names, such as, for instance, Mecca, Baghdad, Jerusalem, Damascus, and the Yemen, are given in their English spellings. Less common place-names, which are the vast majority, are transliterated. Biblical figures appear in the accepted English spelling. Iranian names are usually transcribed according to their Arabic forms, and the presumed Iranian forms are often discussed in the footnotes.

Technical terms have been translated wherever possible, but some, such as *qāḍī* and *imām*, have been retained in Arabic forms. Others that cannot be translated with sufficient precision have been retained and italicized as well as footnoted.

The annotation aims chiefly at clarifying difficult passages, identifying individuals and place-names, and discussing textual difficulties. Much leeway has been left to the translators to include in the footnotes whatever they consider necessary and helpful.

The bibliographies list all the sources mentioned in the annotation.

The index in each volume contains all the names of persons and places referred to in the text, as well as those mentioned in the notes as far as they refer to the medieval period. It does not include the names of modern scholars. A general index, it is hoped, will appear after all the volumes have been translated.



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Abbreviations Employed

BGA	Bibliotheca geographorum arabicorum
EI ¹	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islām</i> , first edition
EI ²	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islām</i> , new edition
GAS	F. Sezgin, <i>Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums</i>
GMS	Gibb Memorial Series
IC	<i>Islamic Culture</i>
IJMES	<i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i>
Isl.	<i>Der Islam</i>
JA	<i>Journal Asiatique</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JESHO	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
JSAI	<i>Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
MW	<i>The Muslim World</i>
REI	<i>Revue des Etudes Islamiques</i>
RSO	<i>Rivista degli Studi Orientali</i>
SI	<i>Studia Islamica</i>
WZKM	<i>Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes</i>
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>

In citations from the Qur'ān, where two different numbers are given from a verse, the first is that of Flügel's text and the second that of the official Egyptian edition.

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Translator's Foreword



The section of Ṭabarī's history devoted to the caliphate of al-Ma'mūn concentrates essentially on events in Iraq and, to a lesser extent, on events in Mecca and the Hijaz insofar as the struggles for political and religious control of the Holy Places were reflections of those going on in the heartland of Iraq. Nevertheless, Ṭabarī was a chronicler of the history of the caliphate as a whole, hence he could not entirely neglect the regions outside Iraq. A fair amount of attention is paid to Egypt, where al-Ma'mūn's governors had to cope with various rebellions of both the local Muslim Arabs and the Copts, and to events in northern Syria, the Jazīrah and the Byzantine marches in eastern Anatolia, which formed the backdrop to the Caliph's last illness and death. But events in the Maghrib beyond Barqah are totally ignored; and the laconic references to Khurasan, Transoxiana and Sind rarely go beyond the noting of changes of governors there.

The main theme of the annalistic narrative of the earlier years of the reign, from al-Ma'mūn's succession to rule over the united empire on al-Amīn's death in 198(813) until al-Ma'mūn's decision to come westwards from Marw and establish firmly for the first time his authority in Iraq in 204(819), is of violent conflict in Iraq. At the outset the conflict focused on three contending groups: Abū al-Sarāyā's pro-Shī'ī revolt; the

representatives of al-Ma'mūn's authority there under al-Ḥasan b. Sahl; and the old Arab and Iranian families of Iraq like the Hāshimites and their allies the Khurasanian Abnā' or guards of the first 'Abbāsids, now settled mainly in Baghdad, above all in the Ḥarbiyyah quarter to the north of al-Manṣūr's Round City. This last group resented the Persophile policies of al-Ma'mūn exemplified, as they saw it, by his favor to the Sahl brothers; hence they took the lead in raising to power at Baghdad other members of the 'Abbāsīd family, notably in 201(817) al-Manṣūr b. al-Mahdī as amīr or nominal deputy for the Caliph, and then in 202(817) Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī as an explicit anti-Caliph. The military maneuvers of the respective groups, covering an area between Baghdad and Baṣrah, are treated in great detail, as are domestic events within the capital itself, including the fascinating episode of the attempt of the local representatives of Sunnī orthodox piety, Khālid al-Daryūsh and Sahl b. Salāmah, to take advantage of the deep yearning for public order after the social chaos and strife of the Civil War years and to establish in Baghdad a theocratic society with the secular power made more conformable to the moral imperatives of the Qur'ān and sunnah.

