

THE ECONOMIC FACTORS OF THE 'ABBASID DECLINE DURING THE BUWAYHID RULE IN THE FOURTH/TENTH CENTURY

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Abstract

The 'Abbasid caliphate in the fourth/tenth century suffered from a sharp economic decline. This was the result of several factors, mainly civil wars, the Zanj and Qarmatian revolts, political interference by the Turkish and Daylamite soldiers, military iqtā' and the activity of the 'ayyārūn. The civil wars had a destructive effect on the city of Baghdad and its citizens, ruined most of the land and caused a devaluation of dirham and dīnārs. The revolts of the Zanj and Qarmatians paralyzed trade in southern Iraq leading to a stagnation of currency and the banking system and a decrease in financial activity. The involvement of the Turkish and Daylamite soldiers in politics, and rivalries among them to gain power, led to the devastation of canals, dams and consequently ruined the agricultural sector. In addition, the introduction of military iqtā' during this period resulted in the damage of cultivated lands due to their excessive exploitation and abandonment of their irrigation system. Finally, the activities of the 'ayyārūn in looting merchants' goods, burning many houses, and killing people, inflicted considerable loss on the merchants, encouraging the latter to leave Baghdad and do business in other cities.

Key words: 'Abbasid, iqtā', 'ayyārūn, amīr al-umarā', Buwayhid.

A. Introduction

Many Muslim people lament the annihilation of the ‘Abbasid by the Hulagu in 1250. The cruelty that the Mongols committed upon the people in Baghdad and the story of the heaps of human skulls and blackened river of thousands of burnt books, still lingers in the minds of Muslims. The empire that had made them proud had declined and finally was annihilated by the Mongol army. They wondered why the empire which reached its golden era during the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd and his son al-Ma’mūn could be easily destroyed by the Mongols. Generally many Muslims know that after the reign of al-Ma’mūn’s successors, the empire sharply declined and there emerged many petite dynasties in the east and west of the empire. They know that the emergence of the petite dynasties was first due to the weakness of the central government and the spirit of tribalism and regionalism which encouraged people in the west and the east, in particular, those who were ‘*ajam* (non-Arab), to get rid of the ‘Abbasid control and found their own dynasties. However, there were actually some factors which weakened the ‘Abbasid empire, particularly economic factors, that very few people know of.

This paper will elaborate the economic factors that led to the decline of the ‘Abbasids. However, before elaborating these factors, first it will look at the extent of the available sources relating to the economy of the empire, next it discusses the general economic background of the caliphate, and then analyzes some factors that lead to the economic decline. These factors include civil wars, uprising, interference in politics by soldiers, military *iqṭā’*¹ and the activity of the ‘*ayyārūn*.² The elaboration of these factors is expected to shed light on the failure of the ‘Abbasids to restore their power and overcome various lords and *amīr al-umarā’*³

¹ *Iqṭā’*, assignment to an individual of right to collect taxes from an area or community, usually in exchange for military services; see Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: the Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century*, (London and New York: Longman, 1988), p. 399.

² ‘*Ayyārūn* (sing. ‘*ayyār*), originally a derogatory term meaning “vagabond”, but later used of irregular troops and vigilante group; *Ibid.*, p. 398.

³ *Amīr al-umarā’* literally means “commander of commanders”, title given to those who took over secular authority in Baghdad after 324/936; *Ibid.*

who undermined their authority, crumbled their empire and paved the way for the coming of the Buwayhids and then the Seljuqs. In addition, it may add to our knowledge of the political situation of the 'Abbasids and provide us an understanding of how the weakness of the 'Abbasid caliphate during the Buwayhid and later on during the Seljuqid period was not only due to incapability of the caliphs themselves, but also to the political and economic conditions.

B. Historical Sources on the 'Abbasid Economy

The study of the economic history of the Arab caliphate is a recent development. Much of what has been written falls within the realm of *fiqh* or jurisprudence, and of cultural and social history. The available sources were recorded many years after the events on the basis of information transmitted by memory. In addition, the majority of these sources deal with economic problems only tangentially in the form of stories and anecdotes.⁴ Most available texts on economic subjects deal with the merits of commerce and merchants, principles, rules and laws relating to commerce: these include the work of Muḥammad al-Shaybānī (d.804) entitled *Kitāb al-Kasb* (Book on Earning) and those of al-Jāhiz: *Iḥdā 'Asharāt Rasā'il* (Eleven Letters); *Risāla fī Madḥ al-Tujjār wa Dhamm Khidmat al-Sulṭān* (In Praise of Merchants and in Condemnation of Officials), *al-Ṭabaṣṣur bī'l-Tijāra* (A Clear Look at Trade). In this last work, al-Jāhiz discusses the qualities, values and ways of evaluating gold, silver, pearls and precious stones, scent and aromatics, textiles, skins and other commodities, and lists the goods imported from the provinces of the Islamic empire and from foreign countries. Like al-Jāhiz, Abū al-Faḍl Ja'far b. 'Alī al-Dimashqī in his *Kitāb al-Ishāra ilā Maḥāsīn al-Tijāra* (The Book of Signs to Know the Benefits of the Trade) devotes some space to theoretical and ethical discussions, but his main purpose is to provide practical guidance for merchants. He discusses the types, qualities and prices of merchandise, the importance of the three types of merchants (the wholesaler, the exporter and the traveling merchant) and other necessary information relating to the business of commerce.

⁴ Elias H. Tuma, "Early Arab Economic Policies (1st/7th-4th/10th Century)", *Islamic Studies*, vol. 4, No. 1 (March 1965), p. 1.

Likewise, ‘Abd al-Salām Hārūn, an eleventh century author, discusses the purchase of slaves with a classification of their geographical origins in his *al-Risāla fī Shirā’ al-Raqīq* (The Epistle on the Purchase of Slaves) while al-Jawabārī (13th century) deals with the subjects of trickery and fraud committed by the merchants: *al-Mukbtār fī Kashf al-Asrār* (The Selection of Revealing the Secrets).⁵

The political and social history of the Islamic empire has been thoroughly recorded in works that were written and passed down from generation to generation, though some of these works are expanded and many others are abridged. However, there is a serious scarcity, especially during the middle period, of sources dealing exclusively with the economy, except for some brief references here and there. There is practically no work which discusses the particular domain of economic dynamism from an experimental point of view.⁶

In view of the above, our discussion of the economic history of the ‘Abbasid caliphate before and during the Buwayhid period, will of necessity be fragmentary. What can be said is based on the only available written sources, especially Ibn al-Jawzī’s *al-Muntaẓam*⁷ and Miskawayh’s *Tajārib al-Umam*,⁸ and these relate to the general economic condition of the caliphate, the factors that led to the decline of the economy and the attempts made by some caliphs and sultāns to reverse the economic decline.

C. General Economic Condition

The economic condition of the ‘Abbasid empire and the Muslim world in general in the fourth century was in serious decline. According to Muhammad Abdul Jabbar Beg, this was manifested in economic

⁵ Bernard Lewis, “Sources for the Economic History of the Middle East”, in M.A. Cook (ed.), *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East from the Rise of Islam to the Present Day*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 88-9.

⁶ Habib b. Abdallah, *Del’iqā’ Etatique à l’Iqtā’ Militaire: Transition Economique et Echangement Sociaux: à Bagdad, 247-447 de l’Hegira /861-1055* ap. J. (Stockholm: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1986), p. 25.

⁷ Ibn al-Jawzī, Abū al-Faraj ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Alī, *Al-Muntaẓam fī Tārīkh al-Mulūk wa al-Umam*, 10 vols., (Haydarabad: Dā’irat al-Ma’arif al-‘Uthmāniyya, 1939).

⁸ Miskawayh, Abū ‘Alī Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Yūsuf, *Tajārib al-Umam*, 2 vols, (Tehran: Dār al-Shurūsh li’l-Ṭibā’a wa’l-Nashr, 1987).

depression as well as inflation.⁹ There are several reports that speak of the death of a large number of people due to starvation caused by scarcity of food and rising prices. There are some accounts of famine and shortage of food at different times. We hear of military revolt because of delayed pay, or demands for higher pay, due to price increases, and of mass revolt against the government. The revenue of the government decreased steadily as agricultural products diminished due to the fact that most of the land had been ruined and laid waste by civil wars and other conflicts. The *amīrs* sought ways to replenish the state treasury, resorting at times to illegitimate methods such as confiscations and levying fines against corrupt officials and adopted dangerous measures such as distributing lands to the army and civil servants. The caliph's estates were reduced, his palace ransacked, his revenues from the *jawālī* (poll-tax) diverted and his stipend decreased from year to year.

