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On the Meaning of the ‘Abbasid Call to al-Riḍā

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It is well known that the recruiting officers of the Hāšimiyah in Khūţab called to kītāb Allāh wa-sunnat nabiyyihī wa'l-beyi’ā li'l-ridā min allāhi bays Muhammaḍ-rasūl Allāh. What did contemporaries take this to mean? Apparently they took the first half of the slogan to mean that the movement involved principles. Whosoever called to the book of God and the sunna of his Prophet in early Islam proclaimed himself to be acting “out of anger on behalf of God” (ghadab bi’llāh), as opposed to out of anger on his own behalf. The principles involved would be specified after the call to book and sunna, and the second half of the Hāshimite slogan duly identified the Hāshimiyah as a movement committed to al-layfah. But what did the word al-ridā mean? That is the question to which this birthday offering is devoted.

The sources tell us that al-ridā was a cover name. Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī, the first ‘Abbasid imām, instructed the leaders of the Hāshimiyah not to mention his name to ordinary recruits, but rather to refer to him as the ridā; if asked to identify him, they should say, “we are in tawfiq, and have been ordered to keep the name of our imām secret.” Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad, the second imām, likewise preferred to keep his identity secret. Modern scholars generally accept this explanation, though they tend to see it in a somewhat Machiavellian light: the cover name did not merely serve to hide the ‘Abbasids from the authorities, but also, and perhaps more importantly, from adherents of the ‘Alids, whom they thus contrived to recruit for their own cause. But there is reason to believe that this explanation should be rejected: the ‘Abbasid use of al-ridā would appear to have been neither precautionary nor Machiavellian in intent.
The word riḍā means “satisfaction” and “agreement,” or, when applied to a person, “someone with whom one is satisfied, to whom one has given one’s consent.” If this meaning is taken seriously, a person who claims to be al-ridā claims to owe his position to communal choice: in some sense or other he claims to have been elected. The literal meaning is of course somewhat lost on the modern reader, who generally assumes the ‘Abbasids to have meant very little by their choice of this particular word: insofar as the cover name had any significance, it amounted to no more than a vague promise of future satisfaction with whatever ruler they might in due course produce. But in texts relating to the Umayyad period, the literal meaning of the word is very much alive. Here al-ridā is precisely someone who owes his position to communal agreement; more specifically he is someone elected by shārā, “consultation,” as the following passages show.

1. In 77/696, Muṭṭarīf ibn al-Mughira ibn Shuḥba and the Khārijites of Mesopotamia entered into negotiations with a view to an alliance. When asked to declare his stance, Muṭṭarīf announced, “I call you to... making this matter [sc. the caliphate] a shārā among the Muslims, so that they can set up as their imām over themselves the person of whom they approve for themselves (man yaradūna li-anfushshā), in the same way in which ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭīb left them to do it. The Arabs will agree when they know that by a shārā one simply means al-ridā of Quraysh” (ja-ina al-arāb idhā al-umāma an-namā yurādu bi-l-shārā al-ridā min Quraysh rda). The Khārijites responded to this by declaring that Quraysh did not in their view have any better right to the caliphate than other Arabs [sic], that the Muslims should choose whoever was best, and that they themselves had already chosen “the person of whom we approve most and who is the strongest among us” (qad iiṣmaarūna li-anfushshā arṯāna fi-nīn wa-ashhadīna). Both sides thus took al-ridā to mean somebody chosen by the community; they merely disagreed as to whether the choice should be made from within Quraysh or, on the contrary, from within the entire community of Arabs/Muslims.

2. ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Umar is said to have voiced an opinion similar to Muṭṭarīf’s on an earlier occasion. When Muṭṭawīya put pressure on the Medinese to accept his son Yazīd as his successor, Ibn ‘Umar objected that the caliphate was not hereditary, and that ‘Umar had set up the shārā on the assumption that within Quraysh it belonged to whoever was most fit for it, and of whom the Muslims approved as the most God-fearing and satisfactory person (wa-innānā hiya fi Quraysh khāṣṣatun li-man kāna lahā aḥlan minman innaḏakhu al-muslimūn li-anfushshāman kāna atqā wa-arādā). Ibn ‘Umar’s man inraḏāhu al-muslimūn is clearly synonymous with al-ridā.

3. When Ibn al-Zubayr had allegiance sworn to himself, Abū Hurra, the mawdū of Khūzai’i, is said to have exclaimed, “Is this what we helped you for? You used to call for al-ridā wa’t-shārā. Why did you not wait and consult (a-fa-lā yaharta wa-shāwarta)? We would have chosen you and given allegiance to you.”

4. Muṭṭawīya is said to have argued against the Banū Ḥashim along the following lines: “As for the caliphate, it has passed from one group of Quraysh to another by the consent of the masses and consultation of the elite (bi-ridā al-umma wa-bi-shārā al-khāṣṣa). ... For what reason should you have it? By consent and agreement on you regardless of kinship, or by kinship regardless of agreement and consent, or by both together?” (a-bil-ridā wa’t-jamā’ a’alayhum da’wa al-qurāba an il-qurāba dīna al-jamā’a wa’l-ridā an bihina jamī’ān?). Here ridā, shārā, and jamā’a are enumerated as so many titles to power arising from communal agreement, in contradistinction to titles arising from descent.

