

## THE CALIPHATE OF HĀRŪN AL-RASHĪD



Allegiance was sworn to al-Rashīd, Hārūn b. Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbbās on Thursday night, the night in which died his brother Mūsā al-Hādī. His age at his accession was twenty-two years. It is said that on the day he was hailed as Caliph, he was only twenty-one. His mother was a concubine from Jurash in the Yaman who was called Khayzurān, "The Reed." He was born at Rayy, on the third day remaining in Dhū al-Ḥijja in 145 [763] in the Caliphate of al-Manṣūr. The Barmakīs are reported to have alleged that al-Rashīd was born on the first of Muḥarram in 149 [766].<sup>415</sup> Faḍl b. Yaḥyā was born seven days before him on the seventh day remaining in Dhū al-Ḥijja 148 [766], and Faḍl's mother was appointed a wet-nurse to al-Rashīd. She was Zaynab bt. Munīr, and suckled him with Faḍl's milk, while Khayzurān suckled Faḍl with Rashīd's milk.

[600] Sulaymān b. Abī Shaykh: On the night that al-Hādī died [General] Harthama b. Aʿyan roused al-Rashīd // and had him invested with the Caliphate. Hārūn sent for Yaḥya b. Khālīd b. Barmak, who had been imprisoned – al-Hādī had determined to kill both him and Hārūn that night – and Yaḥyā came to him and took up the wazīrate. He then summoned Yūsuf b. al-Qāsim b. Ṣabīḥ<sup>416</sup> the Secretary and ordered him to write the official letters. When morning came and the officers had assembled, Yūsuf b. Qāsim rose, praised God and glorified Him, and called down benedictions upon Muḥammad, God bless him and give him peace. He made a most eloquent speech, mentioning the death of Mūsā

<sup>415</sup> The later date appears more probable, see *E.I.*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. Hārūn al-Rashīd.

<sup>416</sup> Yūsuf b. Qāsim b. Ṣabīḥ was a secretary and poet who had served both the Umawīs and the ʿAbbāsīs. He was known for his eloquence, and his letters were collected as models of their kind. See *Fihrist*, 1130.

and Hārūn's accession to power after him, and of the accession-gifts being made to the people.

Aḥmad b. al-Qāsim --- his uncle ʿAlī b. Yūsuf b. al-Qāsim: Yazīd al-Ṭabarī, our mawlā, told me that he was there carrying the writing materials of my father Yūsuf, and remembered all he had said. After praising God, the Mighty and Glorious, and benedictions on the Prophet, he said

“Truly God has shown favor and kindness to you, O People of His Prophet's House, the House of his Succession and source of prophecy, and to you, O people of obedience, the helpers of the Revolution [*dawla*] and assistants of the Call [*daʿwa*] through His gracious acts which may not be reckoned for number and pass not away for the length of eternity, and through His perfect succour, to unite your company and exalt your rule; to secure your power and weaken your enemies, that the Word of Truth might prevail – and you are most worthy of that, and its people. Thus God has made you powerful, for God is puissant and mighty, and you are the helpers of the service [*dīn*] of God well-favored, and wielders of His sword unsheathed for the People of the House of His Prophet, may He bless him and give him peace! By you He has delivered them from the hands of their oppressors, the Imāms of tyranny [the Umawīs], breakers of God's compact and shedders of hallowed blood, the consumers of the conquests and appropriators of the booty. Therefore make mention of God's gifts of grace, and take care not to change lest that too be changed. Now God, Mighty and Glorious, has called His viceregent the Imām Mūsā al-Hādī // and taken him to Himself, empowering after him a rightly-guided [*rashīd*] and well-pleasing Commander of the Faithful, merciful to you and compassionate, who will accept those of you who do good and pardon benevolently those of you who trespass, and he – God give him long enjoyment in His grace, and keep for him the charge He has given him, the rule of the Community, entrusting him with what may be entrusted to His friends, the people who obey Him! – has promised you for his part kindness and mercy to you, and to share your gifts among you according to your merit, giving to you from the lawful wealth which God has given the Caliphs, from what is in the treasuries, the equivalent of so-and-so many months' salary, apart from other gifts you may receive, retaining the rest for the protection of what you would defend, and what charges may occur to the treasury in the provinces and outlying areas from rebels and heretics, until the reserves return to their fullness and abundance and their former state. So praise God, renewing your gratitude so as to deserve an increase in His benevolence to you by the good opinion of you He renews in the Commander of the Faithful and His grace through him upon you, may God assist him to obey Him. Ask of God that He grant him length of days, and grant you through him continual wellbeing; and so you may receive mercy. Give him the handclasp of your good faith and stand to swear your allegiance. May God preserve you and protect you, may He set things aright through you and at your hands and bring you near himself in the relation reserved for His righteous servants.”