The decline of agriculture and the decrease in cultivated areas started from the very beginning of Muslim rule, but it accelerated greatly in the later middle ages. Abū Yūsuf, who lived during the eighth century AD, witnessed the agricultural decay of the Jūkhā region at the eastern part of the Tigris since the Arab conquest. The water resources of this once fertile region had disappeared and its agricultural production diminished. Abū Yūsuf observed as well that the decline of Iraq's agriculture had begun with the conquest by the Muslims. The area which had been allowed to lay waste since that time was so large that it would be impossible to bring it under cultivation within a short time.¹⁰ The decrease in cultivated areas also occurred in the western part of the empire. The agricultural lands of Egypt grew increasingly smaller during the eighth and the first half of the ninth centuries. According to al-Maqrīzī, in the middle of the ninth century the country was in decline with deplorable effects on the revenue of the government.¹¹

⁹ Muḥammad Abdul Jabbar Beg, "Contribution to the Economic History of the Caliphate: A Study of the Cost of Living and the Economic Status of Artisans in Abbasid Iraq", *Islamic Quarterly*, 16: 3-4 (July/December, 1972), p. 148.

¹⁰ E. Ashtor, *A Social and Economic History of the Near East in the Middle Ages* (London: Collins, 1976), pp. 58-9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

Among the phenomena of the decline of the economy at the end of the fourth/tenth century was the devaluation of the *dirham*, a silver coin favoured in business transactions. According to Abū Shujā‘ Rūdhrawārī, the reduction in its value was among the factors which led to the Daylamite revolt in 383/993. Later in 390/999, the Daylamites criticized the government over the decline of the dirham, and then proceeded to the house of the vizier, Abū Naṣr, to seize his wealth. The factor that had caused the decline of *dirham* was financial crisis, which in turn led to the price of the *ḍinār* rising to an unprecedented height during the fourth/tenth century.¹²

The decline of agriculture inevitably reduced the revenue of the government derived from taxes and agricultural products. Consequently, the *amīr al-umarā’* or the sultān was forced to reduce the caliph’s estates and other economic privileges. This encroachment of the caliph’s financial resources actually started with the transfer of the administration of the caliphate to the *amīr al-umarā’* Ibn Rā’fiq in 324/935. The caliph al-Rāḍī bestowed upon him comprehensive power over the army, tax-gathering and public security in the region under the caliph’s control.¹³ Although the caliph at this time still had a vizier, he was completely powerless because he no longer had any control over the provinces and the *ḍiwāns*. It was Ibn Rā’iq’s secretary who controlled the entire business of the state. In this respect, Miskawayh says, “The revenue from the provinces is transmitted to the treasury of the *amīrs*; they order and prohibit everything regarding it and expend it as they please while remitting what they choose to the caliph for his expenses. The old treasuries have ceased to exist.”¹⁴

The *amīr al-umarā’* allotted the *nafaqāt* (daily allowance) to the caliph, assigning for this special purpose *al-ḍiyā’*, called *al-ḍiyā’ al-mustakblaṣa* or *ḍiyā’ al-khidma* (estates assigned for the use of the caliph).¹⁵ The *ḍiyā’* of

¹² ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dūrī, *Tārīkh al-‘Irāq al-Iqtisādī fī al-Qarn al-Rābī’ al-Hijrī* (Baghdad: Maṭba‘at al-Ma‘ārif, n.d.), p. 226.

¹³ Mafīzuallah Kabir, *The Buyyid Dynasty of Baghdad (334/946-447/1055)*, (Calcutta: Iran Society, 1964), p. 189.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 190; Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, vol. 1, p. 352.

¹⁵ Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-Ṣūlī, *Kitāb al-Anwāq*, (Al-Qāhira: Maṭba‘at al-Sāwī, 1935), pp. 131, 145.

the sultān or estates of the caliph originally consisted of lands which the 'Abbasids had confiscated from the Umayyads.¹⁶ These increased gradually through purchase, through confiscation of the lands of officials who had died or those who had been dismissed from their offices for different reasons or through *iljā'* (postponement). The *ḍiyā'* of the sultān extended to different parts of the province of Iraq, in the Sawād, in the areas adjacent to Baghdad, Kūfa, Baṣra and Wāsiṭ, and in the lands reclaimed (*murtaja'a*) from the marshes, around Mawṣil and in Ahwāz and Iran.

Soon after the Buwayhids entered Baghdad in 334/945, they deprived the caliph al-Mustakfī of his control of the provinces and gave him a stipend of two thousand *dirhams* a day for his personal expenses (or 60.000 *dirhams* monthly = 4.600 *dīnārs* monthly).¹⁷ As these payments tended to be delayed, Mu'izz al-Dawla granted some fiefs, which were known as *ḍiyā' al-khidma*, to the caliph, yielding him a revenue of two hundred thousand *dīnārs* annually. These were supervised by the caliph's personal secretary. In the same year, Mu'izz al-Dawla deposed al-Mustakfī and installed al-Muṭī' in his place, annulling the salary and assigning the caliph an *iqṭā'* with an annual income of 200.000 *dīnārs*. Two years later, he stopped the daily allowance of the caliph altogether, leaving him to rely entirely on the *ḍiyā' al-khidma*. Therefore, the income of the caliph declined after 334/945 to about seven percent of what it had been during the reign of al-Muqtadir.¹⁸ Subsequently, even these estates also dwindled as a result of interference from the dependents of Mu'izz al-Dawla and Bakhtiyār, some of whom seized the outlying estates of the caliph, while others obtained some of them as *iqṭā'*, and still others undertook to tax-farm them for revenues, which they had no intention of paying.¹⁹ In addition, the caliph's property was frequently confiscated, his house robbed and precious objects taken. These confiscations took place three times under Buwayhid rule, but similar things had also happened before. Al-Rāḍī was subjected to confiscation and forced to pay the *amīr al-umarā'* an amount of money which he was

¹⁶ Al-Jahshiyārī, *Kitāb al-Wuṣṣarā' wa al-Kuttāb*, (al-Qāhira, 1938), p. 90.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 191; Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, vol 2, p. 344.

unable to raise, leaving him no other choice but to have silver and gold dishes melted down and struck as coins. Similarly, the caliph al-Muttaqī was deprived of his property and even blinded.²⁰

Ibn al-Jawzī states that the income from the estates of the caliph eventually decreased over the course of time to only fifty thousand *dīnārs* annually. During the reign of Sulṭān al-Dawla, the caliph, al-Qādir, was paid almost the same amount annually, besides two hundred manns [kilograms] of aloe woods, fifty manns [kilograms] of camphor, five hundred items of luxurious clothing and an unspecified quantity of scent. Jalāl al-Dawla agreed to continue this for the next caliph al-Qā'im.²¹

In addition to the fiefs and stipend, the caliph seems to have been allotted the proceeds from the *jizya* or *jamālī*, the poll-tax paid by non-Muslim subjects. In fact during the emirate of Jalāl al-Dawla, the soldiers who were not satisfied with the salary they received collected the *jamālī*, which was the caliph's prerogative, interfered with the mint and then imposed duties for their own benefit on commodities imported into the capital from Mawṣil.²² When Jalāl al-Dawla once again secured the proceeds of the *jamālī* in 434, he was obliged in the following year again to allow their appropriation by the caliph's officers.²³

Because of the economic crisis, the caliphs during the Buwayhid period were economically weak. They were not expected to be able to build a strong army to oppose that of the sulṭān, or to draw bureaucrats to their circle. On the contrary, they lived in simplicity and were constantly short of revenue. A clear indication of the caliph's lack of money was al-Muṭī's objection against providing money for the holy war against the Byzantines, which had been demanded by Bakhtiyār as mentioned earlier. The economic crisis during the fourth/tenth century not only caused the caliph's political weakness, but also incited brigandage, theft, social conflict and uprising, as we will see later.

²⁰ Mahmūd Ḥasan Aḥmad and Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Sharīf, *al-Ālam al-Islāmī fī al-ʿAṣr al-ʿAbbāsī* (Al-Qāhira: Dār al-Fīkr, n.d.), p. 524.

²¹ Kabir, *Buwayhid Dynasty*, p. 192.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 103; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 8, p. 78.

