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## THE PORTRAYAL OF ABBASID RULERS IN *CHRONOGRAPHY* OF THEOPHANES THE CONFESSOR

**Abstract.** This text supplements another, a paper presented a decade ago on the portrayal of Umayyad rulers in *Chronography* of Theophanes the Confessor (B. Cecota, *Islam, the Arabs and Umayyad Rulers according to Theophanes the Confessor's Chronography*, “Studia Ceranea” 2, 2012, p. 97–111). I am limiting myself here to discussing only those source remarks which directly concern one of the Abbasid Caliphs, or alternatively, to narratives structured in such a manner that they implied certain traits of a ruler. General remarks concerning the portrayal of the entire dynasty have been included, both in the main text and in the footnotes, only where this was necessary for the understanding of the context in which the Caliphs’ descriptions appear.

**Keywords:** Abbasid, Byzantine historiography, Theophanes the Confessor, Byzantine-Arabic relations, Caliphate

It should be noted at the outset that the passages devoted to the history of the seizing of power by the Abbasids, as presented in the *Chronography*, allow us to arrive at two key conclusions. First, the very legitimacy of the new dynasty was not particularly firm, as the author presented its members as refugees, taking shelter in a desert (AM 6240)<sup>1</sup> and who used others to achieve their goals – as exemplified in particular by Abu Muslim, who did not take any real personal risks<sup>2</sup>. The sons of Echim and Alim<sup>3</sup>, meaning Hashemites and Alids, have been described as being related to Muhammad, but the author did not consider their family ties to the Prophet as providing a stronger mandate than that of the Umayyads, whom he moreover presented as direct successors to the founder of the new

<sup>1</sup> *Theophanis Chronographia*, AM 6240, ed. C. DE BOOR, Lipsiae 1883 (cetera: THEOPHANES), p. 424.19–20. The reference to the southern border of Syria, where the center of the Abbasid dynasty, Humayma, was located, allows us to suppose that Theophanes did not pick his information from the sources favourable to the new dynasty, as its historiography generally ignored the connections of the house of ‘Abbas with this region: P.M. COBB, *Community versus Contention: Ibn ‘Asākir and ‘Ab-bāsid Syria*, [in:] *Ibn ‘Asākir and Early Islamic History*, ed. J.E. LINDSAYS, Princeton 2001, p. 100–126.

<sup>2</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6240, p. 424.20–23.

<sup>3</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6240, p. 424.18.

religion, and emphasised that ancestors of Marwan II had ruled from the time of Muhammad himself<sup>4</sup>. Let us add here that this was not consistent with the historical truth, of course because of the Righteous Caliphs, among whom (beside one of the members of the Umayyad dynasty) was also the progenitor of the above-mentioned Alids.

The second conclusion is that the leadership of the new dynasty had become more fractured: starting with the person who initiated the uprising – Ibrahim al-Imam ibn Muhammad, the brother of As-Saffah and Al-Mansur, and who ultimately did not take power, to the (very clearly emphasised by Theophanes) subsequent division of the state into near-independent domains. In relating the events of AM 6241, the Byzantine historian mentioned that Abdel the son of Alim (Abd Allah ad-Jafar) received Syria, Salim son of Alim (Salih ibn Ali) – Egypt, and Abdel, the brother of Abul ‘Abbas (As-Saffah) – Mesopotamia. The latter, according to *Chronography*, became the supreme ruler, and established his seat of power in Persia, having appropriated – along with his Persian allies<sup>5</sup>, as was strongly emphasised – the treasures taken from the Umayyads.

<sup>4</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6240, p. 424.13–14. The mention of Alids alongside Hashemites by Theophanes need not be incidental. Research into the propagandist versions of the narratives presented by the new dynasty shows that the Abbasids did also refer to their Alid heritage, emphasising only that it was thanks to the activity of the house of ‘Abbas (with the passivity of the house of Ali) the Caliphate returned to *ahl al-bayt* – the Prophet’s family: E.L. DANIEL, *The Anonymous “History of the Abbasid Family” and its Place in Islamic Historiography*, IJMES 14.4, 1982, p. 419–434. Descendants of Ali (more specifically – of Husayn) had, according to some scholars, during the war between the Umayyads and Abbasids considerable chances to create their own bid for power, and posed a danger to both of these dynasties. After all, some of the insurgent units have come together under the slogans of restoring the Caliph’s power to the Prophet’s family; at the same time the need for new *shura* was raised: P. CRONE, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, Edinburgh 2005, p. 87–98. The Alids have lost this chance because of their passive attitude: F. OMAR, *Some Aspects of the Abbāsīd-Husaynīd Relations during the Early ‘Abbāsīd Period 132–193 A.H./750–809 A.D.*, Ara 22.2, 1975, p. 170–179.