[601]

Yaḥyā b. Ḥasan b. ʿAbd al-Khāliq --- Muḥammad b. Hishām al-Makhzūmī: Yaḥyā b. Khālīd came to al-Rashīd while he was sleeping under a quilt with no waist-wrapper the night al-Hādī died, and said "Rise, Commander of the Faithful." At this, al-Rashīd said "How you terrify me with any admiration of my succession! You know what my situation is with that man, and if this gets to him, what will be my situation then!" Yaḥyā told him "Here is al-Ḥarrānī, Mūsā's wazīr, and here is his seal." At this he sat up in his bed, and said "Give me counsel!" // While he was still speaking, a messenger arrived and said "A boy-child is born to you!" He said "I have named him ʿAbdallāh," and said again to Yaḥyā "Give me counsel!" "Then," said Yaḥyā, "I advise you to keep Armenia for yourself!" "I've done it," said Hārūn. "By God I will not pray in ʿĪsābādh unless it is under my control. I shall pray the noon-prayer nowhere but in Baghdad, and with the head of Abū ʿIṣma [carried] before me!"

Then he dressed and went out to lead the prayers over al-Hādī. After that, he called for Abū ʿIṣma and cut off his head, and had it carried before him on a lance when he entered Baghdad. This was because he had once been riding with Jaʿfar, the son of al-Hādī, when they came to one of the bridges of ʿĪsābādh. Then Abū ʿIṣma had turned to him and said "Stay where you are, and let the Heir to the Throne pass!" Hārūn had replied "Hearing and obeying are due the Prince!" and had reined in until Jaʿfar was across the bridge. This was his reason for killing Abū ʿIṣma.

When al-Rashīd came to the middle of the bridge into Baghdad, he called for divers and said "Al-Mahdī once gave me a ring for which he had paid a hundred thousand dinars, a ring they called 'the Mountain.' I once entered my brother's presence wearing it, and when I had left him, Salīm al-Aswad overtook me here in the middle of the bridge and told me 'The Commander of the Faithful orders you to hand over the ring to me,' so I threw it into the river at this spot."<sup>417</sup> They dived and brought it out, and he took the greatest pleasure in it.

Muḥammad b. Ishāq al-Hāshimī --- several of his friends, including Ṣabbāḥ b. Khāqān al-Tamīmī: Mūsā had deposed al-Rashīd as heir, and had had the oath taken to his son Jaʿfar, while ʿAbdallāh b. Mālik was

<sup>417</sup> Ibn ʿAbdūs al-Jahshiyārī says that al-Hādī wanted the ring and had threatened Yaḥyā al-Barmakī with death if he did not persuade Hārūn to part with it. As part of his policy of giving up anything but the succession to conciliate al-Hādī, Yaḥyā begged Hārūn to present it to his brother. Hārūn then set out, but on the way threw it into the river – possibly because al-Hādī, to prevent Hārūn from a moral victory, sent a Caliphal servant to demand it of him. If true, the story illustrates Hārūn's immature behavior and his cavalier treatment of his mentor Yaḥyā. See *al-Wuzarāʾ*, 201, also Abbott, *Two Queens*, 102.

