

THE GOVERNMENT OF KHURASAN UNDER THE EARLY 'ABBĀSID CALIPHS (A.H. 136-170/A.D. 753-785)

Oleh:

Norhayati Haji Hamzah *

Abstract

Wilayah Khurasan yang terletak di Iran telah ditakluki buat pertama kalinya oleh orang-orang Arab semasa pemerintahan Umar al-Khattab (13-23/634-644). Ia merupakan tempat bermulanya revolusi menentang kerajaan Umayyah di bawah pimpinan Abū Muslim al-Khurasani yang akhirnya membawa kepada pembentukan kerajaan 'Abbāsiyyah. Kepentingan Khurasan dalam sejarah 'Abbāsiyyah telah menyebabkan para khalifah 'Abbāsiyyah mengawal pelantikan gabenor-gabenor Khurasan, di samping cuba mewujudkan hubungan yang baik di antara pusat pemerintahan di Iraq dan wilayah Khurasan. Artikel ini akan menganalisa pentadbiran Khurasan di bawah pemerintahan khalifah 'Abbāsiyyah awal iaitu dari pemerintahan khalifah Ja'far al-Manṣūr hingga Mūsā al-Hādī berdasarkan sumber-sumber primer seperti al-Ṭabarī, al-Balādhurī dan al-Ya'qūbī. Ia turut membincangkan secara terperinci bukan sahaja perantikan gabenor-gabenor Khurasan tetapi juga polisi khalifah yang berkaitan.

INTRODUCTION

In the year 132/749-50, 'Abbāsid Caliphate was established in Iraq with the help from the Khurasanis (people of Khurasan), which consequently explains why Khurasan became the most important province of the 'Abbāsid. Given the importance of Khurasan, this paper intends to examine the governorship of Khurasan under the early 'Abbāsid caliphs which will be based totally on the early sources by historians such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Balādhurī, al-Ya'qūbī and others. In other words, its purpose is to describe in detail the connection between the appointments of the governors of Khurasan and the policy of the 'Abbāsid caliphs over the province. Generally, basic reliance is given to al-Ṭabarī and Ibn al-Athīr's reports since they give detailed accounts of most of the events. In addition, Khalifa Ibn Khayyāṭ, al-Azdī and al-Ya'qūbī also provide useful information about the events although their reports are not as detailed as al-Ṭabarī.

* Norhayati Haji Hamzah, M.A, Lecturer at the Department of History and Islamic Civilization, Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya.

KHURASAN UNDER ABU JA'FAR AL-MANSUR (A.H.136-158/A.D.753-774)

In 136/753-4, the oath of allegiance was given to Abū Ja'far, known as al-Manṣūr as the second 'Abbāsīd caliph on the day of al-Saffah's death.¹ He ruled for twenty-two years, one of the longest reigns among the early 'Abbāsīd caliphs. There were several revolts in Khurasan especially during the beginning of al-Manṣūr's caliphate, but they were followed by a long period of peace until his death in 158/773-4. Khurasan was largely stable for nineteen years during the twenty-two years of his rule. Given the importance of the governorship in Khurasan, al-Manṣūr appointed governors from among the Khurasani soldiers who had played a major role in the revolution. Since al-Manṣūr continued to search for a person not only loyal to him but also capable to do the job, there were several changes of governors taking place between 137-140/754-757. However, the search came to an end with the appointment of Muḥammad al-Mahdī, the caliph's son, in 141/758-9 who remained in office for ten years.

Abū Muslim 'Abd al-Rahman b. Muslim (132-137/749-754)

Abū Muslim is well known as the most important man in the history of the 'Abbāsīd *da'wa* and it was through his efforts that the 'Abbāsīd came to power. He was the representative of the 'Abbāsīds who played a major role in motivating the Khurasanis to fight against the Umayyads.² Regarding his origin, Al-Balādhurī and al-Kūfī give the most detailed accounts on the subject in which they combine different versions of events in their reports. On one hand, according to a version of al-Balādhurī, Abū Muslim was a slave of a man from Herat or Bushanj who had been sold to Ibrāhīm, the 'Abbāsīd *Imām*.³ Another version states that he was a slave of Banu Ma'qīl at Isfahān.⁴ Al-Kūfī, on the other hand, claims that Abū Muslim was a slave of Īsā b.

¹ Abū'l 'Abbās b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī known as al-Saffah was the first 'Abbāsīd caliph declared by Abū Muslim and the Khurasanis. See Al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad b. Jarīr (1964), *Tarīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, I, ed. M.J. Goeje et.al., Leiden: E.J. Brill, p. 89; al-Ya'qūbī, Ahmad b. Ya'qūb (1955-1956), *Tarīkh*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, III, p. 84; al-Azdī, Abū Zakariyā (1967), *Tarīkh al-Mawṣil*, ed. A. Ḥabībah, Cairo, p. 161; Ibn Kathīr, Ismāil b. Umar (1966), *al-Bidāya wa Nihāya*, VIII, Beirut: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, pp. 60-61.

² R. Fyre (1947), 'The Role of Abū Muslim in the 'Abbāsīd Revolution' in *Muslim World*, Vol. 37, pp. 28-38.

³ Al-Balādhurī, Ahmad b. Yahyā (1971), *Anṣāb al-Ashraf*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, p. 119.

⁴ Al-Balādhurī, *Anṣāb*, p. 120; M. Sharon (1983), *Black Banner From the East*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, p. 204; E.L. Daniel (1979), *The Political and Social History of Khurasan under 'Abbāsīd Rule: 747-820*, Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, p. 103.

Ma'qil of Banu Ijl in Khurasan.⁵ Modern writers such as E.L. Daniel, Farouk Omar, Hugh Kennedy and others are divided in their opinion of Abū Muslim. For example, Daniel concludes that Abū Muslim was a Khurasani while Farouk Omar regarded him as a Persian *mawlā*.⁶ From these accounts, it is difficult to trace the origin of Abū Muslim but early historians agree that *Imām* Ibrāhīm sent him to Khurasan for the 'Abbāsīd cause and that he remained loyal to his master (the 'Abbāsīds) till the end of his life.

After the 'Abbāsīd revolution in 132/794-5 and the establishment of the new caliphate, Abū Muslim remained in Khurasan and administered most of the Eastern provinces on behalf of the caliph, Abu'l Abbas b. Muḥammad b. Alī known as al-Ṣaffah. He became powerful and influential over the province and independent of the central government located in Iraq. Abū Muslim regarded Khurasan as his province and remained a governor from the caliphate of al-Ṣaffah the beginning of al-Mansūr's reign.