This period of storm and stress comes to an end with al-Ma'mūn's migration from Khurasan to assume the throne of his forefathers in their traditional capital; the collapse of Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī's anti-caliphate; and the latter's subsequent ignominious capture in the streets of Baghdad wearing female guise. The death—most probably accidental—of the Eighth Imām of the Shī'a, 'Alī al-Riḍā, conveniently brought about the abandonment of al-Ma'mūn's policy of endeavoring to reconcile the two wings of Islam, Sunnī and Shī'ī, by making the Imām his heir, though a similar policy was sustained on the intellectual plane with the enforcement by al-Ma'mūn and his two successors of Mu'tazilī theological doctrines. The most serious grievances of the anti-Iranizing forces in Iraq were removed by the murder of al-Faḍl b. Sahl in 202(818) and the illness and retirement shortly afterwards of al-Ḥasan b. Sahl.

Hence Ṭabarī's narrative for the last decade-and-a-half of al-Ma'mūn's reign is taken up with such episodes as the final quelling of Naṣr b. Shabath's prolonged uprising amongst the

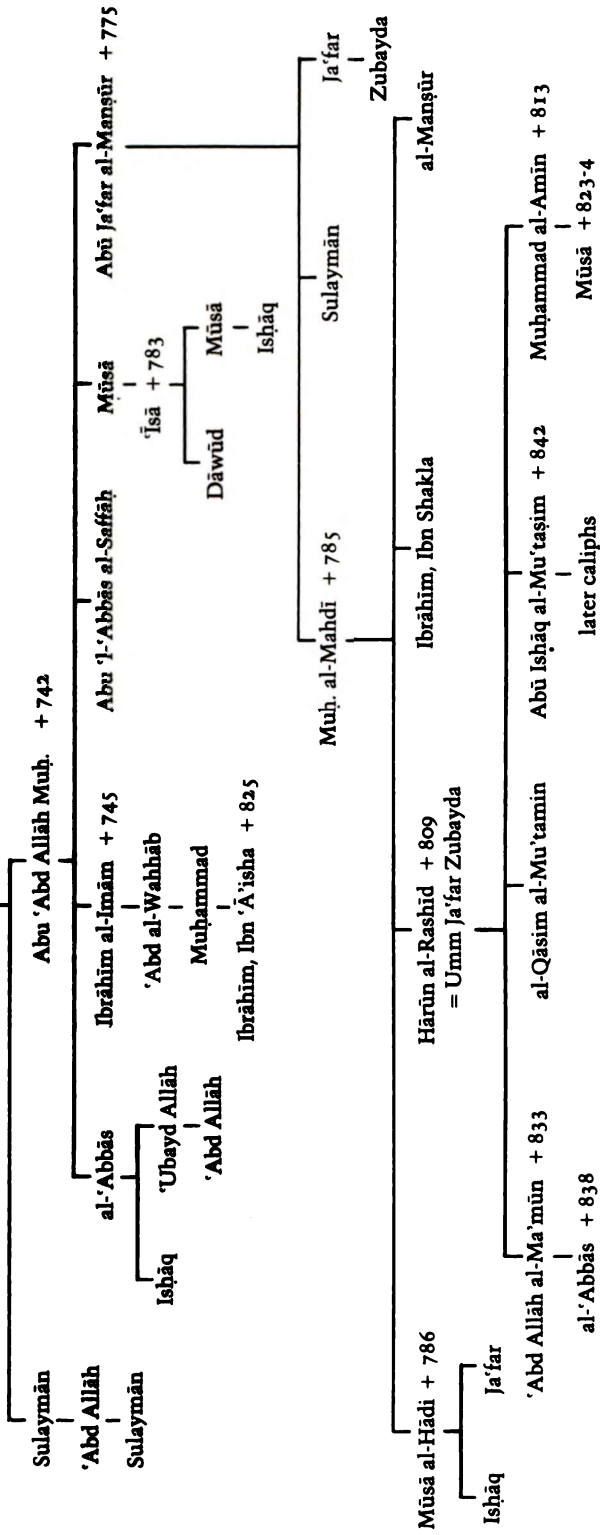
Arabs of the Jazīrah; the story of Ṭāhir b. al-Ḥusayn's appointment as governor of Khurasan and his apparent repudiation of caliphal authority just before his sudden death in 207(822); the munificent ceremonies attending al-Ma'mūn's consummation of his marriage to Būrān, daughter of al-Ḥasan b. Sahl, at Fam al-Ṣiḥ; the abortive rebellion in Baghdad of the 'Abbāsīd Ibn 'Ā'ishah; the restoration of caliphal authority in Egypt; and the last campaigns of al-Ma'mūn against the Byzantine emperor Theophilus, in the course of which he was to die near Tarsus in 213(833). Above all, we find inserted here, under the events of the year 213(833), the story of the beginnings of the *miḥnah* or inquisition by means of which al-Ma'mūn endeavored to impose on the leading religious dignitaries of the empire acquiescence in the Mu'tazilī doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'ān. The annals proper of al-Ma'mūn's caliphate close with a selection of anecdotes about the Caliph and his conduct, relating to his stay in Syria or to his presence at the court in (normally) Baghdad.