## THE YEAR 174

(20 MAY 790–9 MAY 791)



Among the events of this year were tribal uprisings [*‘aṣabiya*] in Syria. Al-Rashīd made Ishāq b. Sulaymān al-Hāshimī governor of Sind and Makrān; he appointed Yūsuf, son of the Qāḍī Abū Yūsuf<sup>428</sup> as a qāḍī while his father was yet alive; and Rawḥ b. Ḥātim, governor of Ifrīqiya, perished. //

[610]

This year al-Rashīd left Baghdad for Bāqirdā and Bāzabdā,<sup>429</sup> and built a palace at Bāqirdā. On this, a poet said,

“Bāqirda and Bāzabdā for summer or for spring!  
At Bāqirdā and Bāzabdā the sweet, cool fountains sing.  
And Baghdad, what is Baghdad? Even as its dust  
Is excrement, so its heat’s like depth of lust.”

‘Abd al-Malik b. Ṣāliḥ<sup>430</sup> led the summer expedition in this year.

Al-Rashīd led the Pilgrimage again this year. He began at Madīna, and distributed great wealth among its inhabitants. The plague had broken out in Mecca, so he did not enter it until the Day of Moistening when he performed the Circumambulation of the Ka‘ba and the Course between Ṣafā and Marwā, and did not stay longer in the town.

<sup>428</sup> Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb al-Anṣārī al-Kūfī was one of the students of Abū Ḥanīfa and founders of the Ḥanafī school of Sunnī Islam. Hārūn gave him the new title Qāḍī al-Quḍāt, “Judge of Judges.” See *E.I.*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. Abū Yūsuf.

<sup>429</sup> LeStrange says that Bāzabdā was on the west bank of the Tigris in the Bāqirdā district of the Tigris, and the site of a Roman fortress. See LeStrange, 93f. Yāqūt states that Bāzabdā on the west bank, and Bāqirdā on the east bank of the Tigris were two districts, and Bāzabdā took its name from the village of that name, *Mu‘jam*, s.v. Bāzabdā and Bāqirdā. <sup>430</sup> ‘Abd al-Malik b. Ṣāliḥ b. ‘Alī, the ‘Abbāsī.

sell you for it.” “Don’t say anything but good to the ‘Abbāsī!”, said Hārūn, and ordered Yaḥyā to be given a hundred thousand dinars that day, though he had imprisoned him part of a day.

Abū Yūnus: This made the third time Hārūn had imprisoned him, and four hundred thousand dinārs he had sent him.

In this year, tribal strife broke out between the Yamanīs and the Nizārīs in Syria. The head of the Nizārī faction at the time was Abū al-Haydhām.<sup>445</sup>

#### ACCOUNTS OF THE TRIBAL STRIFE IN SYRIA

These disorders broke out in Syria, where the sovereign’s administrator at this time was Mūsā b. ‘Isā. Many people were killed as a result of the feuding between the two factions, so al-Rashīd made Mūsā b. Yaḥyā al-Barmakī governor of Damascus. He put a number of troops and officers and experienced elder secretaries under him. When he came to Syria, he was permitted to go to the residence of Šāliḥ b. ‘Alī al-Hāshimī,<sup>446</sup> and Mūsā stayed there until he had made peace among the people and the disturbances were quiet and government was re-established. The report of this came to al-Rashīd in Baghdad and he gave Yaḥyā final disposition of the prisoners who had been taken. Yaḥyā pardoned them, and what they had done, and brought them to Baghdad. On this Ishāq b. Ḥassān al-Khuzaymī<sup>447</sup> said:

“Who’ll convey us to Yaḥyā when way is barred  
 By roars of every furious lion?  
 O unforsaking Shepherd of Islam,  
 In felicitous way, in fragrance conspicuous –  
 Wholesome both his drinking place and what is poured as drink –  
 He sleeps in the hills and the mountains  
 Until his camel kneels stretching out its neck,  
 Or he drops his anchor in the City of Peace.  
 Every frontier has its guard from his heart,  
 And the radiance of his eye still hovers over it.”

<sup>445</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *Tārīkh*, v, 91: “Strife broke out in Damascus between the Yamanīs and the Muḍarīs [Nizārīs]. The head of the Muḍarī faction was Abū al-Haydhām, whose name was ‘Amīr b. ‘Umāra b. Khuzaym al-Nā’im [ . . . ] al-Murri, one of the famous bedouin horsemen. The reason for this strife was that al-Rashīd’s governor in Sijistān had killed a brother of Abū al-Haydhām, so he rebelled and attracted a great following.”