The government under the governorship of Abū Muslim was peaceful despite the two revolts that broke out in Transoxania. The first was led by a man called Sharik b. Shaykh al-Mahrī at Bukhārā in 133/750-1.⁷ Al-Narshakhī, one of the early historians gives a complete account of the revolt where he claims that Sharik was an Arab from Bukhārā and a supporter of the 'Alids, while the rest of the historians do not give any information on the subject.⁸ Modern writers like Farouk Omar, Barthold and Nicol consider the rising as Alid due to its slogan that '*it was not for this that we gave the bay'a to the family of the Prophet, to shed blood and act unjustly*'.⁹ It is difficult to accept the argument since it is not supported by other sources and it is not necessarily true that a person who supports the slogan is a supporter of the 'Alids. Al-Ṭabarī, al-Balādhurī and al-Ya'qūbī agree that the revolt was against the

⁵ Ibn A'thām al-Kūfī, Aḥmad b. Uthmān (1975), *Kitāb al-Futūh*, Hyderabad: Dā'irah al-Ma'ārif al-Uthmānī, p.153; Sharon, *op.cit.*, p. 205.

⁶ Daniel, *Khurasan*, p. 104; F. Omar (1960), *The 'Abbāsīd Caliphate: 132-170/750-786*, Baghdād: National Print & Pub. Co, p. 80.

⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, p. 74; al-Balādhurī, *Anṣāb*, p. 171; al-Ya'qūbī, *Tarīkh*, p. 77; V. Barthold (1928), *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*, London: Messrs. Luzac & Company, p. 195; N.M. Nicol (1979), "Early 'Abbasid Administration in the Central and Eastern Provinces: 132-218 A.H./ 750-833 A.D." (Ph.D Dissertation), Univ. of Washington, p. 175.

⁸ Al-Narshakhī, Abū Muḥammad b. Ja'far (1954). Trans. R. Fyre, *The History of Bukhārā*, Massachusetts: Medieval Academy of America, pp. 62-65.

⁹ Omar, *'Abbāsīd Caliphate*, pp. 157-158; Barthold, *op.cit.*, p. 195; Nicol, *'Abbāsīd*, pp. 175-76.

governorship of Abū Muslim although they do not mention directly the cause of the revolt. There is a major agreement in the sources indicating that Abu Muslim sent Ziyād b. Šālih against the rebels and the latter succeeded in suppressing the revolt. Although this revolt was a minor protest against Abu Muslim's governorship but Khurasan maintained its stability under Abu Muslim.

The second revolt broke out in Transoxania under the leadership of Ziyād b. Šālih, the governor of Bukhārā.¹⁰ The cause of the revolt is not clearly explained by early historians. According to al-Balādhurī, Ziyād was not satisfied with Abū Muslim's policy, claiming that, '*We have taken the oath for the establishment of justice and the revival of the sunna of the Prophet, but this man behaves like a tyrant*'.¹¹ The rebellion is significant because it is an indication of a struggle between the caliph and Abū Muslim over appointments of governors in Khurasan. Ziyād had been appointed by Abū Muslim as the governor of Soghdia and Bukhārā. On the other hand, al-Ṭabarī mentions that al-Šaffah sent Siba' b. Nu mān with the nomination of Ziyād on his behalf, and ordered Ziyād to kill Abū Muslim.¹² In addition, al-Balādhurī claims that al-Šaffah nominate Ziyād as the governor of Khurasan. Therefore, it shows that al-Šaffah intended to get rid of Abū Muslim and he ordered Ziyād to rebel against the latter. Consequently, a strained relationship existed between the caliph and Abū Muslim, and it is possible that the latter tried to increase his power and compete with the caliph. The rebellion was easily suppressed and Ziyād was killed by the *dihqan* of Barkath.¹³ Contemporary writers have the same opinion of the revolt and regard it as a treachery of the 'Abbāsids against Abū Muslim.¹⁴

In 136/753-4, al-Manšūr succeeded to the caliphate and decided to get rid of Abū Muslim after realizing Abū Muslim's power and influence in Khurasan. According to al-Ṭabarī, al-Manšūr had the intention to get rid of Abū Muslim since the caliphate of al-Šaffah but he was prevented from doing that by the caliph.¹⁵ In 137/754-5, al-Manšūr used the refusal of Abū Muslim to meet him and Abū Muslim's

¹⁰ Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, p. 168; al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, pp. 81-83; Ibn al-Athīr, 'Izz al-Dīn Alī b. Muḥammad (1871), *Al-Kāmil fī al-Tarīkh*, VI, ed. C.J. Tornberg, Leiden: E.J. Brill, pp. 455-6.

¹¹ Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, pp. 168-9.

¹² Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, I, p. 182.

¹³ Dihqan is an Arabic form of dihqan which refers to the Persian term for landowners in Iran and Iraq, usually gentry rather than the member of the higher aristocracy.

¹⁴ Omar, *'Abbāsīd Caliphate*, pp. 159-60; Daniel, *Khurasan*, pp. 111-12; Nicol, *'Abbasid Administration*, p. 175; Barthold, *Turkestan*, p. 196.

¹⁵ Al-Šaffah did not agree with the advice of al-Manšūr to kill Abū Muslim considering the latter's contribution to the caliphate. See al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, I, p. 85.

The Government of Khurasan Under The Early 'Abbasid Caliphs (A.H. 136-170/A.D. 753-785) intention to proceed to Khurasan as reasons to kill him. After several efforts made by al-Manṣūr in persuading Abū Muslim to meet him, the latter became unsure of his actions and decided to obey the caliph.¹⁶ At this point, al-Manṣūr took the opportunity by murdering Abū Muslim in his presence at al-Madā'in. It was the end of an important man who had made a major contribution to the establishment of the caliphate and who remained loyal to the 'Abbāsids until the end of his life.

Abū Daud Khalid b. Ibrāhīm al-Dhuhli (137-140/754-757)

Abū Daud was appointed by al-Manṣūr as the governor of Khurasan before the death of Abū Muslim in 137/754-5.¹⁷ He was one of the original twelve *naqībs* from Banu 'Amr b. Shayban who played a major role in the 'Abbāsīd *da'wa* and the 'Abbāsīd revolution. Abū Daud was one of the trusted companions of Abū Muslim and had been appointed his deputy in Khurasan before he went for *hajj* in 136/753-4. Regarding the reason of his appointment, al-Ṭabarī mentions that during the crisis between al-Manṣūr and Abū Muslim, the former wrote to Abū Daud appointing him as the governor of Khurasan. The purpose is to detach Abū Daud from Abū Muslim and to weaken Abū Muslim's position in Khurasan.¹⁸ Al-Manṣūr succeeded in his effort since Abū Daud's loyalty was now transferred to al-Manṣūr and Abū Daud was made the new governor after the death of Abu Muslim in 137/754-5.

Abū Daud's brief governorship was in stabile despite of a small local revolt occurred after the death of Abū Muslim. The revolt was known as the revolt of Sunbadh, named after its leader. The exact place of the revolt is not clear, due to differences among the early historians. According to al-Ya'qūbī, it was in Khurasan but Khalifa and al-Balādhurī mention al-Rayy.¹⁹

There is similarity among the early historians in certain aspects of the revolt, such as the background of Sunbadh, reason of the revolt and the commander sent by al-Mansur against Sunbadh. Al-Ṭabarī, al-Balādhurī and Khalifa agree that Sunbad was

¹⁶ In the beginning, al-Manṣūr responded to the letter of Abū Muslim by saying that he was not like the Sassanid ministers who deceived their king due to their crimes. In fact, he was in his obedience to the caliph. The climax of al-Mansur's effort was his letter to Abū Muslim threatening to kill him if he refused to appear in the caliph's court.