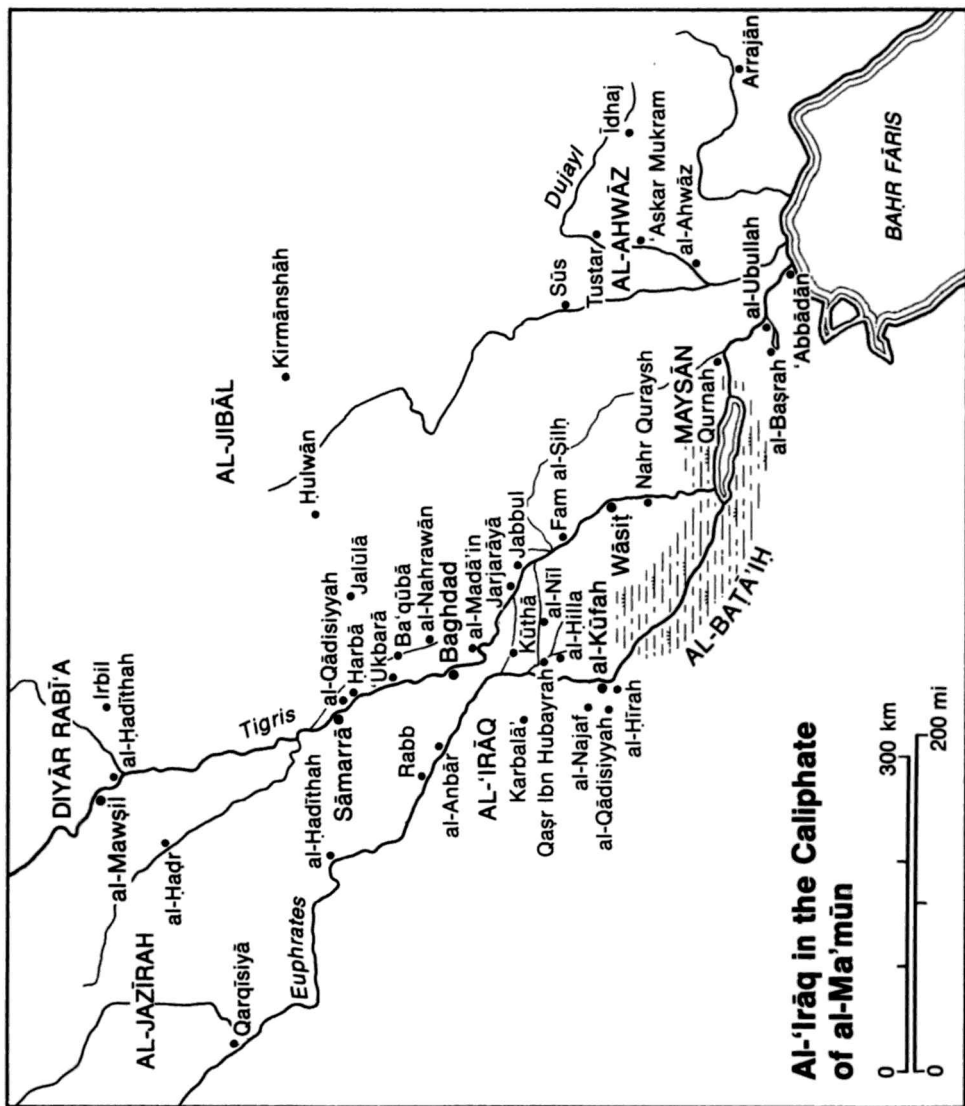
A feature of the post-204(819) part of Ṭabarī's account of al-Ma'mūn's caliphate is his insertion of the apparently complete texts of various chancery or *inshā'* documents, such as Ṭāhir b. al-Ḥusayn's admonition to his son 'Abdallāh, itself an early example of the "Mirrors for Princes" genre in Arabic; letters from al-Ma'mūn and 'Abdallāh b. Ṭāhir summoning the rebel Naṣr b. Shabath to obedience; the letter from Aḥmad b. Yūsuf to 'Abdallāh b. Ṭāhir congratulating him on receiving the surrender of the Egyptian rebel 'Ubaydallāh b. al-Sarī; the public proclamation made on the occasion of al-Ma'mūn's execution of 'Alī b. Hishām; the correspondence between al-Ma'mūn and the Emperor Theophilus; al-Ma'mūn's *waṣīyyah* or dying testament to his brother Abū Ishāq al-Mu'taṣim; and above all, the series of three lengthy letters sent by al-Ma'mūn, en route for the Byzantine front, to his lieutenant in Baghdad, the Ṭāhirid Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm al-Muṣ'abī, requiring subscription by the theologians and canon lawyers to the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'ān.