<sup>446</sup> At Salamyā, see n. 254.

<sup>447</sup> Ishāq b. Ḥassān al-Khuzaymī, not mentioned in the *Aghānī* or *Fihrist*, but mentioned briefly in *Irshād al-Arib ilā Ma’rifat al-Adīb* of Yāqūt, see v, 457.

And another poet said of Mūsā,

[626]

“Discord has broken out in Syria  
 That whitens the head of an infant. //  
 Mūsā was poured upon it  
 With his cavalry and troops,  
 And Syria surrendered when  
 He came, the unique in his weave,  
 He the generous, who has  
 Bested the best by his openhandedness.  
 Infected by the generosity of his father  
 Yaḥyā, the liberality of his forbears,  
 Mūsā b. Yaḥyā has excelled  
 In new initiative and glory.  
 The Mount of Glory Mūsā [Moses] has obtained,  
 Though glory was the stuffing of his cradle.  
 I single him out for eulogy  
 Whether in prose or in poetry.  
 From among the Barmakīs, one rod  
 Is for him, and how noble a stalk!  
 Their poems of eulogy comprise all meters,  
 Even *al-khafīfa* and *al-madīda*.<sup>448</sup>

This same year, al-Rashīd replaced Ghīṭrif b. ‘Aṭā’ as governor of Khurāsān with Ḥamza b. Mālik b. Haytham al-Khuzā‘ī, whose nickname was “the Bridegroom.”

Al-Rashīd also appointed Ja‘far b. Yaḥyā al-Barmakī governor of Egypt, and ‘Umar b. Mihrān<sup>449</sup> ruled it for him.

WHY AL-RASHĪD MADE JA‘FAR GOVERNOR OF EGYPT AND JA‘FAR  
 HAD ‘UMAR RULE IT

Muḥammad b. ‘Umar --- Aḥmad b. Mihrān --- al-Rashīd: Mūsā b. ‘Īsā the ‘Abbāsī aimed at throwing off his allegiance. He was already governor of Egypt, and al-Rashīd swore “By God, I shall replace him with the lowliest man at my court, so find me such a man.” At this, someone mentioned ‘Umar b. Mihrān, who used to be a secretary to Khayzurān, and had never worked for anyone else. // He was a man with a squint, whose face was deformed, and whose costume was vile. His *taylasān* was the best garment he possessed, though it was worth only thirty dirhams.

<sup>448</sup> *Khafīf* and *madīd* are two rarely used metres of verse. <sup>449</sup> See n. 395.

He used to hitch up his clothes and roll up his sleeves, and he rode a mule with a rope halter and an iron bit, while his slave would ride on its cruppers. Al-Rashīd now sent for him and set him over Egypt, in charge of the land-tax, estates, and military arrangements. He, however, said "Commander of the Faithful, I shall govern it on one condition." "What is it?" said Hārūn. "That I have permission, when I have set the country in order, to leave," he replied. This he granted to him. Then he went to Egypt, and his appointment was made while Mūsā b. ʿĪsā was still governing there, and Mūsā was expecting his arrival. ʿUmar entered the city on his mule, with his slave Abū Durra mounted on a pack-mule. He went to the residence of Mūsā b. ʿĪsā when all the people were present, and went in and sat down among the last of the people. When the people of the public audience had dispersed, Mūsā b. ʿĪsā said to ʿUmar "Is there something you need, old man?" "Yes," he replied, "May God make things right for the Prince!" Then he brought out his documents and handed them to him. Mūsā said "Let Abū Ḥaḥṣ come – and may God preserve him!" "I am Abū Ḥaḥṣ," he replied. "You are ʿUmar b. Mihrān?" Mūsā asked. "I am," he said. "Why then, God cursed Pharaoh for saying 'Is not mine the kingdom of Egypt?'"<sup>450</sup> said Mūsā. He handed over the administration to him and left the country. Then ʿUmar went to Abū Durra, his slave, and said "Don't accept any presents except those that can be put in leather bags: do not accept an animal or a slave-girl or a slave-boy." People began to send their gifts and he would accept only valuables and clothing, and bring them to ʿUmar, who would label them with the names of the donors. Then he levied the taxes. Now there were certain people in Egypt who had become accustomed to putting off payment and defaulting on their land-tax. He began with one of these men. The man put him off, and he told him, "By God, you will only pay the land-tax you owe at the treasury of the City of Peace, if you [ever] hand it over." The man said "I will pay." ʿUmar grew harsh with him; then he said "I have sworn, and I do not break my oath," and sent him to Baghdad with two men from the army. Tax-administrators at that time used to correspond directly with the Caliph, so he sent a letter to al-Rashīd, saying "I sent for So-and-so, and requested him to pay the taxes he owes, but he put me off and told me to wait. I gave him a respite and then called him again, but he delayed and tended to argue about it, so I have sworn that he should not pay it anywhere but to the treasury in Baghdad. The total he owes is this much, and I am sending him with so-and-so and such-a-one from the Commander of the Faithful's troops, from so-and-so's com-