<sup>5</sup> These, in particular in the context of the important role of the Persian element which was deprived of significance by the Umayyads, was highlighted in the earlier literature on the subject of the Abbasid uprising: J. WELLHAUSEN, *Das arabische Reich und sein Sturz*, Berlin 1960, p. 247–305; G. VAN VLOTEN, *Zur Abbasidengeschichte*, ZDMG 52, 1898, p. 218–226; IDEM, *Recherches sur la domination arabe, le Chiitisme et les croyances messianiques sous le Khalifat des Omayyade*, Amsterdam 1894, p. 12. Currently, following the research achievements of the seventies and eighties of the past century, the attention is rather on the contribution of the Arab tribes settled in Khorasan, of which it would be difficult to say that they had been excluded: M. SHARON, *Black Banners from the East. The Establishment of the ‘Abbāsīd State. Incubation of a Revolt*, Jerusalem–Leiden 1983; J. LASSNER, *The Shaping of ‘Abbasid Rule*, Princeton 1980 [= PSNE, 5102]; M.A. SHABAN, *The Abbasid Revolution*, Cambridge 1970; F. OMAR, *The Abbasid Caliphate, 132/750–170/786*, Baghdad 1969. Cf. also the discussion on the Abbasid way of winning over the dissatisfied members of particular Arab tribes, who were often instrumentally used and subsequently eliminated: Kh.Y. BLANKINSHIP, *The Tribal Factor in the Abbasid Revolution: The Betrayal of the Imam Ibrahim B. Muhammad*, JAOS 108.4, 1988, p. 589–603.

This reference to the Persian connections of the new Caliph gains significance in the context of the later remarks regarding the rebellion of the Arab tribes against the Abbasids, e.g. in AM 6242, when a Qays<sup>6</sup> uprising was quelled by a Persian contingent<sup>7</sup>. The weak legitimacy of As-Saffah's power would also have been attested to by a remark about a council held in Samaria and Trachonitis, during which his leadership over the others was decided by lot<sup>8</sup>. Theophanes added there

<sup>6</sup> A reference to the split into the Qays and the Yemen, which lasted from the time of the second *fitna* and the takeover of the Caliphate by the Marwanids. What is important here is that Theophanes is attempting to associate this split with Abu Muslim, who was supposedly inciting the Yemen against the Qays. Indeed, the rivalry between the two tribes certainly was relevant in the context of the subsequent and final conquest of Syria by the Abbasids, during which the Yemen lent their support to the new dynasty, facilitating the entry of the black-bannered troops into Damascus, after Marwan made his escape. There is also no doubt that the last of the Umayyad Caliphs relied in his activity in 748–749 in western Iran and Iraq on the Qays chiefs, such as Yazid ibn 'Umar ibn Hubayra, Nubata ibn Hanzala Kilab, or 'Amir ibn Dubara Murrah. Nonetheless it should be kept in mind that the Qays-Yemen conflict lasted several decades, practically from the 680s, and initially stemmed from the fight over the legacy of the main Umayyad line, the Sufyanids. In *Chronography*, both of the Arab factions appear only at the time of the takeover of power by the Abbasids. Cf. i.a. P. CRONE, *Were the Qays and Yemen of the Umayyad Period Political Parties?*, I 71, 1994, p. 1–57; Kh.Y. BLANKINSHIP, *The Tribal...*, p. 589–603; M. HOEXTER, *The Role of the Qays and Yaman Factions in Local Political Divisions. Jabal Nablus Compared with the Judean Hills in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, AAST 2.1, 1972, p. 277–282; H. KENNEDY, *The Origins of the Qays-Yaman Dispute in Bilad al-Sham*, [in:] *Proceedings of the Second Symposium on the History of Bilād al-Şham during the Early Islamic Period up to 40 A.H. / 640 A.D. The Fourth International Conference on the History of Bilad al-Sham*, ed. M.A. BAKHIT, Amman 1987, p. 168–174.