²³ Kabir, *Buwayhid Dynasty*, p. 192.

D. Factors Leading to the Economic Decline

M. A. Shaban maintains that the economic problems of the empire resulted from the cumulative effects of bad management in all fields, at all levels and of all regions. The symptoms were not only the lack of equal opportunities between the various sectors of society, but also between the diverse regions of the empire. The main concern of the central government was to exploit its domains without regard for the interests of its subjects. The central lords enjoyed the benefits while the people from the outer areas made all the sacrifices. The government felt responsible only for enforcing tax-collection, the revenues of which were to support a corrupt bureaucracy and an almost useless army. Even public services were ignored in many cases. Necessary repairs to irrigation systems were now charged to the users who had to pay for them over and above the required taxes.²⁴ For more than a century the caliphate had neglected investment in irrigation and restoration projects in the most productive of its provinces. Consequently, in the course of the late ninth and early tenth centuries, the economy of Iraq was ruined.²⁵

Corrupt practices such as hoarding wealth, which had already started under the Barmakids, continued to influence all ruling circles and became a regular practice. Members of the 'Abbasid family acquired more and more estates as their numbers increased rapidly. Many government officials, who came from families with great land holdings used their position to increase "their own wealth and that of their master."²⁶

The economic crisis during the fourth/tenth century seems to have been a general phenomenon resulting from several factors, besides the others mentioned above. Al-Tawhīdī, who lived during this period, wrote, "The hardship, poverty and depressing conditions suffered by people encouraged them to be stingy; the merchants were more cautious [in spending their money] and the people were reluctant to do good

²⁴ M.A. Shaban, *Islamic History: A New Interpretation*, vol. 2 A.D.750-1055 (A.H. 32-448) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 89-90.

²⁵ Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 136.

²⁶ Shaban, *Islamic History*, p. 90.

deeds, this was in particular due to the hardship they suffered from.”²⁷

The decline of the economy of the ‘Abbasid Empire was not primarily due to malpractice of the authorities and government officials, but to other factors as well. There was the civil war between al-Ma’mūn and al-Amīn, and between al-Musta’in and al-Mu’tazz, the revolts, especially those of the the Zanj and Qarmatians, the activity of the ‘*ayyārūn*, the flight of peasants to urban areas, natural calamity and the spread of plague. In the next sections we will discuss the contributing factors to the economic decline of the ‘Abbasid empire, in particular those of civil wars, uprisings, military *iqṭā’* and the activity of the ‘*ayyārūn*.

1. *Civil Wars*

The civil war between al-Amīn and al-Ma’mūn (196/811-198 / 813) had a profound effect on the economy of the ‘Abbasid empire. The conflict arose over the status of the province of Khurāsān. According to the succession agreement made in Mecca in 186/802, al-Ma’mūn was given authority over Khurāsān, while Iraq province was to be under the control of al-Amīn. After the death of their father Hārūn al-Rashīd (170-194/786-809), al-Amīn was persuaded by an important group of *abnā’*²⁸ led by ‘Alī b. ‘Īsā and the *ḥājib* al-Faḍl b. Rabī‘ to reestablish Baghdad’s control over the province (Khurāsān). For his part, al-Ma’mūn, supported by his vizier al-Faḍl b. Sahl and the magnates of Khurāsān, was determined to defend his rights and rejected the demands of his brother, and even went so far as to proclaim himself *imām*. The breach became final when in Ṣafar 195/810, al-Amīn appointed his own son Mūsā as heir apparent, removing al-Ma’mūn from his place in the succession. Two months later (Rabī‘ II 195/January 811), ‘Alī b. ‘Īsā was appointed governor of Khurāsān and supplied with an army drawn from the *abnā’* and numbering 40, 000 people. In Baghdad, al-Amīn recruited the people of the city, contemptuously referred to as ‘*ayyārūn*, whom the Arab sources defined as tramps, prisoners, riff-raff, the unemployed,

²⁷ Ḥasan Aḥmad and Ibrāhīm al-Sharīf, *Al-‘Alam al-Islāmi*, p. 209.

²⁸ *Abnā’*, literally means “sons”, used (a) of the descendants of the Persian settlers in Yaman at the time of Muḥammad, and (b) of the descendants of the Khurāsānīs who came west with the ‘Abbasids armies and settled in Baghdad; Kennedy, *Prophet*, p. 398.

shopkeepers, peddlers and the dregs of society.²⁹ These 'ayyārūn defended the city using leaves of palms as helmets, and mat of reeds filled with soil and stones as armour and shields, sticks as spears; strips of cloth for flags, and the horns of cows as trumpets.³⁰ Against 'Alī b. 'Isā 's army, al-Ma'mūn sent Ṭāhir b. al-Ḥusayn to Rayy with an army of only 5000. In Sha'bān 195/May 811, the two armies met outside the city walls of Rayy and Ṭāhir won a decisive victory, 'Alī b. 'Isā was killed and his army fled west in disorder. The defeat of 'Alī b. 'Isā's army paved the way for Ṭāhir to proceed to Iraq. He defeated a smaller army of *abnā'* at Ḥamadān and established himself, before winter set in, in Hulwān on the edge of the Iraqī plains, only a few days journey from Baghdad itself. In Baghdad, al-Amīn tried to raise new armies to supplement the now weakened *abnā'*, turning first to leading Arab tribes like the Shaybānis and to the Qayṣīs of northern Syria. In both cases, the *abnā'* declined to co-operate with their alleged allies, while the Arabs were unwilling to fight for al-Amīn without important political concessions and rewards. Al-Amīn was therefore unable to organize a coalition. In the spring of 916/812, Ṭāhir was joined by a large army led by Harthama b. A'yān and succeeded in capturing the cities of southern Iraq without any real difficulty. In Dhu al-Ḥijja 196/August 812, Harthama began to lay siege to Baghdad, which lasted slightly over a year. At the beginning of 198/September 813, after realizing the impossibility winning the war, al-Amīn now attempted to surrender to his father's old friend Harthama, who sent a boat across the river to fetch him. However, Ṭāhir, suspicious of any private deals which excluded him, overturned the boat, captured the caliph and executed him.³¹

The year-long siege of Baghdad was an almost unparalleled episode in the history of Islamic society, in the sense of its destructive effect on the city itself and its citizens. In addition, the years between the death of al-Amīn in 198/813 and the arrival of al-Ma'mūn in Baghdad in

²⁹ *Ibid.*; CL Cahen quoted by Ahmad, includes to the people of the 'ayyārūn as the following: the naked 'anrāt (those dressed in rags), working class people (*rubaydiyya*), men of the market (porters, keepers, etc), street vendor (*bā'at al-ṭariq*), the populace (*ra'āt*), wanderers (*ā'ir*) especially gangs (*awbāsh*), and finally the shrewd (*shuttār*).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

³¹ Kennedy, *Prophet*, pp. 148-52.

204/819, saw prolonged and destructive fighting throughout the Near East, but especially in Baghdad and the surrounding countryside.³² This civil war had presumably an effect on the supply of food-stuffs from one region to another within the domain of the 'Abbasid caliphate, which included Iraq, Syria, Persia, Ḥijāz and so on. Based on the numismatic evidence, the civil war also led to the devaluation of the 'Abbasid *dīnār*, and consequently to a marked inflationary trend in the cost of living.³³

The second civil war occurred between al-Musta'īn and al-Mu'tazz as a result of the rivalry between the Turkish commanders who supported al-Musta'īn and those who sided with al-Mu'tazz. The caliph al-Musta'īn left Sāmarrā for Baghdad following his vizier Waṣīf and Bugā, the latter's younger brother, at the beginning of 251/865, due to insecurity and under attack from other Turks. The Turks remaining in Sāmarrā realized that an alliance of the caliph, Waṣīf, Bughā, the Ṭāhirids and the *shākiriyya*³⁴ of Baghdad was a formidable threat to their position and they decided on war. They chose a new caliph for themselves, al-Mu'tazz, and embarked on the siege of Baghdad.

The second siege of Baghdad resembled in many respects the first that had occurred during the reign of al-Amīn, with its long and desperate battles, the involvement of the *'ayyārūn*, and finally the divisions among the defenders, leading to the fall of the city. Waṣīf and Bughā were less than eager to fight the army of Sāmarrā, from which they themselves had come, and transferred the power to others. Furthermore, the Ṭāhirid leader was disappointed with the rebels, weakening the spirit of the resistance. As a result, the miserable al-Musta'īn was exiled to Wāsiṭ, where he died soon after, while Mu'tazz became an undisputed caliph taking his base in Sāmarrā', with the support of the Turkish military.³⁵

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Abdul Jabbar Beg, "Contribution", p. 148.