[628]

<sup>450</sup> Qur. 43:50.

mand. If the Commander of the Faithful sees fit to write to me upon his arrival, then may he do it, if God – be He exalted – pleases.”

After that no one put him off about any part of the land-tax, and he collected the first and second installments of the tax. When the third became due, there ensued problems and delays. At this, he called those who owed the land-tax together with the merchants and claimed the payment. They then delayed, and complained that they were in straits. At this he ordered the gifts that they had sent him brought in, opened the sacks and called for an appraiser. He weighed what was in the purses and credited the donors with those sums, then he called for the chests and auctioned off what was in them to the merchants, crediting the donors with those sums. After this he said “O people, I kept your gifts for you until the time you needed them, so now give us what is ours.” After this, they paid him until the total tax assessment for Egypt was paid, and sent in, and it was not known of anyone else that he made up the total assessment for Egypt. Then he left as he had come, riding on a mule with Abū Durra on another mule – he had permitted him that.

This year the summer campaign was led by ʿAbd al-Rahmān b. ʿAbd al-Malik, and he conquered a fortress.<sup>451</sup>

[629] Sulaymān the son of the Caliph al-Manṣūr led the Pilgrimage, // and according to al-Wāqidi, Zubayda the wife of Hārūn and her brother made the Pilgrimage with him.

<sup>451</sup> Ibn al-Khayyāt says “There was no summer campaign in this year, but ʿAbd al-Malik b. Ṣāliḥ [the ʿAbbāsī] wrote to Makhlad b. Yazīd b. ʿUmar b. Hubayra, ordering him to march against Dabasa, where ʿAbd al-Malik’s son ʿAbd al-Rahmān would meet him, so they conquered it together.” See *Taʾriḫ*, 483. Theophanes says the fortress of Thebasa was taken by the Arabs in October of 793, see *Chronicle*, 152.



## THE YEAR 180

(16 MARCH 796—4 MARCH 797)



Among the events of this year was the factional strife [*ʿaṣabīya*] that broke out in Syria among its inhabitants.

It is mentioned that when this factional strife developed and became a momentous matter, al-Rashīd became worried, and entrusted Jaʿfar b. Yaḥyā al-Barmakī with the government of Syria, saying “Either you will go there, or I shall go.” “No, I shall myself defend you,” Jaʿfar told him, and set out with the leading officers, horses, mules and weapons. He made ʿAbbās b. Muḥammad b. Musayyab b. Zuhayr his Chief of Security and Shabīb b. Ḥumayd b. Qaḥṭaba Captain of his Guard. Then he went to Syria and reconciled its inhabitants and slew the bandits there and those who had taken to robbery. He disarmed them, leaving not a lance or a horse. The inhabitants returned to security and tranquility, and the conflagration was extinguished. Manṣūr al-Namarī said, as Jaʿfar was setting out:

“Kindled in Syria are the fires of civil strife,

Yet this is the season of Syria for fires to subside,  
Since there swells a wave of the sea of Barmak’s House  
Against it, extinguished are comets and portents of evil.