5. In 116/734–35, the Khurāsānī rebel al-Ḥārith ibn Surayj called his opponents to “the book of God and the sunna, and to allegiance to al-ridā.” He frequently clamored for a shārā (i’il al-amr shārā). The contexts in which he clamored for a shārā show that he had the governorship and subgovernorships of Khurāsān in mind, but it is, after all, to the caliphate that the slogan al-amr shārā normally refers. His call for al-ridā is thus likely to have been a call for a caliph to be elected by shārā; at all events, it was obviously a call for “someone acceptable,” and not for a specific person.

6. The earlier rebel Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab is likewise said to have favored the principle al-amr shārā on his capture of Basra in 102/720, and to have called to al-ridā, more specifically al-ridā min Banī Ḥashim, shortly thereafter. That Yazīd meant the same thing by these two slogans seems likely, though it cannot be proved; he proceeded to call to al-Faḍl (or al-Mufaddal) ibn ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn al-‘Abbās ibn Rābi’a ibn al-Ḥārith ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib without a shārā ft Banī Ḥashim having been enacted. But however this may be, his call for al-ridā min Banī Ḥashim was clearly a call for “whatever Hāshimite will turn out to be acceptable,” not for a specific member of that
family whom he did not dare to name: al-ridā was somebody who remained to be chosen.

7. ‘Abdallāh ibn Mu‘āwiya, the ‘Alī who staged a revolt in Kufa and western Persia in 127–29/744–47, is said to have called either to al-ridā min āl Muḥammad or else to himself.14 The import of this information is evidently not that he called either to a Hāshimi whose name he did not dare to divulge or to himself, but rather that he called either to the Hāshimite in general (more precisely, to “whatever Hāshimit will be acceptable”), or else to himself in particular. This suggests that Ibn Mu‘āwiya’s da‘wa underwent the same evolution as that of Ibn al-Zubayr; in other words, that he began by calling to al-ridā wa al-shirā (this time within the Prophet’s family), but proceeded to dispense with the shirā in the belief that the choice was a foregone conclusion.

8. Juday’ ibn ‘Alī al-Kirmānī, the leader of the Yamaniya in Khurāsān, is said to have called to al-kitāb wa al-sunan wa al-ridā min āl Muḥammad upon his escape from Naṣr ibn Sayyār’s prison, that is, before his alliance with Abū Muslim.15 This may well be wrong. Whether it is right or wrong, however, al-Kirmānī is clearly envisaged as calling to al-ridā in the sense of “someone acceptable to all,” not a specific person, let alone someone whose name he did not wish to divulge. For he explained his call with reference to the fact that “he could not accept Naṣr and his governors as rulers of the Muslims” (la yathā bi Naṣr wa ʿummāhī walātan ala al-muslimīn). Moreover, an alternative account of his wishes at that time states that he wanted the Khurāsānīs to choose “a man from Bakr ibn Wālī on whom we can all agree (nāridahu jamītāna) and who can govern all of us until a caliphal command arrives.”16 Al-Kirmānī was thus remembered as having wanted a ridā, whether from Bakr ibn Wālī or from the Prophet’s family; a ridā in the sense of someone acceptable to all and who still remained to be chosen.

9. Adherents of al-Mukhtār are said to have called followers of Mu‘āwiyah ibn al-Zubayr to “the book of God and the sunna of His Messenger, and to allegiance to the amīr al-Mukhtār, and to making this matter a shirā in the family of the messenger.”17 The idea of a shirā in the ahl al-bayt was thus a familiar one in Shi‘i circles, or more specifically, those circles with which the leaders of the ‘Abbasid revolution are generally believed to have been connected.

In sum, the word al-ridā is associated with shirā in passages relating to persons as diverse as Mu‘āwiya, Ibn al-Zubayr, Mutarrif ibn al-

Mughīra, and the Khārijites of Mesopotamia. The association is also attested for Khurāsān at the time of al-Hārith ibn Surajj, when ‘Abbasid missionaries were active there. The call for al-ridā recurs in other contexts, two of them contemporary with the revolution, in which it must have been a call for a person yet to be elected or approved; and finally, the call for a shirā in the Prophet’s house is documented for the revolt of al-Mukhtār, a revolt with which the ‘Abbasid revolution was connected. In short, the Hāshimites al-ridā can hardly have been intended or understood as anything other than a call for a caliph elected by shirā fit ahl al-bayt; the movement called to al-ridā because it had no specific candidate for the throne.