¹⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, I, p. 107; al-Balādhurī, *Anṣāb*, p. 226; Hamza b. Ḥasan al-Isfahānī (1961), *Tarīkh Sini Mulūk Al-Ard*, Beirut, p. 162.

¹⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, I, p. 108.

¹⁹ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tarīkh*, III, p. 87; Khalifa Ibn Khayyāṭ, Abū 'Amr (1967), *Tarīkh*, 1, ed. Akram Diya al-'Umari, Najaf: Imprimerie al-Adabe, p. 442; Al-Balādhurī, *Anṣāb*, III, p. 246.

a zoroastrian from Nishapur while al-Ya'qūbī claims that he was one of the companions of Abū Muslim who decided to seek revenge for the latter's death.²⁰ There is no evidence of a close relationship between Sunbadh and Abū Muslim to the extent that the former sought revenge for the latter. Daniel believes that the assassination of Abū Muslim was not the main factor of the revolt but rather an opposition against the government, due to the disappointment with the result of the 'Abbāsīd revolution. Although most of the sources maintain that the murder of Abu Muslim was the main reason of the revolt, but it is likely a crisis between Muslims and non-Muslims in which Ibn al-Athīr mentions the term '*al-Muslimūn*' in describing the battle between both groups. Ibn al-Athīr and Ibn al-Tiqtāqa also mention that Sunbadh intended to go to al-Hijaz and destroy the Ka'ba, which confirmed that the revolt was between Muslims and non-Muslims.²¹ Al-Manṣūr sent Jahwar b. Marrar al-Ijli against Sunbadh and he succeeded in crushing the revolt. Sunbadh managed to escape but was killed shortly after that. This revolt was a minor one and did not effect the governorship of Abū Daud and Khurasan as a whole.

The year 140/757-8 witnessed the death of Abū Daud and the appointment of 'Abd al-Jabbār in his place. There is a general agreement among the early historians regarding the reason for his death. According to the sources, a group of people created a disturbance at Abū Daud's house at Kushmahan in Merv.²² Unfortunately, he fell from the parapet while he was trying to find out the reason and died the same day. Reason for the disturbance is not clear. Al-Ṭabarī confirms the existence of the disturbance but he fails to give the reason. However, al-Balādhurī gives a clear account that al-Manṣūr became suspicious of Abū Daud since the later refused his order to appear at the court. Therefore, al-Manṣūr ordered Abū 'Isam 'Abd al-Raḥman b. Salim, a *mawlā* of 'Abd Allah b. Amir to kill Abū Daud and promised him the governorship of Khurasan. Consequently, Isam went to Abū Daud's residence and started a disturbance.²³ It is difficult to say how much reliance should be put on al-Balādhurī report but there is a possibility that there was a conspiracy against Abū Daud. This is supported by the fact that al-Ṭabarī tries to avoid mentioning the reason of the disturbance, as if he is trying to avoid mentioning the subject. Besides that, Daniel believes that there was a political struggle between al-Manṣūr and Abū Daud

²⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, I, p.119; Ibn al-Tiqtāqa, Muḥammad b. Alī b. Tabataba (1966), *Fi al-Adab al-Sultāniyyah wa al-Duwal al-Islāmiyyah*, Beirut: Dār Sādir, p. 171; al-Ya'qūbī, *Tarīkh*, III, p. 87.

²¹ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, VI, p. 481; Ibn al-Tiqtāqa, *Sultāniyyah*, p. 171.

²² Al-Balādhurī, *Anṣāb*, p. 226; al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, I, p. 128.

²³ Al-Balādhurī, *Anṣāb*, p. 226.

The Government of Khurasan Under The Early 'Abbasid Caliphs (A.H. 136-170/A.D. 753-785) in Khurasan while Omar considers that the conspiracy against Abū Daud was the creation of al-Manṣūr.²⁴ There is a possibility that al-Manṣūr plotted against Abū Daud due to his close relationship with Abū Muslim.

'Abd al-Jabbār b. 'Abd al-Rahman al-Azdī (140-141/757-758)

'Abd al-Jabbār was appointed by al-Manṣūr as the governor of Khurasan after the death of Abū Daud in 140/787-8. As to Abū Daud, 'Abd al-Jabbār was a Khurasani officer and a *dā'ī* who played a major role in the revolution especially in the siege of Wasīt. After the revolution, he became the head of *shurta* under al-Ṣaffah and remained in office under al-Manṣūr until his nomination to Khurasan.²⁵ Therefore, it is clear that his appointment is due to his contribution to the caliphate.

'Abd al-Jabbār's governorship can be considered the most important period in the history of the governorship of Khurasan in the early 'Abbāsīd caliphate. It witnessed the first serious rebellion against the government led by the governor himself. In 141/758-9, 'Abd al-Jabbār renounced his allegiance and proclaimed a rebellion against al-Manṣūr. The exact reason of his rebellion is not known due to the differences in the sources. According to al-Balādhurī, al-Musayyab b. Zuhayr al-Dabbī, head of the *shurta*, incited al-Manṣūr against 'Abd al-Jabbār. He complained to the caliph that the governor of Khurasan kept a lot of money in the treasury (10,000), which was supposed to be sent to the central government.²⁶ Al-Manṣūr then wrote to 'Abd al-Jabbār asking him to send the money to Iraq but he refused and rebelled. Accuracy of this report is not known but there is a possibility that al-Musayyab plotted against 'Abd al-Jabbār and al-Ṭabarī confirms the assumption in his account. He reports that al-Manṣūr ordered al-Musayyab to chop off 'Abd al-Jabbār's hands and feet and kill him.²⁷ There must be a reason for al-Manṣūr to assign the duty to al-Musayyab and perhaps al-Balādhurī gives a correct account about the relationship between 'Abd al-Jabbār and al-Musayyab. Modern historians mention that the revolt was a crisis between Khurasan and the central government. For example, Barthold concludes that 'Abd al-Jabbār was not satisfied with the government and declared a revolt, but he does not mention the cause of his discontentment.²⁸ Besides that, Kennedy believes

²⁴ Daniel, *Khurasan*, pp. 158-9; Omar, *'Abbasid Caliphate*, pp. 203-4.

²⁵ Khalifa, *Tarīkh*, 2, p. 466; al-Ya'qūbī (1892), *Kitāb al-Buldān*, ed. M.J. Goeje, Leiden: E.J. Brill, p. 303.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

²⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, I, p. 135.

²⁸ Barthold, *Turkestan*, p. 199.

that 'Abd al-Jabbār supported those who wished Khurasan to become an independent province.²⁹

Regarding the revenues of Khurasan, the 'Abbasīds' policy was that it should be sent to the central government, whereas the Khurasanis preferred it to be spent in Khurasan. The problem of revenues had in fact increased the gap between Khurasan and the central government. Perhaps 'Abd al-Jabbār agreed with the second opinion and refused to send the revenues to al-Manṣūr. Besides the case of revenues, al-Ṭabarī states that 'Abd al-Jabbār also ignored the order of al-Manṣūr to send troops for a raid against Byzantium.³⁰ Al-Manṣūr considered the former's attitude as a rebellion and al-Mahdī was sent against him. In turn, al-Mahdī sent Khazim b. Khuzayma to Merv and he succeeded in defeating the rebel. 'Abd al-Jabbār escaped but he was captured and sent to the caliph.