³⁴ Shākiriyya was intact units under the leadership of their local chiefs, from Transoxania, Armenia, and North Africa; Ira M. Lapidus, *Islamic Societies*, p. 127.

³⁵ Kennedy, *Prophet*, pp. 173-4.

2. *Uprisings and Interference in Politics by Soldiers*

There were many revolts recorded by Muslim historians from classical up to medieval times, that not only resulted in many deaths, but also involved acts of looting, the burning of houses and the devastation of agricultural lands. There were many causes of revolts, often including political reasons, reaction against oppression or social division. The huge gap in living standards between the lower strata of the masses and the higher ones, who lived luxuriously, stimulated much social discontent. The rich could enjoy a wide variety of delights which were available to them and they had the means to indulge in their wealth. The poor expressed their bitterness in uprisings and participation in clandestine movements against the state, like the Qarmatian movements and that of the Zanj. The Arabs and the Bedouins embarked on attacking the Sawād of Kūfa and the surrounding lands around Baghdad.³⁶

The rebellions, too numerous to list here, were generally destructive, but the most significant revolts that had an important impact on the politics and economy of the 'Abbasid empire were those of the Zanj (c. 256-319/869-931)³⁷ and the Qarmatians (c. 277-319/890-931). Zanj is a term applied to the Negroes brought from East Africa who were employed to remove the nitrous layers which covered the swamp to the north of Baṣra. They numbered from 50 to 500 workers called "sweepers" whose jobs it was to take out the nitrous layers and pile them up in mounds, so that the land might become arable again. Their strict discipline and the poor conditions in which they lived, developed in them a group spirit, and their great number, amounting to many thousands, gave them a consciousness of their own strength. Their leader was a certain 'Alī b. Muḥammad, who came from Verzenin (near modern Teheran) and pretended to be an offspring of the caliph 'Alī - as did many other leaders of uprisings -, but according to Arab historians, he belonged to the tribe of 'Abd al-Qays.³⁸

At the beginning of September 256/869, 'Alī began to rouse the sweepers, promising them that he would lead them to freedom, give

³⁶ Fahmī 'Abd al-Razzāq Sa'ad, *al-Āmma fī Baghdad*, pp. 181-2.

³⁷ Ashtor, *Economic History*, pp. 116-7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

them property and remain faithful to them to the end. His goal was the overthrow of the existing regime, the establishment of a new social order, and the restoration of a pure Islam, with the social justice it implied. As with many other leaders of revolt, he pretended to be the Mahdī whom all Muslims believe will come at the last day and strive for the restoration of the true religion.³⁹

The first attack of the Zanj on Baṣra in 256/869 was unsuccessful because they were defeated by the ‘Abbasid army under the command of Ja‘lān and with the support of other Zabībī and the Banū Hāshim.⁴⁰ Following this defeat, they built their own capital, al-Mukhtāra (the Elect City), situated on the canal Nahr Abī al-Khāsib, south east of Baṣra. In the same year, they took several towns in the eastern part of the empire: al-Ubulla, ‘Abadān, Khūzistān, al-Ahwāz, killing many of their inhabitants.⁴¹ They then cut Baghdad’s supplies from the south, intercepting the ships on the Tigris. In September 257/870, they took Baṣra, burning several villages around it, killing whomever they found and plundering people’s properties.⁴² Two years later (259/872), they occupied Ahwāz for the second time and devastated the district until they were repelled by the ‘Abbasid army.⁴³ In 262/875, they easily took Baiḥa and Dasta Mayṣān because of the absence of the ‘Abbasid army to fight the Ṣaffārids.⁴⁴ In 265/878, they took three towns on the Tigris: Jabbul, al-Nu‘māniyya and Jarjaraya.⁴⁵ Having subjugated all these towns, they then built another new town al-Manī‘, and in 266/879, they took Rāmḥurmuz from the Kurdish rebels. This marked their highest achievement and the peak of their power, after they had been revolting for ten years. Their town, al-Mukhtāra, had become the capital of the Zanjī state, incorporating large parts of southern Iraq and Khūzistān.⁴⁶

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī al-Ma‘rūf bi Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, vol.7, (Bayrūt: Mu‘assasat al-‘Ālamī li’l-Maṭbū‘at, n.d.), p. 431.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 7, pp. 471-3; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 7, Bayrūt: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Ilmiyya, 1987), vol. 7, pp. 236-7.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 481-2; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 7, pp. 244-6.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 504-5; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 7, p. 259.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 521; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 7, p. 292.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 521; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 7, p. 322.

⁴⁶ Ashtor, *Economic History*, p. 119.

In 267/880, Abū al-'Abbās b. al-Muwaffaq, the future caliph al-Mutaḍid, was able to seize the regions along the Tigris from the leader of the Zanj, Sulayman b. Jāmi'. In the month of Rabī', al-Ākhir, al-Muwaffaq and his son Abū al-'Abbās, succeeded in taking al-Manī'a and al-Manṣūra. As part of the strategy for attacking the Zanj, in this year, al-Muwaffaq built a city facing the city of al-Mukhtāra, named after him, al-Muwaffaqiyya.⁴⁷ The next year, al-Muwaffaq's army began to destroy the fortresses of al-Mukhtāra, and while some of his army had penetrated the town for the first time, they were faced by the army of the Zanj and some of them were killed, forcing them to retreat to their encampment, the city of al-Muwaffaqiyya. Al-Muwaffaq caught the merchants who supplied the Zanj in al-Mukhtāra, killing some of them and taking others prisoner.⁴⁸ The raid on al-Mukhtāra ceased for a while because al-Muwaffaq was wounded during the combat.⁴⁹ When he recovered from his wound, in Sha'bān 269/February 883, al-Muwaffaq resumed military activity, joined by Lu'lu' and the Ṭūlūnid army. After about six months of bitter fighting, al-Mukhtāra was taken and 'Alī b. Muḥammad killed, with his head brought to Baghdad and exhibited to the people. Some of his commanders, such as Sulayman b. Jāmi' and Ibrāhīm b. Ja'far al-Hamadhānī, were taken prisoners.⁵⁰ The Zanj's revolt, which had terrorized Iraq and undermined the 'Abbasid empire for fourteen years, was finally subdued. Kennedy comments on the effect of the Zanj's rebellions as follows:

Slave farming and large-scale reclamation of land were never begun again and it seems unlikely that the city of Baṣra ever fully recovered. Trade routes had been disrupted for too long, merchants had found other ways of communicating with the east, via Sirāf in southern Iran for example, and Baṣra and southern Iraq in general entered a long period of decline.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 9, p. 585.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 603-4; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol.7, p. 364-5.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 609; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol.7, p. 374; Alexandre Popovic, *La Révolte des Esclaves en Iraq au IIIe/IXe siècle* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1974), p. 143.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 654; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 7, pp. 399-400.

⁵¹ Kennedy, *Prophet*, p. 181.

In addition, the revolt of the Zanj was a decisive phase in the history of the caliphal empire. The disruptive forces became so strong that they brought about its decomposition. North Africa had broken away a long time ago. During the long war against the revolting slaves, and in the period that followed, many other countries separated themselves from the 'Abbasid caliphate.⁵² Above all, the revolt of the Zanj contributed to the damage of agriculture of Sawād and its irrigation systems, paralyzed the trade and commerce of southern Iraq, and exposed the weakness of the political and military system of the caliphate.⁵³

This major political calamity was followed by the menacing Qarmatian revolt. The Qarmatians or *Qarāmiṭa* (sing. *Qarmaṭī*) were the adherents of a branch of the Ismā'īliyya. Originally the name was given to the followers of Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ (Ḥamdān b. al-Ash'ath), an Ismā'īlī leader in the *sawād* of Kūfa. It is said that he came from Khūzistān and then resided in a village called Nahrin, where his piety and asceticism attracted many people. He made *da'wa* on behalf of one of the 'Alid *imāms* and so many people joined him.⁵⁴ Based on the work of al-Faḍl b. Shādhān (d. 260/873-4), *al-Radd 'alā al-Qarāmiṭa*, a refutation of the Qarmatians, this activity must have started before the year 261/874-5 or 264/877-8, which is mentioned by the sources as the date of the beginning of the movement. At first the movement led by Ḥamdān was "merely part of the general Ismā'īlī movement of his time whose leadership he recognized."⁵⁵ However, after his revolt against the leadership in 286/899, and his subsequent disappearance, the Qarmatians threw off their allegiance to the Fāṭimid caliph.⁵⁶ Another Qarmaṭī leader, by the name Abū Sa'īd al-Jannābī, appeared in Baḥrayn, attracting many followers from among the Arabs and other Qarmatians, so that their movement became strong. They killed the people of Baḥrayn and then

⁵² Ashtor, *Economic History*, p. 121.