<sup>7</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6242, p. 427.5–6. Remarks in Theophanes on the subject of the fight with the Qays are also a visible reminiscence of the Syrian traditions. Similar descriptions can also be found in the *Chronicle until 1234: Chronicon Anonymi Auctoris ad Annum Christi 1234 Pertinens*, ed. I.A. BARSOU, J.-B. CHABOT, Louvain 1920, p. 260.16–17, and in Agapius: AGAPIUS (MAHBOUB) DE MENBIDJ, *Kitab al-'Unwan. Histoire universelle. Seconde Partie II*, ed. et trans. A. VASILIEV, Paris 1912 [= PO, 8], p. 530–531. The tendencies noted by Theophanes to undermine the power of the Abbasids by the local Arab tribal associations can be clearly seen in the example of the history of Banu Amilah, who during the Byzantine period were engaged in the defence of the Empire's borders, and who subsequently constituted one of the pillars of the Umayyad rule over Syria, and who during the period of the revolution remained in clear opposition to the Abbasids. One of the reasons for this was supposed to be, according to the scholars studying history of the tribe, the undermining of the Arab element by the new dynasty: M. RIHAN, *The Politics and Culture of An Umayyad Tribe. Conflict and Factionalism in the Early Islamic Period*, London–New York 2014 [= LMEH, 41], p. 84–131, 155–158. These were not, of course, the only causes of the rebellions, of significance was also the Umayyad resentment, with rebellions of Abu al-Ward, the governor of Qinnasrin and Abu Muhammad al-Sufyani, the great-grandson of Muawiyah being prime examples. Cf. P.M. COBB, *White Banners. Contention in 'Abbasid Syria, 750–880*, Albany NJ 2001, p. 43–66.

<sup>8</sup> From Theophanes' point of view it might have seemed a complete absurdity, but this would not have been so from the perspective of the Abbasid principles of choosing a leader, that is, *al-rida min al-Muhammad* (chosen from the Prophet's family by Muslims, in no way imposed), and *al-kitab wa'l-sunna* (according to the Book and the Tradition, exclusively on the basis of the law given by

that, in a way, the authority to give orders in the name of the newly ruling family was held beside him by ad-Jafar, and also by their cousin, Isa ibn Musa<sup>9</sup>. The discussed author did not devote further attention to the first of the Abbasid Caliphs, focusing in his descriptions of the following years primarily on the internal situation in Syria and the persecutions that occurred there, practically limiting his remarks to a mention of the ruler's death in AM 6246<sup>10</sup>.

The problem with the recognition of the authority of the new dynasty is evidenced by the descriptions of the first change on the Caliphate's throne after the Abbasids have taken control of the state. After As-Saffah's death, struggle for his inheritance began among the family members already holding power over individual parts of the state. Theophanes firstly noted that once again the main contender, the brother of the late Caliph, Abu Jafar Al-Mansur, had to turn for help to Abu Muslim, asking him to guard his destined throne<sup>11</sup>. The supposed conflict between the Persians and the Syrians, who lent their support to another contender, 'Abdallah ibn Ali, was highlighted (έναντιούμενον δὲ τοῖς Πέρσαις καὶ προσκείμενον τοῖς τῆς Συρίας). The chronographer even called him the sole ruler of Syria (τὸν μονοστράτηγον Συρίας)<sup>12</sup>. The fact that Al-Mansur's power was not particularly certain had also been attested through an account on his behaviour in relation to Abu Muslim's actions, when the latter had defeated the aforementioned son of Ali ibn 'Abdallah ibn al-'Abbas. In AM 6246 there is a rather extensive passage about the persecutions of Syrian Arabs in Palestine, Emesa, and along the coast of the Mediterranean (τὴν Παλαιστίνην καὶ Ἑμεσαν καὶ τὴν παραλίαν ἐλόντων) carried out by Al-Khurasani's troops. Finally, not receiving support from the main Abbasid line for his actions, Abu Muslim retreated to Persia (πρὸς τὴν ἐνδοτέραν Περσικὴν ὥρμησε σὺν τῷ πλήθει)<sup>13</sup>. Theophanes emphasised here that Al-Mansur feared the main leader of the Abbasid revolution, and therefore decided to use a not too honourable trick – calling upon symbols associated with the Prophet (his staff and sandals – φημί δὴ τῇ ῥάβδῳ καὶ τοῖς σανδαλίοις τοῦ ψευδοπροφήτου Μουάμεδ)

God). On the subject of these rules, cf.: A. MARSHAM, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy. Accession and Succession in the First Muslim Empire*, Edinburgh 2009, p. 183–191.