In conclusion, the rebellion of 'Abd al-Jabbār was a serious threat to the government since it indicates a direct opposition to the caliph. The danger of the revolt can be seen from the way 'Abd al-Jabbār was killed. According to al-Ya'qūbī and al-Balādhurī, 'Abd al-Jabbār sought the mercy of the caliph but al-Manṣūr refused to grant it.³¹ In fact, the former pleaded to be killed in an honorable way but the caliph was so annoyed at his rebellion that he ordered his hand and feet to be cut off. 'Abd al-Jabbār was executed and his corpse was displayed on a cross. Perhaps, the purpose was to warn the people of the consequences of disobeying the caliph.

Muḥammad al-Mahdī b. Abī Ja'far 'Abd Allah al-Manṣūr (141-151/758-768)

In 141/758-9, al-Manṣūr sent his son al-Mahdī, the heir apparent, to al-Rayy and later appointed him as the governor of Khurasan. It was the practice of the 'Abbāsīd caliphs to send the heirs apparent on military expeditions in the East and to appoint them as the governors of Khurasan. Although the sources do not state the reason for al-Mahdī's appointment, it is clear that al-Manṣūr wanted the heir apparent to create a link with the most important province in the caliphate. In other words, al-Manṣūr wished al-Mahdī to establish himself not only in Khurasān but the whole of the Eastern provinces.

Generally, al-Mahdī's governorship witnessed a period of peace and prosperity in Khurasan regardless of a serious local revolt broke out in Khurasan in 150/767-8

²⁹ Hugh Kennedy (1981), *The Early 'Abbāsīd Caliphate: A Political History*, London: Croom Helm, pp. 180-81.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

³¹ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tarīkh*, III, p. 90; al-Balādhurī, *Anṣāb*, p. 230.

The Government of Khurasan Under The Early 'Abbasid Caliphs (A.H. 136-170/A.D. 753-785) under the leadership of Ustadhsis.³² The background of Ustadhsis is not mentioned by the early historians. Modern writers have different opinions regarding the matter where Daniel considers Ustadhsis as a ruler of the Herat area or a member of a Kharijite group in Sistan.³³ Kennedy considers that Ustadhsis was a Zoroastrian.³⁴

There are different reports regarding the reason of the revolt in which al-Ya'qūbī mentions two versions in his account. Firstly, Ustadhsis was against the nomination of al-Mahdī as al-Manṣūr's heir apparent in 147/764-5 and declared a revolt. Secondly, Ustadhsis claimed to be a prophet and collected a lot of followers, and this fact is supported by Ibn al-Athīr.³⁵ Daniel combines the different versions in his writing and concludes that Ustadhsis resembled the *ghulat* opposition against the government of Khurasan. Daniel and Kennedy give the same interpretations that the revolt was in protest against the Arabs who were determined to take control of the local silver mines.³⁶ The exact reason of the revolt is not known due to the unclear reports but there is a possibility that it was against the Arab control of the silver mines because it involved the local people and the Arab conquerors. The revolt was crushed in 151/768-9 by the troops sent by al-Manṣūr under the leadership of Khazim b. Khuzayma. In the same year, al-Mahdī returned to Baghdad and left his deputy in Khurasan.³⁷ The sources do not state the reason for his return but perhaps al-Manṣūr thought that al-Mahdī had been in the office for such a long time (10 years) and should be replaced by another governor.

Humayd b. Qahtaba b. Shabib al-Ta'ī (151-159/768-775)

In 151/768-9, Humayd was appointed by al-Manṣūr as the governor of Khurasan after al-Mahdī. He was the son of Qahtaba b. Shabib, the leading general in the 'Abbasid revolution, who met his death in a confrontation with the Umayyads during the revolution.³⁸ There is a general agreement among the sources regarding the major role played by the family of Qahtaba both in the 'Abbāsīd *da'wa* and the revolution. Humayd and his brother, Hasan were the deputy *naqībs* and among the generals in the

³² Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tarīkh*, III, p. 96; al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, I, pp. 354-58; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, VI, pp. 591-92.

³³ Daniel, *Khurasan*, p. 134.

³⁴ Kennedy, *'Abbāsīd*, p. 184.

³⁵ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tarīkh*, III, p. 96; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, VI, p. 593; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, I, p. 354.

³⁶ Daniel, *Khurasan*, p. 137; Kennedy, *'Abbāsīd*, p. 184.

³⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, I, p. 364; al-Azdī, *Tarīkh*, p. 214.

³⁸ P. Crone (1980), *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 184.

revolution. Later, Humayd was appointed by al-Mansur to different governorships before his appointment to Khurasan.³⁹ It is clear therefore that he was appointed due to his experience and contribution to the caliphate. Humayd ruled for about eight years and his governorship was in peace similar to that of al-Mahdī. He can be considered as a capable governor due to the silence period of his governorship. Al-Mansūr's confidence in Humayd can be proved by the fact that he remained in office till the death of the caliph.

KHURASAN UNDER AL-MAHDĪ (158-169/774-785)

In 158/774-5, al-Mansūr died on the way to perform a pilgrimage and the *bay'a* was given to Abū 'Abd Allah known as al-Mahdī, as the third 'Abbāsīd caliph.⁴⁰ Generally, al-Mahdī's reign was a peaceful one despite of the existence of several local revolts in Khurasan. Given the importance of Khurasan, al-Mahdī continued his father's policy of appointing the first generation of the Khurasanis as governors. Most of them had been involved personally in the revolution and held important posts in the government. Apart from the above, their native origin was another reason which led to their appointment. By appointing a local governor, al-Mahdī had the thought that the governor would become an intermediary between the caliph and the people of Khurasan.

Regarding the governership of Khurasan, changes of governors took place because al-Mahdī was still searching for a most capable person who could satisfy both the central government and the local population. There was stability in Khurasan for more than six years within ten years of al-Mahdī's rule. Local revolts that took place between 160-163/776-783 which will be discussed later were inevitable for large province like Khurasan. However, these revolts were not really a threat to the caliphate and did not have serious effect on the stability of Khurasan.

Humayd b.Qahtaba (151-59/768-775)

Humayd was appointed as governor of Khurasan by al-Mansūr in 151/768-9 and remained in the post till the beginning of al-Mahdī's caliphate. In 159/775-6 he died while he was still in office and Abū 'Awn succeeded him.⁴¹ Humayd held the post for eight years and can be considered as the second governor under al-Mansūr who

³⁹ Humayd was the governor of Jazira in 137/754-55 and Egypt in 142/759-10.

⁴⁰ Khalifa, *Tarīkh*, 2, p. 458; al-Ya'qūbī, *Tarīkh*, III, p. 104; al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, I, p. 451; al-Azdī, *Tarīkh*, p. 232.