⁵³ Sa'ad, *al-Āmma*, p. 181.

⁵⁴ Thābit b. Sinān and Ibn al-'Adīm, *Akhhār al-Qarāmiṭa*, taḥqīq: Suhayl Zakkār (Bayrūt: Mu'assasa al-Risāla, 1971), p. 13; Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 10, p. 75; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 7, p. 493.

⁵⁵ W. Madelung, "Qarmaṭī", *E.I.*, new ed. vol. 5, p. 660.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

went to Qatīf, murdering its inhabitants and intending to march on Baṣra.⁵⁷ In 287/900, Abū Sa'īd and his followers raided Ḥajar and some of them approached Baṣra, defeating the 'Abbasid army under the leadership of al-'Abbās b. 'Amr al-Ghunawī.⁵⁸ In Dhū al-Qa'da, the 'Abbasids sent Badr, a *ghulam* of al-Ṭā'i', to fight Abū Sa'īd and was successful in killing many of the latter's followers.⁵⁹

The killing and capture of so many people, along with the destruction of the country by the Qarmatian, led the people of Syria and Egypt to send complaints to the caliph al-Muktafi. At the end of Ramadan in 291/904, the latter then sent an army to Syria under the command of Muhammad b. Sulayman, who defeated the Qarmatian in the west of Hamah, taking many of them prisoners, and the rest escaping to the desert.⁶⁰ Two years later (293/906), the Qarmatian, under the leadership of Zikrawayh, defeated the 'Abbasid army and attacked the caravans of Khurāsānī pilgrims on their return from Mecca, at 'Aqaba, killing about 20.000 pilgrims,⁶¹ and seizing goods worth about one million *dīnārs*. The next year (294/907), the 'Abbasid army, under the command of Wāṣif b. Suwartakin, met Zikrawayh on the way to Khaffān or Khiffān on 18 Rabi' al-Awwal, and a fierce battle broke out, during which Zikrawayh was captured and died a few days later.⁶²

The first militant stage of the Qarmatian movement seems to have ceased temporarily when Abū Sa'īd al-Jannābī was assassinated in his new capital at Haṣā near Hajar in 301/914. His successor, Abū Ṭāhir, accepted a reconciliation offered by the caliph al-Muqtadir and a peaceful situation lasted for about ten years.⁶³ However, from 311/923 to 316/928, Abū Ṭāhir launched a series of devastating campaigns into southern

⁵⁷ Thābit b. Sinān and Ibn al-'Adīm, *Akhhār*, p. 13; Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 10, p. 75; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 7, p. 493.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 7, pp. 498-9; Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 10, p. 85.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 7, p. 524.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 7, p. 526; Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 10, p. 109; 'Arīb b. Sa'īd al-Qurtubī, *Ṣilat Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī* (Leiden: Brill, 1897), pp. 11-2.

⁶¹ Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 7, p. 549.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 549; Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 10, p. 130; Thābit b. Sinān and Ibn al-'Adīm, *Akhhār*, pp. 35-6.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, vol. 8, p. 83; Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 10, p. 148.

Iraq, raiding Baṣra and Kūfa repeatedly, attempting unsuccessful attacks on Baghdad, and attacking the pilgrims' caravan.⁶⁴ The most barbarous acts committed by the Qarmatians occurred in 317/930, when they raided Mecca, slaughtering the pilgrims and inhabitants, and carrying off to Bahrayn, the Black Stone of the Ka'ba, which was not returned until 339/951.⁶⁵ In 357/968, the *Qarmaṭī* al-Ḥasan al-A'ṣam took Damascus and ravaged Ramla after defeating the Ikhshīdids.⁶⁶ The next year, the Ikhshīdids agreed to pay tribute for Ramla and Damascus after they had been defeated by the Qarmatians.⁶⁷ Their attacks on Egypt and Syria continued until they were defeated by the Fāṭimid caliph, al-'Azīz, in 368/978, and retreated to Ḥasā in exchange for a sizable annual tribute paid to them.⁶⁸

The Qarmatians' rebellion, according to Kennedy, "was to weaken the settled communities at the expense of the bedouin, a process which was to continue throughout the next century and a half."⁶⁹ They also damaged the trade of the Persian Gulf and the trade between Arabia and Iraq, causing the latter to suffer from a decline in international trade. The disruption of the caliphate interfered with the international routes which brought goods from the Far East and South Asia to Baghdad for trans-shipment to the Mediterranean. In the late tenth century, the Fāṭimid regime helped to promote an alternative international route through the Red Sea and Cairo, which also damaged the commercial prosperity of Iraq.⁷⁰ Incessant warfare severely ruined irrigation works in the Tigris region and large districts became depopulated.⁷¹

In the midst of these severe threats, further confusion ensued due to misadministration and the interference of Turkish soldiers in

⁶⁴ W. Madelung, "Ḳarmaṭī", *E.I.*, new ed. vol. 5, p. 662; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 8, pp. 143-80; Thābit b. Sinān, *Akhhbār*, pp. 36-51; 'Aṣīb, *Ṣilat*, p. 139.

⁶⁵ Madelung, "Ḳarmaṭī", *E.I.*, new ed. vol. 5, p. 662; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 7; Thābit b. Sinān, *Akhhbār*, p. 57.

⁶⁶ Madelung, "Ḳarmaṭī", *E.I.*, new ed. vol. 5, p. 663; Thābit b. Sinān, *Akhhbār*, p. 104.

⁶⁷ Kennedy, *Prophet*, pp. 290-1.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Lapidus, *Islamic Societies*, p. 136.

politics during the first half of the tenth century A.D.⁷² The transfer of power into the hands of the Turkish and Daylamite soldiers, led to a general decline in the economic condition of Iraq. The currency and banking system suffered from stagnation and financial activity decreased during this period.⁷³

In addition, the rule of the *amīr al-umārā'* had unfortunate consequences for the irrigation system which could not be improved due to the limited efforts of the state.⁷⁴ During the rule of the *amīr al-umārā'* between 324-335/935-945, the canals were neglected and the country ruined due to the rivalries and wars between the *amīrs*, and the confusion brought on by the mutiny of the army. During the conflict between the Turkish *amīr* Bakjam and Ibn Rā'iq, the latter destroyed the river Diyali and committed many evil acts which caused damage to the dams of Nahrawān, consequently ruining agriculture. In 329/940, the dams of the rivers Rafil and Būq were damaged and were not repaired, rendering the Badūriya river useless for about ten years. In 330/941, the Nahrawān river dam was damaged due to the depredation of Ibn Rā'iq and his soldiers. In the year 333/934, the 'Isā river dam was damaged and the *amīr al-umārā'* failed to repair it. And finally, the Khālīs river dam was damaged in the same year and no restoration was attempted except that the caliph closed the damaged dam on the Ṣarāt river in 327/938. Al-Ṣūlī describes the consequence of this deed, saying that, "it destroyed the world, and increased prices to a dangerous level up to this time", i.e. to the year 334/945. This black period was brought to a close by the invasion of the Buwayhids of Baghdad in 334/945. The Buwayhid occupation of Baghdad for a century (945-1055), was characterized by civic disturbances between Sunnites and Sh'ites, the lawless activities of the *'ayyārūn* and other upheavals affecting public security, and the general debasement of the *dīnār* leading to inflation.⁷⁵

In addition, rivalry between the leaders, during the period of *amīr al-umārā'*, trying to impose their power on Baghdad and the consequences of their domination on agricultural income and the destruction of

⁷² Abdul Jabbar Beg, "Contribution", p. 148.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Sa'ad, *al-Āmma*, p. 181.