This conclusion is corroborated by the fact that a shirā fit ahl al-bayt was in fact attempted after the revolution. Indeed, it is possible that such a shirā was also attempted before the revolution. As regards the pre-revolutionary attempt, we are told by Abī ‘l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī, a Shi‘i author, that a number of ‘Alī and ‘Abbasid members of the Hāshimites house (including Ibrāhīm and the future al-Mansūr) met at al-Ahwā near Mecca shortly after the murder of al-Walīd II; with the exception of Ja‘far al-Sādiq, all agreed to acknowledge Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdallāh (al-Nafs al-Zakīya) as the maḥdī.18 They met again in the reign of Marwān II, but on this occasion Ibrāhīm was informed by a messenger that the Khurāsānīs were gathering troops for his cause, whereupon the ‘Alīs dissociated themselves from him.19 The story of the second meeting is also found in Abhār al-Abbās, a pro-‘Abbāsid work, in a slightly different form. A number of Hāshimites met at Mecca in 129/746–47 in order to pay homage to ‘Abbās ibn ‘Abdallāh as the maḥdī.20 Ibrāhīm heard of this and joined them, but a messenger informed him of the activities of the Khurāsānīs on his behalf, whereupon he managed to have the meeting postponed. When ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Ḥasan, the maḥdī’s father, despaired of winning Ibrāhīm for his son’s cause (or alternatively, when Marwān II got wind of the movement in Khurāsān, and suspected ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Ḥasan of being its leader), the latter denounced Ibrāhīm and dissociated himself from his deeds.21 The ‘Abbāsid version thus stresses that Ibrāhīm’s presence at the meeting was accidental, that he avoided paying allegiance to the ‘Alī, and that the ‘Alīs publicly renounced such rights as they might have to the fruits of the revolution; but it does not deny that ‘Alīs and ‘Abbāsids had in fact come together on the eve of the revolution to elect a leader from among themselves. Quite different sources also inform us that the caliph al-Mansūr had paid allegiance to Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdallāh at Mecca.22
Even so, however, the story may not be true. Muhammad ibn 'Abdallāh does not refer to his supposed election by the Hāshimite house in his correspondence with al-Mansūr regarding their respective rights to the caliphate, though he would certainly have mentioned it there if it had actually taken place (and if the correspondence is authentic); and the story of the second shārār makes no reference to the first. Moreover, even if we accept the reality of these meetings, the fact that 'Abbasids participated in them is no guarantee that they were arranged by the Hāshimīya movement. Further, they are not explicitly called shārārs; and though they could obviously be qualified as such in the general sense of “consultation,” they were not electoral bodies nominated by the community and/or its representatives; that is, they were not shārārs in the technical sense of the word. All in all, then, they will have to be discounted.

The shārār which was attempted after the revolution presents a different case. As regards this episode, we are told that the death of Ibrāhīm al-Imām shortly before the arrival of the Khurāsānī troops in Iraq prompted Abū Salāma, the leader of the Kufan organization, to contact three senior ‘Alīds, either because he wished to transfer the caliphate to one of them, or else because he intended to “make it [the caliphate] a shārār between the sons of ‘Abbās and Abū l-‘Abbās.” Either way, his plans came to nothing, but his behavior has always been something of a puzzle. It is not very likely that Abū Salāma should have been a secret adherent of the ‘Alīds all along; if his heart had never been in the Hāshimīya movement, then why would he have invested his life and fortune in it? Nor does it seem likely that Ibrāhīm’s death should have caused him radically to reconsider the objective to which his life had been devoted. The chances are that he was acting out of loyalty to the movement as he had always known it, and the oddity of his behavior disappears if we assume it to have stood for al-ridā min ahl al-bayt in the sense of “Hāshimīte singled out by shārār”; if Abū Salāma took Ibrāhīm to have been the ridā in this sense, the latter’s death evidently meant that another shārār fi ahl al-bayt had to be staged. That this is how he reasoned cannot be proved, but he plainly did not regard Ibrāhīm’s rights, however acquired, as hereditary; and what is more, many other members of the movement apparently did not do so either. The sources are, of course, at pains to assure us that the imamate had been hereditary within the ‘Abbasid family since Muhammad ibn ‘Alī acquired it from Abū Hāshim, but there are three good reasons for rejecting their claim.

First, Ibrāhīm’s death caused too many members of the Hāshimīya to look for candidates among the ‘Alīds. According to Ahkhār al-‘Abbās, Ibrāhīm’s death caused a schism in the ‘Abbasid movement, as some argued that the imamate now reverted to the ‘Alīds; according to Ibn Aṭṭah, Kufa at the time of the arrival of the Khurāsānīs was divided between people who expected an ‘Alīd to be enthroned and others who expected the enthronement of an ‘Abbasid; and according to all, the senior leader of the revolution was one of those who wanted an ‘Alīd, or who wanted a shārār between ‘Alīds and ‘Abbasids (possibly meaning that he hoped and/or expected a shārār fi ahl al-bayt to produce an ‘Alīd candidate). What we are confronted with here are not naive philo-‘Alīds duped by the use of labels such as al-ridā, ahl al-bayt, or al-Muḥammad into supporting a cause which they now wished to abandon, but on the contrary, members of the leadership aware of and satisfied with the candidature of the ‘Abbasid Ibrāhīm. If a whole section of the Hāshimīya loyal to Ibrāhīm could turn to the ‘Alīds on Ibrāhīm’s death, Ibrāhīm’s rights to the imamate cannot have been widely regarded as hereditary.

Second, the sources are too obsessed with the idea of shārār. Thus, one version of the events surrounding Ibrāhīm’s death has it that Qaḥḥaṭa approved of Ibrāhīm’s wazīya to Abū l-‘Abbās on the ground that without it “the matter would become a shārār within his family.” Another story has it that, as already mentioned, Abū Salāma attempted to invoke such a shārār. A third story reassures us that some sort of shārār was indeed enacted: the result was the election of Abū l-‘Abbās. How can this obsession with elective procedures be squared with the assertion that Ibrāhīm had acquired hereditary rights which he passed on by bequest to his brother?