For some three-fifths of Ṭabarī's section on al-Ma'mūn's caliphate we have a parallel text, that of the surviving part of Aḥmad b. Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr's *Kitāb Baghdād*; the parallelism

al-'Abbās (uncle of the Prophet)

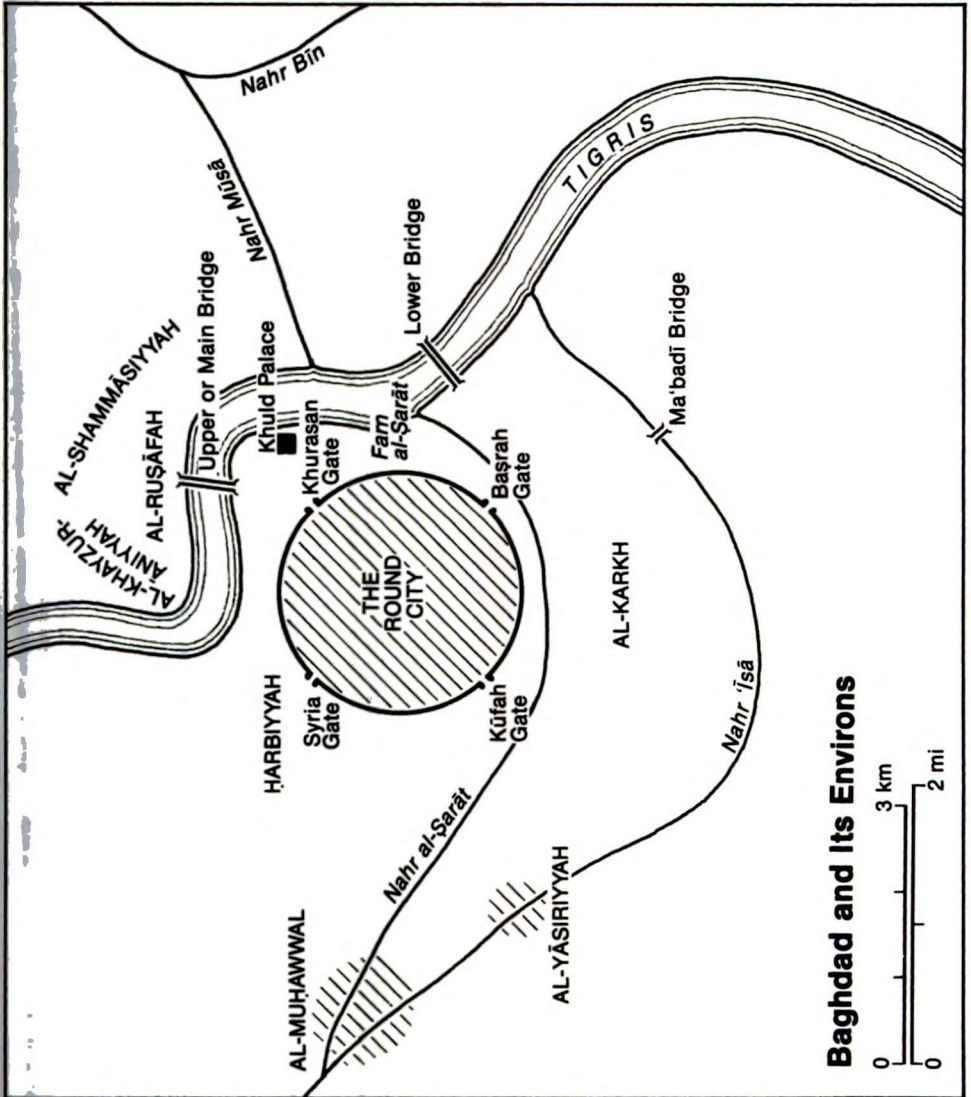
GENEALOGICAL TABLE OF THE 'ABBĀSĪDS
(with special reference to those members
of the family mentioned in this section
of al-Ṭabari's *History*)