⁷⁵ Abdul Jabbar Beg, "Contribution", p. 148 .

farmlands and the irrigation systems, all delivered a fatal blow to agriculture. This inevitably caused famine and diseases, which killed a great number of people in Baghdad and encouraged others to flee from the city.⁷⁶

3. *Military Iqtā'*

Another factor which brought about economic decline was the introduction of the military *iqṭā'*, namely an *iqṭā'* granted to soldiers in lieu of salary. In the fourth/tenth century the *iqṭā'* passed into military phase in which the lands were distributed to the soldiers on a large scale. This was a result of several factors, among them the emptiness of the state treasury during the last years of the reign of al-Muqtadir (after 317/929) and under his successors, the lack of experience on the part of the first Buwayhids in administration, and military anarchy.⁷⁷ The granting of *iqṭā'* and the creation of tax-farms caused the peasants to lose their motivation to maintain rural productivity.⁷⁸

The year 334/945 was decisive in the development of this practice, since Mu'izz al-Dawla started to distribute *iqṭā'*s to his soldiers without calculation, a policy which was followed by the Buwayhids who succeeded him. From that time onwards, the military *iqṭā'* increased steadily to the extent that the *iqṭā' mudniyya*⁷⁹ became second in importance. The military *iqṭā'* expanded at the expense of other kinds of lands, such as the special *iqṭā'*, estates of the caliph and the lands belonging to the state treasury. 'Aḍud al-Dawla went so far as to bestow his army the *waqf* land (land belonging to a religious endowment).⁸⁰

Actually, the military *iqṭā'* was not hereditary, neither was it for a lifetime. It was not considered a possession of the *muqṭī'* (the holder of

⁷⁶ Sa'ad, *al-Āmma*, p. 181.

⁷⁷ Al-Dūrī, *Tārīkh al-Iraq al-Iqtisādī fī al-Qarn al-Rābi' al-Hijrī* (Baghdad: Maṭba'at al-Ma'ārif, 1948), p. 30; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 8, pp. 342-3.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ The *iqṭā' mudniyya* was granted to the government officials in lieu of the salary. It was very common in the beginning of the fourth century. When a vizier received the post of the vizierate, he was given this *iqṭā'*, and when he was deposed, it was taken back and then rendered to his successor; Al-Dūrī, *Tārīkh*, p. 29; see also Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, vol.1, p. 155; al-Tanūkhī, *al-Faraj ba'da al-Shidda*, vol. 1, p. 137.

⁸⁰ Al-Dūrī, *Tārīkh*, p. 30.

iqṭā'), because the Buwayhid *amīr* reserved the right to cancel it whenever he wished. If it was given to military leaders, its revenue was a compensation for the salary which the Buwayhid treasury could no longer pay its soldiers. The grant of *iqṭā'* was accompanied by an agreement which implied that the holders of the *iqṭā'* were obliged to send a certain amount of money or its equivalent from the produce of the land, all at one time or by installments. They were also responsible for the maintenance of the canals crossing their lands.⁸¹ In reality, however, they did not pay anything to the state treasury. They exploited their land as they wished and entrusted the working of their *iqṭā'* to their deputies, while not declaring their revenues, a tradition which was carried on from the time of Mu'izz al-Dawla up to the time of 'Aḍud al-Dawla.⁸²

Miskawayh provides us a detailed description about Mu'izz al-Dawla's dealing with the land. He mentions that in 334/945, the army mutinied against him and demanded its pay. Realizing that the treasury was empty, Mu'izz al-Dawla granted his Daylamite followers and leading officers, his courtiers and his Turkish soldiers, estates belonging to the sultān, people who had gone into hiding, and Ibn Shirzād, a former vizier, as well, and dues belonging to the public treasury on estates in private ownership. The result was that the Sawād ceased to pay taxes and no longer was under the control of revenue officers; only a small part of it remained liable to taxation and was therefore farmed.⁸³

Mu'izz al-Dawla's measure in granting most of the state lands to his soldiers, according to Miskawayh, was a grave mistake. He also granted most of the lands of al-Sawād in fiefs while they were still in a desolate and unproductive state and before they were restored to cultivation. Added to this, the viziers did not take harsh measures against the frivolous holders of the *iqṭā'*s, letting themselves be bribed and be persuaded by intermediaries so that the *iqṭā'*s were obtained on an inconsistent *'ibra* (measurement of the land liable to taxation).⁸⁴ Those who gained profits,

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 31

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁸³ Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, vol. 2, pp. 96-100; Miskawayh, *Eclipse*, vol. 2, p. 100.

⁸⁴ *'Ibra*, an estimate of revenue taken as the mean between the most and the least productive years; H.F. Amedroz, "Abbasid Administration in the Decay", *JRAS* 2 (1913), p. 823.

retained their grants, while those who did not, returned their *iqṭāʿ*s and received others so as to compensate them for their losses. The mischief was so wide-spread that it became regular practice for the soldiers to ruin their *iqṭāʿ*s and then return them in exchange for land they were allowed to choose for themselves, thereby benefiting enormously.⁸⁵

The grantees often entrusted the management of their estates to slaves and agents, who kept no account of profits and losses and did nothing to further productiveness or improvement. They merely embezzled their masters' property by various methods, while their masters recouped themselves for the loss of revenues by fines and unjust dealings. The officers in charge of the irrigation system departed because the territory was no longer in the hands of the *sulṭān*. Their duties had been reduced to calculating what was needed for irrigation, which was then apportioned to the assignees, who neglected to pay for their shares, and if they paid, the money was embezzled and not spent on the purposes for which it was levied. These inspectors were indifferent to possible accidents, being content to take what could benefit them and disregarding sources of danger. They would make new demands of the government or return the grants which had gone to ruin in their possession, and handed over the administration of each district to the leading Daylamites, who regarded them as their private domain for life. These governors were surrounded by dishonest agents whose aim was to delay matters, to make adjustment and to put off payments or taxes from year to year.⁸⁶

After mentioning the corrupt practices of the holders of *iqṭāʿ*s, Miskawayh mentions the consequences which led to the damage of the cultivated lands in particular and the decline of the economy in general. Over the course of time, he maintains, principles relating to the land were abandoned, canals were ruined, and government agencies were annulled, so that misfortunes fell on the cultivators. They either left their villages or endured injustice without obtaining redress or surrendered lands to the *muṭṭāʿ* in order to escape oppression by coming to terms with him. Consequently, cultivation ceased, some of the *dīvān*s were closed, and the very tradition of clerkship and administration

⁸⁵ Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, vol. 2, pp. 96-100; Miskawayh, *Eclipse*, vol. 2, p. 100.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

vanished.⁸⁷

The districts not included in such *iqṭā'* were assigned to two classes of men, one being comprised of generals and other officers of the army, while the other was made up of government officials and men of business. The officers were eager to hoard wealth, gain profits, raise grievances, and demand reductions in taxes. If they were investigated, they became enemies of the sultans. If their wealth was reduced by payments that were strictly demanded from them, they became open rebels. If they were treated with leniency, their greed became worse and stopped at nothing. The civilians of the official class, on the other hand, were more skillful than the military at transferring liability onto the shoulders of the government and at making stealthy profits at its expense.⁸⁸

Miskawayh goes further, saying that Mu'izz al-Dawla continued to follow his inclination as regards his soldiers, freely distributing grants of land (*iqṭā'*) and increasing stipends, sometimes showering them with riches and favours. He was, therefore, unable to save money for accidents or to preserve revenue. His expenses increased whereas his resources diminished till there was a deficit against him, which was never kept under control, but tended to increase at an enormous rate. In the course of time, this led to the Daylamites' demands not being met, and to their becoming envious of the Turks by reason of their favoured position. Necessity compelled the sultān to attach the Turks more closely to himself, and promote them higher and higher, favouring them more and more and relying on them against the Daylamites. As his favour was increasingly bestowed on the former and neglect shown to the latter, enmity occurred, and indeed with the Turks being stimulated by greed and the Daylamites by want and poverty, the instinct of revolt was engendered, becoming the cause of what happened later.⁸⁹

Mu'izz al-Dawla had planted the roots of destruction in the economic and political spheres. Economically, he damaged cultivated

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Miskawayh, *Eclipse*, vol. 5, pp. 100-5; Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, vol. 2, pp. 97-102; H.F. Amedroz, "Abbasid Administration", pp. 823-4.

lands, which constituted the main source of revenues for the state. Therefore, it was no wonder that he always lacked money to pay his army, or that the latter often rebelled against him. Politically, he laid the ground for conflicts and division within his army, leading to his destruction by the policy of favouring one group, i.e. the Turks, and neglecting the other, i.e. the Daylamites.