<sup>9</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6241, p. 425.18–19: καὶ μετ' ἐκείνον τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ Ἀβδελᾶ, καὶ μετὰ τοῦτον τῷ Ἰσὲ Ἰβνιμουσέ.

<sup>10</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6246, p. 428.15–16.

<sup>11</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6246, p. 428.17–19: γράφει οὖν πρὸς τὸν Ἀβουμουσλίμ ὄντα κατὰ τὴν Περσίδα φυλάξαι αὐτῷ τὸν τόπον τῆς ἀρχῆς, καθὼς ἐκληρώθη αὐτῷ.

<sup>12</sup> Passage: THEOPHANES, AM 6246, p. 428.19–24. According to some of the interpretations of 'Abdallah ibn Ali's actions, he not only intended to take the throne, but perhaps also to return to Syria and continue to rule from there, invoking in this way the Umayyad legacy (which would however have been rather ironic, considering that he was one of those responsible for murdering the majority of the members of the previous dynasty): A. BORRUT, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir. L'espace syrien sous les derniers Omeyyades et les premiers Abbassides (v. 72–193/692–809)*, Leiden–Boston 2011 [= IHC, 81], p. 354–367.

<sup>13</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6246, p. 429.1–6.

and the family’s authority (ὅπως αὐτῷ τὴν πατρὶ πρέπουσαν εὐχαριστίαν), he successfully pleaded with the Khorasan leader for an opportunity to meet him. Once Abu Muslim arrived at the agreed location (ὁ δὲ ἀπατηθεὶς παραγίνεται σὺν χιλιάσιν ἰπέων ρ’), he was said to have been murdered by the other personally (ἐνωθεὶς τε αὐτῷ κτείνεται ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ χερσὶν ἰδίαις), while his supporters had been bribed (ὁ δὲ ὄχλοι σκεδασθέντες αὐθημερὸν ᾤχοντο φιλοτιμίαις οὐκ εὐαριθμήτοις ἐφοδιασθέντες). As Theophanes mentioned, it was in this manner that Al-Mansur gained his power (καὶ οὕτω τὰ τῆς ἀρχῆς τῷ Ἀβδελᾶ διευθύνεται)<sup>14</sup>. To sum up then, the legitimacy of his rule, according to the narrative found in the *Chronography*, was limited to a victory – achieved by trickery – over the other pretenders, be it through a military conquest, betrayal or fraud. This was not the only such case of dishonourable conduct attributed to Al-Mansur in *Chronography*. Using lies and poison he got rid of another important (as Theophanes emphasised, third in importance in the Caliphate – ὁ τρίτος κληρὸς τοῦ κρατεῖν) person, his cousin Isa ibn Musa. In the relation AM 6256 we find a rather lengthy story<sup>15</sup> regarding the circumstances in which the latter was excluded from inheritance. When Isa was complaining about his headaches (κεφαλαλούμενον γὰρ ἡμικρανικῶς αὐτὸν ὀρῶν), Al-Mansur offered him a medicine prepared by his court physician Moses, a deacon of the Antiochene church (Μωσεῖ τινι τοῦνομα, διακόνῳ τῆς Ἀντιοχείων ἐκκλησίας), who having received a generous payment (ὄν ἤδη δωρεαῖς ἦν πεπεικῶς δριμύτατον κατασκευάσαι – the passage in fact speaks of bribery), prepared a potent potion with narcotic properties (φάρμακον μετὰ τοῦ καὶ ναρκῶδες εἶναι σφόδρα). Isa, Theophanes emphasised, even though he refused to eat meals in Al-Mansur’s presence out of fear of being poisoned by the latter (καίπερ ἀσφαλιζόμενος τοῦ συμφαγεῖν αὐτῷ διὰ τὴν ἐπιβουλήν), which did not attest well to the Caliph’s moral condition, nonetheless allowed himself to be convinced to take the drug. The “medication” caused his senses to be dulled, and Isa lay for some time senseless (τῶν ἡγεμονικῶν ἐνεργειῶν στέρηθεὶς ἄφωνος προύκειτο), although he later recovered. The Caliph however used the period during which Isa was ailing to convince the Abbasid elites that the latter was not a suitable to be his heir, as a result of which said elites recognised the rights of Al-Mansur’s son, Muhammad ibn ‘Abdallah nicknamed Al-Mahdi (οἱ δὲ ὁμοφρόνως ἀρνησάμενοι αὐτὸν δεξιὰς ἔδωκαν τῷ υἱῷ τοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἀβδελᾶ Μουάμεδ, τῷ ἐπικληθέντι Μαδί). Theophanes concluded his story by highlighting that once Isa recovered, Al-Mansur falsely consoled him, while pretending he had nothing to do with bringing about Isa’s poor physical and mental state. A similar story was also relayed by At-Tabari, the latter however stated that the physician, Bukhtishu Jurjis Abu Jibrail, was of the Nestorian faith<sup>16</sup>. The elimination of political opponents through the

<sup>14</sup> The entirety of the tale of Al-Mansur’s trickery: THEOPHANES, AM 6246, p. 429.6–14.