Finally, there is a conspicuous absence in all this of people who held that the imamate had passed to Ibrāhīm’s sons. If Ibrāhīm had inherited the imamate from his father, he would indeed have been able to bequeath it to his brother; however, given that the circumstances in which Ibrāhīm was alleged to have made the bequest (that is, on his deathbed in prison) were such that the reality of the bequest was disputed, one would have expected some to have advocated the cause of his sons. Yet nobody did so: the choice was between Abū l-‘Abbās and the ‘Alīds. It is true that both of his best-known sons were too young to qualify for the caliphate at the time, but one does not get the impression that it was their age which disqualified them: nobody seems to have displayed the slightest interest in the fact
that they even existed.⁵⁷ How can this be reconciled with the claim that the imamate was hereditary within the ‘Abbasid line?

In short, it would seem that the revolutionaries called to al-ridā min ahl al-bayt in the same spirit in which Mu‘ārrif ibn al-Mughîra called to al-ridā min Quraysh: they happened to believe that the caliphate belonged to whoever was chosen as the most suitable person from within the groups in question. Given that the revolution resulted in the establishment of a new dynasty, rather than a succession of caliphs elected by shârâ, it must soon have come to appear obvious that the revolutionaries had called to al-ridâ in the loose sense of “acceptable person,” with reference to the imâm from among themselves; by the time Abû ‘l-Sarâyâ had oaths of allegiance taken ‘âlâ al-ridâ min al Muḥammad, the word had come to mean little more than “legitimate imâm”⁵⁸; and though al-Ma‘mûn emphasized that his al-Ridâ had been chosen from among ‘Alids and ‘Abbasids as the most suitable candidate,⁵⁹ the very fact that he called him al-Ridâ transformed the programmatic word into a personal name.⁶⁰ But it was evidently not as a meaningless word that the revolutionaries had first adopted it.

If this is accepted, three points follow automatically. First, the story of Abû Ḥāshim’s testament is spurious. According to this story, Abû Ḥāshim ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Hanâfiyya bequeathed his imamate to Muḥammad ibn ‘Ali ibn ‘Abdallâh ibn ‘Abbas, from whom it passed to Ibrâhîm ibn Muḥammad, and thereafter to the ‘Abbasid caliphs: it was precisely because Muḥammad ibn ‘Ali had acquired rights which he hoped to encash that he organized (or took over) the mission in Khurâsân.⁶¹ Now if the ‘Abbasids had regarded themselves as legitimate imâms by hereditary right since the mid-Umayyad period, then their call to al-ridâ would indeed have to be explained on the assumption that al-ridâ was a cover-name; but if their call to al-ridâ was a call for a shârâ, it follows that they cannot have regarded themselves as such imâms after all: the story must be false. This is not to deny that there are links between the revolt of al-Mukhtar and the ‘Abbasid revolution: it was presumably thanks to these links that the ‘Abbasids seized on Ibn al-Hanâfiyya when they decided to claim the caliphate by hereditary right.⁶² But the story of Abû Ḥāshim’s testament cannot have made its appearance before the shârâ ideal had broken down.⁶³

Second, the Ḥâshimiyya movement owed its name to Ḥâshim, the eponymous ancestor of the Prophet’s house, not to Abû Ḥāshim, the supposed bequeather of ‘Alid rights to the ‘Abbasids.⁶⁴ In fact, one scarcely needs the ridā/shârâ theory to see this point. If members of a clan called Ḥâshim led a movement called Ḥâshimiyya devoted to the rights of the clan in question, it would be very odd if the reference were not to Ḥâshim, the eponymous ancestor of the Ḥâshimi clan, but rather to an obscure member of it remembered or invented only for his supposed transfer of the imamate from one branch of this clan to another. Differently put, in a culture in which poetry about the ahl al-bayt was known as Ḥâshimiyyât with reference to the founder of the family in question, a movement sponsoring the rights of the ahl al-bayt could scarcely call itself, or come to be known as, Ḥâshimiyya with reference to someone else. Both the missionaries and their opponents are frequently made to single out Banû Ḥâshim as central to the concerns of the da‘wa, whereas Abû Ḥâshim never figures.⁶⁵ Given that the story of Abû Ḥâshim’s testament came to be invented, we should not be surprised that some hagiographers assumed the term Ḥâshimiyya to be derived from his name;⁶⁶ but it is, in fact, more likely that Abû Ḥâshim owes his name to the revolutionary movement than the other way round.

Finally, the relationship between the ‘Abbasids and the revolution customarily named after them is nothing if not problematic. Why did the organizers of this revolution choose to stage it on behalf of a member of the Prophet’s family still to be chosen? If we accept that the organizers were ‘Abbasids, a plausible answer would be that their own membership in this family was too marginal for them to claim the imamate on the basis of descent alone, or indeed to claim it at all: to contemporaries of the revolution, the term ahl al-bayt conjured up descendants of ‘Ali.⁶⁷ If their membership in the ahl al-bayt was so marginal as to count for nothing, we must envisage them as laymen hankering for a Ḥâshimi ruler, without having a Ḥâshimi candidate to hand: they called for an acceptable member of the Ḥâshimi house in the same spirit in which al-Kârânî is supposed to have done so, that is, with a view to handing over to an ‘Alid as soon as one had been chosen. Alternatively, their membership in the ahl al-bayt was sufficiently real for them to qualify for election by shârâ, a procedure which had the advantage of placing strong emphasis on personal merit: as organizers of the revolution, they were demonstrably superior to the ‘Alids in terms of political talent. This seems more likely, especially in view of the parallel with Ibn Mu‘âwîya; but in either case, things were unlikely to turn out as calculated. If the ‘Abbasids succeeded in acquiring power, they were going to think twice about handing over to an ‘Alid figurehead. At the same time, the
‘Alids were unlikely to renounce such power by consenting to the election of an ‘Abbasid; sooner or later, the ‘Abbasids would thus have to justify their possession of power with reference to hereditary rights. Since it was the ‘Alids rather than the ‘Abbasids who were regarded as kinsmen of the Prophet, this meant postulating that the ‘Alids had bequeathed their rights to the ‘Abbasids, or in other words, it meant inventing the story of Abū Ḥāshim.