⁴¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, I, p. 459; al-Azdī, *Tarīkh*, p. 236; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, VI, p. 53.

remained in office for a long time. The first was Usayd b. 'Abd Allāh b. Mālik al-Khuza'ī, al-Mahdī's deputy in Khurasan for ten years. There is disagreement among the early historians regarding the appointment of Humayd and his successor. There are three versions given by the early historians. According to al-Ṭabarī, al-Azdī and Ibn al-Athīr, Humayd died in 159/775-6 and Abū 'Awn succeeded him. The second version by al-Ya'qūbī mentions that Humayd was appointed by al-Manṣūr for a period of time but was replaced by Abū 'Awn.⁴² Under al-Mahdī, Abū 'Awn was deposed and Humayd was restored to his position. He remained in office till his death and Mu'adh b. Muslim became the next governor. The third version by Khalifa states that Humayd became the governor of Khurasan after Abū 'Awn and he remained there till his death. Humayd's son, 'Abd Allah was in charge in Khurasan till the beginning of al-Mahdī's reign.⁴³ However, al-Mahdī removed him and Abū 'Awn was appointed for the second time.

From the above, it is difficult to ensure the correct account and the exact date of the nomination of Humayd and Abū 'Awn since Khalifa and al-Ya'qūbī do not mention the date of their appointments. It is possible that Khalifa gave the most accurate report because he was alive during the period of al-Manṣūr and al-Mahdī. However, it is difficult to determine the sequence of the appointments among the governors of Khurasan due to the absence of dates in the account. The same problem occurs in al-Ya'qūbī's version, thus giving a small possibility of reliability. Compared to Khalifa and al-Ya'qūbī, al-Ṭabarī and al-Azdī present more convincing reports since they include the dates of the appointment of Humayd and his successors. A solution can be drawn that Humayd was appointed by al-Manṣūr in 151/768-8 and Abū 'Awn succeeded him in 159/775-6. There is no exact reason to explain the disagreement among the sources. However, an assumption can be made that the reports of Khalifa and al-Ya'qūbī try to emphasize the significant role played by the family of Qahtaba b. Shabib in the caliphate where Humayd was twice appointed to Khurasan and he was succeeded by his son, 'Abd Allah. For generations, the family continued to play an important role before and after the revolution. Realizing the importance of the family, it is possible that the historians made an effort to stress its role in their accounts. Regarding the interpretation of modern writers, Daniel and Nicol are dependent on al-Ṭabarī and they conclude that Humayd was succeeded by Abū 'Awn and later by Mu'adh b. Muslim.⁴⁴

⁴² Al-Ya'qūbī, *Buldān*, p. 303.

⁴³ Khalifa, *Tarīkh*, 2, p. 463.

⁴⁴ Daniel, *Khurasan*, pp. 140-42; Nicol, *Abbāsīd*, p. 178.

Abū 'Awn 'Abd al-Mālik b. Yazīd al-Khurasani (159-160/775-776)

Abū 'Awn was appointed to Khurasan in 159/775-6 after the death of Humayd b. Qahtaba and he was in office for only a year. Abū 'Awn was a Khurasani who played a major role in the revolution where he was entrusted to fight the last Umayyad caliph, Marwān II, in the battle of the Zab.⁴⁵ There is a general agreement among the early historians on the significant role of Abū 'Awn in the revolution. It can be said that Abū 'Awn's experience in the revolution and his contribution to the caliphate were the reasons that lead to his nomination.

Compared to the rest of the governors of Khurasan under al-Mahdī, Abū 'Awn's governorship can be considered a trial to him because two local revolts broke out during his short rule. These were the revolts of Yūsuf al-Barm and al-Muqanna'. The revolts did not possess a great danger to the government but al-Muqanna' in some way was a major threat to Islam. The revolt of Yūsuf al-Barm took place in 160/776-7 led by a man called Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm called al-Barm but the place of the revolt is unclear. Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn al-Athīr state that it happened in Khurasan but they do not mention the exact place. Al-Ya'qūbī gives a detailed account where he states that al-Barm was a client of *Banu* Thaḳīf in Bukhārā, and that the disturbance occurred in Khurasan. However, another version of Ibn al-Athīr mentions that the revolt began in Bushanj and later spread to Merv al-Rudh, Talaqan and Jurjan. Al-Ya'qūbī is the only historian who describes that Ahmad b. Asad was sent to Farghana to fight al-Barm. Yazīd b. Mazyad al-Shaybānī, the governor of Sistan, was later sent by al-Mahdī against al-Barm.

Modern writers have different opinions regarding the history of this revolt. Daniel combines the versions in his writing but fails to determine the exact place of its appearance.⁴⁶ Barthold gives interpretation based on al-Ya'qūbī's account and he makes the assumption that it began in Bukhārā since al-Barm was a *mawlā* in Bukhārā. On the other hand, Farouk Omar depends on the reports of al-Ṭabarī and al-Athīr and believes it occurred in Khurasan where al-Barm occupied Bushanj, Talaqan and Jurjan.⁴⁷ He also takes the account of al-Ya'qūbī by mentioning that Yazīd b. Mazyad, who was fighting Yahyā al-Sārī in Sistan was ordered by al-Mahdī to advance to Khurasan against al-Barm. However, Omar misunderstood the text because al-Ya'qūbī does not state Yazīd was ordered to go to Khurasan against al-

⁴⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, I, p. 48; al-Azdi, *Tarīkh*, pp. 127-29.

⁴⁶ Daniel, *Khurasan*, p. 166.

⁴⁷ Bushanj is situated in the west of Heart and Jurjan, lying at the south-eastern corner of the Caspian. See G. Le Strange (1905), *The Land of the Eastern Caliphate*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 377 & 411.

The Government of Khurasan Under The Early 'Abbasid Caliphs (A.H. 136-170/A.D. 753-785) Barm, instead al-Ya'qūbī just points out that Yazīd was asked to fight al-Barm without mentioning either it was in Khurasan or Farghana.⁴⁸ Since he mentions that Aḥmad b. Asad was sent to Farghana, it can be said that Yazīd was in fact fought al-Barm in Farghana.

Regarding the nature of this revolt, al-Ya'qūbī states that it was a religious revolt calling on people to perform *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar*. However, al-Ṭabarī and Ibn al-Athīr report that it was a political uprising against al-Mahdī and his policies.⁴⁹ Barthold takes al-Ya'qūbī's report and considers it as religious revolt in the name of the ordinances of Islam.⁵⁰ Daniel's interpretation is based on the sources and having observed the nature and the content of the revolt, he concludes that it was a political revolt against al-Mahdī. In fact, punishment that was imposed on al-Barm shows that the revolt was a political one. During the battle between al-Barm and Yazīd, al-Barm was defeated and he was brought to al-Mahdī together with his followers. Al-Mahdī abused and put him to death. His hands and legs were cut off and was beheaded with his followers. Their corpses were crucified on the Upper Bridge over the Tigris. It is clear from the punishment that there was a feeling of anger in al-Mahdī towards al-Barm and al-Mahdī realized the danger posed by al-Barm.