<sup>15</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6256, p. 435.22 – 436.8.

<sup>16</sup> TABARI, *Annales*, I, 188, vol. I, ed. M.J. DE GOEJE, Leiden 1879 (cetera: TABARI).

use of trickery presented in the aforementioned story, which was after all of an accessory nature, was something of an exception, more often said opponents had been deprived of their lives. Theophanes did not omit the mention of, i.a., the fate of a contender for the Caliphate, ‘Abdallah ibn Ali<sup>17</sup>, about whose fate the Chronographer informed independently in two places – AM 6246<sup>18</sup> and AM 6258<sup>19</sup>. He was locked up in a tower, and its foundations were placed on blocks of salt, which had been washed away by water, and as a result the tower collapsed, killing its troublesome inhabitant. This rather extravagant method of execution is also mentioned by Arabic sources<sup>20</sup>. Theophanes did not provide more specific details, but did write about both the tower which collapsed on the unfortunate man, as well as of an assassination carried out in the ruins of some otherwise undetermined building. It is interesting that he related both versions, and the latter showed that al-Mansur did not keep his side of the agreement with ‘Abdallah, according to which the latter was to be treated according to his rank and descent from the same family, and that he would not suffer any harm<sup>21</sup>. The elaborate manner of the execution was supposed to be a trick which allowed circumventing the arrangements of the *aman* concluded between the Caliph and the rebel. Either way, the Chronographer noted the fact of the murder itself.

The following Abbasid Caliph, Al-Mahdi, appears most frequently in *Chronography* in the context of the military expeditions sent against the Empire, although these had not been led by him personally (some of these were led by his son, Harun). Among these we may nonetheless find one reference to the Caliph’s characteristic traits – in the passage AM 6271 Theophanes mentioned that Al-Mahdi, likely because of the earlier failures of the expeditions sent against the Byzantium, became infuriated and organised one further great expedition, comprised of Persian, Syrian and Iraqi contingents, which succeeded in reaching as far as Dorylaeum<sup>22</sup>. One should add that, firstly, the Abbasid ruler’s reaction to the defeat of his

<sup>17</sup> The question of the correctitude of legitimacy of both the competitors is not simple, and, following Jacob LASSNER, one should consider As-Saffah to have been the main “culprit” behind this; as the aforementioned scholar stressed, As-Saffah’s many achievements did not include preparing of the rules of succession. Thus practically at the dawn of the new dynasty, one of the greatest conflicts over the throne in Abbasid history had taken place (*The Shaping...*, p. 19). Hence the later, from the times of al-Mansur, practice of documents establishing the principles of inheritance (*shart*), according to which the successor was chosen, however according to this procedure some people did also waive their potential rights: A. MARSHAM, *Rituals...*, p. 230–250.

<sup>18</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6246, p. 428.28 – 429.1: ὄν τινα φρουρήσας ἐν οἰκίσκῳ σαθρῶ καὶ κατορυχθῆναι προστάξας τὰ θεμέλια λάθρα τοῦτον ἀπέκτεινεν.

<sup>19</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6258, p. 439.8–9: τούτῳ τῷ ἔτει Ἀβδελᾶς Ἰβνιναλὶμ τέθνηκεν, πτωθέντος ἐπ’ αὐτὸν τοῦ πύργου, ἐν ᾧ ἐφρουρεῖτο.

<sup>20</sup> TABARI, I, 188.

<sup>21</sup> For a detailed discussion of the traditions regarding this agreement, cf.: A. MARSHAM, C.F. ROBINSON, *The Safe-Conduct for the Abbasid ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Alī (d. 764)*, BSOAS 70.2, 2007, p. 247–281.