The Commander of the Faithful hurled Jaʿfar against it,  
In whom is the cure of its fracture, its bonesetting;  
He has launched the auspicious of soul and glorious,

[640] By whom will be reconciled Qaḥṭān and Nizār. //

Over them a Barmakī rock is poised to crush,  
Whose falling is meant for the heads of the rebels.

You come leading a forest of men in whose heights  
Are like stars of the Pleiades, the Dooms are its fruits.  
When its banners flutter and make noise in the wind,

The hearer is struck with fear in bewilderment.  
 So say to the people of Syria, 'Let not your hopes  
 Becloud your minds, be they in aspiration great or little,  
 For now the Commander of the Faithful in his own spirit  
 Is come to you – if not his soul, then his soul's chosen –  
 The ruler hoped for in piety and in fear of God,  
 Whose authority is unattainable in its eminence.'  
 Minister of the Commander of the Faithful, his sword  
 And lance, whose edges make war itself to bleed,  
 To whomever else the Caliph's secret thoughts be hid,  
 In you are found their shelter, for you are their refuge.  
 You have fulfilled, and not deceived a folk in any compact,  
 And you've approached no situation that could bring you shame.  
 A physician to bring affairs to life, though all awry  
 By operation of the Age their necks, for you are their bonesetter. // [641]  
 Whenever Yaḥyā's son Ja'far is met  
 By difficulties great, their enormity does not dismay him.  
 From you in Syria has been raised a cloud  
 Whose benefits are hoped for, whose destructive power feared,  
 And blessed are the folk there, else woe betide their mothers!  
 Life is come to Syria, or else is come perdition.  
 And they make peace, it was a cloud of favor  
 And of rain; and if not, then its drops are blood.  
 Your father, lord of kings, Yaḥyā Khālid's son  
 Is brother to favor and to grace in which great things seem small.  
 Where'er you look, in Barmakis is generosity  
 Like races run so swift their dust is settled.  
 He whose mount stops at your tent brings stars of fortune,  
 And mighty grows the clan who has you as its neighbour.  
 Is my excuse to the fates, that their power  
 And their enforcement still falls short of Ja'far?  
 The eye of sorrow burns at his departure,  
 And my soul cannot find rest when it recalls him."

Ja'far b. Yaḥyā set Ṣāliḥ b. Sulaymān over the Balqā' Plain and its adjacent areas, placed as his deputy in Damascus ʿĪsā b. al-ʿAkkī, and set out for home. Al-Rashīd heaped favors upon him. It is mentioned that when he came before al-Rashīd, he entered his presence and kissed his hands // and his feet, and then remained standing before him and said, [642]  
 "Praise be to God, O Commander of the Faithful, who has comforted my loneliness and answered my cry and had mercy upon my entreaty and postponed

but stir them up for them until they earn them an inheritance of everlasting sorrow," ʿAbd al-Malik told him.

As they were passing Manbij, where ʿAbd al-Malik's dwelling was, al-Rashīd said to him, "Is this your place?" "It is yours, Commander of the Faithful, and came to me through you," he replied. "What's it like?" he asked, "Less than the houses of my family; better than the houses of Manbij," he told him. "What are the nights like there?" he asked. "All waking," he said.

#### QĀSIM B. AL-RASHĪD'S INVASION OF BYZANTINE TERRITORY

This year al-Qāsim b. Rashīd invaded the Byzantine territory in the month of Shaʿbān [30 July–27 August, 803] and halted before Qurra and laid siege to Ḥiṣn Sinān<sup>524</sup> until they were exhausted. Then the Byzantines sent to him, offering him three hundred and twenty Muslim male prisoners of war so that he would leave there. He agreed to do so, and withdrew [695] from Qurra and Ḥiṣn Sinān by a truce. //

ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā b. Mūsā died on this expedition in the territory of the Byzantines, where he had gone with al-Qāsim.