There is another disagreement between the early historians regarding the status of al-Barm. According to al-Ya'qūbī and Ibn al-Athīr, he was a Kharijite but al-Ṭabarī and al-Jahshiyari regard him as infidel.⁵¹ Modern writers are divided in their opinion of al-Barm's status. Based on al-Ya'qūbī's account, Barthold considers al-Barm as a Kharijite and he describes the later Kharijite revolts led by al-Barm's grandson during the caliphate of al-Ma'mūn. Omar shares the same opinion with Barthold and he considers al-Barm's revolt as Kharijite.⁵² Al-Ya'qūbī states that al-Barm called the people to the promotion of good and repression of evil. Omar regards this slogan as containing a Kharijite element, and thus considers the revolt as Kharijite. Daniel rejects the idea that al-Barm was a Kharijite but considers him a rebel.⁵³ Although some of the early and modern historians seem to agree that al-Barm was a Kharijite,

⁴⁸ Omar, *'Abbāsīd Caliphate*, pp. 302-303.

⁴⁹ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tarīkh*, III, p. 107; al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, I, p. 480; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, VI, p. 43.

⁵⁰ Barthold, *Turkestan*, p. 166.

⁵¹ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Buldān*, p. 303; al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, I, p. 470; al-Jahshiyari, Abū 'Abd Allah Muḥammad b. Abdus (1938), *Kitāb al-Wuzarā' wa al-kuttāb*, ed. M. Al-Saqqa et al., Cairo, p. 193.

⁵² Barthold, *Turkestan*, p. 198; Omar, *'Abbāsīd Caliphate*, p. 302.

⁵³ Daniel, *Khurasan*, p. 167.

it is difficult to accept this due to the vague explanation. Perhaps, it can be said that the revolt was a local one and did not possess any relationship with the Kharijites. The argument by Omar that the slogan *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar* has a Kharijite element is vague because in Islam, the act of calling people to do good and forbid evil can be done by any individuals without being connected to a sect or a group. Thus, the revolt was simply a personal rebellion against the authority and did not have any personal relationship with any rebellious group during that time.

A serious revolt known as the revolt of al-Muqanna' appeared in Bukhara before the death of Humayd b. Qahtaba, the governor of Khurasan in 159/775-6. Compared to al-Ṭabarī and Ibn al-Athīr, al-Narshakhi gives the most detailed account of the revolt and modern writers are dependent on him. It is also important to note that Ibn al-Athīr's report differs from that of al-Ṭabarī. This shows the significance of the revolt to the extent that Ibn al-Athīr depends on other sources in order to give a complete account of it. Most of the early accounts agree that it occurred in the year mentioned above except al-Ṭabarī who claims that it began in 161/777-8.⁵⁴ However, a general idea can be taken that this revolt 'began in 159/775-6 and became widespread in 161/777-8. It was known as the revolt of al-Muqanna' (the veiled one) because the leader used to cover his face with a mask. There is an agreement among the early historians that the revolt was led by a man who identified himself with different names like Hakīm, Hashim or 'Aṭa.⁵⁵ On the other hand, the origin of al-Muqanna' is unknown due to the differences in the sources. According to al-Ṭabarī and Ibn al-Athīr, al-Muqanna' was from Merv while al-Narshakhi claims that Balkh was his birthplace.⁵⁶

All sources agree that al-Muqanna' succeeded in gathering a big number of follower especially in Soghdia and Bukhara. Al-Narshakhi and Ibn al-Athīr mention the involvement of the Turks where al-Muqanna' invited them and allowed the Turks to attack and plunder the Muslims.⁵⁷ The exact reason of the involvement of the Turks is not known but an assumption can be made that they intended to gain some benefits from the revolt. This is clearly seen from the account of al-Narshakhi that many Turks came from Tukharistan in hope of plunder. Besides that, there is no evidence that the Turks were interested in the faith of al-Muqanna'. The early historians agree

⁵⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, I, p. 484.

⁵⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, III, p. 484; al-Ya'qūbī, *Buldān*, p. 304; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, VI, p. 38; Ibn Tiqtaqa, *Sultāniyah*, p. 180.

⁵⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, I, p. 484; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, VI, p. 38, al-Narshakhi, *Bukhārā*, p. 66.

⁵⁷ Al-Narshakhi, *Bukhārā*, p. 68; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, VI, p. 39.

that al-Mahdī sent a number of commanders against al-Muqanna'. Ibn al-Athīr gives a complete names of the commanders where he mentions that Abū Nu'mān, al-Junayd and Layth b. Nasr b. Sayyar were the first group to fight the rebels together with Ḥasan b. Tamim b. Nasr and Muḥammad b. Nasr.⁵⁸ However, they failed to crush the revolt and al-Mahdī entrusted Jibrīl b. Yahyā to lead the campaign. Although al-Ṭabarī and al-Narshakhi do not mention some of the names given by Ibn al-Athīr, they agree that a number of commanders were involved in fighting the rebels. Among the commanders mentioned by the sources are Abū 'Awn b. 'Abd Mālik (the governor of Khurasan), Mu'adh h. Muslim, Jibrīl b. Yahyā and Layth, either the son of Nasr b. Sayyar or a client al-Mahdī.⁵⁹ In addition, Sa'īd al-Harashi, the *amīr* of Herat was entrusted to lead the last campaign against the rebels in 163/779-10 and he managed to suppress the revolt.⁶⁰ Therefore, it is clear that the revolt was a serious threat to the authority and the Muslims since the rebels were able to defeat capable generals sent by the caliph.

There is disagreement between the early sources regarding the reason for the revolt. Al-Ṭabarī, al-Narshakhi and Ibn al-Athīr agree that it is a religious revolt calling people to a new faith where al-Muqanna' used to teach the transmigration of souls and regarded himself as God. On the other hand, al-Jahshiyari indicates that it was intended to take revenge for Abū Muslim.⁶¹ Based on the early sources, modern writers have different opinions about the subject. Barthold gives a clear explanation on the cause of the revolt where he considers the followers of al-Muqanna' as the party of Abu Muslim or 'the people in white raiment's.' (*al-mubayyida*) who intended to take revenge for Abu Muslim. It is difficult to accept the statement by al-Jahshiyari that al-Muqanna' intended to take revenge for Abū Muslim because the description of the revolt does not mention any relationship between the former and the latter. There is an alleged slogan of the revolt that Abū Muslim was better than the prophet Muḥammad, but it cannot be taken into consideration due to the vague explanation of the sources. It is impossible that al-Muqanna' had the intention to seek revenge for Abū Muslim since the latter died in 137/754-5 and the revolt began in 159/775-6. The gap between those events was about 20 years and it seems unlikely that al-Muqanna' had a very close relationship with Abū Muslim so that he remained loyal to him and decided to seek revenge. Barthold's opinion that 'the people in white' were the party of Abū Muslim is not accurate because it can refer to any rebellious group who were against the government, who adopted black as their colors. Another opinion is that

⁵⁸ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, VI, p. 39.