<sup>22</sup> The entirety: THEOPHANES, AM 6271, p. 452.4–6.

army is hardly surprising, secondly, this is not a remark that in any way would strictly reflect the Caliph's nature. Unfortunately, for the most part we can only count on this type of incomplete information. Al-Mahdi is also described in the context of one of the largest passages of Theophanes' work, which was devoted to the persecution of Christians (the aforementioned AM 6272). It is however worth noting that he was not presented as directly acting against the followers of Christ, but as a man who sent forth a persecutor – Mouchesias – to Syria<sup>23</sup>. Let us add that according to the relation contained in the *Chronography*, the Empress Irene was contacting, regarding peace agreements, not the Caliph, but his son, Harun (AM 6274)<sup>24</sup>. The relation from AM 6276 mentions only the death of Al-Mahdi and the fact of the takeover of power by his son, Musa al-Hadi<sup>25</sup>.

The latter did not really get any attention from Theophanes, who only in AM 6278 remarked about his death and the takeover of power by his brother, Harun ar-Rashid<sup>26</sup>. It is worth noting two facts here – Harun had already appeared on the pages of *Chronography* as the leader of numerous expeditions against Byzantium, and thus in the above passage he was bestowed with the dubious honour of a descriptive appendix regarding his person, according to which he distinguished himself by doing many wrongs to Christians (πολλὰ κακὰ τοῖς Χριστιανοῖς ἐνεδείξατο)<sup>27</sup>. Musa had not been granted such a distinction. Moreover, the sole passage relating in any way to the conditions prevailing under the Abbasid rule during his reign, in AM 6277, may be interpreted as a hint of a certain normalisation in the Christian-Muslim relations and easing up of the persecution. The specific fragment relates to the contacts between the new Patriarch of Constantinople, Tarasios, and the bishoprics in Antioch and Alexandria<sup>28</sup>. Going back to Harun, one should conclude that on the pages of *Chronography* he appeared almost exclusively in military context, and there are practically no mentions of his internal policies, with the exception of remarks on the quelling of a rebellion in Khorasan (AM 6297<sup>29</sup> and perhaps AM 6301, where his death in the same province was given a mention, but without direct references to the ongoing uprising<sup>30</sup>). Moreover, we have not received any characterological description of the ruler, beside a brief summary of his campaign against Nicephoros I (AM 6298), where Theophanes concluded that Harun was satisfied and rejoiced (καὶ δεξάμενος Ἀραβῶν ἦσθη καὶ

<sup>23</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6272, p. 452.22–23. Most likely Jerusalem, as a holy city in which the Caliph was present at the time was mentioned in the passage: καὶ αὐτὸς ὑποστρέφει ἐπὶ τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν. καὶ πέμπει Μουχεσιάν, Ζηλωτὴν λεγόμενον.

<sup>24</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6274, p. 456.19–21.

<sup>25</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6276, p. 457.11–13.

<sup>26</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6278, p. 461.9–10.

<sup>27</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6278, p. 461.10–11.

<sup>28</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6277, p. 460.31 – 461.1.

<sup>29</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6297, p. 481.7–8.

<sup>30</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6301, p. 484.5–7.

ήγαλλιάσατο), because he had been able to subjugate the Empire (ὡς ὑποτάξας τὴν Ῥωμαίων βασιλείαν)<sup>31</sup>. Ar-Rashid appeared in these relations almost like a *God's Scourge* on the Byzantines, since his expeditions were usually highly successful, both during the time when he commanded them as the Caliph's son (AM 6272<sup>32</sup> and AM 6274<sup>33</sup>, when he was receiving a tribute from Irene<sup>34</sup>), and as a ruler in his own right (the expedition described in AM 6298<sup>35</sup>, concluded with Nicephoros' surrender<sup>36</sup>). Theophanes however did not provide an evaluation of the ruler, aside from the remark about him causing much evil to Christians.

We find a similarly brief, single sentence summary of the entire reign in the description of the takeover of power by Harun's successor, Al-Amin, who was characterised by the Chronographer as incompetent in every regard (AM 6301 – Μουάμεδ, ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ, ἀφυῆς κατὰ πάντα<sup>37</sup>), although without specifying the nature of this incompetence. The chronicler appeared to have taken the side of the second of Harun's sons, the younger Al-Ma'mun, who was also aspiring to his father's inheritance. The author emphasised that the other contender was being supported by the army<sup>38</sup>, the same military which had so many times embarked on expeditions against Byzantium under ar-Rashid's command. While under the rule of the latter, the Caliphate – beside the troubles in Khorasan – appears to have been a strong state, ceaselessly focused on expansion. The civil war which had erupted between the two brothers had brought about, according to the Chronographer, a downright apocalyptic anarchy which had resulted in (of importance to Theophanes) numerous persecutions of Christians, murders, pillaging and destruction of monasteries and entire cities<sup>39</sup>. It would seem that the only similar events that could be brought up in comparison are the descriptions of the rule of the Umayyad Marwan II. This is interesting, as according to some of the elements of the Muslim narratives presenting the clash between Harun's inheritors, these take on a similar, almost messianic dimension<sup>40</sup>. The Chronographer may have been then suggesting that there will be no way out from this collapse of the Abbasids under the rule of Al-Amin and Al-Ma'mun, except for another change in power. It appears possible, considering