#### THE BYZANTINE BREACH OF TRUCE

This year the Ruler of the Byzantines broke the truce which had been between his predecessor and the Muslims, and denied what the king before him had guaranteed. The reason for this was that there had been peace before between the Muslims and the ruler of Byzantium. Their ruler at that time was Irene – and we have mentioned before this the peace between her and the Muslims. Then the Byzantines turned against Irene and deposed her, and chose as their king Nikephoros. The Byzantines mention that this Nikephoros was a descendant of Jafna of Ghassān<sup>525</sup> and before he became king had been in charge of the Bureau of Land-tax. Irene died five months after she was deposed. It is mentioned that after he became king, and the Byzantines came together in obedience to him, Nikephoros wrote to al-Rashīd:

"From Nikephoros, Basileos of the Romaioi,<sup>526</sup> to Hārūn, King of the Arabs. As for what follows, the Queen who was my predecessor put you in the rook's square,

<sup>524</sup> Ḥiṣn Sinān is identified by Yāqūt as a fortress in Byzantine territory. Qurra is not identified. Theophanes states that in August the Emperor Nikephoros I sallied forth against the Arabs, and met them by Krasos in Phrygia, where he lost many men and was almost captured, see *Chronicle*, 162.

<sup>525</sup> Jafna b. ʿAmr was the reputed founder of the pre-Islamic Ghassānī Arab Christian state in Syria. See *E.I.*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. Ghassān, also Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 78ff.

<sup>526</sup> This would have been the title translated here to Arabic as *Malik al-Rūm*.

and herself in the square of the pawn, and sent you such wealth as truly should have been sent by someone like you to one such as she, but that was by the weakness of women and their foolishness. When you have read my letter, return the money which she sent to you, and free yourself from the consequences of this extortion to you, otherwise the sword must decide between us.”

When al-Rashīd read this letter, such wrath fell upon him that no one could look at him without his speaking to them, and those with him dispersed, fearing lest some word or act from them anger him still more. His wazīr was unable to decide whether to counsel him, or leave him to follow his own course, without him. Then he called for pen and ink, and wrote on the back of the letter: //

[696]

“In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. From Hārūn, Commander of the Faithful, to Nikephoros the dog of the Byzantines: I have read your letter, son of an infidel woman. You shall see my answer, and it will not be in words. Goodbye.”

Then he set out on that very day, and halted at the gates of Heraclea, and took it and plundered it. He took the best of it, and seized and ruined, burned, and laid waste. At this, Nikephoros begged him to accept a yearly tribute, and he consented. Then when he returned from this expedition and had come to Raqqa, Nikephoros broke the treaty, and betrayed the compact. The cold was severe, and Nikephoros felt certain that he would not come back. When word came that Nikephoros had gone back on what he had undertaken, no one was prepared to inform al-Rashīd of this, fearing what would happen to him and to them in war at such a time of year, so they made a ruse by means of a poet of the people of Junda<sup>527</sup> called Abū Muḥammad ʿAbdallāh b. Yūsuf. It is also said his name was al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf al-Taymī.<sup>528</sup> He recited these verses:

“Nikephoros has broken the treaty you gave him,  
 And on him fall the changes of perdition.  
 Be happy, O Commander of the Faithful,  
 For God thereby brings you a great booty,  
 And your subjects have rejoiced that thus  
 The envoy of that breach came as herald of good news.  
 They beg that your right hand may hasten the campaign  
 That heals their spirits on the battlefield of renown.

<sup>527</sup> Junda, *sic* in text, was a locality in Iraq near the mouth of the Nīl Canal, according to Yāqūt, *Muʿjam*, s.v. Junda. However, the Cairo text corrects this, and says the correct reading is Khurra. There were two districts of Fārs, Ardashīr Khurra and Shāpūr Khurra, but neither would be expected to furnish Arabic poets at this time.

<sup>528</sup> Al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf al-Taymī was an ʿAbbāsī poet. I have found no biographical details about him.