If this is so, the shift from an ideology of shī‘a to one of waṣīya may well have been initiated by Ibrāhīm. A Shi’ī author such as Abū l-Faraj has no doubt that the story of the testament was invented about this time;58 and it would seem difficult to deny that the Ḥāshimiyya expected Ibrāhīm al-Imām to succeed, for all that no shī‘a appears to have elected him. But Ibrāhīm can hardly have claimed more than that Abū Ḥāshim had designated him as his successor;59 the fully developed story in which Abū Ḥāshim makes a permanent transfer of rights to the imamate from one branch of the Ḥāshimiyya house to another must reflect the establishment of the new dynasty, for all that this dynasty was soon to reject it.59

We must, however, also consider the possibility that, contrary to what is usually claimed, the ‘Abbasids were not the organizers of the revolution which enthroned them. Thus, a passage in Kitāb al-‘ayn wa’l-hadā‘iq has it that it was the Khurāsānīs who chose the ‘Abbasids, rather than the other way round: when the Khurāsānīs wanted to set up a mission in favor of the Prophet’s family, they looked for a candidate who could be described as the noblest, the most generous, and the most meritorious in respect of religion; they decided on ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Hasan ibn al-Hasan, whom they approached without revealing their true intentions; but ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Hasan led them to Muhammad ibn ‘Ali ibn ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Abbās.61 If the Khurāsānīs began by working for the Prophet’s family in general, as this story implies, then al-ridā min ʿal-rasūl was indeed the obvious slogan for them to adopt.

The same source also tells another story in which the ‘Abbasids make their appearance in the da‘wa at a late stage. According to this story, the Prophet himself predicted that the ‘Abbasids would rule, and the ‘Abbasids were eagerly awaiting their appointed time. Meanwhile there were Shi‘ī missionaries in Khurāsān who were calling to Banū Ḥāshim in general, and others who were calling to Abū Ḥāshim in particular, the leaders of the former [sic] being Ibn Kathīr and Abū Salama. When Abū Ḥāshim was poisoned, he transferred his rights to the ‘Abbasids and wrote to his missionaries instructing them of this fact; they accepted it, even though Abū Salama was secretly in favor of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq. Abū Ḥāshim was poisoned by al-Walīd II (d. 125/743), and the transfer took place fi aswāt wa‘ṣiṣat Abī Muslim.62 Now there is obviously something wrong with this story. If Ibn Kathīr and Abū Salama were missionaries on behalf of the Ḥāshimite in general (as indeed they would seem to have been), then they were not the missionaries over whom Abū Ḥāshim had control;63 and if we emend the story to say that they were missionaries on behalf of Abū Ḥāshim, then the reference to the others working on behalf of the Ḥāshimite in general becomes pointless. This suggests that the story had an earlier version in which the Shi‘ī missionaries in Khurāsān begin by working for Banū Ḥāshim in general, whereupon the leadership of the Ḥāshimite family passes to Abū Ḥāshim, whereupon Abū Ḥāshim dies bequeathing the leadership to the ‘Abbasids. In other words, what we have here seems to be an alternative account of how Khurāsānīs working for Ḥāshimite in general ended up by sponsoring ‘Abbasids in particular. Even if this interpretation is rejected, the story explicitly dates the ‘Abbasid connection with the da‘wa to the 740s, and more precisely, to after Abū Muslim’s arrival in Khurāsān in 128/745–46. However the story is understood, the Khurāsānīs must thus have adopted the call to al-ridā before they committed themselves to the ‘Abbasids, as the first story also implies.

This is not the only information in the tradition which suggests that Khurāsānīs and ‘Abbasids only came together later.64 Thus, the story of the meetings at al-Abwā‘ and Mecca present Ibrāhīm as unaware that the Khurāsānīs were preparing a revolution on his behalf,65 and several members of the ‘Abbasid house, including the future al-Manṣūr, joined the revolt of ‘Abdallāh ibn Mu‘āwiyah on the eve of the Khurāsānī revolution, in apparent ignorance of the fact that this revolution was being prepared.66 Admittedly, if Ibn Mu‘āwiyah had called to al-ridā min al-Mu‘āwiyah, the ‘Abbasids could have joined him in an effort to further the common aim (instructing Abū Muslim to liquidate him as soon as he ceased to be useful, as he proceeded to do in 129/746–47). But one would have expected at least one ‘Abbasid to have gone to Khurāsān to assist matters there. Why was the future al-Manṣūr happy to administer a minor district in al-Ahwā‘ on behalf of Ibn Mu‘āwiyah, when he could have participated in the raising of black banners among his own followers in Khurāsān?67 Why was neither he nor any other ‘Abbasid instructed to move on when the Khurāsānī missionaries asked for a member of the ahl al-bayt and
got 'Abū Muslim instead. Why, in short, was there no 'Abbasid involvement with the Kharāsānī war effort until the Khurāsānīs arrived in Iraq? It must be added that other participants in Ibn Mu'āwiyah’s revolt seem to have been equally ignorant of the supposed ‘Abbasid involvement with Khurāsān. Thus, Sulaymān ibn Ḥabīb ibn al-Muhalab, Ibn Mu'āwiyah’s governor of al-Ahwāz, belonged to a family which was both well connected with Khurāsān and favorable to the revolution once it was underway; indeed, he himself is said to have called to 'Abū Salama [sic] on the arrival of the Khurāsānī troops in Iraq. But that the future al-Manṣūr was more than an ordinary subgovernor had not apparently come to his knowledge: he would scarcely have been so foolhardy as to beat and extort money from a member of the ‘Abbasid family if he had known that the ‘Abbasids were preparing a bid for the caliphate on their own.