<sup>31</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6298, p. 482.16–17.

<sup>32</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6272, p. 452.21–22.

<sup>33</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6274, p. 456.2–5.

<sup>34</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6274, p. 456.19–21.

<sup>35</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6298, p. 482.1–3.

<sup>36</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6298, p. 482.13–15.

<sup>37</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6301, p. 484.7–8.

<sup>38</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6301, p. 484.8–10.

<sup>39</sup> These questions are best summed up in the passage opening the description of the civil war – THEOPHANES, AM 6301, p. 484.10–14: κἀντεῦθεν οἱ κατὰ τὴν Συρίαν καὶ Αἴγυπτον καὶ Λιβύην εἰς διαφόρους κατατμηθέντες ἀρχὰς τὰ τε δημόσια πράγματα καὶ ἀλλήλους κατέστρεψαν, σφαγαῖς καὶ ἀρπαγαῖς καὶ παντοίαις ἀτοπίαις πρὸς τε ἑαυτοὺς καὶ τοὺς ὑπ' αὐτοὺς Χριστιανοὺς συγκεχυμένοι.

<sup>40</sup> H. YÜCESOY, *Messianic Beliefs and Imperial Politics in Medieval Islam. The 'Abbāsids Caliphate in the Early Ninth Century*, Columbia SC 2009, p. 71–80.



several highlights of the role of Khorasan/Persia in both the events of 759–750, and those described in the context of the civil war, that for the Byzantine chronicler the latter would have simply been another episode of the uprising, especially since in AM 6304 there is a mention of a usurpation in the context of taking control over Damascus by a pretender (δὲ Δαμασκὸν ἄλλος κατέσχε τύραννος)<sup>41</sup>. Theophanes did not hide his outrage at the anarchy, murders and violence which occurred during the Caliphate's civil war, describing them as abominable to God (καὶ πᾶσαι πράξεις θεοστυγεῖς ἐν κώμαις, with this summary found in the final relation in *Chronography* for AM 6305<sup>42</sup>). There are no signs of the Byzantine's triumphalism in this passage, but rather an alarm caused by the lack of order, which may have resulted (and indeed had, as per Theophanes' ample descriptions) in negative repercussions for the Christian population of the Muslim state.

To sum up, the relations mentioned above, located in the final parts of the *Chronography*, present the situation within the Caliphate in a decidedly apocalyptic tone, and perhaps suggesting that we are dealing with the moment in which the Muslim state was collapsing, the process which began with the Abbasid uprising in the mid-eighth century. Such construction of the narrative in Theophanes' work is to some extent consistent with... the findings of modern day historians. I do not of course mean here the aforementioned rather impassioned descriptions, but rather the analysis of the balance of power at the Baghdad court, of which the Confessor could not have known very much (or did not consider it particularly interesting), and the research on which had led some to far reaching conclusions. According to these, the crisis of the Abbasid dynasty, the problem of leadership in the Muslim state, began with the civil war after Harun ar-Rashid's death.