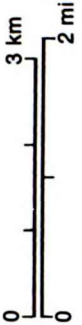


Al-'Irāq in the Caliphate of al-Ma'mūn

Farn-al-Šarāt



Baghdad and Its Environs



begins in Ṭabarī at III, 1036, with the events of the year 204(819/20), but excludes a part of the extensive section (III, 1118–33) on the *miḥnah*, where several folios of the corresponding text of Ibn Abī Ṭāhir seem to have been lost. There is no doubt that Ṭabarī followed the older historian (who died in 280[893], according to al-Mas'ūdī and Ibn al-Nadīm), even though he only mentions Ibn Abī Ṭāhir once by name (in III, 1516, quoting him, citing Ibn al-Ṣūfi al-Ṭālibī on the rebellion of the Husaynī 'Alid Yaḥyā b. 'Umar b. Yaḥyā in Kūfah in 250[864]). Yet Ṭabarī copied intelligently; thus Keller, the editor and translator of Ibn Abī Ṭāhir, has pointed out that he omitted two verses of the ode to al-Ma'mūn by which Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī made his submission to the Caliph because Ibn Abī Ṭāhir's text rendered them faultily. He was also, as an annalist, less interested in literary and cultural history, hence he omitted some of the anecdotes which Ibn Abī Ṭāhir gives at the end of his narrative about al-Ma'mūn's stay in Damascus and about the poets and singers at his court; but it seems certain that the passage on the *miḥnah* mentioned above as unique to Ṭabarī stemmed also from Ibn Abī Ṭāhir. However, Ibn Abī Ṭāhir's concentration on affairs in Iraq and Syria meant that Ṭabarī could not, as a conscientious annalist, entirely pass by events in other parts of the caliphate comprising the Islamic heartlands, and so had to find other sources for, e.g., the events in Egypt. Here, two sources are specifically mentioned: Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Makhḥad, who was personally in Egypt at the time of 'Abdallāh b. Ṭāhir's quelling of the revolt of Ibn al-Sarī (III, 1087); and, more vaguely, several of the indigenous people of Egypt (III, 1091). Other items of information, e.g., the sparse ones relating to events in Khurasan and on the far eastern fringes of the caliphate, must have come from (to us) unknown chronicles, *kutub al-ta'rikh*. The whole question of the relationship between Ibn Abī Ṭāhir and Ṭabarī has been discussed in a highly detailed and masterly fashion, so as to require no further discussion here, by Keller in the Introduction to his German translation of the *Kitāb Baghdād*, II, pages XIII-XXVI.

Although Ibn Abī Ṭāhir's history is a parallel text and source and, therefore, provides a control for much of Ṭabarī's text, Stanislas Guyard, who edited pages 459–1163 of the *Tertia se-*

ries of Ṭabarī's history, faced peculiar difficulties in his task. Like Ibn Abī Ṭāhir's history (which Guyard utilised in the then still unedited British Museum manuscript), much of this section, from page 755 l. 14 onwards, rests on a unicum in the Istanbul manuscript Köprülü 1041 (C) copied in 651(1253). From page 1068 l. 11 onwards, it is true, he had a second manuscript, located in the Oxford Bodleian, Pococke 354 (O), but this has a lacuna from page 1101 l. 16 to page 1112 l. 14 (see the general editor de Goeje's *Introductio*, page LXV). That the text which Guyard finally produced for the period of al-Ma'mūn's caliphate reads as intelligibly as it mostly does is a tribute to his sagacity and insight; the obscure passages which remain would not appear to be capable of complete elucidation unless fresh good manuscripts turn up.

There remains only the pleasant task of thanking those who have given valuable advice on problems connected with the text or have lent me necessary books: my colleague Dr. Norman Calder; my former student Dr. Yūsuf Abū al-'Addūs; and my friends Dr. Martin Hinds, Dr. Patricia Crone and Dr. Carole Hillenbrand. I am particularly indebted to Dr. Hinds, who has read through the whole of my translation and accompanying notes, and has indicated many useful references, corrections and improvements; but for any remaining shortcomings, the responsibility is mine alone.