4. *The Activity of the 'Ayyārūn*

The economic problems of Iraq, and particularly those of Baghdad, were aggravated by the activity of the *'ayyārūn* (sing. *'ayyār*). Historical accounts mention that scarcity of food stuffs or increase in prices resulted from the activities of the *'ayyārūn*, who frequently plundered and raided merchants' stores, disturbing the flow of merchandise, costing them money and inevitably led to increases in prices. Furthermore, the *'ayyārūn* very often burnt shops, and the Turkish army, when in search of the *'ayyārūn* or during clashes with them, also set fire to the shops in which they had hidden themselves.

From the fourth/tenth century onwards, the movement of the *'ayyārūn* was a common element in the public life of Baghdad. The first appearance of the *'ayyārūn* mentioned by Ṭabaṛī and Mas'ūdī was during the cruel siege of Baghdad by Ṭāhir, the commander of al-Ma'mūn's army. According to Ṭabaṛī, al-Amīn looked at the people who had no armour or weapons, and ordered the house of armaments to be opened for them and the prisoners broke out of prison and joined al-Amīn's forces to defend the capital.⁹⁰ They were organized according to units of ten men, commanded by an *'arīf*, one hundred men by a *nāqīb*, one thousand men by a *qā'id* and ten thousand of men by an *amīr*.⁹¹ Their chiefs were known as Dunal, Damhal, Abū Numla, Abū Asara, Daykuwayh (Halawayh), Yantawayh (Ninawayh), names which indicate that men of all races and faiths mixed together.⁹² These *'ayyārūn*, using sticks and stones, fought to repel Ṭāhir's soldiers, who wore armour

⁹⁰ Ṭabaṛī, *Tārīkh*, vol., 8, pp. 429-30, 443.

⁹¹ Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma'ādīn al-Jawhar*, vol. 2 (Bayrūt: Mu'assasa al-'Ālam li'l-Maṭbū'āt, 1991), p. 318.

⁹² C. Cahen, *Mouvements Populaires et Autonomisme Urbain dans l'Asie Musulmane du Moyen Age* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1959), p. 37.

and carried spears. They fought as though possessed and great numbers of them were killed.⁹³ When the fight became prolonged and extended to different places along the eastern river, the *'ayyārūn* came from everywhere and assembled, numbering “about one hundred thousand men” and attacked the army of al-Ma'mūn. Many of them were killed, wounded or drowned.⁹⁴ It is likely that the chief of the *'ayyārūn* was among those who advised al-Amīn not to surrender after his defeat, but to flee to Syria, from where he could continue the fight. During this period, a number of poems were written on the heroic fight of the *'ayyārūn* in defense of the city of Baghdad.⁹⁵ In the course of time, they sometimes mixed in the society, sometimes marched in the streets or in demonstrations. There are plenty of accounts of their uprisings at the end of the 10th century, in the third decade of the 11th century, and the fourth decade of the 12th century.⁹⁶

When the caliph, al-Muhtadī, was head of the army and lacked support against the Turkish officers whose soldiers mutinied in 256/869, he decided to retreat and made an appeal to anyone who would aid him to continue the battle. Only the *'ayyārūn* answered his appeal. Arriving at the front gates of the prison, they took the bridle of the caliph's horse and asked him to liberate the prisoners, not letting him go until he had given orders to this effect.⁹⁷

In 325/936 the governor of Baghdad, Lu'lu', incorporated into the ranks of the police the *'ayyārūn* and the men of faction (*abl al-'aṣabiyyā*).⁹⁸ And when *amīr* al-Barīdī marched towards Baghdad in 330/941, and *amīr* Ibn Rā'iq and the caliph went out to face him, a considerable number of the *'ayyārūn* from “all quarters of the city” assembled to participate in the war. On Friday, al-Barīdī was defamed in the pulpits of the city's mosques.⁹⁹

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Simha Sabari, *Mouvements populaires à Baghdad à l'Époque Abbasside, ix^e-xe siècles* (Libraire d'Amérique et d'Orient Adrien Maisonneuve, n.d.), p. 77.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁹⁸ Cahen, *Mouvements Populaires*, p. 37.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

In addition to patriotism demonstrated by the *'ayyārūn*, they were very frequently involved in brigandage, plunder and riot. The period of trouble which marked the first part of 4th/5th centuries, was naturally conducive to the appearance of the *'ayyārūn*. Indeed, starting in 306/918, they began to appear as groups of thieves, sometimes as assistants of political leaders facing the weakness of the regular public force. In the course of time, the *'ayyārūn* quite often fought against the authorities, especially the chief of the police and the preacher of the mosque. For example, in 307/919, Nujh was appointed as head of the police in Baghdad. He installed several *faqīhs* (experts on Islamic law) in their headquarters so that the police might act according to their rulings and advice. The *'ayyārūn*, without due respect to Nujh, continued to launch attacks against the merchants of the city.¹⁰⁰

The *'ayyārūn* activities seem to have been frequently similar to those of thieves. The poverty and hardship suffered by the poor resulted in different manifestations, such as theft, hard work, public disturbance, asceticism and Sufism, and adherence to Shī'ism.¹⁰¹ The activities of the thieves formed a significant phenomenon. The thieves came from the poor or oppressed class of society and increased in number as changes took place in the Iraḳī community, such as the emergence of large and crowded cities, the increase of consumption, the rise in the cost of living, the declining conditions of farmers and the increasing pressures caused by the bedouin migration to the cities in the fourth century. This development left behind a social group, unable to feed itself or earn a livelihood, that sought vengeance and revolted against the authorities who had failed to improve living conditions.¹⁰²

Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī tells us of the consequences of this political and social instability, which encouraged the activities of the thieves (*'ayyārūn*).¹⁰³ In 332/943, Ibn Ḥamdī, the reputed *'ayyār*, began to cause trouble for the authorities. According to al-Ṣūlī, he had been a porter in an iron shop before becoming a thief. The *amīr* Shirzād

¹⁰⁰Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, vol. 1, p. 69; see also Sabari, *Mouvements Populaires*, p. 79.

¹⁰¹Sa'ad, *al-Āmma*, p. 211.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, p. 213.

employed him to guard the route to Wāsiṭ on the condition that he return all the money amounting to fifteen thousand *dīnārs* from his plunder of the ships. Accordingly, Ibn Ḥamḍī and his men increased their activity of plundering the rich people of Baghdad, day and night. The governor of Baghdad, Ashkorj (Abū al-'Abbās al-Daylamī), employed Ibn Ḥamḍī to find the thieves, but the latter instead became the head of the bandits against the landlords. The *amīr* Ṭūzūn gave an order for his arrest, and when he was finally caught, he was tortured and a group of his men also seized and crucified.¹⁰⁴

In the face of popular pressure, in 361/971, a mobilization against the Byzantine was proclaimed. There was a massive mobilization, in the course of which the *'ayyārūn* made their appearance. A fight broke out between the crowd, who possessed weapons, and the *'aṣabiyya*. The people were divided into *fityān* (youth), Sunnites and Shi'ites and the *'ayyārūn*. The latter, taking advantage of the confusion, plundered people's properties and burnt houses and shops, especially in the al-Karkh quarter.¹⁰⁵ One year later (362/972), the quarter of al-Karkh was burnt again on the order of the vizier, Abū al-Faḍl, as revenge for the murder of police in al-Karkh. Many shops were burnt (17.000 shops, 320 houses) whose revenues amounted to 43.000 *dīnārs* monthly.¹⁰⁶ In addition, the *'ayyārūn* attacked the merchants, plundered their money, their goods and broke into their houses. The merchants were forced to mount guards.¹⁰⁷ The activity of the *'ayyārūn* resumed in 364/974, when they set fire to the shops of wood, butchery, mats and straw. Their power increased to the point that they rode on mounted horses and claimed that they were commanders (*qunwād*). They took it upon themselves to guard the markets and the street.¹⁰⁸

The trouble made throughout Baghdad by the *'ayyārūn* increased in 380/990 when a fight broke out, first among themselves, and then spread, eventually including the inhabitants of al-Karkh and Bāb al-

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*; see also Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, vol. 2, pp. 54-5.

¹⁰⁵ Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 8, p. 619.

¹⁰⁶ Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 7, p. 60.

¹⁰⁷ Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 8, p. 619; Sabari, *Mouvements Populaires*, p. 81.

¹⁰⁸ Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 7, p. 74; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, vol. 11, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Ilmiyya, 1985), p. 298.