<sup>41</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6304, p. 497.12–13. Similar narratives, highlighting the Persians of the new ruling dynasty can also be found in the Syrian historiography: J.S. MUTTER, *By the Book: Conversion and Religious Identity in Early Islamic Bilād al-Shām and al-Jazīra* (PhD Thesis, The University of Chicago 2018), p. 66–67. This pointing to the Persian connections of the Abbasids appears to have been an element of a broader idea held by Theophanes, according to which the power taken over by the Arabs had been reverting in his times back to the Persians (in the east, which could give rise to hope of the Empire's return to the western lands of the Muslim empire), however this may well have also been a reminiscence of the current observations of the policies pursued by the Abbasid Caliphs. The Abbasids are indeed associated with a certain departure from the idea of a Caliph as the first among the faithful and a return to the traditions of a Persian monarchy, rooted in the east. The changes in the court, harking back to Sassanid models and introducing, among others, a degree of separation between the ruler and the rest of the people, for example through complex court ceremonies, which nonetheless were carried out in the 'spirit of Islam', and the religion was often the justification for these actions. These questions have been discussed in detail by: M.R. FIGUEROA, *Religión y Estado durante la dinastía abasí. El califato de al-Mansur*, EdAA 40.1, 2005, p. 57–87. This does not mean however that there are no threads in the Muslim historiography suggesting that the reason why the Abbasids succumbed to the charm of the monarchy were Byzantine influences. The imperial envoys were blamed for the evil influence on the first Caliphs, especially on al-Mansur: A.M. ROBERTS, *Al-Mansūr and the Critical Ambassador*, BEO 60, 2011, p. 145–160.

<sup>42</sup> THEOPHANES, AM 6305, p. 499.20.

The point is that despite al-Ma'mun's victory, the clash with al-Amin itself resulted in the creation of rather powerful and consistent opposition, which was not only undermining the Caliph's position, but also his actions aimed at increasing the power of his office in relation to the *ummah*<sup>43</sup>. It ultimately gained rather extensive influence, when in the 830s al-Mu'tasim took the throne in Baghdad, which had led to the decomposition of the significance of the title of "prince of the faithful" in respect of the subjects, who were gaining ever growing regional independence, and which in consequence became one of the leading causes of the collapse of the Abbasid rule<sup>44</sup>. The first signs of such state of affairs were indeed associated with the civil war, it is enough to mention here that the conflict undoubtedly helped Tahir ibn Hussain to gain prominence and who, as the governor of Khorasan, stopped recognising al-Ma'mun as Caliph already in the early 820s<sup>45</sup>, and became the founder of the Tahirid dynasty, which was then, after all, tolerated by the Abbasids for several decades.

In making conclusions on the basis of the material presented above, one needs to above all note that not many remarks allowing characterising the Abbasid rulers have been preserved within the *Chronography*. This seems rather puzzling. Considering that the Caliphs of this dynasty were contemporary to Theophanes, he should have had some more information about them compared to the Umayyad rulers, such as Mu'awiya or 'Abd al-Malik, to whom he after all dedicated more space. This is yet another element in the Byzantine chronicler's narrative which gives us a reason to consider which sources the Confessor was using, and how strongly they influenced the final appearance of the passages devoted to the history of the Muslim state.

*Translated by Michał Zytka*

<sup>43</sup> Regardless of the fact that the Caliph himself appeared to have been a rather able theologian, familiar with both the Quran and the hadith tradition, a patron of many scholars, and had considerable knowledge of other cultures as well as history, his attempts to introduce the *mihna*, which manifested itself (in a nutshell) in persecutions, grounded in the Caliph's authority, for the lack of support for Mu'tazilism. These had ended in failure, both political and religious, and in consequence led to the downfall of the Abbasid state: M. DEMICHELIS, *Between Mu'tazilism and Syncretism: A Reappraisal of the Behavior of the Caliphate of al-Ma'mūn*, JNES 71.2, 2012, p. 257–274. There are multiple hypotheses about the reasons for which the Caliph had reached for such drastic measures, these range from his desire to emphasise his own religious authority, to being influenced by various religious groups – from the Mu'tazilites to Alids: J.A. NAWAS, *Al-Ma'mun, the Inquisition, and the Quest for Caliphal Authority*, Lockwood 2015, p. 31–82.

<sup>44</sup> J.A. NAWAS, *All in the Family? Al-Mu'tasim's Succession to the Caliphate as Denouement to the Lifelong Feud between al-Ma'mūn and his 'Abbasid Family*, Or.JPTSIS 38, 2010, p. 77–88.

<sup>45</sup> It is worth considering whether the sources of the Tahirids' independence could not be found in the slogans raised during the Abbasid revolution. If so, the House of 'Abbas would have once again been the victim of its own success: M. КААБИ, *Les origines tāhirides dans la da'wa 'abbāsīde*, Ara 19.2, 1972, p. 145–164. Soon, and not only in the eastern part of the realm, other local governors started to demand their own independence: D. RUDNICKA-KASSEM, *Realizing an Insightful Vision of a Powerful and Independent State. Ahmad ibn Tulun and the Reign of his Dynasty (868–905)*, KSM 11.3, 2014, p. 11–23.

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