The relationship between the dynasty and the movement which enthroned is evidently a problem which takes us far away from the meaning of al-ridā, but it should be clear that the history of this movement has been subject to more ideological rewriting than is normally assumed: if al-ridā meant what it appears to have meant, we must confess that we do not yet (or any longer) know how or why the ‘Abbasid revolution came to be ‘Abbasids.

**POSTSCRIPT**

T. Nagel, *Untersuchungen zur Entstehung des Abbasidischen Kalifates* (Bonn, 1972) also argues that al-ridā was a person chosen by shīrā.

**NOTES**


6. Tabari, ii, 984 ff. The edition by M. A. F. Ibrahim (Ta’rikh al-Tabari [Cairo, 1960–69], vi, 287) reads anna mā, which makes nonsense of the passage unless an illā is inserted before al-ridā. The meaning of Muṭarrif’s message is quite clear from the Khārijite counter-argument (note especially . . . mā ḍhakarta lanā min al-shīrā hīna qulta inna al-‘arb idhā ‘alimun anānuma turidūna bi-hādeh al-amr Qur’ānī . . . ). It follows that we must here have the word anna in the same sense as in Qur’ān 21:108; cf. E. W. Lane, *An Arabic–English Lexicon* (London, 1883–89), i, col. 196a, s.v. anna.


8. Tabari, ii, 446 f., on the Basrami in the second civil war: at first they disagreed about whom they should make their emir, then they agreed that two men were to make the choice for them: when they had given their consent, "they agreed on . . . [X and Y] to choose whomsoever they might find acceptable for them" (fa-tarādīfah o.l . . . an yahhāra man yarḍa’sā), "[X] made people promise that they would accept whomsoever they might choose" (la-yarḍa’sā bīn yahhāra). He said, "I have chosen this one on your behalf," so they cried, ‘we accept’ (qāla o-lam ināna il ‘ala al-ta’ṣīd lahum bihi, fanadadh qu’ra’id). The person chosen by this form of shīrā could clearly also be described as al-ridā.


9. Akhbar al-Abbās, pp. 51, 74 (the reply is unilluminating). Cf. Tabari, ii, 488 f., where the Khurāsānīs in the second civil war are invited to pay homage to Salm ibn Ziyād ‘alā al-ridā bīlād yastaqīma ann al akhbi’rī, "on the basis of agreement on him until the caliphate should be put in order," that is, on the basis of popular choice as opposed to caliphal appointment.

10. Tabari, ii, 1567.


12. Cf. Tabari, i, 1919, where Naṣr ibn Sayyār, the governor of Khurāsān, has to step down so that "the matter can be resolved by shīrā; and ii, 1918, where a shīrā for the selection of subgovernors is actually set up.

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e filologiche, 6th ser., xiv (1958), pp. 214 f., with reference to al-Baladhuri (unpublished) and ʿUyun, pp. 58, 60 (I owe this reference to Martin Hinds).

14. Baladhuri would seem to have found the two programs contradictory: cf. his sā'a, discussed by Gabli, “Rivolta,” p. 214 n.


18. Tabari, ii, 1866.


21. Ibid., p. 178.

22. Akhadhar al-ʿAbbāsī, pp. 385 f., 389. The date of this meeting is given as “while Abū al-Wāḥid ibn Sulaymān ibn Abū al-Malīk was amīr of the bājī.”

23. Tabari, iii, 152 (cf. iii, 264); van Vloten, “Zur Abbasidengeschichte,” citing a Zaydi manuscript (cf. Maqātil, p. 145).


25. Abū Sulama seems to have been unaware of the election of Muhammad ibn ʿAbbās, cf. below.

26. They could have taken place before the ʿAbbāsid became involved with the Kurāšānī daʿwa. cf. below; indeed, the story of the meeting implies that ʿIbrāhīm knew nothing of the activities of the Kurāšānī on his behalf before the messenger informed him.

27. The paradigmatic shirāzī is the one appointed by ʿUmar, who designated six men in his capacity of leader (in the sense of representative) of the community. ʿUmar’s example is said to have been strictly imitated by Saʿīd ibn Rāḥil al-Khārijī in the Jazīra in 127 (Khaliṭa ibn Khayyāt, Taʾrikh, ed. S. Zakkār [Damascus, 1957–68], pp. 568 ff.). However, another version has it that he asked his qaṣīrād to designate ten men, from among whom he selected four; these four chose two from among themselves, who were then asked to agree between themselves who was to be the leader (ibid.). In late Umayyad Kurāšānī, Naṣr ibn Sayyār and al-Ḥārith ibn Surayj each designated two men, who were to choose the governors of Transoxania (clearly not from among themselves), and who were also to draw up the rules which these governors had to follow (Tabarī, ii, 1918). In mid-Umayyad Basra, the community itself designated two men to make the choice for it (above, n. 7; this procedure is not, however, explicitly called a shirāzī).