⁵⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, I, p. 484; Barthold, *Turkestan*, p. 200.

⁶⁰ Herat is the present day Afghanistan.

⁶¹ Al-Jahshiyari, *Wuzara*, p. 277.

the revolt was a struggle between the Muslims and non-Muslims. This is supported by the fact that all early sources use the term '*al-Muslimūn*' in describing those who participated in the battle with the troops of al-Muqanna'.⁶² Al-Narshakhi mentions that the followers of al-Muqanna' killed the Muslims and took their properties. Hence, a conclusion can be drawn that the revolt was local and indicated a struggle between the Muslims and non-Muslims from 159-163/775-779. There is no evident that the revolt was against the 'Abbasid government in particular.

In conclusion, the governorship of Abū 'Awn can be considered a trial to him due to the appearance of al-Barm and al-Muqanna'. In fact, he was dismissed from Khurasan and Mu'adh b. Muslim became the governor in 160/776-7. Al-Ṭabarī states that al-Mahdī was angry and decided to remove him. Ibn al-Athīr takes this idea from al-Ṭabarī and mentions that Abū 'Awn was deposed because of his failure to defeat al-Muqanna'.⁶³ There is a possibility that his dismissal was due to his failure to defeat al-Muqanna' because Mu'adh suffered the same fate in 163/779-80. It does not mean that Abū 'Awn was an inefficient governor but al-Mahdī was looking for a better person who could govern Khurasan according to his interest.

Mu'adh b. Muslim (160-163/776-779)

In 160/776-7, Mu'adh b. Muslim became the third governor of Khurasan under al-Mahdī. His background is unclear and most of the sources do not mention his origin except al-Ya'qūbī, who give a brief statement of the matter. According to al-Ya'qūbī, Mu'adh was a *mawlā* of a Rabi'a tribe, specifically a *mawlā* of Banu Dhuhl and a native of Khurasan or Rayy who settled in Baghdad.⁶⁴ Compared to his predecessors, Mu'adh had played a minor role in the revolution. His first involvement was in 150/167-8, when he was among the officers sent by al-Manṣūr to suppress the revolt of Ustadhsis.⁶⁵ Therefore, there is no specific reason lead to his appointment except his minor contribution to the caliphate. An assumption can be made that al-Mahdī wanted to make a change in his policy. Since the reign of al-Manṣūr, majority of the governors were Khurasanis who had played a leading role in the revolution. This policy was continued by al-Mahdī and his first choice was Abū 'Awn. However, al-Mahdī was not satisfied with his performance and decided to try a new policy by choosing Mu'adh, who was not among the leading revolutionary commanders.

⁶² Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, III, p. 484; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kamīl*, VI, p. 39; al-Narshakhi, *Bukhārā*, pp. 65-67.

⁶³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, I, p. 477; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kamīl*, VI, p. 39.

⁶⁴ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Buldān*, p. 303; Crone, *Slaves*, p. 183.

⁶⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, I, p. 354.

However, al-Mahdī's experiment proved a failure because Mu'adh also failed to crush the revolt of al-Muqanna' and he was removed in 163/779-80. Hence, al-Mahdī returned to his previous policy and appointed al-Musayyab as the new governor of Khurasan.

The revolt of al-Muqanna reached its peak during Mu'adh's governorship and it was crushed in 163/779-80 by Sa'id al-Harashi. From the beginning of his governorship, Mu'adh made the best effort to defeat al-Muqanna' but he failed to obtain any success. According to al-Narshakhi, Mu'adh fought a great deal with the Turks and 'the people in white raiments' for two years (61-63/777-779), sometimes he winning the battle and sometimes losing.⁶⁶ The sources give different reports regarding the dismissal of Mu'adh. Most of them agree that Mu'adh was deposed and al-Muasyyab replaced him. However, al-Narshakhi states that Mu'adh requested retirement after two years fighting al-Muqanna'. Based on the majority of the accounts, it can be said that Mu'adh was in fact been dismissed from Khurasan. This conclusion is supported by the fact that Sa'id al-Harashi complained to al-Mahdī about Mu'adh's inability to fight al-Muqanna' and the caliph accepted it. Therefore, this can be regarded as the reason that led to the dismissal of Mu'adh in 163/779-10.⁶⁷

In 162/778-9, another local revolt by a group known as *al-Muhammira* (the wearers of red) broke out in Jurjan under the leadership of a man called 'Abd Qahar but was easily crushed by the authorities. Information given by the sources with regard to the revolt is very limited due to its insignificance and the early accounts give brief reports on the subject. Early historians such as al-Tabari, al-Balādhurī and al-Ya'qūbī do not mention the cause of their appearance. Based on Gardizi's account, Daniel describes that al-Muhammira intended to seek revenge for Abū Muslim. Their slogan was "*Abū Muslim was still alive. Let us seize the kingdom and give it back to him.*"⁶⁸ However, Daniel does not decide whether al-Muhammira were determined to seek revenge for Abū Muslim. It is difficult to put so much reliance on this statement because the sources do not mention any relationship to Abū Muslim. Since the statement is not supported by the other sources, it becomes vague and its reliability can be doubted. Perhaps, al-Muhammira represented a local revolt and did not have any relationship with Abū Muslim. They were against the local government, but it does not mean that al-Muhammira were dissatisfied with the central government. Nevertheless, there is a general agreement regarding the events of the revolt. The early historians state that 'Abd Qahar conquered Jurjan and killed a lot of people.

⁶⁶ Al-Narshakhi, *Bukhārā*, p. 72; Daniel, *Khurasan*, p. 142.

⁶⁷ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, VI, p. 51.

⁶⁸ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tarīkh*, III, p. 108; al-Tabarī, *Tarīkh*, III, p. 493; Daniel, *Khurasan*, p. 147.

Therefore, al-Mahdī sent a man from Tabaristan called Umar b. al-'Ala, a butcher from Rayy who had fought the revolt of Sunbadh, to deal with the matter and he succeeded to defeat al-Muhammira by killing 'Abd Qahar.

Al-Musayyab b. Zuhayr b. Umar b. Muslim al-Dabbi (163-166/779-782)

Al-Musayyab was a Khurasani who played a major role in the revolution and one of the deputy *naqībs* of the 'Abbāsīd *da'wa*. After the revolution, he became head of the *shurta* from the reign of al-Saffah until Hārūn al-Rashīd.⁶⁹ There is a special relationship between al-Mahdī and al-Musayyab. This is clearly seen from an event in 158/774-5 when al-Manṣūr dismissed al-Musayyab from the *shurta* because he had flogged Aban b. Bashir, al-Manṣūr's secretary, to death. The reason was Aban's complaint regarding the collection of taxes in Kufa, which was under 'Amr b. Zuhayr, the brother of al-Musayyab. According to al-Ṭabarī, al-Mahdī persuaded his father (al-Manṣūr) to forgive al-Musayyab and to restore him to his post. As a result, al-Musayyab was re-appointed as the chief of the *shurta*. Therefore, there must have been a good relation between al-Mahdī and al-Musayyab to the extent that the former persuaded al-Manṣūr to forgive the latter. In addition, it is important to know the contribution of al-Musayyab's family since the very beginning. After the death of al-Manṣūr and the proclamation of al-Mahdī as caliph, it was al-Musayyab's son known as 'Abd Allah who carried the *Harba* (ceremonial spear) for al-Mahdī.⁷⁰ The other sons of al-Musayyab also played an important role in the caliphate until the period of al-Ma'mūn. In fact, for generations, this family controlled the *shurta* due to the confidence of the caliphs. From the above, a conclusion can be drawn that al-Musayyab's service and contribution to the caliphate led to his appointment to Khurasan in 163/779-80.