Baṣra, Shī'ite and Sunnite communities. Each of them had a leader and each place of commerce had its guards. Properties were plundered, and crime and violence prevailed. Each group burnt the other's shops. The evil deeds of the *'ayyārūn* resumed in 384/994, resulting in a struggle between the people of al-Karkh and Bāb al-Baṣra. The *'ayyārūn* joined their leader, a man by the name of al-'Azīz, who appeared from Bāb al-Baṣra, where his influence was great and where he had wreaked a great deal of terror. He and his followers burnt shops, fought the police, took product-taxes (*ḍarā'ib al-amī'a*) from the merchants of al-Karkh, collected *irtifā' al-aswāq* (dues taken from the markets) from other tradesmen, before escaping in a boat.¹⁰⁹

During the conflict between the masses and the Christians, the former plundered the Qaṣī'a section in 392/1001 and were joined by the *'ayyārūn*, among them the 'Abbasids and the 'Alids, who were involved in the riot, causing much trouble and destruction in Baghdad. They committed evil deeds and plundered the property of many individuals, killing some of them and driving many to the edge of destruction. Bahā' al-Dawla then sent 'Amīd al-Juyūsh Abū 'Alī b. Ustādh Hurmūz to Iraq to restore order. Once he entered Baghdad on Thursday 17 Dhulḥijja, he punished equally the 'Abbasid and the 'Alid *'ayyārūn*, as well as many Turks, by drowning them in the river. He also banned the Shī'ites and Sunnites from celebrating their sacred days.¹¹⁰

In 416/1025, the *'ayyārūn* increased their activity by breaking into the houses of people during the day and during the night, carrying torches while marching in procession. They entered into people's homes and demanded their possessions, while often killing people openly and burning al-Karkh. They targeted the Turks as well. The police measures, as well as the bolting and strengthening of doors and gates, were of no avail. The Turks burnt Ṭāq al-Ḥarānī in the course of the riot between them and the *'ayyārūn* and the masses. This state of confusion caused prices to rise, so that one *kurr* of wheat cost 80 *dīnārs*, and many people

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 9, p. 106.

¹¹⁰ Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 7, p. 220; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 9, pp. 171, 178.

left their countries.¹¹¹

In 420/1029, many raids and evil deeds were committed by the *'ayyārūn* in the east section of the capital city of Baghdad under the leadership of al-Burjūmī. Many bandits joined him and stayed with him.¹¹² They entered stores which they had already marked before. In the absence of the police, they acted freely and entered the house of Abū Bakr b. Tammām, the preacher, next to Qahramāna mosque, facing towards *Dār al-Mamlaka* (Palace of the Caliph). From the eastern section they continued their attacks to the western section, and many houses were plundered and stores broken into, the mosque of al-Ruṣāfa was attacked during the night and the clothes of those who were in it were stolen. The caliph, al-Qādir, therefore, gave permission to transfer all the belongings of the mosque such as curtains, lamps, etc. to the residence of the caliph.¹¹³

On 20 Dhuḥijja of the same year, Abū Ya'la al-Mawṣilī and his followers from 'Awāna and 'Ukbāra, came to Baghdad. They killed five policemen and entered al-Karkh waving their swords, claiming that Kamāl al-Dīn Abū Sinān had sent them to protect the city and to serve the sulṭān. The people of al-Karkh opposed them, killing and crucifying those who were caught.¹¹⁴ In 421/1030, at night, al-Burjūmī and his followers would attack the stores and *kbāns* in the streets of 'Aliyya and Rabī' and seize many goods.¹¹⁵ They plundered the garment shops, making off with a great many goods. The people of al-Karkh rose against the *'ayyārūn* and chased them away, while merchants closed their stores and slept in them. They demanded that the authorities send in the police to help them restore order in the city. Abū Aḥmad al-Nasawī, the chief of police, tried to crush the *'ayyārūn* and succeeded in causing them to subside temporarily. However, when they began to gain the upper hand, the riots resumed and al-Nasawī was forced to flee for his life.¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 8, p. 22; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidaya*, vol.12, p. 20; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 9, p. 349.

¹¹² Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 8, p. 44.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

On Saturday night, 22 Rabī‘ al-Ākhir of the same year (421/1030), a group of bandits came to the Barāthā mosque and stole whatever they could, going so far as to pull out its iron windows. Rioting began and lasted for days, with savage crimes being committed, especially in the al-Karkh quarter. The sultān was powerless to stop the riot and, consequently, lost much of his dignity and authority.¹¹⁷ The frequent raids on the al-Karkh quarter has two possible explanations. First, the al-Karkh section was the centre for merchants, where many shops were found. Second, those ‘*ayyārūn*’ who often raided al-Karkh, were of the Abbasid ‘*ayyārūn*’, who raided it in an attempt to damage the headquarters of the Shī‘ites.

From the above, we learn that the ‘*ayyārūn*’ had committed many evil deeds, such as looting, burning and killing many people in Baghdad, causing invaluable material losses for merchants, in particular, and the masses, in general. Many people were also killed during their raids and riots. Frequent riots incited by the ‘*ayyārūn*’ brought about insecurity and recurrence of disturbances in the centre of the caliphate. This, in turn, discouraged economic growth in the capital city because many merchants, who feared the raids launched by the ‘*ayyārūn*’, would not do business in Baghdad, but rather traded in other cities, which were secure from the activity of the ‘*ayyārūn*’. In addition, the riots incited by the ‘*ayyārūn*’ very often involved clashes between the Shī‘ites, who lived mostly in the al-Karkh section, and the Sunnites, who resided in the Bāb al-Baṣra. Furthermore, since among the ‘*ayyārūn*’ were ‘Abbasids and ‘Alids, their crimes were also linked to the enmity between both communities. The authorities seem to have been powerless to crush the ‘*ayyārūn*’. It was not until 392/1001, when the iron handed ‘Amīd al-Juyūsh, Bahā’ al-Dawla’s deputy in Baghdad, was able to execute and overcome the ‘*ayyārūn*’. During his tenure, up to his death in 402/1011, the city was relatively peaceful because of his harsh measures against the ‘*ayyārūn*’ and inciters of communal clashes. After his death, the ‘*ayyārūn*’ resumed their activity and did so by provoking people among the Shī‘ites and Sunnites.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 55.

E. Concluding Remark

The economic condition of the 'Abbasid caliphate in the fourth/tenth century suffered from sharp decline. This is due to several factors: civil wars, uprising of the Zanj (Negroes) and Qarmatians, interference of soldiers in politics, military *iqṭā'* and activities of the '*ayyārūn*'. The civil wars had a destructive effect on the city of Baghdad and disturbed the supply of food stuffs from one region to another within the domain of the 'Abbasid caliphate. They ruined most lands, caused a decrease in government revenues, and loss of agricultural products, leading to a devaluation of the 'Abbasid *dirham* and *dīnārs* .

The uprising of the Zanj which lasted for about 14 years, contributed to the damage of agriculture of Sawād (rural area of Iraq) and its irrigation system paralyzed the trade of southern Iraq, and weakened the political and military power of the caliphate. The uprising of the Zanj was followed by that of the Qarmatians. The latter not only massacred a great number of people but also damaged the trade of the Persian Gulf and the trade between Arabia and Iraq, causing the latter to suffer a decline in international trade. The disruption of the caliphate interfered with the international route that brought goods from the Far-East and South Asia to Baghdad for transshipment to the Mediterranean Sea. This situation was aggravated by the takeover of the 'Abbasid power by the Turkish and Daylamite soldiers. Consequently, the currency and banking system stagnated and financial activity decreased. Due to rivalries and wars, the canals were neglected, the country was damaged, and some rivers and dams were ruined.

The decline of the 'Abbasid dynasty also resulted from the military *iqṭā'*. It caused damage to the cultivated lands, in particular, and the decline of economy, in general. The principles related to good dealings with the land were abandoned. As a result, canals were ruined due to the lack of maintenance, cultivation ceased and government agencies, whose task was to look after the lands, were annulled.

Finally, the economy of the 'Abbasid caliphate declined through the activity of the '*ayyārūn*'. They committed many evil deeds, such as looting merchants' goods, burning houses and killing the people of Baghdad, causing invaluable material losses on the part of the merchants. Frequent riots, incited by the '*ayyārūn*', brought about disturbances in

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the centre of the caliphate, and discouraged economic growth in the capital city, because many merchants, escaping from the ‘*ayyārūn*, left Baghdad to do business in other cities.

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