C.E. Bosworth
Manchester, April 1984



The Caliphate of 'Abdallāh b. Hārūn al-Ma'mūn



[*The Remainder of the Events of the Year 198*
(September 1, 813–August 21, 814)]

In the year 198 (September 1, 813–August 21, 814), the war between the two sons of Hārūn al-Rashīd, Muḥammad (al-Amīn) and 'Abdallāh (al-Ma'mūn), came to an end, and the people in the eastern lands, in Iraq and the Hijaz, came together and gave their obedience to 'Abdallāh al-Ma'mūn.

In this year, al-Ḥasan al-Hirsh came out in revolt in Dhū al-Hijjah (July–August 814) with a group of the dregs of the people and a large number of tribesmen, proclaiming, or so he asserted, the cause of "the one well-pleasing [to God] from the house of Muḥammad [*al-Riḍā min al-Muḥammad*]." He came as far as Nīl,¹ and then exacted taxes, practised extortion on the merchants, plundered the villages (of the neighborhood) and drove off herds.²

In this year, al-Ma'mūn granted to al-Ḥasan b. Sahl,³ brother

1. Town of central Iraq to the south-southeast of Baghdad, near a transverse canal, the Greater Ṣarāt, which connected the Euphrates with the Tigris; see G. Le Strange, *The lands of the Eastern Caliphate*, 72–3.

2. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, VI, 301.

3. Secretary and financial official for al-Ma'mūn, detested, like his brother, by the Abnā', the Khurasanian military class of Baghdad, for his Zoroastrian background (see below, 52) and Iranian sympathies; see D. Sourdel, *Le vizirat 'abbāside*, I, 215–18; id., *Et*² s.v.

of al-Faḍl b. Sahl,⁴ the governorship of all the districts of Jibāl, Fārs, Ahwāz, Baṣrah, Kūfah, the Hijaz and the Yemen which Ṭāhir b. al-Ḥusayn⁵ had conquered, this being after the killing of the deposed one Muḥammad (al-Amīn) and the people's general submission to al-Ma'mūn.⁶

In this year, al-Ma'mūn wrote to Ṭāhir b. al-Ḥusayn, who was at that moment established at Baghdad,⁷ ordering him to hand over the whole of the tax revenues in his possession, collected from all the provinces, to the representatives of al-Ḥasan b. Sahl, and that he should leave and make his way to Raqqah.⁸ He handed over to him responsibility for the war against Naṣr b. Shabath⁹ and appointed him governor of Mosul, the Jazīrah, Syria and the western provinces (al-Maghrib).¹⁰

In this year, 'Alī b. Abī Sa'id¹¹ came to Iraq as al-Ḥasan b. Sahl's representative for collection of the land tax there. However, Ṭāhir refused to hand over the land tax to 'Alī until he had paid in full the army's pay allowances. When he had fulfilled this obligation to them, he handed over the tax revenues to him.

4. Adviser and vizier to al-Ma'mūn till his assassination in 202 (818) (see below, 80); see Sourdel, *Vizirat*, I, 196–213; id., *El*² s.v.

5. Al-Ma'mūn's general in the civil war with his brother al-Amīn, and member of an Iranian family long in the service of the 'Abbāsids; see C.E. Bosworth, in *Cambridge history of Iran*, IV, 90–5; *El*¹ s.v. (W. Barthold).

6. Ya'qūbī, *Ta'riḫ*, II, 539; anon., *Kitāb 'Uyūn al-ḥadā'iq*, 344; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, VI, 297–8.

7. Al-Ma'mūn himself was at this time in his eastern Khurasanian capital of Marw.

8. The main town of Diyār Muḍar, on the upper Euphrates, in what is now northern Syria; see Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, III, 58–60; Le Strange, *Lands*, 101–3; M. Canard, *Histoire de la dynastie des Ḥamdānides*, I, 90–1; *El*¹ s.v. al-Raḳqa (E. Honigmann).

9. Arab leader from the 'Uqayl tribe who took advantage of the confused situation in the Jazīrah during the civil war period to head bands of Zawāqil or Qaysī Arabs against the central government till his submission in 209 (824/5) (see below, 138–44); see H. Kennedy, *The early Abbasid caliphate*, 168–9.

10. 'Uyūn, 344; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, VI, 298.

11. Khurasanian and cousin of al-Ḥasan b. Sahl, bearer of the honorific of Dhū al-Qalamayn and administrator of Iraq for al-Ḥasan after the death of al-Amīn; see Sourdel, *Vizirat*, I, 202, 205, 216.