There is a general agreement between the early historians regarding the date of al-Musayyab's appointment (163/779-80) and his dismissal (166/782-3). Information given by the sources in term of his dismissal is very brief, for example al-Ṭabarī states that Khurasan was agitated against al-Musayyab and al-Tūṣī was appointed as a new governor. The account state that al-Musayyab was dismissed by al-Mahdi but there is no reason given for that.⁷¹ Based on Gardizi's account, Barthold and Daniel consider that al-Musayyab was recalled from his post due to his action of increasing taxes.⁷² There is a possibility that al-Musayyab increased taxes because Khurasan was agitated directly against him. The local population would not have complained without

⁶⁹ Omar, *'Abbāsīd Caliphate*, p. 354; Crone, *Slaves*, p. 186; al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, I, p. 384.

⁷⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, I, pp. 455 & 517.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 517.

⁷² Daniel, *Khurasan*, p. 168; Barthold, *Turkestan*, p. 203.

a serious reason since they did not have any problem with the previous governors. The increase of taxes was really a burden and they had to express their dissatisfaction with the local government, but it does not mean they were against the central government. Regarding the taxes, Gardizi mentions that al-Musayyab introduced a new coinage known as *musayyabi* dirham and the people of Shash, Ilaq and Khojend in Transoxania had to pay taxes using the dirhams. Daniel considers that the new coinage system could be the reason for the disturbances against al-Musayyab. Based on several sources, Barthold mentions the existence of several new coinages such as *muḥammadi*, *musayyabi* and *ghitrifi* dirhams. The population were dissatisfied with the new system and complained about the matter.⁷³ It is probable that the new coinage provoked the people against al-Musayyab because it was related to the problem of taxation which has been discussed before. As a result, the people protested against him and al-Mahdī had to recall al-Musayyab in 166/782-3.

Abu'l 'Abbas al-Fadl b. Sulayman al-Ṭūsī (166-171/782-787)

In 166/782-3, al-Ṭūsī was appointed by al-Mahdī as the governor of Khurasan and Sijistan. He remained in Khurasan and nominated Tamim b. Sa'id b. Da'laj as his deputy in Sijistan, on the order of al-Mahdī. Similar to the previous governors, al-Ṭūsī was also a Khurasani who had played a major role in the revolution especially in the siege of Wasit against Ibn Hubayra in 132/749-50. After the revolution, he was appointed as the head of the *haras* in 141/758-9 and the keeper of the seal (*khatam*) in 153/770-71.⁷⁴ Therefore, it is clear that al-Ṭūsī's contribution to the caliphate was the reason of his appointment to Khurasan.

Al-Ṭūsī's governorship can be considered the most peaceful period compared to the rest of the governors of Khurasan under al-Mahdī. This is supported by the early historians who do not mention the existence of any disturbance under al-Ṭūsī. He can be regarded as al-Mahdī's favourite governor because unlike the previous governors who had been dismissed, al-Ṭūsī remained in office till the beginning of al-Rashīd's caliphate. This shows that al-Mahdī was pleased with his performance and had found a suitable person to represent the central government and the people of Khurasan. Based on Gardizi's account, Barthold and Daniel mention that al-Ṭūsī was very concerned with the welfare of Khurasan and its inhabitants. He abolished the unjust taxes imposed by al-Musayyab, rebuilt the desolated areas near the Oxus and erected walls to guard against the Turkish raids.⁷⁵ A total reliance on the report seems to be

⁷³ Barthold, *Turkestan*, p. 205.

⁷⁴ Al-Tabarī, *Tarīkh*, I, p. 131 & 517; Khalifa, *Tarīkh*, 2, p. 467; al-Jahshiyari, *Wuzarā'*, p. 124.

⁷⁵ Barthold, *Turkestan*, p. 203; Daniel, *Khurasan*, p. 168.

impossible since Gardizi's account is not supported by any of the other sources. However, it is possible that al-Ṭūsī had done something for the benefit of the local people and that they were pleased with him and there was no complaint against al-Ṭūsī during his governorship. Therefore, al-Ṭūsī was a very capable person and his rule can be regarded as a successful one.

KHURASAN UNDER AL-HĀDĪ (169-170/785-6)

In 169/785-6, al-Mahdī died at Masabadhan due to a hunting accident and his son, Mūsā al-Hādī became the fourth 'Abbāsīd caliph.⁷⁶ Al-Hādī's caliphate was a brief one since he died a year after his appointment and consequently, his contribution to the caliphate was limited due to his short tenure. Regarding Khurasan, al-Hādī maintained al-Ṭūsī as the governor, which shows the capability of the latter, and the caliph's confidence over him. Khurasan was in peace under al-Ṭūsī where al-Ya'qūbī mentions that the kings were in obedience to the caliph. Generally, Khurasan was in prosperity during the governorship of al-Ṭūsī.

CONCLUSION

Khurasan played a vital role in the 'Abbāsīd's revolution and simultaneously in the history of the 'Abbāsīd. The importance of Khurasan is clearly stated in the early sources such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Balādhurī, al-Ya'qūbī, Ibn al-Athīr and others. Hence, after the establishment of the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate in 132/ 749-50, every efforts had been taken especially by the early 'Abbāsīd caliphs to create a good relationship and to maintain the administration in Khurasan. The purpose of doing that is to gain a constant support or the loyalty of the Khurasanis to the 'Abbāsīd. Regarding the governorship of Khurasan, the early 'Abbāsīd caliphs (al-Manṣūr to al-Hādī) appointed majority of the Khurasani officers who played a major role in the revolution as governors. The policy of the caliphs in appointing the Khurasanis as the governor of Khurasan indicated the importance of Khurasan to be ruled by its native that could be the representative of the central government in Iraq and the local population in Khurasan. It seems that this policy achieved its purposes due to the fact that Khurasan was generally in peace and prosperity during the early 'Abbāsīd caliphs regardless of some revolts that occurred within that period. In a sense, it shows the success of the 'Abbāsīd's policy over Khurasan and undoubtedly that the people in Khurasan preferred the Khurasanis to govern Khurasan on behalf of the caliph.

⁷⁶ Khalifa, *Tarīkh*, 2, p. 477; al-Ya'qūbī, *Tarīkh*, III, pp. 113-14; al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, I, pp. 544-55; al-Azdī, *Tarīkh*, p. 257; al-Jahshiyari, *Wuzarā'*, p. 167; Ibn Kathir, *Bidaya*, VIII & X, p. 157.