28. Thus the majority of the sources, see F. Omar, The ʿAbbāsid Caliphate (Baghdad, 1969), pp. 139 ff.


30. The response of the ʿAlīs was unencouraging, while in the meantime, impatient Kurāšānīs elevated Abū ʿl-ʿAbbās to the throne. Cf. Omar, Caliphate, pp. 143 ff.

31. If so, he can scarcely be said to have made a “bewildered” convocation for a “prosaic” shirāzī (P. Crone, Slaves on Horses, the Evolution of the Islamic Polity [Cambridge, 1980], p. 65).


34. ʿUyun, p. 191.

35. Cf. Ibn ʿAṭham. Futūḥ, viii, 178, where Abū Sulama makes the choice on behalf of the community: “O people, will you accept what I do?” (kaʾa annu ṭadiḥa ḫanān ayyaʿaʿu). They said, “we accept your command” (raṣṭa ʿal-ʿummīka), “do what you like.” He said, “. . . Abū Muslim . . . wrote to me ordering me to set up a Ḥashimite caliph for the people . . . we have considered the best (akhyār) of Banū Ḥashim . . . and have accepted ʿAbdallāh ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Ali ibn ʿAbbās ibn ʿAbbās on your behalf . . . do you agree? (qad irtaḍṣat lahu . . . fa-hal raṣṭi? They answered, “Yes, we agree” (raṣṭi). Normally, Abū ʿl-ʿAbbās is said to have been ʿĪbrāhīm’s legatee; here he is ʿal-ʿAbbās, chosen in open competition with other Ḥashimites.

36. Both were minors at the time according to Ibn Hazm. Jamharat ansāb al-arab, ed. ‘A. S. M. Hārūn (Cairo, 1962), p. 31, Muhammad ibn ʿĪbrāhīm was 122, and was thus only ten years old at the time of the elevation of Abū ʿl-ʿAbbās (Tabarī, ii, 1716). He was put in charge of a summer campaign and/or appointed governor of the Jazīra (Baladhuri, Futūḥ al-balḍān, ed. M. J. de Goeje [Leiden, 1868], p. 187; Tabarī, iii, 125; Kalfā, p. 641; cf. Akhadhar al-ʿAbbāsī, p. 404). ʿĪbrāhīm’s other sons are rarely mentioned; they died without issue (Baladhuri, Ansāb, ii, 127), which could be taken to mean that they died in childhood.

37. Both were present in Khutā along with the rest of the ʿAbbāsids (Tabarī, iii, 27; Yaʾqūbī, Taʾrikh, ii, 419), and their existence could thus have been expected to elicit some comment.

38. Maqātil, p. 343; the word comes alive at pp. 349 f., where Abū ʿSarāyā’s imām has testified in favor of another ʿAlīd: wa in raṣṭiwa bāhī fa-kawma al-ridā wa illa faʾkhabhūra li-anṣābiha. They end up by choosing another.

39. “His choice . . . from the two families as a whole has been ‘Alī ibn Mūsā . . . on account of . . . his perfect excellence, his clear knowledge, his manifest godliness, his genuine abstinence, his leaving off of this world, and his assertion of freedom from the people,” as Al-Maʿānī put it in the document of succession (Crone and Hinds, God’s Caliph, p. 138). Compare Ibn Khalilīkān, Waʿfīyat al-aʿyān, ed. I. ʿAbbās (Beirut, 1970–72), iii, 270 (no. 423), where we
are told that al-Ma'mūn gathered the khawās al-awlīyā', and told them that all of the descendants of al-'Abbās and 'Ali he had found no one more meritorious and deserving of the caliphate than 'Ali al-Riḍā.

40. The choice of the epithet was al-Ma'mūn's. Cf. Crane and Hinds, God's Caliph, p. 188; Magāṭīl, p. 369.

41. Cf. S. Moscati, "Il Testamento di Abū Ḥāṣim, Rivista degli Studi Orientali xxvii (1952); Sharon, Black Banners, ch. 5.

42. Cf. Crane, Slaves on Horses, n. 456.

43. It is reassuring to see that Islamists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries generally regarded this story as apocryphal (J. Wellhausen, The Arab Kingdom and Its Fall, trans. M. G. Wein [Cambridge, 1927], p. 503; Noldkée and others in Moscati, "Testamento," p. 35).

44. Pace a number of scholars of whom Wellhausen seems to be the earliest (Kingdon, pp. 503 f.), and Sharon the most recent (Black Banners, passim).