He paid his capitation tax and lowered his face,  
 Wary of cutting swords, as men are wary of death.  
 You saved him from its coming, and 'twas as though  
 [697] The firebrands blazing in our hands had been snuffed out. //  
 Then you dismissed the ranks of men securely,  
 And thus your neighbour was in safety, pleased.  
 Nikephoros, when you deceived, as far from you,  
 The Imām, you were both ignorant and deluded!  
 Did you think, breaking faith, you were out of his reach?  
 Your mother be deprived of you, your thought was vanity!  
 Your fate has met you in a sea of auguries,  
 And oceans from the Imām have overwhelmed you.  
 For truly, the Imām is well able to get at you  
 Whether your dwellings are near, or lie afar.  
 Though we be absent, yet the Imām is not neglectful  
 Of aught he governs by his firmness or directs;  
 A king who has dedicated his soul to the *jihād*,  
 So that his enemy by him is ever overpowered.  
 O ye who would in aspiration seek to please God –  
 To whom no secret thought is ever hidden –  
 No good advice can profit him who'd cheat his Imām,  
 Yet good advice is ever thanked in good advisers.  
 Good counsel to the Imām is an obligation of faith;  
 To those who give it, expiation and purification.”

On this, Ismā'īl b. al-Qāsim Abū al-Atāhiya says,

“The Imām of Guidance has concerned himself for the Religion,  
 And given copious drink to all who prayed for rain.  
 Yours are the two names, derived from *rushd* and *hudā*  
 So you are he called “Right-Guided Son of him Divinely Guided.”  
 When you are displeased with a thing, it is accursed,  
 And if you're pleased, it pleases all the people.  
 Your lofty hand has opened up for us the Orient and Occident,  
 And thus enlarged are both the East and West.  
 [698] You have embroidered on the face of earth with generous dews, //  
 So that her face by generosity was adorned.  
 God has ordained that Hārūn's reign be limpid, clear –  
 And God's decree is final for creation.  
 The World yields up her milk for Hārūn, well content,  
 And Nikephoros is Hārūn's tax-paying *dhimmi*.”

Al-Taymī also recited

“Sporting with a trifle, the causes of death follow Nikephoros,  
 Since they have seen him playing in the Lion’s den –  
 And none who seek that lair shall ’scape from terror,  
 Though they elude the fangs and flesh-hooked paws.  
 He broke his compacts, and he who unknots those brings  
 Dissolution on his soul, not on his enemies.  
 The Imām whose benefits are sought for  
 Let him taste the fruits of forbearance, inherited;  
 But he rejected friendship after he had granted it  
 And now his wives must weep for him, red-eyed, with tangled hair.”<sup>529</sup>

When he had finished his recitation, al-Rashīd said “Has Nikephoros truly done that?” and he understood that his ministers had employed a subterfuge in this matter. He returned to the offensive, despite the greatest trials and harshest inconvenience, until he regained his former position, and this time he did not stop until he was satisfied and had obtained all he desired. At this, Abū al-‘Atāhiya said,

“Has not Heraclea cried for destruction  
 By the king stayed in right judgment?  
 At early morning Hārūn came thundering with death,  
 And lightning blazes forth from cutting swords, // [699]  
 While banners bringing with them victory  
 Pass by like pieces of the clouds.  
 Commander of the Faithful, you have conquered; be secure  
 Rejoicing in the spoils, and in the return.”

#### THE SLAYING OF IBRĀHĪM B. ‘UTHMĀN B. NAHĪK

It was in this year, according to al-Wāqidi, that Ibrāhīm b. ‘Uthmān b. Nahīk was killed, but someone else says that this occurred in the year 188 [804].

Šāliḥ al-A‘mā,<sup>530</sup> who was close to Ibrāhīm b. ‘Uthmān: Ibrāhīm used often to mention Ja‘far b. Yaḥyā and the Barmakis and weep in grief and love for them, until he went beyond weeping to seeking revenge, and

<sup>529</sup> Al-Taymī seems to have been unaware that even Christian emperors were not excused from monogamy.

<sup>530</sup> Šāliḥ al-A‘mā (the Blind) is unidentified. It is tempting to identify him with Šāliḥ al-Miskīn, the son of al-Manšūr, who had an estate on the east side of the Tigris near that of ‘Uthmān b. Nahīk, see Lassner, *Topography*, 82 and 255 n. 38.