Thus a certain naqīb acted as story-teller, fa-yaddhāru mahāsin Bani Ḥāshim wa-yaddhānu Bani Umayya (Ibn Kathīr, Bidaya, X, 32). Yūsuf ibn Umar al-Thaqāfī would imprison anyone known for muwadāt Bani Ḥāshim wa-mawādāt ahl al-bayt (Dīnawarī, Abkār, p. 259). Qaṭṭāba called the Syrians to mā fi bāhā al-maṣṣaf min tofīdī Muḥammad ẓīn wa-tofīdī Bani Ḥāshim (Ibn Aṭhām, Futūḥ, viii, 172). The missionaries called to ināmat Bani Ḥāshim (Maqāṣīl, Création, vi, 50). The mission was a dawlah li-Bani Ḥāshim (Ya‘qūbī, Tārikh, ii, 408-409 and passim). Abū Salama was ordered to enthroned a khālfatūn Ḥāshimīyān, and chose Abū ʿl-Abbās as the best of Bani Ħāshim (Ibn Aṭhām, Futūḥ, viii, 178). And so on.

But as Sharon notes, we have to await al-Shahraṣānī before we see them do it (Black Banners, p. 84 n.).

47. Cf. Sharon, Black Banners, ch. 4.

48. Magāṭīl, p. 161: the missionaries of Banū Ḥāshim went out to preach in favor of the A‘lids on the death of Walīd II; when things began to go well for them, each farīq would adduce a wāṣiyān in favor of its own candidate.

49. If so, the transition from an ideology of shī‘ār to one of wāṣiyān may have been less drastic than it sounds. In Umayyad court poetry, Uthmān’s position rests on both shī‘ār and wāṣiyān, in the sense that he was elected by a shī‘a set up by ʿUmar on his deathbed, sc. by wāṣiyān (Crone and Hinds, God’s Caliph, p. 32, n. 41). By the time we reach Abū Yūsuf, the person chosen directly by the imām on his deathbed was the rāṣīl; the community would accept him (Maqāṣīl, p. 549).

50. There is surprisingly little reference to it in the historical (as opposed to heresiographical) literature. Neither Abū ʿl-Abbās nor Dāwūd ibn ‘Ali refers to it in the accession speeches of 132; they also do not say anything incompatible with it (Tābirī, iii, 29 f.). It must be with reference to the alleged testament that Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakīya asks al-Maṣūr; how the ‘Abbasids can claim to have inherited ‘Ali’s power, given the fact that ‘Ali’s descendants are still alive (ibid., p. 209); but al-Maṣūr himself does not invoke it, being well on the way to adopting the position which his son al-Mahdī was later to make official, namely, that the ‘Abbasids had not inherited the imamate from an ‘Alid, but rather from al-‘Abbās himself (especially ibid., p. 215; cf. TIM, “Correspondence,” p. 794). Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakīya’s question demonstrates the polemical weakness of Abū Ḥāṣim’s testament vis-à-vis ‘Alid claims.

51. ‘Uyūn, pp. 179 f.

52. ‘Uyūn, pp. 180 f.

53. The text is explicit: qad intaḥāri bi-Khurāṣān dā‘ūt min al-shī‘a wa-qul īnasārī qismayn, qism minshin yad‘a ʿlā al-Muḥammad ʿalla al-ḥāṣir wa-qul īnasārī al-bahār wa-dā‘ūt ʿlā Abī Ḥāṣim ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīya, wa-kāna al-muṣawwī bi-al-bahār dā‘ūt ʿlā al-raṣūl Allāh ‘ṣūn ibn Ḥaṭtār wa-kāna al-bahār yarīfīn fī l-ma‘ṣār wa-lqāf ʿlī Abī Ṣalāmā. And it is quite true that Ibn Kathir and others called to al-Muḥammad, Abū Šalama himself being known as waẓir al-Muḥammad and Abū Musūn as amīn al-Muḥammad. None of them breathed a word about Abū Ḥāṣim.

54. Similarly Sharon, Black Banners, but in a quite different vein.


57. He was governor of Idfah (thus Jāshīhārī, Baladḥārī, and van Vloten in the preceding note) on behalf of Sulaymān ibn Ḥaṭtār ibn al-Muḥallab, Ibn Mu‘awīya’s governor of al-Ahwāz (thus all except Jāshīhārī).


59. Cf. Crane, Slaves on Horses, pp. 139 f. One Muḥallabīd was in charge of Abū Musīn’s vanguard in 131 (namely, Abū Sa‘īd ibn Mu‘awīya ibn Yazīd ibn al-Muḫallab); cf. Abkār al-‘Abbās, p. 337); two Muḥallabīds appear as members of Qaṭṭāba’s army at Isfahān and Nhāvand in the same year (namely, ‘Umar ibn Ḥāfṣ al-Atāk and Yazīd ibn Ḥātīm; cf. ibid., pp. 338 f. [corrupt]. 352 f.; Tabīrī, iii, 4, 139); another one appears as a member of this army in Iraq (Abū al-Rahmān ibn Yazīd ibn al-Muḫallib, Abkār al-‘Abbās, p. 378; but cf. Baladḥārī, Anwār, iii, 138); and two of them rebelled in Basra on behalf of the approaching armies (Sulaymān ibn Mu‘awīya and Rawḥ ibn Ḥāzm, Abkār al-‘Abbās, pp. 355 f.; M. Hinds, An Early Islamic Family from Oman: al-‘Abbās’s Account of the Muḥallabīds [forthcoming], pars. 102–105 and the notes thereto).

60. Hinds, Early Islamic Family, part. 106.

61. Cf. the references given above, n. 56. Some of the sources (especially Jāshīhārī) credit Abū ʿAlīyāb al-Mārjānī, Sulaymān ibn Ḥaṭṭār’s secretary, with the foresight which Sulaymān lacked. His rough treatment of Abī Ja‘far was to cost him his life.